

The national question post-apartheid: Western Cape lessons and challenges for socialist theory and practice

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This is a very preliminary working paper. It will be developed based on comments, further literature review and ongoing research. Formulations are posed very tentatively as the ideas need testing and sharpening. The intention is to deepen the theoretical rigour and political programmatic aspects of the paper as a contribution to political and academic debates on the post-apartheid social formation in South Africa.

Abstract

Post-apartheid, there has been inadequate theorisation of the national question in South Africa from a socialist paradigm. Having achieved the national liberation of black people, the ANC government has embarked on a nation-building project. Twelve years into the post-apartheid era, the national question remains unresolved. The nation-building project has raised new problems and cast old problems in a new light. One such problem is how the national question manifests itself in the Western Cape province. This province, which post-1994 has seen sharpened racial conflict, is populated by a majority of "Coloureds" with "Africans" and "whites"² as minorities. In light of the nation-building project, how should these tensions be understood? Does their manifestation demonstrate an unresolved national question or a failing nation-building project? What are the political and economic factors which shape the contours of the national question in this province? How should the Western Cape be understood historically? What is the impact of the changing population demographics on shaping the national question and its resolution in the Western Cape? How have South African nationalisms manifested themselves in the Western Cape and how do they relate to non-racialism? Does the *Home for All* message contribute to the resolution of the national question in this province? Whilst not exhaustively addressing all these questions, this paper will use the questions to construct an overview of problems of the national question in a post-apartheid South Africa from a Western Cape perspective. The analysis will engage with the thesis of colonialism of a special type (CST) through the concepts of class and structural transformation. This Western Cape lens on the national question will be used to gesture an initial framework through which to deepen socialist theory and praxis on the South African national question as a whole. For reasons of space and limited time, this initial work does not include a detailed gender analysis³.

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² The paper reluctantly uses the apartheid categorisation of the South African population into African, Coloured, Indian and white.

³ Further work will be done to integrate a gender analysis in its interrelation to the national question using key themes emerging from the Western Cape around the social, political and economic conditions of women. These

1 Theorising the National Question

At least since the early 1960s, the Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) thesis has been the pre-eminent theoretical framework used in the analysis of the South African national question. Applied to the apartheid period, the CST thesis held that South African society was a form of colonialism where the colonial community occupied the same territory as the colonised people. *“As a system white nationalism in South Africa must be regarded as a form – a very special form - of colonialism”* (Holiday, 1988). The CST assumed that an oppressor white nation came into being with the 1910 Constitution, which excluded blacks, and this laid the basis for regarding South Africa and its population in general as an emerging single national entity (Pomeroy, 1988). In this way, the CST thesis defined blacks as a nation which was shaped by the trajectory of a specific path of racialised capitalist development based on national oppression. In general, Marxist discussion of the national question acknowledges that capitalism tends to group a population with all its various classes into a single nation in a single territory (Mzala, 1988). It can therefore be argued that South Africa manifested this tendency throughout the entire period of CST.

This emerging black nation included Coloured (the majority of whom reside in the Western Cape) Indian South Africans who *“despite deceptive and often meaningless concessions ... share a common fate with their African brothers (and whose)... own liberation is inextricably bound up with the liberation of the African people”* (ANC, 1969). In other words, the strategy aimed at liberation of the black majority (of which Coloured people were considered a part) from national oppression and exploitation challenged and largely undermined a *“negative minority approach (i.e. thinking of one’s group as a separate entity)”*. To have adopted such an approach would have been a *cul-de-sac* (Pahad, 1988). However, in my analysis the CST thesis did not sufficiently explain the development of, and develop strategies to address racial identities in colonial and apartheid South Africa together with the concomitant fears and perceptions of working class Coloureds about the reduction of their privileges due to deracialisation. The short-lived non-racial moment of the 1980s was also overstated as if it had already overcome these racial identities, fears and perceptions. In addition, the CST thesis committed a strategic mistake by imposing the concept of African leadership on the Western Cape in the 1980s without a rigorous understanding of the nature and character of Coloured identity including its African roots.

This notwithstanding the internal CST conditions allowed for the principle of non-racialism to play a revolutionary organisational and ideological role. Thus, CST was resisted and challenged with ideologies that gave priority to majority interests and non-racialism thus going beyond a narrow majority-minority dichotomy (van Diepen, 1988).

Consequently, the CST thesis posited the concept of a National Democratic Revolution (NDR) which would destroy apartheid-era social and economic relationships, and lay the basis for a new and deeper internationalist approach (Pomeroy, 1988). In terms of the CST thesis the central aspect of the national question in South Africa was about the defeat of this special type of colonialism through the self-determination of oppressed people in South Africa the essence of which would be the emergence of a new, sovereign and non-racial South African nation in which race, ethnicity and nationality are no longer indices of difference. According to the CST thesis, this concept of ‘nation’ was *“not defined by skin colour*

include the impact of capitalist globalisation, commodification, and racial identities on women as well as the feminisation of cheap labour and implications of the crisis of social reproduction on gender relations.

or racial designation” and involves *“sovereignty that will come from a people as a whole and not from a collection of Bantustans and racial and tribal groupings organised to perpetuate minority power”* (Jordan, 1988). For the post-apartheid period, this conceptualisation of sovereignty should challenge how we understand the different *“racial ... groupings organised to perpetuate minority power”* in the Western Cape and how far this country has gone to achieve non-racialism which *“is not only a possibility, but ... an essential part of the concept of ‘One Nation’”* (Jordan, 1988).

According to Wolpe (1988), the South African national question reflected the interrelation between class and race and therefore the *“dynamic of race and class ... (provided the basis)... for an answer to the question of how socio-economic inequalities (were) to be solved”* which, clearly today, is something that is a source of heated debate in an increasingly racialising and unequal Western Cape and South Africa. This class-based approach to the resolution of the national question meant a fundamental rejection of accommodation of national liberation within the exploitative structures of capitalist South Africa (van Diepen, 1988) and the rejection of a narrow nationalism in which an elite group amongst the oppressed gains ascendancy (ANC, 1969). This required the bringing about of a revolutionary subject to bring about *“national sovereignty ... and (the turning around of) the social order”* (van Diepen, 1988). However, despite the coming into being of such a revolutionary subject, the reality of the 1993 political settlement did not manage to make this fundamental break with capitalism (Marais, 2003 and SACP, 2006).

It was late in the life of the CST thesis that the social inequality of women was included in understanding CST and the posing of alternatives. Early theorists such as Tessa Marcus (1988) demonstrated how *“the oppression of women was integral to, (and) ... a presupposition for the perpetuation of African national oppression”*. In terms of this analysis, the position of women in a liberated South Africa would be guaranteed and determined by the content which organised women would inject into the struggle with respect to their oppression as women.

The CST thesis was challenged by other left schools of thought. Freund (cited by Mare, 2003) argued that to see the struggle against apartheid as anti-colonial was to miss the mark because South Africa had been effectively independent for decades despite its colonial roots. Neville Alexander (1986) argued that the CST thesis obstructed the drive towards single nationhood. Many other critiques suggested that CST promoted nationalism which is an ideology which can corrupt the working class, divide it, and prevent its unity at a time of sharp class struggles. These criticisms notwithstanding, the CST thesis remained valid in analysing the social formation that existed from the early 19th century South Africa.

The CST thesis has not really grappled with theoretical and programmatic aspects of the national question post the 1994 democratic breakthrough. There is still no rigorous theoretical conceptualisation of the dynamics of race and class in the post-apartheid reality. Perhaps this is not surprising given that Marxism generally has been criticised for its weak conceptualisation of the national question. These critiques have pointed to the problematic relationships socialist governments had with nationalism, the tendency of Marxism to overemphasise the economics of capitalism against the territorial and physical aspects of nationalism, the tendency of Marxism to reduce the psychological aspects of Marxism and the absence of a coherent Marxism theory of nationalism (Dexter, 1996).

2 Post-Apartheid Capitalism: Structural Constraints to Resolving the National Question

Under CST, the racial structure ensured the domination of all white classes over all black classes but this no longer necessarily holds in the post-apartheid liberal democratic dispensation. Does this mean that the apartheid racial structure has been completely destroyed? To answer this question, the section below discusses whether South African can be thought of as a neo-colonial state, the impact of capitalist globalisation on the national question, how the emergence of the black section of the capitalist class reverses the drive for complete national liberation, how the nation-building project fails social integration and the relevance of class to the national question.

Restoring capitalist profitability, globalisation, neo-colonialism and a weakening working class

In other African countries, independence for former colonies did not automatically put an end to colonial relations and this had adverse implications for how the national question was to be solved (van Diepen, 1988). Given the special nature of its colonialism and its level of industrialisation, classifying post-apartheid South Africa as neo-colonial may be off the mark. However, like the economies of many colonies, historically the white ruling bloc was always bound up with the main capitalist countries (Pomeroy, 1988). The post-apartheid evolution of these links demonstrates that there are qualitatively new conditions which are not necessarily neo-colonial but still have implications for how the South African national question evolves post-apartheid.

The level of South African industrialisation and the extent of the dominance of finance capital became the springboard for what Lesufi (2006) has described as a post-1994 South African imperialist and profit-seeking extension by South African capital into Africa. This is another feature which distinguishes South Africa from the ordinary post-/neo-colonial script. This imperialist character of South Africa has been built on the definition of South Africa's capitalists as being South Africa's national interests. Interests of South African capital are undoubtedly the economic foundation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and represent a capitalist consolidation of the new South African nation. This South African expansionism can have negative consequences for regional integration and development given the complex social, economic and political links South Africa has with Southern Africa at least.

It was on the basis of the links white capital had with leading capitalist countries that South African capitalism sought its re-insertion into the circuits of global capitalism (SACP, 1998) on terms perhaps different from those which pertained under neo-colonialism in general. The impact of capitalist globalisation in South Africa, similar to key aspects of neo-colonialism, has been to constrain the ability of, and space for the new nation state to consolidate endogenously. Thus, as demonstrated below, the importance of the national self-determination of the new South Africa in the post-1990 global situation. But this raises the question of the nature of the post-apartheid state. This is essentially a capitalist state which is presiding over three fundamental processes: (i) restoration of capitalist profitability to a capitalist trajectory built on the back of cheap black labour; (ii) re-insertion of white-owned capital into the global economy at the expense of national objectives; and (iii) the emergence of a black stratum of the capitalist class. As discussed below, such a state is complicating and delaying the resolution of the national question.

Firstly, as Webster and von Holdt (2005) demonstrate, capitalist globalisation has given birth to a “*new despotism at work*” leading to a re-organisation of work and the weakening black workers at the point of production. In their analysis, flexibility in production, competition in the market, and new mechanisms of producing cheap labour power have effectively weakened the black working class by undercutting the power of unions and facilitating the emergence of a new, largely white, despotism in production.

Secondly, the entire labour force is under attack from global capitalist restructuring. Large numbers of workers in developing countries engage in wage labour to meet their needs but the wages are not adequate and therefore workers continue to rely on non-wage means of support. Thus the emergence of large numbers of “*semi-proletariats*” who, in South Africa are largely black, and depend on both waged labour and cultural security networks (Sehgal, 2005). Many others, largely black township and rural dwellers, are victims of chronic and structural unemployment living under the strained conditions undermining their social reproduction and their self-agency. Constituting a nation is likely to be fraught with intractable problems in conditions where the majority is excluded through the very circumstances that had been the result of their previous social segregation under apartheid – illiteracy, poverty, rural isolation and oppression of various kinds (Mare, 2003).

Thirdly, as du Toit (2005) argues, analyses have to go beyond simplistic, reductionist, linear and determinist accounts of capitalist globalisation. What happens to black workers under the “*new despotism*” is not simply the direct result of capitalist globalisation but is rather always locally mediated by, situated and embedded in the realities of complex local social, economic and political contexts. In the case of the rural Western Cape, these contexts include the social and cultural legacy of slave society, colonial settlement, segregation, white domination and apartheid which produced racialised identities. These were later challenged by the political dynamics of democratisation, political transition, human rights and the transformation, restructuring and democratisation of local government. However, these democratising impulses did not fully defeat the legacy of colonialism and apartheid particularly in the Western Cape as shown by the dire conditions of farm workers in the province despite the introduction of favourable laws.

To illustrate, the new labour laws protecting farm workers did not structurally change and reverse the long history of dispossession, slavery, forced labour, exploitative work and social control in Western Cape farms. This long history helped create a white rural landowning class which has assumed for itself that ownership of land also means the right to govern the lives of those who work it (du Toit, 2005). Before the new labour laws, well-entrenched social relations of paternalism permeated Western Cape farms in the form of the ‘tot’ system, workers’ dependence on tied housing, evictions and vulnerability to racial and physical abuse (Nasson, 1984; du Toit, 1993). Clearly, the new labour laws fall far short of effectively addressing the structural foundations of these social relations (Jara, 2006).

The agricultural sector has faced pressure from deregulation, liberalisation and intensified integration into global agricultural value, commodity and trade chains exposing the sector to more competition, risk and structural changes (du Toit, 2005; du Toit and Ally, 2004; and the WFP, 2003). Whilst conditions for skilled, core and permanent farm workers may have improved, however many farmers responded to the changed conditions by restructuring their businesses and shedding labour (du Toit, 2005). There is evidence of a shift away from the use of permanent workers and towards the use of temporary, seasonal and sub-contracted labour who are largely women including an increase in the numbers of ‘*outsiders*’ (African workers from the

Eastern Cape) who are forced into constant friction with Coloured '*insiders*' (du Toit and Ally, 2004). In other words, white-controlled Western Cape agriculture is passing risks and costs onto black workers whilst at the same time feminising cheap labour and dividing workers on a racial basis. So whilst these economic and regulatory pressures may have freed black workers from the "*ambiguous implicit contract of paternalism*" (du Toit, 2005) but structural, power and social relations mean that in the Western Cape liberal democracy has not liberated black workers from white supremacy and class exploitation with little negotiation and contestation by black farm workers (WFP, 2003 and Jara, 2006). In other words, despite democratisation, features of CST remain well entrenched in the rural Western Cape. Insertion of South African agriculture deepens the racial oppression and class exploitation of cheap black and feminising black labour. This same process entrenches land inequality in light of the failed market-based land reform programme which has not delivered land, infrastructure, access to finance and markets, skills, jobs and dignity to landless black farm workers and other rural dwellers.

Another critical factor was the entrenchment of existing property rights by the 1993 political settlement. These property rights were obtained and secured through dispossession, destruction of socio-economic systems, national oppression, gender oppression and economic exploitation. It must be perfectly understood that transformation in terms of existing property rights and redressing the imbalances caused by colonialism and apartheid were not likely to be possible if existing property rights were recognised and entrenched (Ntsebeza, 2005). In Slovo's words, "*the basic objectives of liberation cannot be achieved without undermining the accumulated political, social, cultural and economic white privileges. The moulding of our nation will be advanced in direct proportion to the elimination of these accumulated privileges*" (1988). The protection of property rights has proved a serious barrier to the expropriation of property for redress and undermining these "*accumulated ... white privileges*" which are essential in nation-building. The 1993 political settlement left "*accumulated ... white privileges*" and capitalism intact thereby sacrificing many of the radical working class demands for the democratic ownership and control of the means of production and wealth redistribution. Instead, the emerging state and the nation-building project were beholden to old interests. This is worse in the Western Cape where there remains significant presence of white parties in the provincial and local governments as well as the entrenched practice of state institutions and resources are used to protect white privileges such as the many anecdotal reports about rural police stations refusing to act against abusive and racist farmers in the Western Cape.

Objectively the post-apartheid working class has had its traditional power basis objectively weakened and its social and political weight reduced by the combined impact of the restoration of capitalist profitability under a liberal democracy and capitalist globalisation. Capitalist globalisation, coupled with post-apartheid capitalist profit-maximisation and commodification of basic services, is reducing the social weight of, and atomising the working class instead of helping to consolidating a single "*national market binding various*" diverse groups. These processes have actually perversely incorporated workers into the capitalist economy through their centrality in production whilst simultaneously marginalising them in the economy (du Toit, 2005). Ironically, under CST it was the process of proletarianisation that helped to break down tribal divisions and to lay the basis for an emerging nation whereas in the era of capitalist globalisation the working class is subject to division and atomisation. This has huge implications for working class consciousness, self-agency and class struggles for the resolution of the national question.

Class and race

In Wolpe's view (1988), the basis of the national question lay in the economic structure. Informed by this view, Webster, et al, (2005) raise the question: what are the contours of the new post-apartheid racial order and how do they reflect the changing labour supplies, the informalisation of work, and the emergence of an African bourgeoisie? In what ways does liberal democracy conserve/restore or challenge/dissolve the racial division of labour and racialised property relations?

The national question remained incomplete in many African states because bourgeois strata held the reins of state power (Pomeroy, 1988). According to the SACP (2006), the post-apartheid state has inspired the growth and development of such a black bourgeois strata whilst also restoring profitability to the main section of capital (white capitalists). This shows the limitations of South Africa's liberal democracy in challenging the racial division of labour and racialised property relations, and thus resolving the national question.

Like other ruling classes, the South African capitalist class has a deep interest in the enflamed form of the national question as a means of retaining its control. This essentially white ruling class, whilst not directly and expressly appealing to loyalties for national unity on the basis of race or colour, has effectively exploited racial and colour loyalties to foster a comprador black section and has overtly and covertly induced racial tensions between the different racial categories of South African workers.

White workers occupy a special role in this racial division of the working class. Despite their desertion by the ruling class goal of securing the restoration of capitalist profitability post-1994, the white working class has essentially defended its colonial and apartheid privileges by opposing affirmative action, employment equity and refusing to join political forces with its numerically larger and politically organised black working class sisters and brothers. Under CST, the white working class had occupied an important *"seat at the ruling table of the capitalist class helping in the domination of the black working class"* (Mzala, 1988). Under such conditions, the white working class had an objective interest in maintaining the inferior economic status of black workers. It is only logical that the liberal democratic framework has not yet shaken the white working class out of this ideological corruption despite its increasing exposure to capitalist globalisation, affirmative action, and a non-discriminatory and equitable labour market policy. In fact, the crumbs it received from the capitalist table helped it to consolidate skills, expertise, good lifestyles, financial assets and amenities which the majority of black workers still do not have. These place the white working class in an advantageous position where it can meet its socio-economic needs and allow itself to be used on a racial basis to block the workplace and socio-economic empowerment of black workers. The NUMSA conference provided tens of examples of how the white working class conducts itself in relation to black workers on a daily basis throughout the Western Cape. These examples confirm the emergence of a new form of white chauvinism amongst white workers. This is worsened by the absence of organised trade union and political organisation of white workers on a non-racial basis. Further work is required to analyse the socio-economic profile of white workers in order to identify similarities and differences between them and black workers. Such empirical information would be the basis of non-racial trade union and political work amongst white workers in order for them to recognise their common class interests with black workers. This will not be an easy task.

In addition, as the NUMSA conference noted, in the Western Cape the capitalist class continues to divide and weaken the unity of African and Coloured workers. In this regard, appeals are made to what was the intermediate position occupied by Coloured workers in apartheid racial hierarchies. This is done at two levels. The majority of African workers are made to resent and begrudge their fellow Coloured colleagues who normally occupy more senior positions across the board. The second level is where white social forces like the DA have paternalistically become political champions of the line that Coloured people are considered by the democratic dispensation as not black enough and therefore classifying them as losers to democracy.

In all these ways, the ruling class, as the class holding power, has sought to shape the substance of the new South African nation and its state given that Coloured and African workers largely depend on this white capitalist class for employment. In the words of the Communist Manifesto (Marx and Engels, 1967) *"In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanish, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end"*. In other words, the perpetuation of national oppression in the form of white privilege and racism is reinforced by the accommodation of national liberation within the exploitative structures of South African capitalism. This was the essence of the discussions which took place at the recent NUMSA Western Cape provincial conference on non-racialism held in July 2006. Addressing the legacy of national oppression is increasingly constrained by the capitalist character of the South African economy post-apartheid.

Seekings and Natrass (2002) show that inequality has increased within races post-apartheid. In South Africa today one cannot assume that blackness necessarily means disadvantage but this is not the same as arguing that race is irrelevant in inequality given that poor black people continue to be the worst victims of racial discrimination (Erasmus, 2005). These findings challenge the understanding of privilege in terms of old approaches to race and class. It is not far-fetched to suggest that for the 1,5 million or so black middle class beneficiaries of the post-apartheid dividend there is not much of a national grievance left. If there is, the attendant tasks are not about its structural foundations but essentially about further deracialisation of action in the capitalist market. For these sections, their concrete material reality as black people has changed significantly in relation to the wealth of the country, the political institutions of administration, education, opportunities, public prestige, etc.

Can Afro neo-liberalism resolve the national question?

Apartheid colonialism prevented the normal growth of a black bourgeoisie (Pomeroy, 1988). Logically therefore a key component of the post-1994 dispensation has been the vocal and determined emergence of a stratum of emerging black capitalists and the tremendous growth of a black middle class. These strata emerge objectively following the removal of racial barriers as well from a deliberate class project which the SACP described as *"Afro neo-liberalism"* in its 2000 Strategy Conference. Building on broader, neo-liberalism an aggressive black African petty bourgeois agenda asserts a narrow accumulation regime.

Afro-neo-liberalism correctly emphasises the urgency of tackling racial inequalities and racism in our society, but conveniently forgets that it is the very black working class that is at the receiving end of undefeated white racism and capitalist exploitation. The real aristocrats, white monopoly capital, are left unchallenged by Afro neo-liberalism, except insofar as to how they should be encouraged and given

incentives to support the creation of a black capitalist class. Thus a new type of anti-working class, and typically compradorial-type relationship and dependence is created between white finance monopoly capital and these emergent strata. As the sensational SACP discussion document (2006) argues, this compradorialism relies on the patronage of established capital, not just foreign, but also, in particular, established sectors of domestic capital. This emerging class fraction has, typically, not accumulated its own capital through the unleashing of productive processes, but relies on special share deals, “affirmative action”, BEE quotas, fronting, privatisation and trading on its one real piece of “capital” (access to state power) to establish itself.

In essence Afro-neo-liberalism, like its global neo-liberal foundations, seeks to strip the national question of its class content, or conversely, seeks to insert a different class content into the struggle to address the national question. Two kinds of contradictions threaten to swallow Afro neo-liberalism. Firstly, the entrenchment of capitalism is unlikely to address the national question. Already, capitalist relations continue to deepen racial contradictions and class inequalities even within the very previously oppressed black majority. Secondly, instead of creating an independent black capitalist class it creates a black section of the capitalist class that has a (internal) compradorial-type relationship to the white capitalist class, thus deepening the hold of white local and international monopoly capital over the South African economy. This is likely to become a new form of internal colonialism, reflecting itself less through the political, but increasingly through economic forms of subjugation and domination. The emergent black capitalist stratum is not galvanising a national developmental effort. It is, in fact, highly factionalised, incapable of uniting itself, and, therefore, increasingly incapable of uniting a national bloc behind its hegemonic leadership behind a sustainable nation-building project (SACP, 2006). Instead, at moments when its progress is blocked it is likely to retreat to subjectivist explanations and overly psychologised explanation for persisting injustices and white racism (SACP, 2006). This is often linked with a failure to adequately analyse the deeply entrenched, structured character of capitalism, and its systemic reproduction of the peripheralisation, underdevelopment, or the persisting poverty and marginalisation of the majority of South Africans. In the Western Cape, Afro neo-liberalism has also had the effect of isolating Coloured people in a province where white capital is extremely manipulative and fairly well organised politically.

Absence of social integration and a progressive political project

The ANC’s nation-building project, whether in its “rainbow nation” or “Home for All” versions, has not been based on a conscious political strategy which understands and addresses the complex challenges discussed above. It has not sufficiently considered the structural socio-economic base of national oppression and of the solution to the national question.

Where critical structural interventions could have been made, we saw equivocation and even a retreat to racialised strategies. The housing crisis is an example of this. In the African townships, this crisis is visible everywhere: dense and ever-expanding urban sprawls of shacks. In contrast, in the Coloured townships this housing crisis is deceptively invisible as it is hidden in backyards of formal good-quality housing. National, provincial and local housing policy has not provided sufficient housing units to meet the ever-growing backlog and has prioritised the reversal and rolling back of apartheid spatial planning. As a result, the Delft township, far away from the Cape Town economic centre, is the only post-1994 settlement which can be claimed as significantly racially mixed. The perpetuation of apartheid spatial patterns limits inter-racial social integration and the emergence of deracialised identities. This is against the logic of capitalist development which from the beginning of the 20th century

formed a single national market binding various black groups by economic location (Mzala, 1988). These processes undermine the argument that nation-building must also refer to the building of material, infrastructural conditions for a united nation – overcoming apartheid geography, addressing the massive inequalities of decades of combined and uneven development (Cronin, 1996).

At a political level, there has been no social mobilisation of shack- and backyard dwellers in a common movement of the homeless staking their claim for a social wage. The contestation of charity mobilised for the victims of regular fires (which destroy informal housing) at the Joe Slovo camp and the intense disputes over who has rights to benefit from the N2 Gateway Housing Project have exposed this glaring absence of non-racial homeless people's solidarity and social mobilisation. These have also resurfaced old tensions between "*amagoduka*" and established residents of Cape Town's African townships. Under these conditions, black working class unity, as the bedrock of nation-building, is far from a reality. Instead, the entrenchment of racial identities, mutual fears and mistrust are the order of the day. In addition, profound processes of thorough-going, such as nation-building, are likely to be deformed and stunted without being buttressed by organic processes of popular self-empowerment, without self-agency.

In the 1980s, the anti-apartheid struggle was characterised by extensive and grounded political education of activists and the mass base on non-racialism and nation-building. In contrast, the post-1994 period has been marked by a virtual absence of such political education. Such consciousness building would have needed to also address the structural socio-economic base of national oppression and liberation. By their very nature, "*rainbowism*" and the "*Home for All*" variants of the nation-building project are incapable of driving a systematic consciousness building programme of the kind required which would not simply soothe racial animosity but actually address it systematically.

The rise of a narrow Africanism within the ANC in the Western Cape, on the back of the concept of African leadership, can be seen as the beginnings of the tendency towards national exclusiveness which must be understood as, a la Mzala (1988), "*a drive by the bourgeois elite among the oppressed to take over the role of the new exploiter*". Such Africanism is strategically incapable of structurally rolling back apartheid geography, socially mobilise a non-racial homeless people's movement and decommodify basic services as basis for building integrated communities. The emergence of this kind of Africanism is to be founded in how ANC Strategy and Tactics is defined in class terms. For example, Netshitenzhe (1996) narrowed the scope for national liberation to the removal of "barriers that have been set by apartheid in terms of black people and Africans' (in particular) access to the economy and services" leaving intact the economic structure of society. In the same piece, he also sought to equate the role of the working class in national liberation together with that of the "*middle strata*". Such Africanism could rise in the Western Cape given the relative political marginality of organised working class formations in the body politic of the province.

3 The Reproduction of Racial Identities

There was something quite deterministic in the CST thesis about how nation-building would take place post-apartheid. Mzala (1998) categorically stated that the people of South Africa after liberating themselves from apartheid will gravitate irresistibly towards integration. Carrim (1996) put it this way: "*as the process advances, the culture, values and interests of the African working class and its allies will*

increasingly come to constitute the core of the new South African". Instead of these pre-determined outcomes, we have seen, amongst other things, the reproduction of racial identities to the detriment of the nation-building project. These include the racialisation of transformation, inequality, capitalism, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and criticism in a manner which shows degeneration of the national debate to the level of race populism (Mare, 2003), a far cry from "*rainbowism*" and even further from a radical national project. How should we understand this new form of racialisation? Already in 1996, Carrim (1996) had identified, on the one hand, the impetus for the evolution of a broad, non-racial identity, and on the other hand, the emergence of ethnic and racial identities in new forms. Dexter (1996) explained these developments in terms of the limited transition occasioned by the 1993 political settlement. According to Dexter (1996), "*the pressure to revert to old, comfortable identities that are primarily based on perceived racial ethnic identities*" becomes great in light of the limited transition "*even if these identities were artificially created*".

Provincialism

Another outcome of the 1993 political settlement is the break-up of South Africa into nine provinces largely coinciding with ethnic and language boundaries. In my analysis, the creation of these provinces has diluted the goal of building a united non-racial South Africa. As a result, tendencies to provincialism, regionalism and ethnicity have been entrenched and in the future they may become centripetal forces against national unity.

The creation of provinces may have removed Bantustans but more significantly was the move away from the social content of these spaces (Mare, 2003). These were spaces of extreme discrimination and inequality. It is in these spaces where social reproduction is tenuous for the black working class. It is in these same spaces where there has been extremely limited racial and social integration as apartheid geographies have been reinforced by post-apartheid spatial development patterns. No wonder then it becomes easy for creeping racialisation to become a national expression of provincialism, regionalism and ethnicity.

Simultaneously asserting and problematising African hegemony

As long as the deep and unmitigated racism from the apartheid period is denied by white South Africans, they will remain outside the process to build a new South African nation whose African character they must accept and also help to shape. Therefore the argument for building a new African-centred South African nation is legitimised by what Holiday (1988) described as a "*profound spatio-temporal disorientation*" of white South Africans which prevented them from understanding where and when they are living, and who they are. This disorientation is still a barrier to nation-building post-apartheid and means that they have not become Africans in Africa, a la Tambo (1979).

However, this is not so straightforward even within the liberation movement. The concept of African leadership or hegemony has been described by the ANC (1997) to refer to the hegemony of indigenous Africans over national life and the character of the new nation. There are three problems with this formulation. Firstly, African is implied so as not to consciously and deliberately include Khoi and San heritage which includes a history of ignored but heroic anti-colonial resistance. This is to miss an important opportunity to embrace and reaffirm the African origins of large sections of Coloured people in the Western Cape (Ozinsky and Rasool, 1993). Secondly, African is used loosely to paper over class differentiation amongst the diverse African communities in South Africa. African leadership can end up as a narrow nationalistic

concept if it is not related to its class content (Carrim, 1996). To be controversial, there is no doubt that a white but communist Joe Slovo was a far better representative of black working class interests than a black but capitalist Patrice Motsepe. The third problem has to do with the imagery of a timeless pre-colonial African society which can be transmitted as a whole to a 21st century capitalist South Africa. This has opened the doors for moribund feudal forces and practices to rear their ugly heads. These problems are not raised to undermine the concept but to point to the limitations of its current conceptualisation which are actually against the logic of nation-building.

Feudal identities

The compromises made by the ANC government to traditional leaders are another factor which can potentially reinforce narrow and chauvinistic rise of ethnic identities, cultural practices and undemocratic rule by an unelected and parasitic elite. This perpetuates the “*subject*” status of rural people thus denying them their “*citizenship*”. How can rural “*subjects*” be part of a progressive 21st African nation? It is only free “*citizens*” who can be such. Indeed the Freedom Charter gave recognition to the cultural diversity of South Africans but this did not imply that these are eternally frozen categories and that the expression of different identities must ultimately serve to foster national unity (Carrim, 1996). The *African Renaissance* project and the invoking of African leadership has had the effect of freezing these categories as they were in some timeless pre-colonial Africa which had not even reached the stage of evolving into an oppressed black nation. Even worse is the establishment of forums of traditional leaders in the cosmopolitan and largely urbanized African constituency of the Western Cape. This can have the effect of further ethnicisation of communities against broader integration.

The ANC (1997) suggests a dangerous direction when it regards nation-building as including the process of developing those individual elements that distinguish these various communities from one another. This is not to suggest homogeneity from above. But in light of the crises facing the nation-building project and the perpetuation of racialised and ethnicised identities such a line of argument is dangerous. This is made worse by the absence of a national consensus on how to deal with both the positive and negative cultural heritages of the “*various communities*”.

What could possibly explain these compromises with ethnically-based traditional leaders? Compromise is a quick-fix solution to social mobilisation of popular forces in rural areas behind democratisation and nation-building. Cynically, could it be that the ANC government seeks to control rural dwellers through traditional leaders and legitimise its rule instead of deepening democracy? Indeed, traditional leaders are a reality that the ANC government had to deal with but in the absence of mobilised popular forces in rural areas the compromises struck are far from advancing democratisation and nation-building.

The need to rethink the racial basis of affirmative action

Anti-discrimination, equity and affirmative action policies are legitimate policies to change the demographic content of public and private institutions as a start but these policies seem to be having racialised side-effects (Erasmus, 2005). Those who have benefited the most from these measures are middle class blacks whilst the racialised structural inequalities facing the black majority remain entrenched (Alexander, 2006 and Erasmus, 2005).

Despite their broad-based and legitimate nature, the affirmative action and equity policies have also not been able to build bridges between Africans and other racial groups across the country. Racialised divisions and antagonisms have been fed by the implementation of these policies. A range of commentators across the political spectrum have forcefully argued that these policies perpetuate race categories, identities and “*race thinking*” (Alexander, 2006; Erasmus, 2005; Leon, 2004; and Ozinsky and Rasool, 1993). Those on the left like Erasmus and Alexander do not equate their critique of race-based policies with the sudden amnesia about past discrimination which leads the Democratic Alliance to evangelise for colour-blindness.

The NUMSA conference also showed that affirmative action and employment equity are meaningless without skills development because black workers can only get promoted so far before they reach the ceiling beyond which skilled white workers continue to occupy the higher rungs of racialised workplace hierarchies inherited from apartheid. In line with this Alexander (2006) notes that affirmative action can only mean something for those individuals who are similarly qualified or skilled in cases where those who belong to designated groups get preference over others.

In the practical implementation of these policies, the distinction between African, Coloured and Indian is consistently maintained to the point where the notion of black people falls away (Alexander, 2006) – this being a reversal of gains from the anti-apartheid struggle.

In the final analysis, affirmative action is not about structural transformation of the South African economy. The legacy of CST will not be transformed by a mere deracialisation of the boardrooms and the “*equitable*” sharing of some economic privileges to a new elite (SACP, 2002). Structural economic and social change is essential to get most black people to the point where they can benefit from affirmative action (Alexander, 2006). Therefore the employment of race categories and racialised justifications ring increasingly hollow as the dynamics of a deracialising capitalism unfold leaving behind the workers and the poor (Mare, 2003). This brings to the fore the importance of transformation of economic relations. In the absence of such transformation, it becomes easy and tempting to retreat to racialised categories. In this regard, Alexander (2006) cites Marx who provides clarity on how nation states can reinforce or reverse racism: “*state actions were highly consequential in shaping the template of modern race relations. Where and when states enacted formal rules of domination according to racial distinctions, racism was reinforced... where racial domination was noted encoded by the state, issues and conflicts over race were diluted.*”

4 Deepening Socialist Theory and Praxis on the National Question

For a range of reasons, as discussed above, the people of South Africa after liberating themselves from apartheid did not gravitate irresistibly towards integration as Mzala (1988) so boldly predicted. This is a challenge to socialist theory and practice. The liberation movement’s approach to the national question was located within the perception of a global transition from capitalism to socialism (Mzala, 1988). This perception no longer holds and capitalist globalisation is well-entrenched across the globe. Therefore, how can a progressive nation-building project proceed under the overbearing global reality of capitalism?

Absent in our society is social mobilisation against racism and white racism in particular which is tied to white economic power. Socialist theory has to engage with

the meanings of race as a social construct in our society. This is because race continues to be a site of division and exclusion amongst South Africans (Erasmus, 2005). In contrast to the past, racial divisions appear to be self-imposed, as argued above, whilst racially based exclusions are hidden (Erasmus, 2005). The major problem in this regard is the absence of a countervailing deracialising force which engages society critically around the idea that race has no biological or cultural basis, and that it is not a fixed identity which cannot change. Socialist theory and praxis has a massive role to play in this regard including answering the question of how to mobilise both Coloured and African workers into united class action as well as the question of how to build the non-racial and class consciousness of white workers.

But social mobilisation on its own is not sufficient. It needs to be based on a class struggle focused on the thorough-going transformation of the structural conditions which produce black under-development. An important front of the class struggle in this regard is around the collective empowerment of social groups, sectors and classes which have been historically oppressed as opposed to narrow empowerment and affirmative action (SACP, 1993) as critiqued above. This requires the subordination of empowerment to the logic of collective reconstruction and development and the raising of ideological and working class heat against narrow black economic empowerment and affirmative action. The white trade union, Solidarity, has proposed a class-based, rather than a race-based, approach to affirmative action. It is quite easy to dismiss this as a protection of white privilege but it is much closer to the critique of narrow affirmative action made above and to the building of a non-racial and class based consciousness. Already Alexander (2006) suggests that because of the demographic fact of a black majority a class-based approach to affirmative action will be more effective and more precisely targeted. This would make it possible for all economically disadvantaged individuals, irrespective of race to benefit and this could build non-racial class unity. Therefore socialists are challenged to transcend racialised affirmative action and empowerment. What does this mean in practice?

The struggle for the rolling back of the capitalist market is critical. According to Alexander (2006), we must continuously expose the contradictions of the system, initiate and support the most radical democratic reforms and continue with raising class and cultural consciousness. There is a special responsibility to work closely with the organised formations of the working class. This is the stratum of the working class that has traditions, numbers and capacity to play a leading strategic role in changing our society and build socialism. It is on this basis that Coloured and African working class unity can be built. For the working class, despite the divisions and weaknesses discussed above, nation-building can still mean, amongst other things, unifying itself nationally as the leading class whose culture, aspirations and economic interests become increasingly those of the nation.

Working class forces need to forcefully enter the debate about what kind of national identity we should be constructing, and in whose interests it is that it takes the form and content it does. Part of this must be a consistent approach to linguistic, cultural and religious questions. Despite all its radicalism, the South African working class is essentially socially and culturally conservative. Because of this realisation COSATU opted not to make a submission to national legislation dealing with virginity testing and circumcision despite the problematic gender aspects of these cultural activities. Therefore, a major challenge is to envision and experiment with processes that can unleash progressive identities across the board in a manner which enlightens "*sub-altern groups (with) ... the historical, social and political ways in which their (current) identities have been constructed*" (Alexander, 2006).

The nation-building project requires a class approach to understanding Coloured and Indian identities and consciousness, the objective conditions and positions of these communities as well as the class structure of these communities (Carrim, 1996). For example, Coloureds come up with the extremely negative human development indices in national statistics. This is at variance with the notion that Coloureds benefited more than Africans from apartheid.

It is not possible to achieve any of the above tasks with, for example, an SACP in the Western Cape that is more than 90% African and with minimal presence in the Coloured working class and its local struggles. The challenge is to open working class politics and organisations to the Coloured working class.

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