

Changing Concepts of Articulation: Political Stakes in South Africa Today

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Intense struggles are currently underway within and between the African National Congress and its Alliance partners. In an effort to make sense of these struggles, this essay revisits earlier South African debates over race, class, and the national democratic revolution. Its focus is on multiple and changing concepts of articulation and their political stakes. The first part of the essay traces important shifts in the concept in Harold Wolpe's work, relating these shifts to struggles and conditions at the time, as well as to conceptual developments by Stuart Hall in a broader debate with Laclau's work on populism, and with Laclau and Mouffe who take the concept in a problematic post-marxist direction. I then put a specifically Gramscian concept of articulation to work to explore how the ruling bloc in the ANC has articulated shared meanings and memories of struggles for national liberation to its hegemonic project – and how a popular sense of betrayal is playing into support for Jacob Zuma.

The race-class debate in South Africa refuses to go away, Neville Alexander noted in his 2002 book *An Ordinary Country*. Since then race-class debates have amplified dramatically, along with intensified struggles over the meaning of the 'national democratic revolution' (NDR).¹ Key contours of these debates find clear expression in a special edition of *Bua Komanisi!* issued by the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party (SACP) in May 2006 (SACPa, 2006), and the furious response on 19 June from the African National Congress (ANC, 2006). In a rejoinder entitled 'Is the ANC leading a national democratic revolution or managing capitalism?', the SACP reiterates its accusation that the ANC has come to be dominated by 'the narrow self-interest of an emerging black capitalist stratum with close connections to established capital and to our movement,' that acts 'not in order to advance the NDR, but for personal self-accumulation purposes' (SACPb, 2006).

For many on the left, the hijacking of the NDR by a bourgeois class project is scarcely surprising. The very notion of the NDR derives, Alexander points out, from

the dual-economy, liberal-pluralist notion of 'colonialism of a special type', which was supposed to be the paradigm within which the SACP analysed South African society but which, in reality, simply abdicated any pretensions to political leadership of the mass movement and permitted the ... aspiring black middle class leadership of the ANC to lead the mass struggle (Alexander, 2002:25).

And lead they did, he went on to note, 'with single-minded clarity to the ends of the African nationalist struggle.' More generally, two-stage theory has long been the focus of intense critique in the context of South African race-class debates.

Yet precisely because the NDR remains a live and influential social category, it is insufficient simply to point to its analytical inconsistencies and political shortcomings, and then set it aside. What needs to be grasped more fully is *how* meanings of the NDR have been redefined and articulated as part of the hegemonic project of the ruling bloc within the ANC, along with how and why these meanings have become an increasingly vociferous site of struggle and contestation within the ANC Alliance and in grassroots politics.

Deeply entangled with struggles over the meaning of the NDR is popular support for Jacob Zuma, who stands at the centre of the 'succession debate' that is producing massive upheavals within and between the ANC, SACP, and Cosatu (the Congress of South African Trade Unions). Part of what is going on, no doubt, is opportunistic jostling for position in provincial, national, and local political arenas between those labelled as Mbeki-ites and Zuma-ites. Yet the challenge to the ruling bloc within the ANC has been made possible by powerful currents of popular support for Zuma that even key leaders of the SACP admit are poorly understood – other than that they are in some broad sense a coming together of a politics of grievance and resentment.²

What, then, are the analytical tools that are likely to be most useful in grappling with the dangerous conjuncture in which we find ourselves? My central argument in this essay is that there is a great deal to be gained from going back to earlier race-class debates in South Africa, and focusing on the concept of articulation – or, more precisely, on the multiple and changing concepts of articulation that have figured prominently in these debates, and their political stakes.

The concept of articulation was first introduced to South African debates in 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power' (1972), Harold Wolpe's enormously influential contribution to race-class debates framed in terms of the articulation of modes of production. In *Race, Class and the Apartheid State* (1988), however, Wolpe deploys a radically different concept of articulation. A highly significant but little-recognised influence behind this shift is a piece by Stuart Hall (1980a) entitled 'Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance'. Engaging explicitly with the race-class debate in South Africa and with Wolpe (1972), Hall moves the concept of articulation from the structural marxism of Althusser to the cultural marxism of Gramsci.

While Wolpe acknowledges Hall's influence and the far more supple and politically powerful analysis that it enables, this Gramscian conception of articulation has remained under-utilised, in South African debates as well as more generally. Part of what has happened, I suggest, is that Hall's concept of articulation has become conflated with a third – but again very different – notion of articulation set forth by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) as part of their project of renovating liberalism in the name of 'radical democracy' and post-marxism.

In addition to clarifying the analytical and political differences among these diverse concepts of articulation, I try in this essay to suggest how the concept might be adapted and used to grapple with the conditions in which we find ourselves today.

Wolpe's Re-Articulations of Race & Class

In his deeply influential intervention in the race-class debates that raged in the 1970s, Wolpe (1972; 1975) deployed the concept of articulation of modes of production derived from Althusser to call into question the claim that apartheid was

a continuation of segregation.³ Wolpe used the concept to refute liberal (and indeed orthodox marxist) portrayals of the racial order in South Africa as an irrational hangover of Afrikanerdom that would melt away with the further development of capitalist market relations. Instead, Wolpe proposed that capitalism in South Africa had latched on to subsistence agriculture in the reserves which provided a subsidy in the form of cheap labour power. In other words, South African capitalism had developed in part through articulation – or joining with – the pre-existing non-capitalist mode of production. Political domination and legitimating practices had, as a consequence, assumed distinctively racial and ethnic forms.

By the middle of the century, Wolpe argued, the capacity of the reserves to sustain subsistence production had collapsed. Apartheid represented a new racial capitalist order with a panoply of repressive legislation and practices directed towards regulating and reconfiguring the conditions of reproduction of cheap labour power. Thus apartheid was not simply an extension of the earlier system of segregation, as some radical critics had argued. Instead, he maintained, racial ideology in South Africa – and the political practices in which it was reflected – sustained and reproduced capitalist relations of production, although in complex, reciprocal (but asymmetrical) relationships with changing social and economic conditions.

Wolpe also built on his revisionist analysis of cheap labour power to launch a critique of theories of internal colonialism – in particular, ‘colonialism of a special type’ (CST) that had become the theoretical cornerstone of the ANC/SACP alliance by the late 1960s. These theories are unable to explain the relationship between class and race or ethnic relations, he asserted. As a consequence, race and ethnic relations are once more treated as autonomous and in isolation from class relations (Wolpe, 1975).

With intensified political urgency driven by changing conditions since the Soweto uprisings, Wolpe returned to debates over the relationship between racial domination and the capitalist order in *Race, Class & the Apartheid State* (1988). The imperative to revisit old questions about race and class arose, he argued, from a new context – most notably, ‘the relative decline in the need for cheap black labour, and the increasing costs of maintaining stability in the face of black opposition’ (Wolpe, 1988:49). In responding to these conditions, ‘certain white economic and political forces’ were in the process of creating ‘the political space in which the rationality of the free market system can operate, that is to say, to ensure the reproduction of capitalism under new conditions’ (Ibid.).

In moving away from the cheap labour-power thesis, Wolpe underscored the imperative for a non-reductionist understanding of class in relation to race. The problem of reductionist marxism, he argued, is not its starting point – the general relation of exploitation – but ‘the path it follows from the abstract to the concrete, a path which leads it to impose the abstract on the concrete as if they were homologous’ (Wolpe, 1988:51). What is so problematic and limited about reductionist forms of understanding is that they fail to appreciate how, in specific concrete conditions, classes are likely to be internally *differentiated*:

Classes ... are constituted not as unified social forces, but as patchworks or segments which are differentiated and divided on a variety of bases and by varied processes. It is true that a more or less extensive unity may be brought about politically through articulation, within a common discourse, of specific interests which are linked to the common

property which defines classes. *But, and this is the fundamental point, that unity is not given by concepts of labour-power and capital, it is constituted concretely through practices, discourses and organisations. One might say that class unity, when it occurs, is a conjunctural phenomenon* (Wolpe, 1988:51, emphasis added).

In this crucially important move, Wolpe is making use of a concept of articulation that is significantly different from that embodied in the Althusserian notion of articulation of modes of production. As I argue more fully below, it derives most immediately from Stuart Hall's (1980a) engagement with the South African race-class debate, which builds on Wolpe's work, and which Wolpe explicitly acknowledges.

In the conjunctural moment with which he was grappling, this conceptual shift enabled Wolpe to call into question the assumption that opposition to white domination would *necessarily* function to unite all black classes against the regime. Pointing to the enormous expansion of a black petit bourgeoisie in the 1980s which was becoming increasingly organised, as well as to possible divisions within the black working class, he warned that political struggles to overthrow or sustain white domination in South Africa could not be read off structures of either class or race. Instead, they would depend on the specific conjuncture and forms of struggle.

Neville Alexander has recently observed that Wolpe's treatment of the relationship between race, class and capitalism in *Race, Class & the Apartheid State* potentially opens up conceptual and political space for more nuanced analysis and action. Yet, he argues, Wolpe ends up defending two-stage theory and helping to pave the way for 'the aspiring black middle class leadership of the ANC to lead the mass struggle' (Alexander, 2002:25).

There are indeed sections of Wolpe's text in which, while conceding that the struggle for national liberation could move in conservative or reformist or bourgeois directions, he vigorously defends the SACP's two-stage thesis from the accusation that it is likely to be hijacked by an emerging petite-bourgeoisie.⁴ As Michael Burawoy (2006:15) has noted, Wolpe 'didn't see what Frantz Fanon saw: two very different, opposed projects that existed side by side, that vied with each other within the decolonisation struggle' – a point to which we shall return below. Burawoy also identifies a key shift in Wolpe's work in the late 1980s when, while still in exile, he embarked on a major new research project into education in a new South Africa.⁵ This work, Burawoy argues, represents Wolpe's shift from a Leninist adherence to the SACP's view of the imperative to seize state power, to a Gramscian argument for a War of Position

that would restructure civil society before winning state power, warning against a War of Movement (boycott education and liberation first) or succumbing to a War of Position from above (expanding and reform of education for upgrading the labor force) (Burawoy, 2006:18).

What is also distinctive about these writings, Burawoy maintains, is that they validated struggles outside the state, and intensified Wolpe's frustration with his confinement to a narrow policy terrain following his return to South Africa in 1990. In his final paper published shortly before his death in 1996, Wolpe launched a prescient and incisive critique of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) *White Paper*, discussed more fully below. While Wolpe did not live to see the ANC's explicit embrace of neoliberal forms of capitalism and the re-articulations of race and class embodied in Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), the broader

questions he raised in his final paper remain powerfully salient. It is precisely in grappling with these questions that the revised conception of articulation holds out considerable promise. First, though, we need to delve more deeply into this concept and distinguish it from what I will argue is a distinctively different notion of articulation currently in circulation.

Rethinking 'Articulation': Analytical & Political Stakes

By the term, 'articulation', I mean a connection or link which is not necessarily given in all cases, as a law or fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not 'eternal' but has constantly to be renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections – re-articulations – being forged. It is also important that an articulation between different practices does not mean that they become identical or that one is dissolved into the other. However, once an articulation is made, the two practices can function together as 'distinctions within a unity' (Hall, 1985:113-4).

Let me start with Stuart Hall's 'Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance' (1980a).⁶ Engaging with the South African race-class debate (although not the political freight attached to CST), Hall acknowledged Wolpe's deployment of the concept of articulation of modes of production – in particular, the advance it represented on liberal and neo-Weberian formulations of racially structured social formations – while also pointing to some of its structuralist limits. In the process, he reworked the conception of articulation to argue that the workings of race and forms of racism cannot be read off economic structures:

One must start ... from the concrete historical 'work' which racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions – as a set of economic, political and ideological practices of a specific kind, concretely articulated with other practices in a social formation (Hall, 1980a:338, emphasis added).

Thus, Hall went on to note, racialised practices are not necessary to the concrete functioning of all capitalisms. Nor does it make sense to extrapolate a common, universal structure to race and racism: there is no 'racism in general'. Instead, it needs to be shown *how* race comes to be inserted historically, and the relations and practices that have tended to erode and transform – or to preserve – these distinctions through time, not simply as residues or holdovers, but as active structuring principles of the present organisation of society and the forms of class relations:

Race is thus, also, the modality in which class is 'lived', the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and 'fought through.' This has consequences for the whole class, not specifically for its 'racially defined' segment. It has consequences in terms of the internal fractioning and division within the working class which, among other ways, are articulated in part through race. This is no mere racist conspiracy from above. For racism is also one of the dominant means of ideological representation through which the white fractions of the class come to 'live' their relations to other fractions, and through them to capital itself (Hall, 1980a:341).

As I have argued more fully elsewhere (Hart, 2002), there are important lacunae in this analysis – most notably attention to gender and sexuality. Yet what Hall accomplished was to open up new possibilities for non-reductionist understandings

that go far beyond notions of ‘intersectionality’ through which some feminists have sought to grapple with the neglect of race and ethnicity in earlier marxist-feminist formulations of gender and class.

To grasp the analytical and political stakes in Hall’s revised conception of articulation it is useful to start with the concrete conditions with which he was grappling and his own positioning within them. Grant Farred (1996) has given us a wonderfully illuminating account of Hall’s engagement as a diasporic Caribbean intellectual with race and class in post-war Britain. In the late 1950s and 1960s, Farred explains, Hall was caught between immigrant activism in context of escalating racism on the one hand, and his growing influence in ‘New Left’ circles on the other:

Hall was not only ideologically split between the two communities in which he was invested, he was separated by class from the one with which he shared a racial affinity. Hall could only give critical public voice to the tensions, stresses, and precariousness inscribed within that process retrospectively, once he had been able to resolve the issue of class (Farred, 1996:6).

By the mid-1970s, ongoing anti-immigrant racism embodied in ‘Powellism’ – and its reverberations in Thatcherism – propelled him into the work on race for which he is best known, *Policing the Crisis* (1978).

What, then, of Stuart Hall’s lesser-known turn to South African race-class debates? Of great significance is his engagement with the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) since its founding in 1959. In his address to the 40 year ‘Perspective’ conference in 1999, Hall comments on how the AAM’s founding coincided with large-scale Afro-Caribbean migration to Britain, and how impressed he was by the AAM’s capacity to connect with ordinary ‘unpolitical’ people by permeating everyday life – especially the ways in which sport, consumer boycotts and sanctions formed wedges into political consciousness of race and racism.⁷

These political engagements with questions of race and class are important in grasping what is analytically distinctive about the concept of articulation that Hall and Wolpe (1988) are using. One key lies in Hall’s ‘reading’ (1974 [2003]) of Marx’s notes on method in the 1857 ‘Introduction’ to the *Grundrisse* – which is also, as McGregor Wise (2003) points out, a reading of Althusser’s appropriation of Marx. What this double reading makes clear is that Hall is using the concept of articulation as central to Marx’s method – that of advancing from the abstract to the concrete, in the sense of concrete concepts that are adequate to the concrete in history:

Both the specificities and the connections – the complex unities of structures – have to be demonstrated by concrete analysis of concrete relations and conjunctions. If relations are mutually articulated, but remain specified by their difference, this articulation, and the determinate conditions on which it rests, has to be demonstrated ... Differentiated unities are also therefore, in the marxian sense, concrete. The method thus retains the concrete empirical reference as a privileged and undissolved ‘moment’ within a theoretical analysis without thereby making it ‘empiricist’; the concrete analysis of concrete situations (Hall, 1974 [2003]:128, emphasis added).

While acknowledging the Althusserian concept of a social formation as a complex ensemble of relations structured in dominance, he also insists (contra Althusser) on a reading of Marx in terms of the ‘mutual articulation of historical movement and theoretical reflection’ (Hall, 1974 [2003]:137).⁸

In focusing on what he calls 'the combined and uneven relations between class and race' through his engagement with South African debates, Hall (1980a) also insists that the concept of articulation must be supplemented by a reading of Gramsci that is significantly different from Althusser's narrowly structuralist interpretation. At the time, Gramsci was seen as the pre-eminent theorist of Western marxism. On the contrary, Hall maintained, Gramsci's insistence that the problem of hegemony be viewed as a historically (and geographically) concrete articulation – along with his deep engagement with Italian history – made his work profoundly relevant for non-Western social formations:

The problem of the State, and the question of strategic alliances between the industrial proletariat and the peasantry, the 'play' of traditional and advanced ideologies, and the difficulties these provide in the formation of a 'national-popular' will all make his analysis of Italy specially relevant to colonial countries (Hall, 1980a:333-4).⁹

The turn to Gramsci also enables extending the concept of articulation to encompass not only the joining together of diverse elements – the sense in which Althusser and indeed Wolpe (1972) used it – but also the second sense of articulation in English and French, namely 'to give expression to' or the production of meaning through language. In a related piece published at the same time, Hall (1980b) noted that

it is largely Gramsci who has provided us with a set of more refined terms through which to link the largely 'unconscious' and given cultural categories of 'common sense' with the formulation of more active and organic ideologies, which have the capacity to intervene in the ground of common sense and popular traditions and, through such interventions, to organize masses of men and women (Hall, 1980b:69).¹⁰

It was in fact Laclau (1977) who first elaborated the double meaning of articulation in his analysis of populism, arguing that signifiers like 'freedom', 'equality', and 'the people', have no fixed, intrinsic meaning or class belonging. Rather, they can be reconvened as elements within very different discourses, positioning the popular classes in relation to a power bloc in quite different ways. Yet for all that it represented an important advance, Laclau's conception remained on a fairly narrow structuralist terrain – a point taken up more fully below.

There is yet another important shift in the concept of articulation between Laclau (1977) and Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), that is closely linked to their embrace of post-marxism and radical democracy in which they claim to extend the concept of hegemonic articulations 'far beyond Gramsci'. As part of their critique of class reductionism and economism, they effectively abandon *any* conception of determination while nominally holding on to revised notions of hegemony and articulation. This disabling move lies at the heart of their incapacity to engage with questions of capitalism.¹¹ It also produces a deeply impoverished concept of articulation – one that abstracts from the historically and geographically specific but interconnected processes, material conditions, forms of power, and processes of subject formation.

These distinctions are crucial in differentiating Hall's Gramscian conception of articulation from that of Laclau (1977), as well as from Laclau and Mouffe (1985) with which it is often incorrectly conflated.¹² Indeed, Hall has noted that in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*:

there is no reason why anything is or isn't potentially articulable with anything else. The critique of reductionism has apparently resulted in the notion of society as a totally open discursive field (Hall, [1986] 1996:146).

Elsewhere Hall (1988:157) comments on his effort 'carefully to demarcate the immensely fruitful things which I learned from Ernesto Laclau's [1977] *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* from the dissolution of everything into discourse which, I believe mars the later volume, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, despite its many insights.' He also qualifies carefully what he takes from Laclau (1977) – including the latter's tendency to pay too little attention to how the articulation of discourses with the practices of particular classes have often been secured over long periods.

The stakes in these different conceptions find vivid illustration in an analysis by Ari Sitas (1990) of the limits of understandings derived from Laclau (1977) to explain Zulu 'ethnic nationalism' and working class cultures in the vicious dying days of apartheid. Calling into question analyses of 'Zulu-ness' as the product of ideological interpellations from above, Sitas insisted that the black working class is not a *tabula rasa*, but bears its own traditions: "'Zulu-ness" must be viewed as a negotiated identity between ordinary people's attempts to create effective and reciprocal bonds (or functioning cultural formations) out of their social and material conditions of life *and* political ideologies that seek to mobilize them in non-class ways' (Sitas, 1990:266) – and each sets limits on the other.

In addition, he argued, while black workers in Natal understand that there is some 'social bond' knotting them together, there are different *modalities* (one could also say articulated combinations or articulations) of this 'Zulu-ness' – mediated through relationships to land, dispossession, and proletarianisation – which assume distinctively different forms in different parts of the province.¹³ Gender and sexuality are undoubtedly also key elements in these articulations. In other words, such 'negotiations' are shaped and constrained by class in relation to other determinations, but these can only be grasped concretely.

The shift from Althusser to Gramsci is precisely what is at stake analytically in Sitas' critique of how Laclau (1977) was being used to explain Zulu ethnic nationalism, and in his insistence that official and popular articulations must be grasped in relation to one another. Significant political stakes attach to this alternative conception precisely because, as Sitas points out,

it is on such a local understanding and traditions that labour organisations can engage with 'social views and visions' to echo Hlatshwayo, in order to begin providing for a resonant alternative to Inkatha's myth complexes. In the process, the delicate relationship between chiefs and commoners, the unwritten record of the Congress movement in Natal, of religion, etc. will have to be explored. So far, most of the scholarship in and on Natal has boosted Inkatha's self-confidence as the logical heir of Zulu legacies; it is time that it boosted the self-confidence of ordinary people (Sitas, 1990:273).

Hlatshwayo was at the time Cosatu's Cultural Co-ordinator and an oral poet whose analysis of the challenges he confronted as an organic intellectual bears powerful traces of Gramsci and Fanon. As he put it,

You have to start from where people are and go with them where they take you. I mean if you are thrust in this struggle then you have to engage in people's social views and visions (cited by Sitas, 1990:263).

These considerations bear directly on the question of popular support for Jacob Zuma, and how it is fuelling the 'succession crisis.' The failure to attend carefully to the forces playing into support for Zuma is closely linked to another major hiatus in a great deal of critical analysis of the post-apartheid conjuncture – engagement with the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). Of necessity in very broad brushstrokes, I shall now try to put the Gramscian concept of articulation to work in outlining the processes through which the NDR has become a key site of contention. In concluding, I try to suggest in a very preliminary way how these processes are closely interconnected with the multiple currents feeding into the rise of popular support for Zuma.

Re-Articulating Race, Class & Nationalism after Apartheid

An essentially neo-liberal RDP strategy, which is what we are left with, may well generate some level of economic growth; should this happen, the existing mainly white and Indian bourgeoisie will be consolidated and strengthened; the black bourgeoisie will grow rapidly; a black middle class and some members of the black urban working class will become incorporated into the magic circle of insiders; but for the remaining 60-70 per cent of our society this growth path, we venture to predict, will deliver little or nothing for many years to come (Adelzadeh & Padayachee, 1994:16).

What is at stake in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) for the ANC and its allies, Wolpe (1995:89) noted in his final paper, is the completion of the NDR:

That is to say, the establishment of a democratic electoral and parliamentary system and the electoral victory of the ANC are considered to provide the principal enabling condition and instrument for, in the words of the [RDP] White Paper, a 'fundamental transformation' of the social and economic order.

Yet, he noted, citing the prescient passage above from Adelzadeh and Padayachee (1994), the framing of the RDP and the White Paper submerged crucial political issues.¹⁴ While operating on a deeply contested terrain, the RDP eradicated sources of contradiction and conflict by asserting harmony and a consensual model of society; and, on the basis of this premise, it conceptualizes the state as the unproblematic instrument of the RDP (Wolpe, 1995:91). Accordingly, he concluded, conceptions of 'fundamental transformation' central to the NDR were likely to become a major source of contestation in the future.

This more complex view of the RDP enables us to see how the unilateral declaration of GEAR the following year was more than just a shift from relatively benign neo-Keynesianism to harsh neoliberalism, as is often supposed.¹⁵ GEAR was not simply a roll-back of the state; nor was it just the final victory of class over race apartheid. Instead, I suggest, GEAR represented a redefinition of the NDR in terms of a re-articulation of race, class and nationalism, along with the assertion of new technologies of rule. These include the consolidation of conservative forces bent on working in alliance with white corporate capital to create a black bourgeoisie nominally more responsive to 'development'; creating the conditions in which the state can hold not only its agencies but also non-state bodies to its principles; inciting not only the black bourgeoisie but the population more generally to become 'entrepreneurs of themselves'; and making social support conditional on the correct attitudes and aspirations.

These technologies of rule conform quite closely to what some might call neoliberal (or advanced liberal) governmentality.¹⁶ Yet there are several reasons why this interpretation is at best very partial.

One is that the redefinition of the NDR also embodies a powerful drive to contain popular mobilisation. An initial manifesto of this broader state project was an ANC Discussion Document issued in 1996 entitled 'The State and Social Transformation', widely believed to have been authored by Thabo Mbeki. While not making explicit reference to the NDR, the manifesto asserts the imperative for containing 'the instinct towards "economism" on the part of the ordinary workers' in the following terms:

If the democratic movement allowed that the subjective approach to socio-economic development represented by 'economism' should overwhelm the scientific approach of the democratic movement towards such development, it could easily create the conditions for the possible counter-revolutionary defeat of the democratic revolution (paragraph 6.11).

From one perspective, then, GEAR can be seen as part of a vanguardist project to exercise a new *form* of activism defined in technocratic and hierarchical terms, and to assert the dominance of a transnationally-connected technocratic elite over mass mobilisation and action.¹⁷ Yet this is not all there is to it. The redefinition of the NDR *also* works in and through new articulations of nationalism.

Considerable significance attaches to how we understand post-apartheid deployments of nationalism. The general tendency on the left has been to underscore the regressive bourgeois character of post-independence nationalism in southern Africa. A more nuanced analysis by Franco Barchiesi points to 'the extreme and peculiar flexibility of the ANC's nationalist discourse – in this very different from nationalist rhetoric fallen into disrepute elsewhere on the continent – and its remarkable capacity to adapt to changing global scenarios' (Barchiesi, 2006:224). He shows how the ANC's portrayal of 'the nation' and the policies needed to build it are cast in terms of a definition of what the 'real world' makes viable.

To grasp the hegemonic power of official articulations of nationalism as well as their limits, we also have to look carefully to how they work in and through ongoing invocations of the struggle for national liberation and the suffering for freedom that our people have endured. This is not just a cynical manipulation from above; it carries powerful moral weight and connects with specific histories, memories, and meanings of racial oppression, racialised dispossession, and struggles against apartheid. Precisely because official articulations of nationalism tap into popular understandings of freedom, justice, and liberation from apartheid racial oppression, they bolster the ANC state's hegemonic project in crucially important ways. Writing about the 1980s, Hein Marais (2001:262) has observed that the ANC became adept at articulating nationalism to its hegemonic project: 'it managed to deploy an array of ideological precepts and symbols, and to assert their pertinence to the lived realities of millions of South Africans.' In the immediate aftermath of the 2004 national government elections, Jeff Guy reiterated this point, stressing the ongoing importance of the ANC's capacity to articulate popular currents of nationalism:

This facility continues to this day, and it is nationalism which gives its political discourse both the strength and the flexibility to absorb changes, inconsistencies and failures in policy and postures by presenting a consistent nationally-grounded history and vision of the future ...

South African nationhood is an imagined construct – but one with sufficient perceived authenticity and actual authority to provide the framework for an agreed nationalist discourse and political framework to ensure the participation and support of individuals and organisations representing a wide range of ideological positions (Guy, 2004:86).

Yet the deep grounding of popular understandings of nationalism and liberation is a razor blade that cuts both ways – a phrase often used by Alfred Duma, a resident of Ezakheni township who forged his own razor-sharp dialectical tools of analysis on Robben Island. Precisely because official articulations of nationalism are linked to histories, memories, and meanings of freedom struggles, redress for the wrongs of the past, and visions of a new nation, they are potentially vulnerable to the current counter-claims of betrayal.¹⁸ Feeding into these charges of betrayal are, of course, the deprivations of livelihood for the majority of black South Africans, and the obscene inequalities cutting across race lines that have intensified with the (further) unleashing of neoliberal forms of capitalism in the post-apartheid era.

There are, in other words, profound instabilities built into the ruling bloc's redefinition of the NDR, and the re-articulations of race, class, and nationalism through which it is working. Let me turn now to tracing in broad outline how these pressures and tensions have amplified since 1996.

The frequency and intensity of official invocations of the NDR provide revealing indicators. Between 1996 and 2001/2, official references to the NDR were either missing from key documents as noted above, or they were fairly bland and routine. A key turning point was the Bredell land occupation in early July 2001, which represented a profound crisis of the ANC's hegemonic project (Hart, 2002; 2006a). Thousands of desperately poor settlers paid nominal amounts of money to representatives of the Pan Africanist Congress for patches of privately-owned land between Johannesburg and Pretoria, and immediately started erecting ramshackle shelters. In response, the ANC government moved swiftly and brutally to evict the settlers. Anger provoked by Bredell fed directly into the rise of oppositional movements which made a dramatic appearance on the international stage at the World Conference Against Racism the following month. Precisely a year later, in August 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) provided an even more spectacular platform for oppositional movements, severely embarrassing the ANC government and the Alliance more generally.

It was in this context that we saw new and increasingly vociferous official deployments of the NDR as part of an arsenal to discipline the 'ultra-left'. Immediately following the WSSD, strategically-placed ANC figures sprang into action, excoriating the 'ultra-left anti-neoliberal coalition' and accusing it of acting in alliance with 'real neoliberals' (i.e. the predominantly white Democratic Alliance) and with foreign elements hostile to NDR.¹⁹ Mbeki reiterated this theme in his address to an ANC policy conference in late September 2002, asserting that 'we have radically reduced the capacity of the opponents of the national democratic revolution to conduct a campaign of terror against the revolution,' while at the same time accusing 'Left sectarian factions' of occupying 'the same trench with the anti-socialist forces' in their joint efforts to impede the national liberation movement.²⁰ The 'Strategy and Tactics' document prepared for the December 2002 conference is replete with references to the NDR, describing the ANC as the 'leader of the national democratic struggle, a disciplined force of the Left, organised to conduct consistent struggle in the interests of the poor.'

The ruling bloc's aggressive disciplining of the 'ultra-Left' was accompanied by new assertions of the ANC as a developmental state, as well as a further redefinition of the NDR in terms of a First and Second Economy. Mbeki inaugurated this redefinition in a media briefing following the Cabinet Lekgotla on 29 July 2003:

Now, this is, as it were, the modern part of South Africa, with your aeroplanes and your computers and the people sitting around this room, who read and write and so on. We, all of us, we are this modern sector ... So, you then have this large part of South Africa, which is relatively uneducated. It is unskilled. It is not required in terms of modern society. I am saying 'required' in the sense of employability. So, we have recognised this from the beginning, that large numbers of our people are poor and are in this condition. You can make the interventions we make about modernisation of the economy and so on, but it wouldn't necessarily have an impact on them, because of that degree of marginalisation. Therefore, you needed to make different sorts of intervention.²¹

The First/Second Economy figured prominently in the ANC's 'Ten Year Review' later in 2003, its manifesto for the 2004 election, Mbeki's State of the Nation address in February 2004, his opening address to parliament in May 2004, and a slew of statements by lesser luminaries.²² Later in 2004 a series of articles entitled 'Approaches to Poverty Eradication and Economic Development' appeared on the ANC Today website, asserting

the critical need for the state to be involved in the transformation of the Second Economy. This state intervention must entail detailed planning and implementation of comprehensive development programmes, fully accepting the concept of a developmental state.²³

At the same time, leading ANC figures were quick to make clear that planned intervention in the Second Economy did not in any way reduce official commitment to rapid capital accumulation driven by market forces.

As I have discussed more fully elsewhere (Hart 2006b), First/Second Economy discourses can be seen as part of an effort to contain the challenges from oppositional movements that reached their zenith at the time of the WSSD and render them subject to government intervention. What is significant about this discourse is the way it defines a segment of society that is superfluous to the 'modern' economy, and in need of paternal guidance – those falling within this category are citizens, but second class. As such they are deserving of a modicum of social security, but on tightly disciplined and conditional terms.

Strategies to identify and treat a 'backward' segment of society go a long way towards explaining the vehemence with which powerful figures in the ANC dismissed proposals for a modest Basic Income Grant (BIG). The reason why the ANC government rejects the BIG, I suggest, is precisely *because* it is a universal grant – and therefore lacks points of leverage for instilling in its recipients the 'correct' attitudes and aspirations.

Yet it is one thing to identify the depoliticising thrust of discourses of a Second Economy and the disciplinary practices that accompany them, and quite another to presume that such effects are necessarily secured in practice. It is indeed the case that several of the more militant oppositional movements that emerged in the early 2000s are in a state of disarray. The decline of these movements was, however, accompanied by a massive upsurge of angry protests all over the country. In October 2005, the Minister of Safety and Security announced that his department had

recorded 881 illegal protests during the 2004-05 financial year – during which period there were reported to have been 5,085 legal protests.²⁴ Many of these uprisings were directed at local government officials and councillors, and framed in terms of failure to deliver basic services and housing, but encompassing as well a range of other grievances – including official moves to displace people from areas defined as urban ‘squatter settlements’ to rural peripheries.

The upsurge in popular anger extends well beyond specific local grievances, however. These broader and deeper tensions burst into open view in the middle of 2005, when two explosive issues fed into one another at the ANC’s National General Council (NGC) conference in June 2005.

First was a discussion paper on bridging the divide between the First and Second Economy entitled ‘Development and Underdevelopment’ prepared by Jabu Moloketi, a conservative figure close to Mbeki. The central thrust of the paper is that ‘An increase in investment is only likely to result in an increase in employment if the cost of labour is reduced relative to capital’ (ANC, 2005:8). The paper then proposes a dual labour market strategy in which minimum wage and other collective bargaining agreements are waived in the lower segment of the labour market. The document unleashed fierce condemnation by the ANC’s Alliance partners, the SACP and Cosatu, who saw the Moloketi proposals as undermining the few concessions to organised labour in the neoliberal turn of the 1990s. In addition, it provoked a barrage of angry critique of the elitism of the ANC’s Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) measures, making clear how BEE sits uneasily astride the discursive divide between the First and Second Economies, and serving to underscore the deeply conservative character of post-apartheid race-class articulations.

The NGC meeting was also a key conjunctural moment in which the anger provoked by ‘Development and Underdevelopment’ fed into and amplified the fury unleashed by Mbeki’s firing of Zuma as deputy president of the country less than two weeks earlier, following Zuma’s implication in the corruption trial of his financial advisor, Schabir Sheik. It was at precisely this moment that popular support for Zuma crystallised into a major force. This support was reflected most immediately in the NGC’s refusing to accept Zuma’s withdrawal from party structures, and insisting that he be reinstated as deputy president of the ANC.

The NGC became, in effect, the crucible in which Wolpe’s (1995) prophecy that the meaning of the NDR would become a key site of struggle was fully realised. The explosive anger that erupted at the NGC also underscores the double-edged character of articulations of nationalism as liberation – how they are key elements of the post-colonial hegemonic project, while at the same time deeply vulnerable to charges of betrayal. In short, the NGC was the moment when the ruling bloc within the ANC lost its grip on articulations of the nation and liberation.

Part of what Zuma represents is a move to seize the mantle of the liberation struggle and present himself as its rightful heir.²⁵ Positioning himself as the hero of national liberation is the key to Zuma’s capacity – at least for the time being – to articulate multiple, often contradictory meanings into a complex unity that appeals powerfully to ‘common sense’ across a broad spectrum. They include his asserting himself as a man of the left (much to the chagrin of many on the left who point to his support for GEAR, as well as his links to certain fractions of capital); as a traditionalist who dons leopard skins on key occasions (and as one who brought peace to KwaZulu-

Natal, helping to end the violent civil war of the early 1990s); and as an anti-elitist (his regular reference to himself as 'not educated' – but, by implication, extremely smart – is a direct attack on the technocratic elite surrounding Mbeki often portrayed by Zuma supporters as arrogant and self-serving, and as not having served in the trenches of the revolutionary struggle). These rearticulations of race, class, and nationalism are also shot through with gender and sexuality.

Yet these are not simply interpellations from above. The figure of Zuma operates in many ways as a point of condensation for multiple, pre-existing tensions, angers, and discontents that until recently were contained within the hegemonic project of the ruling bloc in the ANC, and have now been diverted into newly opened fields of conflict. How this popular anger will be inflected remains a wide open question. S'bu Zikode, leader of the Durban shackdweller's movement (*Abahlali base mJondolo*) put it succinctly at a public lecture on 29 June 2006, when he urged the audience to understand that 'Our desperation and anger can go in many directions.'

Towards a Conclusion

This partial and very preliminary effort to grapple with the rise of Zuma and the struggle within the ANC Alliance owes a great deal to Laclau's (1977) analysis of populism, from which we still have much to learn – especially in terms of his insistence on non-reductionist understandings of populism. It was in this piece that Laclau extended the concept of articulation in seeking to come to grips with Peronism in Argentina, and from which Hall (1980a) drew inspiration in engaging Wolpe (1972) and the South African race-class debate.

Yet we have also seen how earlier South African debates highlight the limits of Laclau's structural analysis, and the imperative for a more fully Gramscian understanding. In the current moment of danger, what is at stake is whether and how the left engages with popular discontents and forms of common sense – including those that take the form of popular support for Jacob Zuma.

In reworking of the concept of articulation along Gramscian lines, Hall has provided an invaluable analytical tool – as well as a means for attending to Gramsci's injunction about what is entailed in superseding existing forms of common sense:

it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity (Gramsci, 1971:330-1).

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Endnotes

1. The NDR refers to the first stage in a two-stage theory of revolution adopted by the South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1962 and subsequently by the ANC, in which the overthrow of the apartheid state would inaugurate a phase of national democracy that would pave the way for the second-stage socialist revolution.

2. This point became clear at the launch of the SACP's Discussion Document at University of KwaZulu-Natal, 30 June 2006.
3. Foster-Carter (1978) notes that neither Althusser nor Balibar use the term 'articulation of modes of production', and claims it was Pierre-Philippe Rey who introduced it in a widely-distributed mimeographed paper entitled 'Sur l'articulation des modes du production' (1969).
4. '[W]hat is absolutely clear in the contemporary period is that no section of the national liberation movement is committed to or struggles for, what may be termed a bourgeois national democratic revolution. Even the conception of the "left/workerist" contention that the national liberation movement is bourgeois in character, has nothing in common with the vision of corporate capital or, say, the bantustan sections of the black petite-bourgeoisie for a de-racialised capitalist South Africa. The two-stage revolution does not envisage a transformation based merely on a degree of redistribution of wealth and political power in favour of black people; it envisages the first stage as merely a stage in which the conditions are established which will permit the inauguration of a process of further social transformation' (Wolpe, 1988:33-34).
5. 'Against both boycott and reform he defends the ongoing struggle for "people's education" – a schooling that would eliminate ignorance and illiteracy, cultivate an understanding of apartheid and all its oppression and inequalities, that would counter competitive individualism with collective organization, that would equip people with the capacity to realize their potential' (Burawoy, 2006:17).
6. This piece has been republished in radically shortened form in Essed and Goldberg (2002). What is lost in this shortened version, though, is much of the engagement with South African debates which is, in my view, precisely what makes this intervention so compelling.
7. He also acknowledges his close relationship with Wolpe: 'I met Harold Wolpe shortly after his sensational escape from prison and we used to talk long into the night about South African affairs, about the ANC, about the work which Harold was doing around education and so on.'
8. In a subsequent piece Hall (1985) further distinguishes his position from that of Althusser, as well as from the post-structuralists – those like Foucault who broke with structuralist theory by insisting on radical contingency, while retaining elements of structuralism.
9. Although Hall makes no mention of Fanon, the parallels between this reading of Gramsci and Fanon are very close.
10. His larger project in this piece is transcend the structuralist/ culturalist division to combine 'the best elements in structuralist and culturalist enterprises, by way of Gramsci's work', going on to note that they pose, together, 'the problems consequent on trying to think both the specificity of different practices and the forms of articulated unity they constitute' (Hall, 1980b:72).
11. Wendy Brown makes a related point: 'It is interesting ... that the optimism of radical (social) democratic vision is fueled by that dimension of liberalism which presumes social and political forms to have relative autonomy from economic ones to be that which can be tinkered with independently of developments in the forces of capitalism. Indeed, it is here that the radical democrats become vulnerable to the charge of "idealism", where idealism marks the promulgation of select political ideals de-linked from historical configurations of social powers and institutions ...' (Brown, 1995:12).
12. For example Braun and Disch (2002) and Fischman and McLaren (2005).
13. My research in the 1990s in two areas of northwestern KwaZulu-Natal provide strong support for this argument (Hart, 2002).
14. See Bond (2000) for an argument about how the RDP White Paper effectively evacuated the progressive elements in the original framing of the RDP.
15. GEAR is an acronym for Growth, Employment and Redistribution, an extremely conservative package of macro-economic policies that the ANC government presented to the South African public as a *fait accompli* in June 1996.
16. Elsewhere (Hart, 2007) I discuss more fully the uses and limits of the concept of governmentality.

17. Johnson (2003) argues that Mbeki and his followers have found the reorganisation of the state along conventional (neo)liberal lines quite compatible with their Leninist understanding of the primacy of vanguard party leadership over mass action.

18. The 'land question' – along with histories, memories, and meanings of racialised dispossession and the imperatives of redress – are also part of this complex (Hart, 2002; 2006a; 2006c).

19. In September 2002, the Political Education Unit of the ANC issued a revealing document entitled 'Contribution to the NEC/NWC Response to the "Cronin Interviews" on the Issue of Neoliberalism'; see also Makhaye (2002) and Moleketi and Jele (2002) along with the sharp response by Masondo (2002).

20. Article in *City Press*, 29 September 2002, p. 8 entitled 'Ultra-left transposes DA agenda on the ANC'.

21. <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2003/03080511461001.htm>; accessed 30 June 2004.

22. For documentation, see the references provided by the South African Regional Poverty Network: <http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000830/index.php>; accessed 30 June 2004.

23. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/ancdocs/2004/text/at47.txt>; accessed 19 December 2004.

24. These figures are contained in an article entitled '66 cops injured in illegal service delivery protests', *Cape Argus*, 13 October 2005.

25. I develop this and related arguments more fully in Hart (2006c).

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