Literature and the national question

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Summary

This article addresses itself to the question as to why the notion of the nation is being rejected as framework and method of cultural studies in Western Europe, while it has come to serve as a rallying point in cultural activism in South Africa. While acknowledging that international capitalism does not spell the end of the nation (as imperialist and anti-imperialist re-territorialisation), this article questions the simplistic equation of national culture/resistance culture/revolutionary culture which is defined in (negative) correspondence to what is conceived of as "dominant culture". The article concludes by citing a warning by Fanon against nationalist myths which extol the hegemony of a neo-colonial bourgeoisie.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel behandel die vraag waarom die beginsel van die nasie as raamwerk en metode vir kulturele studies in Wes-Europa verwerp word, terwyl dit in Suid-Afrika 'n strategiese punt vir kulturele aktivisme geword het. Met die toegewing dat internasionale kapitalisme nie die einde van die nasie (as imperialistiese en anti-imperialistiese re-territorialisasie) aankondig nie, bevraagteken hierdie artikel die simplistiese gelykstelling van nasionale kultuur/weerstandskultuur/revolusionêre kultuur in 'n (negatief gedefinieerde) verhouding tot dit wat as "dominante kultuur" verstaan word. Die artikel kom tot 'n slotsom soos weerspieël in 'n aanhaling van Fanon se waarskuwing teen nasionalistiese mites wat die hegemonie van 'n neo-koloniale bourgeoisie ophemel.

The re-thinking and re-structuring of language and literature curricula and teaching methods in the wake of the students' revolt in Western Europe in the 1960's, was frequently prefaced by statements like the following:

> We have to end the state of affairs which makes us protest against emergency legislation today, and discuss the syntax in the writing of some great novelist tomorrow. (Quoted, with minor changes, from Pehlke, 1973: 33.)

As one of the ways of making the teaching of language and literature more socially and politically relevant, it was suggested to take it out of the traditional bourgeois mould of national philology. With regard to the study of German language and literature, for instance, the following demand was voiced:

> German Studies, in order to address the problems of today, has to stop being German Studies. (Pehlke, 1973: 33)

Similar efforts have been made (for approximately the last 10 years) and are being made today in South Africa by people involved in the theory and practice of cultural politics, to adapt cultural expressions to the perceived needs, aspirations, concerns and demands arising from the present political situation. The battle cries can be summed up as a variety on the theme of

> reconciling grandiose images and symbols with "the extreme effectiveness and visible potency of direct action, of the rock and the petrol bomb". (Nkosi, 1988: 44)

The responses to this in South Africa universally perceived "crisis" of the state of the arts (termed by several contemporary South African writers as a "Crisis of Representation"), are varied. To select just a few from a wide spectrum, let me cite the following examples:

At the Jubilee Conference of the English Academy of Southern Africa, one of the contributors suggested that writers in South Africa – faced by "landscapes of cataclysmic political change" – should remain silent altogether for the time being and avoid the crisis by simply not writing, until a little more imaginative space becomes available. (Ndebele 1987: 220) As a second option, to guard against "irrelevant" writing, one critic of poststructuralism in general and of J.M. Coetzee's work in particular suggests to all ivory tower literati to teach a course in English as a Second Language instead. (Chapman, 1988: 340)

By far the most vociferous response, however, comes from a wide range of "cultural activists" who urge artists, musicians, performers and writers and their audiences to situate cultural production within the popular/populist demands of national liberation from oppression and exploitation. This definition of a "national culture" which is to function as "resistance culture" spans cultural activism from a variety of political organisations and tendencies: Black Consciousness, non-racial democratic organisations under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front, as well as proponents of working class culture serving the aims and objectives of COSATU and NACTU.

Many of the cultural activists currently writing and performing explicitly define their role as spokespersons for a nation. Thus, in the poem "The Crocodile", Mzwakhe Mbuli recites:

> I am the product of hunger
> I am the product of social injustice
> I represent the victims of tyranny
> I represent the insulted majority
> And I come from apartheid-land
>
> I recite for a nation
> I represent a nation. (Quoted from Hadland, 1989: 83.)

Or, in the words of the "worker-poet" Mi Hlatshwayo, talking about his poetico-political ambitions:

> I wanted to be a poet, control words, many words, that I may woo our multicultural South Africa into a single society. I wanted to be a historian, of a good deal of history, that I may harness our past group hostilities into a single South African ... history. After 34 years' hunger, suffering, struggles, learning to hope, I am only a driver for a rubber company... (Quoted in *FOSATU Worker News* 35.)

The new nation to be created is heralded in slogans accompanying marches, rallies, meetings, in performances, poetry and pamphlets, as well as in the names and titles of some of the more recent publications (e.g. *New Nation, New African,* and the subtitle of the Sowetan "Building the Nation").

Comparing the examples of demands and envisaged solutions to situations perceived as "crises" in Western Europe and South Africa, the question arises as to the definitions of and aspirations tied to the concept of the nation. More specifically, the question arises as to why the notion of "nation" was rejected in its content and method in Western European (notably German and French) schooling, while it has come to serve as a rallying point in cultural production in South Africa. To be able to answer this question, I need to venture on a historical detour.

Critics of the late sixties and early seventies in Western Europe subjected the teaching and learning of language and literature in the framework of national philologies to close political and historical scrutiny. The emergence of a discipline of national philology was inextricably linked to the economic interests of the rising bourgeoisie, which were aimed at the formation of a nation-state, in order to overcome the pre-existing feudalist particularism. This is how Marx and Engels defined the achievements of the hegemonic bourgeoisie:

> [The bourgeoisie] has agglomerated [the] population, centralised [the] means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, became lumped together in one nation, with one government and code of laws, one national class interest, one frontier and one customs tariff. (Marx & Engels, 1980: 39–40)

The freedom of trade and commerce which the European bourgeoisies hoped to achieve after their various revolutions, tended to transcend national boundaries. Marx and Engels describe the formation of a nation-state, and its simultaneous dissolution, as aspects of one and the same process:

> In the place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have [exchange] in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. (Marx & Engels, 1980: 39)

The demands for a unified nation-state, and with it, the teaching of a national philology, can be seen in connection with the development and expansion of trade, commerce and finance capital in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In as much as, economically, the boundaries of the nation-state became permeable at its very inception, so the concept of a world literature was not viewed as being in opposition to a national philology. The national aspirations of the bourgeoisie encompassed a cosmopolitanism, defined by reference to a "common humanity". (See Wieland, 1972)

However, as soon as private property, free trade and the class identity of the bourgeoisie were threatened (as was the case during the continental trade barriers following the Napoleonic Wars and the French occupation of parts of Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century), the ideal of cosmopolitanism faded. Those civil rights and liberties which had previously been

declared universal and inalienable, were confined to members of the bourgeois class and were used to delimit the class boundaries within a bourgeois nation-state.

Referring to such evidence of opportunistic and selective attribution or withholding of civil rights, liberties and ideals, and to the international nature of capital, critics and historians have disputed the validity of any efforts to the literature and literary criticism to the concept of "nation".

This also encompasses, in general terms, the stance of critics of broadly structuralist or post-structuralist prominence (e.g. Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Girard and Baudrillard). The manner in which these critics and theoreticians celebrate the liberation of desire under conditions of Late Capitalism, echoes the quiet euphoria articulated by Marx and Engels in the face of the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie:

> The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations ... It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in the place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade ...
>
> It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aquaducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former [large scale migrations] and crusades.
>
> The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and with them the whole relations of society ... [Continuous] revolutionising of production, [continuous upheaval] of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. (Marx & Engels, 1980: 38)

The common denominator established between the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie and revolutionary desire (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984: 33) is the liberation of productive forces from the fetters of normative codes which previously had spanned the whole social field. (Girard, 1987: 284)

Deleuze and Guattari illustrate these developments in their analysis of Kafka's works. They introduce their book on Kafka with the following questions and remarks:

> How does one gain access to Kafka's work? It is a rhizome ... We can enter anywhere, there is no entrance that is better than any other one, no one has priority, any one is good enough, even if it is a cul-de-sac, a narrow pipe, a bottle neck. We only have to be mindful where it leads us, over which crossroads and which passages we get from one point to the next one, what a chart of the rhizome would look like, and how it changes as soon as we enter somewhere else. For the principle of multiple entrances is only there to prevent the entry of the enemy, the signifier; in any case, it confuses all those who try to "interpret" a work, which in actual fact only wants to be tested experimentally. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1976: 7)

These introductory remarks serve, among other things, to illustrate the workings of a non-signifying language which defies all codes. A "decoded"

language, for Deleuze and Guattari, is in most instances synonymous with their notion of a "deterritorialised" language, which characterises a "minor literature" of which Kafka's works provide an example. A "minor literature" is defined as "the literature of a minority which has to use a major language". (Deleuze & Guattari, 1976: 24) This was precisely the dilemma of Jewish people living in Prague. Their literature, considered from all angles, was an impossibility:

> They lived from the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, and the impossibility of writing in any other way. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1976: 24)

The impossibility not to write points to a suppressed national consciousness which has to rely on literary expression; the impossibility of writing in German stems from the fact that, for the majority of Prague Jews, German represented a stilted language; and the impossibility of writing in any other way resulted from their consciousness of being out of place on Czech territory.

In a diary entry dated 25 December 1911, Kafka characterises a minor literature as being less elitist and more explicitly politically oriented than canonised literature with its established codes, markets, critics and valorisations. (Kafka, 1976a: 151)

The political significance of a minor literature is translated by Deleuze and Guattari into the terms of a liberation from all codes, which they follow in Kafka's work by looking at the traces of a non-signifying language in the form of animal sounds, endless adjuncts of spaces in the sphere of the law, etc. In contrast to this approach, I would like to resume the notion of a deterritorialised language, which indicates a tension between nation (language and culture) and state (territory, law). Moreover, the concept of a deterritorialised language dissolves the state in favour of the nation, or at least it assumes a disjunction between nation and state. This disjunction becomes evident in many of Kafka's writings. The above mentioned diary entry defining the concept of a minor literature emphasises the creative and political possibilities arising from a disjunction between nation and state, as opposed to the relatively static canonised literature which arises in the context of an unproblematic identification of nation and state.

On the occasion of a speech on the Yiddish language, Kafka specified the continuously changing, vagrant nature of this dialect: The Yiddish dialect, he explains, lives outside of any canon formation, outside of all grammatical rules; it appears as a continuous act of speaking, which does not come to rest and does not adopt any order. It is eclectic in its adaptation of foreign words, because there is no official language that can impose any systematicity on it. The coherence of the dialect is precarious, without any degree of necessity. What produces the coherence of this dialect is not explicable in terms of state or readily defined nation. (Kafka, 1976b: 306–307).

Kafka's diary entries and his speech on the possibilities of a minor literature might be viewed as arising from a quest for national independence, as evidence of the aspirations of assigning a territory (state) to a nation (ethnic

group), along with the aspirations of ethnic groups in the Austrian Empire (conceptualised by Otto Bauer and Karl Renner).

However, for Kafka the tension between state and nation is not resolved with the realisation of national aspirations, i.e. with the national group attaining state power. The disjunction between state and nation persists in a nation-state once national independence and national unity are granted. The national question haunts Kafka's stories in the form of a non-alignment of state and nation, in forces of centralisation and decentralisation, cephalous and acephalous structures of the state, conflicting tendencies of molar and molecular forces.

This conflict between state and nation is evident in the story of *The Great Wall of China.* The construction of the Wall requires a great national movement, enthusiasm, support, confidence, patriotism, unity and a common enemy. After elaborating on the preconditions of this great national effort, the following statement ensues: "This explains why the Wall is built in fragmented parts." (Kafka, 1976c: 54)

In the hands of Kafka's narrator, the nation-state disperses into fragments, gaps, incompleteness. The narrator laconically states: "There was so much confusion in people's minds at the time, probably just because so many tried to unite for the sake of working towards one objective." (Kafka, 1976c: 55)

In the process of the transmission of the Emperor's message, different interpretations are caused by temporal lapses due to barriers between various national languages. These lapses and misinterpretations become the object of laughter. At the same time, the narrator insists, national unity is a fiction which is important to uphold:

> One might want to conclude from such occurrences that in actual fact we do not have an emperor at all. This would come close to the truth. However, I cannot repeat often enough, that perhaps there is no people ... more loyal than we are; but our loyalty does not serve the emperor ... It is more convenient for us to believe that Peking and her emperor are one, maybe a cloud, quietly moving beneath the sun in the course of time. (Kafka, 1976c: 66)

Another story (*Die Abweisung I*) tells of a country, a nation without a capital, without visible borders, without definable principles of coherence and communication, without a clearly demarcated centre from which orders and regulations are issued. The narrator marvels:

> It is peculiar, and this surprises me again and again, to see how in our town, we readily obey all the orders coming from the capital. Our civil servants never failed to report for duty ... (Kafka, 1976c: 63)

The national question, considered from this Kafkaesque angle, is neglected in the analyses of those who declare the end of the nation by referring to "the age of internationalism". (See Eagleton, 1987: 3, 9.) Ernest Mandel criticises a similar approach in the following terms:

> All those ... who ... regard the multinational companies as sovereign colossi overriding the power of the late capitalist State, tacitly assume a notion ... that big capital no longer needs to reckon with any serious difficulties in sales or

> realization, or with major social crises ... In other words, they simply presuppose that there is no further need for the State to intervene in the economy in order to master acute cyclical and structural crises, or great eruptions of the class struggle. (Mandel 1980: 330)

Even though Mandel's critique is aimed at theories proclaiming the dissolution of the capitalist state, we can, I believe, apply this to the notion of the nation as well. The very theories which declare the dissolution of the nation in the age of internationalism, confine themselves to a view of capital nationally. For if they were to examine the preconditions, mechanisms, cycles and expansive tendencies of international capital, they would have to include the re-territorialisations in the form of nations. The designation of nationalities in some of the British colonies are characteristic of imperialist divide-and-rule policies. The process by which the capitalist mode of production in South Africa became the dominant mode, is integrally linked to the history of racialism, starting with a policy of definition, distinction and delimitation of ethnic groups according to a combination of racist, evolutionist, linguistic, cultural, economic, political and strategic criteria. The subdivision of the population into ethnic groups was then enforced through cultural policing, confinement, selective labour recruitment, control through imposition of tax and pass laws, repressive legislation, restriction of cultural and social mobility, separatist town and regional planning, racial and class discrimination in the provision of services, allocation of resources and facilities, and urban development. The grand Verwoerdian plan envisaged the creation of ten to twelve "nations", each with a right to self-determination ("independence").

In this context, the early Leninist (conditionally stated) concessions (later rebuked by Lenin but adopted by Stalin) to "the right of self-determination of all nations" (upheld for a brief period by the Communist Party of South Africa in 1932) never gained much ground in that form in the history of the South African political opposition, as they tend to provide a rationale for ethnic separatism. Therefore the national question came to be treated by South African oppositional groupings not so much as a question of national independence, but of national unity.[2] Stalinist definitions of "nationhood" in terms of a community of language, culture, territory and economy, have, however, left their mark, e.g. in the four nations-thesis (which lists Africans, Whites, Coloureds and Indians as the four chief nationalities). (Quoted from Williams, 1988: 78.) The four nations-thesis has found its way, in modified form, into the Freedom Charter, which recognises the existence of distinct national groups and races whose language rights and equal status are to be protected. (Williams, 1988: 78) The application of the four nations-thesis is also evident in the organisational structure of the Congress Alliance.

What has moreover remained of the Stalinist legacy is the tendency to prioritise language and culture in the definition of nationhood, at the expense of the criteria of class, and of political and economic criteria. This tendency gave rise to the emphasis on "national" oppression. The ANC Youth League in 1948 explicitly stated: "We are oppressed not as a class, but as a people, a nation." (Williams, 1988: 78) This definitive statement, which gave rise to

strategic policies, goes back to the fierce debates which took place immediately prior to and on the occasion of the Sixth Comintern Conference in 1928. Members of the CPSA, among them James Gumede and Jimmy la Guma (father of writer Alex la Guma), were supported by the newly stalinised Comintern (against Bunting and Roux) in their contention that socialism in South Africa could be achieved only through the struggle against national oppression. (Cronin, 1986: 73) This statement of principle was enshrined in the two-stage theory of revolution, according to which the first stage is aimed at a national democratic state, to be followed by a socialist transformation. Being a section of the Communist International governed by party discipline, the CPSA had to endorse the Resolution on the South African Question, put forward by the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

The priority of the struggle against "national oppression" was more systematically elaborated in the theory of Internal Colonialism or Colonialism of a Special Type, which, until today, has remained a central policy document of the ANC/SACP alliance (albeit with substantial modification over the years). The proponents of this theory argue that

> the distinguishing feature of South Africa is that it combines the characteristics of both an imperialist state and a colony within a single, indivisible geographical, political and economic reality. (Quoted from Bundy, 1989: 3.)

A 1962 statement explains the basis of this theory:

> South Africa combines the worst features of both imperialism and colonialism in a single national frontier; indeed, "Non-White South Africa" is the colony of "White South Africa". The indigenous population experiences the features of a colony: national oppression, poverty, exploitation and political rightlessness. This fosters a strong national identity and the SACP [holds] that there [are] no acute or antagonistic class divisions among the African people.[3]

The fostering of a national identity to oppose and resist an oppression which is conceived of as "national oppression" has largely fallen into the domain of cultural activism of the last fifteen years. The umbrella of official (if outlawed) nationalist/populist and more lately, popular frontist resistance policy has allowed cultural activists to establish their legitimacy as writers, musicians, performers and artists "of the people" and "for the people". The exact constituency of "the people" varied over time, though; broadly speaking, it changed from "the black man" to "the people" to "the people under the leadership of the working class". Comparing and quoting examples from the different definitions of "nationhood" which correspond to different emphases and phases in political mobilisation, Kelwyn Sole notes that class analysis has not played a major role in circumscribing the stuff of writing and performing:

> The fiction of an egalitarian pre-colonial era transmutes easily into the rhetoric of a classless modern South Africa, in which equality and liberty would be guaranteed if it were not for apartheid . . . The stress is on human nature rather than class struggle as the major force of social change, and a distinctive African personality which lends itself to collective existence is constructed. (Sole, 1984: 58)

Recalling the past is seen by many writers – Credo Mutwa (*uNosilimela*), Maishe Maponya (*The Hungry Earth*), Matsamela Manaka (*Egoli*) and the worker poets of the COSATU Durban Cultural Local (*Black Mamba Rising*), to mention just a few examples – as a precondition for the forging of the future. Plays like Maponya's *The Hungry Earth*, and the recent Sarmcol Workers' *Bambatha's Children* cover a lengthy historical time period, linking the present predicament of exploited and oppressed Africans to colonial conquest.

In the case of Maponya's play, the implicit presupposition, which links the past to the present in a more or less linear way, is that of the internal colonialism thesis, which stresses colonial subjugation in the form of racism, and correspondingly, the anti-imperialist struggle against racialist colonialism. The mythical recourse to the land as the soil of harmonious communal existence provides the basis of the anti-apartheid national goal projected into the future.

It was, in fact, the chiefs and community leaders whose bases were compromised through the passing of the 1913 Land Act, who played a key role in the early years of the existence of the ANC. This is reflected in the 1928 Resolution on "The South African Question" adopted by the Executive Committee of the Communist International. In this document, considerable scope is given to the agrarian question, at a time when an independent African peasantry, and the subsistence economies in various parts of South Africa, had declined already under the impact of proletarianisation, tax legislation, encroachments of white settlers, capitalisation of agriculture, labour tenancy and the establishment or consolidation of "Native reserves" (Wilson, 1971: 56; Bundy, 1979). Still, the Resolution holds that the national question in South Africa is based on the agrarian question, the black peasantry being the moving force of the political struggle. This tenet was one of the factors contributing to an early alliance between the SACP and the ANC, long before this alliance was formally established. It is enshrined, albeit in a relatively vague formulation, in the Freedom Charter and has thereby served to forge the continuity of the traditions which inform present-day constructs and symbols of resistance.

Similar tendencies of anti-imperialist nationalism are also evident in writings on this subject from other African countries (even though the legacies of cultural policies in the former French, British and Portuguese colonies are vastly different). Ngugi, for instance, states in an article entitled "Literature in Schools" (1981), that

> In literature, there have been two opposing aesthetics: the aesthetics of oppression and exploitation and of acquiescence with imperialism; and that of human struggle for total liberation. (In: Harlow, 1987: 8)

A general equivalence is assumed between "culture of the oppressed", "national culture", "resistance culture" and "revolutionary culture" – an equivalence which coincides with the privileging of the notion of a "national democratic revolution".

In as much as other territories subjected to imperialist rule have developed

similar cultural programmes, similar equivalences have been established in various other nationalisms. In this respect it is instructive to look at the book by Barbara Harlow on *Resistance Literature*. The definitions of resistance literature in this book, comprising studies of anti-imperialist oriented activisms in Palestine, Nicaragua, Mozambique, Angola and South Africa, are largely derived from a two stage theory of revolution which prioritises *national* liberation.

This broadly defined stance was asserted even by so-called post-colonial national movements. At the 1960 World Conference, Communist parties from newly independent states outlined, in a joint statement, the path of "non-capitalist development", and in some cases, the establishment of an independent national democracy characterised by political and economic independence, and anti-imperialism.

In some of the studies cited by Harlow (Ghassan Kanafani on the literature of occupied Palestine and Maldondo Denis on Puerto Rico), a particular type of the Internal Colonialism thesis and its corollary, a two stage theory of revolution, are adopted, which leads to a definition of "the culture of the oppressed" in close correspondence to that which is called "the culture of the oppressor". "Resistance Literature" as a genre was first identified in 1966 by the Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani in his study "Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine". (Harlow, 1987: 1) Harlow herself maps resistance literature, whether written in exile or under occupation in terms of

> a people's collective relationship to common land, a common identity, or a common cause ... [Resistance literature] presupposes ... an occupying power which has either exiled or subjugated ... a given population and has in addition significantly intervened in the literary and cultural development of the people it dispossessed and whose land it occupied. (Harlow, 1987: 2)

This genre-definition is interesting in several respects: it does not specify the nature of that "subjugation", while it focuses exclusively on "literary and cultural development", as well as claims to land ownership. This identifies the class basis of the "resistance" relatively accurately, and thereby the emphasis on a "national" movement becomes explicable. This class basis then tends to be translated into the idiom of a liberation motivated by the realisation of "human nature". To quote Kanafani again:

> If resistance springs from the barrel of a gun, the gun itself issues from the desire for liberation and that desire is nothing but the natural, logical and necessary product of resistance in the broadest sense: as refusal and as a firm grasp of roots and situations. (Quoted in Harlow, 1987: 11)

Anti-imperialist popular pictography and iconography is likely to picture the pen of the poet and writer as a weapon. In fact, the identification of cultural activism with the armed struggle is a much more frequently employed metaphor than the association of any other tools with weapons. Anti-imperialist writers themselves equate their activism with the armed struggle. (Harlow, 198: 11) Harlow follows this equation by identifying the ingredients of anti-imperialist popular resistance and its goals as literature, poetry, the

gun, the pamphlet and the diplomatic delegation. (Harlow, 1987: xvii) Against the making of this type of national myth, Fanon polemicises:

> There was ... the anxiety to be present at the universal trysting place fully armed, with a culture springing from the very heart of the African continent. Now this [Universal Cultural] Society will very quickly show its inability to shoulder [the] different tasks, and will limit itself to exhibitionist demonstrations, while the habitual behaviour of the members of this [Universal Cultural] Society will be confined to showing Europeans that such a thing as African culture exists, and opposing their ideas to those of ostentatious and narcissistic Europeans. (Quoted in Harlow, 1987: 19.)

Defining and practising a "culture of the oppressed" in close correspondence (albeit negatively defined) to that which is viewed as "the culture of the oppressor", recalls Fanon's skepticism of and polemics against a neo-colonialism which finds its ideological home in a neo-liberal universalism parading as a claim to nationhood. In his critique, Fanon accuses the national bourgeoisie of ex-colonies of having "totally assimilated colonialist thought in its most corrupt form" (Fanon, 1970: 312). Picturing a polemical dialogue between neo-colonial rulers and their militant critics, the following constellation is revealed:

> The only worthwhile dogma, it was repeatedly stated [by the neo-colonial leaders] is the union of the nation against colonialism. And on they went, armed with an impetuous slogan which stood for principles, while their only ideological activity took the form of a series of variants on the theme of the right of peoples to self-determination, borne on the wind of history which would inevitably sweep away colonialism. When the militants asked whether the wind of history couldn't be a little more clearly analysed, the leaders gave them instead hope and trust, the necessity of de-colonisation and its inevitability, and more to that effect. (Fanon, 1970: 318)

It would, I believe, take an orientation towards class analysis in order to wrest oppositional cultural production from its snug co-existence with a nationalism explained by colonial subjugation. In order to equip cultural production with the capacity of education and, very optimistically speaking, resistance, a contradictory and dialectical relation to its conditions of existence has to be postulated (logically and politically speaking).

This does not mean, however, that the construct of the nation and its various corollaries do not deserve careful study and discussion. Returning to the starting point, therefore, I believe that national philology should be taught – not on its own terms though, but in its history, in order to explain the basis of class alliances and interests of various nationalisms, which will hopefully one day become explicable in the terms of what Lenin designated them to be: the mental products of past oppression. (Quoted from Connor, 1984: 37.)

Notes

1. This development is also known in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: civil liberties found their way into the republican constitutions, but were in effect rendered null and void by other provisions and clauses in those constitutions. (See Marx & Engels, 1980: 106.)

2. The different understandings of the national question – as either national independence or as national unity – account for some of the recent curious and bizarre exchanges between Soviet academics and members of South African delegations, on which the SACP felt compelled to comment in order "to get things straight": professor Gleb Starushenko of the Africa Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences "argued that a parliament which accommodated 'group rights' should be considered for the post-apartheid period ... Starushenko also urged the ANC to work out 'comprehensive guarantees for the white population' and undertake that there would be no broad nationalisation of capitalist property." The SACP attempted to set the record straight by renouncing this position, commenting that "while this approach was suitable in the Soviet Union, it is not valid for South Africa" ('Parley with the Party', *WIP* 56/57, 1988: 4).

   On the basis of an argument similar to that presented by the above mentioned Soviet academic, professor Herman Giliomee (UCT) and former Soviet ambassador to Zambia and Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee vice chairman Vasili Solodovnikov found agreement in their two nations thesis in assessing South Africa's battling nationalisms (Afrikaner and Black nationalism). It took Joe Slovo to remind the honourable members of the Soviet and South African delegations of the importance of class analysis. (See 'Democracy in Action', IDASA, December 1988 – Report on a meeting in Leverkusen, West Germany, between 22 Soviet representatives, 7 members of the ANC and 5 white South Africans (including Slabbert and Boraine).
3. Summarised in its classical form by Bundy, 1989: 4. For a more recent version of the CST theory, see Wolpe, 1988: 29, 30.

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