THINKING THEORETICALLY?

AFRIKANER NATIONALISM AND THE COMPARATIVE THEORY OF THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY:

A TRIBUTE TO HAROLD WOLPE

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> *The failure to examine the changing non-ideological conditions in which specific groups apply and therefore interpret and therefore modify their ideologies, results in the treatment of the latter as unchanging entities. By simply ascribing all action to generalised racial beliefs, prejudices or ideologies, the specific content of changing social relations and the conditions of change become excluded from analysis.*
>
> - Harold Wolpe (1971: 101).

Introduction

Harold Wolpe died just over one year and two months ago. His contribution to the emergence of a critical, but engaged analysis of the development of South African society was immense. Elsewhere I have attempted a partial assessment of aspects of that contribution. I have suggested that over and above his own penetrating dissection of a wide variety of issues linked to the struggle for a democratic South Africa, Harold Wolpe's unique contribution to South African social science was his insistence on theoretical rigour. It is in this sense, I argue, that both through his own writing and through his personal influence on a large number of South African intellectuals, Harold Wolpe schooled generations of South African social scientists in the necessity to think out the problematic of their own analysis. He was the first to insist explicitly that the pre-condition of coherent critical analysis was the need to problematise one's own assumptions.

This challenge remains as pertinent and as pressing today as it was in the worst days of apartheid. The fact that convention wisdom would have us believe that the theoretical givens underlying Harold Wolpe's work have been brought into question by the global changes of the past decade, in no way detracts from the urgent necessity to develop a theoretically coherent analysis of the possibilities and limits of transformation in the post-apartheid era.

The starting point for the development of such analysis remains for me what it was when Wolpe began his own theoretical assessment of the prevailing analysis of South Africa at the end of the 1960s — a critique of the assumptions underlying current conventional wisdom. As the extract from an early Wolpe article cited above suggests, such a critique would then lead to what, I am still persuaded, also remain the essential elements of any assessment of the possibilities and limits of the current period; "the specific content of changing social relations and the conditions of change".

This paper attempts to apply what I understand to be the spirit of Harold Wolpe's intellectual legacy to an assessment of the implications for democratic transformation in South Africa of a crucial aspect of the current global and domestic conjuncture — the resurgence of various forms of nationalistic assertion. More particularly, using the historical experience of Afrikaner nationalism, I seek to criticise much prevailing theorisation of the phenomenon of nationalism. The paper outlines the parameters of what strike me as a more fruitful approach to the analysis of nationalism, and concludes with an assessment of the lessons for the current hegemonic project to be drawn from the history Afrikaner nationalism.

The political context

At the end of the Twentieth Century, does anyone still need convincing of the power of ethnic nationalism to rip apart even powerful and apparently stable societies? From Bosnia to Kashmir, from Chechnya to Rwanda, from KwaZulu to Québec, the forces of ethnic nationalism have mobilised the past to serve their dream of a separatist future. In an époque in which the certainties and promises of modernity all seem to have been swept aside, the apparently resurgent force and presence of ethnic nationalism have given rise to a new truism of contemporary political science and international relations: the post-Cold War global order is defined by the contending Siamese twins of globalisation and ethnic nationalism.

The power and disastrous consequences of various forms ethnic nationalism have been evident in South Africa for much of the Twentieth Century. In a country no stranger to the horrors of ethnic violence, South Africans of all backgrounds and persuasions have a huge investment in the success of President Mandela's 1996 appeal for the creation of 'a new [non-racial, non-ethnic] patriotism' on the ashes of apartheid. Executive Deputy-President Mbeki defined this challenge as follows:

> History has granted to us the privilege to be the midwives of a new nation...We must seek to build out of South Africa's diversity one nation with a common sense of patriotism.

Despite the sometimes striking political achievements of South Africa's new democracy, the forging of such a new and non-ethnic nationalism remains a matter of hope rather than accomplished fact. Responsibility for the success of such a project rests on more than the impressive post-1994 accomplishments of South African sportsmen and sportswomen, more even than on the arthritic shoulders of a revered but aging President. Forging such a new nationalism requires laying to rest the various ghosts of South Africa's conflicted history.

The scariest of these ghosts is the ethnic legacies which transfigure the country's history. By far the ugliest of them all is Afrikaner nationalism. Most South Africans justifiably celebrate its demise. Yet the history of Afrikaner nationalism has a great deal to teach us both about the prospects both for Mandela's 'new patriotism' and for resurgent ethnic nationalist projects elsewhere. This work-in-progress seeks to present a preliminary sketch of some of the elements of Afrikaner nationalist history which seem to me to have a direct bearing on how, at the end of the Twentieth Century, we can most usefully conceive both ethnic nationalism and the wider field of the politics of identity. I am painfully aware that the ideas presented in this paper are in a preliminary and schematic form, and require much elaboration.

The intellectual context

A disproportion definitely exists between the way in which nationalism is used to explain history and politics, and the explanatory capacity of the concept as outlined by its theorists. The intellectual foundations provided by the latter simply will not support the explanatory structures that have been placed on them.

Recent South African social science has focussed heavily on the "construction" of various racial, gender and ethnic identities — or more correctly, subjectivities — in discourse and forms of cultural representation. Much of this writing draws on Benedict Anderson's celebrated view that "the nation...is an imagined community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign". Seen in Anderson's terms, nations are conceived of as systems of cultural representation through which people come to believe (imagine) that they share an experience of identification with a particular culturally-defined extended community. Anne McClintock has summarised this view as follows:

> As such, nations are not simply phantasmagoria of the mind, but are historical and institutional practices through which social difference is invented and performed. Nationalism becomes, as a result, radically constitutive of people's identities, through social contexts that are frequently violent and always gendered.

McClintock's own analysis seeks to extend Anderson's notion of the "invented nature of nationalism" to explore "the gendering of the national imaginary".

As I have made clear elsewhere, I am troubled by the explanatory model underlying much of this kind of analysis. The literature on such issues is vast and it is not my intention here to present either a detailed survey or an elaborate critique. Nevertheless, I do need to mark out the broad parameters of the theoretical issues in dispute.

My principal objection to both culturally-focussed and post-structuralist theories of nationalism is not that they are wrong in their claim that all nationalism are invented, or constructed, or based on imagined communities. Indeed, I hope to have shown exactly this myself in an earlier study of the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism: ie. how the (evolving) Christian-nationalism propagated first by the secret Afrikaner Broederbond (Brotherhood) after 1934, and then the Herenigde (Re-united) National Party after 1940, were in no sense emanations from the bosom of an organically united volk, but were rather laboriously constructed in a long and profoundly contested process, one consciously and deliberately undertaken by a relatively small group of middle class intellectuals and politicians.

My quarrel with such theories of nationalism (and indeed the wider field of the construction of subjectivity through discourse and cultural representation) lies rather at the level of how we conceive the process of the invention of such imagined communities. This involves complex ontological and epistemological issues which I hope to elaborate on in a later version of this paper. Suffice it here to locate my objection in all the silences inherent in the use of the word verbs "to come to" and "to become" in Anderson's definition and McClintock summary of his position.

It seems to me that the key question is that of how do different social categories of people "come" to believe that they belong to an imagined community called a nation, and, equally, just how does nationalism "become" radically constitutive of identities? I would argue that the explanatory model presented in much recent post-structuralist literature implicitly presumes that identifying the subjectivities represented in discourse and/or cultural rituals and routines is sufficient to account for actions and identities assumed by collectivities of real social agents. In other words, this literature seems to me to presume that the mere elaboration of this or that subjectivity in discourse leads directly (and in a way which almost none of this literature explores empirically) to the adoption of such identities by the groups of people targeted by the discourse.

A more sophistical version of this argument is presented by authors who examine cultural representations. Thus, there seems to be little to quarrel with, eg, in McClintock's characterisation of the nation:

> Rather than expressing the flowering into time of the organic essence of a timeless people, nations are contested systems of cultural representation that limit and legitimize people's access to the resources of the nation state.

In this text, McClintock uses Afrikaner nationalist history to demonstrate how such an array representations and ideological emblems are always gendered. Her analysis is powerful and apparently persuasive. However, while she clearly demonstrates the gendered nature of the cultural and ideological representations of Afrikaner nationalism, I would contend that because her focus remains almost exclusively at the level of the representation of gender difference internal to this emerging nationalist discourse, her model does not provide an adequate explanation for why these particular forms of representation won out over others. She acknowledges the contested nature of systems of cultural systems, but largely limits her analysis to identifying the gendered nature of such representations.

This method cannot explain the outcome of such "contested systems of cultural representation" precisely because it ignores process. The argumentation is replete with the use of verbs which foreclose any such analysis of process, in ways that take the outcome of process as in some sense pre-given. Thus, eg, McClintock says of one of the central institutions of Afrikaner nationalism, the Afrikaner Broederbond:

> The tiny white brotherhood swiftly burgeoned into a secret, country-wide mafia that came to exert enormous power over all aspects of Nationalist policy.

There are a number of problems with both this apparently purely descriptive claim, and with the explanatory role it plays in McClintock's argument. The first is factual. The Broederbond (AB) simply did not burgeon either swiftly or unproblematically, and certainly not in a regionally homogenous fashion. As its official history makes clearl, the Broederbond's expansion was slow, highly uneven, deeply contested within Afrikaner nationalism. Likewise it took the Broederbond many years to consolidate its influence over policy, and this remained uneven and spasmodic right up until the collapse of Afrikaner nationalism.

Most fundamentally, the Broederbond's expansion and influence were finally only possible because of an array of political developments external to the secret organisation. Thus the abandonment of Republicanism in 1927 by the Prime Minister and leader of the National Party (NP), General Hertzog, brought into the AB a completely new and vigorous leadership. The young urban Afrikaner intellectuals who comprised this leadership then set out, still fairly fruitlessly, to insert both themselves and the Bond qua organisation into positions of control in all cultural institutions catering to Afrikaans-speakers, and to fashion new ones where these did not exist. The fallout in the two northern provinces of the 1934 "fusion" of Gen. Hertzog's NP with Smuts's SAP — an event way beyond the Bond's control — likewise fortuitously presented these young intellectuals with an access to leading positions in the now-gesuiwerde (purified) northern National Parties, positions from which they had been previously excluded. The narrow rejection by Parliament of Prime Minister Hertzog's plea that South Africa should not declare war on Germany in September 1939, then finally shattered the tenuous "South Africanism" through which General Hertzog had appealed to so many Afrikaans-speaking whites in the 1930s. This led to a crucial opening of the field of cultural representation for new definitions originating from the Broederbond. Finally, I would argue that it was only in the late 1950s that the Broederbond attained the "enormous power over all aspects of Nationalist policy" which McClintock claims for the organisation — ie. when the Cape National Party had finally and decisively lost control of the federal National Party, and when an isolated new Hoofleier (Leader-in-chief), Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd, needed to consolidate a power base for himself. Indeed, during the short premiership of Verwoerd's mentor and predecessor, Broederbond member J.G. Strijdom (1954-1958), so strenuously had the latter excluded the AB from the realm of policy, that at least one branch pondered whether the time had not come to dissolve the secret organisation.

The second objection to this characterisation of the Broederbond lies at the level of its implicit explanatory model. Again, summarising this highly complex, uneven and deeply contested process with the past tense of the verb "to come", allows McClintock to do a number of things. Firstly, as suggested above, it obliterates process. This leads to an implicit, but strong inference that the outcome, the eventual result, explains the process. This then forecloses alternative possible outcomes. By doing so, it leaves the analyst free to treat both history and historical effects largely from the view point of the victors of highly contested process, ie. as if the meanings embodied in the victors' discourse and practice were the only ones present during the process. The outcome, and the meanings contained in the representations of the winners, are then implicitly evoked as representing the process. Thus outcome becomes the means of explaining the past, and hence the present. The mere representation of subjectivity in discourse is taken as sufficient to explain identity. This form of analysis simply does not even pose the crucial questions of why and how such representations eventually triumphed over others, nor the equally significant question of the process through which ideas and representations promulgated by specific groups of people are eventually wholly or partially assimilated (or not) by much larger and highly differentiated groups of people. These silences have the effect of implicitly reinforcing the argument of (successful) ethnic nationalist movements themselves — that their victory is explained by the ineluctable authenticity and power of their ideas (or in McClintock's view, symbolic performance of invented community)

This is evident in McClintock's treatment of the 1938 Tweede Trek (Second Trek) or Eeufees (Centenary) — the long, Broederbond-organised, cultural orgy celebrating the centenary of the "Great Trek". She clearly shows the gendered content of much of these celebrations. Yet she curiously ignores the, admittedly ambiguous, meaning of the attempt by the female members of the radical Garment Workers Union (GWU) to present a different class (and gender?) reading of the Tweede Trek. This openly socialist trade union of predominantly Afrikaner women sent its own Kappie Kommando (Bonnet Commando) to the final ceremony of the Eeufees. The Kappie Kommando was an explicit effort to present a radically different interpretation of the event to the meaning being given to it by its Broederbond organisers. Why did this not evoke much of an echo among the mass of Afrikaans-speakers, many of whom were working class women? Why did the construction of, gendered, Afrikaner identity triumph over the various numerous competing forms of subjectivity? What are the conditions of existence for this triumph, and the contested processed through which it occurred?

My point here is not simply to critique McClintock's understanding of nationalism, but rather to use elements of such a critique to suggest an array of other questions that need to be posed in order to grasp the politics of identity. In what follows, I use my understanding of Afrikaner nationalist history to present the beginnings of an alternative explanation, one which assigns a central explanatory role to political process.

Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaner identity

Historical amnesia and historical falsification are essential factors in the formation of any nation. It is in this sense that the development of historical studies so often represents a danger to the idea of nationality.'

At the core of any nationalism lies the question of identity — how large groups of people from different social and regional backgrounds come to believe that they all belong to a common community. What was it, for example, that in the 1950s led most white, male Afrikaans-speaking workers, define themselves as Afrikaners first, as white South Africans second, and as workers only third — and act accordingly in political terms? Such was not always the case. From the 1910s through to the mid-1940s many, if not most, such individuals acted politically in terms of a self-definition which clearly saw themselves first as men, secondly as workers, thirdly as white South Africans and only fourthly as Afrikaners. Some may even have defined themselves as Transvalers or as Kaapenaars (Cape Dutch) before they saw themselves as Afrikaners

After General Hertzog's renunciation of Republicanism in 1927, and particularly following "fusion" in 1934, a small group of intellectuals who ran the Afrikaner Broederbond set out quite deliberately and self-consciously to fashion a new 'Christian-national' identity for all white Afrikaans-speakers. Yet most of this target group displayed no great interest in such a definition of 'their' culture and identity. Electoral studies reveal that it was probably not until the election of 1958, or even the 1960 referendum on the Republic, that an overwhelming majority of white Afrikaans-speakers voted for the National Party and its project to 'Afrikanerise' South Africa.

However a mere thirty years later, the collective Afrikaner ethnic identity which the Broederbond had worked so hard to forge had effectively collapsed, along with 'official' Afrikaner culture. Nowhere is this more forcefully expressed than in the voëlvry (free as a bird) music and writings of young Afrikaners in the late 1980s. Enormously popular on Afrikaans campuses, their work deliberately parodied the nationalist version of Afrikaner culture, bearing self-conscious testimony to the confused, but decidedly non-Afrikaner, identity of these self-styled 'children of Verwoerd'. Consider, eg., the last stanza of the poem 'Curriculum vitae' by André Letoit (also known as 'Koos Kombuis'):

My nooi is in 'n naartjie	My girlfriend is in a tangerine
My ma vrees elke kommunis	My mother fears every communist
My oom het 'n jacuzzi	My uncle had a jacuzzi
En ek weet nie wie die fok ek is	And I don't know who the fuck I am

It should surprise nobody that the onetime self-styled volksfront ([Afrikaner] people's front) which was the National Party, finally acknowledged the total failure and collapse of its own ethnic project. In accepting South Africa's 1993 Interim Constitution, FW de Klerk's NP threw away everything the National Party had been elected to represent in 1948, everything that de Klerk's uncle, former Prime Minister JG Strijdom, and his father, the founder of Job Reservation, Jan de Klerk, had fought all their political lives to defend — indeed, everything which FW de Klerk himself had been raised to believe were the alpha and omega of the Afrikaner nationalism. Gone was volkseenheid (the [presumed organic] unity of the [Afrikaner] volk), the once sacred task of the protection of the Afrikaans language and culture. Abandoned were segregation, apartheid, church and state. But renouncing the struggle to defend everything "Afrikaans", everything it had ever stood and fought for, indeed the very bedrock on which it had existed since 1914, the National Party clung ferociously to the pensions and 'capitalistic' class privilege it had so eloquently denounced throughout the 1940s.

So, what does this baleful history tell us, both about nationalism in general, and about the prospects for a 'new patriotism' in a country still ravaged by the consequences of apartheid?

Nation, identity and nationalism

The term nationalism is most widely used in the sense given to it by Ernest Gellner. This sees nationalism as "primarily a principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent". I argue below that Gellner's definition requires some elaboration. Before this can be undertaken, however, a number of other points need to be made.

All nationalisms lay claim to exclusive authenticity. There are at least three mutually reinforcing levels to this. Firstly, nationalism claims the exclusive answer to the "correct" definition of the membership, form, and types of difference comprising "its" nation. At this level, nationalism defines difference — both who belongs to the nation and who does not (us/them), as well as the legitimate forms of differentiation within this authentic nation (gender, class, regional etc.).

Secondly, all nationalisms echo SWAPO of Namibia in claiming for themselves the role of the "sole, authentic representative", as the authentic "voice", of "their" nation. Indeed, throughout history, nationalists of all hues have shown themselves remarkably willing to act violently against those disputing this claim to exclusive representativity.

Thirdly, all nationalisms present themselves as the authentic and exclusive vehicle for the realisation of the historical (or divine) destiny they have discovered for "their" nation.

Thus, in order for nationalism to exist, the nation must exist. However, as testified to by the myriad failed attempts by social scientists and political activists to develop an "objective" definition of nations, these are not material forms of social organisation with clear and boundaries and membership evident to all. Moreover, "nations" are relatively recent phenomena in world history. All nations have had to be conjured into being, have been invented. This means that both their very existence,as well as their membership and boundaries, cannot be taken as self-evident. It is in this sense that all that nations, like all nationalisms, are "invented" or "constructed".

It is in this sense, then, that national identity — the particular dominant subjectivities this or that nation represents — is in no sense primordial, nor can it ever be taken as given. Like nationalism, the very idea of the existence of a nation, poses the central question of collective identity. In order to resolve the conundrum of nation and nationalism, it is crucial to specify what is understood by identity.

Here a number of points need to be made. Firstly, both individual and collective identities are multiple and fluid. As Belinda Bozolli has shown, an individual's social identity is constructed from the arrangement of various — and themselves constructed — "building blocks". The women of Phokeng saw themselves at one an the same time as elderly, married women; as mothers; churchgoers; peasants; and onetime urban workers, etc. etc. Secondly, identity is always relational and contextual. People define themselves in relation to other people, but also emphasise one or other combination of these multiple building blocks of their identity depending on context. Is Woody Allen primarily an American or a New Yorker? Or a Jew? Or a film maker? Or a New York, Jewish American film maker and..? Or something else? He is of course, different things dependent on context, and viewed by whom.

This leads me to argue, perhaps tautologically, that identity is not only socially constructed, but that it is also historical. That latter characteristic refers to the fact that individual and collective identities change over time. White Afrikaans-speakers in South Africa today do not define themselves in the same way as they did in the early 1950s. While we should all be thankful for this, it is important to stress that this shifting definition (or perhaps even abandonment) of Afrikaner identity is not explained by some collective coming to its senses on the part of "Afrikanerdom". Again, as I hope to have shown elsewhere, the very notion of "Afrikanerdom" was always an ideological construct. Rather, the conditions of existence which underpinned the framing of "Afrikaner" identity in nationalist discourse have changed, as have the social position and roles of much of the white Afrikaans-speaking population. This latter point is crucial as it gives my answer to the question of exactly how such identities are constructed — ie through prolonged and contested processes of political struggle, not through mere discourse.

The history of Afrikaner nationalism seems to bear this out. My own research on the elaboration by intellectuals of Afrikaner nationalist ideology in the period 1934-1948 taught me that these experts fought viciously among themselves. They struggled mightily in the realm of ideas—one former Broederbond Chairman was even quite literally lobotomised as a result. The "Afrikaner" subjectivity "constructed" in the discourse of the 1940s was both highly variegated, and the product of protracted and bitter struggle between such "experts". The "construction" of a particular Afrikaner subjectivity by the Broederbond Afrikaner experts went unheeded by key groups of "Afrikaners" for much of the 1930s and 1940s. These agents opted for other, competing identities (some as "workers" others as "South Africans"). Only fairly late in the game, and under very specific conditions and circumstances, did they come to assimilate the subjectivity embodied in the nationalist discourse. Moreover, the hold of this

generalised Afrikaner nationalist identity lasted for a relatively short historical period — from the early 1950s to the end of the 1970s.

This means that in and of itself, the "construction" of such identities through discourse is meaningless unless we have the means to explain the real historical (and highly political) process by which particular identities are discarded and others are received, adopted, assumed, and transformed. In the absence of such an analysis, which needs also to be theorised, explanation becomes another form of historicism: the outcome was inscribed in the process from the outset, therefore there is no need to explore the process.

Locating Afrikaner nationalism — identity and empowerment

The study of nationalism has very permeable boundaries.

Before I can answer the question of the appropriate theoretical tools with which to grasp nationalism, three further points need to be made.

1) The first relates to Gellner's definition of nationalism cited above. While many writers seem to agree that all nationalisms promote the principle that state and nation should be congruent, nationalism involves much more than mere principle — no matter have actively and aggressively promoted. I would argue that above and beyond this core principle, the concept of nationalism equally needs to include three additional and distinct elements. These elements are often conflated in the literature, in the sense that reference to the core "principle" of nationalism is taken as sufficient to account for them.

a) On the one hand, the concept of nationalism is used to refer the group of 'usual suspects' - the small gang of ideologues who invent the desired identities and the nationalist project.

These are the people who propagate the nationalist "principle" identified by Gellner. These ideologues are always drawn from exactly the same groups of men (almost never women) — teachers, academics and other intellectuals, small town lawyers, priests, small businessmen, journalists and artists. In the words of Wole Soyinka's first novel, these are 'the interpreters' who appoint themselves to define the world for a clientele of their own choosing. They proclaim the new identities, elaborate new nationalist utopias, and set up the secret societies, self-help groups, cultural associations and political parties which are intended to be the vehicle for the nationalism they invent.

Nationalist discourse is largely the "product" of selfconscious elaboration by such interpreters. However, much of the writing on the history of Afrikaner nationalism seems to treat the ideological activity of these interpreters as sufficient explanation for this phenomenon. Yet the history of the last two hundred years, even in South Africa, is littered with the failure of such projects to ignite any mass enthusiasm. The mere appearance of nationalist interpreters and their nationalist discourse does not nationalism make. Simply preaching at people is a notoriously inefficient way of getting them to change their behaviour, let alone their identity.

To take but one example from the orthodox pantheon of Afrikaner nationalist historys. The formation in 1875 of the Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners (GRA — Fellowship of Genuine Afrikaners) and the publication of their journal, Die Afrikaanse Patriot, did not generate Afrikaner nationalism, despite the GRA's claim "to stand for our Language, our Nation and our Country". Nor did it render inevitable the eventual development of a mass movement inspired by Afrikaner nationalism.

Of course, nationalists — and incidentally, most of liberal historians of South Africa — account for epiphenomena such as the GRA as the "precursors" or "harbingers" of the "real" nationalist movement, an essential element in a "geometric continuum" of nationalist assertion, synthesising all "Afrikaner" organisations into one overall converging "Afrikaner Voice". Not only does this take as given and as entirely unproblematic the primary ideological construct of Afrikaner nationalism, "Afrikanerdom" or "the Afrikaner nation", in doing so it

legitimises exactly the teleological logic of nationalist ideology itself. In other words the eventual outcome of a complex set of contested historical circumstances — "modern mass nationalism"— is unproblematically sundered from its historically specific conditions of existence and transformed into the timeless ethnic concept of Afrikanerdom. This is then imposed backwards in linear historical time as a core concept to organise aspects of South African history as far back as the Great Trek of 1835-1838. In these terms, the past becomes the inevitable and predetermined movement to the present. A perceived feature of the present — mass nationalism — is inscribed backwards in linear time to explain the past. The present thus explains the past. The development of Afrikaner nationalism becomes one all-embracing, teleological process in which an undifferentiated historical subject, "nascent Afrikanerdom" realises its self-positing end. It matters little whether the historian invokes Divine Will or "ethnicity" to explain this process of the self-realisation of "the Afrikaner nation". In either case, the uncritical use of this historicist ethnic concept necessarily inscribes the result on the process from the very outset. Analysis then becomes the simple description of a predetermined unfolding.

b) This points to a further, more important element of nationalism. It is the process through which much larger collectivities of men and women, drawn from different class and regional backgrounds, come to assimilate and act in terms of the new identities proclaimed by the interpreters. They do so to such an extent that these new identities suffuse, indeed overwhelm, all other elements of their individual identities, almost regardless of context. Only once they do so, is it legitimate to consider nationalism as a movement. For example, by the early 1950s, most of the male and female trade unionists who had long defined themselves as white, Afrikaner workers, had come to see their identities as white Afrikaner workers, and acted accordingly. Until they did so, until very large masses of people targeted by the interpreters began to act in terms of the newly-internalised identity long proclaimed by the self-appointed spokesmen (never women) of the volk, quite simply no volksbeweging (movement of the — Afrikaner — volk) existed — whatever the nationalist discourse, or performance, to the contrary.

Never in the history of modern nationalism has this mass internalisation of a new collective identity simply occurred by itself. Never has it been a spontaneous response to even decades of thumping the ethnic drum by the nationalist interpreters. It took the Broederbond and the various Afrikaner nationalist trade union organisations it set up, over twelve years of long hard work to win the support of a significant section of Afrikaner workers by 1948. The key organiser in this process was Dr. Albert Hertzog (son of the former Prime Minister). His historic contribution to the National Party (NP) victory of 1948 was his ultimate realisation that the nationalists would never 'capture' Afrikaner workers (as he put it) merely through appeals to ethnicity, nor even through the Broederbond-orchestrated cultural circus of the centenary of the Great Trek in 1938. While the prolonged cultural theatre of the Eeufees did generate vast Afrikaner enthusiasm, and led to the founding and rapid growth of the Ossewa Brandwag, this cultural fervour notably did not translate into votes for the NP.

Afrikaner workers were only finally won over when the interpreters learned to organise around bread and butter issues. These interpreters had to demonstrate to Afrikaner workers that they, rather than what they called 'the Jewish/communistic/imperialistic' trade unions, were best able to secure higher wages, better working conditions, widows pensions, disability benefits etc. Afrikaner workers stayed loyal to the National Party only so long the NP looked after their material (rather than cultural or even linguistic) interests. The same is true of Afrikaner farmers, and all other social forces mobilised in the nationalist coalition. The conundrum for the NP was how to advance, simultaneously, the material interests of Afrikaner workers, farmers, the new Afrikaner middle class and emerging business. This required a very delicate and hugely contested political balancing act. The NP answer was two-fold: firstly Afrikaner favouritism in the public service and parastatals, and secondly, apartheid.

The NP could not sustain this tightrope act beyond the mid-1970s. As I have shown elsewhere, Afrikaner nationalism collapsed long before FW de Klerk's announcement of the unbanning of the ANC and the freeing of Nelson Mandela on 2 February, 1990. Huge fissures in the nationalist edifice had opened by the mid 1960s, and could not be closed with ethnic and ideological polyfilla. Afrikaner nationalism ruptured under the weight of the recession of

the 1970s, the debacle of the first SADF invasion of Angola in 1975, and the 1976 Soweto revolt. The 1978 election of PW Botha as NP Hoofleier was the final nail in the coffin of volkseenheid — though it took him forty months to drive Dr. Andries Treurnicht and the old-style populist flat-earthers out of the NP.

c) This points to a further dimension absent from Gellner's definition of nationalism as "primarily a principle". In all nationalist ideologies and movements, some members of 'the nation' are always more equal than others. Not all Afrikaners benefited equally from NP rule. While the material position of white Afrikaans-speakers improved dramatically during the 1950s and 1960s, the main beneficiaries were the new Afrikaner entrepreneurs fostered by the NP.

During the 1930s, the small group of intellectuals who ran the Afrikaner Broederbond self-consciously set out to do two things which were to shape Afrikaner nationalism, and fix its future trajectory. They sought firstly to fashion a new 'Christian-national' identity for all white Afrikaans-speakers, and secondly to use this new identity to mobilise the volk to build a volkskapitalisme (people's capitalism) which would overcome the then glaring economic disparities between Afrikaans and English-speaking whites. Though they made huge gains in both endeavours, their success remained mixed.

I discussed the first of these projects above. Here I would argue that the ultimately more enduring initiative launched by the Broederbond in the 1930s was the volkskapitalisme of the Afrikaner economic movement. This project to end the exclusion of Afrikaans-speakers from the commanding heights of the urban economy was sold to the volk as a programme which would economically empower all Afrikaners, poor whites, workers, farmers, intellectuals and entrepreneurs. Responding to the 'pauperisation and domination' of Afrikaners by what the interpreters variously labelled as the 'British' or 'Jewish' 'capitalistic system', volkskapitalisme explicitly set out to "mobilise the volk to capture control of this foreign [capitalist] system and adapt it to our national character". This boiled down to a concerted programme to mobilise the savings of the volk to finance existing and new Afrikaner undertakings.

Volkskapitalisme was both startlingly successful and a remarkable, though always predictable, failure. Virtually from nowhere the Afrikaner economic movement turned existing minuscule Afrikaner undertakings such as Sanlam and Volkskas into the corporate giants they are today. Volkskapitalisme also created the Rembrandts, Federale Volksbeleggings, various banks and other Afrikaner economic powerhouses which now occupy such a central role in the South African economy.

Yet despite the Broederbond's sales pitch, the benefits were not felt by all Afrikaners. While the economic movement did lead to the economic empowerment of some Afrikaners, these were not the vast bulk of the farmers and the workers whose savings contributed so heavily to the success of volkskapitalisme. To the extent that Afrikaner workers and farmers became economically empowered under the NP, it was the state, rather than Afrikaner business, which looked after their interests.

Indeed, the ultimate success of Afrikaner business was a function both of state policies — the National Party's Afrikaner favouritism after 1948 — and an opening created by the Anglo American Corporation. Substantial support from the apartheid state in the form of contracts, quotas and concessions, interlocking directorships with state undertakings, favourable access to government, all gave larger Afrikaner undertakings a crucial inside edge. Equally significant, if not determinant, was the move to cooperation with 'the English'. When Anglo-American virtually gave the (then) General Mining and Finance Corporation to a tiny Sanlam subsidiary in 1964, the ground was laid both for the creation of the mighty Gencor empire and for taking the volk out of volkskapitalisme.

The very success of the Afrikaner economic movement began to undermine the collective sense of a common Afrikaner identity. By the early 1960s, Dr. Albert Hertzog and other leaders of Afrikaner workers were arguing that the geldmag (finance power) of the new Afrikaner capitalists had betrayed the volk. By 1980, these Afrikaner entrepreneurs had largely turned their backs on Afrikaner volkseenheid (unity of the volk) in the name of profit.

De Klerk and the Afrikaner establishment could jettison their entire political past with relative ease after 1990 precisely because the creation of Afrikaner business and a wealthy Afrikaner middle class had forever separated their interests and their futures from those of their less privileged volksgenote (members of the volk)

2) This distinction between these three elements of nationalism would suggest that the key to understanding the its emergence, power and ultimate prospects lies in grasping two crucial transitions — a) how these interpreters manage to inculcate the subjectivities they proclaim within the actions of much wider (and differentiated) groups of people, and; b) how success transformed the nationalist project. If the history of Afrikaner nationalism offers any comparative lessons, the single most important is that this transition is always a contested and highly politicised process. This would further suggest that a grasp of the complexities of this process, and hence the potential and real contradictions present at any moment of the history this or that nationalism is the central analytical task.

Doing so poses too many epistemological issues to be examined here. Perhaps the most important of these however, is the old theoretical conundrum of the relative weight of agency versus structure. Building on a critical analysis of the insights of the "constructivist" school of international relations, I hope to come back to this issue in a later version of this paper.

3) The history of Afrikaner nationalism strongly suggests that, as historical phenomena, that "successful" nationalist movements are likely slowly to "work themselves out of a job" once in power. The very success of the hegemonic project of Afrikaner nationalism by the end of the 1960s both eroded the very conditions which had brought it into being, and transformed the social position of the various social forces which comprised its mass base. The result was the removal of the raison d'être of Afrikaner nationalism, and hence, its eventual collapse.

Towards a comparative concept of nationalism

> "[T]he conditions of existence of a mode of production cannot be derived from the concept of that mode".

To paraphrase Harold Wolpe, this sketch of Afrikaner nationalist history, leads me to believe that the empirical existence of Afrikaner nationalism can be derived neither from the concept of nationalism, nor from the discourse of nationalist interpreters. An empirically and theoretically coherent analysis of nationalism — be it the Afrikaner, the Zulu, the Serbian or even the proposed "rainbow" variant — is possible only through an examination of the twin elements identified in the quotation which begins this paper; "the specific content of changing social relations and the conditions of change".

I would argue then that a fruitful comparative analysis of the contested processes which gives rise to nationalism would need to explore at least the following elements. To save space in an already overly long paper, I present these only in schematic form, as a partial and incomplete list of questions (examples drawn from Afrikaner nationalism are included in parentheses).

1) Locating the interpreters:

• Which category(ies) of social agents set out to invent the nation?

• How and where are these social agents located in the "pre-nationalist" social formation (relative economic deprivation of the small town Afrikaner middle class)?

• What were their (often conflicting and competing) interests in elaborating a new nationalism?

2) Historical context and social structure:

- Social pressures on both the interpreters and the wider social categories they claim to represent (development of agrarian capitalism, industrialisation, urbanisation, the "poor white problem")

- Role of language and other central 'national/ethnic' indicators in assigning specific places in the economy and capital accumulation;

- Political instability and patterns of power

3 Discourse of the nation:

- What categories of inclusion/exclusion (self/other), and of internal difference, are incorporated in the new discourse of the nation enunciated by the interpreters?

- The nature of the common identity (volksgebondheid) and the external enemies in opposition to which the common identity was formed (Brit en Bantoe, or as it was sometimes represented, khakis en kaffers).

- The nature of the parlous state of the nation, and the fate awaiting it if were not to realise the true (ie. inherent, God-given) mission proclaimed by the interpreters (verarming en oorheesing; verkaffering, verbastering en verengelsing; etc.)

- What are the internal modes of legitimation of this discourse? This would include:

  a. The golden age (Trekker republics);

  b. The litany of — almost always — external causes of present woe (the "English", from Slagtersneck, through the Anglo-Boer war; die swart gevaar from Dingaan to the ANC)

  c. Original sin — the traitors and weak leaders who had led the nation to its current impasse (from President Burghers, through hensoppers, to Smuts and Jan Hofmeyr)

4) Mobilising strategies:

- forms of organisation created/employed by the interpreters, eg.: secret societies (the Broederbond); the media (the formation of Nasionale Pers, Voortrekker Pers, etc); cultural organisations (the F.A.K); "national" economic undertakings (Sanlam, Volkskas, Rembrandt) and economic organisations (Die Reddingsdaadbond, Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut); "national" trade unions (Die Nasional Raad van Trustees, Blankewerker se Beskermingsbond); mass movements (the Ossewa Brandwag); political parties (the gesuiwerde NP and its successors);

- Organisation (or use made) of catalytic events and cultural/political theatre (Eeufees; Sharpeville, first assassination attempt on Verwoerd);

- Issues focussed on: language, culture, economy, religion (all encapsulated in die Republiek);

- Specific social categories targeted for particular kinds of mobilisation (Afrikaner workers)

5) Internal conflicts

- class, regional basis (provincialism in the NP);

- struggle over details of ideology ("who" comprises the volk, "its" authentic representatives, and mission);

- between various nationalist organisations (NP vs. OB et al. in 1940s), and the kinds of political terrain each represents (how the federalist structure of the NP reinforced regionalism and struggles for personal position);

- over personal position (who wins the plumb patronage positions in party and state)..

6)   Nature of opposing forces confronting nationalism:

- Social location in process defined in "2" above;

- Forms of political organisation and their (contextual) strengths and weakness (changing nature of the United Party after, firstly, being abandoned by the Hertzogites, and secondly, the end of WWII);

- Nature of its political leadership and alliances (division of the South African capitalist class around labour policy, taxation policy, urbanisation policy, etc);

- reasons for its failure (ie, election of the NP in 1948 as a defeat for social forces organised in the UP)

7)   Hegemonic project once in power

- locating "the nation" internationally (Republicanism)

- Exploring the how the nationalism movement manages and responds to the central tension between the way in which it sets out to consolidate the interests of the social forces comprising its social base (die Afrikaner volk and Afrikaner favouritism), and its need in government to legitimise its rule and represent the wider society and sets of economic interests (volskapitalisme vs. economic management);

- forms of consolidating its hold on power (reorganising the state and electoral system, repression, etc.)

- form of statism (volk en staat)

- evolving treatment of "the other" (apartheid, Afrikanerisation of the Civil Service, etc.)

8)   Effect on nationalist project of its own rule

- new (?) modes of class formation (creation of a new Afrikaner bourgeoisie, taking the volk out of volskapitalisme), and its impact on the "national unity" (Afrikaner geldmag teen die volk), and core policies (Afrikaner business abandons key elements of apartheid in 1970s and 1980s);

- Consequent changes in forms of internal conflict and struggles ("North vs. South" replaced by verligte/verkrampte struggle, increasingly open class conflict, and splits in NP and all Afrikaner organisations);

- Papering over the cracks (Dr. Verwoerd and Vorster — ideology seems at its most extreme just as the hegemonic project realises itself and the huge fissures in NP boil over into verligte/verkrampte struggle

- Weakening of nationalist unity and project

Lessons for black empowerment and a 'new patriotism'

[N]o serious historian of nations and nationalism can be a committed political nationalist, except in the sense in which believers in the literal truth of the Scriptures, while unable to make contributions to evolutionary theory, are not precluded from making contributions to archeology and Semitic-philology. Nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so.

Finally, it is instructive to pose the question of the potential lessons to be drawn from Afrikaner nationalism concerning the prospects for both black economic empowerment and for a 'new patriotism' in a country still ravaged by the consequences of apartheid?

I would argue that at least seven important lessons can be identified:

- The first is that no matter how many former militant black workers' leaders follow former ANC General-Secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa, into new black business initiatives, and no matter how powerful groups like Ramaphosa's National African Investments Limited (NAIL) become, the people who will be empowered by emerging black business are not the unemployed, the rural poor, the squatters who make up the bulk of the South African population.

  Business empowers businesspeople. Period. Business can provide employment to the poor, but in an economy adapting to globalisation, such opportunities will be decidedly limited. Even were they to propose a black volkskapitalisme, on their own, new black business groups cannot, will not, offer much to the poor. Like taxes, the poor may always be with us. But in a country transfigured by ethnic violence and racial inequalities, this prospect is as threatening to the rich as it is to the poor.

  The corollary of this is the sad truth that government remains the only institution which commands both the resources and the potential will (for it remains a mere potential) to act to improve the situation of the poor. The pursuit of (black) corporate profit will not do so, just as it did not do so for poor Afrikaners, many of whom are now bank in the ranks of the poor in the new South Africa. For a new patriotism to take root in South Africa, the Mandela government has to deliver real benefits to the poor. This is the only way that the (black) poor can be economically empowered.

- The second lesson is that Afrikaner ethnic identity was not innate, not born into the blood as the interpreters proclaimed. Nor could a new Afrikaner identity be brought into existence either by simple ideology or by cultural circuses, no matter how diverting. This means that the mere proclamation of a 'new patriotism' by new interpreters of the new South Africa will not bring it into being. It also means that even if South African sporting teams repeat their extraordinary, successes of 1995 and 1996, the patriotic fervour this generated across racial lines will not, in and of itself, translate into such a new nationalism.

- The third lesson lies in an observation by Eric Hobsbawm; nations do not create themselves they are (repeatedly) created by their enemies. Without British colonialism, without the extraordinary insensitivity of white English-speakers to the Afrikaans language, without the deaths of 25,000 Boer women and children in British concentration camps 1900-1902, without the exclusion of Afrikaans-speakers from effective participation in the capitalist economy, there would have been no Afrikaner nationalism. 'Hoggenheimer' was as much to blame for Afrikaner nationalism as were the Christian-national 'interpreters' and the NP. And had the United Party Minister of Agriculture not refused to increase the price of maize just weeks before the 1948 election, it is probable that the UP would not have lost all 15 of its Transvaal rural seats, so giving the NP a five-seat majority in Parliament.

  In other words, nationalism is just as much about the failure of alternative projects and identities as about success for the new identities and policies proclaimed by the

interpreters. This is a double-edged sword in the new South Africa. On the one hand, it implies that should Mandela's new patriotism fail, the likely beneficiaries will be those who preach the violent politics of a narrower nationalism. These range from the Zulu separatists, through the 'one settler one bullet' variants of Africanism, to the discredited clowns of the Afrikaner far right. On the other hand, the evident and universal failure of 'trickle down' economics to benefit the poor and unemployed in the rest of Africa, opens a narrow — but rapidly closing — window of opportunity for the ANC to promote a new patriotism built around some kind of alternative economic vision.

- This, however, depends on the fourth lesson to be drawn from the collapse of Afrikaner nationalism. New nationalisms only ever sustain widespread support, under one almost universal condition — when they can demonstrate their ability to improve the lives of large numbers of people. Bread, or at least the belief that bread is on its way, and not sporting and cultural theatre, is what keeps nationalism going. Unless the Mandela government can deliver on its social and economic promises, talk of a new patriotism is just so much whistling in the dark.

- The fifth lesson is that Nelson Mandela is not the first revered nationalist to stake his political future on national reconciliation and a new patriotism. South African first two Prime Ministers, Generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts, did the same after 1910. Their inability (or unwillingness) to address the growing poverty among many former Boer commandos allowed General J.B.M. Hertzog to depict them as having sold out to 'imperialism'. The same fate then befell Hertzog himself in 1940. In Mandela's South Africa, whatever the need for fiscal restraint and the demands of international competitiveness, the programme of national reconciliation has not yet fed the poor, housed the homeless, nor employed the millions of unemployed. Until it does so, the discourse of a new rainbow nation is unlikely to win the support of the victims of apartheid now turned into victims of globalisation.

- The sixth and most important lesson is that nationalism is about at least the appearance of a social contract, one that seems to benefit all. Successful nationalist movements are multi-class alliances. They work because the rich have learned that they have to give, and be seen to be giving, to the poor in ways which actually seem to hurt the rich — or at least constrain their greed. Once again there is a dual significance here. There can be no new patriotism without the active and involved consent of the millions of South Africa's poor and unemployed. These are the people who will determine the future of this project, not the relatively small group of previously-excluded blacks who manage to climb aboard the post-1994 gravy train, be it in the government or the corporate coaches. But the poor will not give their consent if the privileged, old and new, pursue only their own profits or 'empower' only themselves, nor if the privileged — old and new — demand policies which make the rich so much richer and tell the poor that they must, regrettably, rely on the informal sector.

- The final lesson of the collapse of Afrikaner nationalism is that if the 'new patriotism' ultimately fails, this failure will not necessarily produce revised ethnic nationalisms. Rather, it is more likely to lead to something even more insidious - a collapse in the belief in the power of politics to improve peoples lives. The 1990s have shown that this kind of depoliticisation, so rampant in the United States, does not produce new social movements nor new forms of mobilisation. Rather it leads to new and often uncontainable forms of social violence and social chaos — of which redistribution through crime is perhaps the least pernicious. This, to coin a phrase, is the alternative too ghastly to contemplate.

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