Between discourse and reality:
critical remarks on the relevance of Gramscianism for the study
of racism in post-apartheid South Africa

Michiel De Coninck

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**MICHIEL DE CONINCK**

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Abstract

This article aims to offer some insights in the role of racism and nationalism in post-apartheid South Africa. We argue that the prevalence of these concepts offers one among many causes for the lack of generalized class struggle up until recently. The theoretical concepts of Antonio Gramsci form the starting point for our argumentation. We will closely examine the concepts of 'hegemony' and 'historical bloc' in the original Gramscian paradigm, and the relevance of these concepts today. We are aware of the specific context in which these concepts originated, and will therefore try to adapt them to the peculiar case of South Africa. More specifically, this means that two adjustments to the original paradigm are required. Firstly, we will consider the specific position that South Africa occupies in the capitalist world economy as a so-called sub-imperialist state. Secondly, we will use the thesis of Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein to adapt Gamsci's insights on culture to the more specific case of racism, by placing this latter concept in its economic and historical context and linking it to the problem of nationalism. Finally, we will apply these concepts to our case study of South Africa. We will examine two existing forms of racism, and evaluate them by the use of our theoretical framework. A first, internal form of racism offers a perfect example of the creation of a hegemonic consensus by the ruling class, that at the same time also has to adapt to the grievances of the lower classes. A second, more external form of racism towards foreigners, shows a less clear form of consensus, which, I argue, is mainly because of the ambiguous economic and social position of these foreigners.
Samenvatting

Dit artikel heeft als doel om dieper in te gaan op de rol van nationalisme en racisme in post-apartheid Zuid-Afrika. De impact van deze concepten op huidige socio-economische processen kan mee verklaren waarom een bredere klassenstrijd in Zuid-Afrika zo lang achterwege is gebleven. Gebruik makend van het werk van Antonio Gramsci wordt het nut en de relevantie van de concepten 'hegemonie' en 'historisch blok' aangetoond. Aangezien deze concepten in een zeer specifieke historische en politieke context tot stand kwamen, zullen deze nadien licht aangepast worden voor onze casus. Eerst gaan we de relevantie van deze concepten na voor een sub-imperialistisch land zoals Zuid-Afrika. Nadien maken we gebruik van het werk van Étienne Balibar en Immanuel Wallerstein om de meer algemene ideeën van Gramsci over cultuur toe te passen op een meer concrete vorm hiervan, met name racisme. We doen dit door dit racisme in zijn historische en economische context te plaatsen, en het te linken aan de problematiek van nationalisme. Met deze theoretische bagage evalueren we nadien de rol van racisme in post-apartheid Zuid-Afrika. We onderscheiden twee varianten van racisme, en argumenteren dat beiden vanuit het Gramsciaanse paradigma kunnen verklaard worden, zij het op een enigszins verschillende manier. De interne tegenstelling tussen blanken en zwarten biedt een perfect voorbeeld van een hegemonisch discours dat door de elite wordt geconstrueerd om zijn eigen belangen te dienen. Tegelijkertijd toont het echter ook aan dat deze elite steeds rekening moet houden met de grieven van de rest van de bevolking. Een tweede, externe vorm van racisme tegen migranten, toont een minder eenduidig dominant discours, wat kan verklaard worden door de ambigue socio-economische positie van deze migranten.
Introduction

For the past nineteen years, South Africa has been a strange beast in international politics, especially when it comes to the popular opinion surrounding it. Praised everywhere in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC), and Nelson Mandela in particular, were expected to help the country recover from the trauma of 46 years of apartheid, and lead South Africa into a new age of prosperity.

International expectations were enormous, not only for South Africa itself, but also for the role the country was expected to play in the rest of the African continent. However, contrary to popular belief, coloured by both the almost mythical figure of Mandela, as well as the country's positive image put forward in the international media, South Africa still faces severe socio-economic problems today. As a result, future generations are burdened with a hefty mortgage. Present-day South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world, with almost half the population's income below the minimum living level (Hurwitz & Luiz, 2007, p. 108). The country has the doubtful honour of being in the top five countries with the highest inequality when measured by the GINI coefficient (Human Development Report, 2011). Official statistics consistently measure unemployment at 35 to 40% (Barchiesi, 2007, p. 561). And finally, the events in Marikana in August 2012 provided a clear indication of a renewed increase in class struggle, as well as the start of a more widespread contestation of the legitimacy and omnipotence of the ANC.

An important question that has been raised in the aftermath of Marikana, was why such events did not occur earlier. The economic deprivation that caused a lot of grievances in the industrial sector was already present from the start of the post-apartheid era on. Evidently, there were forms of protest in the past decade, but this was more in the form of single-issue movements with a limited program, as opposed to a more general contestation of the current social and economic policies (Cornell, 2009). Obviously, not one single reason can explain this relative lack of general labour protest in South Africa during the past few decades. Nevertheless, in the following article, I would like to delve deeper into one partial explanation for this, namely the discrepancy between the concepts of race and class in the country.

Because of its unique history, South Africa faces various other problems, apart from the obvious economic ones, especially when it comes to dealing with its apartheid past. Even more so than in other countries, both feelings of nationalism and racism, and especially the interaction between
these two, continues to determine socio-economic processes to a large degree. The legacy of half a
century of formal apartheid is a harsh one, that still has far-spread consequences. This does not
mean however, that we should adopt a deterministic view that blames current problems on the past.
Social and economic decisions of the past nineteen years have had, as I will argue, at least as much
an impact on present-day feelings of racism in South Africa.

While this racism clearly still exists, it has been affected by a remarkable mutation process in
comparison to the apartheid era. Projects of nation-building have to a certain degree tried to deal
with persistent racism but have, in an interesting and dialectical way, turned this into its opposite:
feelings of racism were reinforced in other respects. In this article, we shall take a closer look at the
underlying causes of this transformation. Rather than attribute this to abstract sociological
processes, we shall use the Gramscian vision on power politics to determine which groups in
society benefit from these persistent feelings of racism. More specifically, we shall scrutinize the
role of the ruling ANC party and the traditional media in this process.

In order to complete this research, we will start with some reflections on the theoretical insights of
Antonio Gramsci. These have, even by academics, quite often been interpreted as very one-
dimensional. As I will argue, in reality these ideas form one of the most coherent frameworks for
the study of culture and ideas in a capitalist society and can therefore be interpreted as a pinnacle of
dialectical thought. Secondly, we shall try to adopt the ideas of Gramsci, which focus on culture and
ideas in general, to the specific case of raciality and racism. The thesis of Étienne Balibar and
Immanuel Wallerstein, directly linking modern forms of racism to nationalism, will receive special
attention here as an additional explanation. Finally, these insights must be applied to the the peculiar
case study of South Africa. As I shall argue, present-day racism in South Africa knows at least two
different variants which can both be analyzed according to the Gramscian framework, although in a
slightly different way. While the internal form of racism pictures a standard form of top-down
hegemony by the political elite, the external variant offers us a much more ambiguous political
discourse on foreigners. While this seems contradictory at first, we shall argue that this is in fact a
perfect representation of the ambiguous economic position of foreigners themselves in the country.
Theoretical reflections on the concept of hegemony

Of all Marxist thinkers, Antonio Gramsci is probably one of the most complex: one can find roughly as many interpretations of his work as there are interpreters. Since most of his legacy consists of loose essays and tractates, every interpretation of his work will necessarily depend on the chosen selection, and the order in which it is read (Anderson, 1976, p. 6). The fact that his 'prison notebooks' were written in more or less total isolation from the outside world, combined with the sometimes cryptic explanations to evade the prison censorship, does not help us either (Gramsci, 2003).

This does not mean of course, that we should fall into the postmodernist trap of considering the multitude of interpretations of Gramsci as equally valid. As Peter Thomas (2009) argues, the prison notebooks have a fundamental coherence that can and should be grasped when dealing with Gramsci's theoretical insights. These insights offer us a remarkable dialectical vision on power relations in a capitalist society, and a handful of concepts that are fundamental for modern scientific research, in the first place the concepts of 'hegemony' and 'historical bloc'.

When talking about the concept of power, Gramsci makes a clear distinction between the more brute form of domination, and a much more subtle way of power, which he terms hegemony (Gramsci, 2003, p. 333). It is this latter concept that will be of the utmost importance in the context of this article, although we need to remark that we can't separate both concepts from each other. T.J. Jackson Lears (1985, p. 568) rightfully describes both concepts in a dialectical relationship. A society solely based on domination can't properly function, as does one based on hegemony. The question therefore is not what type of society we are dealing with, but which form of power is dominant in any given context.

This derives from the fact that, while simple military control can very easily be imposed onto others, more subtle ways of control, in particular the control of ideas, which has become one of the central themes of Gramscian research, can only come out of a certain consensus between ruler and ruled. This central theme of the Gramscian framework puts us into the realm of hegemony. One of the popular misconceptions of Gramscian theory is that it would be some sort of one-way direction control of ideas (Jackson & Sorensen, 2007). The ruling class, together with some other collaborating groups in society, is believed to form a so-called 'historical bloc', that presumably has the monopoly on the production of ideas. A more in depth reading of Gramsci however, quickly
reveals a much more dialectical process. As Gramsci himself puts it:

"the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinated groups, and the formation and the life of the state is conceived as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups." (Gramsci, 2003, p. 182).

In this scenario, the 'historical bloc' must be interpreted as a way for the leading social-class forces to rule by integrating a variety of different class interests in their program (Morton, 2007, p. 118). This is accomplished by the collaboration of certain groups of intelligentsia, but evenly requires a degree of agreement by the working class.

When we transpose this to the development of political and socio-cultural ideas in any given society, it can only mean that these can never be imported onto a people from the outside. Earlier traditions, conceptions, and experiences of the masses will at least have to form the basis for new ideas, if not have a more profound impact (Morera, 1990, p. 26). This of course does not mean that we should neglect the power and influence of the ruling class. It does indicate however, that the construction of any hegemonic discourse is always a two-way process, in which the ideas of the masses are more than simply fictional (Morton, 2007, p. 81).

The vulgar and one-way interpretation of Gramsci's concept of hegemony is not the only element that needs to be falsified. As Perry Anderson (1976) remarks, both Marxist and non-Marxist thinkers have critiqued Gramsci for his supposed idealist way of thinking, as opposed to the materialist basis of orthodox Marxism (Bates, 1975). However, T. J. Jackson Lears (1985) correctly points out that Gramsci's work is far from idealist, but instead offers a fresh dialectical interpretation of the relation between societal structure and superstructure, and gives an answer to one of the weakest parts of the original Marxist paradigm. One of the biggest critiques on Marx' work still is the supposedly deterministic role of the economic base of society, which is understood to ultimately decide social change (Dumolyn, 2003, p. 61). Leaving aside whether or not this critique is legitimate, Gramsci offers us a slightly different model that largely neutralizes this: where Marx still considered the economic structure of society to be a relational process within the context of the existing mode of production, Gramsci "narrowed the economic base to include only the material and technical instruments of production" (Lears, 1985, p. 570). As a result, the sphere of the socio-political superstructure is not only broadened, but also provides for a more natural
interaction, without having to refer to unverifiable phrases like 'economics ultimately being decisive'.

While Gramsci's insights offer us a valuable framework for further analysis, a couple of things need to be kept in mind. First of all, while Gramsci's theory is generally viewed as a universal paradigm for capitalist societies, we need to realize that most of his personal writing concerned Italy. As with any social theory, adaptations therefore might be required for a more in depth analysis of any given case study. When it comes to South Africa, it is especially the Gramscianism of Rebecca Davies (2007) that proves to be most effective. In her research, Davis mainly focuses on the changing position of Afrikanerdom in present-day South Africa. The changing discourse on Afrikaner identity, she argues, should be seen as a reaction to the changing world order of the past twenty years, with a global consensus on a neoliberal economic agenda (Davies, 2007, p. 360). However, Davies does not fall into the trap of suggesting a deterministic connection between these two. Instead, she focuses on the structure-agency process at hand here, or as she puts it: "identity is exposed as a structural and contested condition, punctuated by systemic transactions and moulded by agents." (Davies, 2007, p. 359). This, in the post-apartheid period, has made way for a historical bloc that still favors the interests of capital, but at the same time has to pay attention to the griefs of a newly emerged black petit bourgeoisie and, to a lesser degree, the organised working class.

This more down-to-earth interpretation of Gramsci provides us with a slightly more useful framework for the study of South Africa. However, a second problem with the traditional work of Gramsci arises here, in the fact it focuses on the study of ideas in general. It remains to be seen whether or not this can be directly applied to the problems of raciality and racism. For this, the writings of Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (1996) can offer us some valuable tools that shall be examined in the next chapter.
Race and class: a tale of communicating vessels?

The concepts of race and racism have been the focus of a wide range of scientific research. Before offering some of the scientific insights that are relevant within the context of this article, I would want to make clear that, following Richard Lewontin (2006), in no way I consider the existence of 'races' to be a biological given. Raciality in its broadest sense is merely to be seen as a cultural and social distinction of people, a constructed framework based on supposed biological differences. However, the constructed origin of the concept does not make the consequences of it any less real (Meskell, 2005). In itself, while being a social construct, raciality is not necessarily harmful, as it merely creates a distinction between people, not necessarily a stratification. When any form of stratification does occur, the term racism seems more fitting. In this case, forms of cultural, economic or political exclusion are in play, leading to a denigration or even oppression of one group by another.

As with the construction of ideas in general, the nascency and transformation of a hegemonic vision on cultural or racial diversity does not take place in a vacuum. What this means is that, when doing research on both the meaning and impact of racism, one has to always keep an eye on both the historical and socio-economic roots of it. Authors like Alana Lentin (2005) and Kenan Malik (1996) trace the roots of modern racism back to the rise of modernity in the Western world, and more specifically the Enlightenment. Lentin mainly focuses on the rise of the European nation-states in the nineteenth century, and the need for the still developing bourgeoisie to legitimise itself and its national project. The Enlightenment brought forth a theoretical support for nationalism, which proved to be a strong weapon in this ideological struggle, by gathering people behind the same language and flag. This necessarily created a dangerous form of raciality, sometimes even already racism in the way described earlier, by constructing an 'us' versus 'them' logic. If not before, racism definitely became part of the hegemonic vision on political and economic differences during the colonial era.

Kenan Malik on the other hand, rather than taking the construction of the nation-state as his main focus, links the intellectual shift of the 18th century to the other big revolution of that time: the industrial one (Malik, 1996, p. 72). According to Malik, racism as we know it today originated in the class struggle of the 19th century. The ideas of the Enlightenment were first and foremost used as a way to create a distinction between autochtonous upper and lower classes: capitalist 'captains of industry' were presented as the pinnacle of Western civilization, an example for everyone to follow.
Later on, during the period of imperialism, the newly 'discovered' people in the South were simply fit into this scheme, with the local elites and évolués getting a spot above the European working class, while still being unable to reach the absolute top of so-called 'civilization'.

Despite their different approach, both Lentin and Malik see the modern forms of racism as a clearly manipulated project, that was not so much a direct and logical consequence of modernity, but a historical process that was constructed and shaped within the context of very specific political and economic power relations.

All of this indicates a very strong link between radical economic and social change on the one hand, and the becoming of modern racism on the other. This suggests that this modern racism has in essence a class origin, as opposed to a cultural one. Immanuel Wallerstein correctly explains this by pointing to the fact that in earlier modes of production raciality was mainly used as a way to keep 'the outsider' out of the own society (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1996, p. 33). This was mainly a cultural choice, since the search for cheap labour was not so much an issue in former modes of production. In a capitalist society however, the opposite is true: the outsider needs to be integrated into the capitalist labour process, although not entirely. In its continuous effort to avoid the ever-imminent falling rate of profit, capitalism has constantly sought to integrate new people into its economic process as a means of cheap labour, mainly so-called semi-proletarian labour. This, Rosa Luxemburg (2003) explains, allows capitalists to pay these new workers a wage below their reproduction cost, since they still have certain forms of subsistence economy to fall back on.

All of this suggests that a lot more so than in earlier modes of production, under capitalism, racism has become an import way of control by the ruling class. As Balibar and Wallerstein point out however, this process cannot be seen separately from nationalism. Both combine into a process of historical reciprocity, in which both tendencies have constantly strengthened each other (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1996, pp. 53-54). This indicates that, despite common claims, modern forms of nationalism do in fact create division and intolerance. While nationalism as a theoretical concept does not necessarily imply this, the historical evolution that this concept has known, and its modern link with racism, suggests that in practice, a hegemonic and racialized projection of 'us' versus 'them' is created, in which the other is continuously described as inferior.

This does not mean that under capitalism, the modern variant of racism has not in itself known an evolution. Starting from a division based on plain racially inspired criteria in the colonial era, a
more economic division was adopted in the Cold War period, with both the phase theory of W.W. Rostow and the Stalinist two-stage theory claiming their own economic system to be superior (Ottaway, 1987; Foster, 2007). This created the ideological legitimation to dominate and control other people, under the guise of 'developing the underdeveloped'.

As several authors have described (Harrison, 1995; Todd, 2011), the past few decades have seen a new change in the discourse on racism. Nowadays, there is mainly a focus on cultural differences, that suggest not so much a stratification of people, but merely a division, apparently moving from the realm of racism to that of raciality. However, when we analyze this within the framework offered by Balibar and Wallerstein, very little has changed. The political and economic power relations that defined modern racism in the first place, have largely remained intact.

Of course, most of the above theoretical insights on racism and nationalism have largely been written from a Western perspective. The question remains to what degree we can transpose all off this to the Global South, and to South Africa in particular. From a Marxist perspective, the biggest difference between Western and non-Western states seems to be the position they occupy in the capitalist world system, and the effect this has on the national elite. Following the writings of Ruy Mauro Marini (1972) on Brazil, Patrick Bond (2004) has more recently gone as far as to label South Africa as a so-called sub-imperialist state. These states occupy an intermediate position in the world economy, described by Marini as "the form which dependent capitalism assumes upon reaching the stage of monopolies and finance capital" (Marini, 1972, p. 15). This puts them in a very peculiar economic position, being very dependent on foreign capital, while at the same time trying to emulate Western forms of imperialism in their own region.

More important for us however, is the effect this has on the national bourgeoisie. Marini argued that the capitalist class in these sub-imperialist countries never managed to become a fully autonomous group, precisely because of their dependency on foreign capital. The lack of reliable own resources puts a hefty limit on their personal power. Obviously, this also limits the degree to which they can create a coherent discourse on racism, suggesting a bigger input from the base of society. When the bourgeoisie in newly independent states is weak, according to Franz Fanon, this means that:

"the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the state. [...] Such retrograde steps [...] are the historical result of the incapacity of the national middle class to rationalize popular action." (Fanon, 1976, p. 119).
This brings us to an interesting contradiction. An increase in racism can apparently be indicative of a strong historical bloc, using a tactic of divide et impera, but can just as well suggest a weak one, not being able to control undesirable upsurges of racism. To get a more clear image of this, we shall now move on to the peculiar case study of South Africa. As will be argued, the past two decades after the abolition of apartheid have seen a conservation and in some cases even an increase in racism. While this racism takes many forms, we shall mainly focus on two variants here, namely the still existing division between black and white South Africans, which I term 'internal racism', and the rising intolerance against immigrants, here defined as 'external racism'. In the context of this paper, we will pay special attention to the role of the political elite in all of this, as well as the media. To judge the relevance of the Gramscian perspective offered above, the key question will be whether or not this increase in racism is in fact advantageous to elites.

The internal discourse on race: from Mandela's rainbow to Zuma's phallus

As indicated in the introduction, racism takes many forms, and what is and what is not entirely depends on the used definition. In this chapter, we will take a look at the form of racism that has traditionally been associated with South Africa, namely the disparity between black and white South Africans. Obviously, this is a grave simplification of the apartheid era. Firstly, this vision ignores the presence of other groups, most importantly people of coloured and Indian origin, as well as clear divisions within black and white communities. Secondly, a purely sociocultural interpretation of apartheid ignores the more complex economic process of surplus extraction that formed the basis for white minority rule, as I have argued elsewhere (De Coninck, 2011). The system of homelands and labour migration allowed the South African capitalist class to keep its labour reserve both cheap, by partially keeping old form of subsistence economy intact, and under control, by preventing large-scale forms of protest.

While a purely cultural explanation of racism in both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa is therefore far from scientific or complete, it doesn't mean that the persistence of latent frictions,

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1 Despite how awful and meaningless terms like 'black' and 'white' sound, they will nevertheless be preferred here, since they are also used in a lot of official documents, censuses and surveys. In addition, the term black is much more neutral than the term African to depict the majority of the South African population, as this latter term would insinuate that these people are the only 'true' inhabitants of the country.
especially between the white and black population of the country, is any less real. Over the past few years, we have seen various instances of uprisings of this internal form of racism, and what has especially been remarkable in all of this, is the role of the ANC. When Mandela came to power, the dominant political discourse was that of South Africa as a 'Rainbow Nation', a country in which all South African citizens could peacefully live together. This vision on post-apartheid South Africa had already been agreed on in 1955 by several anti-apartheid organizations, with the signing of the Freedom Charter, that started off with the famous statement that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people" (The Freedom Charter, 1955). Under Thabo Mbeki however, the ruling party's discourse changed rather significantly.

In a 1998 statement, Mbeki considered the South African state to still be a very divided one, to even consist of two different nations:

"One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure.

[...]

The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled." (Mbeki, 1998)

While Mbeki's statement is not necessarily false, it is striking how the dominant political discourse has refocused on the prominence of race from the late nineties on. Interestingly, this coincided with the disappointing economic growth figures during the first years of post-apartheid. (Edwards & Alves, 2005, p. 13).
As the graph above indicates, up until 2002, the GDP figures were disappointing, to say the least. Even in those years when there was a slight increase, this was far below the expected numbers, considering the lifting on international boycotts for South Africa and a renewed export to the SADC-region (Leys, 2009, p. 17) On top of that, redistribution in these early post-apartheid years was rather scarce, both in terms of land and wealth. Only after the neoliberal reforms of the late nineties do we notice a new rise in GDP, but at a huge cost. A self-imposed policy of austerity measures led to a shedding of jobs and a rise in poverty (Bond, 2004). On top of that, the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) reforms (South Africa's Economic Transformation, 2003) that were introduced at the start of the 21st century have all but aggravated the existing inequality in the country. The original idea of achieving economic redistribution by giving black citizens more career opportunities was largely in vain, because of the overall shortage of jobs. On the highest level, it led to an integration of the old, white business class and the new political elite, with companies increasing the amount of black members of the board, mainly ANC-supporters. (Johnson, 2009; Freund, 2007) Thus, while these reforms did lead to a blending together of old and new elites, it hardly changed anything at the base of society. Up until today, South Africa remains one of the most unequal countries in the world (Human Development Report, 2011), leading to it mockingly being addressed as a so-called 'Irish coffee society', with a small white layer and some black sprinkles on top, but above all a broad, black base (W. Hamilton, personal communication, December 12, 2012).

The 1998 speech of Mbeki, and the subsequent ANC policy, therefore seems like a way to distract from the neoliberal reforms that the GEAR-program introduced, and refocus on the still present consequences of apartheid. Whether or not this shift in rhetoric is intentional, is of course hard to

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2 Personal graph, based on figures retrieved from [http://data.worldbank.org](http://data.worldbank.org)
say, but it may be obvious that it fits nicely into Gramsci’s reflections on dominant discourse, and the use of hegemony as opposed to domination, distracting from the disappointing economic figures by finding a scapegoat. More interesting than the intention of all of this however, would be to look at the consequences of this discourse. What is striking, is that the past nineteen years of post-apartheid policy have created a very ambiguous attitude towards nationalism, racism, and especially the combination of these two. We find very clear indications of a rather successful nation-building project in South Africa. Initiatives like the TRC, despite its many flaws, helped South Africans, both black and white, to deal with the past and to create a feeling of national coherence.\(^3\) Musea have been dedicated to the combined struggle of South Africans from all origins for a non-racial future (Teeger & Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2007). In all of these examples, we notice a very strong influence of the ANC government, aiming to build a form of South African nationalism, transcending racial borders. It is therefore all the more remarkable how the dominant discourse has reshifted towards stressing racial division.

The most remarkable example of this in recent years is without a doubt to be found in the ANC’s reaction towards the in 2012 published painting ‘The Spear’ by the white artist Brett Murray. In his ‘Hail to the Thief II’ exhibition, Murray included a paining representing president Jacob Zuma with his genitals exposed. (Munusamy, 2012). The controversy that followed, eventually leading to a lawsuit by the ANC, accusing mister Murray of racism, was unseen. Both fierce defenders and attackers of Murray raised their voice in the popular media (Schutte, 2012; Manheru, 2012). Whether or not the painting was actually intended to be racist is something I wish not to judge. What is certain however, is that Murray's exhibition as a whole was an obvious critique of president Zuma's policy, and more in general the several stories of corruption and misgovernance by the ANC. Because of this provocation, a reaction by the government seems rather obvious. Less obvious however is how this incident was immediately fit into a racial discourse, eventually leading to a lawsuit, instead of responding to the critiques raised by Murray. This example seems to confirm our earlier hypothesis, namely that a racial discourse can under circumstances be used as a way of divide et impera by a political elite.

The most recent elections in South Africa offer another example of the racial dividing line that is

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3 The use (and abuse) of the TRC as a form of discourse by the ruling elite, mainly in a way to create a coherent and stable nation, would take us too far, as it is worthy of a full article in and of itself. More information on this topic can be found in the writings of Gibson (2006) and Leebaw (2003).
kept intact by the elite. The role of raciality as an explanation for voting behavior, as Karen Ferree (2006) already described for the first three national post-apartheid elections, remains in place today. Although the Democratic Alliance (DA) has since then made some significant progress electorally, this party remains mainly a 'white party', both in terms of its leadership and electorate, while the ANC is still perceived as a 'black party'. This became painfully clear again during and in the aftermath of the 2011 municipal elections, where both parties actively played the race card. The DA leader Helen Zille was presented by the ANC as a white supremacist (The Clashing Rainbow Colours, 2011), while the DA was at the same time accusing the ANC of bullying non-black citizens in both political and economic ways (Satgar, 2012)

This of course doesn't mean that the political realm is the only sphere having an impact on the construction of this hegemonic discourse. As argued before by Antonio Gramsci, this is always a dialectical process, in which there is a consistent input from below. This is clearly indicated in the case of South Africa, where we see several opposing forms of nationalism. The two most explicit examples of this are to be found in the Zulu and Afrikaner movements. Although both of these also have known a clear influence from above, the situation nowadays is a bit more complex: the Inkatha Freedom Party that repopularized Zulu nationalism in the late eighties is merely a shadow of its former self, while the remains of the old National Party have completely vanished into the ANC and the DA. Despite this, both forms of nationalism still exist in present-day South Africa. Zulu nationalism has mainly manifested itself as an 'invented tradition' (Ranger, 1983), stressing a masculine warrior identity (Schönfeldt-Aultman, 2006). This newly created vision shows no clear signs of racism, at most it uses a discourse of raciality towards whites.

Afrikaner nationalism on the other hand, has in the past years seen a new increase of extremist groups. The most striking example of this can probably be found in the confronting reportage by Elles van Gelder and Ilvy Njiokiktjien (2012) of Afrikaner training camps where young children are brainwashed into a racist and stratifying discourse. This is of course an extreme example, but seems to be indicative of a wider, continuing Afrikaner distrust of black fellow citizens (Murithi, 2011). It would be too easy to blame separatist parties for these nationalist tendencies, because, as argued, the most important ones of these have all but disintegrated. The continuing importance of these tendencies thus demands additional explanation. As Klandermans, Werner & Doorn (2008) pose, the apartheid past is still very much alive in the present. Younger generations of white South Africans still grow up in a rather isolated environment, and, while they more often than not acknowledge the horrors of apartheid, they in no way feel guilty for this past themselves. In no way
do the authors suggest that guilt should be a natural response, but the current situation does significantly impede a further process of reconciliation.

There is more going on than simply a sociocultural continuation of racial thinking however. The politics of BEE have put the Afrikaner communities in a position of relative deprivation, seeing how white poverty and unemployment keeps rising year after year, while, in the eyes of these white communities, black citizens are favored when applying for a job (Davies, 2007). While white unemployment still is nowhere near the numbers for black citizens, this image certainly plays a role in the persistence of distrust. Another real problem of which extremist groups can make use to increase this distrust, is the continuation of racist murders on whites, mainly white farmers (Andersson, 2003). A rhetoric like this allows these groups to ignore the fact that both wealth and land remain extremely unevenly distributed, with a lot of the economic consequences of apartheid remaining intact (Southall, 2004).

What does all of this indicate for the current forms of internal racism that we see in South Africa? As argued, distrust between white and black communities remains an important issue. However, plain racism, or even the heritage of the apartheid past, only offers a limited explanation for this. Deeper social and economic cleavages play an equally important role. While the past ten years have seen a moderate growth in GDP, this growth remains rather low, and more importantly, very unevenly distributed, leading to a decreasing standard of living for the majority of the population, black and white alike, which in turn results in a rise of discontent. Both the ruling party and nationalist tendencies have tried to seize this discontent, in the case of the former to distract attention from the economic problems and the impotence of the government to deal with this, in the case of the latter to pursue their own political agenda. However, as we showed, this is not merely a top-down process. Even when there is no direct political influence, feelings of racism seem to persist.

So what does this tell us about the role of the South African political elite? We briefly mentioned Frantz Fanon's thesis, namely that racism in the neocolonial world can be a sign of a weak national bourgeoisie, unable to stop tendencies that go against a general nationalist project (Fanon, 1976, p. 119). South Africa however seems to offer an interesting counterexample for this. While there is a clear bottom-up dynamic noticeable, the most remarkable element seems to be how feelings of displeasure are used and manipulated by diverse political factions, and transformed into a story of raciality and racism. The ANC party and government is no exception to this. Contrary to Fanon's
assertion, societal feelings of racism are in this case not a indication of weakness by the elite. They are instead indicative of its strength, and should first and foremost be analyzed from a Gramscian perspective. Internal forms of racism in South Africa thus seem to offer a perfect example of how racism can play an important role in the creation of a hegemonic consensus.

The story gets more complex however. The division between white and black South Africans is only one of many forms of racism present in this country. In what follows, we shall take a look at a more external form of racism, which knows a rather different dynamic.

The duality of external racism

As pointed out in the previous chapter, racism takes many forms and, especially in South Africa, goes a lot further than the stereotypical cleavage between 'black and 'white'. While internal forms of racism are mainly manifested passively in South African society, conflicts between supposed 'true' South Africans and foreigners play a much more visible role.

As mentioned before, Balibar and Wallerstein correctly point out the interrelation between racism and nationalism. South Africa offers a particularly good example for this. From the early nineties on, the ANC, and especially Nelson Mandela, propagated the idea of South Africa as a 'Rainbow Nation': a country that is united in its diversity (Meskell, 2005, p. 73). Realizing the difficulties a society as diverse and plural as the South African one can offer, the ANC tried to find elements of bonding that could create a mutual, nationalist feeling. Martin Murray even goes as far as to argue that:

"the new discourses on nationalism, 'nation-building', and national identity have fundamentally reshaped the way that ordinary South Africans see themselves as belonging to an imagined community." (Murray, 2003, p. 443).

While internal struggles persist, as indicated above, a lot of people see themselves in the first place as South Africans, as opposed to belonging to a specific ethnic group.

While this process of nation building had a certain degree of success, it didn't come without its flaws. We already mentioned the contestation of this discourse by opposing forms of nationalism,
especially by Zulu and Afrikaner separatist movements. A flaw that can be considered just as important however, lies exactly in the success of the ANC nationalist discourse. As Balibar and Wallerstein (1996) argued, nationalism, because of its necessary link with modern racism, inevitably creates a distinction between 'us' and 'them', between citizens and non-citizens. Several events in recent history have made this painfully clear in the case of South Africa.

The past two decades have seen several outbreaks of violence against immigrants, with the most striking example being the nationwide riots of 2008 (South Africa: Foreigners still at risk, 2012). Across the country, more than 60 foreigners were killed, and tens of thousands others displaced. These events led to a large-scale debate on both the causes and effects of racism against immigrants in South Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2010). Especially the research done by professor Jonathan Crush (2008) for the South African Migration Project provides some rather shocking results. In a large survey conducted in 2006, nearly 50% of the respondents supported or strongly supported the deportation of foreign nationals, including those living legally in South Africa, 67% agreed that foreigners use up resources, and 67% associated migrants with crime (Crush, 2008, p. 1). Equally striking however, was that 32% of the respondents indicated that they only had little or no contact with foreigners, and only 17% having a great deal of contact with them (Crush, 2008, p. 4).

This seems to indicate that, just like internal racism, ideas concerning foreigners are at least to a certain degree fed to the population by outside sources. The question remains by whom. According to Ransford Danso and David McDonald (2001), the popular media play an important role in the image building surrounding foreigners. Their research indicated that a large proportion of newspaper articles can be classified as openly 'anti-immigration'. While the numbers mildly decreased during the late nineties, 28% of their sample articles could still be classified as such. 25% directly linked foreigners to crime, with many others picturing them as 'jobstealers' or 'illegals' (Danso & Mcdonald, 2001, pp. 124-126).

While there is no clear causality between the representation of foreigners in the media and a general increase in racism, there at least seems to be a noticeable correlation. Following our Gramscian perspective, one would assume that the popular media in this example fulfill the role of intellectuals in the South African historical bloc. To a certain degree, this is certainly true. The links between the media and big business are clear, with a lot of the media in general, and the print media in particular, still being in the hands of the same conglomerates as during the apartheid era (Nyamnjoh, 2010, p. 69). When we take a look at the dominant political discourse on foreigners
however, we find that, unlike the representation of internal racism, the external variant knows a much more ambiguous discourse. There are most certainly examples to be found of representatives of the government preaching that immigrants pose a threat. In 1997, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, as Minister of Home Affairs, proclaimed that 'illegal aliens' cost South African taxpayers 'billions of rands' each year (Crush, 2008, p. 45). Frequent pleas from parliamentarians, including ANC ones, have recently led to a drastic increase of troops along the South African border to keep illegal immigrants out (Martin, 2012). Joe Modisse, as Minister of Defence, even threatened to switch on the electric fence on the Mozambican border (Neocosmos, 2006, p. 99). The 'threat' of these foreigners has also clearly been linked directly to South African nationalism, with the Minister of Home Affairs encouraging 'good patriots' to report illegal migrants to the authorities (Neocosmos, 2006, p. 95).

It is important to notice however, that, when we look at the political elite, this discourse of stimulating intolerance and even racism is not the only one present. Especially when we evaluate the reaction of the top of the ANC party to this problem, we read a completely different story. Both Jacob Zuma (Hweshe, 2011) and Thabo Mbeki (Intolerance towards fellow Africans must be tackled, 2001) frequently called for a peaceful cohabitation of South African citizens and immigrants during their presidency. They emphasized the role of neighbouring countries in the anti-apartheid struggle, and the tremendous economic and political efforts these countries had to make in order to support the South African struggle. At the same time, they also stress the social and economic importance of these migrants.

While this rather contradictory discourse of the ruling elite seems rather strange at first sight, it shouldn't surprise us when we realize that the economic position of migrants in post-apartheid South Africa is just as contradictory. On the one hand, they offer cheap labour, essential for the economic development of the country (Edwards & Alves, 2005, p. 11). Especially big farms near the South African border make use of illegal or semi-illegal labour to circumvent national employment standards, keep profits high, and stay competitive on both the national and international market (Rutherford & Addison, 2007). Meanwhile, in the cities, immigrants also offer a boost to the local economy by being active in small scale industries. Quite often, they are even more successful in these sectors than South Africans, because of the connections they have established within the local migrant communities (Zuberi & Sibanda, 2004).
On the other hand, the economic impact of foreigners puts a brake on further economic development. The relative economic success of migrants offers ammunition to nationalist groups to picture them as 'job stealers', creating distrust between locals and foreigners. The role of the media, linking foreigners to both the shortage of jobs for 'true' South Africans, and the rise of crime, only further enhances the rise of intolerance. This puts some rather serious stress on the already fragile economy, seeing how the increase in crime in the country and the general instability have frequently been cited as an important obstacle for Foreign Direct Investments in the country (Clarke, Habyarimana, Ingram, Kaplan & Ramachandran, 2007, p. 92).

All of this indicates that foreigners indeed play a very ambiguous role in the present-day South African economy. This, in turn, poses a serious challenge for the creation of a unified hegemonic discourse by the ruling class' historical bloc. On the one hand, external racism can be used as a way to distract from the bigger political and economic issues, just like internal racism. Foreigners have proven to be an ideal scapegoat for the lack of jobs, the rise of criminality, and more generally the consequences of the current neoliberal policies. On top of this, this simple and one-sided scapegoating conveniently ignores the problems of low wages and insecurity that these migrants face. At the same time however, too much stigmatisation of foreigners has proven to turn from advantageous for the elite into its dialectical opposite, by turning South Africa into a less attractive destination for Foreign Direct Investments, and a less stable economy in general. Thus, from a Gramscian perspective we could pose that, while a certain degree of distrust can be advantageous for the elite, the excessive fueling of intolerance by the media in particular has to be countered by the top of the ANC party, to avoid outliers like the riots of 2008. This has proven to be a tremendous exercise in balance in the past decade, and will most likely continue to be so, unless the economic position of these migrants changes in the first place.
No matter how you turn it, the question on the how, why and when of raciality and racism remains an extremely layered and complex one, especially in a country like South Africa. Any analysis of this phenomenon will therefore be limited at best. Nevertheless, in this article, we have tried to come to at least a partial answer to a few questions concerning this topic. We acknowledged that a complex concept like racism in reality can take very different forms. In the case of South Africa, we mainly focused on two such variants, namely the 'revival' of the division between black and white South Africans on the one hand, and the increasing intolerance against foreigners on the other hand. To do this, we used a perspective that focuses on power politics: we mainly looked into the role that the South African political elite plays when it comes to influencing the dominant discourse. For this, we payed special attention to the Gramscian concepts of 'hegemony' and 'historical bloc'. However, we acknowledged the particular circumstances in which these concepts originated. To adapt the Gramscian paradigm to our case study, we first judged its accuracy for a sub-imperialist country like South Africa. Subsequently, we considered the peculiarities of racism via the thesis of Balibar and Wallerstein, linking racism to nationalism.

As has been pointed out, internal and external racism in South Africa show a similar, yet also very distinct dynamic. The internal form probably comes closest to an archetypal Gramscian scenario of a successful historical bloc, at least when it comes to the role of the political elite. Although there are clearly other trends from below as well, especially when it comes to both Zulu and Afrikaner nationalism, the main finding here is that the discourse of the ruling party has given rise to a renewed polarisation between black and white South Africans. This was clearly visible in both the controversy surrounding Brett Murray's paining, and the 2011 municipal elections, with both the ANC and the DA devoting special attention to raciality in their campaign. However, as we pointed out, this is not solely a matter of political discourse. Both the collective memory of the apartheid era and the degree to which this era is still painfully present as an economic reality in the current 'Irish coffee society', offer an additional explanation for the hegemonic consensus on raciality.

From a theoretical perspective, the internal variant of racism offers us a clear example of Gramscian dialectics: political rhetorics play an important role in creating a hegemonic discourse, but this is not sufficient. In the case of South Africa, this discourse was clearly strengthened by the economic inequality of the country, with both poverty and unemployment mainly being a black phenomenon. This offers a counter-argument against Fanon's idea of an unstable post-colonial society being an
indication of a weak national elite. In the case of South Africa, the elite has instead cleverly made use of existing societal cleavages to retain and even expand its own position.

When we take a look at the external variant of racism, we see a slightly different story, mainly when it comes to the dominant political discourse. While we find instances of xenophobic behavior from representatives of the ANC and the government, it is much more difficult to find a coherent narrative here. We explained this by pointing to the ambiguous economic role of foreigners. On the one hand, their presence is beneficial for the ruling class, offering both a cheap labour force and a scapegoat to distract from the deeper economic cleavages that the country faces. On the other hand however, an excessive stigmatisation of foreigners has proven to have a reversed effect, leading to a situation of instability, which, in turn, can be harmful to the economy. The hegemonic discourse on external racism has thus proven to be a tremendous exercise in balance for the political elite.

In the end, we can state that, while the different variants of racism in South Africa know rather different dynamics, they all fit nicely into our Gramscian framework. This of course does not mean that our paradigm is the only valid one. It does mean however, that our use of the Gramscian concept of hegemony offers a partial explanation for the relative lack of a general class struggle in South Africa in the past decades. Race and class, two concepts that have always been interwoven in the history of this country, have consistently been used to create a division within the population, and the post-apartheid period is no exception to this. Economic grievances have undoubtedly been boiling up during the past two decades, but have for a long time been suppressed, *inter alia* by the hegemonic ideas on raciality and racism. It remains to be seen whether or not this will change in the aftermath of the 'Marikana massacre'.
Bibliography


