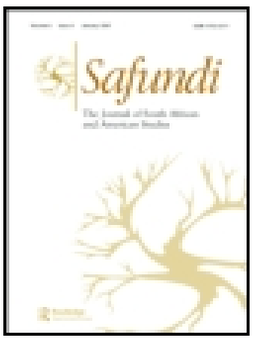

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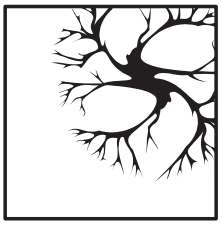

In Search of a Nation

NATION BUILDING IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

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When the African National Congress (ANC) won the first democratic election in South Africa's history in April 1994, it set out to implement its longstanding aim of building a "truly united, non-racial, and non-sexist nation" (ANC 1997a: 1).[1] For decades, a white oligarchy, fueled at first by Afrikaner nationalism and later by white survival politics, systematically engineered a brutal system of racial discrimination and of political, social, and economic oppression of the country's nonwhite population (see Leatt, Kneifel, and Nürnberger 1986, 66-88). Facing the ravages of apartheid, the ANC-led government saw as a key objective the eradication of racism and discrimination and the healing of the deep racial and ethnic divisions fracturing the nation's soul. A major component of this effort at national reconciliation is the government's project of "nation building," to wit, to create a new national identity—"forging a new South Africanism" (Carrim 1998, 1) out of the deeply divided subnational identities left by the apartheid legacy. The term *rainbow nation* became popular as a metaphor for symbolizing the "'new' South Africa, the imaginary nation being constructed in the post-apartheid era" (Baines 1998, 1). The metaphor captures the intent of the nation building project, namely, "to forge greater national unity and provide for the expression of diversity" (Carrim 1998, 1).

It is this tension between unity and diversity—between a national identity and a plethora of subnational identities—that has become the site for increasing frustration and vigorous debate in recent years in South Africa's political and cultural circles. Some have portrayed the government's nation building project as a thinly veiled attempt to subvert the relative autonomy of subnational groups in the interest of establishing African cultural hegemony (see Groep van 63 2000; Barrell 2000, 1). On the other hand, there are those within the African National Congress who, impatient with the slow progress in

1. For an excellent overview of the ANC's interpretation of and commitment to "nonracialism," from the organization's inception to the 1994 democratic elections, see Robert Price, "Race and Reconciliation in the New South Africa," *Politics & Society* 25, no. 2 (June 1997), 149-78.

the country's social and political transformation, are pressing for a more robust Africanist approach to the "national question" (see Van Vuuren 2000, 15).

The key question is this: How does the ANC's nation building project foster the development of a new nonracial South African national character precisely in the context of a multicultural democratic society? As Boyce correctly notes, the fundamental question in negotiating the tension between unity and diversity in defining the country's national character is this: "What should the post-apartheid South African nation look like?" (1999, 234). From this question, several other key issues follow. What does the term *nation* mean in the new South Africa? Who is included in the "nation" and who is excluded, and on what basis? What precise content does—or should—the construct *nation* have? Who determines that content and on what basis? From whence does the national identity gain its salience and power to transcend the particularities of ethnicity and race and function as a unifying bond? What is the appropriate relationship between the overarching national identity and the multiplicity of subnational identities?

In this paper, I examine the ANC government's nation building project in light of these questions. Insofar as nation building intends to secure the full and equal participation of all of South Africa's citizens in its fledgling democracy, it should be applauded. Moreover, to the extent that the ANC's nation building endeavor seeks to provide desperately needed redress for the deplorable political, social, and economic inequalities inherited from the apartheid regime, the effort is laudable. However, in what follows, I claim that the theoretical framework and the conceptual dynamic that animate the ANC-led project of nation building are deeply problematic. Indeed, the problems inherent in this nation building effort prompt me to suggest that, ironically, "nation building" may do more harm than good at this stage in the life of South Africa's young democracy. Instead, the government will do well to spend its efforts on concrete attempts to foster democratic institutions and a democratic culture.

Nation Building in Post-Apartheid South Africa

In this section, I sketch briefly the contours of the ANC's nation building project. Then I examine two basic and interrelated weaknesses that threaten to undermine the merits of the project. To anticipate, the two weaknesses are these. (1) The theoretical framework of the nation building project remains beholden to the racialized discourse of its nemesis, apartheid. The fact that the ANC's discourse forms a "mirror response" (Maré 1999, 248) to apartheid discourse, and considering the continued the incorporation of "liberation" rhetoric in this discourse as an explanatory tool, means that the emerging national identity will be ambivalent at best and divisive at worst. In any case, this "nationhood" will lack the political and emotional power to command the loyalty of South Africa's diverse—and still deeply divided—population. (2) Since *race* continues to function prominently in the ANC's construal of the national character, the temptation is overwhelming to identify the dominant culture (in this case, the "African majority") with the common culture (the democratic "nonracial" national culture the ANC envisions). Not only will this lead to a kind of ethnic imperialism, it will also

endanger the development of a robust democratic culture. Put succinctly, these weaknesses jeopardize two key relationships in any democracy, namely, the relationship between the nation's *common culture* and the *dominant culture* and the relationship between the *common culture* and the *plurality of cultures* that constitute the society (see Degenaar 1992, 7).

We turn first to an examination of the theoretical framework of the ANC's nation building discourse. In an astute analysis, Gerhard Maré argues that "there has not been a conceptualization or theoretical formulation of the struggle against apartheid, nor a history of that struggle, adequate to allow the task of creating a unified commitment to a central political authority in post-apartheid South Africa" (Maré 1999, 245). Consequently, any attempt by the government to generate a concept of "nation" is destined to be constructed "on the basis of an exclusive rider, such as 'race'" (245). The reason for this, contends Maré, is that in the liberationist struggle against apartheid, both apartheid and the opposition to that regime's rule on the basis of race were "racialized"; that is, both the apartheid demagogues and the ANC elites who opposed them were interpreting social relations in the South African context as based on the existence of distinct "races" (251). Thus, the ANC's discourse about the "nation" and "national identity" became "a racialized construct to mirror the racialized state" (246) under apartheid rule. ANC rhetoric became a "mirror response" (Maré 1999, 248) to the racialized discourse of the apartheid regime.

> When oppositional attempts were being made to theorise the position of social groups as it related to nation-building, debates around the "national question" as well as "colonialism of a special type" (or "internal colonialism"), built on these same foundations—foundations whose strength lay precisely in the *obviousness* of "race" conflict…(Maré 1999, 246).

It is against this theoretical background that the ANC's vision of a "nonracial" South African nation must be viewed. For, as Maré correctly points out, as a "mirror response" to apartheid discourse, talk of "nonracialism" *assumes*, explicitly or implicitly, the existence of "four races (at best 'four race-nations')" (247): whites, Africans, Coloureds, and Indians. *Nonracialism*, therefore, does not imply the disappearance, or even the sublimation, of race as a defining category of the nation; rather, the construct "will merely mean that such 'racial' categories will not form the basis of discrimination" (247-48). This leads Boyce to claim that nonracialism constitutes an essentially *defensive* posture, intent on "managing our diversity rather than [on] engaging in a much more radical and transformative debate" (Boyce 1999, 236). Indeed, as the ANC document "Nation-Formation and Nation-Building" puts it, integrating South African society "across racial, language, ethnic and other barriers" means striving for a "healthy equilibrium" between the various racial and ethnic communities, a kind of "balance" between the centrifugal ('disintegrative') and centripetal ('integrative') tendencies" (ANC 1997a, 5).[2]

2. For a historical analysis of the racialized discourse in South Africa with reference to nation building, see Degenaar 1992, especially 2-5, 11-14.

It could be objected that, given the multicultural (and multiracial) nature of South African society, it would be foolish to ignore the centrality of *race* in constructing a national identity. Moreover, maintaining a "healthy equilibrium" between the racial and ethnic identities might go a long way toward achieving national reconciliation and a sense of nationhood. Furthermore, given the inequalities created by the apartheid regime in the interest of securing and maintaining political, social, and economic privilege for the white minority, how can justice (and national reconciliation) be achieved apart from "the liberation of Africans in particular and black people in general from political and economic bondage" (ANC 1997b, 6)?

However, when the ANC's racialized discourse is viewed in the context of the "binary oppositions" (Maré 1999, 248) that developed as a consequence of its self-understanding and practice as a liberation movement, these objections become deeply problematic. For its liberationist rhetoric injects into nonracialism's goal of "managing" the country's racial diversity a reductionistic logic of *opposition* and *mutual exclusion* that, eventually, jeopardizes the creation of the very *nonracial*, democratic South African society the nation building project seeks to achieve. Let me expound on this point.

In the ANC's literature, the "logic of binary opposition" (248)—principally between "oppressor" and "oppressed"—is especially apparent in the characterization of the South African historical situation as "colonialism of a special type" (ANC 1987). Colonialism in South Africa is "of a special type" insofar as there is "no spatial separation between the colonizing power (the white minority state) and the colonised black people" (ANC 1987, 1). What unites South African colonialism and classic forms of colonial oppression is "one central characteristic—the denial of the African people of their rights of national self-determination" (2-3). The binary opposition of colonizer–colonized now takes on deeply *racial* connotations. The colonizer is the white minority regime while the colonized comprise the country's black, and particularly, African, majority. Notwithstanding attempts in the ANC literature to distinguish between the white political *regime* and the white *population* (see, for example, ANC 2001, 3), the "people of South Africa" is still construed as consisting of two antagonistic blocs—one white, one black (Maré 1999, 250). Thus, the goal of the ANC-led government's nation building project is understandable; namely, to achieve a state of "non-antagonistic relations between 'races'"—that is, the absence of racism and any form of discrimination (Maré 1999, 250). Creating this "healthy equilibrium"—a "united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society"—involves "the resolution of the antagonistic contradictions between the oppressed majority and their oppressors; as well as the resolution of the national grievance arising from the colonial relations" (ANC 1997a, 2).

However, the fact that the construct *colonizer–colonized* tags the reality of two (antagonistic) racial "blocs" results in democracy *itself* being racialized. Maré comments:

> I argue that because the organising principle of CST [Colonialism of a Special Type] is "race," democracy has also been inadequately theorised and hence remains racialised. It is difficult to see how the "colonizers" can become fellow citizens with more than formal equality, in their own eyes, but especially in the eyes of the "colonised." The temptation, even if not yet the consistent practice, will be to see democracy as a victory of a "race" majority (Maré 1999, 250).

In his extensive writing on nation building and democracy creation in South Africa, philosopher Johan Degenaar has warned of the deleterious effects of racialized discourse on the health of a democracy. But Degenaar also shows how employing race in the service of nation building programs can easily lead to forms of "ethnic imperialism." Degenaar notes that the construct *nation* limns "the congruence of culture and power, of people and state" (Degenaar 1992, 2). In multicultural situations, unlike in homogeneous societies, *nation* refers not to the domination of one dominant culture over others but rather to loyalty to a "transcendent factor" that transcends the strictures of race, class, language, and ethnicity (2). A crucial question for societies seeking national unity through pursuance of a "transcendent factor" is this: "What is the relationship between the culture of a particular community and the broader culture of society which now claims congruence with state power whereby legitimacy for political rule is acquired?" (Degenaar 1992, 7). Implied in this question is the principal danger of this form of political life, namely, "how not to succumb to a form of Jacobinism according to which the dominant culture takes itself to be the common culture" (12). If a clear distinction between the "transcendent" common culture and the dominant culture is not vigorously maintained, such a society can easily lapse into a form of cultural "imperialism" (7). As I hope to show below, the framework, logic, and goals of the ANC's construal of nation building, outlined earlier, make the project particularly vulnerable to the danger this Jacobin move.

The Travail of Nation Building in South Africa

As I mentioned, given the oppositional logic of ANC discourse, particularly its tendency to limn binary constructs like oppressor–oppressed *racially*, the government's quest for "a broader South African national identity" (Carrim 1998, 2) is especially vulnerable to the Jacobin danger. This is particularly obvious when one observes the interrelation of terms like *majority rule*, *national self-determination*, and *nation building* in ANC discourse. The ANC construes the South African liberation struggle as "an anti-colonialist national liberation struggle." The ultimate aim of this struggle is the achievement of "national self-determination or national sovereignty" (ANC 1987, 3) for the country's black, and particularly African, people. And such national self-determination is centered in the creation of "a democratic state based on the principle of majority rule" (4). The connection between national self-determination and majority rule is clear from the following statement: "Black majority rule is thus merely the form through which the oppressed, colonised peoples of South Africa will achieve the content of their struggle for national self-determination" (ANC 1987, 4).

Once again, the racialized binary of oppressor–oppressed functions as the interpretive category for determining the meaning and the interrelation of the relevant terms. National self-determination and majority rule become the prerogative—indeed, the moral imperative—of the colonized, and *only* of the colonized. As Jordan has claimed, "the right to self-determination or to national freedom/independence does not apply to the dominant group, but is applied exclusively to the oppressed or dominated group"

(Jordan 1994, 3). And since the colonized is per definition the nation's black (and particularly African) people, "national self-determination" coincides with "black majority rule." It is hard not to agree with Maré that democracy, now interpreted as black majority rule, can be construed as anything more than a "'race' victory."

This construal places the country's white population—and increasingly its Coloured and Indian populations, as well as other emerging minorities—in an awkward position relative to claims to self-determination. The ANC has made it clear that the liberation struggle "was a struggle against a system of oppression, not against Whites as a race" (ANC 2001, 4). And yet, in its literature, whites are, either implicitly or explicitly, identified with the "oppressor" side of the equation. Two examples will suffice. A recent ANC policy document on racism states, "The resolution of the [colonial] conflict, therefore, required the destruction of the racist regime in order to build a single nation *out of the oppressed and the oppressor groups*. The remains the ANC's historic mission" (ANC 2001, 4, emphasis mine). Contra the ANC's stated intention, this statement lumps together as "the oppressor group" ("whites as a race") and the "racist regime" perpetrated by the apartheid elite, thus placing whites outside the organizational and moral ambit of the quest for self-determination. The "self" in self-determination is the province of the oppressed. And the oppressed apparently does not include the white "race"—or includes it only insofar as whites are willing and able to identify with the aims and goals of black self-determination. As a second example, President Thabo Mbeki recently employed the same oppositional rhetoric to characterize South Africa as consisting of "two nations, one black and the other white" (Mbeki 1998, 3). The white "nation" is "relatively prosperous…and has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure.…The second and larger nation is black and poor…" (3-4). Mbeki attributes the persistence of these "two nations" to the "perpetuation of the racial, gender, and spatial disparities born of a very long period of *colonial* and apartheid white minority domination" (4, my emphasis).[3] Once again, the binary logic of oppressor-oppressed serves to inject *race* as the principal explanation of the nation's woes.

The ambiguity and ambivalence in the ANC's discourse is not surprising, given its continued use of the oppressor-oppressed category as a fundamental interpretive tool. The mutually exclusive nature of the binary constructs of "oppressor" and "oppressed," refracted through a particular construal of the category of *race*, creates a racialized hermeneutic that has three principal drawbacks. First, it is incapable of addressing the role of the white minority without invoking racial categories reminiscent of apartheid. Indeed, the oppositional categories of "oppressor" and "oppressed" are inadequate as a hermeneutic tool for negotiating the relationship between minority cultures and the national culture *as such*. In the emerging ethnic and cultural pluralism that is beginning to characterize post-apartheid South Africa, this is bound to exacerbate this already

3. For a forceful critique of Mbeki's "two nations" explanation of inequality in post-apartheid South Africa, see Nicoli Natrass and Jeremy Seekings, "'Two Nations'? Race and Economic Inequality in South Africa Today," *Daedalus* 130, no. 1: 45-70. For a contrasting perspective, see Adam Habib, "Economic Policy and Power Relations in South Africa's Transition to Democracy," *World Development* 28, no. 2 (2000), 245-63.

conflictual relationship.[4] For ANC intelligentsia to continue to avail themselves of this conceptual rhetoric in a post-apartheid situation does not bode well for its ability to govern effectively in a pluralistic democracy.[5] Second, it continues the racialized discourse made prominent under the apartheid regime, albeit now from the vantage point of the oppressed majority. Third, considered together, the two previous points have implications that make the pursuit of a *common* South African identity very problematic indeed.

Let us, then, consider the implications of the above points for the discussion about nation building. The term *national* is consistently paired with *self-determination*. And in the ANC literature, the right to "self-determination" is accorded the country's black (particularly African) people only; nowhere is any other ethnic group given the right to national self-determination. This prompts the question: Does this mean that the dominant majority, expressing itself politically and institutionally through the ANC-led government, has the right—or assumes the right—to define the national identity, the nation's collective "self"? And in a post-apartheid situation in which Coloureds and Indians are showing signs of deep alienation from the ANC (see Simmons 2001; Grimond 2001), will the national "self" become the vehicle for *African* cultural hegemony? Degenaar's question is pertinent: "Who has the authority to constitute the self referred to in the expression 'national self-determination'? Who is the appropriate self for self-determination?" (1992,14). Given its racialized, oppositional discourse, and emboldened by its two-thirds majority in Parliament,[6] the ANC may be sorely tempted to claim the authority to fill the national "self" with its own construal of South Africa as an "African nation." And in doing so, the ANC-led government will conflate the dominant culture

4. As Maré has pointed out, the ANC's adoption during the liberation struggle of the conceptual apparatus of "Colonialism of a Special Type" "close[d] the door on alternatives to ANC-led opposition to apartheid. Those who did not support the obvious correct position of opposition to 'colonial' rule…the policy of apartheid, were in the service of their colonial masters…The notion of democratic pluralism was difficult to maintain under such conditions" (Maré 1999, 249).
5. According to Maré, a large part of the ANC's current difficulties has to do with its continued effort to style itself as a "national liberation movement" (see, for example, ANC 1997b) as opposed to being a political party in a multiparty political context. Indeed, ANC leaders consider "trite" attempts to "counterpose this to being 'a party' in the broad sense or as understood by adherents of formal bourgeois democracy" (13). But in the context of a pluralistic democracy, the ANC-led government is subjected to intense public scrutiny. Moreover, the apartheid monster in terms of which it constructed its liberationist discourse, exists now only as a legacy. Thus, says Maré, the "contradictions of [the ANC's] present position (neither movement nor party) will undoubtedly continue to erode either its nation-building project (claimed within its guise as an overarching movement) or (much less likely) its operation as a governing party…(Maré 1999, 252). The challenge before the ANC, says Maré, is to redirect its claims from being a liberation movement to that of being a party that offered a moral vision for the country *as a whole*… (253, my emphasis). He concludes, "If the ANC can no longer function as the oppositional pole to apartheid and, hence, not as the core of the nation-building project as at present expressed, it can meet the demands of its principles…and commit itself to safeguarding and extending democracy" (253).
6. Phil Mtimkulu suggests that it is likely that the ANC will use the power of its two-thirds majority in Parliament to be more aggressive about "delivering" on the promises of its project to "transform" South Africa's political, social, and economic landscape. See his article, "One Party Domination, Transformation and Democracy: Critical Challenges Facing the African National Congress (ANC) in the New Millennium," *Mots Pluriels* 13 (April 2000), 1-17.

with the common culture (the national character), thus realizing the danger of Jacobinism that Degenaar has pointed out.

Opposition to Nation Building in South Africa

For many subnational groups in South Africa today, the ANC-inspired and directed dominant culture has *already* begun to shape the country's national identity. And a number of politicians, intellectuals, and members of ethnic and cultural minority groups are growing increasingly vocal in their opposition to the nation building project. Some of these objections will be reflected in the discussion below.

The fundamental danger in allowing the dominant culture to determine the national identity is this: When the crucial distinction between dominant culture and common culture collapses, so does the *transcendent* character of the common culture. As we noted earlier, the unifying function of the common culture resides precisely in its ability to transcend *all* ethnic and racial communities, inspiring them to rally around a set of truly *common* values or ideals. Conflating the dominant culture with the common culture fatally compromises the *transcending* function of the national identity. At least two implications are likely to follow.

First, ethnic and cultural groups that do not share any or all of the dominant culture's ideals or values, or their construal of the character of the nation, will find it difficult to identify with the proffered "national identity." At best, they will express suspicion or ambivalence toward it. The ANC's recent call to "assert African hegemony" in South Africa illustrates this point. The appeal for African hegemony is part of the Mbeki government's call for an "African renaissance," an effort to demonstrate that "an undervalued and urecognised continent can rule itself successfully" (Adam 1998, 3; see also Mbeki 1998). But to ascertain the meaning of "African hegemony" in the context of *South African* society, the connection between this concept and the project of nation building must be carefully examined. On one level, African hegemony and nation building connect to affirm the desire for an African renaissance mentioned above, namely, that the identity of the emerging South African nation "should truly be an African nation on the African continent" (ANC 1997a, 4). This means that the nascent South African nation should not be "a clone…of the US and UK in outlook; in the style and content of its media; in its cultural expression; in its food; in the language accents of its children; and so forth" (4). But it is when one asks about the precise content the word *African* in the phrase *African hegemony* should have that questions begin to surface. Note how the word *majority* informs the phrase *African hegemony* in the following statement:

> The main content of the NDR [the ANC-led National Democratic Revolution] is the liberation of Black people in general, and Africans in particular. They are in the majority, and they constitute even an overwhelmingly larger majority of the poor. *Related to this* is the identity of the South African nation in the making: whether it should truly be an African nation on the African continent…Hence,

> what is required is a continuing battle to assert African hegemony in the context of a multi-cultural and non-racial society (ANC 1997a, 4, my emphasis).

The statement seems to imply that it is the prerogative of the majority—"Black people in general, and Africans in particular"—to determine the content of the term *African* in the phrase *African hegemony*. This observation is confirmed unequivocally by a high-ranking ANC intellectual: "In the long term…this national identity will revolve primarily around the culture, values and interests of the African majority…" (Carrim 1998, 2). And if this construal is placed in the context of the ANC's racialized oppositional discourse discussed earlier, then it is hard to avoid the conclusion that "African hegemony" masks a Jacobin maneuver to assert an ethnically defined dominant culture as the nation's common culture. It is precisely this move that has caused increasing friction between the government's nation building efforts and vocal spokespersons from several of the country's ethnic and cultural groups. This brings us to the second implication of the danger inherent in collapsing the distinction between dominant culture and common culture.

To begin with, some minorities, such as Indians and Coloureds, are beginning to feel increasing alienated from the "common culture," as defined by the government's nation building project. A recent survey found that the Indian population, particularly the unskilled and poor among them, experience the government's economic restructuring programs as deeply unsettling. Similarly, Coloureds complain that "under apartheid we were not white enough, now we are not black enough" (Grimond 2001, 2; see also Simmons 2001).[7]

More important, however, is that some of these subnational groups are beginning to experience this alienation as hegemonic and oppressive—as a Jacobin attempt to force an alien culture on them, thus threatening their own culture's integrity. Ironically, the ANC's call for an "African hegemony" comes at a time when, emboldened by the collapse of apartheid's "legislated identities" (Moodley and Adam 2000, 51), ethnic and cultural groups are emerging in post-apartheid South African to assert their identities in the freedom afforded by the new democracy. The stimulus for the charge that "African hegemony" amounts to the attempt to impose an ethnically defined dominant culture on the multicultural context of South African society can be traced to the ANC's own description of the relationship between the "national identity" and racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. The description of this relationship in the ANC literature is ambiguous, at best, and confusing, at worst. From its inception, the ANC has acknowledged that South Africa is an ethnically and culturally diverse society. South Africa's racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity "enriches our unity" (ANC 2001, 3). Moreover, people will have "multiple identities," and they should be given space to express these identities (Carrim 1998, 2; ANC 1997a, 4). However, the freedom and the

7. Lee Watkins wrote an interesting account of the negotiation of identities among Coloured hip-hop artists in the Cape Town area. Disenchanted with the "myth of national unity, as propagated by the state," these artists express through their music both their alienation from political life in post-apartheid South Africa and their conscious attempts to construct new identities. See Lee Watkins, "'*Simunye*: We are not one': Ethnicity, Difference and the Hip-hoppers of Cape Town," *Race & Class* 43, no. 1 (2001), 29-44.

"space" in which to express these identities is bounded by the desire for "the emergence of a common South African identity" (ANC 1997a, 4), as is clear in the following statement: People may express their multiple identities "in a way that fosters the evolution of a South African national identity" (Carrim 1998, 3). The "national identity," thus, *sets the parameters for the construal and expression of subnational identities*.[8]

It is, therefore, not surprising that some ethnic and cultural minorities in South Africa are denouncing the ANC-led government's nation building project as hegemonic and oppressive. Perhaps the most significant criticism comes from a loosely associated group of Afrikaans academics, literary critics, writers, and journalists, who are concerned about the increasing marginalization of the Afrikaans culture and language in post-apartheid South Africa.[9] One group, calling itself "Groep van 63" (Group of 63), is launching a "cultural political strategy" (*kultuur-politieke strategie*), to ensure that "a democratic Afrikaans-speaking world can assume its rightful place [in South Africa] as a historically conscious community" (Groep van 63 2000a, 1, my translation).[10] Specifically,

8. The point can also be made by examining the ANC's ambivalence about the continuing usefulness of the *rainbow nation* term. While the term is helpful in limning cultural diversity, it can become counterproductive when it is used as a pretext for "fossilis[ing] ethnic and racial identities and entrench[ing] a form of multi-racialism in which each community largely inhabits its own separate cultural universe" (Carrim 1998, 3). This concern rightly invokes the deleterious effects of racial and ethnic manipulation under the apartheid regime. Moreover, the term *rainbow nation* hampers the "emergence of a new [South] African nation" when it is employed to "express the character of South African society as one made up of black Africans who pay allegiance to Africa, whites who pay allegiance to Europe, Indians who pay allegiance to India, and Coloureds somewhere in the undefined middle of the rainbow…" (ANC 1997a, 4). But what does it mean "to pay allegiance" to Africa or Europe or India? If "paying allegiance to" refers to a sense of patriotism stemming from pride of citizenship, then most South Africans, black and white, are paying allegiance to their country—and, by extension, to the African continent. What more can the phrase be taken to mean? It helps to remember that the statement above appears in a discussion about the need to assert African hegemony "in the context of a multi-cultural and multi-racial society" (ANC 1997a, 4). The *rainbow nation* construct gets in the way of asserting African hegemony; it hampers "the process towards the emergence of a new African nation" (4). Or, as Carrim puts it, the national identity provides room for the expression of multiple identities, provided that they "are reconcilable with it" (Carrim 1998, 2). And, as we have already noted, the national identity consists of the "culture, values and interests of the African majority." Thus, the ethnically defined dominant culture, flying under the banner of "African hegemony," and now construed *as the common culture*, sets the parameters for the formation and expression of subnational identities. On this interpretation, it is probably not too much of a stretch to surmise that "paying allegiance to Africa" implies expressing loyalty to the ANC's understanding of South African society as "a new African nation."
9. The Afrikaners launching this initiative style themselves as "nuwe Afrikaners" [new Afrikaners]. By this appellation, they mean to describe Afrikaners who exhibit the following characteristics: (a) They have a sense for democracy and cultivate an openness for the diversity of accents and idioms among Afrikaners; (b) they are not xenophobic; (c) they are conscious of their responsibility to help rebuild the African continent; (d) they seek to build a robust communal consciousness among Afrikaners; and (e) they admit that "our shared history" is characterized by serious mistakes (Danie Goosen, "Metapolitieke Bemagtiging en die Nuwe Afrikaners" [Metapolitical Empowerment and the New Afrikaners]. Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the South African Academy, January 22, 2001.
10. Mariana Kriel has shown an interesting connection between the linguistic and cultural motivation of groups like Groep van 63 and the nascent Afrikaner nationalism that animates it. See her article "1875/2000 Paarl/Hammanskraal: 'Om te staan vir (ons nasie se belange en) ons taal [To stand up for

they are advocating for the "metapolitical empowerment" of the Afrikaner—the power to protect and nurture the founding symbols (*stigtende simbole*) of the Afrikaans minority (see Goosen 2001, 7)[11] so as to prevent the marginalization—and perhaps even disappearance—of Afrikaans culture.

Groep van 63's most important—and potentially most controversial—claim is its insistence that the rights and interests of Afrikaners as a *minority* be constitutionally ensconced.[12] Indeed, the group claims to be fighting for the protection of the rights of *all* minority groups in South Africa, not just the Afrikaans community. For many South Africans, though, talk about group or minority rights or group differentiation (or even ethnicity) is strongly associated with the ethnic manipulation and racial discrimination perpetrated by the former apartheid regime (Bornman n.d., 6)[13]—hence the controversial nature of Groep van 63's endeavor. The group is very clear, however, about the reasons for its "cultural political strategy." The nation building project of the ANC-led government will result in Jacobin domination of the political and cultural claims of the African majority, to the detriment of the interests of the country's minority groups.[14] Such a situation endangers the viability of the nation's young democracy. The constitutional recognition and protection of the rights of minorities not only coheres with international trends in multicultural societies, it is also the only way to safeguard the society from devolving into a monolithic culture, on the one hand, or to stimulate the emergence of fundamentalism or xenophobic ethnocentrism, on the other (Groep van 63a, 6). Providing constitutional protection for minorities allows for the "creative participation" (*skeppende betrokkenheid*) of these communities in the "greater whole" of South African society. The group argues for a dramatic shift in South Africa's political life from the outmoded (modern) quest for the nation-state—characterized by the subjection

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(our nation's interests and) our language]" Paper delivered at the First International Conference of the Linguistic Associations of South Africa in January 2000.

11. Most of the other Afrikaans groups that are emerging—among the more prominent, PRAAG (Pro Afrikaanse Aksie Groep [Pro-Afrikaans Action Group], Stigting vir Afrikaans [Foundation for Afrikaans])—share Groep van 63's broad aims. The extent of sympathy and influence these groups command among Afrikaans-speaking South Africans is not clear. For an excellent overview of the political, cultural, and economic situation of Afrikaners in post-apartheid South Africa, see Mads Vestergaard, "Who's Got the Map? The Negotiation of Afrikaner Identities in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Daedalus* 130, no. 1 (Winter 2001), 19-43; see also Lawrence Schlemmer, "Gee Kans! Afrikaans se saak groei wêreldwyd [Just Wait! The Case for Afrikaans is Building Worldwide!]," in *Afrikaans Vandag* (Newspaper of the Foundation for Afrikaans).
12. Groep van 63, PRAAG, and other Afrikaans organizations have published only essays and position papers thus far. The first book-length argument to date in favor of the rights of Afrikaners as a minority in post-apartheid South Africa is Z.B. du Toit's *Die Nuwe Toekoms: 'n Perspektief op die Afrikaner by die Eeuwisseling* [The New Future: A Perspective on the Afrikaner at the Turn of the Century] (Pretoria: J.P. van der Walt, 1999).
13. The constitution does provide individuals with the right to practice the culture, language, and religion of their choice without discrimination. Moreover, the constitution prohibits discrimination against an individual based on his or her race, language, culture, or ethnic origin. The constitution also calls for the establishment of a Commission for the Advancement and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities. However, the constitution does not go as far as ensconcing the rights of minorities or groups.
14. Group van 63 considers the aim of nation building, namely, the establishment of the nation-state, as outmoded and passe (Groep van 63 2000a, 2).

of minority cultures to the values and aims of the majority culture—to a form of "postmodern minority politics" (4), in which, besides individuals, minorities are considered subjects of legal rights.

It is unlikely that minorities will receive constitutional protection under an ANC-led government, since this line of thinking contradicts the deepest assumptions and aims of its nation building project. However, it would behoove ANC thinkers and policy makers to seriously consider the claims of Groep van 63 and others regarding the status of minorities on South Africa's political and social landscape. If they do not, racial and ethnic tension and conflict will only intensify, thus threatening to jeopardize the country's still vulnerable democracy. For ANC leaders to dismiss claims for minority or group rights as merely attempts to secure white privilege or to claim that ethnic consciousness is solely a product of racism and ethnic manipulation under the apartheid regime[15] are simplistic and fail to acknowledge the extensive international scholarship that has developed over the past several decades about ethnicity, minorities, and group rights in multicultural societies (see Kymlicka and Shapiro 1997).[16]

FROM NATION BUILDING TO CONSTITUTIONALISM

A number of prominent commentators on South African politics (among them, Johan Degenaar, Heribert Adam, Gerhard Maré, Robert Mattes, and Albert Venter) have rejected the ANC-led government's nation building project as outmoded, regressive, and counterproductive—even dangerous.[17] They argue that a form of "civic nationalism" or "constitutional patriotism" is better able to address the problems inherent in nation building and to foster a robust democracy in post-apartheid South Africa. Since I am in basic agreement with this line of reasoning, I conclude the paper with a brief outline of this form of politics, relying primarily on the work of well-known South African philosopher Johan Degenaar.

For Degenaar, a fruitful discussion of South Africa's political future requires a new conceptual framework; that is, the debate needs to be placed in a *postmodern* register. From a postmodern perspective, terms like *nation building*, *nationalism*, and *the nation state* form part of "a modernist discourse in a post-modernist age, enforcing a uniformity where

15. The ANC continues this line of reasoning as recently as 2001 in a document submitted to the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, from August 31 to September 7, 2001. See *Non-Racialism in Action: Acknowledging the Past; Changing the Present; Building the Future* (African National Congress, 2001), 4.
16. For a discussion of ethnicity and group rights on the South African scene, see Elirea Bornman, "Groepregte en 'n Nuwe Demokratiese Bestel in Suid-Afrika" [Group Rights and the New Democratic Dispensation in South Africa] (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, n.d.) and Simon Bekker, *Ethnicity in Focus: The South African Case* (Durban: Centre for Social and Development Studies, 1993) and idem., "Suid-Afrika se Eksperiment met Kulturele Pluralisme" [South Africa's Experiment with Cultural Pluralism], *Annale van die Universiteit van Stellenbosch* 1 (1997), 1-16.
17. For a perspective on the failure of nation building projects in other parts of Africa, see John Sharp and Pat McAllister, "Ethnicity, Identity, and Nationalism: International Insights and the South African Debate," *Anthropology Today* 9, no. 5 (October 1993), 18-20.

a diversity should be acknowledged and respected" (Degenaar 1994, 24). Captive to modernity's quest for uniformity and homogeneity and its suspicion of difference, "the tendency of nation building programs is to impose a common culture onto communal cultures since nationalism prescribes the congruence of culture and state power" (Degenaar 1995, 10). This leads to a form of "cultural imperialism" in which "the ideal of a national uniformity…takes the place of communal cultures" (10). For Degenaar, this is precisely the danger inherent in the ANC-led nation building project in post-apartheid South Africa.

For Degenaar, instead of seeking to build a nation, South Africans should endeavor to create a "constitutional pluralist democracy based on a sense of common citizenship with mutual respect for different cultural traditions" (Degenaar 1992, 12). On this view, persons belong to society on two levels: "a belonging to the state—a shared sense of citizenship—and a belonging to one's communal culture—a shared sense of 'psychic shelter'" (Degenaar 1994, 28). The *shared values of common citizenship* (freedom, empowerment, constitutionalism, a bill of rights, etc. [Degenaar 2000, 163]), ensconced in the country's constitution, thus function as the "transcendent factor" in this model. These values, expressed by the constitution, reflect the consensus of *all* citizens; indeed, "the negotiation of values is one of the crucial aspects of a democratic culture" (Degenaar 2000, 164). This sense of consensus also assures the *genuine transcendence* of these values and principles vis-à-vis all of the cultural, racial, or ethnic groups comprising society. A pluralistic democracy cannot rely on a modernist appeal to a "metanarrative" ("universal values" or the myth of common ancestry or of the "nation") to secure loyalty to the national identity that these liberal values express. Therefore, protecting and nurturing the sense of national belonging is realized through the hard work of *doing* democracy—that is, through "the *praxis* of citizens who actively exercise their civil rights" (Degenaar 1994, 29). This suggests that a democratic system is not "a state of affairs that has already been achieved" (Degenaar 2000, 163); instead, it must be "sought for, fought for, and won in every situation" (163). In this "battle" to establish a democratic, multicultural civil society, the responsibility for nurturing and practicing the virtues of mutual respect, openness, and problem-solving falls squarely on the citizens themselves.

To thematize the challenges of difference and conflict inherent in a pluralistic democracy, Degenaar recommends a form of "critical multiculturalism." Critical multiculturalism "enables [citizens] to respect difference while, at the same time, opposing oppression in favor of emancipation and justice" (Degenaar 2000, 158). Difference and tension between communities in a multicultural context are expected, even welcomed. Degenaar warns: "[M]y advice to South Africans is that we should not romanticise too easily about reconciliation between conflicting communal cultures, but accept the challenge of continuing tension as part and parcel of a pluralist world and of the tension-generating and enriching diversity of a post-modern culture" (Degenaar 1994, 27). Indeed, democracy *requires* diversity and the tension inherent in it, since it allows us to understand the nature and function of culture in our lives and our society: "Culture is only understandable in the tension of multicultural situations. That is to say, multiculturalism is not accidental to our comprehending culture; it is its necessary condition" (Degenaar n.d., 1). To prevent the "necessary tension" between cultures from devolving into a "collision of cultures" requires of citizens in pluralistic democracies to

develop "an ethics and politics of difference" (Degenaar 1995, 13). This postmodern ethics and form of politics turn from the "antagonism of identity" to the "agonism of difference": "An antagonism in which each aims initially at conquest and conversion of the other can now (given supporting conditions) become an agonism in which each treats the other as crucial to itself in the strife and interdependence of identity/difference" (13).[18] Thus, a postmodern perspective allows South Africans to appreciate their plurality of cultures and encourage them to engage in intercultural contact as an *enriching* experience. "We must cherish this plurality," says Degenaar, "and hold off all gods and tyrants intent on taking it away from us" (13). There is no doubt that, for Degenaar, the ANC-led government's nation building project constitutes the most important "tyrant" to be battled at this point in the life of South Africa's young democracy.

This brief analysis of Degenaar's proposal cannot do justice to its depth and complexity or effectively nuance the critical questions it provokes. I will only mention two issues that need further clarification and exploration. The first issue tags the all-important relationship between the nation's (transcendent) common culture and the subcultures that comprise the society as a whole. A major goal of this paper has been to show that nation building schemes are incapable of providing an adequate definition of this relationship. While I agree with Degenaar that a set of shared liberal values and principles is a more satisfactory candidate for South Africa's "common culture," he has done very little thus far to define exactly the *nature* and *extent* of the relationship between these values and the civil culture. For example, in light of the postmodern suspicion of metanarratives, homogeneity, and universal claims, how does one justify the *universal* status of these values and principles? Is citizen consensus enough? Recognizing that consensus can itself mask a form of oppressive majoritarianism, is some kind of rational justification needed; and if so, on what basis will such justification proceed? Related to this, what is the *epistemic* status of these values and principles? In other words, in what exactly does their *transcendent* character reside which allows them to function *as normative* vis-à-vis the claims and practices of the society's cultural/ethnic communities?

The second issue has to do with the moral expectations Degenaar's model raises for the practice of "critical multiculturalism." How do citizens move to an "agonism of difference" in a society fissured by racism, discrimination, mutual suspicion, and—especially—gaping political, economic, and social inequality? It is well to reject the "antagonism of identity" characteristic of nation building projects; however, without a "thick description" (Geertz) of how critical multiculturalism can be successfully instantiated in a deeply divided society such as South Africa, Degenaar's proposal takes on an air of abstraction.

In one of his recent articles, Degenaar asks, "How can the human world live its difference?" (Degenaar 2000). Applied to the South African scene, perhaps the pertinent question is not *how* but *can* the South African "world" live its difference?

Only time will tell.

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18. It is interesting to note the contrast between Degenaar's notion of *agonism* and the ANC's use of the term *osmosis* to describe the interaction of cultures in South African society (see ANC 1997a, 4). *Agonism* maintains the tensive relationship between identity and difference, while *osmosis* suggests a "blending" of cultures in the interest of the larger goal of "African hegemony."

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