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Article

Whither nationalism? Are we entering an era of post-nationalist politics in Southern Africa?

Krista Johnson

Introduction
More than 40 years ago Frantz Fanon provided a potent critique of bourgeois anticolonial nationalism when he argued that it was an ideology aimed at the (re)attainment of nationhood through means of the capture and subsequent occupation of the colonial state, and which represented only the interests of the elite indigenous classes (Fanon 1963). In recent years, in part as a result of the rise of viable opposition political parties with the capacity not only to influence policy but to challenge incumbent parties for state power, and the blossoming networks of civil society in several Southern African countries, Fanon has been resurrected by some scholars of the region to launch scathing critiques of nationalist ideology and practice, and of the national liberation movements whom they suggest were always more concerned with the consolidation of elite power than with the empowering of the powerless, and with the extension of privilege rather than with its overthrow (Bond 2002, Melber 2002). For these scholars, some of the key features and indeed limitations of post-independence African nationalism have been the abuse of power exercised by the national liberation parties over its citizens, and the partnerships forged with capital and international forces by an African leadership that identifies with the decadence of the bourgeoisie of the West.

Under the guise of post-independence African nationalism, national liberation movements turned political parties, to varying degrees, have been able to strengthen their political dominance and maintain control over the state by selectively reconstructing narratives of the wars of liberation and inventing new traditions that establish the nationalist parties’ exclusive post-colonial legitimacy to rule. The boundaries between the party,
government/state, and constructions of the nation often have become blurred in the post-independence era of Southern Africa, meaning that those who opposed or dissented from the line of the nationalist party were branded as enemies of the people and of the national interest.

However, in recent years we have witnessed the rise of viable opposition political parties in several Southern African countries, such as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in Zimbabwe and the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) in Zambia, that have successfully challenged the nationalist parties in some political contests. Perhaps more importantly, we have witnessed a resurgence of grassroots, popular politics and the rise of so-called new social movements such as the Anti-Privatization Forum, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, and the Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa that have successfully challenged the ANC government’s policies on crucial issues such as AIDS treatment and the privatisation of basic resources and services. The community struggles, demonstrations and marches waged by these groups have received international attention and signal for some the building of an alternative politics that can successfully challenge the dominant neoliberal policies of many Southern African governments. Commenting on the mass mobilisation and demonstrations organised in opposition to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002, the Canadian anti-apartheid activist John Saul excitedly remarked,

I feel, even more strongly … that we are now entering into novel and complex political terrain in South Africa, terrain that is extremely dangerous but also marked by genuine promise…it was difficult to be on that march and not sense that it served as a significant signpost on the road to a post-neoliberal and post-nationalist politics in South Africa – and as an impressive rallying point for those forces from below that might yet get things back on track in their country. (Saul 2002:13)

The growth of so-called new social movements and grassroots organisations centered on material and basic needs and often aligned with broader anti-globalisation and anti-neoliberalism campaigns may in some respects suggest the revitalisation of grassroots popular politics in South Africa. However, this new alliance of social movements is not without its own contradictions. The leftist scholar and activist Patrick Bond argued as much noting that,

As the final rally opened, a spokesperson from the landless movement intoned ‘Viva Robert Mugabe, Viva! Viva Zanu-PF, Viva!’ , to strong
applause from the large rural delegation ... the landless gathering was full of promise but also pitfalls, as witnessed in the movement’s positive reaction to Mugabe’s invitation for a welcome to the Johannesburg airport ... in advance of the heads of state meeting ...

(Bond 2002d:2)

Incidents such as this reveal the heterogeneity of groups that comprise this burgeoning grassroots movement and the disparate interests they represent. What is inspiring about these new forms of struggle and political organisation is that they are fuelled by ordinary people who are protesting at the barbaric affects of imperialism and neoliberal economic policies and practices that prioritise fiscal discipline and the interests of foreign capital over meeting the basic needs of its citizens. But their anti-imperialism manifests itself in various forms – not always anti-capitalist, sometimes socialist, and sometimes nationalist. Indeed the support for President Mugabe among a large portion of South Africa’s rural poor is an indication of the continued resonance of nationalist sentiment. Similarly, many of the sentiments emanating from within the anti-privatisation movement are nationalist in origin, and advocate for increased state intervention and more neo-Keynesian economic policies rather than anti-state slogans and rhetoric.

Such a reality poses serious challenges to the leadership of this new social movement alliance as well as to African intellectuals, particularly those who once shared the liberation movements’ nationalist objectives but may now be critical of many of the policy strategies adopted by nationalist leaders in power. It compels us to pose pointed questions as to what we mean by a post-nationalist politics. Should our criticisms be targeted towards the national liberation movements or towards the nationalist project? Should we label all nationalist demands as reactionary? In what way does a post-nationalist project translate into an anti-state project? And what might be a post-nationalist vision or construction of the nation?

In fact, one of the limitations of these debates has been that post-nationalism has been ill-defined and used to characterise multiple and disparate political projects. Broadly speaking, post-nationalism has been used to connote a critique of post-independence state nationalism. In this regard it has been related to anti-nationalist and anti-state projects. Leftist scholars like John Saul and Patrick Bond have used the term to explain what they hope is a burgeoning socialist and anti-imperialist movement or sentiment. For liberal scholars post-nationalism connotes a liberal democratic political project that places emphasis on individual rights and multiparty
politics. In contrast, African nationalist and pan-Africanist scholars, more wary of so-called post-nationalist political projects, have characterised post-nationalism as a political project detached from the pan-African ideal and free of its moral imperatives, which promotes a more exclusionary and adversarial image of the nation (Mkandawire 2003). In this paper I draw on the arguments of this third group of scholars to provide a critique of both leftist and liberal intellectuals who have rushed to embrace post-nationalism while disparaging nationalism and nationalist leaders.

Deconstructing the nationalist struggles in Southern Africa is a useful exercise but only if it is well-informed and able to interrogate the complexity of the problems that nationalist leaders face, and the structural context for the failure of the nationalist developmental project. This paper attempts to weigh these debates by critically examining some of the recent charges against the ruling national liberation movements made by leftist intellectuals with an extensive and committed involvement in Southern Africa. The new critics, intent on exposing nationalist leaders as the new emperors without clothes, have focused on the material basis and bourgeois and elitist character of post-colonial nationalism. While there is certainly a need to challenge nationalist leaders on their record, this paper argues that we need to take the national project seriously by critically revisiting and deconstructing the nationalist agenda rather than consigning nationalism to the dustbin of history.

**Fanon and nationalism**

Nationalism and the nation-state have returned to prominence in Western social scientific scholarship, especially since 1989. Most of the contemporary studies of nationalism continue to be filtered through a First World or Western lens that perceives nationalism as ‘near-pathological’ (Anderson 1983:129), ‘chauvinistic’ and resulting ‘in the violent intensification of already existing social divisions’ (Lazarus 1999:161). Ironically, such perspectives have been readily accepted in contemporary post-colonial studies where they have taken on their own distinctive features. This is quite opposite from the approaches taken in the context of decolonisation when the liberationist credentials of at least some anti-colonial nationalist movements were not in doubt. Neil Lazarus reminds us,

> To speak during those years of Vietnam or Cuba or Algeria or Guinea-Bissau – to evoke the names of such figures as Che, Fidel, Ho, Amilcar Cabral, no matter how fetishistically – was to conjure up the specter of national liberation, that is, of a revolutionary decolonization capable,
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in Frantz Fanon’s memorable phrase, of ‘chang[ing] the order of the world’. (Lazarus 1999:161)

In their critique of anti-colonial nationalist movements some contemporary theorists of Southern African ‘postcoloniality’ have drawn on Fanon’s denunciation of bourgeois nationalism (Bond 2002a, 2002b; Bond and Manyanya 2002; Melber 2002). For example, Patrick Bond argues that Fanon’s premonition that the ‘historic mission’ of the bourgeois nationalists was to constitute themselves as functionaries, straddling the international division of labour between metropolitan capitalism and the subaltern classes in the peripheries has been upheld in both post-independence Zimbabwe and post-apartheid South Africa. In *Fanon’s Warning: a civil society reader on the New Partnership for Africa’s Development* (NEPAD), Bond argues that NEPAD as ‘a new framework of interaction with the rest of the world’ is an example of the partnership between Africa’s leaders and powerful foreign interests that may lead to Africa’s rapid integration into the world economy, but is unlikely to provide equitable and sustainable growth. He contends,

Mbeki and his main allies have already succumbed to the class (not necessarily personalistic) limitations of post-Independence African nationalism, namely acting in close collaboration with hostile transnational corporate and multilateral forces whose interests stand directly opposed to Mbeki’s South African and African constituencies. (Bond 2002a:1)

Bond shares with many of the civil society critiques of NEPAD included in his book a great deal of scepticism over the form of corporate-driven globalisation and development supported within NEPAD (Bond 2002b). He argues that Africa’s marginalisation has occurred not because of a lack of integration into the global economy but because of too much of the wrong sort of integration. Thus for Bond, NEPAD simply represents the complicity of the African national bourgeoisie in the extension of neocolonial globalisation, a condition Fanon foretold when he wrote of the national bourgeoisie as ‘being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neocolonialism’ (Fanon 1963:152).

Bond and Manyanya make a similar condemnation of Zimbabwe and the ruling ZANU-PF party (Bond and Manyanya 2002). They argue that the leadership of the national liberation party, despite its continued radical rhetoric, became the local agents of imperialism by following the structural adjustment plans dictated by the IMF.
After national liberation, the petit-bourgeois leadership can abandon its alliance with workers and peasants and emerge as the new ruling class by gaining certain concessions from both foreign and local capital and, in fact, forming a new alliance with these forces, which they need to stay in power. Of course, lip-service commitment, à la Kenya, to the masses will be made. (Bond and Manyanya 2002:25)

These policies alienated the urban and rural masses from the ruling ZANU-PF and precipitated the explosion of mass action in 1997-8, reflecting what the authors term the ‘exhausted nationalism’ of the ruling nationalist party (Bond and Manyanya 2002). Such exhausted nationalism is characterised by an abuse of power by the nationalist party, in which it becomes increasingly authoritarian over its own citizens, demanding loyalty and obedience instead of welcoming the free flow of ideas and expression of popular discontent.

Henning Melber, in his article on the national liberation movements turned governments in Southern Africa, makes a similar argument, suggesting that, to varying degrees, these revolutionary liberation parties have transformed themselves into a new ruling conservative elite, often becoming the post-colonial enemies of democracy and freedom (Melber 2002). He argues that the nationalist parties ‘have been able to establish exclusive post-colonial legitimacy to rule by constructing selective narratives of the war(s) of liberation and establishing themselves as an integral part of the post-colonial national identity’ (Melber 2002:163).

Given the blurred boundaries between party, government and state under a factual one-party system subordinating the state and the growing equation of the party being the government and the government being the state, any opposition or dissent is considered to be hostile and branded as an enemy to the people and the national interest. (Melber 2002:163)

For Melber the blending of party, government and state among the ruling nationalist parties indicates a very similar development in Southern Africa to the one Fanon prophesised over 40 years ago. Fanon spoke of the abuse of power exercised by the party that controls the masses, not to make sure that they really participate in the business of governing the nation but to remind them constantly that what the government expects from them is obedience and discipline. The political party … instead of welcoming the expression of popular discontentment, instead of taking for its fundamental purpose the free flow of ideas from the people up to the government, forms a screen and forbids such ideas. (Fanon 2001:146,147 – quoted in Melber 2002: 168)
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These intellectuals provide important analyses of the detrimental impact of state nationalist ideologies that promote anti-democratic and authoritarian governance practices and mask neoliberal economic policies that keep Southern African countries in relationships of dependence with the developed world. They highlight the material basis of nationalism, which has tended to be bourgeois and elitist in character. However, the debates have tended to become framed in terms of left versus right politics, while dismissing any progressive possibilities of nationalist politics. For example, what do we make of the persistence of nationalist sentiments among the grassroots and poor? Can it be explained as simply ‘false consciousness’ on their part?

A critique of nationalist politics in Southern Africa requires a more nuanced understanding of nationalist pressures emanating from elites as well as from the poor. Ruling nationalist parties confront multiple nationalist pressures from new African elites demanding capital/resource accumulation, and from the poor demanding redistribution. To be sure, the nationalist project in Southern African countries has tended to lean towards elite/bourgeois nationalism, to the detriment of the poor. As Neville Alexander argues, the nationalist project will continue to lean towards bourgeois nationalism if multiple understandings of the nation persist. Yet the goal cannot be to deny the national question nor to replace a racialist approach to the national question with one that is classist (Alexander 2002:41).

To develop a more nuanced understanding of post-independence nationalism, I suggest we revisit the writings of Fanon and consider some of the lessons learnt in other parts of the continent. Fanon has proved to be incredibly prescient in laying out the questions that continue to haunt us in the post-colonial and post-apartheid era. Yet, his denunciation of bourgeois nationalist ideology was not an abstract repudiation of nationalism as such. Indeed his critique was made from an alternative nationalist standpoint, an argument convincingly made by Neil Lazarus in his interrogation of some recent ‘second thoughts’ on anti-colonial nationalist ideology and practice (Lazarus 1999). Fanon distinguishes between bourgeois nationalism and an alternative form of national consciousness – a liberationist, anti-imperialist, nationalist internationalism1 of which he wrote,

[it] is not nationalism in the narrow sense; on the contrary it is the only thing that will give us an international dimension … [I]t is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. (Fanon 1968:247-8)
For Fanon, in the context of decolonisation, nationhood can be secured under different auspices. The neocolonial option would emerge if the state comes to be dominated by the national middle classes, and capitalist social relations are extended. But for Fanon, the national project also has the capacity to become the vehicle of a social(ist) demand that promotes the fundamental transformation of the prevailing social order. From this perspective it is clear that Fanon privileges the nation-state as a decisive site of anti-imperialist struggle and the fulfilment of a progressive nationalist/nation-building project. This has been seen by some as a limitation of Fanon’s thinking. However, for Fanon the attainment of nationhood was not the end goal in itself but a step in a broader internationalist project. Furthermore, while Fanon recognises the importance of recreating national identity and consciousness, he argues that it is important to go beyond this to create a social consciousness at the moment of liberation. Without this, decolonisation merely becomes the replacement of one form of domination by another.

Mahmood Mamdani makes a similar distinction in his seminal article on the state and civil society in contemporary Africa (Mamdani 1990). He traces the evolution of nationalism from a popularly rooted conception forged during the anti-colonial struggle to one transformed into a state ideology in the post-independence era. The reformulation of nationalism as a state ideology was characterised by two processes:

- on the one hand, a delegitimation of all democratic struggles as partial, sectarian or tribal while upholding the state as the only legitimate expression of the interests of the whole (the country, the nation, the people); on the other, the displacement of all internal, popularly derived efforts towards a way forward by an externally imposed, state-centred, technocratic search for a solution. (Mamdani 1990:49)

While Mamdani provides a critique of state nationalism, it is firmly grounded in an alternative nationalist discourse. For him the crucial point to be recognised is that

the crisis of nationalism today is the crisis of one particular anti-democratic variant of it. But the formulation of an alternate perspective on nationalism, based on a popular and democratic orientation, is not possible unless we move away from a state-centred approach to one which puts emphasis on the autonomy of popular organisations, and in the contexts of such a shift, raise the question of social transformation from below. (Mamdani 1990:49)
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Thus the state nationalism of the post-independence era cannot be understood as simply the logical evolution of the popular nationalism of the anti-colonial struggles for they are grounded in fundamentally different projects. During the anti-colonial/anti-apartheid struggle, nationalism was a progressive force that emerged as a result of the popular unity forged in struggle. It was part and parcel of the democratic struggle. Yet, as a state ideology, nationalism becomes reactionary when it equates the national project and nation-building solely with the state and is grounded in the project of state-building. Thus, Mamdani suggests that it was when nationalism became divorced from the democratic struggle that the defence of nationalism could easily be presented as the defence of state interests (Mamdani 1990:52).

What we can learn from Mamdani’s analysis is the need to distinguish between different forms of nationalism, and its potential as a progressive as well as a reactionary force, both within and outside of the state. His detailed discussion of the national question and democratic struggle in Uganda highlights the need to break down various social and class bases underpinning different nationalist movements, and the tendencies that may alter current trajectories.

Nationalist movements and leaders in many instances have been easily assimilated to the rationalist social engineering of nation-building, adopting projects of national development very much in accordance with Western models and interests. But nationalist passions have not. Nationalism as a doctrine and sentiment rooted in common history, culture and language still has considerable resonance among large sections of Southern African people. Indeed, while nationalist ideology holds no candle to liberalism or Marxism as an intellectual doctrine, it has elicited a far more intense and widespread commitment.

This is particularly so in Southern Africa where the national question or, in juridical terms, the right to self-determination,² remains a central issue and an area of intense debate. The national question plays itself out in different ways, as reflected in recent debates over the land issue in Zimbabwe, as well as debates in South Africa between COSATU, the SACP and the ANC within the ruling tripartite alliance, and the debates over ‘who is an African’. In fact, nationalist ideology prevalent within the liberation movements of Southern Africa viewed colonialism and apartheid as a denial of sovereignty and self-determination as well as a denial of rights. Thus, in the post-independence era that still confronts the legacies of colonialism/apartheid, African
governments face ambiguously the so-called national question – that is, fundamentally the continuous search for equality and sovereignty by various communities that have historically merged into a single nation-state.

This aspect of southern African reality is not fully grasped within the context of the left versus right debates. On this point Jeremy Cronin suggests that

if we are to understand South Africa then this left-right axis needs to be supplemented with another axis, North-South. For it is the persisting crisis of under-development in the South, of a South that is not so much neglected as actively linked into debilitating accumulation patterns centered on the North, that lies at the heart of the South African reality. (Cronin 2003:1)

Indeed it is the persistence of colonial legacies, including semi-colonial accumulation paths and racialised inequalities, that continue to shape Southern Africa’s reality and must be addressed in particular and complex ways. Such a reality is inadequately grasped through an exclusively class analysis that dismisses nationalist sentiments as simply a manifestation of ‘false consciousness’.

African nationalism has been shaped by the historical context in which it developed and the present global context in which it operates. African nationalism emerged in response to colonialism and was heavily influenced by African intellectuals who were educated abroad, as well as Pan-Africanist intellectuals such as Garvey, Padmore and DuBois. This has limited (as well as strengthened) the nationalist project in several ways. For example, Mkandawire explains that the early African nationalists were

cheered on by the ‘modernisation school’ that considered ethnic identities and social pluralism as ‘barriers to development’ … [The] image of the nation was essentially ‘European’ in its mystified forms – one race, one language, one culture. Alternative images of nation states – multiethnic, multicultural or multiracial – were never seriously considered, and if considered had been so tarnished by apartheid’s claims as to be of no lasting or sympathetic interest. (Mkandawire 2003:5)

Indeed, this has been a criticism hurled at Fanon by critics such as Christopher Miller, who argues that Fanon privileges the nation-state as the primary political unit without questioning the appropriateness of that construct in the African context, or the form that it might take (1990).

Far from being ‘natural national entities’ or cohesive nation-states, the modern nations of black Africa must make do with borders created to satisfy European power-brokering in the ‘Scramble for Africa’, borders
that often violate rather than reinforce units of culture ... In Fanon’s essay on national culture there is no analysis of what a nation might be ... (Miller 1990:48)

As a result, African states’ ethnic diversity was often masked over, and pan-African cultural continuities promoted even where none existed. At the same time, within the nationalist agenda the overwhelming focus on imperialism and the hegemony of neo-liberalism meant that class differences within the nationalist project tended to be minimised or even denied. In other instances, the nationalist project, drained of its anti-imperialist and class character, degenerated into ethnic nationalism.

In contrast, more recently the image of the nation offered by the new breed of leaders in Africa, such as Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Paul Kagame of Rwanda, is one detached from the pan-African ideal and free of its moral imperatives (1990: 6).

Post-nationalist leaders have tended to define the nation either in more exclusivistic terms or in adversarial terms. In the former case, the insistence is on more precise definitions of who are nationals, as in the case of Cote d’Ivoire’s President Conan Bedia’s insistence on ‘Ivorite’ or Zambia’s Frederick Chiluba’s genealogical definition of a Zambian. The latter shows up in dreams of territorial extension or redefinition of colonial borders that has been broached by some Tutsi intellectuals. (Mkandawire 2003:7)

Indeed, post-nationalism in Africa, as characterised by Mkandawire and represented by ‘new African leaders’ such as Museveni and Kagame, is not without its limitations, having to confront the same structural constraints as nationalist regimes. In many African countries this political project has proved to be divisive and polarising, both nationally and regionally, as witnessed by the increase in border conflicts. Furthermore, such post-nationalist leaders have all too easily succumbed to the imperatives of neo-liberalism and globalisation, and are more often concerned with their reputation outside Africa than with building a positive reputation among their neighbours. It is dubious whether the construction of the nation provided by post-nationalist leaders in Africa will fare much better than its nationalist predecessors.

Outside of the state, the post-nationalist project has taken on a decidedly anti-state character. Fuelled in part by leftist (and non-leftist) intellectuals who have found themselves increasingly marginalised from government policymaking and have turned their research and intellectual inputs towards
advising civil society and non-governmental organisations, there has been an uncritical embrace of civil society as the engine for social change. In South Africa in particular, the trend toward intellectuals becoming NGO consultants or even spokespersons for grassroots movements has taken hold and is not without its problems. To begin with, some of this work has been firmly placed within the neoliberal framework and the discourse on universal human rights which has proved less capable of dealing with the contemporary political environment where harsh local and global inequalities persist, and there remains a strong demand for socio-economic justice. To the left of the political spectrum, the relationship between intellectuals and the masses can often be a contentious one, and NGOs are often used as launching pads for particular political agendas or to hurl attacks at the state. At times, intellectuals have a tendency to articulate a particular leftist or socialist agenda while ignoring the actual demands on the ground, many of which are nationalist.

The knee-jerk reaction has been to promote civil society and new social movements as the only progressive and effective alternative to state nationalism. What is clear is that we need considerable empirical research on these new social movements and post-nationalist opposition groups to determine to what extent these are organic movements or ones defined by an international architecture, Western donors and the neoliberal agenda. In a candid interview, one of the leading figures of the new social movements in South Africa, Trevor Ngwane, confessed,

If we’re honest, some of these social movements consist of nothing more than an office and a big grant from somewhere or other. They can call a workshop, pay people to attend, give them a nice meal and then write up a good report. They build nothing on the ground. (Ngwane 2003:54)

It is hard to see how a diverse, contradiction-ridden civil society will be any more able than the post-colonial state to withstand the hegemony of the neoliberal framework. Clearly what is required is a more balanced analysis of the potential as well as limitations of both the nationalist project and the post-nationalist alternatives. This point will be explored further in the next section on political developments in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe – ceding the nationalist terrain

The political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe provides an interesting case by which to examine both the limitations of the nationalist project as well as post-nationalist alternatives. Zimbabwe has increasingly been used as
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Evidence of the effects of an exhausted post-liberation nationalism as well as an indication of its rapid decline in Southern Africa. The opposition party formed in 1999, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), handed the ruling nationalist party, ZANU-PF, its first national electoral defeat in the 2000 parliamentary elections. The MDC has its roots among social movements, labour organisations and human-rights NGOs that first came together on the streets during mass protests (1996-9), and then through the National Working People’s Convention (February 1999) and the National Constitutional Assembly (1999 – the present).

However, soon after its formation the MDC became increasingly influenced by capitalist elements such as the white commercial farmers and big business interests who shared an opposition to Mugabe and the ruling ZANU-PF. In 2000, with the appointment of Eddie Cross, a leading official of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI), as economic secretary of the MDC, the party began to take on a decidedly neoliberal agenda (Bond and Manyanya 2001: 95).

What had begun as a working-class party resisting Mugabe’s neoliberalism, malgovernance and repressive state control was hijacked by international geopolitical forces, domestic (white) business and farming interests, and the black petit bourgeoisie. (Bond 2002c:1)

This observation is important because it highlights that the dominance and hegemony of the neoliberal framework is such that even the popular-democratic struggles that emerged in response to the ineffective neoliberal policies of government are susceptible to being coopted by these very same neoliberal forces in the course of struggle. Indeed, both Mugabe’s nationalist project and the MDC’s post-nationalist alternative need to be analysed and understood within the context of a neoliberal hegemony.

What is interesting in the context of the land question in Zimbabwe is the resilience of nationalism’s image of the nation, and the resonance of its notion of cultural reaffirmation and the liberation of the race. Mugabe has cunningly abused the memory of the liberation struggle, the land question and the cultural anchors of Zimbabwe’s past to sustain his nationalist project. However, the MDC’s post-nationalist alternative has also displayed a number of limitations.

To be sure, the capitalist policies of the MDC leadership, particularly regarding the land question, facilitated Mugabe’s success in deactivating much of the opposition to ZANU-PF in the countryside in the run-up to the 2002 presidential elections. Mugabe also used state repression and rigged
electoral rules against the MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai to secure his electoral victory. However, the MDC began losing momentum and strength when it effectively ceded the nationalist terrain to ZANU-PF, a point that came out most clearly over the land issue. Land redistribution was at the heart of Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle and fundamentally defines the nationalist project in that country. On this crucial issue the MDC ceded the nationalist terrain almost from the very start with its unholy alliance with the Commercial Farmers’ Union.

The MDC chose to focus on economic management and government reforms in its campaigning before the June 2000 parliamentary elections. On the issue of land acquisition, the MDC called for a transparent but ill-defined market process, in contrast with the ZANU-PF leadership who called for a speedy reclamation of land from the whites and even supported the land occupations (Moyo 2001: 7). While many have alleged that the land issue is merely a campaign strategy for ZANU-PF used in every election since 1980, it is one that has resonance with the majority of Zimbabweans and will not go away until it is adequately resolved.

Mugabe, without a doubt, capitalised on nationalist sentiments for political ends. Reflecting on the MDC’s defeat in the 2002 elections, Brian Raftopolous shows how even radical nationalism can be evoked in demagogic and dangerous ways:

In a more negative sense the nationalist legacy, in response to colonial violence, also brought with it experiences of political mobilisation which we need, as a nation, to unlearn and move away from. In particular, we need to continue our protests against the practices of forced party affiliation through violence, the demonisation of dissent as unpatriotic, a selective use of the history of the liberation struggle to deny other voices the right to be heard, and narrow race-based assertions of who has a legitimate right to be called national. (Raftopolous 2002:1)

ZANU-PF and President Mugabe’s actions must not be condoned. But it is important to recognise that part of the MDC’s failure was to not challenge ZANU-PF on its nationalist record, for this is precisely where it was vulnerable. For example, the ruling party presented its compulsory land acquisition programme ‘Fast Track’ ahead of the 2002 presidential elections, after adhering to an ineffective, market-driven land reform policy for the previous 20 years. Especially with the introduction of the World Bank-initiated structural adjustment programme (ESAP), the ruling party’s land
policies promoted the growth of new export land uses that called for greater privatisation of land, including communal and state-owned lands. These policies diminished the potential for mass-based socio-economic benefits from land, and strengthened the concentration of capital accumulation in selected rural areas (Moyo 2000:13). Reacting to the ruling party’s adherence to a largely market-driven land-reform process, a leading Zimbabwean expert on the land question, Sam Moyo, concludes: ‘The state’s legitimacy as an arbiter and protector of the land rights of the poor is, therefore, increasingly questioned’ (Moyo 2000:13).

Without delving further into the land question in Zimbabwe it should be clear that ZANU-PF was vulnerable on this issue. The very social movements that gave rise to the MDC challenged the ruling party on precisely these neoliberal, market-driven policies. However, as the MDC increasingly came under the influence of powerful international interests they chose to shy away from these issues and focus on government reforms, or they chose to deal with the land issue within a rights-based framework, not in the context of the national question and a concern for socio-economic justice. Having become a broad church, representing multiple and disparate domestic and international interests, the MDC was unable to present a more popular and progressive democratic agenda that could address the demands of the poor majority.

But pressure also came to bear on Mugabe from within his own constituency. The peasant class and the war veterans, two of the present government’s most powerful voting constituencies, were two of the most vocal groups opposing ZANU-PF’s land policies in the 1980s and early 1990s and posed a serious internal political threat to Mugabe. Responding to the failed resettlement exercise, in the mid-1980s landless peasants began to occupy and use land that belonged to politicians and the black elite. Branded ‘squatters’ by the media and forcibly removed in some areas by the police and army, by the 1990s peasants began to occupy white-owned farms (Chitiyo 2000). Thus, as early as 1992, the government was being forced to respond to the nationalist pressures for redistribution from its rural constituency and push through the Land Acquisition Act, which allowed the government to designate commercial farms for resettlement.

Similarly, far from being the band of anarchic thugs that they are portrayed as being in Western and even some Southern African media, the Zimbabwean war veterans have been a potentially powerful political alternative force to the ruling party since independence. The Zimbabwe War Veterans’
Association (ZWVA) was formed in 1989 in response to the government’s failure to assist ex-combatants. Land was one of the war veterans’ primary grievances. The government responded by passing the War Veterans Administration Bill (1991), the War Veterans Act (1992) and the War Victims Compensation Act (1993). In practice, however, the system put in place was ineffective in part as a result of false claims, interventions by the ZANU-PF party hierarchy, and little accountability within government regarding disbursed funds (Chitiyo 2000:19). The disgruntled war veterans became an increasingly vocal political threat to the ruling party.

Under increasing criticism and facing challenge politically, President Mugabe, at the ZANU-PF summit in Mutare in September 1997, succumbed to pressure from the war veterans and announced a package that would pay each genuine ex-combatant a lump sum of Z$50,000 and a gratuity of Z$5,000 per month for life (The Herald, September 17, 1997). The government’s capitulation to the war veterans precipitated a political and financial crisis that persists to this day. But the war veterans, like the peasants, proved to be a malleable political partner for the ruling party. By mid-1999, factional struggles within the war veterans movement as well as mounting criticism of the government were bringing the two sides closer together. The government used coercion, delegitimisation and negotiation to neutralise the war veterans and co-opt them into the ruling party’s agenda. By the time of the constitutional referendum in February 2000, the war veterans had effectively become the ‘military wing’ of ZANU-PF in the war against white commercial farmers (Chitiyo 2000:19), and were spearheading ZANU-PF’s election campaign.

Again, it is important to note that initially the movement of war veterans was potentially positive. In so far as their political activity was organised along nationality lines, it was not necessarily reactionary to the extent that it was anchored in popular organisation and aimed against pro-colonial and anti-democratic interests. That the state was able to seize the initiative reflects its ability to manipulate social cleavages and internal organisational weaknesses within the war veterans movement.

No one condones President Mugabe and ZANU-PF’s use of land invasions, racial scapegoating and violence and intimidation to retain power. But what the actions of the war veterans and peasant class reveal is the organic pressure within the nationalist agenda in Zimbabwe, an agenda that unfortunately is not immune to being co-opted but which, at its core, is redistributive and anti-imperialist but not necessarily socialist.
Unfortunately, the war veterans were reduced from a potentially powerful political alternative, promoting a more radical nationalist agenda, to a recognised but politically co-opted special interest group. Yet the fact remains, President Mugabe and the Zimbabwean state do not have a free hand to act as they please. The actions of the Mugabe administration should be heavily criticised, but it should also be clear that the government is responding to pressures from social forces, indeed from a black elite seeking capital accumulation but also from the poor demanding redistribution. But the tendency among leftist intellectuals has been to critique post-colonial nationalism entirely from a class perspective while minimising, if not denying, race and the national question. The problem with this is that it doesn’t acknowledge pressures from multiple sources, and thus dismisses nationalist sentiments of the poor as simply ‘false consciousness’.

If our focus were on deconstructing the nationalist project in Zimbabwe it would become quite clear that ZANU-PF has not only failed to address the national question but has failed to put forward a viable national project. The Mugabe administration, by and large, has failed to redistribute resources to the poor. Furthermore, it has failed to promote a national agenda, using Zimbabwe’s history of economic inequity, which galvanises all sectors of society around a common vision and social order (Savage 2003). Instead it has sown division and violence that has been very detrimental to the nation-building process. But rather than simply pointing to the failure of the national developmentalist project in Zimbabwe we must ask why it failed. What was the potential for a progressive political alternative to emerge within the nationalist agenda, and why was it so easily co-opted?

**Conclusion**

Nationalism has always been double-sided. Many of the virtues of nationalism – sense of community, patriotism, a sense of shared historical past – are also its dark side … strong communal feeling can easily turn into xenophobia, and the need for unity can generate pressures for conformity that can stifle intellectual work. (Mkandawire 2003:12-13)

The relationship between intellectuals and the post-colonial nationalist project has always been contentious. The new critics are not the first to expose nationalists as the new emperors without clothes. But their critique is not just of the failure of nationalist leaders to deliver in the post-colonial era but of the nationalist project itself, which they claim never really held the progressive goals of fundamental transformation and democratisation. In so
doing, however, instead of deconstructing and demystifying nationalist struggles, much of the criticisms seem to dismiss nationalism and the nationalist struggles altogether, along with any progressive, anti-imperialist agendas that it might encompass. In its place a post-nationalist alternative is being proposed that is at present very undefined and does not take into consideration the actual demands emanating from the grassroots (or various other sectors of society).

However, if we are serious about our task as critical intellectuals we must acknowledge and address the dilemmas within the nationalist project before consigning it to the dustbin of history. Indeed, as Mkandawire reminds us, In defiance of its death foretold, nationalism in Africa and elsewhere has displayed a remarkably enduring resonance, although in the eyes of some incongruously and regretfully so. (Mkandawire 2003:2)

Such enduring resonance is unlikely to diminish even with the recent flurry of condemnations from intellectual circles.

**Note**

1. I’ve borrowed this phrase from Neil Lazarus who uses the term to indicate Fanon’s dual revolutionary commitments to the national liberation struggle and the wide struggle for socialist internationalism (Lazarus 1999:162).

**References**


Article

Constructing a developmental nation – the challenge of including the poor in the post-apartheid city

Susan Parnell

Introduction

If only in income terms, South African cities are more unequal today than ten years ago. Using a range of indicators they also have higher numbers of poor people (SACM 2004). This is despite steady economic expansion (characterised by growth in GDP, a declining budget deficit, falling public-sector debt and increasing foreign reserves) and the extensive efforts of the post-apartheid state to secure urban reconstruction and development. It is not that there have not been significant advances in constructing a more inclusive system of urban governance, there have. Since 1994 urban poverty reduction has been a key national objective (Box 1), and city governance is slowly receiving greater national political profile if only because of the overwhelming importance of urban economies in maintaining and growing the national economy (SACM 2004). But, the overtly developmental commitments of government have not yet had the desired impact in creating sustained growth or redistribution.

This paper breaks with much of the academic critique of the ten years of transition (Bond 2000, Desai 2002, Marais 1998), and from the conventional view of international development theorists like Escobar (1999) and Ferguson (1995), by arguing for more not less government. In particular I suggest the need for a more careful assessment of the institutional imperatives necessary for rolling out development at the city scale. My argument is not that the state should be the sole driver of development since clearly this is neither viable nor desirable. Rather I suggest that inclusive city development without comprehensive and progressive state engagement is not sustainable and that in South Africa, as in many post-colonial contexts, state apparatus,
especially at the sub-national scale, is inadequately configured for implementing a developmental agenda. In this context the policy emphasis on special projects, like the urban-renewal programmes, might be putting the cart before the horse. What is needed is the putting in place of the fundamentals of city management so that pro-poor developmental initiatives can thrive.

**Box 1: Key national/international urban poverty-reduction policies and objectives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National policy imperatives and targets for reducing urban poverty</th>
<th>International policy imperatives and development targets on urban poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Reconstruction and Development Programme</em>¹</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Urban Development Strategy</em>²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Urban Development Framework</em>³</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Developmental Local Government</em>⁴</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Urban Renewal Programme</em>⁵</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Millennium targets for 2015</em>⁶</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Habitat Agenda</em>⁷</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*New Partnership of Africa’s Development (NEPAD)*⁸</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cities Alliance without slums</em>⁹</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg Plan of Action</em>¹⁰</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁵ Details available from Department of Housing and Department of Provincial and Local Government
⁷ [http://www.unchs.org/mdg/](http://www.unchs.org/mdg/)

Paradoxically, South Africa’s cities are the centre of the nation’s wealth but also of its most abject poverty. Without access to land or shelter, work or education the urban underclass must find resources to pay for basic services and costly rentals while they fight to survive in hostile social and environmental conditions. In meeting the challenges of urban poverty the post-1994 democratically elected South African government introduced a system of developmental local government as the foundation for building cities and towns that are more equal and just (*Local Government White Paper* 1998). Priority was given, too, to the establishment of metropolitan government and district councils that not only secured non-racial sub-
national democracy and a single system of taxation but also created a platform for intra-urban redistribution. Local government does not fund or drive all urban redevelopment and municipal investments provide only a partial perspective on city reconstruction. Despite well-documented concerns about problematic implementation, it would be churlish to ignore the massive national and provincial government investment in housing and other urban infrastructure, or to ignore the positive impact of the deracialisation of the health, education and grant systems on the lives of the urban poor.

Indeed there is a case to be made that the government has done exceptionally well just to keep pace with the growth in demand for urban services, and that once population growth slows the impact of the last ten years of investment will become clearer (see Table 1). Further state efforts at urban reconstruction, including special area-based interventions, are also being initiated and are beginning to take shape. But, as I will demonstrate, despite democracy and the massive extensions of physical and social services, there are still unacceptable levels of urban poverty. In short, without a critical review of the problem of urban poverty and inequality there can be no solution to the post-apartheid development dilemma. I argue that for a government seeking to unlock the developmental potential of its citizens, such a review must focus on the problem of institutional exclusion. The emphasis on the sub-national scale and on urban poverty makes local government an obvious entry point of analysis and intervention.

It is my contention that persistent poverty, inequality and under-development in the post-apartheid city is the outcome of a misplaced understanding of the dynamics of human settlement within the overall developmental agenda of the post-apartheid state, especially the local state. I am not suggesting that everything we have in place is wrong, far from it, or that the state should retreat in favour of civil society or community-led initiatives. Nevertheless I want to highlight three aspects of policy that merit much closer attention if government is to meaningfully facilitate the developmental vision of post-apartheid democracy.

First, the general reluctance of government and policymakers to acknowledge urban rather than rural poverty, thereby facing the realities of the urbanisation of poverty and the demands on urban local government. Secondly, the oversimplified perception that racial inequality is the exclusive or even key driver of social polarisation in cities has masked other critical lines of social and economic cleavage and will hinder implementation of any serious urban development programme. Thirdly, the tardiness in building an
appropriate institutional foundation from which to run a developmental local state that is capable of responding to current and future urban development imperatives means that a large section of the urban population experiences institutional poverty. The institutional exclusion that reinforces the poverty of the unemployed, poorly serviced and badly educated population of cities is embedded in the social, environmental and economic functions of city government that flow from the mandate of developmental local government. It is these institutional barriers to development that fall squarely in the domain of government and could provide the levers for unlocking underdevelopment in the post-apartheid city.

Table 1: Increase in services relative to population and household expansion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ekurhuleni used as the example</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demography:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Households</td>
<td>543,122</td>
<td>776,929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>2,026,067</td>
<td>2,480,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual average rate of population growth 1970-2001</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unemployment:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of unemployed</td>
<td>316,906</td>
<td>516,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of households living in informal dwellings</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of households living in informal dwellings</td>
<td>159,138</td>
<td>223,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Refuse Removal:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of households without weekly refuse removal</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of households without weekly refuse removal</td>
<td>71,304</td>
<td>93,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water Supply:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of households without piped water on site</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of households without piped water on site</td>
<td>87,899</td>
<td>137,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Toilet Facilities:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of households without flush toilet</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of households without flush toilet</td>
<td>86,227</td>
<td>128,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Electricity Supply:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of households without electricity supply</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of households without electricity supply</td>
<td>137,585</td>
<td>192,450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census 2000
Why urban poverty is underestimated
The basic reason why urban poverty is consistently underestimated in South Africa is that it is almost always contrasted with rural poverty. This misses the point. Fortunately, largely arising out of the work of the South African Cities Network, there is a growing recognition that meeting national and international targets for poverty reduction requires an urban as well as a rural focus. Because of the South African history of migrant labour poor peoples’ lives often straddle rural and urban boundaries. It is thus a case of needing both an urban and a rural poverty reduction strategy, rather than seeing the problems of poverty in rural versus urban poverty terms, as is too often the case.

Adjudicating urban poverty profiles only in contrast with that of rural poverty has created particular policy distortions in South Africa. There are three major explanations for the faulty assessment of urban poverty in South Africa. The first lies in how we define what is ‘urban’. Internationally there is a technical problem, that has no easy solution, for defining ‘urban’. Typically countries use both a density and size criteria to indicate the proportion of the population deemed to be urban. South Africa uses none of these definitions. Nor does it invoke the UN’s size-based definition of urban (settlements of over 2000 people are urban) (UN Habitat 2001). Instead both Census 1996 and Census 2000 use variations of the old apartheid definition of urban, which was premised on that area that fell under the political jurisdiction of a municipality elected and run by white people. The South African definition is not only clearly very problematic ideologically as it fails to revoke colonial notions that Africans were rural and ‘traditional’ and not urban and ‘civilised’, but it is also totally misleading.

Huge non-agricultural settlements, sometimes referred to as displaced urbanisation (Murray 1992), that are characterised by extreme poverty, continue to be named as ‘rural’ simply because they fell under the old homeland administrations and not under a white local authority. Bushbuckridge, Botshabelo and Winterveld are obvious examples of this. Provinces like Limpopo are typically seen as rural and poor using the existing definition but would become urban and poor if an alternative, more conventional, urban definition were adopted. The problem with these overly ‘rural’ figures is that they feed the myth that the South African poor are predominantly a peasantry whose sole need is land reform, thereby diffusing the urgency for consolidating the nation’s embryonic social safety net, of which the effective functioning of local government is a part.
The problem is more than semantic – in policy terms it does not matter if an area is classified rural or urban, but rather that people who live there are poor and in need of appropriate state assistance. But in post-apartheid South Africa the designation of ‘rural’ has been as a proxy indicator of poverty and is widely used to target development resources (most notably through the equitable share). While I have traced the technical or definitional problem back to apartheid, contemporary political and even policy usage of the terms urban and rural reinforce the problematic application of the concepts in ways that have generally undermined efforts to put urban poverty at the core of the developmental agenda. In its most extreme form this position suggests that the negative impacts of apartheid were all borne by people in the old homelands that are now called rural areas. This not only ignores the burden of black urbanites but suggests that the settlement patterns are static, which they are not.

The second problem lies in the statistics that are used to measure poverty and to contrast rural and urban poverty. As we have seen in South Africa the categories ‘African’ or ‘rural’ are often assumed to be a proxy indicators of poverty because these groups show higher average levels of poverty than the categories ‘white’ or ‘urban’. While these patterns are generally true (cf the distribution of unemployment in Table 2) and can be explained with reference to the apartheid legacy of excluding unemployed Africans from cities and repatriating them to homelands, which became concentrations of poverty, they mask important variations within and between the categories. The net effect is to negate urban need and to make the urban poor slip out of the developmental sights of the state.

Table 2: Urban/non urban unemployment by race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African</th>
<th>Coloured</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strict definition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban rate</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-urban rate</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expanded definition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban rate</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-urban rate</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While cities are centres of wealth, they are also the focus of intense poverty. Experientially, we know that there are high concentrations of poverty within particular cities, making poor urban areas (normally former townships or informal areas) the highest concentrations of poverty in the country. Moreover, the generally accepted notion that women and children are more vulnerable to poverty holds equally well for urban areas. The post-apartheid demographic reality counters stereotypes that have depicted South African cities as predominantly white, adult and male places: in fact African women and children make up the bulk of the total urban population (Figures 1 and 2)

**Figure 1: Total Urban Population, by Race 1996**
One reason why the position of the urban poor in South Africa has been ignored is the way that the figures on the distribution of poverty are presented. There are different ways of measuring poverty and not all reveal the same patterns. Some of the most standard measures include income poverty in the form of poverty gaps or infrastructure poverty, for example using informal housing as an indicator of poverty and need (Housing Atlas 2002). Using informal housing as an indicator of poverty accentuates the urban problem while the use of a single income poverty line tends to underestimate the extent of urban poverty because of the higher cash demands of living in town (compare Figures 3 and 4).
Figure 3: Poverty measured by the shortage of adequate housing

Figure 4: The poverty gap
The third reason for underestimating urban poverty is that the steady urbanisation of poor people in South Africa has not been recognised. This is not simply a product of the migration of poor people to town, though there is no doubt that the mechanisation of farm labour, ineffective land reform, incentives of better-run urban welfare systems and the abolition of influx control restrictions have all contributed to urban-ward migration. But the internal growth of the largely African population who are disproportionately poor must also be cited as a major dynamic contributing to rising urban poverty (Figure 5). The *State of the Cities Report 2004* indicates that ‘between 1996 and 2001, the population of the largest 21 urban centres in South Africa rose from 18.4 million to 21.1 million – that is by 14.23 per cent over the period’ (SACN 2004). This means that the population of cities is growing faster than the national population growth, although the rate varies across the urban centres (Table 3).

**Figure 5: Racial patterns of urbanisation**
There are a number of reasons why it is likely that the abolition of apartheid has accentuated the urbanisation of poverty in South Africa. First, under apartheid influx controls, all urban dwellers were (theoretically) employed and the unemployed were repatriated to the bantustans. Thus urban Africans, although paid very low wages, were generally employed. Today the urban unemployment level among urban Africans is 28.9 percent [only marginally lower than that of rural areas (Table 2)]. Secondly, the introduction of cost recovery for services (such as water and electricity) in rural areas is undermining the differentials in the cost of living between urban and rural areas, thereby reducing the imperative of the poor to live in low-cost rural locations and spawning urban migration. Thirdly, the extension of urban housing provision to women makes it possible for women-headed households (often among the poorest of the population) to choose to remain in, or move to, an urban location. Fourthly, the removal of apartheid decentralisation incentives to homeland towns has seen the relocation of some people to larger towns. Finally, the 2000 metropolitan municipal boundaries were extended to include informal areas, such as Orange Farm in Johannesburg and the greater Durban informal settlements, that have never been enumerated as urban. This is likely to not only increase the proportion of the population recorded as urban but to increase the proportion of the recorded urban population that is poor.

What these patterns imply is that cities are already primary nodes of poverty. Moreover, ongoing urbanisation means that cities have to become a much more central part of the development focus of government. It is not enough simply to focus on urban areas without a nuanced understanding of urban poverty profiles. Evidence to date suggests that urban policy perspectives are crude and undifferentiated, conflating notions of race and class, ignoring age and gender and other well established patterns of vulnerability and exclusion. A systematic understanding of the political economy of inequality in South African cities provides an essential entry point for transformative policy interventions.
The challenge of including the poor in the post-apartheid city

The nature of poverty and inequality in South African cities

There is no doubt that apartheid created a particular racially distorted profile of poverty and that this racialised legacy is still indelibly etched on the South African cityscape. In 2004, especially in large cities where the black middle class is concentrated, not all black people are poor and not all poor people are black. This does not mean that the racial legacy of apartheid no longer applies. On the contrary it is now more important than ever to understand how apartheid worked so that the discriminatory institutions can be changed and transformed. But overcoming urban apartheid requires much more than the repeal of overtly racial legislation such as the Population Registration Act or Group Areas Act. We need to understand the institutional architecture of apartheid urban management and to ensure that the new system of city government does not unintentionally carry over structural inequities or exclusions.

Table 3: Annual Population Growth Rate, 1890-1996 (Percentage)
Metropolitan Areas and Larger Cities *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Greater Joburg</th>
<th>Greater Cape Town</th>
<th>Greater Durban</th>
<th>Port Elizabeth</th>
<th>East London &amp; Mlantsane</th>
<th>Bloemfontein, Botshabelo &amp; Thaba Nchu</th>
<th>Total Metro Areas &amp; Cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891-1911</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-1921</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-1936</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-1946</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946-1951</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1960</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1970-1980</td>
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<td>1991-1996</td>
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<td>19.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculated from population censuses

* Table compiled before the 2000 Demarcation Board boundaries were defined; see O Crankshaw and S Parnell (2002) Urban Change in South Africa. Report for IIED, London: for a full list of magisterial districts included in calculations. Note a number of fluctuations relate to the inclusion/exclusion of homeland settlements in the census.
The enduring legacy of urban apartheid lies in the way that the National Party inscribed its racist agenda into the mechanisms and institutions of urban government and regulation. Central to the success of apartheid was that not all black people were treated in the same way, which means that the impacts of the racially discriminatory system were not felt uniformly by all black people (Hindson 1987, Crankshaw 1997, Lemon 1991). In general, apartheid policy caused material poverty for black people living in ‘white’ urban areas (Box 2). Among the city-scale strategies adopted were racist forced removals, inferior housing and jobs for black people, the differential costing and provision of urban services according to race classification, the application of influx controls and the repression of urban social movements. The apartheid state pursued other policies that undermined black peoples’ wellbeing, including providing very poor education and inadequate access to health care, restricting access to democracy and enforcing political and cultural repression.

**Box 2: The racialised legacy of apartheid urban poverty**

**Racist clearances and the impoverishment of black urbanites**
What the forced removals of the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s have in common is the erosion of hard-earned urban economic niches, the increase in costs brought on by settling into new housing far from town, and the disruption of established community structures. Crime, high urban costs associated with locational peripheralisation and poor-quality living environments of urban South Africa have their roots in the nearly century-long trajectory of removing and relocating blacks from prime land to less and less desirable locations within the city. Recognizing that the cost of urban racial residential segregation were borne by blacks robbed of their property or tenancies provides the starting point of acknowledging the apartheid legacy of inequality and poverty.

**Poverty and urban housing supply**
Segregationist and apartheid housing provision created poverty in three distinct ways. First, the poor quality of the stock available to blacks – men, women and children – negatively affected their urban productivity and performance; secondly, the value of houses transferred from rental to ownership was less for blacks than for whites; thirdly, there were missed opportunities for black investment in urban property.

**Poverty, inequality and urban jobs**
Urban poverty in black South Africa is directly related to restrictions on free trading rights for all, and racist employment codes. Black urban residents earned very low wages in unskilled jobs and therefore did not
have enough money to meet basic needs. Even after job reservation was lifted, Africans struggled to compete because of poor education levels associated with inferior segregated education. Black people struggled to create independent economic opportunities under apartheid because of restrictions on trading and retail activity in the townships.

**Quality and cost of urban services and municipal finances**

Poverty in South Africa is more than usually associated with the high cost of household expenditure. The irrationality of the segregation-driven location of the residential areas of the poor increased costs such as transportation. Moreover, because of the system of financing townships, there is a legacy of the unfair cross-subsidisation of rates to rich white neighbourhoods instead of poor African residential areas. In common with other third-world cities, residents of informal settlements pay the highest per item costs on basic commodities such as water and fuel.

**Poverty through the manipulation of urbanisation**

Apartheid not only created inequality within urban spaces but also created major discrepancies between urban places. Opportunities for wealth creation depended very largely on what kind of urban centre individuals found themselves in. Addressing the urban poverty legacy of apartheid necessitates an examination of the entire system of urban settlement and a holistic assessment of migrancy, urbanisation and the long term viability of dormitory towns.

**Poverty, the struggle and politics**

The victory over apartheid came at a price. Struggle politics was indirectly funded by students who stayed away from school and who after 1994 had no formal education; workers who participated in strikes and boycotts and had their wages cut; residents who, if only because of fear, flooded off the violence-torn trains onto the more expensive taxis; and the families who paid their fees or dues to the shacklords, warlords, civics, and other political structures that effectively governed the townships in the 1980s.


Apartheid as a strategy depended on the fact that not all black people were treated in the same way or treated equally badly. There were huge differences in the urban experiences of semi-skilled workers with Section 10 (a) rights that gave them virtual permanence in urban areas, and those of unskilled migrant workers living away from their families in hostels or urban inequality in ways that leave the urban youth and recent migrants in
especially vulnerable positions (Crankshaw and Parnell 1999:439-43, 2004). It is these groups that lack jobs, formal housing or services who are most in need of state assistance. It is also among these groups that HIV/AIDS is most prevalent (Tomlinson). And it is these groups, without regular or well-paying jobs, who find themselves living in unregulated and informal backyard shacks and settlements where they have the weakest claim on the resources of the local state for subsidised service support. So, the poorest of the poor miss out on benefits designed to protect them, while the relatively better-off residents of the old townships have been effectively incorporated into municipal systems and are thus able to appropriate the subsidies. In practice all this does is reinforce the old apartheid division between those with Section 10(a) rights and other Africans.

**Institutional poverty in South Africa**

The failure of the economy to provide jobs for all leaves the poor dependent on state assistance for securing the essential requirements of life, including food, water, shelter and environmental protection from hazards. South Africa, while not a rich country, is fortunate to be able to offer a modicum of support to the poorest sections of the population through the public health and education systems, and through various social grants (Seekings 2002, Streak 2004). The pension and child grant systems are essential to the livelihoods of poor households, ensuring that basic needs are met, though there is lively debate on how best to target grants to the poor (Meintjes et al 2003). What the grant and public service roll-out means, in practice, is that the poorest are those who are unable because of institutional failure to access the state assistance designed to provide a social safety net.

Alongside the persistence of a second economy, the marginalisation of the poor from the core administrative or institutional systems and resources of government is one of the key dimensions of persistent and chronic poverty. While coverage for the pension and child-grant system is patchy, much has been done to ensure better take-up of the grants and wider distribution of the resources to all South Africans. A key step in this process was deracialisation, followed by programmes to facilitate uptake for eligible recipients. The local government contribution to the social package of grants and public services has lagged behind dramatically. No municipality in the country has an effective indigent programme in place and even the powerful metros of Johannesburg, Tshwane, eThekweni and Cape Town are only now designing and implementing indigent polices.
Thus, even in the most affluent metros in the country, the poor, most of whom were classified black under apartheid, are still excluded from the redistributive mechanisms of the local state. This is especially true for those classified African and even more particularly for those Africans who never secured even temporary rights to settle in cities under the segregationist dispensations. It also holds for the youth who have yet to establish a formal residential niche that is recognised by the urban municipal systems. This institutional exclusion of the majority of the population from the systems of municipal government suggests that the core modus operandi of colonial and apartheid bureaucracy has not yet been overturned (Mamdani 1996). In other words, a dual system of city administration still prevails and the poor are relegated to a second tier, analogous to the second economy, where formal state benefits are not applied and poverty flourishes.

Against this backdrop we have to ask how institutional urban poverty can be overcome. Because much of what the state can do in cities is co-ordinated by local government, if not delivered directly by local government, this sphere provides the focus of the remainder of this paper. It is now widely accepted that the experience of poverty is multidimensional. While inability to access income remains one of the most obvious expressions of need, definitions of poverty typically refer to the absence of capital such as land or access to natural resources, as well as to the importance of social and intellectual capital, and even the climate of democracy and security necessary to enhance the capabilities of the poor and excluded. From the perspective of the developmental state the way the poor overcome social, environmental or economic poverty is through their inclusion in state-driven or facilitated developmental efforts, though clearly the state is not the only stakeholder in the process, nor necessarily the major stakeholder. But without an inclusive approach government action to reduce poverty will fail.

In South Africa the institutional dimension of poverty has rarely been addressed, although the deracialising logic of the Lund Commission (1998) was premised on broadening the net of eligibility for social grants and transfers. Similarly, the demand for the introduction of a basic income grant (BIG) following the Taylor Commission (2002) also hinges on the logic of universalism or inclusivity. Curiously, local government’s involvement in providing a universal social safety net to the poor by ensuring access to affordable basic needs has not entered into the welfare debates around sequencing or selection. Yet, in urban and rural areas the redistributive capacity of the municipal indigent package is potentially more significant in
both monetary terms and as a lever for protecting the basic social and environmental rights of the poorest than the BIG would be.  

Other advantages of giving priority to the municipal indigent grant programme are that the services provided by a local authority, especially water and sanitation but also waste and disaster mitigation, are critical for basic needs and poverty reduction – especially in urban areas. The link between the municipal social package and progress on the MDGs or Presidential targets is at least as direct as those of the BIG. Ensuring inclusive systems of municipal service delivery that uphold the individual rights of the poor while offering some public advantage (everybody gains by a working sanitation or stormwater system even if some people don’t pay for the service) has the added benefit of fostering local democracy and building inclusive non-racial social structures.

The notion of citizenship implied in such an inclusive system of governance should not be left as an abstract principle embodied in the Constitution; it has to be translated into the daily realities of urban management. The notion of developmental local government sets out the broad parameters or vision of what inclusive citizenship will entail. We are now at the point of translating these aspirations into workable programmes. What is becoming clear is that addressing institutional exclusion is imperative to achieving developmental local government. A first step is to identify the institutional barriers that prevent the poor from accessing the (albeit limited) resources of the state. While there are clear differences in sectors and in specific cities there are some general pointers relating to the social, environmental and economic mandates of local government that help to identify the problem.

**Institutional poverty and the social mandate of local government**

What poor people have in common with other South Africans are basic socio-economic and environmental rights set out in the Constitution (Liebenberg and Pillay 2000). This means that both the private rights of individuals to basic services and the public right to a healthy and sustainable environment must be secured. The municipal social package, known in South Africa as an ‘indigent’ policy, provides one of the key platforms for upholding notions of public good inherent in the Constitution. The objective of the municipal indigent policy is to plan how these universal rights might be achieved through the activities of local government. Central to the task is working out how the needs of poor people, who cannot afford to pay for basic services, can be addressed in a manner that does not challenge the overall integrity or sustainability of the financial or natural resource base.
The challenge of including the poor in the post-apartheid city

The Constitution is clear that there should be an inclusive and unitary approach to the roll-out of government services and benefits. It specifically excludes discrimination on grounds of race, gender, disability or sexual orientation. This non-discriminatory principle has significant implications for the design of municipal indigent programmes. It must be accessible to all residents, implying that currently unregulated settlements (and those living in backyards) must be brought into the municipal system so that residents are not excluded from indigent support. Moreover, local government indigent support must not entrench discriminatory land and housing allocations, for example in areas of traditional tenure where gender discrimination has been an issue. Currently land tenure plays an important part in excluding the poor from municipal benefits such as the free water or electricity allocations.

Because of the allocation of powers and functions across the spheres of government, some of the most important services for the poor fall within the jurisdiction of local government, in particular water and sanitation, electricity, waste, environmental health and planning. The fact that water, waste and electricity are not only the financial lifeblood of municipalities but are traditionally provided only to those who can pay for them, underscores the imperatives of fully understanding the inter-relationship between poverty and the institutional mechanisms designed to ensure that local government reaches those in need through its social package. This presupposes that the poor in the towns and cities of the country are known.

The form and location of poverty will vary as will the severity or duration of poverty, making it difficult to say exactly who is poor at any one time. The analysis of urban poverty is still at a very general stage. It is clear that there are particularly vulnerable groups – among them women, children, people living with HIV/AIDS and other diseases, the disabled and the elderly. Poverty is clearly concentrated among people classified African under apartheid. National and provincial welfare programmes target some of these vulnerable groups, either with particular grants (like a pension or a disability grant) or through geographical targeting of resources (like the rural development and urban renewal nodes). But the social responsibilities of the local state centre on households not individuals and demand a different approach to targeting.

Municipalities will select some form of targeting to reach the groups that are most in need but the support will be restricted as local government’s resources are severely constrained. Since a very large percentage of the population is poor, by at least some measures of poverty, it is important to
point out that the severity of the experience of poverty varies. Some may be chronically poor, some may be poor only because they have experienced a temporary shock. Also, because South Africa is a relatively wealthy country many people will experience relative poverty rather than absolute poverty.

All the evidence suggests that there will be a disproportionate percentage of vulnerable individuals (especially women, children and the disabled) within households that seek support for basic service provision. We also know that these households in absolute poverty are geographically concentrated in townships, informal settlements and marginalised displaced urban settlements, though there may cases anywhere in the city.

**Institutional poverty and the environmental mandate of local government**

The relationship between poverty and environment is clear and sectoral reforms driven by national and provincial government in water and sanitation, air pollution, sustainable energy, waste management and land-use planning have given prominence to issues of poverty. With notable exceptions, these have not yet been taken up systematically at a city level. The consequences of failing systematically to implement the developmental mandate of environmental management in cities is that the poor are subjected to environmental hazard, are exposed to environmental risk and fail to benefit from environmental regulation or protection. Unlike the economic functions of local government that relate primarily to private goods or the social functions that mix public and private benefits, environmental functions generally fall squarely in the domain of public benefits. What this means is that it is clear government should take a lead role in delivery while acknowledging that it is much harder to monitor how government does so or that it does so in an inclusive fashion.

Within the context of rolling out developmental local government and meeting international and national commitments on sustainable development it is imperative that urban environmental issues are contextualised for their impact on the lives of the poor. In the largest cities there are broad sectoral policies in place on most of the key dimensions of urban environmental management though, in general, detailed institutional arrangements for implementation, enforcement, monitoring and funding have yet to be finalised. There are also the shared problems seen with the social and economic functions of local government that arise from South Africa’s apartheid history, namely that black people and black sections of the city
were never incorporated into the municipal systems and so are often still effectively excluded from urban environmental management.

Under apartheid, local government’s mandate was limited to a small proportion of the population, most of whom were relatively affluent. The establishment and maintenance of the institutional framework of democratic local government has involved fundamental reconfiguration of the institutional set-up, legislative and regulatory frameworks. While minimum standards have been set, the institutional arrangements that are necessary to give effect to environmental policies like integrated waste, air quality control or basic water and sanitation have yet to be defined or enforced across the city. In other words we are a long way off implementing an inclusive environmental management plan for cities.

Translating the principles and policies of environmental sectors into appropriate regulations at the local level involves systematic alignment of local government institutional procedures and systems, such as procurement and planning systems. Most officials and politicians agree that establishing the institutional framework of urban environmental management and its component parts (especially around delivering sustainable and affordable water, waste and energy) are the key challenges for bedding down the inclusive vision of developmental local government.5

There is growing acceptance of the sustainability agenda at the level of rhetoric, but this has not been translated yet into organisational systems and practices. For example there is virtually no practice of environmental auditing; norms and standards have not been made ‘green’. While the National Prosecution Authority has set up a ‘green corruption and policing unit’ no similar capacity exists for environmental infringements at the local level. Similarly, environmental taxation or incentives are not part of standard municipal practice. The limited capacity that has been developed within municipalities for implementation and enforcement is focused on environmental impact assessment requirements, and these are typically driven by private developers in affluent, not poor, neighbourhoods.

Institutional poverty and the economic mandate of local government
The idea that the sub-national state should be involved in economic development was introduced along with the notion of the developmental local government in the 1990s so is still relatively new in South Africa. The White Paper defines the objectives of local government as follows: ‘Local
government can play an important role in promoting job creation and boosting the local economy. Investing in the basics – by providing good quality cost-effective services and by making the local area a pleasant place to live and work – is the key starting point.’ The White Paper also indicates that ‘local government should review existing policies and procedures to promote local economic development (LED) and provide special economic services’ (*Local Government White Paper* 1998 Section 2.3). Examples of these special economic services detailed in the White Paper include marketing and investment support, small business support services, research and technology, and training and placement services. There are elements of the economic development platform that a municipality provides, most notably reliable services, planning and regulation. Dating from apartheid times services planning and regulation are not uniform in coverage, standard or costs across South Africa’s cities. In other words there is already a structural impediment for productive activity in some urban areas.

For local government to achieve its developmental vision will require political commitment to poverty reduction and the transformation of the dysfunctional institutional arrangements inherited from the previous regime. Bluntly, municipalities not only need to want to address the economic needs of the poor but they also need the appropriate tools and instruments at their disposal. Off-the-shelf neoliberal solutions for municipal reform, especially in the economic domain, are not designed to meet the interests or needs of the poor and this means that the institutional instruments for delivery from a more developmental state have to be built.

Building equitable growth is a complex process that involves a broad definition of local economic development to ensure that all citizens become beneficiaries. Creating a developmental strategy is not simply a political commitment but will rest on careful attention to the fine details of municipal financial and administrative systems that will enable and facilitate economic growth for all residents. In addition, for local government to facilitate economic growth it will have to engage other spheres of government and incorporate all stakeholders in a developmental approach to governance.

There is no fixed blueprint for securing economic development. Unlike the areas of service provision where clear targets have been set and there are established mechanisms and practices for measuring local government performance, the economic development field is more fluid, difficult to measure and involves many different players. The scale of unemployment and poverty in South Africa demands that nobody is complacent and that
municipalities are proactive about opportunities and programmes that are locally specific, locally owned and locally rewarding. While reliable and cost-effective service provision and a healthy and sustainable environment are core elements in establishing a context for economic development, it is not enough. Obviously it is a requirement that municipalities get the basics of service delivery right, including such technical issues as a single financial system and an effective and comprehensive indigent grant that would secure the reproductive, if not productive, capacity of residents. But without addressing the fundamental issues of unemployment and low wages, even the best-designed service-based social safety nets are not going to be effective or sustainable. Poverty will continue if there is no economic growth. Poverty will also continue without equitable distribution of the fruits of growth.

The mandate of the White Paper can also be interpreted to require a review of the internal administrative and financial systems of government necessary to facilitate the delivery of the LED (Local Economic Development) plan. National government has legislated specific requirements for financial operatives. The property rates bill implies that the entire municipal regulatory regime will need to be revisited. The more general demands of good governance at the local level will have to address billing, service cost recovery and the distribution of locally generated revenue. These institutional reforms are not separate from the LED programme as a culture of good governance is a prerequisite for sustainable growth and poverty reduction. But an inclusive economic development agenda is not just about good municipal housekeeping, it should entail an aggressive developmental agenda that seeks to expand economic opportunities to the poor. There are specific instruments or levers that local authorities use to either drive or facilitate economic development. There may be specific economic reforms such as licensing procedures, procurement policies, debt management, incentive regimes as well as marketing that will need specialist economic input. An honest appraisal of the economic regulatory and incentive scheme in cities across South Africa quickly reveals that the informal or second economy is tangential to the design, operation and finding of economic management (Nel and Rogerson 2004). A simple rule of thumb provides the indicator of inclusion – if any resident regardless of the nature of the business premise or location, the business size or sector and the language of the entrepreneur or any other personal attribute excludes him or her from accessing state resources, then exclusion occurs.


**Conclusion**

The political transition in 1994 ushered in not only an era of non-racial democracy but also a commitment to a developmental state that would reduce inequality and poverty. In this paper I have argued that defining the developmental agenda of the state requires careful attention to where development takes place, who is identified as poor and, finally, to how the state acts to ensure that its developmental programme is inclusive. Implicitly this means addressing both national and sub-national structures and activities of government. Crucially in South Africa embracing the notion of a developmental state demands that we focus first and foremost on the so far incomplete transformation of local government to ensure municipalities are able to reach their social, environmental and economic obligations in a manner that builds citizenship and fosters sustainable and equitable growth.

In summary, I have argued that while some advances have been made along a developmental path there are real obstacles that will undermine the overall objectives and aspirations of the post apartheid project. In particular I have shown that it is imperative we move away from the contrasting of urban and rural poverty, acknowledging that urban poverty is already a critical issue and one that is likely to increase in importance over the next decades. I have also shown that identifying who is poor within cities, while bound up in the apartheid legacy of race discrimination, cannot be crudely conflated with the old race classifications. Because race and poverty can no longer be as clearly correlated, a much closer analysis of urban dynamics is required. The design of state anti-poverty programmes, including the targeting of state resources and initiatives like the social packages implied in the grants systems, needs to take account of sub-national realities, especially those in urban realities.

Acknowledging urban poverty and the structural and institutional capacity of the state to act developmentally in cities reveals that we have yet to overcome apartheid legacies. To date, whether in the social, environmental or economic realms, it is clear that we fall short of inclusive systems of urban administration. The net effect is that the urban poor, like many of the rural poor, remain excluded from the developmental capacity of government. This problem has to be a priority for the next decade of democracy.

**Notes**

1. This paper reflects on urban policy work undertaken for various government departments, donors and NGOs over the last few years. In almost all instances teamwork was involved and I have gained much from the collaboration of many
people. In particular I would like to thank Tim Mosdell and the Palmer Development Group; Edgar Pieterse, Jacqui Boulle and the Isandla Institute; Jusdy Sibisi and SALGA; Andrew Borraine, Owen Crankshaw, Graeme Gotz, Sithole Mbanga and the South African Cities Network; Kirsten Harrison, Jan Erasmus and the Johannesburg City Council; Elroy Africa and the Department of Provincial and Local Government, and finally Daryl Killian, Chris Albertyn and Daneda. Needless to say the interpretation (and the errors) are my mine.

2. What is needed is a costing to municipalities of what the comprehensive roll-out of the social package would involve.

3. See in particular the indigent policy of the City of Cape Town.

4. South Africa is a signatory to a number of international protocols, including the Biodiversity Convention, the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Action. Typically, reporting on these agreements is undertaken at the national scale and performance is not disaggregated for urban areas.

5. See SACN Energy conference and SACN (2004) chapter on sustainability

6. These and other instruments for inclusive LED are discussed in SALGA (2004) Local Economic Development, Background paper for the SALGA National Conference, October, Cape Town.

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Article

On the (im)possibility of social justice in South Africa

David M Smith

Justice is a name for certain classes of moral rules, which concern the essentials of human well-being more nearly, and are therefore of more absolute obligation than any other rules for the guidance of life. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1863:315-6)

Introduction

Justice is widely regarded as an important virtue of both individuals and societies. Indeed, to act justly has long been considered a defining feature of human civilisation. The notion of justice invokes equity or fairness, with persons treated as they deserve to be: advantage bestowed by some measure of entitlement and penalty according to the magnitude of the offence. To the imperative of balanced judgement, symbolised by the scales of justice, is added the value of impartiality, reflected in the image of justice blind to all but morally relevant circumstances. In short, justice is a matter for very careful consideration, to match the strength of its moral obligation.

The concept of social justice is of more recent origin than that of justice itself, and has a variety of meanings. The term social justice is sometimes used to distinguish ‘distributive’ from ‘retributive’ justice. It can distinguish distributional outcomes from the fairness of the process involved, or ‘procedural’ justice. It may signal concern with a range of ‘social’ conditions, distinguished from others regarded as ‘economic’ or ‘political’. But the most comprehensive and useful meaning of social justice is to identify justice in any sense as social, as something happening in society. To say that social justice is a social construct is to capture both the social character of justice in general and how justice is actually practised in different societal contexts. This is to distinguish social justice from ‘natural’ justice as a universal feature of the fabric of the world, if such a property is conceivable.
The purpose of this paper is to explore the meaning of social justice, in general and within the particular context of South Africa. It draws freely on a number of my previous publications (listed in the references and not cited individually in the text). The intention here is to make more explicit a position stated obliquely in the conclusions of some of my recent writings: that it is difficult if not impossible to imagine social justice in South Africa. The argument is based on problems with the concept of social justice, and on the reality of South Africa emerging from apartheid.

Background: theories of social justice

The notion of justice as a virtue of the good life can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. Agnes Heller (1987) has explained how the ethical and political aspects of this traditional concept of justice were separated during the 18th and 19th centuries. The former came to constitute the modern field of ethics or moral philosophy while the latter became concerned with institutional arrangements. The question of the best social world became largely a matter of the just distribution, or what is now commonly referred to as social justice. The elaboration of social justice has itself subsequently attracted a diversity of theoretical perspectives, further to complicate its meaning.

From the rise of modern liberalism well into the 20th century, the dominant perspective was that of utilitarianism. Embedded in the abstract formalism of neoclassical economics, social justice became a matter of maximising society’s ‘welfare’ as the sum total of ‘utility’ enjoyed by individuals. Despite the egalitarian implications of the assumption of decreasing marginal utility (whereby aggregate welfare is increased by transferring resources from rich to the poor who can gain more from them), a defence of unequal societies was provided by the Pareto criterion (whereby increases in aggregate welfare require there to be no losers). Thus, utilitarianism failed definitively to resolve the question of the just distribution.

The virtual hegemony of utilitarianism was eventually challenged by John Rawls (1971). He proposed a deontological rather than teleological perspective, arguing for justice as what is right rather than concerned with some ultimate good. He took the natural attributes and social-environmental circumstances from which personal advantage tends to arise as beyond individual responsibility, and thus morally arbitrary. While this might suggest equality in the distribution of his ‘social primary goods’ of liberty
and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect, some
degree of inequality may be justified. Rawls’s ‘difference principle’ required
social and economic inequalities to be arranged so that they are to the
greatest benefit of the least advantaged group in society. This is the
resolution persons are supposed to arrive at by viewing society from behind
a ‘veil of ignorance’ as to their actual position within it, accepting that they
could be among the worst-off and therefore wishing them to be as well-off
as possible. Thus, justice was based therefore on a social contract among
self-interested but cooperative individuals.

Rawls provoked a flourishing of interest in social justice, with alternative
theoretical perspectives competing for attention (Kymlicka 2001; Smith
1994). The first major critique was from Robert Nozick (1974), whose
exposition of libertarianism argued for the entitlement of persons to benefit
from their ‘holdings’, including favourable natural attributes and such
assets as capital, land and its resources. A vital proviso was that holdings
had been acquired justly, for example by gift, inheritance or purchase.
Expropriation by force and similar injustice required rectification, an
aspect of Nozick’s perspective that is often overlooked by those seeking to
justify the outcome of unequal initial endowments.

A more potent challenge came from Marxism, which recognizes the
intrinsically exploitative character of capitalist social relations. Karl Marx
and his followers were suspicious of the very idea of social justice under
capitalism, but not very specific about what would follow the revolution
other than that distribution according to need should eventually prevail. It
took a contemporary moral reading of Marx by Ronald Peffer (1990) to
show that distributional principles similar to those of Rawls might be
deduced, but with economic and social security given precedence over
liberty: a reversal of conventional liberal priorities. However, Marxism
remains much more a critique of capitalism than a prescription for social
justice in practice.

Another challenge came from communitarianism, stressing the relational
nature of human life against the tendency of liberalism to atomise the
individual without social context. Michael Walzer (1983) argued that the
meaning of goods to particular societies could require different distributional
principles in different ‘spheres’. Michael Sandel (1982) saw social justice
as a remedial virtue, coming into play only when communal understandings
of entitlement break down. More generally, communitarians tend to argue
the cultural (and local) relativism of distributive justice, against universalists
such as Rawls.

The relational basis of social justice has also been emphasised by feminists hostile to the impersonal rights and rules of mainstream (some say masculinist) perspectives. The ethic of care initially proposed by Carol Gilligan (1982) stressed response to the needs of particular others, and the importance of understanding social context. More recent work has sought to integrate the care and justice perspectives, arguing that they are complementary rather than alternatives (eg Clement 1996). How far the spatial scope of caring relationships can be extended, from close and familiar persons to distant strangers, is an issue similar to that raised by communitarianism, with important implications for social justice at an international scale (Chatterjee 2004).

Further theoretical diversity was provided by the emergence of a politics of difference, elaborated most influentially by Iris Marion Young (1990). She argued for an approach focused on the processes of domination and oppression, identifying unfair treatment on such grounds as disability, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. Some saw this move as cultural domination supplanting exploitation as the fundamental injustice, and cultural recognition displacing socio-economic redistribution as the remedy. But others pointed out that cultural claims are often means to more material ends associated with economic and social equality; difference arising from membership of a particular group should not be a disadvantage.

Despite this diversity of perspectives, some common concerns can be detected. One is with the distribution of means of human well-being; while Young (1990) was critical of what she referred to as the ‘distributive paradigm’, distributional inequalities are intrinsic to concerns about discrimination associated with social constructions of difference. The second is with (in)equality; indeed, Brian Barry (1989:3) claims that ‘the central issue in any theory of social justice is the defensibility of unequal relations between people’. The third is with the structure of society and its institutions; quoting Barry again: ‘a theory of justice is a theory about the kind of social arrangements that can be defended’.

However, these three concerns together constitute a very thin general conception of social justice. The problem is that their further specification, or thickening, reveals important differences. With respect to the object(s) of distribution, there are differences as to the crucial means of well-being; for example, they could be defined in terms of Rawls’s primary goods, human capabilities, rights, opportunities, or the basic needs that have
figured prominently in development theory and practice. With respect to (in)equality, there are differences concerning the crucial dimension; for example, it could be ethnicity, race, occupational status, gender or even geographical space. As to the structure of society, there are differences about the crucial aspect of social identity and relations (for example, class, culture or citizenship), as well as about institutional responsibility (for example, the respective roles of the public and private sectors).

Recognising the seriousness of these issues as impediments to the specification of social justice in practice, there have been moves to resolve them within some overarching theoretical perspective. For example, there has been an attempt to theorise human need independent of the relativism of culture (Doyal and Gough 1991), and to reassert the case for essential characteristics of human being (Nussbaum 1992). Agnes Heller (1987) has argued for a new ethico-political concept of justice, concerned with the best possible moral world. Indeed, she describes the triumph of the right over the good in Rawls’s conception of justice as merely ‘the shabby remnant of the “sum total of virtues” that was once called “justice”’ (Heller 1987: 93). Her proposal (re) reconnects social justice to broader considerations of the good life, or what it means to live well; as Michael Walzer (1994:24) has remarked: ‘we are distributing lives of a certain sort, and what counts as justice in distribution depends on what that “sort” is’.

Moving towards a thicker conception of social justice also implies recognition of geographical and historical context. If there are essential human needs to be satisfied anywhere and at any time, the extent of the shortfall and the specific goods and services required to meet this will depend on the here and now of actual human experience. The relevance of such categories as ethnicity, gender and race will also depend on the context, including the historical legacy of specific forms of discrimination and the grounds on which political mobilisation and struggle are most effective. As to the question of the best possible institutional arrangements to achieve distributive justice, these will depend on the capacity to change the existing structure of a society, and on the broader (international) context within which it functions.

**Interlude: South Africa after apartheid**

This paper is not intended to provide empirical detail on the trajectory of economic and social change in South Africa since the end of apartheid. Space precludes such an exercise valuable though it would be. Instead, I
offer a few selected observations of particular relevance to the context within which any conception of social justice might be evaluated, taken from two quite different sources.

The first is from a review by Firoz Khan (2004), in an issue of Development Update, focusing on the city but of more general relevance. He highlights the following problems, as ‘inequitable outcomes’ of South Africa’s transformation and development (Khan 2004:14; sources cited therein): unemployment estimated at 41.5 per cent (2001); a million jobs lost (1994-7); growing intra-racial inequality, with the income of the top 20 per cent of African households estimated to be about 40 times higher than the poorest 20 per cent (2001-2); a drop in the share of income of the poorest 50 per cent of households, from 11.4 to 9.7 per cent (between 1995 and 2000), with the biggest decline among the poorest; growing poverty, especially among children; a decline in the United Nations Human Development Index, with South Africa falling from 93rd to 107th out of 173 countries (from 1992 to 2000); and a worsening income distribution, with the Gini coefficient rising from 0.56 to 0.57 (from 1995 to 2000).

He sees inherited patterns of uneven development supplemented by new forms of division and exclusion. These include: the social divide between the abandoned city and enclaves of luxury and security; the widening gap between the township, inner city and suburb; and the deep divisions between township residents in formal housing, backyard shacks and informal settlements. Khan (2004:25) also draws attention to ‘sanitised and clinical suburban shopping malls, fantasy worlds ... and gated communities ... the play and living spaces of the affluent, these built environment interventions whose objective is to avoid and/or eliminate “difference”/“other” – perceived as overwhelming and dangerous’.

Reflecting on the broader implications, Khan (2004:8) identifies a ‘brutal and sadistic normlessness, the exact antithesis of an imagined post-apartheid moral economy that strikes at the heart and soul of the reconstruction and transformation project’. Finding redistribution absent from the existing macroeconomic policy, he suggests that there is ‘no coherent narrative/script/conception/theory of social change and how it is to be engineered, managed and sustained’ (2004:16). In practice, he finds an upward redistribution of resources, effected by a new coalition of the old white and new black elite working to the detriment of the poorest 50 per cent of black households. This interpretation is echoed by Ebrahim Fakir (2004:130) in the same issue, referring to ‘new and surprising social and political
contours emerging – increasing levels of social inequality, continuing poverty and unemployment, modest levels of economic growth with little widespread redistribution, and with an increased share of economic prosperity only for old elites and an emerging black technical and managerial occupational class’. Khan (2004:43) concludes: ‘There is no more urgent task in our new democracy than to embark on the long journey of re-dreaming our urban future firmly grounded in the values of social justice, human solidarity and equity’.

The second source is a feature by Rory Carroll (2004) in the British newspaper The Guardian, on the new black elite. It refers to ‘South Africa’s first black rand billionaires, men who have zoomed from modest means to mega-wealth in a few years’. Some see them as models of what is possible in the post-apartheid era, while others condemn them as ‘the embodiment of crony capitalism, which enriches a few and leaves many in poverty’. The black economic empowerment legislation introduced in 2003 was designed to transfer parts of the South African economy to those previously disadvantaged by white rule. While empowerment agreements worth about R10 billion were reported in 2003, critics point to the same men (sic) with political connections being repeated beneficiaries. The question raised is how far this form of black economic empowerment will generate other, smaller-scale enterprises with significant growth and redistributitional effects, rather than merely transferring ownership of existing assets and widening gaps within the black population. As to overall racial inequality, it is pointed out that blacks still control less than four per cent by value of shares on the Johannesburg securities exchange, and that nine out of ten senior management positions are still held by whites.

Not all observers would stress these same aspects of post-apartheid South Africa. Some would point to new freedoms associated with the removal of discriminatory legislation and the introduction of a universal franchise. Others would emphasise improvements in the conditions of many of South Africa’s poorest citizens, especially with respect to servicing informal settlements. However, vast differences in living standards remain, within the cities and between urban and rural areas. That inherited patterns of inequality are being restructured rather than removed, with those originally based on race interpenetrated by class, is part of the reality challenging the achievement of social justice after apartheid.
Challenge: social (in)justice after apartheid

Liberal egalitarianism, as elaborated by the likes of Rawls, provided an obvious critique of the injustice of apartheid. Race is an un-chosen identity; like other social-environmental contingencies as accidents of birth, it should carry no moral credit or penalty, and should have no independent bearing on living standards. It followed that social justice could be defined as ‘racial equality’. But in practice, arguments for racial equality focused very much on the repeal of discriminatory legislation in the interests of liberty and in order to equalise opportunities. While equality of outcomes or living standards by ‘race group’ might have been the ultimate objective, this was seldom stated explicitly, which greatly limited the egalitarian expectations.

More radical views associated with Marxism, stressing the structural injustice of racial domination and oppression under capitalism, were muted in apartheid South Africa. This included the African National Congress (ANC), with its commitment to nationalisation of major sectors of the economy within a socialist society. With respect to other challenges to liberal egalitarianism, elements of communitarianism could be detected in respect for the culture of different population groups, which was by no means confined to apartheid ideology, but this did not protect communities formed by Africans, Indians and Coloureds in supposedly ‘white’ cities from destruction under Group Areas legislation. As to the politics of difference, with its progressive expectations, opposition to apartheid was more a case of stressing the common humanity of South Africa’s peoples against the social construction of difference based on race. The way in which residential segregation and petty apartheid enforced separation and regulated encounters among strangers, especially within the cities, was a far cry from Iris Marion Young’s equality of groups with mutual recognition and respect.

The end of apartheid and the election of an ANC government raised great expectations. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) placed primary emphasis on the satisfaction of basic human needs, reflecting the mainstream development discourse of the times. There was a Rawlsian ring to the commitment ‘to improve the quality of life of all South Africans, and in particular the most poor and marginalised’ (ANC 1994: 15). However, there was also a hint of Pareto in the suggestion that all would gain (implicitly, none would lose), a comforting piece of rhetoric which failed to recognise that hitherto privileged sections of the population might make
sacrifices for the betterment of severely disadvantaged others. The RDP was responsible for some positive impact on housing and service infrastructure in localities occupied by poor blacks, and in this respect some erosion of racial inequality could be identified.

However, the RDP was shortlived, to be replaced by the macro-economic strategy of ‘Growth, Employment and Redistribution’ (GEAR). The emphasis of GEAR on reduced state spending, investment incentives, wage restraint, labour market flexibility and privatisation, strongly resembled the neoliberal development strategy promoted elsewhere by the International Monetary Fund in its structural adjustment programmes. GEAR promised accelerated economic growth but projections of new employment proved optimistic, and the strategy has generated limited benefits for the mass of the deprived population. Patrick Bond (2000:19) is not alone in considering that state policies are excessively neoliberal: ‘too market-oriented, stingy, insensitive to poverty, incapable of integrating gender and environmental concerns, unsympathetic to problems associated with public health and worsening geographical segregation’.

The critique of GEAR is too familiar to require repetition here. However, in the context of alternative perspectives on social justice it is worth a reminder of how Nicoli Nattrass (1996) saw competing moral claims reflected in contrasting approaches. Big businesses supported GEAR in the implicit moral claim that lower wages are good for the poor because a more flexible labour market encourages the expansion of employment; so promoting the interests of capital through an investor-friendly environment is necessary for growth and promotes equity in the long run. The position of organised labour turned this moral argument on its head, proposing that high levels of inequality undermine growth, and that reducing inequality should be a precondition rather than merely an outcome; so poverty should be addressed at least in part through improving the wages of low-paid workers. In Rawlsian terms, the business (and government) position is that initial inequality in favour of the better-off can be justified as in the (eventual) interests of the worst-off. The opposition view is that initial moves towards equality are in the interests of the worst-off. If there are no empirical or logical means of adjudicating between these two alternative theories then it becomes a matter of faith.

Contemporary neoliberalism, with its reliance on relatively free markets, is not the only alternative to liberal egalitarianism. What of the other challenges to mainstream perspectives on social justice, introduced earlier
in this paper, as applied to post-apartheid South Africa? While Marxism remains a powerful source of analytical insight into the workings of a capitalist economy, the prospects of influencing the trajectory of change in South Africa quickly faded with the abandonment of the ANC’s original revolutionary aspirations, and with the contemporary demise of Soviet-style socialism. Indications of communitarianism may be detected in suggestions of a return to traditional African values associated with group identity and solidarity, or *ubuntu*; Augustine Shutte (1993) has argued that such premodern ethics provide an alternative to both liberal individualism and socialist collectivism. This reflects a search for perspectives grounded in Africa and Africanism, manifest in assertions of an ‘African Renaissance’. Some see links between premodern African communitarianism and the contemporary ethic of care, and between an ‘Afro-centric’ morality and the relational ethics associated with feminism. With respect to the politics of difference there has been an attempt to make a virtue of population diversity, reflected in the notion of a ‘Rainbow Nation’: South African citizenship is supposed to transcend ethnicity and race, while still recognising and respecting difference. However, none of these perspectives seem capable of challenging the predominant ethics and practice of (neo)liberal individualism.

It is also possible to identify what may be described as new discourses of social justice in South Africa. One is that of human rights, often invoked in the general sense in the critique of apartheid, but now stressing rights of citizenship through the Bill of Rights incorporated into the 1996 Constitution. Environmental justice has become part of the policy agenda (McDonald 2002); the right to an environment not harmful to people’s health, and to sustainable development, is included in the Bill of Rights. The notion of sustainability is itself the subject of much recent interest, in the context of sustainable cities, for example (Swilling 2004). Sustainability raises the issue of intergenerational justice, including the awkward question of how far into the future a society should project itself, if not indefinitely. Looking back leads to arguments for reparation as compensation for past injustice, including restitution of land and other assets, as well as coming to terms with the kind of experiences addressed through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There are also more practical and pragmatic approaches to redistribution, in affirmative action and empowerment programmes, though there is the danger of perverse outcomes pointed to in the previous section.

The irony is that such varied perspectives compete for attention, as Firoz
Khan (above) calls for resurrection of the values of social justice, human solidarity and equity to counter the prevailing normlessness of the post-apartheid era. The point is that what these values mean is itself contested.

**Dilemma: what could be social justice in South Africa?**

Alternative perspectives may be deployed to make a case for a particular conception of social justice in South Africa. It could be the liberal commitment to racial equality but this is complicated by increasing inequality among the black population, which makes group averages a dubious basis for comparison. It could be libertarian entitlement theory, though full rectification of historical injustices in the acquisition of resources would be inconceivable as the limited progress of land restitution demonstrates. It could be the Marxist commitment to fundamental structural change, though the collapse of socialism elsewhere makes this more unlikely than ever. It could involve the resurrection of community, difficult though this is against the contemporary forces of cultural homogenisation. It could be manifest in an ethic of care, though this is hard to promote in an environment of individual materialism. It could involve the recognition of difference as grounds for positive rather than negative discrimination, though there are powerful objections on the part of the hitherto advantaged. While these perspectives are not all mutually exclusive there are clearly limits to their congruence.

At the risk of taking theoretical thickening too far, it is now proposed to suggest a basis from which the question of the (im)possibility of social justice in South Africa might be posed more constructively. This involves elaboration of the three common elements in the alternative theories outlined earlier in this paper: the distribution of means of well-being, a concern with (in)equality, and the structure of society and its institutions, to which must now be added the time scale. Space constrains inclusion of detailed substance and argument (to be found in some of my other publications).

The composition of that which is to be distributed has been the subject of extensive debate. The resolution ranges from minimal requirements of food, clothing, shelter and so on needed to ensure physical survival, to formulations recognising a range of ‘higher’ needs, including those of a psychological and even spiritual kind, required to sustain human life qualitatively different from that of other sentient beings. What is feasible along this continuum will depend on the context, including what the society
in question may be able to afford. In South Africa, additional guidance is
provided by the Bill of Rights, uncertain though some of its provisions are
until clarified in the process of substantiating claims. Without being more
specific, this context suggests that, as a matter of both justice and rights
everyone should be entitled to the satisfaction of material and security
needs, including decent housing and a comprehensive service infrastructure,
within an environment superior to that of the existing townships and
shacklands (and much of the countryside).

Inequality can be identified in various dimensions. While race remains
the most obvious in the South African context, both technical and ethical
problems arise from the continuing adoption of the former apartheid race-
group categories. Attention has also to be given to issues somewhat
neglected in the preoccupation with racial inequality, including the
disadvantage experienced by women and by poor whites. However, there is
one dimension which commends itself as particularly suitable for the
identification and evaluation of inequality: geographical space. Inequality
among territorially defined population aggregates, in the tradition of
geographical analysis, has the advantage of incorporating other dimensions.
Insofar as spatial patterns of housing and environmental quality, and related
aspects of living standards, are likely still to reflect the racial residential
segregation inherited from apartheid, progress in eroding ‘racial’ inequality
is addressed indirectly by this approach, originally referred to as that of
‘territorial social justice’. The appropriate scale of spatial disaggregation
would not be hard to determine from existing patterns of differentiation, for
example between individual townships and well-to-do suburban
neighbourhoods.

The structure of society is a more difficult issue, particularly when
context is introduced. With respect to institutional fairness, or procedural
justice, the elimination of racial discrimination from present institutions in
South Africa would pass a test which those of the apartheid era would have
failed. However, there could still be institutional bias in favour of those
already in positions of privilege (for example, by virtue of political
connections), and against the poor, as is argued by some critics of the post-
apartheid state. And it does not require commitment to Marxism to identify
class advantage in any capitalist system driven largely by market forces;
markets respond to those with the money to influence them (literally,
purchasing power), and if the existing distribution of income and wealth
arose under conditions of blatant injustice (as under apartheid), then this
source of inequity will tend to be perpetuated. Iris Marion Young (1990: 245) draws attention to what David Harvey (1973) originally describes as ‘hidden mechanisms’ of (re)distribution that produce and reproduce inequalities to the disadvantage of the poor and marginalised, as illustrated by the upward redistribution of resources effected by elites identified by Firoz Khan (see above).

The fact that institutional arrangements may have been arrived at as an outcome of a democratic process may not be entirely convincing as a test of their fairness, such is their vulnerability to the exercise of economic and political power. Another test has been proposed by Onora O’Neill (1992: 68), who asks ‘to what extent the variable aspects of any arrangements that structure vulnerable lives are ones that could have been refused or renegotiated by those they actually constrain’ (O’Neill 1992:68). This resembles a principle advanced by Brian Barry (1995:7): ‘it would widely be acknowledged as a sign of an unjust arrangement that those who do badly under it could reasonably reject it’. There is a suggestion of Rawls in both formulations, with their assignment of the power of veto to the badly-off. While the ANC retains its dominant position in South African politics, there are growing indications that some of its policies might not survive this kind of test. The ultimate test is the effectiveness of institutions in bringing about distributional justice, manifest in substantial improvements of living conditions in impoverished parts of the country.

One further consideration required by theoretical thickening is the time scale. The conception of social justice proposed here requires a process of equalisation, at least with respect to the means of well-being needed to live decent human lives, and arguably with respect to living standards more generally. While perfect equality could be the aim, some degree of inequality might be justified on moral grounds, the most persuasive (following Rawls) being that it is in the interests of the worst-off. Two difficult questions arise. Within what length of time is it required to achieve equality, or to converge on a justifiable degree of inequality? And what degree of inequality can be justified, on the grounds that it benefits the worst-off? Both questions raise issues which require not only moral judgements but also empirical knowledge of the functioning of the South African economy and society, now and in the future. Hence the difficulty, highlighted by Nicoli Nattrass (above), in deciding between competing claims as to the significance of existing inequalities in promoting a more equal society.

So, what are the prospects of achieving social justice in the sense
suggested here? If the key is further sustained improvement in the living standards of the poor, then there are some formidable obstacles. The initial task of getting better services such as water supply, electricity and garbage collection into townships and shacklands was easier than addressing the structural features of poverty built into an economic system that has not been subject to fundamental change. And there are new and growing calls on hard-pressed public expenditure, notably arising from the proliferation of AIDS. Thus, the prospects for substantially relieving poverty do not look promising under the development strategies currently on the political agenda, given the present structure of society, its institutions, and the macroeconmic policies to which the government is committed. This raises the kind of spectre suggested by Hein Marais (1998:5): ‘Left unchecked, the defining trends of the transition seem destined to shape a revised division of society, with the current order stabilised around, at best, 30 per cent of the population. For the rest (overwhelmingly young, female and African) the best hope will be some trickle-down from a “modernised” and “normalised” new South Africa’.

As well as poverty, there are physical development problems constraining further progress towards social justice. South Africa entered the 1990s with a legacy of apartheid planning and construction manifest in spatially segregated, highly differentiated, sharply fragmented and dispersed urban areas. A major impediment to equalisation is the inherited housing stock, with its spatial pattern of extreme contrasts between self-built shacks of informal settlements typical of poor third-world urbanisation and affluent suburbs comparing favourably with those of North America and Western Europe. President Thabo Mbeki’s mandate is to clear slum settlements within ten years; KwaZulu-Natal’s Housing Minister aims to eradicate them in the next six years, with an even shorter time scale promised in Gauteng to replace them with formal housing. However, the prospects of substantially improving, never mind eliminating, the vast swathes of shacklands within a decade seems highly optimistic. In any event, in situ upgrade is likely to perpetuate unsuitable locations, despite official aspirations to the contrary, and with it the pre-existing spatial arrangement of settlements. And the best-planned schemes of local government may be frustrated by the people themselves, including such fraudulent practices as trading the rehousing opportunities represented by shack ownership (see for example The Mercury, August 20, 2004).

The main objective of post-apartheid physical planning has been the
creation of more compact and integrated cities. However, some observers find that the decade has ended ‘without much meaningful progress’ (Donaldson and Marais 2002:198); the reality appears to be further fragmentation (Harrison, Huchzermeyer and Mayekiso 2003). The affluent minority seem increasingly to be seeking the defensive exclusion of gated neighbourhoods. Karina Landman (2002) points out that, whereas urban policy formulated in the 1990s sought to rid South Africa of the segregation and fragmentation of the apartheid city, these settlements have exacerbated the situation.

But it is not just a problem of physical development. These new forms of spatial and social fragmentation risk undermining the common purpose required for a sustained attempt to promote social justice as equalisation. While gated settlements may provide some positive elements of local community for their inhabitants, their exclusivity and control allows those who can afford it to opt out of shared services, taking care only of themselves and their immediate neighbours. They can also create barriers to interaction among people of different races, cultures and classes, adding to the difficulty of building social cohesion. Gated neighbourhoods thus ‘touch on the very issue of individual rights to public space and the fundamental principles of democracy’ (Landman 2002:217-8). Lindsay Bremner observes that ‘the gaps between the worlds of the township, the inner city and the suburbs are widening. The chances that the people of the city will develop a sense of shared spaces, of shared destiny, grow slimmer by the day’ (quoted in Donalson and Marais 2002:6).

Difficult as it is for the state substantially to change the highly unequal spatial structure of South African society, the problems are exacerbated by investment priorities of private capital, eager to fund property development for upper-income groups and the latest refinement in entertainment. There is money to build Johannesburg’s expensive gated suburbs like Dainfern and a vast new casino and commercial complex in the form of medieval Tuscan town (Montecasino), but not to rebuild decaying African townships like Alexandra. Capital has been found for the art deco extravaganza of the Suncoast Casino and other similar ventures in the Durban metropolis, but not to rebuild informal settlements like Inanda. The proliferation of gambling venues is of particular moral significance, with media reports of ‘gambling mania’ and ‘the poor blowing their cash’; as Ashwin Desai has pointed out, life for many people in places such as Phoenix ‘is already a roulette wheel’ (Tribune Herald, January 28, 2000).
There is an influential strand in the discourse of social justice referred to as luck egalitarianism, which (following Rawls) seeks to minimise the role of good or bad fortune. The implications in South Africa are clear. Only a few miles separates Dainfern from Alexandra yet they represent two different worlds. For all but the most exceptional inhabitants of somewhere like Alexandra, the possibility of moving to a home in somewhere like Dainfern is as remote as a trip to the moon, no matter how hard they work. And the difference between these life chances is very largely a matter of luck: no one deserves the good fortune of being born and brought up in the affluent suburbs rather than the townships or shacklands. Such inequalities are morally indefensible, not only from a liberal egalitarian perspective but within any current conception of social justice except an extreme form of libertarianism.

Social justice in South Africa requires a vigorous process of equalisation, narrowing gaps arising from morally irrelevant accidents of birth and subsequent contingencies, very much in the spirit of John Rawls. One interpretation of Rawls’s veil of ignorance behind which we are supposed to approve social arrangements, highlighted by Stuart Corbridge (1993: 464), is that it invites us to think ourselves, literally, into the place of others and imagine what it would be like to be among the worst-off. It invites relatively privileged South Africans to ask what kind of society they would endorse, if under present circumstances they might find themselves living somewhere like Alexandra or Inanda.

Now we come to the fundamental problem frustrating the achievement of social justice in South Africa. Formulated as a process of equalisation, social justice cannot be envisaged as bringing the mass of the poor up to the material living standards of the well-to-do minority for this is both economically unattainable and environmentally unsustainable. If the good life is represented by the spacious suburban home with its manicured garden and other material refinements that go with it, and if the aspiration of the impoverished majority of the present population is to achieve something similar, there will be massive disappointment. The satisfaction of everyone’s basic subsistence and security needs, everywhere, entails a more equal sharing of the means of a much more modest material conception of the good life. If we are distributing lives of a certain sort, as Michael Walzer reminds us, this sort must surely be capable of extension to everyone, within a time scale that makes it worth working for. Insofar as it is evidently so exclusive, the way of life exemplified by South Africa’s affluent suburbs
with their gated neighbourhoods cannot be defended morally, here and now. Yet this is the reality, so sharply differentiated from places of poverty, here and now.

The notion of sustainability has recently entered the policy discourse in South Africa, as indicated above. Sustainable development is conventionally interpreted very much in the context of the physical environment, pointing to limitations on present levels of material consumption enjoyed by affluent populations, if resources are to be maintained and the environment protected for future generations. But it is possible also to identify a moral aspect of sustainability as an interpretation of society that can be propagated convincingly enough to sustain a collective sense of the fundamental fairness or justice of its social arrangements and outcomes. Without such moral sustainability, as an aspect of social cohesion, it is hard to see a sustainable South African society more generally. As Hein Marais (1998: 5) warns, in response to the divisions which he predicts (above): ‘This raises not only moral but political dilemmas, not the least of which is the danger that the incumbent elites come to view the excluded majority as a threat to newly acquired privilege and power, thereby introducing the spectre of a new bout of authoritarianism in response to social instability’. Finding a way out of this dangerous trajectory, if there is one, requires some new ethico-political concept of justice, as called for by Agnes Heller, powerful enough to influence personal conduct and state practice.

However, at present it is hard to see any alternative ethics, or political philosophy, dislodging the individualistic materialism and neoliberal capitalism driving the perpetuation of inequality in South Africa. If the challenge is nothing less than to transform the prevailing political economy and its ethical foundations, the prospects are hardly encouraging. Fundamental social change may depend on the daunting task of devising and propagating a new theory of the good, incorporating inclusive material living standards, combined with an ethic of responsibility to the weak and vulnerable, persuasive enough to be a source of moral motivation. Failure could be a prescription for growing political and social instability from which the well-to-do, with most to lose, may suffer most. In these circumstances, perhaps the prudence of self-interest rather than morality can point the way towards a much more equal society, in the interests of all. However, there is little indication of such thinking in contemporary South Africa. Meanwhile, the best prospect may be piecemeal programmes and projects generating benefits for the worst-off: far short of the ideal of a just society.
Conclusion

The thrust of my argument has been that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to envisage social justice in South Africa. The concept of social justice itself is subject to a variety of interpretations. Any attempt to construct some overarching theory against which competing perspectives might be judged, encounters the philosophical problem of how to provide convincing foundations in a (postmodern) world hostile to essentialism and to the universal aspirations of metatheory. The best we can do is to work with, and between, such theory as is available and the actual contexts within which thicker understanding of social justice arises. Hence my attempted framework in the previous section.

But even here the outcome is unsatisfactory in the sense of a conception of social justice with some prospect of achievement in South Africa. There are major impediments to the extent and pace of equalisation required: economic, political and in the inherited social structure and its spatial form as a built environment. The emphasis might be shifted therefore from what is desirable in some ideal moral world to what is feasible, given the way things actually are and the constraints on structural change. There is a commonly espoused philosophical axiom that ought implies can, relieving individuals (and states) of the moral responsibility to do the impossible. But this merely shifts attention to what is actually possible in South Africa — another highly contentious question. And even if there was an obvious answer would this necessarily qualify as social justice?

It might be tempting to conclude that South Africa is a case of particularism, even exceptionalism, given its distinctive history and uniquely challenging present. However, the country could be regarded as a microcosm of the world at large, with its growing gulfs between affluence and social security on the one hand and dire poverty on the other. As the vast inequalities opened up in the 20th century show no sign of substantial reduction, and as aid from rich to poor countries remains miserly, social justice via redistribution is losing its potency. There is no prospect of raising the living standards of the world’s poor to that currently enjoyed by the affluent of North America and Western Europe: this would be environmentally unsustainable as well as economically and politically inconceivable. Therefore, social justice becomes a matter of ensuring everyone, everywhere, satisfaction of basic material and security needs. As in South Africa the good life has to be (re)defined in these terms, rather than by the mass consumption of the privileged to which the vast majority cannot
realistically aspire. Such an exclusive conception challenges the very meaning of the good life, requiring fundamental reconsideration of how humankind should live, as a matter of prudence as well as of ethics.

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Rough seas for South African seafarers in the merchant navy: the global is the local

Shaun Ruggunan

The labour market for seafarers is not an occupationally homogeneous one. It is two-tiered – the first consisting of officers and the second of ratings. Officers are the senior, tertiary-educated crew members, with the most senior being the captain or master of the ship. Ratings on the other hand are the ‘working class of the seas’, firmly situated at the lower end of the crewing hierarchy and labour market. This occupational differentiation of seafarers contributes to new patterns of inequality in the global and local labour markets for seafarers with regard to their recruitment, wages and working conditions.

Further, the operation of merchant navy vessels necessitates ships being crewed with more ratings than officers. Ratings are therefore the highest labour cost for shipowners. These occupational categories have implications for the way in which the labour markets for seafarers operate. Ratings, as the highest cost factor as well as being low-skilled, are recruited from outside the traditional maritime nations (TMN). Countries such as the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Russia, Poland and North and South Korea are the new ratings supply sources. These ratings are largely not unionised and work for a far lower income than their TMN counterparts. Officers, on the other hand, are not subject to the low wages and job insecurity that characterise ratings employment. Officers are highly sought-after in the labour market for seafarers. Currently there is a shortage of officers and a surplus of ratings in the global labour market, a situation that further exacerbates the divide between them (BIMCO/ISF Report: 2001). According to the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) and the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), there are currently 1,600 South African seafarers (ratings) employed in the South African merchant
Rough seas for South African seafarers in the merchant navy

Exact figures are difficult to determine since a register of seafarers does not exist in South Africa.¹

**Trends in the global labour market for seafarers**

Between 1975 and 1982, the international labour market for seafarers was restructured beyond recognition. The scale and pace of this change was unparalleled in the modern industrial world (ILO Report 2001:31), and nothing short of phenomenal in its creation of new labour markets for seafarers. It is one of the most significant events in labour-market restructuring since the first industrial revolution.

It is essential to understand the nature of the global labour market for seafarers prior to 1975, and how it shifted thereafter, to appreciate the significance of the changes. The shift in labour market hiring practices of mainly European-owned shipping companies in such a short time span can best be described as staggering. The new labour supply countries are not only restricted to the Philippines, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea and China but include countries of eastern Europe. These have become the new labour-supply capitals of the shipping industry. The displaced merchant navy crews were all from the TMN of Europe (Brownrigg et al 2001). While historically some of the new labour-supply countries such as India and Pakistan had crewed European merchant navy vessels, the majority of the new labour-supply countries, such as the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia and Poland are relatively new for European shipping (Northrup and Rowan 1983).²

In just over a decade the labour market for seafarers in the merchant navy had fundamentally altered. Not only were south-east Asian seafarers replacing crews from the TMN of Europe, but seafarers from countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and the Republic of Korea were also replacing the crews of Japanese-owned ships. By 1988 over 50,000 Koreans worked on Japanese-owned ships, displacing thousands of Japanese seafarers (ILO Report 2001:29). By 1986 (ILO Report 2001:29), the number of Filipino seafarers employed on European merchant ships was 2,900. By the end of 1987 that figure had grown exponentially to 17,057. Translated into crewing practices, this meant that the number of European-owned ships with a substantial Filipino crew component went from 200 to 1,130 in just 12 months. By 1995, the number of employed Filipinos on non-Filipino owned ships was 244,782. By 2000, Filipinos comprised 20 per cent of the world’s merchant navy crew (Leggate and McConville 2002:7).
The United Kingdom experienced Europe’s highest displacement of jobs (94,713), followed by France (21,845 jobs). The Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Greece, Norway, Spain and Sweden all reported losses of between 10,000 and 17,000 jobs, the bulk of these occurring between 1974 and 1982 (Leggate and McConville 2002:7). In 1968 the number of seafarers employed in the merchant navy in the UK was 121,750, which number had declined to 112,721 by 1974. By 1982 this figure had decreased dramatically to 53,772, and by 1992 it stood at 33,037 (ILO Report 2001:32-35). In total, the number of UK seafaring jobs lost during this period was 94,713, a 73 per cent decline in the jobs for UK seafarers in a 24-year period. The sharpest decline occurred in fewer than eight years (between 1974 and 1982), when a massive 58,949 jobs were displaced.

In 2000, seafarers from the TMN and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries constituted 27.5 per cent of the global market for seafarers, as opposed to 31.5 per cent in 1995 (ILO Report 2001:33). This suggests that the number of seafaring jobs in Western Europe continued to decline (albeit less rapidly) at the end of the 20th century at a rate of 0.8 per cent a year for the period 1995-2000. This is indicative of the decline in the importance of Europe, and the UK in particular, as the world’s leading supplier of merchant navy crews. According to the (BIMCO/ISF Report: 2001), the world’s top seven labour supply countries – in numerical order of importance, the Philippines, Indonesia, Turkey, China, India, the Russian Federation and Japan – reflect this change in the geography of labour sourcing. These countries provide approximately 50 per cent of the 1,227,000 seafarers in the world as of 2000. Of this 50 per cent, approximately four-fifths come from the Far East, the Indian subcontinent and eastern Europe. Filipino seafarers represent 20 per cent of the world’s supply of seafarers (Leggate and McConville 2002:7). The next seafaring manpower update will take place in 2005.3

The South African labour market for seafarers
South Africa also followed these trends in changing its hiring practices of seafaring crew. Until the early 1970s, the South African shipping industry employed, on a casual and permanent basis, up to 6,000 seafarers of varying skill levels (Kujawa 1996:36b). The largest employer of seafarers then was Safmarine (interview D Collins 2001). As trading conditions became increasingly turbulent for the international shipping industry from the early to mid-1970s because of a wide range of fiscal, financial and technological
factors, Safmarine and other major South African shipping companies were forced to increase their competitiveness with international shipping companies by reducing one of their chief costs, that of labour. Expensive South African ratings were steadily replaced by south-east Asian crew, particularly Filipinos (interviews conducted with the crewing and training managers of key South African shipping companies and SAMSA, the South African Maritime Authority; Kujawa 1996). By 1980, all South African-owned merchant navy ships had a majority non-South African crewing component, and Kujawa (1996) estimates that at least 4,000 South African ratings were displaced by foreign, mainly south-east Asian, crew. This re-crewing is strongly related to the sale of Safmarine to the Maersk shipping group in 1999 and Maersk’s subsequent flag of convenience (FOC) and crewing policies. At the time of the sale, Safmarine operated 50 liner vessels and covered ten trade networks. While there are a number of global influences that resulted in the restructuring of the South African labour market for seafarers, I have identified a range of more localised problems in the training and employment of South African seafarers.

**The training of South African seafarers**

The training, development and employment of seafarers in South Africa has been highly political and racialised (Kujawa 1996; interviews Dlamini 2001, Zungu 2001, Snook 2001, Hagan 2001, Parkinson 2001). The fragmented and multifaceted state of seafarer training in South Africa is directly attributable to apartheid-based education programmes. Education and training was uncoordinated and duplicated owing to the existence of different racialised education authorities. The South African shipping industry was also largely unconcerned about the training and career-pathing of African ratings. At the same time, however, FOC shipping allowed South African companies like Unicorn to run mixed-race rating crews, a practice that resulted in one of the most racially diverse workplaces in apartheid South Africa (Kujawa 1996, interview Dlamini 2001, Parkinson 2001). As shown by Bonnin et al (2004), however, the broad occupational category of seafarers is racially extremely skewed as the majority of South African officers have been white and the ratings predominantly black. This is largely attributable to apartheid training regulations for seafarers.

The main training institution (for officer training) was set up in Cape Town in 1921 (Grutter 1973). This was the General Botha College. Only white men benefited from this college, which legislatively excluded other
ethnic groups and racial categories. The college was handed over to the Cape Technikon in 1990. The Durban Institute of Technology (formerly Natal Technikon) is a more recent provider of officer training. Until 1996, it was ‘a white male only’ institution in terms of its student population (interview, Parkinson 2001).

In terms of ratings training, the Training Centre for Seamen (TCS) was established in 1963 for ‘Coloured’ men wanting to train as ratings. It is now part of the Wingfield Technical College, which was initially established for the training of South African Navy cadets. Since 1993 it has shifted its focus to general engineering training. The ratings training programme offered by Wingfield is not accredited (interview, Fourie 2001; personal correspondence, Morris 2001). As such, ratings who qualify there cannot compete in a global labour market. The only nationally and internationally accredited ratings training institution in South Africa, accredited by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), is the Unicorn Training Centre. The Natal and Cape Technikons are also SAQA and IMO accredited providers but only of officer training.

The ANC government was aware of the training problems encountered in the maritime industry. Its 1996 White Paper on national transport policy states: ‘The crisis of skills and basic education in the maritime labour market will be urgently addressed through a concerted programme of education and training to meet the growing demand of seafarers and to increase the skills base of existing employees of the industry’ (White Paper on National Transport Policy 1996, Department of Transport: 40). The Skills Development and Employment Equity Acts are the tools that government employed to deal with the training and development concerns in the shipping industry. These acts have met with some resistance in the shipping industry and have achieved little by way of redress.

Unicorn Shipping has its own training school in Durban and instructs seafarers at both officer and ratings levels. It is currently committed to addressing some of the racial imbalances in the training and employment of black South African seafarers. In 2004, the 33 cadets – officers in training who were serving their 12-month sea time, not all of whom were Unicorn employees – comprised six white males, 25 black males, one coloured male and one Indian male. The Unicorn Training School had about 1,900 students in 2003 and 2,500 in 2002; these numbers include those training as yachting crew, crew for passenger liners and professional seamen. At the
time of writing, it was difficult to determine how many of these students had actually found employment, as well as how many were specifically trained for the merchant navy. Unicorn currently employs in the region of 90 South African ratings and 75 South African officers but their fleet is expanding and this number will soon increase.

Overall, however, an implicit – and sometimes explicit – belief exists among owners and managements of shipping companies that training and development ‘for the nation’ ‘is not their problem’. Victor Restis, chief executive officer of South African Marine Corporation, contends that:

... one of the reasons could have been that you expected the shipowners to take the initiative and bear the cost [of training]. Well they will not because they already have access to trained professionals. If the country is serious to utilise this opportunity [to train for the nation], somebody will have to take the initiative and see it through ... since many countries make professionally qualified seafarers available at internationally competitive rates, international shipowners and operators do not see the development and training of such staff as their responsibility. Why take on responsibility for and associated cost for something in country A when it is supplied for free by country B?

(comments made to 7th Maritime Conference, Cape Town: 2001)

A recurring theme throughout the maritime industry is that of shipping companies training South Africans solely for their internal requirements, and doing so only reluctantly. This confirms Kujawa’s (1996) findings of her extensive investigation into the training needs of the maritime industry. SATAWU’s position is that the shipping industry in South Africa cannot be the driving force for job creation and equity. At the same time the union acknowledges that it needs resources from shipping companies, such as training berths and training expertise, to ensure the success of any national programme.

Lack of training berths as an impediment to achieving equity, employment, and skill development

Key to the training and equity of South African ratings and officers is the issue of sea time or training berths. In order for a rating or an officer to qualify, s/he needs to serve 12 months of compulsory sea time on a vessel appropriate for his/her qualification level. For ratings, sea time can be less than 12 months, depending on the qualification required, but a compulsory sea time period is required. Failure to achieve sea time means that a candidate who is fully qualified academically cannot qualify as an officer or
rating unless the required sea time is served. In South Africa, the only appropriate vessels that can offer these training berths are owned by the four South African-based major shipping companies. Since the 1970s they have been reluctant to offer training berths to South African cadets and ratings. According to Captain Stohl of Cape Technikon’s Maritime Studies Department and the Maritime Department of the Durban Institute of Technology, more black students entered officer training institutions after 1994 but South African shipping companies have been even more reluctant to provide sea time to cadets. Unicorn Shipping, however, presents an important shift in this practice although it is limited by its fleet size and the physical structure of its ships, which can only accommodate a fixed number of cadets at any one time. Some of the reasons for the reluctance of the wider shipping industry to provide sea time for all cadets or ratings who complete their initial land-based training are discussed under the headings below.

The perpetuation of racial, ethnic and national stereotypes
Interviews conducted with the four major shipping companies in South Africa suggest that black African officers are not perceived to be ‘natural’ seafarers. The Transport Education and Training Authority (TETA) confirmed that this perception was widespread among shipping companies and served as an obstacle to the training, employment and development of black African seafarers. Coupled with it is the perception that the employment of black seafarers means a lowering of ‘standards’ (interviews, Hagan 2001, Maclennan 2001, Fable 2001). The shipping industry remains one of the most conservative in South Africa though there are concerted attempts to change this image. Racial and ethnic stereotypes abound in the organisational cultures of shipping companies, which base their recruitment and training policies on these, examples of which were provided by several of the respondents. The three examples below came from respondents:

If we have a work ethic that is a positive one, that makes a good impression that you have people that are hardworking and willing to work hard they are going to knock out a lot of the competition. Without sort of picking on any nationality, you’ve mentioned the Philippines as an example. The Philippine rating is a very low problem type of rating. He doesn’t get into fights, he doesn’t drink too much, he doesn’t get into trouble and miss the ship, but at the same time they have no or little initiative. They need to basically be hand-held by the officers and pointed out exactly what is required for them to do their job. The work ethic there is, there’s a saving, but they actually have to have their hands
held. Our experience of Cape Coloured ratings – I can’t speak for the Black guys or Zulus based in Durban – is that they have a good work ethic in that they work hard, they’re motivated, they have initiative, they have a natural inclination to go to sea but they also play hard and if you don’t manage them properly they can be problems … in terms of people going off the rails in port, getting drunk and stabbing each other and stuff like that. So there’s the work ethic. (interview 2001)

Even though the Zulu and Xhosa lived on the [KZN] coast they’ve never been fishermen or seafarers. They’ve actually never been in the sea. But Cape Town, there’s actually no place where you can’t see the sea. Because everybody there, black, white, coloured has either got an uncle or a father that was on the tugs, trawlers or with Safmarine. (interview 2001)

There is a distinct impression in the shipping industry that black people are not suited to seafaring as officers. (interview, TETA 2001)

The persistence of these racial and ethnic stereotypes in the maritime industry is supported by the dearth of black officers in South African shipping companies. As such, while employment equity and skills development plans for seafarers may exist in shipping companies it is the contention of the TETA, SATAWU and maritime training institutions that the meaningful implementation of these plans has not occurred (interviews, Dlamini 2001, Fable 2001, Stohl 2001, Parkinson 2001, Fourie 2001; see also Bonnin et al 2001).

The cost factor

The highest operating cost to any shipowner, apart from the actual capital cost of the ship, is crewing (interview, Snook 2001; ILO Report 2001). The issue is complicated by the fact that it is too expensive for companies to run training schemes on experiential vessels (interview, Hagan 2001) while the Skills Development Fund is viewed by the industry as inadequate to run experiential training vessels (interviews, Hagan 2001, Snook 2001, Maclennan 2001). The industry estimates the training costs of a deck cadet at R55 000 a year and R60,000 a year for an engine cadet, both for three years. One of the key problems identified by the 2004 report of the Training Berth Task Team is that once candidates are trained, there is no guarantee that they will remain with the company that trained them. Owing to the current global shortage of officers in the labour market, these newly qualified officers would be extremely marketable.
A more recent attempt at addressing this issue in terms of rating training and employment is the establishment of the Marine Crew Services (MCS) Crewing Company in Cape Town, which is attempting to mass train and export ratings in the same manner as the Philippines. This would involve the operation of a dedicated training vessel. At the end of 2004 both SATAWU and the ITF had reached an agreement with MCS that all seafarers trained and placed by MCS would automatically become SATAWU and ITF members, and would therefore have access to a range of union benefits. It is cheaper for companies to obtain qualified officers from elsewhere, such as eastern Europe, without encumbering training costs. Shipping companies in regulated and unionised labour markets reduce their fleets by chartering out their ships to subsidiaries. This enables the charter company to make crewing decisions that reduce labour costs and removes the responsibility of the parent South African company to hire South African nationals.

The lack of ship ownership in South Africa
Until the mid-1970s, international and South African merchant shipping had been expanding. The oil crisis of 1974-5 reversed the boom in South African merchant shipping, resulting in a 40 per cent reduction in seafaring jobs. Most jobs lost were in the officer category (Kujawa 1996). Subsequently, during the later apartheid years, the implementation of international sanctions against South Africa also marginalised South African merchant shipping from global markets.

There are only four major shipping companies in South Africa and since the acquisition of Safmarine by AP/Moller/Maersk, only one remains authentically South African. Unicorn, which is part of the Grindrod group, operates nine vessels, of which the majority are chartered. There are 100 South African-owned merchant navy vessels; of these, only five are flagged in South Africa while the remainder fly flags of convenience.

In 2003 the TETA’s Maritime Chamber formed a TETA Training Berth Task Team to produce a report on the issue of South African ships’ register. The task team, which consisted of representatives from industry, labour and academia, was appointed to investigate ways of boosting the availability of maritime training berths at sea. It found that the institution of a tonnage tax-type scheme would be the best way forward and is currently gathering more information to finalise the proposal, after which it will be presented to government.
Shipping companies in South Africa

1.1 Pentow-Marine vessels are not registered in South Africa. In addition its vessels are not structurally suitable as training berths. According to the IMO, training vessels have to meet certain structural specifications for the sea time to be accredited. Pentow-Marine is mainly engaged in salvage operations and as such most of their vessels are not at sea for 12 months or longer (interview, Maclennan 2001).

1.2 DeBeers is an exploratory mining shipping company whose vessels are also unsuitable for training since the periods they spend at sea are much shorter than 12 months. The majority of DeBeers operations are run from Namibia.

3.3 Safmarine, now owned by the AP Moller/Maersk group, one of the largest shipping companies in the world, is now employing Greeks to crew their ships at officer level (interview, Fable 2001, Parkinson 2001). There have been concerted attempts by Safmarine’s new owners to recrew their ships with cheaper non-South African labour but SATAWU has managed thus far to stave off the retrenchment of South African ratings on Safmarine ships. Since the company is no longer South African-owned, it remains unclear how much longer these jobs will remain secure.

1.4 Unicorn Shipping remains the only South African shipping company. However, most of Unicorns’s operations involve coastal trade along the African, and particularly the southern African, coast. For their deep ocean-going services, they have chartered out ships to their subsidiaries, which are under no obligation to hire South African crews. While some allegations have been made against Unicorn for not being receptive to offering sea time to black cadets, evidence from 2002 to 2004 shows that the company has actively engaged in the training and provision of sea time for at least 90 ratings and 33 cadets. None of Unicorn chartered deep ocean-going ships flies the South African flag. Unicorn has also reduced its fleet from 16 to five ships, though its fleet expanded to nine in 2004. This may translate into more training berths for South African cadets.

Maritime Fiscal Policy

A country’s maritime taxation policy is an important factor when shipowners decide where to register vessels. It is strongly felt that if more South African ships were registered in South Africa, more South African nationals would be employed as ratings on South African ships (Financial Mail: Special
Despite these opinions, South Africa’s maritime fiscal policy has proved prohibitive to South African shipowners wanting to register their vessels in the country.

Though there has been a concerted move away from the fiscally rigid 1951 Merchant Shipping Act to the fiscally flexible 1998 Ship Registration Act, which was promulgated on April 25, 2003, shipowners feel that the change in legislation has not gone far enough to attract owners to the South African registry (interviews, Hagan 2001, Snook 2001, Maclennan 2001, Zanders 2001, Parkinson 2001). Shipowners argue that the income tax they pay is prohibitive to the registration of ships in South Africa. Most shipowners, under FOC registries, are taxed a flat tonnage rate on the ship, regardless of whether they make a profit. Tax is therefore charged on the weight of the ship rather than on the profit it generates. Every year a rate is set per ton. For example, if the rate is R1,000 per ton and the ship weighs in at five tons, the tax for the year is R5,000 regardless. This is a simplistic example of the tonnage tax calculation but it does encapsulate its core premise. More nuanced versions do exist: for example, sliding scales can apply whereby the tonnage of the vessel is multiplied by its age, as is done in Greece. In the UK, if a shipping company chooses to be taxed under the tonnage tax regime, it must meet certain conditions that commit it to training and developing its national seafarers. In terms of global trends, ten European countries have had tonnage tax regimes since 1985; countries that had adopted this regime in 2003 are Cambodia, India, Pakistan and Korea.

In South Africa, however, taxation is paid on tonnage and profits made by the ship. SAMSA views the issue of equity and job creation for seafarers as part of a wider initiative to encourage ship registration and owning in South Africa by providing a more attractive fiscal environment for the registration of ships on the South African register. Therefore instead of paying a double tax on tonnage and profit, one tax will be levied on tonnage only. SAMSA argues that equity cannot be divorced from larger economic and business issues in the maritime industry.

The TETA Training Berth Task Team report recommending a beneficial ship registration regime is currently being considered by the National Treasury. If promulgated, the following conditions would apply to a tonnage tax scheme:
1. The company must either own or operate ships;
2. The ships must be registered in South Africa;
3. The company must have its strategic base in South Africa and must also exercise most of its management functions in South Africa. (TETA Report 2004:13)

The flagging issue is a matter of concern to SATAWU. The union has gone on record as stating that there can only be a substantial reemployment of ratings if ships are flagged in South Africa. It argues that South African shipping companies employ South African seafarers by ‘force not by their wish’ (interview, Dlamini 2001). Dlamini further contends that an overhaul of the Merchant Shipping Act is needed. While a revision of the Merchant Shipping Act may be fiscally more rewarding to South African shipping companies, it is unclear how many ships will be returned to the South African ships register. Thus far no firm commitments have been made by any of the shipping companies, though the task team established by TETA is currently trying to engage shipping companies to obtain a sense of how many ships will be flagged here.

While SATAWU would favour more ships being registered in South Africa in the hope that more jobs may be created, shipping companies would still be reluctant to pay SATAWU and ITF-mandated wages. Thus, a change in fiscal shipping policy does not engage with the issue of costs of labour. Further, any fiscal policy that introduces a favourable shipping register should be designed to attract foreign tonnage and not just be a measure to ‘retain or restore the current national fleet’ (TETA Report 2004).

**Conclusion**

Theorists of globalisation argue that the world of work is going through unprecedented change. They situate their arguments within the framework of globalisation and shifting labour markets. They contend that the increased mobility of capital since the 1970s to seek out new, cheaper and more flexible labour markets has resulted in a new international division of labour whereby there has been a spatial reconfiguration of labour’s location. This spatial restructuring of labour and capital has resulted in new patterns of inequality between labour of the North and labour of the South in terms of levels of skill and labour process used. These patterns of inequality are articulated and demonstrated in the way that shipping capital has restructured since the 1970s and the impact this has had on seafaring labour.
For local seafaring labour markets in the traditional maritime nations of Europe it has meant the displacement of thousands of seafarers, specifically ratings jobs. For labour markets in developing countries, particularly in south-east Asia, it has resulted in the expansion of the labour market at the ratings level. South Africa’s seafaring labour market, however, did not grow at the phenomenal rate witnessed in south-east Asia, and the Philippines in particular. Instead, South Africa followed the TNM trend by shedding labour. Thus South Africa, while never a global supplier of seafarers to the extent that the TMN nations were, saw its pool of seafaring labour, specifically ratings, reduced considerably. Local and global processes impacting on the seafaring labour market did not occur independently or discretely from each other. Both the local and global processes occurred, and their simultaneous interaction with each other produced the current nature of the South African and global labour markets for seafarers.

**Notes**

1. A register of certificates issued to officers is held by SAMSA, but includes certificates issued to officers who may now be retired as well as officers who may now hold citizenship of countries other than South Africa.

2. In the case of the Philippines, Filipino seafarers provided cheap reservoirs of seafaring labour to the Spanish and were a pivotal part of the Spanish galleon during the Spanish occupation of the Philippines from 1615 to 1815.

3. One of the consequences of this global seafaring labour market is that it has significantly influenced the way in which labour organises and services what is a largely mobile workforce. In this regard, the ITF and its national affiliates develop international agreements to prevent the whipsawing of shipping capital. National unions affiliated to the ITF, like SATAWU, negotiate in conjunction with the ITF to set a standard minimum wage for unionised ratings in the global labour market. The ITF also seeks to protect the interests of non-unionised ratings who work on FOC vessels by regularly inspecting these vessels to investigate occupational health, safety and wage issues. Further, when inspecting a vessel, the ITF encourages ratings on board to join a national union. If FOC ships do not sign an agreement with the ITF regarding working conditions and wage levels, these ships are subjected to solidarity boycotts from dock-workers at whichever national port they dock. This action can cost shipowners very large amounts of money in loss of earnings and productivity. In this way then the ITF is interested in unionising as many ratings as it can in the global labour market. As more ratings become unionised and more FOC ships sign wage agreements with the ITF, it will become increasingly difficult for shipowners to whipsaw between regions to seek out cheaper labour, as a standard wage will be the norm.
4. It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the intricacies of maritime fiscal policy and legislation. Readers are referred to Floor’s Report of the Committee of Inquiry into a National Maritime Policy for the Republic of South Africa (1993) and Lloyd’s List Africa Weekly, March 12, 1999.

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Review Article


Jeremy Grest

This volume of edited papers had its origins in a conference at the European University Institute, Florence, in 2000. The editors are both Professors of Modern History, at Cambridge, England and Florence, Italy, respectively. In their introduction they note the growing literature on the decline of the modern state and argue that its demise is not imminent or even readily imaginable. Taking the importance of the state as their point of departure, contributors to the volume look at its ‘history, its theoretical underpinnings and its prospects in the contemporary world’. Six of the contributors are based in the UK, three in Florence, two in Paris and one each in Switzerland and the Netherlands. The majority are historians with various specialisations – Late Medieval History, Early Modern History, Contemporary History, European Intellectual History, etc, with political scientists, political theorists and political philosophers making up the balance.

The book is very much a European production. The editors have deliberately concentrated on the Western European experience of the state, which, it has to be said, is fully justified in terms of its importance as the cradle of the modern form which was then exported via colonisation and conquest to the rest of the globe, where it has had a very chequered history. State formation in Japan and China is not covered, neither do the two federated states which confronted each other for much of the twentieth century, the USA and the USSR, receive any attention. The only ‘non-European’ state to receive attention is India, the world’s greatest post-colonial democracy. The book is divided into five parts, with a total of 13 chapters and an introduction. Part one, with three chapters, is entitled
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‘States and citizens: setting the scene’, parts two and three, with two chapters each, deal with ‘The medieval background’ and ‘Early-modern developments’. Parts four and five, with three chapters each, are entitled ‘Citizens, states and modernity’ and ‘After the modern state’.

The first of the conceptual, scene-setting chapters, by Quentin Skinner, examines the idea of state power in relation to the freedom of citizens in the Anglophone context. Skinner provides a very useful review of leading traditions of thought about the concept of civil liberty. As one of the central issues in political philosophy today, the suggestion that the fundamental confrontation is between states and citizens is a modern one, in the sense that the issue first arose in the course of the constitutional upheavals of the seventeenth century in England. It was only once the opponents of the Stuart monarchy seriously began to question the powers of the crown in the 1640s that they started to describe themselves as freeborn citizens rather than subjects of their king. In the eighteenth century the idea that the freedom of citizens consisted in an absence of interference in their rights began to take hold, and has never really lost its dominance since then, despite attempts in the nineteenth century to expand the concept of freedom to take in the notion of real human interests. Skinner ends by looking at the moral limitations inherent in such a vision of the relationship between the freedom of citizens and the power of the state.

David Runciman’s chapter ‘The concept of the state: the sovereignty of a fiction’ focuses on the elusiveness of the idea of the state, and the difficulty of identifying it with anyone or anything in particular. He emphasises the classic importance of Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651) and then uses analogies with another powerful institution – money – to make the case that the fictional nature of the state does not undermine, but rather helps, explain its continued power over us.

Gianfranco Poggi’s chapter looks at how the experience of citizenship has been conceptualised. He begins by asking what citizens look like when viewed from the vantage point of the state. He is very clear that they are in the first instance subjects, but have represented themselves to the state in a number of ways, as soldiers, as tax-payers, as right-holders in the Marshallian sense, etc. The second part of his chapter looks at some recent and current developments in the state-citizen relationship, especially globalisation and the formation of supra-national agencies, which render it problematic.

The middle of the book is historically based and deals with the medieval background and early modern developments in state-citizen relations. In
‘Freedom, law and the medieval state’ Magnus Ryan traces the way in which the concept of civic liberty first emerged from the background of medieval law. When the concept of law first became a dominant preoccupation of medieval theorists they did not see it as a way to ensure the liberty of those living under it. Rather it was conceived of as a means of punishing the evil and rewarding the good, and for the maintenance of order. One of the traditional ways of rewarding the good was to give them liberties – special privileges – often in the form of limited rights of self-government. This process often had the effect of creating communities by bringing entire populations under the control of one lord, which then began to add a territorial dimension to the extension of liberties.

In his chapter on the later Middle Ages Almut Hofert looks at the much-debated question of how far the civic traditions and experience of that period contributed to the crystallisation of the modern state. He notes that recent historiography has discredited the idealisation of the medieval city as an island of free burghers in a sea of feudal arrangements. But what remains is the Weberian view that the urban legal systems of the late Middle Ages made an important contribution to the establishment of the impersonal legal rule of the modern state. Hofert argues that we should abandon this view too, and replace it with a concept of a social system based on hierarchy and honour which saw city councils establishing an almost complete sovereignty over citizens, and thus creating the concept of the subject. This authoritarian relationship was eventually transferred from the city to the sovereignty of the state.

Martin van Gelderen critically analyses the tendency for histories of the development of the state, its rise and triumph, to be written in teleological terms. He argues that the power of the meta-narrative of the state has obscured the continued existence, until relatively late in Western European history, of rival conceptualisations of political community. His historiographical essay argues that historians and theorists of modernity have oversimplified a complex picture by failing to pay due attention to the conflict between the state and its rivals in the early modern period.

Annabel Brett focuses on the emergence of the discourse of rights from the early modern period. The idea of being citizens, and not just subjects, and thus having rights as against both fellow citizens and the state is central to European political self-consciousness. But she argues that on examination of the historical development of both these notions – ‘rights’ and ‘citizens’ – that there is something problematic about their association in the modern
idea of ‘citizens’ rights’. She argues that the concepts developed independently of each other in very different contexts. When they were drawn together, in the seventeenth century, the inherent theoretical conflict between rights and citizenship was not resolved. She concludes that this theoretical dilemma has never been finally overcome.

Part Four of the book is entitled ‘Citizens, states and modernity’. Judith Vega in her chapter focuses on Enlightenment conceptions of identity and citizenship, and specifically on the place of women’s rights within these debates. She shows how the struggle for women’s rights gave rise to a language of gender difference which was distinguishable from claims to universal equality or group identity.

Lucien Jaume’s chapter discusses the French Revolution and its influence on the history of citizenship in France. He distinguishes three different views of the citizen associated with the revolution. One was that of the moderates in 1789 for whom citizenship was not an end in itself but a means of protecting private individuals and rights. The second view was associated particularly with Condorcet, for whom the aim of citizenship was the creation of ‘public reason’ – largely through the use of education. Thirdly there were the Jacobins. They saw citizens as members of the people, parts of a whole and thereby subject to the common norms of civic virtue. He goes on to show how, in the two centuries after the revolution, the French concept of citizenship came to be characterised by its universalist and abstract nature, irrespective of all horizontal ties, whether communitarian or associative. These elements have been radically questioned of late by the extension of pluralism, by the growing autonomy of civil society and by the forms of standardisation introduced by the European community.

The eighteenth century saw the crystallisation of the modern concepts of state and citizen in Western Europe. This also coincided with the beginnings of the great phase of Western European imperialism. The case of India discussed by Kaviraj is of great importance, not only by virtue of its scale, but also because it illustrates the successful implantation of a modern state form in a non-Western society and its conversion to popular government. Sudipta Kaviraj’s essay stood out from the collection both for its singularity and for its fascinating insights into state-society relations in a context that is much more akin to that with which we grapple when we think about politics in this country. Kaviraj argues that outside of Europe the modern state succeeded in two senses – first as an instrument, and second as an idea. The organisation of European societies produced by the modern state was
an essential factor in Europe’s ability to bring the rest of the world under its colonial control. Pre-modern forms of political authority were utterly inadequate in dealing with the power of the modern European state. This power could be restrained and eventually effectively opposed only through a movement that organised the power of entire populations against European colonial regimes. The European state also succeeded a second time as an idea. Successful nationalist movements on decolonisation, enthusiastically accepted the idea of a modern society centred on the state’s sovereignty – a principle of social construction that was radically different from the pre-colonial ones.

Kaviraj begins by considering the organisation of power in pre-colonial Indian society. This operated through the caste system, which segmented society and subjected political power to an inflexible religious order, thereby denying sovereignty to the state. He shows that colonial power in India did not enter through a conflict with the Mughal state but through a slow insidious process of commercial, administrative and cultural control. By the mid-nineteenth century it had established a state structure which claimed sovereignty over society. The unwillingness of the colonial state to overextend itself gave increasing opportunities to Indian elites, who eventually shaped the nationalist ambition to seize control from the British. Kaviraj ends by suggesting that the most significant elements in the evolution of the Indian state since independence have been the immense expansion of bureaucracy together with an irresistible impulse towards democracy. The democratic effects of lower-caste electoral mobilisation have undermined the caste-based society, a transformation of enormous and continuing significance.

The final section of the book is entitled ‘After the modern state’. Bo Stråth traces the challenges to the idea of the state as a key instrument of social planning from the 1960s. He emphasises the individualistic thrust of the social movements, inspired by a Marxist critique of the state as an instrument of bourgeois repression. This critique developed within a framework of disintegration; the optimistic image of Western modernisation, industrialisation and democratisation was seriously undermined by the dollar collapse, the oil-price shock and the recurrence of mass unemployment in the first half of the 1970s. The outcome was not the triumph of the working class, but its gradual dissolution as an historical category, and the emergence of the surprisingly robust structure of the neo-liberal state.
Michèle Riot Sarcey looks at the issue of citizenship and gender equality in the context of the French experience. Although the French democratic system is nominally constructed on the basis of liberty and equality, the establishment of representative democracy in the nineteenth century went hand in hand with a social hierarchy grounded on inequalities of class and gender. Women were regarded as naturally inferior, and were limited to their reproductive role, thereby creating a social difference, over time, which became a difference of kind. Politics was the prerogative of free men, and men alone were accorded the privilege of representation. Eventually a new word – parity – was invented to allow women to participate in the representative system. But parity is very different from liberty and equality, and Riot Sarcey feels that a genuinely democratic state, in which men and women are equally gathered together, has still to be created.

Andrew Dobson asks whether it is possible to create a more internationalist conception of citizenship. He considers the question in relation to the environmental questions that now face every state. As many of these problems are global in character states cannot be the only focus of environmental action, but since they remain dominant in our political thinking they make it difficult to generate internationalist conceptions of citizenship. Dobson argues that it is a mistake to link citizenship too firmly to the state. He proposes a ‘non-bounded’ view that could underpin an environmentally oriented concept of citizenship, arguing that the obligations of citizenship are not exhausted by the citizen-state relationship.

The collection of essays contained in this volume is ample demonstration that transformation can be a very long process indeed. Its appeal to a general audience will be somewhat limited, by virtue of its focus. But the quality of the scholarship and the detail of the focus ensure that it will be of interest to the specialist readers that the contributors address.
Review Article

Between explanation and apology: Giliomee and the problem of the Afrikaner ethnic past

Thembisa Waetjen

With modernity and the nation-state arose new and distinctive possibilities for political crimes and for organised, collective guilt. Michael Mann argues that genocide is ‘the dark side of democracy’ since the moral status attached to ‘peoplehoods’ and the idea of their organic representation by a state provide both the ideological groundwork and the organisational means for cleansing unwanted populations from within a bounded, stratified territory. In this ‘age of the masses’, genocide is ‘the most undesirable consequence of the modern practice of vesting political legitimacy in “the people”’ (Mann 1999:21). Writing in 1945, in the early wake of the Nazi genocide of Jews, Hannah Arendt struggled to make sense of the complicity and agency of ordinary Germans (Arendt 2000). In the popular nature of political murder on such a scale, Arendt recognised a new world, one that had outstripped the available political tools of justice and retribution. The real problem, though, was not so much that retribution was impossible, but that mass participation had instituted an order in which ‘the boundaries dividing criminals from normal persons, the guilty from the innocent, have been…completely effaced’ (Arendt 2000:149).

For Arendt, this was a human, not a national or ethnic, problem. What particularly frustrated her was that the real and most pertinent questions about collective political accountability were so quickly subsumed by the explanatory power of group identity, ie, of Germanness. She rejected the democratic assignment of culpability to a ‘people’ and saw bitter ironies in what she called the ‘success of Nazi propaganda in Allied countries’ which eroded any meaningful distinction between Nazis and Germans. The political conditions that had ‘achieved the result of making the existence of each [non-Jewish] individual in Germany depend either on their committing
Apartheid and organised guilt

Apartheid in South Africa was not a system of extermination. Yet, the problem of collective guilt and responsibility belongs to Afrikaners as surely as it belongs to Germans or Americans. The nature of the mass agency that made apartheid legislation and its technologies of control possible, however, is still not well understood. It is surprising, in fact, that...
the problem of mass complicity in a regime premised on the management of group identities has not been more ambitiously and critically scrutinised. Is this because we believe the questions have been sufficiently answered? The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which aimed at a political remedy for post-traumatic nation building, expunged specific guilt while confirming the generalisable culpability of racial and ethnic groups whom apartheid was designed to benefit. In a sense, this has contributed to the idea that mass agency under apartheid is explained through the logic of apartheid itself, with race or ethnic identities as transparent signifiers of political subjectivity.

Today, university students – among others – appear to be content with a simplistic understanding of what was in fact a complex regime, a regime in which large numbers of people – Afrikaans- and English-speaking, white and black, local and international – were complicit, and in which the processes of modernity (capitalism and state-formation) were significant features. Currently, while few critically minded people would suggest looking to some essentialist version of Afrikanerness to explain apartheid, crude cultural and racial explanations are rife. This may be especially true of overseas publics, who began more regularly to hear about Afrikaners and Afrikanerdom in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The protests in 1976 of Soweto’s school children against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, the brutality with which it was put down and the development of a mass anti-apartheid struggle that followed these and other events educated the world about the so-called ‘white tribe of Africa’. Concepts such as ‘laager mentality’, ‘Broederbond’, and the verligte/verkrampte binary became familiar to overseas anti-apartheid activists and the circulating image of Afrikaners – not least among supposedly critical university scholars – was of an undifferentiated, fundamentally backwards and racist culture with a bizarre and self-serving Calvinist doctrine. Such glib stereotypes continue to explain the phenomenon of apartheid for many people.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that the opportunity to consider the problem of collective guilt and accountability under apartheid has been given thin treatment in the most important comprehensive work on Afrikaner history and identity to date, *The Afrikaners: biography of a people*. Indeed, despite its many achievements, this book underlines how the moral and analytical weight of group identity can distract from grappling more critically with the nature of civic accountability and agency in a modern, state-sponsored racial project.
Writing a history of Afrikaners is a burdened project, as Hermann Giliomee acknowledges in the opening lines of *The Afrikaners*. Giliomee proposes to ‘tell the Afrikaners’ story from the beginning with empathy but without partisanship’ (2003: xiii) at a time when ‘apology is easier than explaining’ (2003: xvii). ‘To understand is not necessarily to pardon’, he writes, quoting HDF Kitto (who wrote this of slavery in Greece), ‘but there is no harm in trying to understand’ (2003:xiii).

Such a measured approach will appear reasonable enough to many readers. Yet within Giliomee’s even-handedness lies an assertion, namely that the understanding we seek is an understanding largely of collective motive or rationale, and that this may be found by probing deep into ethnic history. This is a line of thought that, as Arendt warned in a very different context, cannot but betray. It locates the problem of collective agency and responsibility, as well as the formation of a modern regime, within a bounded cultural history. A strong version of this line of thought would have us searching the dark reaches of the past, much as a psychoanalyst would an individual human psyche, for formative experiences that would explain pathological behavior that came later. Giliomee employs a weaker but still powerful line of this same logic. He is not a cultural essentialist, yet he clearly believes in the unitary nature of the Afrikaner story sufficiently to call his narrative a biography. The implications of this position become clearer in the latter chapters of the book.

*The Afrikaners* is offered as a definitive history and is certainly bound to be considered as such. It is important, therefore, to scrutinise not so much its accuracy or objectivity (Giliomee is a careful and fair-minded historian) but rather the lessons it conveys about post-apartheid political memory. One question we can ask at the outset: Is it possible for an ethnic history of Afrikaners to offer an explanation for apartheid without either reinforcing a crude cultural indictment or, alternatively, bleeding into an apology?

**The volk revisited**

In 17 chapters and more than 650 pages of text, *The Afrikaners* chronicles three and a half centuries of political history, highlighting in dense detail and with careful documentation the fraught process of group formation and collective political experience. Though not formally divided, the book can be read in two parts. The first half traces the fate of Dutch-speaking white (whitening?) people from Company settlement through to the early decades of the twentieth century. The second half shifts its focus to the formation
and development of apartheid and becomes quite noticeably focused on Afrikaner intellectual debate. Here the documentary detail remains, yet is marshalled more pointedly towards the problem of explaining apartheid, its doctrinal development and its dismantlement.

While it is the latter part of the book that invites the most urgent debate, it draws its argumentative force from the preceding twelve chapters. These move over topical ground that is relatively familiar, charting the way through violence on the frontier, slavery, migrations, formation of states, war and industrialisation. In this account, Afrikaners are shown to be quite as often caught up in deep rivalries of leadership and of split loyalties, as they are unified by cultural, linguistic, or religious commonalities.

Giliomee identifies the ‘humble beginnings’ of Afrikaners in a rag-tag collection of men hired by the Dutch East India Company as sailors and soldiers who, given land to farm, come to gain a sense of their own interests in seditious tension with their identities as Company burghers. From these roots, the cultural lineage he traces is of white Dutch-speaking farm households who would come to identify themselves and be identified as a distinctive group. Unlike many accounts of this lineage, Giliomee’s does not take its racialised character for granted. Because of decades of sexual mixing between people of all colours and compounded by the slow arrival of European women to the Cape, the factor of ‘whiteness’ within burgher identity requires explanation. The racialised genealogy of Afrikaners was a social and not biological effect – it emerged through ideological and legal work, through formal exclusions related to laws of inheritance, through economic practices related to slaveholding, as well as official religious and social prescriptions. The relative power of European burgher women – developed particularly with regard to property relations in marriage – appears to have had an important impact in shaping the racialised character of Afrikaner lineage. Afrikaner racial identity, indeed, is never securely fixed in this story and, for example, Giliomee dwells on the public discussions that cropped up about whether coloured Afrikaans-speakers should be drawn formally into Afrikaner civic, if not community, life.

The connection between whiteness and lineage is just one example indicating that some of the more pertinent battles relevant to the Afrikaner story were located not in the political domain but in the private life of households. Presumably because of the magnitude of his task to trace a comprehensive political history, Giliomee leaves this angle of social history disappointingly undeveloped. Surely it is in households where relations of
gender, sexuality and race were materially constructed, and where something that could be called Afrikaner culture developed? Surely it is in the structures of patriarchal households on the frontier, on farms, in towns, with the various forms of labour – slaves and wage-earners, and those in between that were uniquely boer inventions – that we may get a thicker sense of this group history? It rankles that the bulk of this volume is almost exclusively the story of men largely abstracted from their gendered identities and private lives. Giliomee’s narrative skims along a level that highlights the agency of men in public life, both the ordinary men – for example, the Company sailors, farmers, militias, slave owners, heads of households, anti-colonial fighters – and also the leaders, the governors, the intellectuals. Women come into this story infrequently, and generally to showcase their radical nationalistic fervour: they are the most rugged survivalists on the treks and the most adamant supporters of Boer militancy in the South African war. Giliomee says that it was women who pushed their husbands, sons, and brothers back into the war with the British during moments of hesitation. Beyond these supportive roles, however, women do not feature at all. Nor is insight into the domestic and private lives of ordinary Afrikaners, on farms or in working class households, available.

This is significant, not (merely) for abstract feminist reasons, but because it bears on Giliomee’s defining sense of what shapes ethnic identity and agency. Without social history, the popular nature of responsibility for apartheid (and, indeed, in earlier forms of segregation) cannot be adequately considered. Giliomee’s organising argument, that the thread running through Afrikaner history is a preoccupation with cultural and economic survival, is never situated in the material realities of daily life. What did the need for ‘survival’ mean for ‘ordinary’ Afrikaners? How did it differ from how party politicians and academics conceptualise it? Were they cynically manipulated or transparently represented? The fact that we get very little sense of what being an Afrikaner actually meant at the level of daily life (what it meant to survive as an Afrikaner for different people in different contexts) weakens the book’s central claim.

In the second part of this book, Giliomee offers his thesis that the role of the Broederbond in bringing about the National Party victory in 1948 has been overstated in most historical accounts. Accordingly, the formation of apartheid and the nationalism driven by the 1938 commemoration of the Great Trek were not the decisive factors in drawing together and mobilising different constituencies of Afrikaner support. Rather, it was the growing
nationalistic outrage at being subordinated to British interests and being taken into World War II on a split vote that ‘[drew] together diverse people in a powerful alliance: cultural nationalists seeking cultural autonomy, farmers seeking labor, businessmen seeking investment capital and clients, and workers seeking racial protection and opportunities for training’ (2003: 446). These diverse people, he claims, had in common the quest ‘to secure Afrikaner political survival’. From this starting point Giliomee situates the formation of apartheid as the ‘making of a radical survival plan’.

Here The Afrikaners becomes more instrumentally a book attempting to deal with apartheid and the shadow of international condemnation faced by Afrikaners. Giliomee delves into intellectual history and in this framework apartheid appears as a strategic and rationally argued response to a particular problem: the problem of ensuring the cultural survival of Afrikaners within an ideal of justice (2003:461). Apartheid is examined from the perspective of the intellectuals and politicians who argued about it, not from the angle of the lived experience of ordinary people, black and white. While the realities of political repression, exclusion and exploitation are unflinchingly documented, Giliomee’s critical focus is on the doctrinal life of apartheid. This is an important perspective, not least because it demonstrates that the vision behind apartheid was by no means monolithic. Yet, again, stationed at this high level we can get little sense of the broader social meaning of these debates. The drama of apartheid’s formation becomes the story of individuals within a moral narrative. Verwoerd himself is assigned a role that lends far too much power to a single individual, as bullheaded and brainy as he was. In terms of responsibility for apartheid, he is left with the lion’s share. Certain voices, notably literary scholar and poet NP van Wyk Louw, appear as oracles of ethical reason, tragically sidelined.

Motive and accountability
Giliomee rejects a class analysis of these events, particularly the thesis that apartheid was a strategy for volkskapitalisme (O’Meara 1983). Yet, even outside of a materialist perspective, it is difficult to see how, especially in relation to the early post 1948 context, he does not view the survivalist discourse as an ideological justification for apartheid. The book’s central argument is premised on the validity of an ethnic concern for survival: the Afrikaners were never numerically significant as a proportion of the southern African population and Giliomee thinks that a collective will to endure against various threatening forces provides an operating motive for
much in the Afrikaner past. Most controversially he argues that both the formation of apartheid and ultimate surrender to anti-apartheid forces were motivated by the same survivalist ethic – the latter being a calculated move to avoid Afrikaner national destruction.

When *The Afrikaners* was first published, it was reviewed in the *Rapport* by Nico Smith, a NGK minister who titled his piece ‘Afrikaner struggle was about domination, not survival’. He wrote:

Giliomee’s interpretation is linked to his point of departure, the perspective that the history of the Afrikaner is a history of the struggle for survival… Personally, I read in the history of the Afrikaners’ struggle for survival rather a struggle for domination…Giliomee has with his research provided a remarkable contribution by providing a true compendium of Afrikaners’ history but his perspective on this history has done the Afrikaners no favour. On the contrary it gives Afrikaners reason to continue living with the idea that they are still caught in a struggle for survival and this is the last thing Afrikaners need at the moment.¹

Responses to this review were instructive. They reflected a spectrum of political leanings, with Pieter Mulder of the Vryheidsfront Plus writing from one end and left journalist Max du Preez from the other.² Commentary narrowed quickly into side taking on the question of whether it was survival or domination that most accurately characterises the Afrikaner past. Yet, survival and domination are inverse principles offered within a single, problematic theory of social change. The one implies apology and the other indictment, yet they similarly pivot around the questions of motive and character. Such a framework attributes coherence and a fixedness to collective ethnic subjectivity.

The comments in *Rapport* clearly were not about the past so much as the future. Afrikaner identity today is open and dynamic, loosened both from nationalistic dogma and state control. *The Afrikaners* is directed to a broad readership, published first in English and appearing not only in academic bookstores but as a featured item on bookseller shelves in malls and airports around South Africa. In this capacity, it acknowledges a pervasive and persistent curiosity about the ethnic group infamously bound up with apartheid. Yet the book is also addressed to Afrikaans-speakers and the Afrikaans language edition has been launched. The new South Africa has not done away with national, ethnic or racial categories but rather has re-valorised them in a new context, and Giliomee has taken hold of this space.
to offer a new foundational story for a group that, as he says, will never again be in power. *The Afrikaners* itself is a monument against the loss of the peoplehood it documents, a new foundational narrative for the process of reforming a collective identity in the post-apartheid context. This one is not a seamless romance, and it enables a much more inclusive reading of what Afrikaans-speakers might share in the future, across racial and class divides.

Yet this comes at the expense of a more critical account of collective agency and of apartheid itself. Giliomee’s use of ‘biography’ in his subtitle further affirms the idea of that Afrikaner peoplehood is a protagonist with a distinct personality, and the ability to reflect on experience and respond (rationally or irrationally) to it. The text sometimes betrays the powerful and problematic logic of this orientation. For example, in describing the humiliations of Boer men on the frontiers by the British-controlled government in the early nineteenth century, Giliomee writes that “[f]ears that dated back to the Company era, of being back into government service as sailors and soldiers, were rekindled” (2003:151). Obviously, the use of word ‘rekindled’ is inappropriate here; while certain fears may be trans-historical, those experiencing them are more specifically located. Historical memory and group identity do not advance together in step with historical time, but are formally created in specific moments, usually by nationalism and its commemorative ceremonies (Connerton 1989).

Because Giliomee’s conception of historical agency is so closely linked to ethnic subjectivity, *The Afrikaners* cannot challenge the idea that explanations for apartheid are located in Afrikanerness. Rather, it seems to confirm that a moral burden lies with Afrikaners as a people, and that little else need be explored with regard to the problem of organised guilt and universal responsibility. Giliomee finds himself trapped in a charged, moralistic framework and, with his aim to generate some understanding (and perhaps sympathy) with Afrikaners as to ‘their’ specific reasons for apartheid, his tone is ultimately defensive rather than inquisitive. In the end, what Giliomee provides us with is not an explanation so much as a detailed, historical rationale.

In some ways this is tragic, and it robs his readership of the chance to reflect on the more complex nature of apartheid and its broader significance for modern and post-colonial societies. With reference to the Holocaust, Bauman describes the ‘gnawing suspicion that…[it] was not an antithesis of modern civilisation and everything (or so we like to think) it stands for. We suspect … that the Holocaust could merely have uncovered another face of
modern society whose other, more familiar, face we so admire’ (Baumann 2000:7). That ‘other’ face of modern society is surely visible in the development of a systematic racial project like apartheid. If this is so, then (as Arendt eloquently argues) it should at all costs not be attributed an ethnic or national character but rather be conveyed to us as our own, human predicament, urging on our quest better to understand the social processes and structures that organise life in the post-colonial, modern world.

Notes
2. Responses were published in the Rapport on December 7, 2003.

References


Review


Jan Theron

‘Another icon of the struggle’ was how one news-reader described Ray Alexander, when she died in 2004. Her autobiography, published shortly afterwards, will reinforce this status. It tells the story of her life, from her birth in Latvia to the indignities of old age: a mugging in the city bowl, a fall from which she suffered concussion, the loss of independence that moving in to live with one’s child signifies. But primarily, of course, it is the story of an activist who played a prominent role in political and trade union organisation in South Africa.

‘Icon’ is also a peculiarly apt term for someone whose photograph was displayed at all important meetings of the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU), the union she founded and of which I became General Secretary in 1976. The term derives from an image of a Jesus figure that was used ceremonially and venerated in the Orthodox Church. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Ray was venerated in the rural towns of the Western Cape where the FCWU had its most enduring presence.

The outlines of her story are by now fairly well known. After being born in Latvia and recruited into the communist underground as a teenager, Ray fled to South Africa in 1929, where her brother and sister were living. She attended her first communist party meeting a day or so after her arrival. A few days later she joined, and became actively involved in the party. She also became involved in organising a number of trade unions. Then, in 1941, she established FCWU, and became its first General Secretary. Together with its African counterpart, the AFCWU, the union was to be the most important affiliate of the SA Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).
In 1951 she was listed as a communist, and the following year banned. She nevertheless stood for Parliament as a so-called ‘native’ representative. She was elected, but prevented from taking her seat. When the communist party was re-constituted underground, she became a member. However faced with the prospect that government was to force her husband Jack Simons from his post at the University of Cape Town, the couple went into exile in 1965, leaving their children behind them. They were the first of the exiles to return in 1990.

What lessons is the reader to draw from her story? In a recent article Raymond Suttner, who edited the book, berates the ‘white left’ for its retreat from politics in the post-1994 period, and its failure to embrace Africanism. Ray together with Bram Fisher and others are held up (icons, again) as examples of non-Africans who willingly embraced the cause of the African majority. The concluding sentence of the book, also emblazoned on the cover, reinforces this kind of populist sentiment ‘For me, the finest cause in the world is the struggle for freedom and a full, satisfying life for all our people’.

But if the struggle for freedom had a concrete meaning before the 1990s, what does it mean now? How does the workers’ struggle relate to the popular struggle, in a context in which the ruling elite is increasingly avaricious, HIV/AIDS is rife and close to a majority of the population is unemployed? How do non-Africans embrace the cause of the majority without simply being relegated to the role of being cheer-leaders for the ruling party?

One could not expect this book to address issues such as these. Ray was after all 77 years old when she returned to South Africa, in 1990. What one does look to is for inspiration in dealing with the issues of the day, and some sense that in doing so one is continuing a proud tradition. The energy and courage Ray brought to a wide range of issues is indeed inspiring. Yet this book left me with a sense of disappointment. I attribute this to its failure to frankly acknowledge the difficulties and failures alongside the achievements, and its absence of analysis and self-reflection. Iris Berger puts a positive gloss on it, in the book’s introduction ‘the power of this life history lies more in the details of the daily political struggles than in Simons’s reflection on or analysis of her experiences’.

For the initiated, with some knowledge of the history of labour and other organisation of the time, there is much that can be learned from the detail of the daily struggles. However this is often from reading between the lines.
For example Ray played an important role in promoting the interests of women within the struggle, and was a founder of the Federation of SA Women (FEDSAW). But the ANC Women’s League hardly rates a mention. In this instance I am not sufficiently informed about the history of women’s organisation to speculate as to the reason.

It is nevertheless noteworthy that as a feminist writing about her own personal formation the parental figures that engaged her seem to have been fathers. Her own father was clearly a formative influence. She writes about her (second) husband Jack’s father, whom she refers to as ‘Father’ throughout. About Jack’s mother nothing emerges, while her own mother, who emigrated to South Africa after her, appears to have been as much a traditional mother figure as Ray was not.

Her organisational affiliations are clearly expressed in the last paragraph of the book. ‘I continue to work with comrades from the Party and FAWU, who visit me for advice…’ FAWU is the result of a merger between FCWU and certain other unions in 1986. The party is of course the communist party. On my reading, her first loyalty was to the party. The book strongly supports the argument that one of the party’s abiding achievements is that, more than any other organisation, it gave concrete meaning to non-racialism in the struggle. On the other hand there is the party’s uncritical stance towards Stalinism and the Soviet Union, and its own embrace of Stalinist practices.

There is passing mention of Stalin’s show trials and the schisms within the party in South Africa in the 1930s. She knew Lazar Bach from Latvia and clearly disliked him. Bach rose to prominence in the party, but was evidently purged after he had gone to argue his position before the Comintern in Moscow. The Comintern ‘did disagree with Bach’, she records without comment, and ‘some say he was killed soon afterwards’. She was distressed at the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. But in the final analysis Ray’s commitment to the party was unwavering throughout. Perhaps the incident that most truly expresses this occurred when Ray and Jack were approached to become underground members. This was some time after the party was reconstituted underground, and Jack evidently had strong reservations about joining. We are not told what Jack’s reservations were, or why such prominent communists had not been approached sooner. Ray nevertheless had no hesitation in joining. ‘I’ve always been a Communist and I’ll always remain a Communist’.

Is her silence about the post-war era made more or less explicable by the fact she spent much of this period in exile? Exile, for Ray, presented the
opportunity to return to Latvia. There she meets Diana, an old friend and party member. Diana is too afraid to give Ray the telephone number of their mutual friend. Ray does not enquire why. After the fall of the Soviet Union, another friend comments that she would not survived the Stalinist period there because she is too outspoken. But it is left to the friend to say so. We do not know if Ray agrees. There is no mention of Hungary, or of Krushchev’s denunciation of Stalin, or the invasion of Chekoslovakia. An old comrade like H.A. Naidoo features when he was an active unionist and central committee member. We do not know what Ray thinks when he resigned from the party, disillusioned by his experience of exile.

She deals with dissolution of the Soviet Union and its satellites by way of a lengthy quote from a 1990 interview with the SA Labour Bulletin. She felt she had been bluffed. It is the only occasion I was able to discern a note of self-criticism or self-doubt in the book. However it is preceded by quotes from Jack’s rebuttal of Joe Slovo’s belated critique of Stalinism, in the paper ‘Has socialism failed?’ ‘In blaming Stalin,’ she quotes Jack as saying, ‘you dodge the real issue …’ Ray does not say she agrees with Jack, but we must assume she did. It is difficult not to read into this stance a failure to come to terms with Stalinism, and the lack of any critique of Stalinist politics, whose attributes include the ruthless pursuit of power and the re-writing of history.

What is now the ruling party hardly features in the narrative prior to the 1950s. This underscores an historical truth that is also relevant in the current context. It is surely incontestable that someone like Ray was only able to achieve the prominence she did because she had an organisational base outside of the ANC, that the ANC was bound to take seriously. Indeed the ANC would hardly have existed as a mass-based organisation, least of all in the Western-Cape, without the trade unions. In the period of underground organisation and exile, however, she writes about the important personages in the ANC she had to do with, and the positions they would later occupy in power. There is little about the inner workings of the organisation in exile that emerges.

Ray’s account of how she built a base in the trade unions is interspersed with an account of what was happening in her circle of activists, in the party, and in her personal life. One is reminded that activism requires a community to nurture it. In Ray’s case, there was an impressive catalogue of individuals who helped in all sorts of practical ways. Some were party members. There were some from the Jewish community. Perhaps the neighbour in whose
washing machine documents were secreted was one of them. Perhaps she was simply a friend. Then of course there was Jack, whose intellectual and emotional support as a ‘liberated man’ is freely acknowledged, but whose professorial salary undoubtedly also enabled the family to maintain a middle-class standard of living.

As someone whose experience was of organising in the late 1970s, I was surprised how politically well-connected her circle was. The chapter headed ‘organising the unorganised’, an old SACTU slogan, deals mainly with the 1930s. As a twenty-something organiser of the sweet workers union, Ray was facing arrest on unspecified charges. She was nevertheless able to meet with the Minister of Labour in the Pact government. He in turn took the delegation to meet the Minister of Justice, who ultimately had the charges quashed. On another occasion, when a Department of Labour inspector suggested to an employer that he dismiss a sweet worker rather than help her get confinement allowance, Ray telephoned the Secretary for Labour, and then met with him in person, to secure his intervention.

Her willingness to pursue all avenues to resolve a worker’s grievance is the stuff of proper organisation. Yet even though Ray was active in a number of trade unions in the Western Cape in the 1930s, it does not seem her endeavours had a significant impact at that time, probably because the industries in which they were located were not particularly significant. It is only in the 1940s, with the organisation of FCWU, that Ray’s organising endeavours took off.

The early 1940s was clearly an auspicious period for trade unionism, because of the war. The industries which the union organised were primarily fruit and vegetable canning, located mostly in the rural Western Cape, and fish canning, located on the West coast and in Namibia. These were perceived to be important for the war effort. So, ironically, a chapter headed ‘against the war’ describes how she and others capitalised on the employers’ unwillingness (because of the war) to take a strike. Again, she made full use of her political connections. Critically, it was the same Secretary of Labour who prevailed on the manager of H. Jones and Company to negotiate with FCWU, when the workers were on strike, soon after the union was established. This was to be the strike on which the union was founded.

The fact that Ray was personally involved in organising workers in the further reaches of the Western Cape and Northern Cape goes some way in explaining her status there. She was also involved in organising in Port Elizabeth. However she does not seem to have been involved in the spread
of the union to Johannesburg, East London and Durban, which appear to have been by a process of amalgamation with other local unions, initiated by the party. It also does not appear that the union ever functioned as a truly national union.

Ray’s banning in 1951 did not precipitate an immediate collapse of the union. However it is clear that its membership had already reached its peak by this point. It is also a matter of fact that by the 1960s organisation everywhere outside of the rural Western Cape had collapsed, although this is not mentioned in the book. The 1950s was the decade of the defiance campaign and the pound a day campaign. However the only organisational advance in that period, if it can be described as such, was the formation of the SA Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). The unions that formed SACTU included those like FCWU that had opposed the dissolution of the Trades and Labour Council, and had opposed the formation of TUCSA, a federation that was exclusively for registered unions.

However Ray’s account of SACTU is tinged with unreality. ‘SACTU became quite an effective body… As industries were growing and developing, the labour force could only come from non-whites, Coloureds, African and Indian, and you could see how African, Coloured and Indian workers became more and more organised in trade unions while whites were not’. Certainly the numerical significance of the white workers was declining. But the enduring legacy of this period was a widening rift between African workers, on the one hand, and Coloured and Indian workers on the other, and the consolidation of a conservative and highly patriarchal leadership in the registered unions that represented Coloured and Indian workers. SACTU was ineffective in countering these trends. By the 1970s the registered unions were by and large hostile to endeavours to organise African workers.

FCWU was also not exempt from these trends. Indeed critical events in the history of the union reflecting this are glossed over, or ignored. All we are told about the decision to form a separate, parallel African FCWU is that ‘the Department of Labour had threatened to deregister some FCWU branches if they continued to take on black members, so the union was forced to form a separate AFCWU’. But this was in 1947, before the National Party took power. There is no indication that this was a controversial decision within the union, eloquently opposed by Oscar Mpetha amongst others. There is also no suggestion of the contradictions that resulted from having a parallel union, which was essentially the same system several affiliates of TUCSA adopted. The split of Paarl Branch, the largest and most
important in the union, does not warrant a mention. Nor does the fact that by the 1970s the AFCWU was practically defunct, or that key leadership of FCWU was corrupt.

The uninitiated might suppose that there was a seamless transition from FCWU to FAWU, in which Ray continued to play a determining and central role. Ray herself implies as much, when she writes of her period in exile. At a meeting in Gaberone she and others ‘planned meetings of various other workers, including the Food and Canning Workers’ Union members, and discussed amalgamations with similar unions. Amid the organising and the increasing number of workers,’ she goes on to say in the next paragraph ‘they also arranged strike action at Fatti’s and Moni’s. We had several meetings with the food union members, and they joined hands with the Food and Canning Workers Union in what was the first to actually become a united union, of various food unions. In 1986 it would become FAWU, and they would elect me as Life President. These meetings, starting in 1975 and extending over the next decade or so, were very fruitful and important in the organisation of the trade union movement in South Africa’.

The above passage illustrates some problematic aspects of the book. To start with, it is difficult to know what it is that the writer actually means. What number of workers was increasing? Who does the ‘they’ who planned strike action at Fatti’s and Moni’s refer to? What is their relation to the ‘we’ that organised a meeting in Gaberone and subsequently? What is the writer actually saying about her role in relation to events spanning more than a decade, from a vantage point in another country? One might have supposed it was the function of the editor to protect the reader against such lack of clarity. But the problem is more fundamental.

The 1979 Fatti and Moni strike refers to the most important strike in which FCWU was involved, and one of the most important involving the emergent union movement. This is not the place to analyse the strike. However its importance related to the fact that the union was breaking into a new and hitherto unorganised section of the food industry. From this point on the membership of the union had less and less to do with the industries Ray was familiar with. However it is untrue to suggest the strike was ‘arranged’, least of all from outside the country, as should be obvious to any informed observer. By the same token it is untrue to suggest that the amalgamation of FCWU with other unions was engineered externally.

This brings me to an element of the book I found disquieting. There is what I can only describe as an element of egotism that pervades the
narrative. The (to my mind gratuitous) reference to herself being elected Life President of FAWU is an example. It suggests this was the culminating event in the amalgamation that resulted in the establishment of FAWU, or an acknowledgement of her central role in these events, neither of which is true. There is a similar tendency to place herself at the centre of a history that was not of her own making in her account of other events. She tells of a meeting between delegations from Anglo American and SACTU, which Ray was part of. This meeting discussed ‘the possibility of our undertaking the organisation of African mine workers and Anglo American’s recognition of a union for African mine workers’. What is interesting about this was that it was in 1972. But the suggestion that there was a causal link between this meeting and the appointment of the Wiehahn Commission is far-fetched.

At the same time there is sometimes a failure to acknowledge the role of others. This is puzzling. Ray was certainly a generous person. She would surely not have commanded the loyalty she did if she had not been. Then why not mention the surname of Wilma, who crops up at various points in the narrative as someone in FCWU with whom Ray was in regular communication, particularly in the period of underground organisation? It is after all public knowledge that Wilma Yon was banned. Why not also mention what Wilma’s job was? My understanding is that she was the administrative secretary of FCWU when Ray was General Secretary. At some point she became secretary of the medical benefit fund. It was nevertheless in no small part due to her that the union had not collapsed entirely by 1976.

I must admit to similar issues in relation to my own role. We are told (for no apparent reason) that a certain Henning Hitze started his term as Director of the German Volunteer Service in Zambia in 1977. I do not think I am being overly sensitive, then, in finding it odd that she fails to mention I was General Secretary of FCWU, in the one paragraph where my name features. I also do not rate a mention in the index. There are three page references to a Dr. Louis Mirvish, by way of a random comparison. He was apparently just a friend. All these page references are wrong, by the way. So too is just about every other reference in the index that I checked. (The correct reference is usually the page number cited, minus two.) In the one paragraph where I feature it is said there that I came to see Ray in Maputo ‘to discuss the Fattis and Monis strike’. We did meet in Maputo. In fact it was Henning who helped set that meeting up. But that was long before the strike took place, as Ray ought to have remembered. Certainly that is not why we met.
I would not have expected Ray to deal at any length with the revival of FCWU in the 1970s, or with events in the 1980s. She was not part of these events, and these events ought not to have been part of her story. It is therefore strange that there is no mention whatever of the one occasion Ray and SACTU was directly involved in the affairs of the union, while in exile. This was after the amalgamation of FCWU with other unions to form FAWU, in 1989, when a split was looming over the Spekenham strike. At SACTU’s invitation a delegation flew Lusaka to meet with them. Is there no mention of this meeting because SACTU’s intervention was unhelpful? Or because she was not comfortable with the divisions in the union that were now manifest? I can only conclude that this once again represents an avoidance of a difficult topic.

Ray’s life contains many good stories. Unfortunately they have not been well told. A litany of struggles and meetings, without analysis and without self-reflection, is not very interesting. The reader is also not able to gauge the importance of these struggles for herself or himself, or form her or his own view. None of the above comments should detract from the magnitude of Ray’s achievements, and the inspiration of her example. Rather they suggest what Ray needed was a critical reader, to point out the manifest gaps and defects in the script. Indeed it appears from the Editor’s introduction that there may have been such reader(s). Partly because of Ray’s age and ill health, she was not able adequately to deal with their comments. That is a great pity. It is also a reminder that those really deserving of iconic status are the ones able to reconcile with difficult truths. I would like to think Ray would have been able to do so, had she been younger or in better health.

Note
1. The real issue, in the passage quoted, ‘is the Soviet abandonment of the concept of the proletariat’. It might be interesting to ascertain from Jack’s paper if and when he considers this abandonment occurred.
Review


Corinne Sandwith

One of the many memorable images in Isabel Hofmeyr’s fascinating study of Bunyan’s imperial travels in the Protestant Atlantic is of young Baptist boys in the English town of Bath standing on a giant floor map of the Congo and singing ‘Congo boat songs’ as they enact the perilous mission journey up the Congo river into the heart of the African interior. This intriguing example of the way in which ‘Africa’ comes to figure in the imaginations of those in England provides an excellent illustration of one of the central aims of Hofmeyr’s study: in contrast to long-standing ‘centre-periphery’ models of the imperial domain, Hofmeyr invokes a complex web of connection, interaction and exchange which, in the manner of much recent postcolonial research, seeks to dismantle ‘national’/‘international’ dichotomies in favour of a much more integrated perspective, one which recognises not only a single discursive and material field, but also dispenses with the patronising image of one-way colonial influence and meek, receptive colonial subjects. In this perspective, Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* emerges, not as one of the main lynchpins of a formidable English literary canon, but as a text which has a long and complicated extra-English history, a text which has also been profoundly shaped and changed by the intellectual formations with which it came into contact, and in which it was embedded. Focusing mainly on Bunyan’s text’s extensive travels in Africa (it was, as Hofmeyr points out, the site of eighty translations), this study examines the hidden intellectual
history of this famous evangelical text, a history of indigenisation, transmutation and ‘translation’ which, Hofmeyr argues, has been completely erased from the dominant literary record.

It is this notion of the shifting, unstable text of imperial mission translation that provides some of the most fruitful departure points for this investigation. In this regard, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* emerges as an extraordinarily ‘pliable’ text, a vast Mary Poppins-like ‘portmanteau’ which can accommodate a seemingly endless number of interpretations. As Hofmeyr shows, this indigenisation of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* exceeds conventional postcolonial models of anti-colonial ‘writing back’ or postcolonial ‘subversion’. While ‘outlandish’ interpretations (Nixon 1987: 577) and anti-colonial readings are certainly important, Hofmeyr’s detailed analysis of the many examples of Bunyan consumption across the African continent reveals a plethora of responses to the text which would have remained invisible had the investigation relied solely on a model of resistant anti-colonial response. This, in fact, is the naïve colonial reading that is attributed to someone as class-conscious as Christopher Hill who, in his analysis of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in Africa (as Hofmeyr suggests), tends to abandon his more habitual sensitivities in favour of a version of the colonial context which highlights only the stark racial antinomies of the colonial domain. By contrast, Hofmeyr’s emphasis on the complex class formations of African colonial societies leads to a much more nuanced sense of the various ‘public spheres’ inaugurated by the text. In this regard, she demonstrates how *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was able to support a number of wide-ranging and even contradictory deployments: in South Africa, for example, it was seized upon by influential African elites as both a document of anti-colonial resistance and as an important tool of upward class mobility. Similarly, by focusing on the interpretative strategies of African peasant communities — interpretations which, interestingly, foreground a completely different set of Bunyan tropes in relation to the readings of colonial elites – Hofmeyr also manages to unearth some of the nuances of a more ‘popular’ response. An investigation which already stands as an exemplary model of painstaking historical reconstruction, this notoriously difficult recovery of the histories of marginal social groups is surely one of the more remarkable achievements of this book.

The attempt — in Hofmeyr’s terms — to ‘stitch together’ the ‘colonial’ and ‘metropolitan’ domains is also part of an effort to resist a longstanding emphasis on the ‘metropole’ as the dominant colonial player. In this sense,
Hofmeyr’s recognition of the thick matrix of existing reading strategies and hermeneutic practices in African contexts is an important corrective to the tendency (in the manner of early South African liberal historians) to imagine the continent as an empty interpretive space. Similarly, when it comes to a reading of more contemporary African appropriations of Bunyan’s text (Thomas Mofolo’s *Moeti oa Bochabela* and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* are just two examples) Hofmeyr’s emphasis on a large and well-established ‘archive’ of African responses to *The Pilgrim’s Progress* provides a significant alternative to conventional notions of postcolonial appropriation and response. In other words, when a writer like Mofolo deploys *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in an effort to address traditional Sotho masculinities, for example, what he responds to is not the ‘pristine’ imported text of English missionary provenance, but an already deeply Africanised story which bears the traces of the many interpretive communities through which it has passed.

Finally, by reinserting Bunyan into an international and transhistorical frame, Hofmeyr also exposes one of the more intriguing duplicities of the discipline of English Studies, a discipline which from the late nineteenth-century onwards, sought to reclaim what it regarded as an alarmingly Africanised *Pilgrim’s Progress* as one of the central texts of the English ‘Great Tradition’. Here, Hofmeyr describes the interesting process by means of which Bunyan was steadily stripped of all his ‘African connections’, and gradually reconstituted as a quintessentially English writer. If English Studies sought to ‘de-colonise’ and ‘de-contaminate’ Bunyan in the interests of shoring up a notion of ‘Englishness’ essential to on-going Imperial projects elsewhere, Hofmeyr unravels and interrogates the fiction of an exclusively English text with a detailed and evocative story of the African Bunyan.

**References**

Review


Gerhard Maré

This, the second issue of what is intended as an annual contribution to monitoring the performance of the governing movement, the state, and society in general towards a fully democratic, less unequal and participatory system, is a welcome addition to what is becoming a thriving and wide-ranging published output on post-apartheid South Africa. The country desperately needs critical analyses of a society in change, a society that needs self-reflection rather than confirmation of the obvious, or, even worse, silencing of questions and questioners.

As with the first issue, this volume takes as its starting point the president’s ‘State of the Nation’ address to parliament, but necessarily stretches the topics covered to give a more comprehensive coverage to what the editors would argue are central social issues in relation to the most recent presidential political and social pointers.

The editors, in their introduction, note that in 2004 there were two ‘state of the nation’ speeches that set the tone of official discourse: in the first, given prior to the 2004 election, President Mbeki reflects on ten years of democracy, obviously with greater emphasis on achievements than on failures, stress on continuities and less on the breaks that have also characterised policy during the first decade of a democratic country; the second, post-election, reflects an apparent ‘significant change in direction’, an ambitious set of goals towards measurable redress within many problem
areas (2005:xx). The second has since been followed up with speculation of a new direction, and possibly leadership, specifically in economic policy formulation and implementation (for example ‘State system set for revamp: Mbeki to take role in govt revamp’, The Mercury May 13, 2005).

The collection, with no fewer than 21 contributions (up from 17 in the first volume), excluding the introductions to each of the four parts and a long ‘Introduction’ by the editors, stretches over 584 pages (excluding the index). The ‘Parts’ cover Politics – with articles including topics such as ‘Race and identity in the nation’ (by Zimitri Erasmus), ‘Rural governance and citizenship’ (by Lungisile Ntsebeza), and ‘The state of corruption and accountability’ (Sam Sole); Society – such as articles on education, policing, arts, and gender representation; Economy – where contributions include Stephen Gelb with an overview of the economy, Roger Southall on Black Economic Empowerment, and Benjamin Roberts on poverty and inequality; and, finally two articles under the heading South Africa in Africa – by John Daniel et al on ‘South Africa and Nigeria: two unequal centres in a periphery’, and Lloyd M Sachikonye with a contribution entitled ‘South Africa’s quiet diplomacy: the case of Zimbabwe’.

Even this brief selection, mentioned above, indicates the impressive scope of the articles that the editors managed to bring together, from within the HSRC staff and from beyond. There are several important issues raised by the editors in their introduction to the volume. The most central point is that of the ‘developmental state’ (2005:xxvi and further), as a more realistic description of the route (to be) followed by the Mbeki government, rather than a direction that could be characterised as reflecting a ‘social democratic agenda’. The developmental state approach would acknowledge Mbeki’s more pragmatic and transformative approach, but closer to an ‘Asian style (capitalist) “developmental state”’ than the social-democratic direction. This model would borrow from Malaysia (a country that has been, in various ways, linked to the ANC and South Africa for more than a decade, featuring again in the Schabir Shaik trial). Maria Ramos, now Transnet CEO, and others have also drawn attention to the Asian model (see ThisDay May 25, 2005 ‘State can’t be neutral on growth: Government to expand role in economy’). This is a debate that will no doubt continue in State of the Nation: SA 2005-2006, and be watched until the end of the Mbeki presidency. Just recently, in one edition of the Sunday Times (15 May 05) there were two commentary pieces on this topic (in Brendan Boyle’s ‘Now for the real change’, and in Itumeleng Mahabane’s ‘State control need not be enemy of
free market’). The issues related to the notion of a developmental state, even if the term is not used, are taken up by contributions in both the Society and in the Economy parts of the volume: under such headings as poverty, inequality and growth, unemployment, and various social welfare measures.

The editors provide sub-themes (‘Problems along the way’, 2005:xxxi) in their discussion of the developmental state, and these can also be followed through as strands in the volume – in various contributions:

- state capacity – which mentions the ‘limited technical capacity of the public service’ (a visit to most Home Affairs offices will dramatically illustrate this, for example; but also read Sam Sole, already mentioned, and Vino Naidoo on the civil service), and including ‘a lack of national coherence’ where the contribution by Erasmus makes for interesting reading;

- the global and African environment – where they draw attention to growing inequality within and between countries of the South (see Roberts in this volume, and Moeketsi Mbeki’s article on the need for an African ‘industrial revolution’ – ‘Why Africa needs an industrial revolution’, The Mercury March 3, 2005); in addition, part four of the book deals with ‘South Africa in Africa’, a very important area for discussion because of the hands-on approach of various ministries (especially the presidency and defence), infrastructural development and capitalist expansion into the rest of the continent, beyond southern Africa;

- democratic accountability and development – the editors warn that ‘while the prevailing wisdom today is very much that development is promoted by democracy, developmental states have often leaned strongly towards authoritarianism’ (2005:xxxvii), and in this regard they draw attention to the mixed blessing of the Malaysian example. Here, they comment, ‘the ruling party has attracted the support of the large middle class, which has been willing to trade its civil liberties for the benefits of prosperity’. This is a timely warning, not just because of the tendency in some cases to suggest repressive measures as a first retort to criticism or problems, but also because it potentially means stronger action against protest from those left out of ‘development’, organisations formed from below. They also call for steps to constrain ‘tendencies towards “crony capitalism”’, where the article by Southall on BEE is apposite. An important contribution that should be read under this theme is that by Séan Morrow and Luvuyo Wotshela (‘The state of the archives and
access to information’), where they conclude: ‘Archives are an intrinsic part of debates over freedom of information. The tensions between secrecy and openness, control and emancipation, persist… The balance and maturity of a society is indicated by how judiciously it deals with these issues’ (2005:331).

Difficulties with the ‘State of the Nation’ series lie in regularly bringing out issues, linked as they are to a regular event – the presidential State of the Nation address. The editors of the first issue acknowledged this by describing the publications as ‘hopefully annual’ (Habib et al 2003:1). Secondly, to find the balance between reflecting society at a particular moment in time and providing sufficient historical contextualization and analysis of the issues.

The first cannot be controlled. However, the ability to meet the deadlines (even if just approximately) will, over time, expand the readership from those interested in the first instance in a record and comment ‘of the moment’, increasingly to include those who will collect these volumes as an essential resource over time (as the South African Institute of Race Relations publications became over the decades during which they were produced, and became the case with the South African Review forerunners of The State of the Nation). I would suggest, strongly, that any serious monitor of the society in which we live start clearing space on their bookshelves for this purpose.

The second can only be met through a combination of description and analysis, and firm editorial policy and contributors’ workshops. This brings its own problems in that to remain interesting the analysts (the contributors) will have to change to a certain extent, even though the issues might not change that much from year to year. Despite the continuity in areas to be covered, they have to be dealt with because of the descriptive update that is required – issues such as HIV/AIDS, poverty and inequality, unemployment, come to mind. At the same time continuity is necessary to ensure that it is published regularly – in this case through a primary publisher, and an organisation, the HSRC, that provides skills in many of the areas that are covered and also provides the editors. In relation to these points, two of the three editors of the first issue also served in that capacity for the 2004-2005 volume, while at least four of the contributors to 2003-2004 also wrote for 2004-2005. Further variation of perspective with continuity is ensured through covering the same topic but with different contributors, such as in the case of HIV/AIDS and unemployment.
At the same time as covering what is essential, the editors have also managed to include some issues that may be seen as peripheral to central concerns, but providing wider coverage of important indicators of the state of the nation, and noting issues that need attention. Altogether an important voice is being heard for the second, and certainly not the last time.

References

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    As Davis said:
    The world ....
    ....... dreamworld. (1974:23)

In references (also note upper and lower case):

    African Labour Bulletin 21(1).
    Davis, James, Claude Braverman and Cecile de Villiers (1976) ‘The benefits of
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    ‘Do not let time, as Darwin said, “take its toll”’. – iow double for quotation
    within quotation, stop after quotation marks.

    Diagrams, tables, graphs, photos: Supply clear hardcopies of all such items, in case they need to be scanned if transfer from disks proves to be problematic.

    Notes: Please note that notes should be end notes, and should be used very sparingly, and certainly not for general referencing (we acknowledge that with certain references, such as archival material, it is clearer to place in notes).