Racism After Apartheid

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It has become commonplace, in the current conjuncture, to attack ‘non-racialism’ and argue for new identities, African nationalism and the importance of Black Consciousness. Moreover, within popular consciousness, despite non-racialism being a founding constitutional principle, there are banal and ahistorical conceptions of non-racialism at work merely reducing it to being colour blind, with no definitional content. This chapter takes issue with the onslaught against non-racialism and the increasing shallow, popular understandings of non-racialism. ‘Radical non-racialism’ is defended in this intervention and an argument is made for its re-affirmation. This is different from the official non-racialism of the African National Congress (ANC), which has morphed into different inflections of state-centred nationalism during different phases in post-apartheid South Africa, to include ‘rainbowism’, Afro-neoliberalism and resource nationalism. Official non-racialism is in crisis in the context of the unravelling of ANC-led national liberation hegemony and the degeneration of the ANC itself.
The defence of radical non-racialism affirms a crucial principle and practice for prevailing anti-racism, in dialogue with some currents within contemporary Black Consciousness, and as part of the renewal of left politics in South Africa. The argument made in this chapter is that official ANC non-racialism, tied to a contingent political-economy analysis and within the frame of the national question approach, is outdated, in crisis and discredited. It is dying with the ANC-led Alliance. At the same time, this chapter argues for replacing the national question with the eco-cide question, in the context of the existential threat posed by the climate crisis to human and non-human life. The eco-cide question is central to a post-national liberation, post-neoliberal and renewed left politics, as the basis for radical, non-racial nation building to sustain life. This perspective is set out in seven theses below.

**THESIS 1**

Radical non-racialism is central to a people’s history of struggle and achieved a hegemonic location in the national liberation struggle against apartheid. Its challenge to racialised exploitation, white supremacy, gender oppression and oppressions in general, because of its deep humanist impulse, defined its radicalism.

Does non-racialism, as a political principle and practice, belong to the ANC? In the mythologised history of the ANC, in the construction of its post-apartheid hegemony and in its official practices as a ruling party, it would seem the ANC has proprietary claims on non-racialism.1 As the party of national liberation and the dominant ruling party for over two decades, it has constructed and articulated post-apartheid nation-building nationalism, in which non-racialism has been a crucial ideological element. This has been part of its project to rule a capitalist South Africa and has impacted on its approach to economic transformation, state building, state-civil society relations and international relations. Various presidents of the ANC and the country have also imbued official non-racialism with particular discursive elements and practices. For instance, Nelson Mandela was the fulcrum of a ‘rainbow’ nationalism, Thabo Mbeki harnessed ‘rainbow’ nationalism for deep globalisation, black economic empowerment and the indigenising of neoliberalism as Afro-neoliberalism,
and Jacob Zuma has brought in an element of resource nationalism linked to a corrupt transactional politics. The success of these nation-building efforts is a separate question; suffice to note that the ANC’s articulation of official non-racialism is in crisis.

On the other hand, radical non-racialism as part of a peoples’ history of struggle does not belong to the ANC. Three defining moments of national liberation struggle in the twentieth century affirm radical non-racialism as an orientation in mass politics, as part of popular struggles and as belonging to the people. The first was the formulation and adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955 at the Congress of the People, including its embrace of the idea that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white. The initiative to formulate the Freedom Charter was not an initiative of the ANC exclusively but of the Congress Alliance, made up of the ANC, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People’s Organisation and the South African Congress of Democrats. Moreover, the process to formulate the content and ideas of the Freedom Charter gave primacy to grassroots dialogue, input and registering the voice of the people. Essentially, the participation and input of the people is what gave the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter its legitimacy. While the Freedom Charter became a programmatic basis of national liberation politics, it reflected the aspirations of the people, including the idea of an inclusive non-racial democracy and nationalism. This does not belong to the ANC.

The second crucial moment was the emergence of militant black trade unionism from 1973 onwards, propelled by the powerful Durban strikes. The rise of independent trade unions, their growth and eventual merger into the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) in 1985 was crucial for affirming radical non-racialism within the organised working class in South Africa. Cosatu embraced non-racialism and the Freedom Charter after serious internal debates. Various affiliates of Cosatu also carried firm commitments to the principles of non-racialism and socialism. Cosatu did not belong to the ANC and was an independent, worker-controlled labour federation. The third crucial moment was the resurgence of mass resistance against apartheid in the 1980s, spurred on by the student uprising of 1976. The mass movement that rose in the 1980s, under the banner of the United Democratic Front (UDF), brought together sport, cultural, faith-based, youth, women, student, union and civic organisations, as well as various other formations. These organisations were not controlled by the ANC, although there might have been ANC sympathisers,
underground operatives and members in some of them. Moreover, some in the UDF leadership also openly affirmed the importance of the link to the ANC. However, the embrace of the Freedom Charter by the UDF strengthened the impulse of mass, radical non-racialism. This impulse did not belong to the ANC.

But what is the content of radical non-racialism, a people’s non-racialism? It has been first and foremost about solidarity and unity. It was about countering the racialised differences of apartheid by constituting strategic unity within and between race groups as concrete expressions of ‘people’s power’, advancing a programmatic unity of all forces to overcome apartheid and the building of powerful people’s organisations. The idea of people’s power (‘the people shall govern’), inscribed in the Freedom Charter, is about deep democracy and was central to Mandela’s political thought in the 1950s. This process of strategic unity was forged in different racialised spatial and sectoral contexts and went through various conjunctural phases since the 1940s. In organisations, such as the Communist Party and the black trade union movement, non-racialism was taken further in terms of different races being part of the same organisation and playing a leadership role. The ANC, on the other hand, remained an African organisation into the 1960s, and non-African leadership was elected into its structures much later. Second, radical non-racialism was deeply anti-capitalist. It married a critique of racial oppression to a critique of capitalism. The Freedom Charter, while a people’s document, was also a product of its time in terms of its imagination and horizons. It was a document deeply imbued with a state-centric perspective, shaped by Soviet socialism, revolutionary nationalism and social democracy. As a people’s document, the Freedom Charter was anti-capitalist. Moreover, the non-reductionist conception of racialised and gendered class understandings expressed itself in Communist Party thinking, in trade union organising and in mass organisations, such as the UDF, with principled commitments to working-class leadership. Class and race were linked in theory and in mass organisations against capitalism and its racialised structures.

The third aspect of radical non-racialism was that it was not anti-white but it was anti-white supremacy. Apartheid (1948–1994) was a white supremacist social order, which had a history going back to the early colonial encounter. Apartheid imbued whiteness with a racialised superiority against the subhuman non-white. It was a social order that brought together racialised economic relations with political and ideological relations to affirm white superiority through Afrikaner nationalism. The radical non-racial tradition embraced those whites
who consciously stood against white supremacy and supported the national liberation struggle. In the Communist Party, in the trade union movement, in faith-based organisations and in the UDF, this was certainly the case. The fourth aspect of radical non-racialism was its recognition that race as a group attribute and racism as a form of discrimination had no scientific basis for its existence in social relations. This was not about being colour blind in a facile sense, but was grounded in a deep humanist and universalist commitment to see and live beyond colour, as part of the struggle for a new society. While apartheid constructed a racist society and organised society through racialised relations, which impacted on all South Africans, our individual and collective challenges were to overcome these racialised social relations and its consequences. Racism in South Africa stole the humanity of the oppressed but it also tried to install a socially engineered racist in all of us, to keep the people divided. The brutalised humanity and racist consciousness, among the oppressed, also had to be confronted. The radical non-racial principle was a crucial guide on this existential journey. Many biographies and autobiographies of radical non-racial activists tell this story and are important resources of existential phenomenology.

In all four respects, radical non-racialism is still relevant in South Africa – as a basis for strategic unity and solidarity for democratic people’s power, as an anti-capitalist critique and practice, as anti-white supremacy and as an existential guiding principle to achieve a humanised society and world. Radical non-racialism is crucial, now more than ever, for a new left politics grounded in addressing the eco-cide question. This will be developed further below.

THESIS 2

Radical non-racialism shares important common ground with Black Consciousness but also goes beyond it in significant ways to achieve a future South Africa beyond skin colour.

The Black Consciousness movement made an important contribution to the liberation struggle in the 1970s. Its most prominent intellectual leader, Steve Biko, as part of this movement, left behind a powerful legacy, which impacted on philosophy, culture, black feminism, psychology, community-empowerment practices, black theology and a critical engagement with liberalism.
Black Consciousness still resonates in the present. A rough typology of post-apartheid Black Consciousness suggests there are three articulations, each with different approaches to South Africa’s future, and includes: (i) academic Black Consciousness, (ii) populist Black Consciousness and (iii) Africanist Black Consciousness. Academic Black Consciousness has produced some important interventions in our national conversation about continued racial oppression, the relevance of black identity and key solutions for the way forward for the country. Xolela Mangcu, for instance, argues, following Biko, for a joint culture among different groups of people, based on race-transcendent leadership and a public philosophy. He argues against the ANC’s non-racial inequality. While Frantz Fanon would be uncomfortable with the essentialist underpinnings of both Biko’s and Mangcu’s understandings of culture, a joint culture premised on the lived experience of the people and born out of struggle to build a deeply democratic society shares common ground with radical non-racialism. Zimitri Erasmus posits a new humanism for South Africa. She suggests love as a political practice, which brings together friendship, imaginative co-creativity, care for the Other and transformative politics as crucial for emancipation. Erasmus’s politically engaged humanism shares much ground with the existential journey central to the practice of radical non-racialism, which has been at the frontline of overcoming racial domination in South Africa. Radical non-racialism is a deeply political humanism that exists and does not have to be invented. It has to be further elaborated.

Populist Black Consciousness is best expressed in student politics today. With the rise of #RhodesMustFall and subsequently #FeesMustFall in 2015, student politics quickly lost its radical non-racial character and became explicitly Black Consciousness-orientated. While this shift has its own explanations, it also had its own implications for student unity, as the pain of the aspirant or already existing black middle-class child was exalted in performative ways. Moreover, two crucial intellectual ideas stand out, decolonising the university and intersectionality. The populist version of decolonising the university would mean removing all white academics and all intellectual work by white academics. This is akin to a ‘Pol Pot approach’ to the university, smacks of adventurous millenarianism and is deeply racist. On the other hand, decolonising the university, as an epistemological and decolonising project, shares important ground with radical non-racialism in terms of not being anti-white but resisting white supremacy in all its forms. Moreover, intersectionality, as an analytical category, is not new to radical non-racialism and its non-reductionist understandings of class, race and gender related to capitalism. Also, it just might
be that radical non-racialism has a much richer analytical tradition around the challenge of simultaneous oppressions which is home-grown. Intersectionality, understood as a concept of political practice to build solidarities among workers, women, students and society, also shares ground with radical non-racialism in terms of advancing strategic solidarities. While there might be different language registers at work and discursive distance, radical non-racialism has come to appreciate this challenge in the course of decades of mass resistance against apartheid oppression and capitalism.

An Africanist Black Consciousness is expressed through the resurgent Pan African Student Movement and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a breakaway political party from the ANC that is led by Julius Malema. These are political forces whose political practice is premised on generalised and essentialised understandings of race and racism. Their dialectical of change is simple: African versus the rest. With the crisis of the ANC’s official non-racialism, these forces have been capitalising on this to argue that the entire non-racial tradition is irrelevant and they have been gaining important ground in some sections of society. As African nationalists, their future for South Africa is exclusionary, populist and based on a dangerous proclamation of racialised difference to advance revenge. It clashes directly with radical non-racialism.

THESIS 3

Radical non-racialism was defeated in the transition to democracy and was displaced by ‘rainbowism’, an Afro-neoliberal approach to nation building and the authoritarian corruption of the Zuma regime. Radical non-racialism is not the same as ‘rainbowism’, liberal democracy or narrow black nationalism.

The ANC-led Alliance has disarticulated radical non-racialism since 1994. This means that the official non-racialism of the ANC-led Alliance and state, at the level of ideological relations and articulation, has eviscerated it. The ideological framing of non-racial politics was remade and this occurred in the context of electoral politics, state policy making, shallow nation building and managing the globalisation of a capitalist economy. This means that national and class struggle, race and class, were not articulated in national liberation political practice.
against, with and beyond post-apartheid capitalism. The programmatic content of national liberation, as contained in the Freedom Charter, was abandoned. Instead, a deeply racist capitalist society was embraced as the means to achieve national liberation. Non-racialism became about normalising the requirements of a globalising capitalism, including racialised labour processes, accumulation and new logics of commodification. The dialectic of working-class solidarity, mass power and radical non-racial unity was surrendered to the power of domestic and global capital. ANC-led Alliance ideological hegemony, through radical non-racialism, was remade against the interests of the historical subjects of liberation struggle, the oppressed black majority (African, coloured and Indian) and the working class. This profound revision in the ideological imagination, articulation and practice of national liberation in the post-apartheid period has to be located in the following material and ideological conditions.

First, reconciliation, national unity and nation building were ideologically uncoupled from radical non-racialism. Instead, nationalism in post-apartheid South Africa became about a fuzzy ‘rainbowism’. We were a country in which racialised difference and oppression was dissolved in the hues and shades of a fictive and re-imagined rainbow nation. We were all the rainbow, the rainbow was us. To dissent from and resist was to stand against the beauty of who we all were as a rainbow nation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the government of national unity, the Mandela factor, the role of sport including the Rugby and Soccer World Cups, were all marshalled to address the deep historical fault lines of racial oppression, class exploitation and sexism. A country ravaged by dehumanisation was now meant to be living the rainbow dream, a new normalcy. The deep racial structures of formal apartheid were also dismantled to prop up this re-imagined nation. A progressive and new constitutionalism was crucial in this regard. Non-racialism was reduced to the celebration of racial diversity in the rainbow. We moved from apartheid racial classification to post-apartheid racial classification.

Second, the ANC-led Alliance and state, despite some intra-alliance quibbles, embraced another ideological element as part of post-apartheid national liberation: neoliberalism. Transnational neoliberalism was central to US-imperial hegemony and international relations over the past few decades. Not only did it seek to lock in the power of US financial markets across the globe, it also sought to remake the functions of the nation-state to serve the market and weaken the power of labour. For the ANC’s rainbowist nationalism, this meant the state and economy were to be de-racialised but not fundamentally
transformed through radical non-racialism. A de-racialised state amounted to being an African state. This is not a capable, non-racial, nation-building state directing, disciplining and reallocating capital. It is not a state capable of leading a nationally determined and driven development project. Despite the rhetoric of constructing a ‘developmental state’, the post-apartheid state merely appeases African nationalism and for more than two decades has been about subordinating this state to the power of global finance. The state has been an Afro-neoliberal state, managing a deeply globalised and financialised economy. The ubiquitous market has squeezed and disciplined the state. With the Zuma project, the state has been squeezed through corruption and rent seeking. The formal authority of the state has been increasingly undermined and an informal, shadow state has emerged. Market-driven and financialised black economic empowerment has been supplemented by state-driven, transactional black economic empowerment. A new parasitic black capitalist class has been in the making in the nexus of the state–market–ruling party. All of this is consistent with a neoliberalised global capitalism that is deeply corrupt and driven by an accumulation logic centred on increasing inequality. In this context, black capital and white capital have become the champions of an ostensible non-racialism to ensure harmonious race relations and radical economic transformation in the rainbow nation. A society led by capital has become the linchpin of national liberation practice and ideology.

Third, radical non-racialism has also been supplanted by marrying nationalism to ‘liberal constitutionalism’. Ironically, the ANC-led alliance has always maintained that historically, the national liberation struggle has never been narrowly about civil and political rights. This was a struggle for fundamental transformation of the racist political economy. Despite this, South Africa’s transformative constitutionalism has been reduced to a liberal constitutionalism articulated with national liberation ideology and its commitment to being a well-governed Afro-neoliberal state. An abstract citizenship has rendered all equal before the law; every South African is now the bearer of rights and a custodian of voting electoral power every five years. In the economy, every citizen is free to sell their labour power and harness the ‘free market’ for wealth acquisition. This liberal fiction, imagined as part of the rainbow nation, stands in stark contrast to the lived experience of precariousness among workers, deep inequality, widespread hunger, high unemployment and extremely high costs to access the courts in South Africa. South Africa’s imagined liberal democracy works only for a minority; hence between electoral cycles there are widespread
social protests and increasingly violent civic struggles to gain recognition for the suffering in the everyday lives of the people. Shallow change, without fundamental transformation based on the constitution, has made South Africa a dangerous rainbow nation with a minority inside the imagined liberal democracy and the black majority outside.

Fourth, the centrality of the working class and working-class leadership was also a pivotal element in national liberation ideology, nationalism and the politics of radical non-racialism. The rise of powerful black trade unions in the 1970s and the formation of Cosatu in the mid-1980s gave a crucial organised expression to the working class in the South African national liberation struggle. The organised power of labour was also an important democratizing force. Workers were actively engaged in their communities, as well as building popular organisation and constituting mass power prior to 1990. Today, in the context of the ANC-led Alliance, Cosatu has been split, it has lost its strategic capacity to shape South African politics, unions have been bureaucratised and there is growing social distance between organised workers and society. Moreover, the Afro-neoliberal accumulation regime has introduced racialised and gendered precariousness, apartheid-style labour relations persist on farms, fragmentation of unions has taken root and worker control in unions has been replaced by a growing business unionism linked to black economic empowerment. South Africa’s working class has been defeated by African nationalism. The erasure and denial of radical non-racialism reinforces both white and black privilege for a minority. This is what the ‘radical economic transformation’ agenda of the ANC really means.

THESIS 4

The ANC’s embrace of deep globalisation, the unravelling of its hegemonic project and its populist call for ‘radical economic transformation’ has unleashed new conjunctural racisms in South Africa, undermining the future of the country.

The roots of racism run deep in South Africa and the making of a racialised social order extends to the colonial encounter of conquest, dispossession, slavery, genocide, segregation, proletarianisation in the context of agricultural
modernisation and industrialisation, and institutionalised apartheid. The racial structures of society have articulated with class and gender in different historical moments and conjunctures in the development of capitalism. Post-apartheid South Africa inherited these racialised structures and relations of oppression. The ANC’s embrace of Afro-neoliberalism and corrupt capitalist accumulation has unleashed both de-racialising and re-racialising dynamics as part of the rainbow nation. De-racialisation has been led by market and transactional class forces producing a black capitalist class and a sizeable black middle class.16 This is sometimes referred to as the 30 per cent solution and has not laid the basis for a viable transformative democracy and social order.

Moreover, re-racialisation of social relations has also emerged in the context of the thin veneer of rainbowsque nation building evaporating as perceptions and insights into corruption at the heart of the ANC-led state have become more visible. The Zumafication of corruption has given licence to looting at various levels of the state and has grown grotesque since the ANC’s vaunted Polokwane conference, which brought Zuma to power at the helm of the ANC and then the country. The Nkandla scandal, Gupta leaks, revelations about state capture in the Public Protector’s report, corrupt dealings in relation to mega-government spend, the compromising of criminal justice institutions together with failed service delivery have fed into the deepening legitimacy crisis of the Africanised state. All these realities have rolled back nation-building efforts and have fuelled racist tropes and stereotypes about the ANC state in everyday common sense. The ANC’s commitment to non-racialism is now in question as it no longer represents the interests of society but the interests of corrupt factions seeking looting opportunities in processes of parasitic accumulation. The ANC’s calls for radical economic transformation ring hollow, given how criminalised its politics has become and how the deep legitimacy crisis of the state re-racialises South Africa. Authoritarian populism will merely further divide the country.

At the same time, the land and agrarian challenge has not been addressed in South Africa, and this is an emotive issue given the historical injustices related to land dispossession. The ANC’s approach to land reform has been modest and has actually not worked in several instances. On its current trajectory, the ANC would take at least another 40 years to achieve even its modest target of 30 per cent land reform. The lack of a proper agrarian transformation strategy (except the use of liberalisation and marketisation since 1994), policy failure and a narrow productivist approach to agricultural development,
through agri-business hubs and export-led agriculture, has again produced a class of small black farmers, connected to the dominant white-controlled and globalised agrarian economy while undermining the potential for more broad-based small black farmer development. At the same time, the land question has become deeply racialised. White farmers still control 73 per cent of agricultural land in South Africa. They are insecure and fearful of the populist direction of the ANC. At a recent demonstration concerning murders of white farmers, called #BlackMonday, a reactive and reactionary Afrikaner chauvinism came to the fore. The old apartheid flag was raised in some quarters and the new South African flag was burnt. These were deeply inflammatory and provocative moves. The African nationalist EFF, through their fiery leader, Malema, has an extremely populist approach to land reform. They have vaunted the Zimbabwe experience of land grabs and have also staged a few land occupations. Malema’s EFF has a profoundly Africanist politics on the land question and he positioned himself as the voice of African nationalism against the Afrikaner chauvinism of #BlackMonday. He further racialised the national discourse, polarising the country even more. The land question has to be resolved but without a populist-engendered race war and in the context of failing corporate-controlled food systems. How the land question is dealt with can be an opportunity to build a new, resilient and food-sovereign system that advances radical non-racialism.

Another crucial expression of conjunctural racism is the rampant xenophobia in society (see Ekambaram in this volume). It is becoming increasingly incontrovertible that state practices and the state’s policy approach to the migration regime are deeply xenophobic. This is contrary to the human rights framework of the country and the country’s international relations commitments to the continent. State xenophobia has also contributed to divisions among the working class. Over the years, many of the violent flare-ups against non-South Africans have occurred in black working-class communities. These communities experience high levels of hunger and unemployment. The competition for economic opportunities is intense, given the crisis of social reproduction and the inability of the state to dynamise a labour-absorbing growth path. State xenophobia has certainly fuelled this situation. Moreover, working-class organisations such as unions, informal trader organisations, civic organisations and faith-based organisations have not done enough to build solidarities and support for migrants/immigrants in these communities. The once deeply solidaristic, radical non-racialism has again been further undermined by the crisis
of national liberation ideology, state practice and the re-racialising dynamics of ANC leadership in South African society.

THESIS 5

The climate crisis threatens the existence of humans and non-human life forms. Eco-imperialism and capital, as a geological force, are driving the climate crisis in the context of the Anthropocene.

On a planetary scale, capitalism has undermined various natural cycles of the Earth’s ecosystem. The assumption of endless capitalist accumulation, as part of fossil fuel and natural resource extractivism, globalised production patterns and wasteful mass consumerism has overshot various planetary limits. Resource peak, widespread pollution and ecological destruction are commonplace. The central contradiction in this context is the climate crisis. The climate crisis, involving the heating of the planet, poses the gravest threat to human and non-human life. We have crossed a one-degree Celsius increase in planetary temperature since pre the industrial revolution and are heading rapidly to overshoot 1.5 degrees in the next two decades or sooner. Many scientists also predict that we will cross the two-degree increase in planetary temperature in this century. These increases unleash dangerous feedback loops and extreme shifts in Earth’s ecosystem. There are already indicators of the awesome destruction and unbearable living conditions resulting from a heating planet. Hurricanes, droughts, heat waves, floods, rising sea levels threatening island states and low-lying areas, and freak extreme weather events are becoming the new normal. In this context, the conditions to sustain life on planet Earth, including South Africa, are being undermined. To make sense of the human impact on the planet, scientists, particularly geologists, have declared that we have left behind almost 11 000 years of stable climatic conditions, known as the Holocene, and are now entering a new stage in planetary history known as the Anthropocene.

This means humans are a causal factor in shaping planetary conditions such as climate change. This is a scientific fact. On the face of it, this approach to the climate crisis makes sense. However, from the standpoint of Marxist ecology, the Anthropocene is really about imperial eco-cide, that is the role of the US as the dominant imperial power refusing to let the world take the climate crisis
seriously, given that a decarbonised civilisation requires fundamental systemic transformation, including going beyond capitalism, if we are to survive. In addition, capital as a geological force is responsible for global carbon extraction, for burning fossil fuels and driving global carbon-based accumulation, including production, consumption and everyday patterns of living that are carbon-centric, wasteful and destructive to planetary ecosystems. Capital as a geological force has for 150 years enlisted the role of rich industrialised countries in the global North, petro states and carbon-addicted ruling classes.

Of late, industrialising countries such as China and India are also contributing, in aggregate, to global emission levels. Similarly, South Africa is a carbon-intensive economy and has extremely high levels of aggregate carbon emissions in the world.\(^{20}\) Global leadership has failed in multilateral institutions and at the state level. The UN Paris Climate Agreement brings too little, too late, and has already been undermined by the Trump administration. Vulnerable island states are challenged by increasing sea levels and climate shocks, such as hurricanes. In 2017, hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria left a trail of destruction in their wake and extremely high costs for reconstruction. South Africa is a carbon-addicted society. Our economy is heavily invested in coal and the government has flirted with a nuclear deal that would bankrupt the state. South Africa’s carbon capitalist forces are also driving a resource nationalism that would lead to fracking in parts of the country with fragile ecosystems and gas/oil exploration of our coastlines through Operation Phakisa. These extractive initiatives aim to yield complex hydrocarbons that will worsen the climate crisis and also involve extending and deepening the carbon-based minerals–energy complex. South Africa is a carbon criminal state seeking to make a few super-wealthy, through carbon capitalism, while the rest of society bears the brunt of climate shocks. This is the terminus of the ANC-led Alliance approach to the national democratic revolution. It is not about sustaining life but about destroying it.

**THESIS 6**

The ANC-led Alliance approach and, more generally, the orthodox Marxist approaches to the national question are outdated in the context of the dangerous climate contradiction and the deepening planetary ecological crisis. The national question has to be replaced by the eco-cide question.
The ANC-led South African state is a carbon criminal state and a failed climate crisis state. It is undermining the right to life of present generations and generational justice for future generations. South Africa’s drought, since 2014, has been one of the worst in the history of the country. It has had dramatic impacts on food prices, hunger (14 million South Africans went to bed hungry before the drought), water systems and food production. Cape Town has experienced acute water stress and could become the first major urban conglomeration that might not be viable because of water shortages linked to climate change. South Africa’s drought is linked to the El Niño effect but also to a heating planet. Moreover, the Knysna fires of 2017, wave-surge flooding in the city of Durban and freak weather events (extreme downpours or cold spells during the onset of summer 2017) all portend a climate-driven South Africa and world. In this context, more droughts, flooding, heat waves and other extreme climate shocks should be expected. More climate shocks also mean more costs for society related to infrastructure, health, food and adaptation. A fiscally constrained state, due to mismanagement and corruption, is already a failed state.21 With climate shocks, such a state will not survive. The South African state thus far has not been able to factor in the costs of these climate shocks and is failing to appreciate the death spiral of society due to climate change. Instead, the state is preoccupied with preventing the Eskom ‘death spiral’ by trying to save South Africa’s corrupt coal-driven electricity monopoly at the expense of society. This is all about return on investment in the context of bad policy decisions, state capture and a worsening climate crisis. South Africa should be leaving Eskom behind as a stranded resource and transitioning to socially owned renewables at local government and community level.

The climate crisis is merely the expression of the deeper eco-cidal logic of global capitalism. More sharply, the climate crisis reveals how capitalism, including post-apartheid capitalism, is incapable of solving the most serious existential threat faced by human and non-human life. Instead, capital, while it is causing the climate crisis, is also undermining the conditions that sustain life, leading to a sixth planetary extinction. This is the crux of the eco-cide question. Yet the ANC-led Alliance in South Africa has embraced carbon-driven capitalist modernity, neoliberal globalisation and its eco-cidal logic. The argument that more carbon-based energy or even nuclear power is required for industrial development is a false argument, given that there are cheaper renewable energy sources that can power the country at scale and meet its development needs. The national question in South Africa, as I have argued, has been resolved
contra the interests of the workers, the poor and the majority. Class and race, in the ANC’s non-racialism, has been about class formation for the few, as part of African nationalism. This has become the dominant agenda of national liberation. Such social forces are incapable of leading deep social change and transformation.

This prompts a serious question: why has the national question ideological approach to liberation ended up in such a degenerate, politically bankrupt and eco-cidal place with a fundamental disregard for the most dangerous contradiction facing human and non-human life? Part of the answer relates to the kind of Marxism that has provided the intellectual scaffolding, template, imagination and tools to think through the national question and which has brought South Africa to this destructive turning point. South Africa’s embrace of the national question approach to understanding racial oppression has its origins in Lenin’s thesis on the right to self-determination, which was further elaborated by Stalin. It was imported into South Africa through the South African Communist Party (SACP) (then called the Communist Party of South Africa) and became central to ANC-led national liberation discourse to understand national oppression. This framework evolved from the 1950s on, and became an analytical tool to understand class, race and capitalism as part of ‘colonialism of a special type’. The SACP’s approach to understanding settler colonialism through positing and analysing colonialism of a special type, from its beginnings in modern economic relations through its vicissitudes of segregation and apartheid, became the hegemonic understanding of the national question in the ANC-led Alliance. It articulated a dualistic understanding of a coloniser/colonised society, in which the oppressor and oppressed shared a common territorial space. Similarly, Trotskyists evoked the political economy concept of racial capitalism.

All the Marxist approaches to the national question in South Africa are marked by a deep productivism, which means that they did not bring into perspective the dimension of nature in historical materialism and in their understandings of South African capitalism. A crucial premise for these Marxisms was the idea of dominating nature, and even the envisaged socialist modernisation, with its state-centric relations of production, was about the march of the forces of production. Soviet modernisation was the answer, despite its extremely destructive ecological relations. Today, China has such an attraction as well with its growth-driven political economy. This is an anthropocentric and Promethean Marxism, marked by a fetish for eco-cidal industrial
development. Whether married to a first or a second stage of revolutionary change, these frameworks are deeply flawed from an ontological point of view.

In addition, the national question approach is based on an 'additive model of change'. Thus, while a non-reductionist approach to class and race were the primary contradictions in the national liberation struggle, this was then extended to include the women's question and oppression. A hierarchy of oppressions was set up within the national liberation canon and this was mediated by the contingencies of the struggle within the national democratic revolution. However, this can easily degenerate into a static understanding of society such that the complexities, contradictions and dynamics of change in a social formation are not fully grasped. Looking at the Freedom Charter, the cornerstone programmatic basis of the ANC-led national liberation movement, and post-apartheid policy documents of the ANC, there is no ecological thrust in these documents that makes the connection between race, class, gender and ecological relations. National liberation thought has no conception of the ecological, even on the terms of its 'additive model of change'. While climate determinism will register and will probably be added to the national question roster of contradictions, this will largely be an add-on that is reactive to a changing reality and not based on a deeper understanding of how it relates to the making of an eco-cidal capitalism in South Africa. This will not be an effective basis to shift society and can easily be about green climate capitalism, a false solution.

Finally, South Africa’s vanguardist national liberation forces (the ANC-led Alliance) are the real custodians of the national question, not the people. These forces are firmly entrenched in a carbon capitalist trajectory and the reproduction of South Africa’s minerals–energy complex, revealing another fundamental weakness of the national question approach to the dangerous climate contradiction and eco-cide. Theory and theoretical analysis, as the basis to guide revolutionary practice, cannot be the preserve of ideologues and vanguardist forces that proclaim to have the monopoly on the truth. Vanguards lose their way and are not the guarantor of ‘revolutionary success’, even for the resolution of the national question. History has repeatedly shown this to be the case, including in contemporary South Africa. Put differently, South Africa’s vanguardist forces, such as the ANC and SACP, are historically exhausted, have failed and cannot be the basis to address the eco-cide question. An alternative politics is required to address the eco-cide question and challenge.

While the national question framework has had a decisive impact on the national liberation struggle, it is outdated, discredited and incapable of dealing
with the life-threatening challenge of the climate crisis contradiction within global and South African capitalism. As it stands, the national question framework is married to carbon capitalism in South Africa and an avaricious resource nationalism in practice. It might take on elements of a green climate capitalism but this will not be enough. The national question framework is part of the problem. The climate crisis and more generally the eco-cide question has to be the basis for a new emancipatory, deeply democratic and transformative politics. The time for the eco-cide question is now.

**THESIS 7**

Securing a future and overcoming the eco-cidal logic of capitalism lies in a democratic eco-socialist nation-building project. Such a project has to confront the climate crisis through deep just transitions, grounded in radical non-racialism, mass transformative politics and the reclamation of our sovereignty to sustain life.

The eco-cide question is the question of our time, for present and future generations and for human and non-human life forms. We cannot sustain life on planet Earth, including South Africa, with runaway global warming and worsening ecological crises. This is not about catastrophism, eco-fatalism or end of times millenarianism. The doomsday clock is ticking but there is still time to act. A fundamental shift in planetary consciousness is required to deal with and overcome the logic of capitalist eco-cide. As I have argued, global leadership in multilateral institutions and in national states are not up to this task. Actually they have failed. In this regard, crucial political imperatives have to be advanced and realised, noting that these imperatives are emerging from grassroots mass movements, radical intellectuals, progressive think tanks and activists engaged with the challenge of sustaining life.24 These imperatives include the following:

- Scientific evidence produced by the UN, NASA and the World Meteorological Organisation, geologists and Earth scientists are compelling in enabling us to understand the scale, pace and current and prospective impacts of the climate crisis. Embracing the science of climate change and other ecological crises has to be the basis for
understanding the eco-cide question and has to be made understandable to all in the public sphere.

- Planetary eco-cide is about understanding how ecological relations have been racialised, classed, gendered and imbricated in various forms of oppressions. It has been central to supremacist whiteness and is about understanding the political economy of 500 years of destruction of human and non-human life in the making of capitalism’s eco-cidal logic. Genocides, slavery, species extinction, colonialism, industrial-scale violence, apartheid and human brutalisation are central to this history of the origins and making of capitalism. These relations can no longer be reified and ignored as part of capitalism’s ‘endless accumulation’ logic. Moreover, with climate change, there are and will be disproportionate impacts on workers, the poor, indigenous peoples, black lives, women peasant farmers and more generally the poorer and darker nations of the world. Capital’s eco-cidal logic is deeply racist and anti-life, more generally. Confronting planetary eco-cide is also about confronting supremacist whiteness and advancing decolonisation as part of radical non-racialism.

- Radical non-racialism has to be re-engaged as the basis for renewing and building mass people’s power to confront capitalism’s eco-cidal logic. This means the anti-capitalism, anti-racism and anti-oppression thrusts of radical non-racialism have to be harnessed to unite social forces, build alliances (of workers, the landless, peasants, women’s organisations, the permanently unemployed, radical intellectuals, students and middle classes) and advance movements to sustain life. These movements are already on the march at the frontlines of confronting carbon extractivism, land grabs, protecting the water, seed and forest commons, protesting against nuclear energy, fighting for decent work and more. Such movements are engaged in finding transformative and systemic alternatives to the contradictions of eco-cidal capitalism in local, national, regional and global spheres. The imperative is to bring out the best of humanity, including human consciousness, solidarity and collective endeavour to scale up these alternatives and sustain life in South Africa and beyond.

- Deep just transitions and democratic eco-socialisms are the horizons and visionary concepts of anti-eco-cide politics. The system change logic of systemic alternatives, such as food sovereignty, the solidarity economy, climate jobs, indigenous knowledge systems, rights of nature, socially
owned renewable energy, mass renewable energy public transport, zero waste, universal basic income grants, water commoning, democratic planning and more, are about deep just transitions beyond capitalism, from within and outside. It is about harnessing deep democracy at the household, community, village, town, city and country level to constitute transformative power from below. At the same time, such deep democracy practices assist with reclaiming, re-embedding and transforming the state so that the people can govern. It is about affirming an eco-centric ethics in our relationship with human and non-human life, while meeting human needs. Simply, the democratic eco-socialism project is about ending the capitalist war with nature and affirming human life, black and white, as part of renewing nation building in South Africa.

NOTES

1 Frederikse (1990) argues for the official unbreakable thread of non-racialism as central to the ANC. See Everatt (2009) for a more complexified history on the origins of non-racialism.

2 A people’s history of struggle and radical non-racialism still has to be written in South Africa beyond the mythologies of the ANC’s official non-racialism or big-man histories.

3 See Suttner and Cronin (1986) for an important history of the Congress of the People campaign and how the Freedom Charter was put together through peoples’ demands and ideas from below.

4 The National Union of Mineworkers adopted the Freedom Charter. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, the most left-wing affiliate of Cosatu, adopted the Freedom Charter as well as committed to developing a more explicit working-class programme. See Forrest (2011: 418).

5 See Seekings (2000) for an ‘instrumentalist history’ of the UDF, in which the ANC made it all happen and was determining. This is another example of official non-racialism in the historiography of South Africa’s struggle, which needs to be challenged through a people’s history of liberation. Of course, this is not to argue that the ANC did not have influence but to over-exaggerate its role in history is propagandistic. It also takes away from the agency of the people and people’s organisations.

6 This is the Mandela that has to be read and reclaimed for our contemporary period. See Mandela (1994), particularly the chapter ‘The Struggle is My Life’.

See Mngxitama, Alexander and Gibson (2008) and Pityana et al. (1991). Both are important collections reflecting on the legacy and impact of Black Consciousness.

See Mangcu (2015).

See Erasmus (2017: 141).

See Chinguno et al. (2017), which is a compilation of reflections and analyses by students involved with Fallist politics and student protests at Wits University.

Stuart Hall (1980), building on Gramsci, assists us to think about the contradictory, non-deterministic and contingent ways in which ideology operates. His method of articulation and how ideologies are constituted through various elements, linked to power and material conditions, is instructive.

I have covered this ground in other work, which I draw on for this part of the argument. See Satgar (2008, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2015).

According to Statistics South Africa (2017a), the unemployment rate was at 27.7% in 2017 and income inequality was at 0.68 (2017b), with sharp increases in income per capita inequality among whites and Indians. Both the unemployment rate and per capita income inequality are among the highest in the world.

The crisis of Cosatu is well documented in Satgar and Southall (2015) and Bezuidenhout and Tshoaedi (2017).

Southall (2016: 42) provides a crucial analysis of the new black middle class. He also looks at the size problem covered in the various studies that deal with this issue. The largest measurement suggests the new black middle class comprised 9.3 million, in 2008, as part of the population.


A land audit done by Agri-SA suggests that white farmer ownership of agricultural land declined from 85.1% in 1994 to 73.3% in 2016. See J. de Lange, ‘Who owns SA’s land?’ City Press, 29 October 2017, p. 8.

The science and urgency of the climate crisis is also covered in the previous volume in this series. See Satgar (2018).

EDGAR (2016) highlights that South Africa was 40th in the world in 2015 in terms of carbon emissions per capita and was 18th in global ranks in 2015 in terms of aggregate emissions.

South Africa’s debt to GDP ratio is increasing and is currently at about 56%. State-owned enterprises are highly indebted and if these institutions default the entire fiscal system could be brought down. At the same time, looting of public resources is inducing tax fatigue and a massive leakage of public finance.

Mzala (1988) provides a useful account of the intellectual genealogy and itinerary of the national question approach. It should be noted that Marxism has also had other approaches to racism and colonialism. See chapter 1 in this volume.

Other Marxists utilised neo-Poulantzian structural analysis, racial Fordism and modes of production approaches. See two useful collections that capture the national question approach in South Africa: Van Diepen (1988) and more recently Webster and Pampallis (2017). What is striking about the latter collection is the complete absence of any recognition of the corporate-induced climate crisis and its eco-cidal implications by the contributors.

See also Satgar (2018) for more in-depth engagement with democratic eco-socialist systemic alternatives, practices and pathways.
REFERENCES


