Article

Black republican tradition, nativism and populist politics in South Africa*

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Abstract
The formation of the Native Club in 2006 provoked widespread debate across South African society as it was deemed to be heralding black reverse racism in a country that had only recently emerged from the violent and exclusivist system of apartheid. The Native Club was interpreted as a threat to the spirit of ‘rainbowism’ and to current efforts at forging common citizenship for whites and blacks. The main weakness of the current debates on the Native Club and the phenomenon of nativism is the relative absence of historicisation and contextualisation within broader issues – in particular antinomies in black liberation thought and historical populist imaginations of citizenship and the nation. This article seeks to historicise and contextualise the Native Club and the phenomenon of nativism within the broader politics of contested conceptualisations of the national question and contested definitions of the teleology of the liberation struggle, as well as differing imaginations of the nation and visions of citizenship and democracy. It is only through a grounded and nuanced historical approach that the logic and the dangers of nativism could be understood together with the resurgence of populist politics crystallising around Jacob Zuma and the broader succession debate currently enveloping South Africa.

Introduction
The South Asian historian Sumit Sarkar (1992:3) once stated that ‘unimportant events of no obvious consequence which stick out and refuse to fit into any of the established patterns of historical reconstruction’ are valuable insofar as they ‘afford oblique entry points into social history and can throw light upon dimensions obscured by dominant – all too often teleological – analytical frameworks’. This is true of the Native Club, the emergence of which in 2006 spawned a flurry of intellectual and political activity and acrimonious debate circulating in both print and electronic media.
The supporters and the critics of the Native Club focused their attention on the murky present with a view to prescribing the mysterious future. No one historicised and contextualised the Native Club in the complex history of the South African liberation struggle. My analysis in this article is informed by the work of Benita Parry (1994:176) where she stated that:

When we consider the narratives of decolonisation, we encounter rhetorics in which ‘nativism’ in one form or another is evident. Instead of disciplining these, theoretical whip in hand, as a catalogue of epistemological error, of essentialist mystifications, as a masculinist appropriation of dissent, as more than an anti-racist racism etc., I want to consider what is to be gained by an unsententious interrogation of such articulations which, if often driven by negative passion, cannot be reduced to mere inveighing against iniquities or repetition of the canonical terms of imperialism’s work.

My key argument is that dismissing nativism as fake philosophy and as anti-racist racism is too simplistic and runs roughshod over the key contours of this phenomenon. Parry (1994:77) noted that nativism is a reverse discourse with its own agency and status in the drama of decolonisation and African resistance in general. As a reverse discourse nativism uses the same categories and the same vocabulary used by the dominant discourse to subvert, undermine, and decentre the latter. As such, it is only through deployment of a nuanced historical interrogation of the terrain in which nativism emerges that one can understand the logic and dangers of nativism. My entry point into the debates around nativism and current populist politics in South Africa is via a reconsideration of the key ideological cleavages and schisms dominant during the struggle for liberation.

The decolonisation of South Africa has been subject to different interpretations beginning with those who believed that since Britain granted dominion status and independence to the white national bourgeoisie in 1910, the national question was solved long ago (Alexander, N 1986:63). However, the adoption of the Act of Union in 1910 that devolved power from imperial Britain to the white national bourgeoisie provoked African nationalism and set a new stage for African liberation-oriented imaginations of the nation and citizenship. The African liberation-oriented definitions of the national question and related visions of nationhood and citizenship were by no means unified and monolithic. Complex antinomies of black thought characterised nationalist liberation-inspired imaginings of both the teleology of the liberation struggle and the nature of the post-
apartheid nation. The situation was further compounded by the fact that at
the international level, the South African struggle was reduced to a mere
anti-apartheid movement, as though apartheid was not a form of
colonialism. It was these misreadings of the South African situation and
narratives of South African political history that continued to reinforce
and feed the myth of South African exceptionalism. Mahmood Mamdani
(1996, 1998) has engaged the falsity of South Africa exceptionalism,
exposing the fact that apartheid was just a form of colonialism not so
different from British indirect rule.

What needs to be explored is the antinomies of black liberation thought
that continue to reverberate and pulsate within the Tripartite Alliance,
provoking nativism and populism. Two broad definitions of the national
question are identifiable. The first is the workerist-Marxist oriented
definition that understood the liberation struggle in class terms, primarily
the conflict between labour and capital. This version of the struggle is still
resonating within the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the
Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). The second is the
nationalist liberation definition whose key contours are: the end of racial
oppression; repossession of land; seizure of political power; and nationalist
The national question is about two problems: national unity and national
independence mediated by class, race, and ethnicity in the South African
case. Indeed in South Africa non-class ideologies of Negritude, Garveyism,
Pan-Africanism, nativism, traditional-ethnic culturalism, and Ethiopianism
intersected with modern global ideologies of nationalism, socialism,
Marxism, and republicanism within nationalist liberation movements. The
end result was antinomies of black liberation thought that gave birth to a
bizarre mixture of black republicans, radical nationalists, traditionalists,
Marxists, Garveyists, Ethiopianists, Pan-Africanists, liberals and nativists
informed and influenced by different pre-colonial African, modern global
and diasporic ideological resources.

Out of this complex ideological liberation terrain emerged crucial
questions that are continuously being asked today relating to the teleology
of the national liberation struggle, the nature of democratic transformation,
imaginations of the South African nation and the definition of citizenship.
These questions are at the root of the current problems of identity which
are provoking the rise of nativism and populism and threatening conceptions
of citizenship and imaginings of South Africa as a rainbow nation. Over the
years between 1912 and 1994, African leaders fighting for national liberation defined the struggle at three broad and interrelated levels: in the purely nationalist terms of black people fighting for their lost lands and lost political power; in liberal terms of a democratic and human rights struggle; and finally in nativist-populist terms of black republicanism and affirmation of black consciousness.

**Antinomies of black political thought**

African nationalism was not a monolithic vision of emancipation of Africans from colonialism and apartheid. The ANC Youth League document (1944) identified two streams of African nationalism dominant during the liberation struggle in South Africa. This is how they put it:

There are two streams of African nationalism. One centres around Marcus Garvey’s slogan, ‘Africa for Africans.’ It is based on the ‘quit Africa’ slogan and on the cry of ‘Hurl the white Man into the Sea!’ This brand of African nationalism is extreme and ultra-revolutionary. There is another stream of African nationalism which is moderate and which the [African National] Congress Youth League professes. We of the Youth League take account of the concrete situation in South Africa and realise that the different racial groups have come to stay, but we insist that a condition for inter-racial peace and progress is the abandonment of white domination and such a change in the basic structure of South African society that those relations which breed exploitation and human misery will disappear. There our goal is the winning of national freedom for African people and the inauguration of a people’s free society where racial oppression and persecution will be outlawed. (Joseph 1998:135-6)

But the ideological situation was in fact more complicated than this. Two factors must be taken into account. South Africa has the oldest African nationalist party that was formed on January 8, 1912, two years after the establishment of the Union of South Africa. Secondly, South Africans fought the longest liberation struggle, stretching from 1912 to 1994. As a result, there was no liberation struggle that was so cosmopolitan in ideological terms as the South African one. Over the years, it soaked up (too) many strands of black liberation philosophies and traditions. A closer look at the long history of the ANC does not confirm the thesis that:

From the founding of the African National Congress in 1910 until it came to power in 1994, the ANC leadership at its core remained committed to ‘a belief in non-racial principles and … a future South African society characterised and enriched by the growing interdependence and co-operation of its various population groups within one economic and
The ANC, like all African liberation movements, had a general direction of struggle but no clear path for realising it. It had no clear ideological underpinning. Like all African liberation movements, it was often forced to react to specific actions of the apartheid colonial state. The issue of ideology was never settled at any one time up until the negotiation period of the late 1980s and early 1990s that culminated in the transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994. Across the long liberation struggle, the ANC was largely forced to project the non-racial strand as its ‘public transcript’ (Scott 1990) for strategic and pragmatic purposes. Due to the exigencies of the struggle, the ANC operated in a hegemonic fashion, consistently surviving by swallowing different strands and doses of African nationalist political thought on liberation and soaking up different ideological strands of black struggles from within South Africa and from outside. Francis Meli captured this reality well when he wrote that Africanism ‘has always been a contradictory phenomenon’ within the ANC. Such luminaries of the South African liberation struggle as Anton Lembede, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and many others, learnt through the struggle and realised the limits and exclusive tendencies of radical Africanism. As Meli puts it, they ‘grew away’ from exclusive black Africanist ideology (Meli 1998:109-12).

Issues of race and class always complicated the nationalist struggle. If one adds the other issues of indigeneity, entitlements, culture and rights, it is hardly surprising that these issues resulted in schisms, divergences, convergences, splits as well as alliances. However, four strands of thought can be identified within the broader liberation movements in South Africa and the thinking of its intellectuals. The first strand is what Peter Ekeh described as the African bourgeois ideology of legitimation espoused by Western educated Africans (Ekeh 1975:91). This involved two desires. The first was a quest for inclusion in colonial governance, which later developed into the second aspect of trying to replace white colonial rulers. It was basically a moderate and elitist view that sought citizenship rights through miming imperial discourses and was not opposed to the perceived ideals and principles of Western institutions. It was predicated on the manifest acceptance of white ‘liberal’ ideals and principles, accompanied by the insistence that African conformity with them indicated a level of achievement that ought to earn the new educated Africans the right to the leadership of their country.
The second strand of thought had a very deep Ethiopianist outlook focusing on a separate and more exclusivist black liberation movement. The Ethiopianist Pan-Africanism that had spread throughout Africa since Ghana’s achievement of independence in 1957 reinforced and solidified claims of ‘Africa for Africans’ and the establishment of black republics across Africa. This Ethiopianist Pan-Africanism dovetailed with Garveyism with its ‘Africa for Africans’ slogan (Barber 1999:110 and Fredrickson 1995:282-3). Nativism was inherent in the strand of thought that sought black native liberation from white settler domination and that interpreted the whole struggle in race terms, including seeking recovery of the African past, African culture, and the restoration of African dignity. In South Africa this liberation thought played itself out within the Pan-African Congress (PAC) under the charismatic and radical leadership of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe.

The PAC imbibed the key issues of Ethiopian Pan-Africanism while basing its identity on the value system of the 1949 ANC Youth Congress’ Africanist Programme of Action (Gerhart 1978). African affirmation was viewed as a precondition to liberation in the context of the colonial and apartheid racial oppression of Africans. The rise of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) under Steve Bantu Biko was part of this African affirmation initiated by the PAC. The connection is captured by Steven M Davis (1998:13) who noted that:

Africanism as a ideology…would not wither with the PAC. Its popularity as an alternative to multiracialism was undiminished and was to manifest itself in later years through intermittent revivals of the PAC and through the rise of black consciousness.

Back republicans were of the opinion that citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa should be rooted in African communal identities, values, and virtues. A true citizen of South Africa was an ‘Azanian’ fully committed to the right of the African people to self-rule and reclamation of all of their ancestral land.

The third strand of political thought looked towards traditionalist ethnic-cultural leadership and espoused a form of ethnic nationalism that sought liberation of different ethnic groups as nations. The current Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) under Chief Gatsha Mangosuthu Buthelezi represents this strand of thought. The fourth and final strand of black thought took the form of Afro-Marxism with an emphasis on class struggles and economic liberation (Picard 2005:93-4). The South African Communist Party (SACP) took the lead on this strand of thought bringing together whites and blacks who were left leaning.
These strands were all shaped by what Kuan-Hsing Chen termed ‘the decolonisation question’ where settler colonialism shaped its supposed opposite (African nationalism):

Shaped by the immanent logic of colonialism, Third Word nationalism could not escape from reproducing racial and ethnic discrimination; a price to be paid by the coloniser as well as the colonised selves. (1998:14)

At a broader level, African nationalist ideologies were not completely disconnected from the broader global ideologies of liberalism, socialism, and republicanism. However, as noted by Halisi (1997:61) ‘at the core of black political thought, there are two interrelated and recurring visions of liberation: one, the image of multiracial union; the other, black republican ideology’.

Yet to see the intellectual debates in terms of a multi-racial and non-multi-racial binary ignores the third vision crystallising around what one can term an indigenous/nativist conception of citizenship focused on native entitlements and black rights as opposed to those of white settlers and their descendants, whom radical Africanists considered as aliens if not enemies of black liberation. Halisi has noted that:

Nascent questions of national identity (how the people are to be defined, who belongs to the political community, and what are the criteria of inclusion and exclusion) embedded in various schools of liberation thought profoundly influence black popular attitudes towards South Africa’s fledging democracy. (1997: 61)

The central concerns of liberation in South Africa were always intertwined with the key question of the relationship between capitalist industrialisation and racial domination. The moderate nationalist black organisations that formed themselves around the ANC over the years mobilised support across race and class and formed alliances across the racial divide. Those forces that formed themselves around the Pan-African Congress (PAC) interpreted the nationalist struggle in the radical Negritudist pan-Africanist terms of mobilising black Africans and black South Africans to fight for a black republic of Azania. The PAC was not alone in espousing the black republican tradition; the Non-European Unity Movement, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), the South African Students Organisation, and the Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO) shared the vision. Those that espoused the multiracial tradition included the ANC, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured...
People’s Organisation, the Congress of Democrats, and the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

The divisions in ideological terms were however not rigid and the currents of black republicanism were strong within the ANC whereas the multiracial ethos also permeated the PAC. This complexity of South African politics was well captured by Robert Thornton when he wrote that:

> South African politics has constantly attempted to explicate and examine the grounds of its very being. This is a politics, which has not been able to take for granted the nature or number of its primary actors. It is a politics that seeks not merely to distribute power, or to acquire and maintain power, but to define the nature of power itself. Many different political visions contend with one another in the political arena; even the limits and nature of the arena itself are questioned and tested. (1996:157)

No wonder then that the BCM dug clear trenches within the broader liberation movement, ‘trenches for physical and psychological warfare’ (Abdi 1999:151). The leader of the BCM, Steve Bantu Biko, defined his understanding of black consciousness as:

> …an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time. Its essence is the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group to rid themselves of shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude…Our culture, our history and indeed all aspects of the black man’s life have been battered nearly out of shape in the great collision between the indigenous values and the Anglo-Boer (Afrikaner) culture. (1978:14-15)

The BCM clearly articulated nativist and Negritude-oriented claims, including fighting against culturally imposed black self-negation, self-alienation, and the feeling of inferiority. Colonialism had led to what Abdi (1999:152) termed ‘identity deformation’ that needed to be reconstituted if natives/blacks were to regain lost confidence. On the other hand, those organisations affiliated to the ANC began to soak up issues of constitutionalism, driving more and more for a constitutional pluralist democracy based on common citizenship with mutual respect for different cultural traditions (Degenaar 1991:12).

The ANC itself retained a strong pool of Africanists even after the defection of some to form the PAC in 1959. As a movement, the ANC became a complex mixture of liberals, traditionalists, Marxists, conservatives, radicals,
Africanists, Black Consciousness activists, Africans, Coloureds, Indians, and whites. Anton Lembede, a leading Africanist within the ANC, protested against the *bambazonke* (catch-all) ideological disposition of the ANC, arguing that the political movement must cease to run like an ideological omnibus ‘stopping at every station to pick up all sorts of passengers’ (Gerhart 1978:78). The operation of the ANC as an omnibus was both a strength and a weakness throughout its existence, making it the largest organisation but also plunging it into constant ideological and operational crises. At the Morogoro General Conference of 1969, the ANC decision to allow whites to join its Executive Council immediately provoked the development of a hard-line Africanist radical faction opposed to white membership of the party (Kotze 1989:61). The Africanists were of the view that once the ANC was in power, black Africans as a group should be dominant in government and the economy. In 1975, the ANC was hit by another crisis, with eight of its influential members attacking the decision to open ANC ranks to whites. Radical Africanists were opposed to this decision and they even protested against the growing influence of the SACP within the ANC (Massie 1997:494).

In 1979, a large number of Black Consciousness groups with their Afro-radical ideology joined the ANC. Thus within the ANC radical Africanists co-existed uneasily with moderate non-racialists. At another level internal struggles took class forms, particularly in the 1990s, when the populist radical Left-leaning members felt marginalised by the moderate bourgeoisie Right within the ANC. Radicals described those who came to power in 1994 as the moderate bourgeoisie Right-wingers of the ANC (McKinley 1997, Goodman 1999). Therefore, within the ANC itself, a strong Africanist voice continually questioned the dominance of whites within the movement and continually pushed the ANC towards Afro-radicalism and nativism.

That nativism was going to be a problem in post-colonial Africa was pointed out long ago by Frantz Fanon (1968:157-8) when he stated that: ‘From nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism’. From as far back as 1961, Fanon had already noticed that there was a ‘permanent seesaw between African unity, which fades quicker and quicker into the mists of oblivion, and a heartbreaking return to chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form’ (1968:157-8).
Triumphalism, the limits of neo-liberalism, and the imagining of the nation

Neo-liberalism is a site and terrain of struggle with different meanings for different people and political constituencies. As such, neo-liberalism is definable at four levels: as a bourgeois class project of elite emancipation; as a popular signifier around which popular masses are mobilised; as a conservative macro-economic philosophy underpinning the capitalist development ethos; and as a potentially useful analytical category for understanding the current conjuncture in South Africa that is promoting resurgent forms of nativism and populism (Mouffe 2000, Laclau 2005:164-71, Robins 2005:1-19, Chipkin 2007:189-222, Ferguson 2006). As a site and terrain of struggle, the celebrated triumph of neo-liberalism has serious limitations and it is in this fertile soil that populist discourses that include nativism have germinated. Chantal Mouffe is one of the major critics of globally dominant ideologies of ‘neo-liberal democracy’. She has written persuasively of what she terms ‘the democratic paradox’ arguing that:

The failure of current democratic theory to tackle the question of citizenship is the consequence of their operating with a conception of the subject which sees individuals as prior to society, bearers of natural rights, and either utility-maximizing agents or rational subjects. In all cases they are abstracted from social and power relations, language, culture and the whole set of practices that make agency possible. What is precluded in these rationalistic approaches is the very question of what are the conditions of existence of a democratic subject. (2000: 95-7)

It is important to understand how South Africans in the immediate wake of apartheid’s collapse became obsessed with neo-liberal ideologies centred around democracy and rights. The drafting of the South African constitution was informed by a context of triumphalist post-Cold War thinking. The constitution was crafted during a time celebrated by Francis Fukuyama as ‘the end of history and the last man’ (1993). Within this overly optimistic mood of an unfolding new world order, neo-liberal democracy as a value and human rights as social imaginary became the legitimate ‘foundation myth’ for an ‘imagined’ new civic, democratic and open society and a common citizenship under the ‘rainbow nation’ (see Anderson’s (1993) famous ideas on nationalism). This must be understood in terms of the history of the country and the nature of the transition from apartheid to democracy as well as the racial and ethnic composition of the South Africa.
society. As Valji has pointed out, even the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) established in 1995 was scripted as a legitimate basis for laying to rest a racially divisive past and paving the way to a new future for South Africa as a ‘rainbow nation’ (2004).

The South African constitution also aimed to be the basis for healing the divisions of the past and a pre-requisite for the emergence of a single nation premised on equality and common citizenship. The neo-liberal discourse on democracy and human rights pervaded South African society at an alarming speed to the extent that Roger Southall recently noted that:

There is no subject more out of bounds in South Africa’s contemporary political discourse than any suggestion that development may require constraints upon democracy. Democratic rights for the majority in South Africa have been so hard won that any hint that they have costs is distinctively unwelcome. (2006: xxxviii)

Commenting on the swiftness with which South Africans embraced neo-liberal democracy, Southall further noted that:

The ANC clings to its identity as the liberation movement which freed South Africa from the shackles of apartheid, the DA identifies itself as the embodiment of individual rights, and the New National Party found the burden of ridding itself of its apartheid past so great that it recently collapsed itself, un lamented, into the new ruling party. Everyone favours ‘freedom’ and academic commentators concur with the new global orthodoxy that the struggle for political and socio-economic rights democratises development whilst also developing democracy. (2006: xxxviii)

Indeed the rank and file of South Africans became so obsessed with the idea of a new South Africa and the romantic idea of a ‘rainbow nation’ that there was overwhelming belief in democracy and human rights as naturally good values to be cherished by everyone across the race, ethnic, class and political spectrum. Democracy and human rights were imbued with magical powers to solve even the rich-poor divide deliberately institutionalised by the apartheid regime. Little notice was taken of the fact that the celebrated neo-liberal democracy and its ‘rights-talk’ was in a marriage with the exploitative capitalist economic system that was itself never supportive of the values of economic equality and the achievement of social justice.

One area to suffer in this era of democratic possibilities was the crucial issue of identity which is always at the centre of nation-building in post-colonial Africa. There was an assumption that because of the transition from
apartheid to democracy, both natives and settlers would metamorphose overnight into a common citizenship. Nahla Valji noted that the key limit of the TRC ‘was ironically silent on the issue of race – ironic given that it was functioning in the context of a country whose entire political and economic system was premised on the organisational principle of race’ (2004:1). Analysing the TRC as a safe foundation for the new South Africa, Mahmood Mamdani stated that the TRC model obscured the colonial nature of the South African context, that is, the link between conquest and dispossession, between racialised power and racialised privilege. To him the fatal flaw of the TRC was that it obscured the link between perpetrator and beneficiary (2000:179).

Apartheid was a brand of colonialism ranking along with indirect rule and associated colonial ideologies of governance. At another level, it was a form of internal colonialism. These dimensions of apartheid needed to be taken into account before people could buy into the romantic and mistaken perception that because of the fall of apartheid, then: ‘We are all South Africans, equal before the law. There are no longer blacks or whites’ (Maphai 2004:12). The nation-builders thought that through education a democratic citizen was going to emerge in South Africa, a citizen truly de-tribalised, de-racialised, and de-ethnicised. The slogan that carried the day was non-racialism feeding into the romantic idea of an accommodative ‘rainbow nation.’ Beneath this euphoria around equality and common citizenship, lay dangerous forces that translated into the sad reality whereby:

When convenient to them, members of both groups were quick to abandon the idea of a South African identity and adopt an exclusive racial identity. The blacks argued that, while they accepted the principles of non-discrimination and merit, history and context demanded the retention of a racial criterion to prevent the perpetuation of white domination of top positions in the private and public sectors….Likewise, the whites adopted a group identity when minority rights were at issue. They argued that without minority rights, majority rule would lead to black domination. (Maphai 2004:12-3)

Maphai (2004:14) rightly noted that the South African transition was a complex one involving a double and simultaneous move: ‘a shift from minority to majority rule, and a shift from an exclusive to an inclusive political system’. There was, however, a third move, involving the dismantling of the idea of ‘South African exceptionalism’ at the regional
and continental level. Mamdani clearly defined the problem of ‘South African exceptionalism’ as based on the belief that the ‘South African experience is so totally and irrevocably shaped by the initiative of the settler, that South Africa is no longer, in any meaningful sense, a part of Africa, native Africa’ (1998:6).

‘South African exceptionalism’ defined in the mould of the settler determining and shaping public discourse as well as the destiny of the country, is generating intense struggles with the black native who is seeking to be in the driving seat and to shape the public discourse in this largely black-dominated African nation. One of apartheid’s enduring legacies was the distortion of South African identity fragmenting Africans into rigidified and geographically ring-fenced homelands while at the same time codifying race as a precondition to access to citizenship. Instead of promoting a single citizenship, apartheid South Africa became a home to dozens of disenfranchised African ethnic groups and other racialised groups of coloureds and Indians, all subsisting under the Afrikaner volk democracy mediated through and by legislated racism known as separate development (apartheid). This history created a serious identity crisis that even the ‘Madiba magic’, ubuntu philosophy, and President Thabo Mbeki’s African Renaissance and pan-Africanist politics have not been able to solve.

The identity crisis and unfulfilled promises are breeding and provoking populist black republicanism with its dose of Afro-radicalism and revival of African cultural consciousness. As this discussion has shown, populist black republicanism is not a new phenomenon in South African politics. It is deeply rooted in the history of the ANC and in the competing imaginations and conceptions of a post-apartheid nation and citizenship. Fatima Meer’s (1971) analysis of African nationalism can be seen as a populist appraisal (and rejection) of the dominance of moderate liberal tendencies in the liberation struggle. She stated that there was ideological confusion during the early nationalist struggle which opened the gate for the acceptance of political moderation including rejection of black popular culture, while accepting assimilation into European culture. According to her this development prevented a militant confrontation with white power when its defeat was possible (1971:125-36).

What happened at the time of the transition was that the moderate non-racial strand of black liberation thought was found to be pragmatic in the context of a multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic society. White
settlers found this strand accommodative of them too, unlike the black republican philosophy. To use the words of James C Scott (1990), non-racialism governed the ‘public transcript’ and formed a more acceptable if highly compromised basis of the transition from apartheid to democracy. The radical republican Africanist thought with its trappings of nativism was relegated to a ‘hidden transcript’—a discourse taking place and playing itself out beyond the formal political arena. Halisi is convincing in his explanation of citizenship struggles and the role of populism in South African politics. This is how he put it:

Rival populisms, nourished by competing visions of liberation, are bound to have an impact on the evolution of South African citizenship because popular democratic traditions, of which populism is one manifestation, are among the most durable sources of inspiration for democratic thinkers. After centuries of racial domination, it would be unrealistic to expect an ethos of non-racial citizenship to prevail unchallenged by older political perceptions. Eventually, the black liberation struggle may come to be viewed by all South Africans as a national achievement and, therefore, a cornerstone of non-racial citizenship identity; but for the immediate future, successive governments will have to cope with the sensibilities grounded in both non-racial and race politics. (1997:78)

The fact is that South Africa has richer and more deep-rooted populist traditions than any other country in southern Africa, traditions born out of the experience of the oldest nationalist party and one which fought the longest liberation struggle. Black intellectuals of South Africa have always reacted to white racial nationalism with their own black populist strategies of black liberation, designed to mobilise across class divides and ethnic divisions. Ernesto Laclau (1977) noted that populist movements never fail to draw on the energies of intellectuals and political elites and to promote solidarities across and beyond class binaries. He added that populist theories tend to excel in their ability to synthesise seemingly contradictory ideas and identities into a pervasive sense of political solidarity.

While populism has mainly emerged as either right- or left-wing doctrines, nativism is another form in which populism emerges in post-colonial Africa. The Native Club formed in 2006 in South Africa is partly a product of a long-standing black South African intellectual tradition that has consistently deployed African populist thought syncretically, injecting Africanist thought and pan-Africanist thought into Eurocentric traditions. With the fading of the PAC, a race-conscious black populism has been gradually accommodated
by the ANC and ‘pulsates strongly within the ANC’ (Halisi 1997:85). It is no wonder then that the black populist thought that was formerly pushed into a ‘hidden transcript’ by the hegemonic and triumphant ‘public transcript’ of non-racialism is publicising itself via the newly launched Native Club.

The key question that needs to be addressed is: what is it about the current conjuncture that is making possible the re-emergence of nativism and populism as South Africa enters its crucial second phase of democracy? Bettina von Lieres (2005:22-32) offers part of the answer. She suggests that post-apartheid democracy is limited to three distinct types of liberal projects:

- Minimalist liberalism aimed at the establishment of the rule of law and minimalist government;
- Juridical liberalism concerned with rights, justice and obligations;
- Communitarian liberalism concerned with cultural pluralism, communal values and group rights.

She concludes that these strands of liberalism are continuously undercut by non-liberal discourses which derive ammunition from identity struggles articulated and attempting to find resonance in contexts other than the ones provided by liberal constitutionalism.

The problem is that these apparently non-liberal discourses of struggle are themselves imbricated in a neo-liberal terrain. ‘Neo-liberalism’ in present-day South Africa is a complex terrain of struggle. One finds ‘nativists’ railing against it, ‘ultra-leftists’ accusing the government of President Thabo Mbeki of neo-liberal puppetism, Zuma-supporters deriving ammunition from a leftist-populist critique of neo-liberalism, and Mbeki-supporters, turning around, pointing an accusing finger at the ‘ultra-left’ as counter-revolutionaries in cahoots with ‘real neo-liberals’. It is within this confused and confusing ideological battlefield that populism and nativism are emerging and need to be understood. The current conjuncture is typified by ideological crisis within the ANC and its partners, a crisis provoked by the glaring limits to neo-liberal democracy and, in turn, to the teleology of the national democratic revolution.

**Key contours of the current conjuncture**

The recent writings of Steven L Robins (2005) and Ivor Chipkin (2007) began to deal with the dynamics of the current conjuncture that is generating resurgences of nativism and populism in South Africa. These scholars have
initiated debate on the limits of the celebrated neo-liberalism as a guiding philosophy for governance and, by extension, the limits of the ‘miracle’ of 1994. In the first place, the black bourgeoisie that came to power in 1994 and its white allies wrongly understood democratisation and social transformation as meaning simply the inclusion of formerly excluded blacks in the democratic process and distribution of resources. In the second place, those that took charge of state power in Pretoria tended to reduce social transformation wrongly to a constitutional affair that could be achieved only through ‘taking racially based legislation off the statute books’ (Robins 2005:1).

Even more crucially, what was celebrated as the victory of the liberation movement over apartheid was a deeply compromised affair in which the ANC only occupied the ‘political powerhouse’ in Pretoria and failed to penetrate the ‘powerhouse of capital’ in Johannesburg (Terreblanche 2004). Therefore the present conjuncture that is breeding nativism and populism pertains to the limits of both liberation and liberal democracy in relation to the crucial questions of cultural claims, customs, identity, citizenship, marginalisation, and governance (Robins 2005:3). Building on the arguments of Laclau (2005) about ‘populist reason’ and Chantal Mouffe (2000) about ‘democratic paradox’, Ivor Chipkin concluded that the ‘problem in contemporary terms is of a particular demos that is not constituted on any measure of population, be it race, culture, religion, ethnicity or any combination of these’ (Chipkin 2007:190). This constitutes the core of what Chipkin terms the ‘theory of the democratic limit’.

The current conjuncture is basically characterised by inherent tensions within the heterogeneous and problematic black-nationalist ‘consensus’ informed by anti-apartheid mobilisation of the 1960s and 1970s; the tensions between liberal ‘universal values’ and the particular contextual exigencies of South Africa; and collapsing popular nodal points at which white and black aspirations could crystallise. All these developments are informed by material and cultural imperatives generated by the limits of the liberation movement’s attempt to deliver material and cultural goods to the satisfaction of South Africa’s diverse racial and ethnic constituencies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2007:50-60).

Nativism and African cultural revival

‘Rainbowism’ as the official imagination of the South African nation soon found itself in tension with resurgent forms of nativism and populism. The high point of nativism was the formation of the Native Club in 2006. The
formation of this club raised animated debate, described by Tom Nevin (2006) as follows:

Since its existence became public, the passage of The Native Club, South Africa’s latest hot potato, has been a baptism of fire. At the outset, it was accused of appropriating the politically loaded label ‘native’ for its own ends; more controversially, it has been accused of racial exclusivity. Its independence and objectivity has also been brought into question, not least due to its apparent patronage by government, although President Thabo Mbeki has more recently been at pains to qualify his acceptance of the forum.

The Native Club was formed by a bizarre mixture of African intellectuals who were very critical of what they perceived to be the continued white domination of knowledge production and public discourse in post-apartheid South Africa. It is no wonder then that the Native Club is housed at the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA) where ideologies of pan-Africanism, decolonialisation and Afrocentricity are being propagated. Its proponents defined it as a public initiative with the prime objective of mobilising and consolidating South African intelligentsia as a social force underpinning social transformation (http://nativeclub.org).

In terms of where the idea to form the club came from, evidence points to President Thabo Mbeki. Recently, the leading ANC intellectual Pallo Jordan was asked why he was not a member of the Native Club and his response shed light on the motivation behind its formation. He stated that the club offered him nothing in ‘terms of any sort of stimulation intellectually’, adding that those who formed the club, blew out of proportion Mbeki’s flippant question ‘Where are the natives?’ He proceeded to state that ‘They [the Native Club founders] did not grasp exactly what Mbeki meant. He was not saying that they must establish an exclusive club. He was saying, “where are their voices?”’ (The Sunday Times, October 28, 2007). Despite these later denials that President Mbeki made a call for such a club, there is evidence that he made a call for ‘such a social force’ when delivering his ‘Inaugural Lecture of the Parliamentary Millennium Project’ in April 2006. Taking a purely Afro-radical position President Mbeki raised critical issues about how the West distorted African history in its crusade to claim a superior position in global governance and the history of human inventions. He reminded his audience of the achievements and inventions of Africa including how the African civilisation of Ancient Egypt invented mathematics and a form of writing and how the Malian civilisation
culminated in the emergence of Timbuktu as a hub of intellectual activity and trade. In this lecture, Mbeki alluded to the dangers of neo-liberal imperialism and advised that the African struggle:

…is to engage in both the total emancipation of our continent from the social, political, and economic legacy of colonialism and apartheid as well as to reclaim our history, identity, and traditions and on the foundation that our ancestors built for all of humanity, rebuild our societies to ensure that they are developed and prosperous. (Mbeki 2006a)

While some scholars like Achille Mbembe are of the opinion that Mbeki is one of the ‘most worldly, cosmopolitan and urbane political leaders modern Africa has ever known’ (Mbembe 2006), they risk underestimating his deep Africanism slanting towards nativism and strong nationalist allegiance. Patrick Bond (2004) noted that Mbeki is an astute politician able to ‘talk left’ while behaving ‘right’ in practical political terms. Mbeki is able to speak both in Afro-radical language and in clear neo-liberal terms, while remaining a respected nationalist leader in Africa and trusted as part of a ‘new’ crop of democratic leaders at the global level. It is under Thabo Mbeki’s leadership that radical Africanist thought has permeated the ANC, pulsating concurrently and uneasily with the ANC’s tradition of non-racialism and its embrace of neo-liberal orthodoxies. Mbeki is one of the pillars of African Renaissance thinking and has been a prolific writer in his own right, as indicated by his contributions to the organisation’s online newsletter *ANC Today*. At one level, the Native Club is partly a presidential initiative and an ANC project because its formation was a direct response to Mbeki’s call for a progressive force to sustain the African Renaissance and to produce ideas to drive African societies. That it is sponsored by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and that its founding Chairperson is Titus Mafolo, a personal adviser to President Thabo Mbeki, further supports this conclusion.

The inaugural Native Club Conference held in Pretoria on May 3-4, 2006 was characterised by animated debate that reflected key issues about the direction of transformation, and aired differing perceptions of the role of intellectuals in the political discourse as well as some participants questioning the very existence of the Native Club itself. There was agreement on the reality of the marginalisation of black intellectual thought within the national discourse and the dominance of white ‘neo-liberal’ thought. The participants raised the issue of the South African government’s intolerance of criticism and its tendency to ‘other’ its critics as counter-revolutionaries
and ultra-leftist loonies. The participants also raised the issue of how taking part in the struggle for liberation had paralysed black intellectuals, creating a vacuum in the realm of black critical thought. The participants were worried that those intellectuals critical of some of the actions and policies of the ANC risked being labelled counter-revolutionaries. The intellectual debates and other exchanges reflected key aspects of the current conjuncture where ideological confusion reigns supreme as indicated by accusations and counter-accusations, schisms and power struggles within the broader Tripartite Alliance.

Within this intellectual ferment, the Native Club was largely seen as a forum to mobilise black intellectuals behind the new struggle for psychological decolonisation. Titus Mafolo as the founding chair of the club was concerned about cultural decolonisation of the minds of South Africans as a very pertinent part of the current struggles. To him, ‘colonialism and apartheid left “nothing to chance” as they implanted in natives the belief that indigenous thought and philosophy did not belong to the era of civilization. To a very large extent, the dominance of neo-liberal ideology in South Africa today is testimony to the legacy of 350 years of apartheid colonialism. The question is whether we have accepted this hegemony as God-given’ (Mafolo 2006a).

Mafolo noted a decline in intellectual engagement by blacks since 1994 and argued that the intellectual vacuum has been filled by a small, but ‘well-resourced, organised and strategically placed [group of] neo-liberals…consistent in trying to shape the form and content of the transformation of SA through public discourse, vocal and visible campaigns for their causes and better networking’ (Mafolo 2006a). To him, ‘the legacy of the past, which has imposed gross material inequalities’, made it easier for neo-liberals to vocalise their concerns. He added that the supporters of the club ‘firmly believed that neo-liberalism is inimical to the objectives of transformation and national reconstruction, at least in terms set and determined by the historically marginalised sections of our society’ (Mafolo 2006a). On the purpose of the Native Club, Mafolo stated that:

We seek to build a climate congenial to continued reflection and self-examination by the native intelligentsia, asserting itself in the realm of arts and culture, socio-economy and politics. The SA intelligentsia faces a cardinal responsibility to mobilise the weakest and most vulnerable sections of the society to find their voices, to live up to its historical obligation of developing and sustaining critical consciousness among the people. We see the scientific, literary and artistic members of our
society playing a central role in the regeneration of our young people, in the form of creative writing, poetry, participating in debates and generally contesting ideas. (2006a)

Mafolo went on to highlight some of the issues that the club will take on, such as preservation of the indigenous cultures, languages and social values that according to him are currently in a state of paralysis and ‘in a cultural limbo’. The challenge for the club was to find ways of codifying some of the values and traditions from the indigenous past and use them in strengthening African societies and nations. Articulating a clearly cultural-nationalist thought, Mafolo said:

Though we are Africans, many South Africans seem to have an identity crisis. Through our dress, music, cuisine, role models and reference points we seem to be clones of Americans and Europeans. The Native Club will grapple with this important matter so that there should evolve South Africans who are truly native rather than exotic. (2006a)

Writing in the journal *Umrabulo*, Mofolo clearly defined the club as ‘the third pillar of our transformation’, focused on cultural revival. The other two pillars were identified as politics and economy. He wrote that:

The Native Club is not an organisation and has no membership. It is a forum, led by a small committee that facilitates workshops, discussions, and debates around different issues and will soon begin research around identified topics. It is a club that seeks to encourage on-going critical engagement, especially among blacks, around the many and varied matters confronting our transformation. (2006b)

Mafolo defined culture as ‘the totality of inherited ideas, beliefs, philosophies, assumptions, values, and knowledge that propel society in a particular direction’. According to Mafolo the critical area that required radical intervention by the club is ‘the space of knowledge production, which is in the hands of whites, the majority of whom adhere to a liberal ideology…As in the economy, whites control and own the means of knowledge production and dissemination’ (2006b).

Giving details on the three pillars of transformation – politics, economy and culture – Mafolo noted that the South African national democratic revolution has made major strides in the arena of politics, dismantling the apartheid political edifice, repealing draconian laws and creating a more representative judiciary system as well as entrenching civil and political liberties. The second pillar, the economy, ‘poses more difficulties than that of politics’. According to Mafolo:
Twelve years after liberation the economy is still firmly in the hands of whites, most of whom continue to resist transformation of the economy and had to be dragged into the process of economic change through legislation. (2006b)

According to Mafolo the South African transition is defined within existing exotic dominant global ideologies – ‘whether liberal, social democratic or socialist – and adopt[s] a negative stance towards anyone suggesting the indigenisation of our revolution’ (2006b).

In terms of research, the key purpose of the Native Club is to explore issues related to ubuntu as an African philosophy of governance before the next step of codification. Addy Maloka (2006) who located the club within the broader national democratic project and the revolutionary traditions of Pan-Africanism, the Black Consciousness Movement and Negritude, as well as Marxism, joins Mafolo in this thinking. According to Maloka (2006:3), the Native Club’s ‘battle-cry [is] to address the legacy of apartheid in the knowledge production sector’. In an important article entitled ‘Writing for Them: “radical” historiography in South Africa and the “radical” other’, Maloka grappled with general disillusionment, a feeling of being peripherised and the general lack of connection between white scholars and black scholars. His article encapsulated the key issues that would in future feed and sustain nativist thinking among black intellectuals. The first issue related to ‘the virtual absence of practising black historians – defined here in terms of research and publications – in the production of historical knowledge in South Africa’ (Maloka 2004:83). While this problem is generally attributed to the apartheid construction of Bantu education, repression of black universities and broad segregationist policies, Maloka adds that ‘racial and class dynamics within the South African academy are themselves equally responsible for the lack of black academics’.

At its formation, the Native Club raised the issues of who is producing the knowledge being consumed by South Africans. The answer was that a minority of white scholars who are well established in different academic disciplines produce knowledge for the majority African population. Xolani Xundu, a journalist, remarked that the issue of who is producing knowledge and the contribution of black academics to knowledge production engaged the minds of those who attended the first conference of the Native Club (2006).

Sandile Memela, also a journalist as well as an author and spokesperson for the Ministry of Arts and Culture, took the debate in another direction,
mounting a critique of what he termed ‘coconut intellectuals: black outside, white inside’. His list of ‘coconut intellectuals’ included Xolela Mangcu, Sipho Seepe, Rhoda Kadali, Vuyo Mbuli, Tim Modise, Themba Sono, Console Tleane, and Aubrey Matshiqi. His key argument was that these black scholars spent a lot of time criticising the ANC government and in the process reinforcing racist assumptions about black governments in order to receive accolades from white liberals as fearless, independent, and courageous intellectuals (Memela 2006). Memela argued that ‘rather than help and support the democratic government carry out and fulfil its mandate, they limit their role to throwing stones at the government’. Memela added that: ‘Inside the government, there are intellectuals who are giving their lives to the system’ (2006).

Maloka (2006) however noted that: ‘During our struggle the realm of ideas always stood vigilant behind the barrel of the gun’. The democratic transition seems to have created a vacuum, which is sometimes attributed to self-censorship and fear of being branded a racist – since the race card is used to discredit people who raise debates – as well as the tyranny of political correctness. Thus at another level, the Native Club must be seen partly as an attempt to assemble an organic indigenous intelligentsia accommodative of the political project of the ANC and Mbeki’s African Renaissance.

The debate on the Native Club becomes more controversial when one looks at the critics of the Club and how they define the initiative. The critics engage first with the use of the term ‘native’ as part of the club’s name. Under apartheid, the word ‘native’ was transformed into an insult, ‘a way to describe and demean black people’ (Carroll 2006). It ranked with other terms such as Negro, nigger, and kaffir that denoted black people as inferior, irresponsible, and uncivilised. At the colonial legal level, which was permeated through and through by race, the term ‘native’ distinguished white European settlers from indigenous inhabitants and entailed the deprivation of natives’ rights and conferment of the same on the white settlers (Mamdani 1996). In a previously racially divided society like South Africa still engaged in democratic transition, when one racial group begins to appropriate the term ‘native’ to itself, the other racial groups are justifiably quicker to panic over their citizenship status. The term conjures up the colonial binaries of settlers and natives. It is within this context that criticism of the Native Club took the form of what Adekeye Adebajo referred to as ‘interracial verbal violence’ (Adebajo 2006).
The club’s use of a once pejorative name for itself, resulted in a barrage of criticism with some South Africans quickly likening it to the Broederbond (Afrikaner Brotherhood), a secret society established in 1918 to counter the humiliating defeat of the Afrikaners by the British in the South African War of 1899-1902. Through the Broederbond, Afrikaners hoped to foster Afrikaner culture and traditions in the face of ill-treatment by the British and their perceived reduction to second-class citizenship. The Broederbond’s silent network was considered to have been instrumental in the final rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the victory of the Afrikaner National Party in 1948 that preceded the entrenchment of apartheid policy. The Native Club is severely criticised for being as exclusivist as the Afrikaner Brotherhood. However, Mafolo has reiterated that the Native Club has no membership and President Mbeki told parliament that ‘I hope I would find in its ranks the Afrikaners…who hoped that one day they would have the possibility to proclaim that they were proudly South African and African natives’ (Mbeki 2006b).

Debates on the Native Club raised other crucial aspects, including the issue of the ability of African intellectuals to ‘speak truth to power’. Those intellectuals who associate themselves with power may end up as ‘purveyors of apologetics or sycophants’ (Mkandawire 2000). Since South Africa gained its ‘independence’ from apartheid recently, many African intellectuals have warned South African intellectuals to avoid coming too close to power and urged them to maintain a safe distance from the ruling political elites. It is not clear how the Native Club will be able to ‘speak truth to power’ (Said 1978) since it is so close to the government.

Looked at from another angle, the Native Club is a reflection of the broader multiple tensions and critiques that are themselves re-plays of diverse tendencies within the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance and the broader society. These tensions revolve not only around issues of economic inequality and the teleology of the liberation struggle, but are also about ideology as well as an African search for identity within the ‘rainbow’ dispensation. The key challenge within the current conjuncture is that of the nature of identity that is forming among the people of South Africa. South African-ness as an identity is still in formation. This argument is clearly advanced by Ivor Chipkin in his recent book Do South Africans Exist? (2007) and is vindicated by the renowned novelist Chinua Achebe who wrote that:

African identity is in the making. There isn’t a final identity that is
African. But at the same time, there is an identity coming into existence. And it has a certain context and meaning. (cited in Ahluwalia 1999:38)

Intertwined with the question of identity is the search for an appropriate ideology to guide South Africa in this crucial phase of democratic consolidation. The ANC can no longer manage to continue operating in an omnibus hegemonic style, standing as a ‘universal church’ where pagans, heathens, monotheists, animists, etc, co-exist united by the goal of constructing a rainbow nation. This takes us to the current issues within the ANC and how these ideological issues reflect re-plays of earlier debates and contestations about the nature of the liberation revolution, of democracy, of leadership, of the nation and of transformation.

One thing is clear: the key members of the Native Club are upwardly mobile black intellectuals, together with African middle classes, who are invoking the needs of the poor without necessarily helping them. The club members are fighting to present themselves as the spokespersons of the poor, willing to commit class suicide in the interests of fundamental transformation – while in reality, the Native Club is an elite forum with elitist demands for a space to direct public discourse. Afro-radicalism and nativism in this context may remain mobilising strategies meant to win the backing of the poor for the elitist struggles of emerging black intellectuals who are in fact wining and dining with the so-called ‘white neo-liberals’ within the academy. As a politico-intellectual initiative, the Native Club is trying frantically to mobilise within the domain of entitlements rooted in nativity and culture as opposed to the rights discourse that embraces the white settlers’ demands as well.

**Populist reason, the Tripartite Alliance and Jacob Zuma**

Ernesto Laclau (2005) articulated the concept of what he termed ‘populist reason’, involving constructions and reconstructions of popular identities based on the mobilisation of ensembles of strategies and making possible the emergence of ‘the people’ both as a collective actor and as an authentic democratic subject. This analysis is very relevant to understanding the present conjuncture in South Africa, where questions of ‘the people’ are still reverberating, revolving around authentic subjects (natives) and non-authentic subjects (settlers/aliens) (Chipkin 2007:1-15 and Geschiere 2005).

To start with, the President of the ANC Jacob Zuma has continued with his popular hit song *Leth’ umshini wami* (Bring My Machine Gun) every
time he meets his supporters, posturing as the most articulate symbol of resurgent populism. Zuma’s song has a meaning in the context of the current conjuncture and stage at which the national democratic revolution led by the ANC finds itself. The current conjuncture is characterised by crisis within the liberation discourse, revealing once more glaring class positions and ideological cleavages involving the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the South Africa Communist Party (SACP), and the ANC itself, all of them operating under a Tripartite Alliance. Throughout its existence, the ANC and its liberation project has always incorporated multiple tensions and internal critiques reflective of its operation as an ‘omnibus’ carrying different passengers.

Articulation refers to giving expression to something as well as to the production of meaning through language (Hall 1980:305-45). Looked at from this perspective, Jacob Zuma and his supporters represent the long existing but hidden populist re-articulation of the national democratic revolution (Hart 2007). Zuma is communicating something through the metaphor of the machine gun and his constant cry for his machine gun. The failures of the black bourgeoisie that came to power in 1994 to fulfil popular demands feed into the growing popularity of Zuma. Zuma is proving able to connect with the masses who are suffering from a sense of betrayal. The ANC is accused mainly by its partner, the SACP, of adopting capitalist tendencies and of serving the narrow self-interests of an emerging black capitalist stratum at the expense of the ordinary peasants and workers (SACP 2006:3-31). Thus the second decade of democracy is unfolding against the bedrock of multiple constituencies frustrated with the (non-existent) fruits of the national democratic revolution, feeding into a sense of betrayal. The popularity of Zuma is located in this fertile ground. What we are witnessing in South Africa is what Gillian Hart terms the ‘coming together of a politics of grievance and resentment’ (Hart 2007:85-86).

As noted by Neville Alexander (2002), the race-class debate in South Africa is refusing to go away and one can add that it continues to re-ignite memories of revolution and continuation of the struggle. A flammable combination of the stress of joblessness, poverty, transport problems, crime, poor service delivery, disease as well as racism, is mixed with pressure on the leadership to give real substance to the model of a new state, is bringing about a new coalescence and the revival of populism. The time has come for South Africans to reflect seriously on the indigenisation of their revolution and their transformation because the ‘natives’ are now very
‘restless’ and the whites are once more referred to as ‘settlers’ leading to general panic. Jonathan Jansen, formerly the Dean of Education at the University of Pretoria, has rightly noted that:

Yet we should not fool each other that just below the epidermis of our conciliatory politics lies a growing level of racialised anger, resentment, alienation and fear among many South Africans ... Anyone with doubts about this should read the entries on the so-called Friends of Jacob Zuma website to see the animosity raised by Zulu against Xhosa; or tune-in to the Cape Town’s call-in radio stations after a more qualified Coloured man was allegedly overlooked in favour of an African man for a job at Eskom; or listen to Radio Pretoria’s mode of reporting in heightened (and often exaggerated) emotional tones about the almost daily murders of farming families in the rural heartland at the hands of black men. (2006)

The puzzling key question is why there is all this restlessness in the midst of a successful and robust economy. Achille Mbembe describes the puzzle in this revealing way:

Many poor whites are growing resentful. White professionals who genuinely want to belong are called ‘settlers.’ At the same time, many young blacks are angry. They feel victimised by their own government. They still cannot get even crumbs from the gluttonous feast going around them – the economy growing at more than 3% a year; the minister of finance triumphantly announcing tax breaks; the governor of the Reserve Bank gloating about the low level of inflation. In the middle of the huge commercial emporium South Africa has become, their own experience is still one of joblessness, hunger, pestilence, and disease. Who is to be blamed if they conduct their lives with deep suspicion that after all, liberation might have been but a cynical ploy to keep them where they have been? …Such is the context that has created a desperate yearning for salvation by some heroic maprofeti eager to get back his machine-gun at a time when other nations compete with their knowledge and technologies. (2006)

A leading Marxist scholar and anti-apartheid activist, the late Harold Wolpe, creatively deployed the concept of articulation of modes of production and predicted that the national democratic revolution itself would be the site of intense struggles, conflicts and contestations (Wolpe 1972: 425-56; Wolpe 1988; Wolpe 1995: 88-101). Conflicts within the ANC are symbolised by emerging cracks within the ephemeral Tripartite Alliance as well as within the centre of the ANC itself as a liberation movement. The ANC has always contained within itself multiple articulations of the democratic national revolution since its formation in 1912. After 1994, it tried to contain
popular mobilisation and worked to articulate the interests of different races and classes utilising both popular undertones of African nationalism and liberal values of democracy and pluralism. It tried to embody within itself different histories, different memories, and different meanings of freedom as anchorages of the rainbow nation, hence its image as a broad church. As noted by Gillian Hart (2007), the ANC used its own definition of the revolution to ‘other’ and discipline others as ‘ultra-leftist’ or even counter-revolutionaries. The ANC also appropriated popular discourses and popular rhetoric to silence such formations as the PAC (Hart 2006).

Kenneth Anderson (1995:4) defined populism as ‘a sensibility inculcated into class over a long period of time by a form of production’. No mere chimera, the popularity of Zuma among workers dramatises a deep-seated populist ideology that has always existed within the ANC and that was committed to the complete decolonisation of South Africa. It had two strands. The first strand is deeply Africanist and its teleology is the transformation of South Africa into a black republic, involving changing all colonial and apartheid names and replacing them with purely African names of pre-colonial heroes and fallen heroes of the liberation struggle. In this black republic, African culture, African history, and African values must occupy the centre stage. The black intellectual will determine and shape the public discourse.

The second strand is Afro-Marxist in orientation. It consists of a two-stage revolution. The negotiated settlement of 1994 was the first stage of the revolution where the black and white bourgeoisie accommodate each other, forgive each other, and promise the rest of the people reconciliation and unity that runs roughshod over material inequalities. It is a necessary stage but not the final teleology of the national democratic revolution. It is the stage of black bourgeois liberation, but does not include the liberation of the masses (the workers and peasants). Hence, the need for a second revolution now crystallising around worker and peasant concerns and ranged against the bourgeoisie. A few revolutionary elements from the bourgeois class who are prepared to commit class suicide in the Fanonian and Cabralian sense, would work together with workers and peasants to achieve true liberation.

It is in this context that one finds Jacob Zuma very loyal to the movement, proclaiming that he is prepared to take any task assigned to him by the ANC. Zuma represents not millenarian thought but a strong populist vein long existing within the ANC. The ANC has survived through a
judicious and strategic deployment of a combination of populism and pragmatism. Gillian Hart sees Zuma representing a populist move not only to appropriate the national democratic revolution as its rightful heir, but also the traditional tendency of the ANC to articulate multiple and often contradictory meanings of liberation (Hart 2007). This Zuma does at a number of levels. First, by masquerading and asserting himself as a leftist representative; second, by presenting himself as a son of the soil, a man of the people and loyal traditionalist who dons leopard skins on key national occasions; and, third, by masquerading as someone lacking Western education and in the process creating a niche for himself as connected to the masses – as opposed to the highly educated elites. All these are strategic articulations of race, class, culture, and nationalism in very creative and populist ways.

The poor people’s frustrations and anger indicate many directions that are not so easy clearly to define beyond the present expressions of nativism and populism. Zuma-ism is making full use of resentment and grievance, with the figure of Zuma himself a point of reference in a multiplicity of tensions, anger, and discontents swelling and enveloping South African society. In this broad set of developments, *Leth’umshini wami* becomes a popular call to *Aluta Continua* (the continuation of the struggle). Those cadres within the ANC that have supported the populist strand of liberation believe that a bourgeois class which is not fully committed to the complete decolonisation of South Africa has hijacked the revolution. The whole Tripartite Alliance is shaking as the embers of black populism gain momentum within the ANC.

**Conclusion**

South Africa is currently at a crucial phase of its political evolution, a phase dominated by attempts to consolidate democracy as well as by doubts about whether the current forms of democracy can be a solution to such intractable historical problems as racism, inequality, poverty, and social justice. At this moment in time race-conscious populism is pulsating strongly within the ANC, giving birth to such formations as the Native Club and feeding broader populist and Africanist thinking.

The embers of populist Africanist-oriented thought that in 1994 took the form of a hidden transcript lurking beneath the temporal, triumphant, and public transcript of non-racialism, are glowing at the centre of politics once more in the context of a crisis around popular expectations. Old ideological
fault-lines are coming into the open, pitting the reformist policies of neo-liberalism and its mantra of creating a black middle-class against a resurgent radical, populist and Africanist bloc wedded to the liberation wartime vision of structural transformation and the empowerment of the working class and peasants. President Thabo Mbeki has been standing astride and uneasily across these fault-lines, as demonstrated by his controversial stance on AIDS, his two nations thesis on the economy, his drive for African Renaissance and his support for the Native Club, and by some of his purely Africanist intellectual writings, public political lectures and presentations.

This article has argued that one cannot understand the key dynamics of the current resurgence of nativism and populism without a proper historical grasp of the complex definitions of the national question and the different imaginations of the post apartheid nation, as well as contestations over the teleology of the national democratic revolution. There are indeed complex antinomies of black thought that have not been laid to rest and that continue to play a role in the definition of the transformational agenda in South Africa.

The formation of the Native Club in 2006 is just a reflection of the resurgence of black republican thought previously represented openly by the PAC but currently appropriated by the ANC as it decentres the PAC from mainstream politics. Nativism is a form of response to the triumphant neo-liberal-inspired philosophy of non-racialism that appears to have benefited mainly the white establishment at the expense of the poor. That nativism is taking the form of an intellectual project also indicates the limits of the current conjuncture in accommodating black academics within the broader national and public discourses driving South African society. The attempt is to indigenise the national democratic revolution and to open the way for black intellectuals to drive and shape public discourse in a more powerful way. Nativism is the vehicle.

Note
* I would like to acknowledge the support of the African Studies Centre, Leiden in the Netherlands where I was a Visiting Research Fellow in the period January-March 2007 during which time I embarked on research for this article.

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