Marxisms in the 21st Century

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At the heart of South Africa’s national liberation struggle was the constitution of a future South African nation in which white domination would be defeated. From the 1960s the Oliver Tambo-led African National Congress (ANC) increasingly used Marxist tools to develop its analysis of the South African social formation that had been shaped by three centuries of colonial dispossession and close to a century of capitalist development. The ANC defined and characterised this social formation as a ‘colonialism of a special type’ (CST) in which all classes and strata of black people were oppressed on the basis of their race. According to the ANC, what was needed to free black people from this national oppression was a multi-class revolutionary front uniting all the oppressed in prosecuting a national democratic revolution (NDR). This ANC theorisation of the social formation and the required political strategy also asserted the crucial and leading role of the working class in the revolutionary process and that the struggle for national liberation would be incomplete without fundamentally and systematically shaking the roots of racialised capitalism in South Africa, even though the ANC did not necessarily mean, or accept the necessity of, a transition to socialism. In essence, the ANC’s use of Marxism was vanguardist and shaped by Stalinised/sovietised influences...
that were transmitted to it through leading members of the South African Communist Party (SACP) who, from the 1960s, dominated ANC theoretical perspectives.

What has become of the ANC’s use of Marxism? What do the nineteen years of post-apartheid ANC rule and nation-building say about the scope and limits of the ANC’s ‘Marxism’? This chapter critically engages with the CST thesis and shows that the ANC’s continued use of Marxism has been transformed into attempts to hegemonise and marry the working class to a project to transnationalise and deracialise South African capitalism. This has been through what the chapter describes as an Afro-neoliberal project that defines the ANC in government today. In addition to this critique of the limits of Afro-neoliberalism in resolving the national question, the chapter takes the argument further by reviewing how the ANC’s nation-building project has failed to grapple with racialised post-apartheid social struggles over housing in the Western Cape. The chapter provides a second case study, which reviews sustained ANC government legislative efforts to retribalise the former bantustan countryside against the logic of a progressive nation-building project. Both these case studies show that the ANC has not been able to realise even its own limited notions of nation-building from the pre-1994 era and that these go against the progressive resolution of the national question. How the ANC has acted on race and nation in the post-apartheid period has opened the door to the reproduction of apartheid racial categories and regressive forms of nationalism including the return of ethnic identity, white supremacist arrogance, regressive racial polarisation, narrow black elite solidarity and Africanist chauvinism, particularly in relation to the so-called Indian and coloured racial ‘minorities’.

This chapter concludes that the ANC’s NDR theory is an exhausted Marxism that is denuded of both its radical impulses and emancipatory logics, particularly when it comes to resolving the national question. The ANC’s nation-building project, whether in its ‘rainbow nation’ or ‘home for all’ or ‘liberation of Africans in particular’ versions, has not been based on a conscious political strategy which understands and addresses the structural socio-economic base of national oppression. Where critical structural interventions could have been made, we saw equivocation and even a retreat to racialised strategies. On this basis, the chapter argues for a post-ANC, post-national liberation Marxism relevant to the constitution of a new historical bloc of forces that can resolve the national question on the basis of transforming South Africa away from racism, white supremacy, racial privileges, narrow Africanism and capitalism.
THE ‘COLONIALISM OF A SPECIAL TYPE’ THESIS

At least since the early 1960s, the SACP-inspired CST thesis has been the pre-eminent theoretical framework used in the analysis of the South African national question. Applied to the apartheid period, the CST thesis held that South African society was a form of colonialism where the colonial community occupied the same territory as the colonised people. The CST thesis argued that white nationalism in South Africa was a unique form of colonialism in which the colonial seat of government was not in a parent country in Europe but inside the country (Holiday 1988). The CST thesis assumed that a white oppressive nation came into being with the 1910 Constitution, which excluded blacks, and this laid the basis for regarding South Africa and its population in general as an emerging single national entity (Pomeroy 1988). In this way, the CST thesis defined black South Africa as a nation which was shaped by the trajectory of a specific path of racialised capitalist development based on national oppression. In general, Marxist discussion of the national question acknowledges that capitalism tends to group a population with all its various classes into a single nation in a single territory (Mzala 1988). South Africa manifested this tendency throughout the entire period of CST.

This emerging black nation included coloured (the majority of whom reside in the Western Cape) and Indian South Africans who ‘despite deceptive and often meaningless concessions … share a common fate with their African brothers (and whose) … own liberation is inextricably bound up with the liberation of the African people’ (ANC 1969, unpaginated). In other words, the strategy aimed at liberation of the black majority (of which coloured and Indian people were considered a part) from national oppression and exploitation challenged and largely undermined a ‘negative minority’ approach (that is thinking of one’s group as a separate entity). To have adopted such an approach would have led down a cul-de-sac (Pahad 1988). However, in my analysis the CST thesis did not sufficiently explain the development of, nor develop strategies to address, racial identities in colonial and apartheid South Africa together with the concomitant fears and perceptions of working-class coloured people about the reduction of their privileges due to deracialisation. The short-lived non-racial moment achieved amongst wide layers of thousands of political activists under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 1980s was also overstated because it had its own weaknesses, such as allowing people to organise in groups based on apartheid-imposed racial identities, as if the non-racial
moment had already overcome entrenched racial identities, fears and perceptions. In addition, the CST thesis imposed the concept of African leadership on the Western Cape in the 1980s without a rigorous understanding of the nature and character of coloured identity, including its African roots. This led to fundamental mistakes in the subsequent ANC Western Cape strategy and tactics.

The above notwithstanding, the internal CST conditions allowed for the principle of non-racialism to play a revolutionary organisational and ideological role. Thus, the CST social formation was resisted and challenged with ideologies that gave priority to democratic majority interests and non-racialism, thus going beyond a narrow racialised majority–minority dichotomy (Van Diepen 1988). Consequently, the CST thesis posited the concept of the NDR, which would destroy apartheid-era social and economic relationships and lay the basis for a new and deeper internationalist approach (Pomeroy 1988). In terms of the CST thesis, the central aspect of the national question in South Africa was about the defeat of this special type of colonialism through the self-determination of oppressed people in South Africa, the essence of which would be the emergence of a new, sovereign and non-racial South African nation in which race, ethnicity and nationality were no longer indices of difference. According to the CST thesis, this concept of ‘nation’ was ‘not defined by skin colour or racial designation’ (Jordan 1988: 118). In the CST thesis the sovereignty of a nation originates and is legitimated by the ‘people’ as a whole. In this regard, Pallo Jordan cited a 1983 speech by former ANC president, Oliver Tambo, wherein Tambo argued that ‘sovereignty will come from the people as a whole, and not from a collection of bantustans and racial and tribal groupings organised to perpetuate minority power’ (Jordan 1988: 117). For the post-apartheid period, this conceptualisation of sovereignty should challenge how we understand the different neo-apartheid power and spatial groupings in the Western Cape and how far the post-apartheid period has failed the non-racial project which the ANC regarded as not only an idealised goal, but an essential part of the concept of a new, united, South African nation (Jordan 1988).

According to Harold Wolpe (1988), the South African national question reflected the interrelation between class and race. This was to argue for a class-based approach to the resolution of the national question, which was different from both an accommodation of national liberation within the exploitative structures of capitalist South Africa (Van Diepen 1988), and a narrow nationalism in which an elite group amongst the oppressed gains ascendancy (ANC 1969). This required the introduction of a revolutionary subject to bring about ‘national
sovereignty … and [the turning around of] the social order’ (Van Diepen 1988: 10). However, despite the manifestation of such a revolutionary subject through sustained and widespread black working-class political action from the mid-1970s on, the reality of the 1993 political settlement did not manage to make a fundamental break with capitalism (DLF 2011; Marais 2001; SACP 2006).

**LEFT CRITIQUES OF THE CST THESIS**

The CST thesis was challenged by other left schools of thought. Bill Freund (cited by Mare 2003) argued that to see the struggle against apartheid as anti-colonial was to miss the mark because South Africa had been effectively independent for decades despite its colonial roots. This then suggested that the South African social formation had to be seen in class terms primarily, in which race, racism and apartheid were functional to capitalism. Variants of this view characterised the social formation as racial capitalism. These left critiques suggested that CST promoted nationalism, which is an ideology that can corrupt the working class, divide it and prevent its unity at a time of crucial class struggles. This critique was linked to strategic perspectives for an explicitly socialist revolution, and not an NDR, which would ultimately resolve the national question. These views argued that a national liberation struggle stage would mean that the struggle for socialism is permanently postponed. Another critique by Neville Alexander (1986) argued that the CST thesis obstructed the drive towards single nationhood by adopting apartheid racial categories instead of rejecting them, mobilising the oppressed and exploited on the basis of their class positions and fostering a new national identity on the basis of unifying characteristics and the class struggle for socialism.

There was something overly deterministic in the CST thesis about how nation-building would take place post-apartheid. Mzala (1988) categorically stated that, after liberating themselves from apartheid, the people of South Africa would gravitate irresistibly towards integration. Yunus Carrim (1996, unpaginated) put it this way: ‘As the process advances, the culture, values and interests of the African working class and its allies will increasingly come to constitute the core of the new South African’. As argued in this chapter, this linear path predetermined by Carrim has not been realised.

There is still no rigorous theoretical conceptualisation on the dynamics of race and class in the post-apartheid reality from a Marxist perspective.
Perhaps this is not surprising, given that Marxism has been criticised for its weak conceptualisation of the national question. These critiques have pointed to the problematic relationship socialist governments had with nationalism; the tendency for Marxism to emphasise the economics of capitalism at the cost of attention to the racial, psychological, philosophical, identity, cultural, linguistic, territorial and physical aspects of nationalism. Further, the absence of a coherent Marxist theory of nationalism has often led to half-baked attempts by left forces to merely paint nationalism red by overemphasising the revolutionary potential of national liberation struggles (Dexter 1996). These weaknesses of Marxism have given space to the rise and consolidation of a problematic ANC approach on the national question, which may still capture nationalist loyalty amongst the formerly oppressed without an appreciation of the interconnectedness between race and class.

AFRÓ-NEOLIBERALISM, POST-APARtheid CAPITALISM AND A FLOWDURING NATION-BUILDING PROJECT

In order to secure long-term conducive conditions for profitability, the ruling capitalist class has actively determined and shaped the substance of the new South African nation. In essence, South Africa is now a post-apartheid nation based on a liberal democratic constitutional dispensation in which the free market and the right to private property are fundamental. This is what the 1994 political settlement ultimately achieved. To play its part in the bargain, the new government also acted swiftly to adopt neoliberal economic policies that facilitated the financialisation, transnationalisation and globalisation of the South African economy. This included a significant restructuring of work that worsened working conditions, retrenched more than a million workers, evicted more than a million farm workers, increased labour productivity and increased capital’s share of national income at the expense of the working class. The working class affected by these processes remains overwhelmingly black and the capitalist class driving them remains overwhelmingly white (the racial capital–labour regime from the apartheid era remains intact) albeit somewhat deracialised at the upper echelons with the absorption of a handful of black capitalists and a larger layer of black managers in the middle to upper echelons of the state and the economy. This process of economic change has significant implications for the resolution of the national question. In essence, addressing
the legacy of national oppression is increasingly constrained by the capitalist character of the South African economy post-apartheid. The perpetuation of national oppression is not now in the form of formal apartheid laws that discriminate against black people. White privilege and racism are now maintained and reinforced by the accommodation of formal liberation and democracy within the exploitative structures of South African capitalism.

For the post-apartheid political dispensation to protect the interests, social positions and property rights of capital is to leave intact colonial and apartheid dispossession, destruction of socio-economic systems, national oppression, gender oppression and economic exploitation. The protection of the above stands as a barrier against a progressive resolution of the national question and other much-needed socio-economic transformation. In Joe Slovo’s (1988: 148) words, ‘The basic objectives of liberation cannot be achieved without undermining the accumulated political, social, cultural and economic white privileges. The moulding of our nation will be advanced in direct proportion to the elimination of these accumulated privileges.’ The emerging post-apartheid state and the nation-building project have not come close to what Slovo had envisaged.

Post-apartheid capitalist restructuring (coinciding with the resolution of the profitability crisis of late apartheid through the significant restoration of capitalist profitability in South Africa) has effectively reduced the social weight of the working class in ways that marginalise it from defining the essence of the nation-building project. Ironically, under CST it was the process of proletarianisation that helped to break down tribal divisions and to lay the basis for an emerging black nation, whereas in the era of capitalist globalisation the working class is subject to division and atomisation. This has huge implications for working-class consciousness, self-agency and class struggles for the resolution of the national question.

In Wolpe’s view (1988), the basis of the national question lies in the economic structure. Informed by this view, Edward Webster, Jacklyn Cock and Michael Burawoy (2005) raise the questions: what are the contours of the new post-apartheid racial order and how do they reflect the changing labour supplies, the informalisation of work and the emergence of an African bourgeoisie? In what ways does liberal democracy conserve/restore or challenge/dissolve the racial division of labour and racialised property relations? The national question remains incomplete in many African states because bourgeois strata amongst the oppressed held the reins of state power after the defeat of colonial rule.
Like other ruling classes, the South African capitalist class has a deep interest in exploiting class and racial divisions from the unresolved national question as a means of retaining its control. This essentially white ruling class, whilst not directly and expressly appealing to loyalties for national unity on the basis of race or colour, has effectively exploited racial and colour loyalties to foster a comprador black section and has overtly and covertly induced racial tensions between the different racial categories of South African workers. Within this overall framework, white workers continue to occupy a special role in this racial division of the working class. Despite their desertion by the ruling class goal of securing the restoration of capitalist profitability post-1994, the white working class has essentially defended its colonial and apartheid privileges by opposing affirmative action, employment equity and refusing to join political forces with its numerically larger and politically organised black working-class sisters and brothers. Under CST, the white working class had occupied an important 'seat at the ruling table of the capitalist class helping in the domination of the black working class' (Mzala 1988: 38). Under such conditions, the white working class had an objective interest in maintaining the inferior political, social and economic status of black workers. It is only logical that the liberal democratic framework has not yet shaken the white working class out of this ideological corruption despite its increasing exposure to the restructuring of work under capitalist globalisation and the associated neoliberal labour market policy. In fact, the crumbs it received from the capitalist table helped it to consolidate skills, expertise, good lifestyles, financial assets and amenities, which the majority of black workers still do not have. This places the white working class in an advantageous position where it can meet its socio-economic needs and allow itself to be used on a racial basis to block the workplace and socio-economic empowerment of black workers. A 2006 Western Cape National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) conference on non-racialism provided many examples of how the white working class conducts itself in relation to black workers on a daily basis throughout the Western Cape (Numsa 2006). These examples confirm the emergence of a new
form of white chauvinism amongst white workers. This chauvinism is worsened by the fact that there is no progressive conscientisation and organisation of white workers on a progressive anti-capitalist and anti-racist basis. Further work is required to analyse the socio-economic profile of white workers in order to identify similarities and differences between them and black workers. Such empirical information would be the basis for non-racial trade union and political work amongst white workers in order for them to recognise their common class interests with black workers.

Given the foregoing analysis of white workers and how post-apartheid capitalism has continued to benefit white people, it is useful to consider where white consciousness is in terms of nation-building. Anthony Holiday (1988: 85) described white South Africans as being caught in a profound ‘spatio-temporal disorientation’, which prevented them from understanding where and when they are living and who they could be within a broader conception of the South African nation. This disorientation is still a barrier to nation-building and means that they have not become Africans in Africa, à la Tambo (1979). Instead, they have held on to and defended their apartheid privileges. The organised political forces amongst them have also sought to actively block and delegitimise any change. This reproduction of white arrogance and supremacy can survive and even get emboldened primarily because of the shortcomings and limits of Afro-neoliberalism.

The above does not represent the totality of race and class dynamics within post-apartheid South African society. Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass (2002) show that inequality has increased within races in the post-apartheid period. This challenges the understanding of privilege in terms of old approaches to race and class. It is not far-fetched to suggest that for the 1.5 million or so black middle-class beneficiaries of the post-apartheid dividend, whatever remains of a national grievance is not about its structural foundations but essentially about further deracialisation of the capitalist market. For these sections, their concrete material reality as black people has changed significantly in relation to the wealth of the country, the political institutions of administration, education, opportunities and public prestige. This has significant implications for how the ANC and sections of the black elite understand and pose issues of inequality and blackness, particularly as it is not in their strategic interests for the black working class to assert its own interests, which may potentially challenge capitalism. In other words, the entrenchment of a deracialised capitalism in the era of neoliberal globalisation fails to resolve the
national question in so far as the national question is about the complete social, economic and political liberation of the black working-class majority. To reaffirm, post-apartheid capitalist relations continue to deepen racial contradictions and class inequalities even within the previously oppressed black majority in ways that leave the national question unresolved.

Further, instead of creating an independent black capitalist class, the post-apartheid period has created a black section of the capitalist class that has, internally, a compradorial-type relationship to the white capitalist class, thus deepening the hold of white local and international monopoly capital over the South African economy. This is likely to become a new form of internal colonialism, reflecting itself less through the political, but increasingly through economic forms of subjugation and domination. The emergent black capitalist stratum is not galvanising a transformative national developmental effort. Whilst it has gained hegemony over the ANC and the state, it is incapable of uniting a historic bloc behind a progressive nation-building project. Instead, at moments when its progress is blocked, it is likely to retreat to subjectivist and overly psychologised explanations for persisting injustices and white racism. It is incapable of connecting white racism with the deeply entrenched, structured character of capitalism and its systemic reproduction of the peripheralisation, underdevelopment, or the persisting poverty and marginalisation of the majority of black people. Its Afro-neoliberalism is narrow and limited.

Instead of achieving predetermined outcomes, we have seen, amongst other things, the reproduction of racial identities to the detriment of the nation-building project. These include the narrow essentialist racialisation of transformation, inequality, capitalism, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and criticism in a manner that shows degeneration of the national debate to the level of race populism (Mare 2003), a far cry from the limited and non-transformative ‘rainbowism’ and even further from a radical project. To understand this new form of regressive racialisation, it is useful to refer to what Carrim (1996) has identified: on the one hand, the impetus for the evolution of a broad, non-racial identity and, on the other hand, the emergence of ethnic and racial identities in new forms. Philip Dexter (1996) explains these developments in terms of the limited transition occasioned by the 1993 political settlement. According to Dexter (1996, unpaginated), ‘The pressure to revert to old, comfortable identities that are primarily based on perceived racial ethnic identities’ becomes great in light of the limited transition, ‘even if these identities were artificially created’.
AFRICAN–COLOURED SOCIAL RELATIONS IN THE WESTERN CAPE

The Western Cape Province presents the most complex manifestations of an unresolved national question. This province, which post-1994 has seen sharpened racial conflict, is populated by a majority of ‘coloured’ people with ‘Africans’ and ‘white’ people as significant minorities while ‘Indians’ and migrants from other African countries are generally considered an even smaller minority. According to Statistics South Africa’s Census 2011 results, 49.6 per cent of people described themselves as coloured, 33.4 per cent as black African, 16 per cent as white, and 1.1 per cent as Indian or Asian (Stats SA 2012). As the 2006 Numsa conference on non-racialism noted, in the Western Cape, the capitalist class continues to divide and weaken the unity of African and coloured workers. In this regard, appeals are made to the previous intermediate position occupied by coloured workers in apartheid racial hierarchies (Numsa 2006). This is done at two levels. The majority of African workers are made to resent and begrudge their fellow coloured colleagues who normally occupy more senior positions across the board (Numsa 2006). The second level is where white social and political forces such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) have paternalistically become political champions of the line that coloured people are considered by the democratic dispensation as ‘not black enough’ and therefore classifying them as losers in democracy (Numsa 2006).

In the African townships in the Western Cape, the housing crisis is visible everywhere: dense and ever-expanding urban sprays of shacks. In contrast, in the coloured townships this housing crisis is deceptively invisible as it is hidden in backyards of formal good-quality housing. National, provincial and local housing policy has not provided sufficient housing units to meet the ever-growing backlog and has prioritised the reversal and rolling back of apartheid spatial planning. As a result, the Delft Township, far away from the Cape Town economic centre, is the only post-1994 settlement which can be claimed as significantly racially mixed. The perpetuation of apartheid spatial patterns limits interracial social integration and the emergence of deracialised identities. This is against the earlier experience in South Africa’s capitalist development which, from the beginning of the twentieth century, formed a single national market binding various black groups by economic location (Mzala 1988). These processes undermine the potential for nation-building based on creating conducive material, infrastructural conditions for a united and emancipated nation – overcoming apartheid geography and addressing the massive inequalities of decades of combined and
uneven development. Existing political organising efforts have not yet resulted in systematic, sustained and effective social mobilisation of shack- and backyard dwellers in a common movement of the homeless staking their claim for a social wage. The contestation of charity mobilised for the victims of regular fires (which destroy informal housing) at the Joe Slovo camp and the intense disputes over who has the rights to benefit from the N2 Gateway Housing Project have exposed this glaring absence of non-racial homeless people’s solidarity and social mobilisation. This has also resurfaced old tensions between amagoduka (migrant workers) and established residents of Cape Town’s African townships. Under these conditions, black working-class unity, as the bedrock of a progressive nation-building project, is far from a reality. Instead, the entrenchment of racial identities, mutual fears and mistrust are the order of the day. In addition, profound processes of thorough-going transformation, such as nation-building, are likely to be deformed and stunted without being buttressed by organic processes of popular self-empowerment, without self-agency. In the 1980s, the anti-apartheid struggle was characterised by extensive and grounded political education of activists and the mass base on a wide variety of societal concerns including non-racialism and nation-building. In contrast, the post-1994 period has been marked by a virtual absence of such political education. Such consciousness-building would also have needed to address the structural socio-economic base of national oppression and liberation. By their very nature, ‘rainbowism’ and the ‘home for all’ variants of the nation-building project are incapable of driving a systematic consciousness-building programme of the kind required, and which would not simply soothe racial animosity but actually address it systematically.

In response to the housing and other socio-economic crises in the Western Cape, Afro-neoliberalism opted to effectively aggravate tensions and conflicts between coloured and African people in a province where white capital is extremely manipulative and fairly well politically organised. The rise of a narrow Africanism within the ANC in the Western Cape, on the back of the older ANC concept of African leadership (see below), can be seen as the beginnings of the tendency towards national exclusiveness which must be understood as, à la Mzala (1988: 51), ‘a drive by the bourgeois elite among the oppressed to take over the role of the new exploiter’ instead of addressing colonial working conditions on the wine farms and other such racially subjugating systems that continue to persist in the Western Cape.

The concept of African leadership or hegemony referred to in the above paragraph has been described by the ANC (1997) to refer to the hegemony
of indigenous Africans over national life and the character of the new nation. There are three problems with this formulation. Firstly, ‘African’ consciously and deliberately implies the exclusion of Khoi and San heritage, which includes a history of slavery, genocide and ignored but heroic anti-colonial resistance. This is to miss an important opportunity to embrace and reaffirm the African origins of large sections of coloured people in the Western Cape (Ozinsky and Rasool 1993). Secondly, ‘African’ is used loosely to paper over class differentiation amongst the diverse African communities in South Africa. African leadership can end up as a narrow nationalistic concept if it is not related to its class content (Carrim 1996). To be controversial, there is no doubt that a white but communist Joe Slovo was a far better representative of black working-class interests than a black but capitalist Patrice Motsepe. The third problem has to do with the imagery of a timeless pre-colonial African society, which can be transmitted as a whole to a twenty-first-century capitalist South Africa. This has opened the doors for moribund feudal forces and practices to rear the ugly head of reactionary nationalism based on ethnic and tribal identity (see below).

Narrow and racialised Africanism is strategically incapable of structurally rolling back apartheid geography, socially mobilising a non-racial homeless people’s movement and decommodifying basic services as the basis for building integrated communities. The emergence of this kind of Africanism is founded in how ANC strategy and tactics are defined in class terms. For example, Joel Netshitenzhe (1996, unpaginated) narrowed the scope for national liberation to the removal of ‘barriers that have been set by apartheid in terms of black people and Africans’ (in particular) access to the economy and services’, leaving intact the economic structure of society. In the same piece, he also sought to equate the role of the working class in national liberation together with that of the ‘middle strata’. Such Africanism could rise in the Western Cape given the relative political marginality of organised working-class formations in the body politic of the province. In general, narrow and racialised Africanism stands against the logic of a progressive and working-class-based nation-building project.

**PROVINCIALISM AND RETRIBALISATION**

Another outcome of the 1994 political settlement was the break-up of South Africa into nine provinces largely coinciding with ethnic and language
boundaries. In my analysis, the creation of these provinces has diluted the goal of building a united non-racial South Africa. As a result, tendencies to provincialism, regionalism and ethnicity have been entrenched and in the future they may become centripetal forces against national unity. The creation of provinces may have removed bantustans, but more significantly failed to move away from the social content of these spaces (Mare 2003). These were spaces of extreme discrimination and inequality. It is in these spaces that social reproduction is tenuous for the black working class. It is in these same spaces that there has been extremely limited racial and social integration because apartheid geographies have been reinforced by post-apartheid spatial development patterns. No wonder it then becomes easy for creeping racialisation to become a national expression of provincialism, regionalism and ethnicity.

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

When it comes to how rural areas of the former bantustans are governed in the post-apartheid period, the ideology of segregation continues. Tradition, custom and welfare are now instruments to govern rural areas and are used to perpetuate the logic of segregation and second-class citizenship for the people who live in these rural areas. They remain citizens of the bantustans and not of a democratic South Africa. No matter what their personal preferences, they must still pay their dues and loyalty to unelected and ethnic-based tribal rulers. Full citizenship, rights, democracy and development are not what drive state policy in rural areas.
It is useful to remember that the 1996 Constitution established wall-to-wall elected municipalities across every inch of South African territory. This new local government mandate was a break with the colonial and apartheid periods where local government in the former homelands combined and concentrated administrative, judicial and executive power in a single state functionary, the tribal authority. It is completely forgotten today that the overwhelming majority of traditional leaders were perverted and co-opted as instruments of colonial and apartheid rule. This was through a process of conferring statutory powers upon them: traditional leaders were conferred with statutory powers over Africans in ‘black areas’. These powers and the statutory structures within which they were exercised formed the building blocks of the homeland system. The new constitutional framework dismantled the homeland system and removed governmental powers given to tribal chiefs. However, what the 1996 Constitution provided for was reversed in subsequent, post-1996 laws – the Communal Land Rights Act, Act 11 of 2004 (CLARA) and the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act, Act 41 of 2003 (Framework Act).

The Framework Act allows all former tribal authorities to continue in the post-apartheid period under their new identity as traditional councils. In other words, the Framework Act does not discontinue the previously hated tribal authorities that were established by the apartheid-era Bantu Authorities Act, Act 68 of 1951. This entrenches apartheid-era tribal boundaries and authorities in virtually all rural areas in the former apartheid homelands, even in areas where there were no longer chiefs. The Framework Act essentially refashions the old tribal authorities as ‘traditional councils’ without much transformation of their content, purpose, functions and powers. It gives traditional councils the very kinds of unaccountable governance powers tribal authorities had under the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act. These powers contributed to various abuses and ultimately led to the loss of legitimacy of tribal authorities in many areas. The Framework Act seeks to locate traditional leaders as the primary institutions of power in rural areas. The Framework Act also enables government to devolve governance powers and responsibilities to traditional councils in fourteen areas of responsibility, including land administration; natural resource management; registration of births, deaths and customary marriages; justice; safety and security; and economic development. In practice, the powers are exercised on such a large scale that it renders the traditional councils an impermissible fourth sphere of government.
The preservation of tribal boundaries and authorities makes post-apartheid South African citizenship and the depth of rural democracy dependent on geography. People living in former homelands are made tribal subjects under a separate legal regime and form of governance from other South Africans. They become insulated from the reach of the laws applying to other South Africans and are subject to customary law as defined and interpreted by tribal chiefs. The consensual nature of customary law is now also undermined when it is applied within fixed jurisdicational boundaries derived from the Bantu Authorities Act, as is done in the Framework Act. With the Framework Act, traditional leaders have begun to circumscribe the power and agency of the majority of rural dwellers, features which are an essential part for the development of consensual customary law. This is inconsistent with undoing the legacy of apartheid laws.

The anti-bantustan revolts that exploded during the 1980s were struggles to be part of a united South Africa and a rejection of the ethnic identities that were perverted, frozen and imposed by apartheid. The post-apartheid legal framework on traditional leaders betrays those struggles and attempts to impose a map of neatly delineated separate ‘tribes’ on the 17 to 22 million South Africans living in former homeland areas. Current attacks on ‘outsiders’, whether labelled foreigners, AmaMfengu, ‘Pedis’ or ‘Shangaans’, illustrate the direction things could take. To justify this slide, the state has used a discourse laden with phrases such as the ‘recognition and promotion of the institution of traditional leadership’, ‘status, role and place’ and ‘institutionalising traditional leadership’. Absent from state discourse are ‘rural democratisation’, ‘democratic transformation of rural social relations’, ‘empowering communities’, ‘self-agency and self-empowerment of rural communities’, ‘sustained social mobilisation of rural communities’, ‘people-driven rural development’, ‘detribalising the former bantustan countryside’ and so on.

To conclude this section, it is useful to refer to ANC president Jacob Zuma’s role in emboldening tribalised identities. In his political fight to become ANC president, Zuma combined the use of victimhood with the strategic deployment of ethnic appeals. In KwaZulu-Natal, Zuma was central in rolling back the Inkatha Freedom Party (a Zulu nationalist movement implicated in apartheid rule and violence). He did not do this on the basis of organising a working class movement into a solid democratic popular support base, using the slow and painstaking methods of persuasion (Horn 2008). He led a group in the ANC that courted the Zulu king (King Zwelithini) and other important cultural symbols (such as the popular Shembe church) as quick-fix personalities to bring with
them all their subjects/believers as voters (Horn 2008). Such an appearance has a powerful effect on locals who are searching for identity and popular welfare in light of growing immiseration. After his June 2005 dismissal as the deputy president of South Africa, Zuma continued to publicly court the Zulu king and other Zulu cultural symbols. He went beyond Zulu ethnicity to actually cultivate and entrench ethnic identity and symbols of other cultural groups. He did this to communicate a powerful but reactionary message: the modernising Thabo Mbeki is a threat to the traditions that the majority of the people hold dear. When such an accessible Zuma is now seen as victimised by a modernising Mbeki, the choice is clear for a Shembe church follower: ‘Zuma is my man’.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A POST-ANC, POST-LIBERATION MARXISM

This chapter has argued that post-1994, the ANC used ‘Marxism’ to justify and codify a neoliberal revolution and the containment of contradictions. Containing contradictions has been a key feature of the politics of the ANC. The ANC-in-government has been able to square a number of circles, pursuing the promise of a massive social-delivery programme whilst sustaining neoliberal economic policies that reproduce the worst of the colonial and apartheid economic order.

One of the most disquieting aspects in South Africa today is the absence of coherent Marxist and other liberatory responses to the crisis of the ANC’s ‘Marxism’, particularly when it comes to the national question. Where they exist, radical analyses have been largely limited to academic debates and have also been marginalised in the wider public discourse and policy process (Du Toit 2005). Yet it is possible to change this and go so much further than what is allowed by dominant ideological frameworks. This is extremely important if a Marxist analysis is to ‘illuminate, not simply the extent and nature of existing problems, but also the scope and possibility for agency, change and transformation’ (Du Toit 2005: 20). This will depend on the extent to which Marxist analysis can go beyond charting broad outlines and features of the structure of South African society and start contributing to enabling ordinary people to make sense of their situations in order to act upon them (Du Toit 2005).

This situation also creates opportunities for theoretical innovation. Specifically, attention needs to be paid to the nascent seeds of a progressive national
project, as was seen in the broad ethnic and racial unity during the working class strikes at Marikana and De Doorns at the end of 2012 and in the solidarity with African migrants who bore the brunt of the May to August 2008 outbreak of Afrophobia. An important arena for innovation in theory and political action concerns the sphere of production and reproduction, particularly when it comes to social reproduction and the need to build and fight for alternative political economy spaces in order to build working-class power across narrow divides. What is required are fine-grained narratives, praxis and alternatives that engage with, challenge and enlarge the space for poor people’s agency (Du Toit 2004). As Webster, Cock and Burawoy (2005) argue, much-needed Marxist intellectual and political work would aim to examine and challenge the capitalist nature of post-apartheid South Africa and pose the question of socialism. I add that the unresolved national question is an essential part of such intellectual and political work. In other words, the door is open for ‘building Marxism’ in a way that is indigenous and creative as it pays attention to the unresolved national question.

According to Webster (2006), the approach of ‘building Marxism’ means that Marxism is seen as a social theory designed to understand dilemmas and possibilities of social transformation. This approach tries to understand a capitalist society and identify possibilities for transforming it. Inherent in this approach is the need for Marxism to be subject to continuous challenge, including the need for it to acknowledge its historic failure to grapple with the national question. ‘Building Marxism’ means reconstructing Marxism. For the unresolved national question, a reconstruction of Marxism means the need to understand post-apartheid nationalism, race, racism and tribalism as a first step towards the reconstitution of a historic bloc capable of advancing its post-capitalist class interests in ways that go beyond narrow economic determinism; in ways that also go to the heart of race and racism and white supremacy as a separate category even if it still originates from economic relations.

South Africa is in desperate need of a radical and transformative political and economic project. Such a project should be about new values that underpin national identity, wealth-creation and ownership and redistribution and it should also be about transforming the power dynamics of social relations. It is such a project that provides the most conducive conditions to resolve the national question, transform society as a whole and build an alternative to capitalism. These are tasks that the ANC’s ‘Marxism’ is incapable of discharging.
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