
ACTS OF CULTURE: SEARCHING FOR A NATIONAL SOUTH AFRICAN IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE DIVERSITY

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We see therefore, that, if imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture.

(Cabral, 1980: 143)

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Introduction

It would not be an exaggeration to say that most South Africans, after over three centuries of life under the heel of colonial domination and white minority, racist rule, are relieved that white minority rule is gone. However, everywhere in society, people continue to see the deep and enduring inequality resulting from colonialism and apartheid. These features are imprinted in the physical, social and cultural fabric of society, which a quarter century of inclusive, non-racial democracy has not been able to erase.

Accordingly, this chapter explores the role of the arts, the diverse cultures and the multiple heritage traditions of South Africans in developing a shared, post-colonial national identity in which diversity is underpinned by equality. This requires the removal of the social and cultural barriers – institutionalised by colonialism and apartheid – between the diverse cultures of South Africa. These barriers were designed to maintain a hierarchical system that elevated minority colonial culture as the official culture of a racist state, while enlisting indigenous African cultures for the engineering of separate ethnic identities – the latter designed to divide the African majority in a system of segregation calculated to secure white minority rule.

This chapter thus engages with some interrelated matters around ‘The National Question’, which circulated in liberation discourse during the 20th century and has remained an important topic in the two decades of post-apartheid, democratic rule. The key questions are: What is nationalism? Is the 19th-century, monolithic, European construct of the nation-state commensurate with a culturally diverse, post-colonial society, such as South Africa? If the answer to the last question is no, what other, more appropriate African conceptions of nation formation are available to a diverse society like South Africa? What is the relationship between social cohesion and nation formation? What role can the arts, culture and heritage play in advancing the transformation of South African society into a polity ‘united in its diversity’, as the Preamble to the 1996 democratic Constitution of the country declares?

In broaching these questions, this chapter deals with the process of nation formation in South Africa. It draws on post-colonial theory, focusing on the role of culture, the arts and heritage in the national resistance and liberation struggles against the divisive strategies of colonialism and apartheid, by unifying the diverse population into an inclusive, post-colonial, democratic nation-state. As such, it engages with what in liberation theory is referred to as ‘The National Question’.

According to Cronin and Mashilo (2017: 24), the concept entered into ‘the programmatic perspective of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1929’. It flowed from the resolution of the 6th Congress of the Communist International of 1928, which called on communists to work with the African National Congress for the attainment ‘of an independent Native South African republic as a stage towards a workers’ and peasants’ republic with full, equal rights for all races’.

However, the struggle for national liberation from colonial and racist occupation of South Africa is much older: the first clashes between aboriginal inhabitants and European settlers over water, land, livestock, natural resources and enslavement in the Cape started in the second half of the 17th century. This sustained struggle spans some three and a half centuries.

‘The National Question’ and nation formation in South Africa

These questions around nation formation are grounded in Cabral’s essay, ‘National liberation and national culture’, in which he discusses the role of culture in national resistance to colonialism and foreign domination. Cabral (1980: 139–143) observes: ‘History teaches us that, in certain

circumstances, it is very easy for the foreigner to impose his domination on a people. But it likewise teaches us that whatever the material aspects of this domination, it can be maintained only by the permanent and organised repression of the cultural life of the people concerned.’ This leads him to the axiomatic postulation appended, with his emphasis, as the epigraph to this essay: ‘We see therefore that, if imperialist domination has the vital need to practise cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an *act of culture*.’

This injunction does not negate the political and economic oppression and exploitation of colonialism. Rather, it follows from Fanon’s (1990 [1963]: 166–99) seminal essay, ‘On national culture’, in which he outlines the role of culture in African liberation struggles in the light of the fact that European colonialism presented itself to the world as a ‘civilising’ project of ‘barbaric and primitive’ peoples bereft of culture. Hence the strategic importance of culture in anti-colonial political theory and the practices of national liberation struggles and their repudiation of colonial negations.

While nationalism and nation formation are central concepts in the discourses and struggles against colonialism and white minority rule in South Africa – as in most liberation struggles – they are usually subject to conceptual contestations and divergent treatment by different ideological positions in the country’s anti-apartheid literature. In descriptive terms, nationalism is a patriotic ideology, which informs national struggles for independence from foreign domination. Its objective, in bourgeois ideology, is the autonomous, multi-class society and democratic constitutional state, as a replacement for the aristocratic, hereditary feudal rule. In Marxist theory, it is conceived of as a transitory stage to be superseded by socialism under proletarian hegemony, culminating in the classless society of communism as the final stage of political development.

Accordingly, in South Africa and elsewhere, the ideological position and the specific social, political and historical conditions from which nation formation is theorised, invariably inflect their conceptualisation and application. This is borne out by the collection of essays on The National Question in South Africa compiled by Webster and Pampallis (2017) in which the subject, presented as ‘unresolved’, is revisited by scholars from different ideological perspectives.

In the light of the above, this chapter is informed by a descriptive definition of nation formation: the process through which diverse but interrelated ethnic groups are unified to form a single, politically autonomous, national state, with a shared national language, culture, religion and economy. It is historically constituted in the revolt against foreign conquest and domination. As shall become evident, many nation-states recognised as such, including South Africa, do not conform to this description.

The formal emergence of African nationalism in South Africa, Meli (1988: 36) writes, dates back to the early 20th century and is marked by the formation of the South African Native National Congress in Bloemfontein on 8 January 1912, later to be renamed the African National Congress (ANC). It was established in direct response to the all-white South African Act of Union, endorsed by the British House of Commons in 1909 and passed by the South African British/Boer Union parliament in 1910. The objective of the ANC was to unite Africans through the jettisoning of what Pixley ka Isaka Seme (in Meli, 1988: 36) – the first treasurer-general of the South African Native Congress in 1911 – called ‘the demon of racialism’. His view was that the ‘aberration of the Xhosa–Fingo feud and the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongaas, between the Basuthos and every other Native must be buried and forgotten. It has shed among us sufficient blood.’

As Harsch (1980: 64–5) records, the ascendancy to power by the Afrikaner National Party in 1948 saw the consolidation of the ‘Native Reserves’, to which Africans were restricted after the 1913 Native Land Act, the 1936 Native Trust and Land Bill, the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, the Group

Areas Act of 1950, the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 and the Bantu Homelands Citizen Act of 1970. This slew of legislation was designed with two objectives: to divide Africans and to nullify their birthright by stripping them of their South African citizenship.

The segregated spatial imprint of this dispensation, along with the Group Areas Act and the large-scale land dispossession this entailed, is still evident in post-apartheid South Africa. Of significance in this chapter is that the urban townships and rural 'homelands' into which the majority of the people – collectively classified as 'non-white', and further into smaller ethnic units – were crammed, served as labour reservoirs and urban dormitory townships. These were generally bereft of publicly funded art, culture and heritage amenities and resources. Likewise, formal art education was excluded from primary, secondary and tertiary curricula for examination purposes. This persisted for the duration of white minority rule.

In response to this, the African nationalist organisations in South Africa, representing the disenfranchised, sought firstly to unify the divided majority and secondly to work with other anti-racist organisations for the attainment of an inclusive, non-racial democracy. At the heart of this historical and political project was what came to be designated 'The National Question'. It entailed the construction of an inclusive, nationalist movement designed to counter the ethnic divisions imposed by the white minority on the majority of South Africans, in a strategy aimed at securing their rule. In response, Africans, under the leadership of the ANC, embarked on the project of nation-building. This involved a movement aimed at unifying Africans in a trans-ethnic national collective to reclaim their birthright as inalienable South African nationals. With this, 'The National Question' – as the process of nation formation came to be called – was set in motion.

The 19th-century, European type of nation-state was generally founded on native ancestral territories brought about by popular revolts against a small, and often foreign, hereditary aristocratic class. The post-colonial, African type of nation-state, in contrast, was a 20th-century phenomenon emerging from native revolts against European colonisation. As such, the modern, African nation-state is a post-World War II phenomenon.

Nation formation, however, despite claims to the contrary, is the result of neither essentialist organic growth nor divine destiny. The right to political self-determination and revolt against foreign occupation and domination is what informs and drives nationalism. The nation-state, which emerges from this, requires for its long-term stability a considerable degree of cultural and linguistic homogeneity. The latter must be buttressed by institutional, social, political and economic integration based on the political and juridical equality of its members. Where homogeneity does not exist, cooperation and alliances between diverse peoples in opposition to an external threat may produce temporary cohesion, forged for the historical purpose of national liberation. Once this is achieved, insurmountable cultural, linguistic and religious differences may, sooner or later, unravel the fragile and contingent unity.

In other words, the sustained cohesion and stability of the nation-state requires a confluence of values and interests, the legal equality of its diverse members, and a willingness to work for higher levels of social integration and collective cohesion. No modern nation or nation-state has materialised, fixed and finalised, from the remote ethnic times of its constituent members. The social, political and cultural movement or political force that propels this is designated nationalism. It is a movement, rooted in the collective will of a people, to constitute an inclusive and distinct, autonomous polity that produces the nation-state. As the history of South Africa attests, this entails a resolute, unrelenting, patriotic and collective identification with a native territory and its aboriginal people, in opposition to foreign conquest and domination. Where cultural, linguistic and religious diversity prevails, the

indigenous native cultures and languages, in most cases, constitute metaphorical relatives of a larger, interrelated national community with a native history.

In South Africa, the essentialist attribution of divine intervention and destiny is evident in the account of the establishment of the Boer Republic following the Voortrekker defeat of the Zulu army at the Battle of Ncome River (1838) in northern Zululand. Before the battle, the Boers made a covenant to honour the day in perpetuity should divine intervention deliver victory. According to Boer accounts of the battle, such large numbers of Zulu warriors were killed that the water of the river ran red with blood, so they renamed the river Blood River after their victory. This victory, which was commemorated by Afrikaners as the Day of the Covenant, paved the way for the establishment of the Boer Republic of Natalia. After the Afrikaner minority came to power in 1948, this was declared a national holiday and celebrated, replete with ox wagons, *voorlaaier* rifles, trekker costumes and regalia. In 1994, the day was renamed the Day of Reconciliation but it is still commemorated as '*Gelofte Dag*' by some Afrikaners.

Relativist accounts, in contradistinction to the above, attribute the homogenising processes of nation formation to a combination of social, cultural and economic developments produced by a single public education system and the spread of mass literacy, the standardisation of dialects into a national language, and the homogenisation of public culture disseminated through mass media. These things – along with a collective history, shared symbols, daily life routines regulated by fixed schedules for public transport and working hours, customised public housing, a dominant public religion, national holidays, mass identification with acclaimed native artists, writers, intellectuals, scientists, national sport teams, a shared cuisine and a set of folk and political heroes – all work together to generate a national consciousness. Context-specific combinations of these developments and processes engender a collective socio-psychological sense of shared experiences by diverse individuals, and foster a sense of belonging and solidarity between its members, which feeds into an all-embracing nationalism.

Early African nationalism in South Africa also adopted an essentialist invocation of nation formation. This is evident in the religious tenor of the South African national anthem, '*Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*' ('God Bless Africa'). The original hymn was composed in 1897 by Enoch Sontonga and first recorded in London in 1923. In 1997 it was adopted as the national anthem, with verses added by the isiXhosa national poet, Enoch Mqhayi. Fragments of the old Afrikaner national anthem, '*Die Stem van Suid-Afrika*' ('The Call of South Africa') were grafted onto it, in Afrikaans and English, during the negotiations to create the national anthem of post-apartheid, democratic South Africa. Its overt religious tenor is a consequence of the Christian education that early African nationalists received in colonial mission schools.

Likewise, the fact that the inauguration of the South African Native National Congress – as the ANC was named at its formation in 1912 – was held in a church stems from the Christian convictions of the founding African nationalist leaders in South Africa. However, during the 20th century, the alliance between the ANC, the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions infused the national liberation movement with a secular nationalism.

The subsequent history of South Africa, covering the second half of the 20th century, was taken up with the contestations and clashes between racists and exclusive Afrikaner nationalism, on the one hand, and a non-racial, inclusive African nationalism, on the other. The historical outcome, after a protracted struggle, saw the ascendancy to power of what by then was a non-racial ANC, with the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions as alliance partners.

The end of white minority rule and the formation of an inclusive, non-racial nation-state in 1994 belie assertions that The National Question, posed during the 20th century, remains unresolved. More accurately, what remains unfinished is the translation of formal constitutional and political equality into tangible economic, social and cultural justice.

Resistance and the role of arts, culture and heritage in the struggle for another South Africa

To understand the role of arts, culture and heritage in the transformation from fragmented ethnic enclaves under white domination into an inclusive, non-racial, post-colonial nation-state, it is necessary to study the role of the sector in the struggle against apartheid in the second half of the 20th century. In doing so, it is necessary to eschew both crude political instrumentalisation and the ideological reduction of arts, culture and heritage to mere epiphenomena in the struggle against oppression or the aestheticisation of political ideologies. Although artists, cultural and heritage practitioners, who participated – directly and indirectly – in the struggle for national liberation, went so far as to declare art a metaphorical ‘weapon of struggle’, this in no way reduced art (including posters) to crude political slogans bereft of aesthetic qualities.

As diverse forms of aesthetic practices, the arts constitute modes of creativity, premised on freedom of expression. In conditions of political and social oppression, it often assumes what Harlow (1987: 2–30) refers to as the mode of ‘resistance art’, which runs counter to repression and censorship. A significant body of individual artists and community-based art organisations responded to social and political developments from the inception of colonialism in South Africa. This can be seen in rock paintings depicting gun-wielding colonists advancing in ox wagons at battle sites in the interior. In addition, a plethora of anti-apartheid exhibitions and publications were mounted and published from the 1960s onwards to constitute a vast national archive of visual heritage.

In South Africa, three cultural clusters can be identified. These are Africans (which include people of mixed descent), Asians and Europeans. Viewed from this perspective, South Africa is far from the extremely pluralistic society that colonial and apartheid discourse has asserted for the strategic purposes of systematic division. A central aspect of this was the colonial and racist claim that Africans were primitive savages lacking in the human refinements of art, culture and heritage, of which the colonists were paragons. This assertion formed the cornerstone of colonial ideology and served to justify genocide, enslavement, exploitation and land expropriations. This outlook, which permeates colonial discourse in Africa, is borne out by the observations of the European mariners, who set foot on South African soil in the 15th century in the wake of Portuguese mariners rounding the Cape in search of a route to the East, and later in 1652, when the Dutch East India Company (VOC) arrived to occupy a strategic patch of land in Table Bay on which to establish a refreshment station, which would service ships en route to and from trading centres in the Far East.

The logbooks and travel journals of the European visitors who disembarked at the Cape left no doubt whatsoever about their views of the indigenous people whom they encountered. Without exception, the native population are described as brute savages, resembling animals, without intelligible human speech and with habits so foul as to engender intense revulsion. Early colonial impressions, compiled by Raven-Hart (1971) and other ethnographers, register unrelenting ethnocentric prejudices and racist slander against the indigenous peoples at the Cape in the 17th century. The ‘First People’ of southern Africa are, without exception, described as ‘repulsive wild creatures’, lower than animals and only vaguely resembling human beings. Considered ‘vermin’, this justified colonial genocide and cleared the way for the violent conquest of African territories.

This colonial and racist slander intensified and continued unabated for three centuries, until the entire subcontinent and its diverse people had been subjugated – and even enslaved – by Dutch–Afrikaner settlers, and later by British colonists, and people’s ancestral land had been expropriated. In 1863, the first Indians were shipped to South Africa as indentured labourers on the sugarcane farms of Natal. In the wake of all of this, small numbers of conquered African offspring were converted to Christianity and provided with basic mission education.

As events unfolded, the Boer and British settlers began erecting religious, political, educational and cultural institutions modelled on those in Europe for the exclusive edification of the settler population. Remnants of these can still be found in the former colonial territories of the Cape, Natal, Free State and Transvaal. The museums consisted of specimens of colonial culture, natural history, palaeontology, archaeology and ethnography. The theatres and concert halls performed Western and colonial dramas, operas, ballets, musicals and orchestral music, and the art galleries collected Western and colonial visual art in white-segregated institutions.

The policy of apartheid was firmly entrenched from 1948 onwards and Hendrik Verwoerd, one of its main architects, guaranteed in the 1953 Bantu Education Act that Bantu Education would be designed to ensure that Africans were restricted to basic forms of physical labour with no, or very limited, opportunities to aspire to anything beyond this (Lee, 2003).

This lack of quality education, along with grand apartheid, based on the systematic division and ethnic classification of Africans, laid the foundations for a society in which the state made no provision for art education at primary, secondary or tertiary levels for much of the population classified as ‘natives’ under British colonialism and as ‘non-whites’ under apartheid. (For years, the South African Native College, established by missionaries in Alice in the Eastern Cape in 1915, was the only tertiary institution for Africans in the whole of southern Africa. This later became University of Fort Hare.)

There were also no public, that is, state-funded, museums, art galleries, theatres, cinemas, concert halls or orchestras provided for the majority. Access to art education and training in schools and at universities was the exclusive preserve of whites. The vast majority of South Africans, stripped of citizenship, had to make do with rudimentary and informal community initiatives.

However, progressive anti-apartheid, creative practitioners and philanthropists, both black and white, and both inside and outside South Africa, stepped up to the historical challenges facing society and established community arts facilities. From the 1950s until the end of apartheid, these community arts facilities were concentrated in the metropolitan areas. A few venues were grudgingly provided by local authorities, such as the Bantu Men’s Social Centre and the Polly Street Art Centre in Johannesburg, and the Kathlehong Art Centre on the East Rand. All of these were eventually closed when local authorities withdrew their support for what they perceived to be hotbeds of dissent and open disregard for the rigid segregation underpinning apartheid. Privately funded facilities included the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre at Rorke’s Drift (1963) in the then Natal province, which was sponsored by Swedish missionaries, while the Funda Centre (1963) in Soweto was funded by the white, liberal Urban Foundation.

Other institutions supporting the visual arts, which relied on foreign funding, included: the Johannesburg Art Foundation, established by Bill Ainslie; the Community Art Centre in Cape Town, established by a local art collective; the Artist Proof Studio in Newtown, established by Kim Berman and Nhlanhla Xaba (1991); and the South African Poster Book Collective (1991). Similarly, theatre and the performing arts found outlets in the Space Theatre, established in Cape Town by Brian Ashbury, a journalist who sold his house to fund the project; the Market Theatre in Newtown, Johannesburg,

established by Barney Simon and Mannie Manim; and *Moving into Dance*, also located in Newtown, established by Sylvia Glaser. The list goes on.

Aided by Dutch and Swedish funders in 1987, progressive South African writers established the Congress of South African Writers and its publishing house, COSAW Publishing. Other independent publishers, such as Ravan Press, Skotaville Publishers and David Philip, were outlets for South African English writers. Taurus, in turn, supported dissident Afrikaans writing. A plethora of literary magazines, including *Staffrider*, established by Ravan Press in 1978 in the aftermath of the Soweto Uprising and later transferred to the Congress of South African Writers, provided outlets for creative writing, social documentary photography and art. All these organisations, projects and publications that were openly opposed to apartheid and racist minority rule were subject to surveillance, censorship, harassment and repression.

This may seem like an impressive array of projects and facilities – which it was, given the social and political constraints under which they were actualised. The reality, however, was that the projects – small, precarious and under-resourced – were basically dependent on international philanthropy and anti-apartheid solidarity. As a result, relatively small numbers of artists were able to access these critical but under-resourced facilities. The official colonial and apartheid educational policies, based as they were on tenets of racist ideology, were grounded in the conviction that Africans, classified as ‘non-whites’, were destined for lives as manual labourers and thus had no need for art and science education.

Because of this, wherever the arts found the means to flourish, creative work by the oppressed was quickly instrumentalised into vehicles for the articulation of criticism and dissent. This was done by giving creative expression to the experiences of the oppressed and articulating the visions of liberation. Consequently, art and literature invariably became aesthetic vectors and catalysts for resistance and revolt. For the apartheid state, such a movement had to be curtailed and repressed through official censorship.

History was repeating itself: this had been the case in the 1960s, when, as Rive (1982: 13) points out, most of the writers associated with *Drum* magazine, including Es’kia Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, Ken Themba, Arthur Maimane, Dennis Brutus, Alex La Guma, Mazizi Kunene, Todd Matshikiza, and others, were banned and driven into exile, rendering South African literature ‘white by law’. As Davenport (1991: 392) records, this was repeated in the Soweto Uprising of 1976, resulting in large-scale arrests and the banning of all the black consciousness leaders and organisations, including community-based arts organisations and writers’ groups.

It also resulted in the murders of many school pupils and the death of anti-apartheid activists in police custody, the most prominent of which was the brutal murder of Steve Biko, the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), whose philosophy and resistance strategies were shaped by his readings of Fanon (1967). Biko was also influenced by the leaders of the 1960s Black Power Movement in the United States, who stressed the importance and necessity of subjective and willed psychological shedding of feelings of inferiority, fear and paralysis induced by racist oppression and domination. This was aimed at strengthening individual and collective resolve to directly oppose, reject and openly confront racist domination, which was considered a necessary vehicle for individual and collective emancipation through fearless and creative, as well as radical and revolutionary, social and political action.

In this regard, creative responses by writers and artists moved through the three phases identified by Fanon (1990 [1963]) in his essay, ‘On national culture’. The first phase involved the assimilation and imitation of Western colonial traditions ensuing from mission education, as was the

case in South Africa, where native writers and artists sought the affirmation of their colonisers. When this proved futile, the second phase involved a return to the native culture, only to find it exhausted and outdated. This phase was followed by the third and final 'fighting phase' for national liberation and a national culture as part of the popular national struggle.

From the 1960s, when the ANC leadership was banned and forced into exile, other South Africans joined the exiled writers mentioned earlier, with musicians such as Miriam Makeba, Hugh Maseleka and Jonas Gwangwa, as well as visual artists such as Dumile Feni and Gerard Sekoto, joining the liberation movement in exile. Their numbers increased in the wake of the repression following the uprising of 1976, when writers like Mongane Wally Serote, Mandla Langa and others went into exile and, together with Keorapetse Kgositsile, who had been in exile since the 1960s, established the Arts and Cultural Department of the ANC.

A 'Culture and Resistance Conference' was held from 5 to 9 July 1982, hosted by the ANC's Medu Arts Ensemble in Gaborone, Botswana. It was at that event that the concept of 'cultural worker' as a non-elitist, creative, non-partisan artist in solidarity with the oppressed and exploited urban-rural worker, was coined. This, as Serote (2008: 193–5) puts it, triggered the emergence of community-based cultural organisations, openly aligned to the struggle against apartheid. These gained impetus in the face of the rallying call to develop an inclusive, democratic, national culture, which unfolded in the 1980s.

A decade after the Soweto Uprising, South Africans mounted a sustained and unprecedented phase of popular opposition to white minority rule under the banner of the United Democratic Front (UDF). While it took place under different conditions and featured different tactics, its inclusive approach was reminiscent of the All-In Convention of the 1960s. This, together with mounting international opposition to white minority rule, which intensified after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union – and with it the perceived waning possibility of a post-apartheid state aligned to communism – resulted in the unbanning of the liberation movements and the release of political prisoners. This paved the way for a negotiated settlement. Amidst all these developments, the last decade of apartheid saw arts and culture being declared 'weapons of struggle' by artists both at home and in exile.

This was followed by the 'Culture in Another South Africa Festival and Conference', hosted in Amsterdam in the Netherlands in December 1989. This event, which was attended by visual artists, musicians, writers, photographers, actors and film-makers from home and in exile, took place as the ANC and the apartheid government were reaching out to each other and paving the way for the unbanning of the liberation movements. The Amsterdam conference proceedings are published in *Culture in Another South Africa*, edited by Campschreur and Divendal (1989: 214–23). In it, apartheid culture was denounced as a tool of oppression intended to maintain the status quo and undermine the national democratic struggle. A set of resolutions was adopted, based on the precept 'that culture was an integral part of the national democratic struggle' for national liberation, and a pledge was made to develop a non-racial and an inclusive 'democratic people's culture' to counter the divisive strategies of racist, white minority rule. The 'Zabalaza Festival' was held in London in 1990 in celebration of South African art and culture. It was also the venue for week-long workshops focusing on the development of both creative and administrative skills. This was in preparation for the imminent arrival of democracy, and the reconstruction of the country and the state into an inclusive, non-racial society.

The above outline underscores the emphasis that the liberation movement placed on the role of art in articulating creative opposition to the culture of racial domination and repression in South

Africa – this at a time when state censorship functioned to curtail and muzzle free expression and artistic dissent.

Thus, every stage of political resistance and opposition to minority rule in South Africa included cultural and artistic modalities, which the government sought to repress, along with direct political dissent. This, coupled with the plunder and destruction of indigenous cultures and the colonial negations of indigenous culture, is the basis of Cabral's assertion that 'national liberation is an act of culture'. This is so, since colonialism justifies itself by presenting itself as a civilising project. This colonial view, as Fanon (1990 [1963]: 169) posits, is the systematic cultural negation of the colonised 'by driving into their heads that colonisation came to lighten their darkness'. This is done by driving 'into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality'. Artists countered this by resisting and exposing the barbarism of colonialism and racist minority rule in South Africa by harnessing the arts in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid, to the point of turning creative practices into proverbial 'weapons of struggle'.

From this, it is evident that resistance art constituted critical practices in the development of an inclusive, alternative national narrative to that of racist minority rule. Coupled with economic, diplomatic, sport, educational, mass action and militant struggles, it formed part of an ensemble of strategies in the quest to liberate South Africa. The importance of arts and culture is borne out by the United Nations Cultural, Sport, Academic and Scientific Boycott imposed on apartheid in 1980, which the ANC had called for as early as 1958.

Social cohesion and nation formation: The role of arts, culture and heritage policies in post-apartheid South Africa

Following the unbanning of the liberation movements and the return of exiles, many artists, cultural and heritage practitioners aligned to the struggle took the initiative to develop democratic art, culture and heritage policies and practices for a democratic South Africa. This was led by the National Arts Coalition, initiated by the Congress of South African Writers in 1992. It involved assembling all the arts, culture and heritage organisations, institutions and practitioners into a National Arts Council (NAC).

At a gathering in the Great Hall at the University of the Witwatersrand, a national executive was elected and tasked with researching international policy developments in the sector. The objective was to identify best practices and develop a set of policy proposals based on democratic participatory principles, tailored for the South African context. It included proposals for abolishing the state-funded colonial and apartheid arts, culture and heritage dispensation and replacing it with an inclusive, democratic and participatory system, premised on the Education and Culture clause in the Freedom Charter, which states: 'The doors of learning and culture shall be opened' (See Suttner and Cronin, 1986: 265).

The NAC proposals were incorporated into the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (South African Government, 1994) along with a proposed framework of cultural institutions for an integrated democratic dispensation, in which diverse cultures were harnessed as resources for creativity, renewal and inclusivity. This was to facilitate the generation of shared values and the emergence of a multifaceted African national identity made up of complementary and interrelated cultures.

In 1994, the NAC convened the International Conference on Cultural Policy in Johannesburg. The proceedings and the NAC's resolutions are published in *Bringing Cinderella to The Ball: Papers Presented at a Conference on Arts and Culture in the New South Africa* (see Oliphant, 1995). This led

to the appointment of the Arts and Culture Task Group by the new minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology in 1994. Tasked with conducting comprehensive consultations and research, this group produced the *Arts and Culture Task Team on Art and Culture Report* (1995), which formed the basis of the 1996 White Paper on Arts and Culture (DAC, 1996).

At the heart of the policies for all the sectors, including arts, culture and heritage, was the imperative to end the race-based, institutional exclusions imposed by apartheid. Guided by principles of redress, transformation, nation-building, accountability, freedom of expression and Africanisation, the central objective of the report was not only to transform society into an inclusive and unified formation, but also to systematically address the exclusions, inequalities and injustices of the past.

In the light of this, the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (DAC, 1996) abolished, as the official culture of South Africa, the segregated arts, culture and heritage dispensation that had been designed and maintained for centuries to cater for a white minority's colonial heritage and nostalgic, European aesthetic practices. In its place, an inclusive, democratic policy framework of transparency and accountability, on the one hand, and freedom of expression and creativity, on the other, was legally enacted. This was to reconfigure, transform and introduce new and inclusive, democratic national, provincial and local implementation and funding agencies for the sector in the form of the National Arts Council, the Film and Video Foundation and the National Heritage Council.

The patchwork of colonial heritage institutions in the Cape and Gauteng provinces was reconfigured into the southern Iziko and northern Ditsong Museums of South Africa by the 1996 White Paper. This has been extended by the Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage, approved by Parliament in 2020, to include the rest of the national institutions in the other provinces. The declaration of new legacy heritage institutions after 1996, including the Robben Island Museum, the Freedom Park Project and the Cradle of Humankind, have begun the process of reconfiguring public heritage institutions to emphasise African heritage in society. The Revised White Paper consequently mandates the centring of African art, culture and heritage, inclusive of the Asian and European traditions, which make up the diverse artistic practices, cultural traditions and heritage of South Africa. Furthermore, new developments related to a Liberation Heritage Route in South Africa and the continent, along with a proposed National Museum of the Liberation Struggle, are in progress. A proposed Khoi, San, Korana and Griekwa Heritage Route has also been approved by the Cabinet as part of the ongoing transformation to embody the African aspect at the core of an inclusive South African culture.

Rigid policy prescription should be avoided as a means of constructing an inclusive national culture. A more effective and non-coercive way is to transform arts education at all levels in all the disciplines – including literature, the performing arts (music, theatre and dance) and the visual arts (fine art, crafts and design) – to facilitate intercultural learning and research. The diverse cultures of South Africa must be treated as equal and studied to establish affinities and differences, as complementary resources for cooperation, exchange, mutual renewal and development. These affinities and differences are already evident in the linguistic families of African languages, cultures and heritage traditions, which have been impacted to a considerable degree by Western traditions. The same applies to the traditions of Indian and Malay cultures in South Africa. This calls for comparative, non-hierarchical, literary, musical, and visual arts and heritage curricula at all levels of education.

The heritage collection and the historicisation of South Africa's national visual arts should be reimagined to achieve broad inclusivity. They should straddle the visual traditions and heritage from the rock paintings and engravings of the San and Khoi, through to the murals, paintings, wood carvings,

ceramics and indigenous weaving practices evident in the country today. These should be promoted, along with multilingualism and the comparative study of South African literature in all languages, as well as incentives for all South Africans to learn at least one African language.

The foundation for the construction of an inclusive nation-state must be the diverse African cultures of South Africa. These cultures and their peoples are not, as colonial and apartheid ethnographic classifications were given to assert, 'water-tight' tribal categories. In fact, these ethnographic classifications were used to create divisions – as a divide-and-rule strategy. This was done to such an extent that people of the same linguistic and cultural group were divided and allocated to separate 'tribal territories', as was the case in the Ciskei and Transkei bantustans in the Eastern Cape. Likewise, the urban townships were divided into zones and housing was allocated on a segregated, 'tribal' basis. This served to divide and fragment the majority of South Africans.

The non-racial liberation movements countered this by working to unite all South Africans; hence the centrality of 'The National Question' in the policies and practices of the liberation movement and its allies. South Africa need not follow a European, homogeneous approach to nation-building. It should rather develop a multilingual, African, post-colonial national state and society, based on equality in diversity as a precondition for the unity proclaimed by the Preamble to the 1996 Constitution. To clear the path for this, the stark social, economic and cultural inequalities inherited from the past must be eradicated, and exclusions must be systemically addressed and incrementally eliminated. In the process, a new type of nation-state, based on inclusivity and equality in diversity, may be developed.

Of critical importance is that diversity should not be enlisted as grounds for division and exclusion, as was the case in the past. Rather, cultural differences should be treated as the complementary resources of plenitude and diversity. This, along with the restoration of African art, culture and heritage practices and traditions, is critical for an inclusive, non-racial, African national polity.

Conclusion

The prospects of South Africa developing into a homogeneous, European-type, monolithic nation-state are slim. At the same time, it is salutary to note that the homogeneous, European nation-states are currently diversifying culturally and ethnically due to increased migrations from Africa and Asia, as well as transnational and regional integration brought about by the formation of the European Union. In addition, immigration into South Africa from conflict regions in Asia and other parts of Africa has intensified since the end of apartheid. This is likely to increase as continental economic integration progresses. This mobility and migration are sure to alter the demography of regional economic centres such as South Africa.

The project of nation-building will most likely unfold on the basis of equality and intercultural solidarity. This will bring diverse African, as well as Asian and European, cultures and peoples together in an inclusive and complementary framework of cooperation, collaboration and exchange. Should an inclusive national heritage and culture emerge in the process, it is likely to be grounded in an African base, infused with diversity and marked by hybridity. This is the dynamic trajectory of all national cultures in a post-colonial, globalising world. Its specific South African contours will be shaped by transformation, redress and Africa-centred inclusivity, having been emancipated from a colonial imagination and racist mould.

Whether a future South African national culture will develop, and how it will be constituted, cannot be prescribed – and it will not come into existence through legislation alone. If and when it

does, its main source, according to Biko (1978: 41–7, 98), will hopefully be rooted in the culture and ethics of African humanism, which informs and upholds the inherent value of every human being – also known as *ubuntu*. Biko predicted that it would prevail over colonialism and apartheid and, in the process, ‘bestow a more human face’ on South Africa and the world. In April 1994, it seemed as though Biko’s prophesy was materialising before the eyes of the world. Then the light went out. But to despair is not an option. So, the work to remake South Africa as an inclusive and sovereign nation-state – of a specific kind, if not a ‘special kind’ – continues.

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