

Nation Formation and Social Cohesion

An Enquiry into the Hopes and Aspirations of South Africans

The Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA), which was publicly launched as a think tank in March 2011, was founded by a group of South Africans with experience in research, academia, policy-making and governance, who saw the need to create a platform for engagement around strategic issues facing South Africa. The Institute combines research and academic development, strategic reflections and intellectual discourse. It applies itself to issues such as economics, sociology, governance, history, arts and culture, and the logics of natural sciences.

Nation Formation and Social Cohesion is the publication of a MISTRA research project that set out to examine different interpretations and meanings that diverse social actors attach to the calls and prospects for nation formation and social cohesion.

The publication links theories of nation formation and social cohesion to actual practices, both focused on the attainment of a just society founded on the irreducible equality of all its members on the one hand, and the factors militating against achieving this, on the other. Ethnographic research in four provinces provides the substance or practice to the theoretical framing of the discourse. The study proceeds by interrogating the theoretical suppositions of nation formation and social cohesion and this serves as a starting point for a thorough reflection on these two processes. Thus a synthesis, and not a conceptual position is arrived at, where the interdependence of nation formation and social cohesion, specifically for postcolonial societies, (and South Africa in particular) can be interrogated effectively and critically.

This publication, with contributors Andries Oliphant, Yacoob Abba Omar, Joel Netshitenzhe, Leslie Dikeni, Shepi Mati, Vincent Williams, Robert Gallagher and Feizel Mamdoo, is intended to add to the debate and stimulate new thinking around the diffi cult processes that are being sought to build a nation in the 21st century.



ISBN 978-1-920655-72-3



9 781920 655723



Nation Formation and Social Cohesion

Nation Formation and Social Cohesion

An Enquiry into the Hopes and Aspirations of South Africans



CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE:	Introduction	13
CHAPTER TWO:	Conceptualising Nation Formation	23
CHAPTER THREE:	An African Wish: Contextualising Debates on 'The National Question' in South Africa	49
CHAPTER FOUR:	Linking Nation Formation and Social Cohesion	91
CHAPTER FIVE:	Western Cape, Hout Bay	123
CHAPTER SIX:	Fietas and Related Areas	147
CHAPTER SEVEN:	Local Perspectives in the Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal	193
CHAPTER EIGHT:	Conclusion	209
BIBLIOGRAPHY		223
INDEX		230

FOREWORD

Among the vexed questions in the evolution of humanity's systems of social organisation are issues of nation formation and social cohesion. Nations, widely understood, date back centuries and have reflected different forms in various parts of the world and in different historical epochs. More strictly organised as nation states, nations and their geographic configurations are associated with the industrial era and the emergence of the capitalist mode of production. The organisation of humanity into nations provides a functional utility to human relations. Yet, the notions of nation states, nationhood, and citizenship – conferring a sense of belonging and exclusion, representing organisational forms around which endowments are appropriated, and reflecting markers of collective identities – do evoke much emotion. Indeed, in most parts of the world, blood was shed in building nations and in asserting their rights in relation to other nations. This is even more acutely manifest in postcolonial polities, straddling the very acts of conquest and dispossession, imposition of geographic entities, enforcement of discriminatory policies, mobilisation for national emancipation, and building of new societies.

Contained within these processes are ebbs and flows in self-definition and the evolution of identities. While mobilisation for a sense of nationhood contains within it a homogenising tendency, pride in the roots from which a variety of identities originate, and the ordering of social status within a nation, can have a centrifugal effect. It is from this perspective that this treatise on nation formation and social cohesion in South Africa is approached. Drawing from literature that defines nations as, among others, political, cultural, economic, and territorial constructs, the study seeks to assess the extent to which South Africa satisfies the theoretical prerequisites to be a nation. This forms the foundation of the report's assessment of progress that has been made since the attainment of democracy. In doing so, a hornet's nest is necessarily stirred. Besides geography, as well as economic and political systems, to what extent do South Africa's people constitute a nation? Do the erstwhile colonial settlers – who, unlike in most other parts of the postcolonial world, have decided in large numbers to make the country their permanent home – deserve equal recognition as members of the emergent nation? Given the many languages, sets of culture, the legacy of racism and socio-economic deprivation, and varying political interests, how strong are the centripetal impulses; how have they played themselves out in the past twenty years; and what are the prospects for the future? In other words, the many complexities that characterise the challenge of nation formation find acute expression in South Africa.



Against this background, two issues arise which have informed the texture of this study. First, the various attributes that are identified to define a nation are inadequate: they have to be combined with the more recent and somewhat diffuse notion of social cohesion, which also embraces people's dignity and welfare and the legitimacy of the State. Second, nation formation and social cohesion can be theorised and assessed at a generic level, but the lived experience of 'ordinary citizens' does add the kind of flavour that macro-indicators can hardly capture. Thus an 'actor-orientated approach' was adopted, represented in the case studies that are outlined in the report.

The concept of 'nation formation' is used to emphasise the fact that, unlike with the more popular notion of 'nation building', the emergence of nations is a process that does not lend itself to artificial homogenising impositions. Yet the role of agency – from the State to civil society and individual citizens– is not underestimated. This understanding informs the recommendations in the concluding chapter.

The researchers themselves will be the first to admit that there are many gaps in the report. MISTRA did not set out to pen the final word on this matter. Rather it aims to add another drop to the fountain of ideas, debate and knowledge on the 'national question' as experienced in post-apartheid South Africa. We do hope that through its insights and inadequacies this report has met that modest objective.

Our profound thanks to the project team: from the thought leaders and the field workers to the administrators, whose labours gave life to this undertaking. MISTRA is also indebted to the funders of this project, and to the Institute as a whole, whose generosity has afforded our minds the space to wander so South African society can continue its journey to discover and nurture its humanity.

Joel Netshitenzhe
Executive Director