Rethinking the South African Crisis
Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony

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Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements viii
List of Abbreviations xi

Chapter 1 Contours of Crisis in South Africa 1
Chapter 2 From Bredell to Marikana: The Dialectics of Protest and Containment 28
Chapter 3 The Unruly Terrains of Local Government 95
Chapter 4 Revisiting the Transition: De-Nationalisation and Re-Nationalisation 155
Chapter 5 The Unravelling of ANC Hegemony: Generations of Populist Politics 189
Chapter 6 Through the Lens of Passive Revolution: The South African Crisis Revisited 219

Select Bibliography 243
Index 255
A crisis occurs, sometimes lasting for decades. This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves ... and that, despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them, within certain limits, and to overcome them. These incessant and persistent efforts ... form the terrain of the 'conjunctural', and it is upon this terrain that the forces of opposition organise (Gramsci 1971: 178; Q13 §17).

Confronting the Present
On Thursday, 16 August 2012, South African police and paramilitary units opened fire on striking mineworkers near the town of Marikana in the north-west platinum belt, killing 34 strikers and injuring another 78. Televised images ricocheted around the world, seeming to support the official story that mineworkers attacked police who then retaliated in self-defence. Yet mounting evidence shows that most of the killings subsequently took place in an area sheltered by rocks that served as an open-air latrine for workers and their families living in the nearby shack settlement of Nkaneng. Out of view of the media, it appears, police assassinated some of the strikers at close range.¹ In addition, eyewitnesses and researchers assert that the initial, widely publicised round of killings was in fact precipitated by police actions. Marikana, in other words, was far more a military operation than an exercise in community policing.
1

Contours of Crisis in South Africa

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Rethinking the South African Crisis

The Marikana massacre was the single most traumatic event of the post-apartheid era, evoking images and memories of police brutality at Sharpeville in 1960 and the Soweto uprising in 1976. Along with the corpses, hopeful visions of a new South Africa lay shattered on the killing fields of Marikana.

Over the weekend following the massacre, Julius Malema - the firebrand former leader of the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League - was cheered by a large crowd of angry mineworkers and their families in Marikana at a moment when ANC officials were terrified to set foot in the area. There and on subsequent occasions, Malema reiterated his claims that white settlers had stolen the rich natural resources of South Africa, and his calls for nationalisation of the mines. Marikana also launched a series of other strikes that swept through urban and rural South Africa. In a revealing commentary the following Monday, Peter Bruce, editor of the influential Johannesburg newspaper Business Day, confessed to his own traumatic response to this turn of events:

What’s scary about Marikana is that, for the first time, for me, the fact that the ANC and its government do not have the handle they once did on the African majority has come home. The party is already losing the middle classes. If they are now also losing the marginal and the dispossessed, what is left? ... To misquote Winston Churchill: it’s not just the beginning of the end. It’s the end of the beginning of the end (Business Day, 20 August 2012).

The beginning of the end, I suggest, was the Bredell land occupation in early July 2001, when thousands of hopeful settlers ‘bought’ tiny plots on a barren stretch of land between Johannesburg and Pretoria, and ANC officials moved swiftly and violently to evict them. Bredell precipitated a profound moral crisis for the ANC government. It also fed into pressures that had been mounting since the mid-1990s, when the ANC’s conservative policies and opening to the global economy dashed hopes of material improvement for many black South Africans. Some of these pressures then found vociferous expression in oppositional movements that burst onto the global stage at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban in August 2001, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. Following the bitter disappointments of the 1990s, the rise of what came to be called ‘new social movements’ – such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum and the Landless Peoples’ Movement – renewed faith in South Africa as a site of hope for many on the left. Activists within and beyond the country heralded the movements as embodiments of counter-hegemonic globalisation and transnational civil society fighting against the ravages of neoliberal capitalism.

Yet this optimism was short-lived: by 2003/04 many of these movements were in a state of disarray. Since then we have witnessed the emergence and proliferation of expressions of popular anger and discontent extending far beyond the reach of the first round of new social movements. These seemingly disparate mobilisations can usefully be understood in the same frame in terms of ‘movement beyond movements’. First, extremely violent outbursts of so-called service delivery protests erupted after the national elections in April 2004, and swept through the country. Often accompanied by intense rage, these municipal rebellions have become an entrenched feature of everyday life in the heavily segregated black townships and shack settlements of post-apartheid South Africa. Yet these uprisings coexist with what on the surface appears as remarkable acquiescence to appalling material conditions, and with ongoing (albeit uneven) electoral support for the ANC.

Popular support for Jacob Zuma in the second half of the 2000s constitutes a second dimension of ‘movement beyond movements’. Gathering force in 2005, this groundswell of support propelled him into the presidency of the ANC in December 2007, and of the country in May 2009 – despite his having been charged with rape (for which he was acquitted) and threatened with charges of corruption. A third manifestation burst violently on to the scene in May 2008, when 62 people defined as foreigners were brutally murdered, and hundreds of thousands more displaced. The rampage
subsided, but everyday forms of xenophobia preceded the pogroms and remain a defining feature of life for many Africans from other parts of the continent – as well as some black South Africans defined as excessively ‘foreign’.

In 2010 yet another expression of anger emerged in the form of demands by the ANC Youth League and its vociferous then-President Julius Malema for ‘economic freedom in our lifetime’ – and, more specifically, for nationalisation of the mines as well as expropriation without compensation of land stolen by whites. Much attention and public commentary has focused on the controversial and flamboyant figure of Malema, who was dismissed from the ANC in April 2012 and faces fraud, corruption and tax evasion charges. Yet there is uneasy recognition that the anger and alienation of large and growing numbers of young men and women rendered ‘surplus’ to the requirements of capital will continue to burgeon even if Malema disappears.

Proliferating expressions of popular discontent over the decade of the 2000s have gone hand in hand with increasing government interventionism. Since 2001 we have witnessed intensified official efforts to manage poverty; rising expenditure at all levels of government; and amplified official ‘pro-poor’ and ‘developmental’ rhetoric. Together with a number of other shifts in official discourses and practices, these moves represent significant departures from harsh home-grown structural adjustment in the first phase of the post-apartheid era (1994-2000). While it may be tempting to dismiss such efforts as sheep’s clothing draped over a neoliberal capitalist wolf, we do so at our peril because they represent part of an ongoing official battle to contain and control popular discontent. This battle intensified over the decade of the 2000s, accompanied by growing tensions within and between the ANC and its alliance partners, and by the ramping up of populist politics that some see tending towards fascism. As is often the case, the rise of populist politics in South Africa over the 2000s has also gone hand in hand with multiple, proliferating expressions of nationalism.

While this book primarily focuses on South Africa, the processes and challenges it grapples with are far more widespread. South Africa is an extreme but far from exceptional embodiment of forces at play in many regions of the world: (1) massive concentrations of wealth alongside the mushrooming of ‘wageless life’ (or what an administrator of the Bundesbank calls ‘populations with no productive function’); (2) oppositional politics that are assuming a multiplicity of forms: the Tea Party in the United States (US), explosive Hindu nationalism in India, widespread anti-Muslim and xenophobic sentiments in much of Euro-America, the re-emergence of fascism in Austria and other parts of Europe on the one hand – and, on the other, the uprisings in the Arab world, the Occupy movement and the anti-austerity movements in Greece, Italy and Spain; and (3) official efforts at containment ranging from liberal biopolitical interventions targeting specific populations (often in the name of security) to increasingly common police brutality and rampant militarism.

Defying the hopes and promises of liberation in the early 1990s, South Africa has come to exemplify all these dimensions in a form that is both extreme and deeply racialised – and the political stakes in how we interpret them are exceedingly high.

**Rethinking the Transition from Apartheid**

In *Disabling Globalization: Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2002a) I argued that local government was emerging as a key site of contractions in the first phase of post-apartheid restructuring (1994-2000). Over the decade of the 2000s, I maintain in this book, it has become the key site of contradictions. Broadly speaking, local government has become the impossible terrain of official efforts to manage poverty and deprivation in a racially inflected capitalist society marked by massive inequalities and increasingly precarious livelihoods for the large majority of the population. Ironically, attempts to render technical that which is inherently political are feeding into and amplifying the proliferation of populist politics.
While local government contradictions have their own specificities, they cannot be understood simply in local terms. ‘Neoliberalism’ – understood as a class project and manifestation of global economic forces, as well as a rationality of rule – has become the dominant frame for many critical understandings of post-apartheid South Africa, yet, while important, it is inadequate to the task. In this book I suggest that the turbulent, shifting forces taking shape in the arenas of everyday life need to be situated in relation to simultaneous practices and processes of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation. Deeply in tension with each other, de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation enable new angles of understanding the transition from apartheid.

At the moment when former president F.W. de Klerk unbanned the ANC and other liberation movements in 1990, the ‘South African nation’ was deeply in question. Quite literally, it had to be conjured into existence from the rubble of a deeply divided past. At precisely that moment, powerful South African conglomerates were straining at the leash to break away from confines of any sort of national economy and reconnect with the increasingly financialised global economy, from which they had been partially excluded during the 1980s by the heightening crisis of the apartheid state.

De-nationalisation refers to alliances through which corporate capital defined the terms of reconnection with the global economy, as well as to the forces unleashed in the process. As such, it encompasses but extends beyond the extremely conservative package of neoliberal macro-economic policies set in place in 1996. The most compelling analysis of changing relations between corporate capital, the global economy and the South African state highlights what Ben Fine and others call the minerals energy complex that has shaped capitalist accumulation in South Africa since the minerals discoveries in the second half of the nineteenth century, and that remains in force today. This analysis, as we shall see, directs attention to the heavily concentrated character of South African corporate capital; the highly advantageous terms on which these conglomerates engineered their re-engagement with the global economy after the fall of apartheid through their relations with strategically placed forces in the ANC; how the conglomerates have restructured and de-nationalised their operations; massive and escalating capital flight; the formation of a small but powerful black capitalist class allied with white corporate capital; understandings of the ‘economy’ fostered through these alliances; their ongoing influence over ANC government policy; and multiple ways these forces continue to play into and intensify brutal inequalities and the degradation of livelihoods of a large proportion of the black South African population.

It is important to emphasise that de-nationalisation does not refer to political intervention in the ‘economy’ conceived as a separate sphere. It signals instead the simultaneously economic, political and cultural practices and processes that are generating ongoing inequality and ‘surplus’ populations, and the conflicts that surround them. De-nationalisation focuses attention on the historical and geographical specificities of southern African racial capitalism and settler colonialism, their interconnections with forces at play in other parts of the world, and their modes of reconnecting with the increasingly financialised global political economy in the post-apartheid period. The forces of de-nationalisation continue to shape the present – but they can only be understood in relation to, and deeply entangled with, practices and processes of re-nationalisation.

One can, I suggest, discern three key dimensions in which re-nationalising practices and processes have taken place. First are inclusive discourses of the ‘rainbow nation’ associated with Nelson Mandela that Ari Sitas (2010) calls ‘indigenerality’ – the liberal, ecclesiastical discourse of forgiveness that made possible the negotiations to end apartheid, and found further expression in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Discourses of inclusion were not just imposed from above – like the ‘national question’ discussed later they had (and to some degree still have) popular appeal. Yet, as Sitas argues, they abstracted from and papered over historical
Rethinking the South African Crisis

geographies of racial oppression, exploitation and racialised dispossession - and were falling apart by the end of the 'Mandela decade'.

A second key dimension of official post-apartheid re-nationalisation is found in the ANC government’s immigration policies and practices. Indigenerality and rainbowism coincided with what Jonathan Crush (1999a) calls ‘Fortress South Africa’ – the ANC government’s latching onto apartheid-era immigration legislation premised on control, exclusion and expulsion. The Aliens Control Act was repealed in 2002, but the bounding of the nation through immigration policy and practices – as well as popular vigilantism, abuses by police and brutal detention of ‘aliens’ – have ramped up and fed into xenophobia.

Third, the most important elements of post-apartheid nationalism are embodied in the keywords of the ANC Alliance: the ‘national question’ and the National Democratic Revolution (NDR).10 The NDR refers to the first stage in a twostage 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 bourgeois national democracy that would pave the way for the second-stage socialist revolution. This aspect of re-nationalisation highlights that it is not a separable ‘political’ process, but is crucially about making the case for accommodation of the inequalities of post-apartheid capitalism as a transitory phenomenon, to be superseded by the (ever-retreating) second phase. Forged in the context of fierce debates over race, class and nationalism since the first part of the twentieth century; elaborated during the anti-apartheid struggle; and reworked in the context of the transition, these terms carry deep popular resonance. Within the ANC Alliance, the NDR has become a site of increasingly vociferous contestation in which articulations of race, class, sexuality, gender, custom and tradition figure prominently.11

Practices and processes of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation, understood in relation to one another, are crucial to comprehending the amplifying tensions and contradictions through which the ANC’s hegemonic project has been unravelling over the past decade. ANC hegemony hinges crucially on official articulations of nationalism and claims to moral authority through leadership of the liberation movement – an authority that has severely eroded over the decade of the 2000s. At the same time, many popular struggles over the material conditions of life and livelihood that erupt in local arenas are simultaneously struggles over the meanings of the nation and liberation, now rooted in a profound sense of betrayal – struggles that can and do move in dramatically different directions.

Taken together, the dialectical relations of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation define the contours of post-apartheid South Africa’s passive revolution. This concept comes from Antonio Gramsci, the Italian scholar-revolutionary jailed by Mussolini in 1926 until shortly before his death in 1937. Gramsci initially used it to interpret how the Risorgimento (the national unification of Italy in the latter part of the nineteenth century) played into the rise of fascism. In the course of his Prison Notebooks he extended and elaborated the concept, and suggested its wider relevance.12 Passive revolution refers not just to a top-down seizure of power by the bourgeoisie in the face of challenges from below. Rather, it involves the overthrow of some older social forms and the institution of new ones, combined with a deliberate and structural pacification of subaltern classes – it combines, in other words, both a ‘progressive’ or ‘modernising’ revolution of sorts, and its passive deformation (Thomas 2012: 35-6).

Part of what is illuminating about the concept of passive revolution is its deeply spatio-historical and comparative character that is helpful in thinking about forces at play in South Africa in relation to those in other regions of the world – in terms of their specificities and interconnections. For Gramsci, passive revolution was not an abstract model that can simply be applied or against which specific ‘cases’ can be measured. The challenge, both analytical and political, is to rework – or as Gramsci might have said ‘translate’.
Rethinking the South African Crisis

– it in relation to the forces thrown up by a different set of circumstances. I will suggest that developing a concept of passive revolution that is adequate to contemporary challenges requires building on Gramsci’s work, but also moving beyond it with the help of Frantz Fanon (1963, 2004), Henri Lefebvre ([1974] 1991), and strands of feminist theory, as well as in conversation with debates over postcolonial nationalisms. 13

First, though, let me situate this book (and its title) in a longer lineage of debate and analysis of South African conditions that draws on Gramsci. In 1981 John Saul and Stephen Gelb published The Crisis in South Africa (updated by Saul in 1986), which represented the first Marxist analysis of the reformist thrust by the Botha regime in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Serious economic difficulties in the 1970s had, they argued, deepened into an organic crisis, forcing capital and the apartheid state into a desperate search for palliative measures. Drawing on Stuart Hall’s (1981) reading of Gramsci, they anticipated that capital’s ‘formative action’ would run aground because co-optation was far too limited and exclusionary to pre-empt the demands of the mass of the population. Reformism did, however, provide new space for political organisation and opposition, and new grievances around which to organise. The result would be growing coalescence of community and workplace struggles against a system with no claim to legitimacy. At the same time, the closeness of the exiled liberation movement to mass struggles in the townships meant that the ANC was unlikely to accept anything short of a fundamental redistribution of political and economic power.

What Saul and Gelb did not foresee, as Sitas (2010: 35) points out, was how the corporate bourgeoisie would fight for their own ‘revolution within the revolution’ – aided, of course, by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the global triumph of neoliberal forms of capitalism. Revisiting Saul and Gelb’s arguments, Carolyn Bassett (2008) focuses on how South African corporate capital wrung concessions out of the ANC in the early 1990s, as well as shaping understandings of the economy, and defining the terms of their re-engagement with the global economy – an account that is broadly in accordance with that of a number of other analysts discussed more fully in Chapter 4. Corporate capital, she maintains, has been too successful, winning so many concessions and giving up so little in terms of supporting reforms to benefit the majority that the reform programme is inherently unstable. Bassett also invokes Gramsci’s theory of passive revolution – which she defines as ‘change imposed from above designed to maintain the economic and political system’ with only passive consent from the masses – to argue that the ANC has been forced to rely on ‘domination’ rather than ‘hegemony’ to consolidate the new order (2008: 185–6).

In a broadly similar analysis published at the same time as Bassett’s, Vishwas Satgar (2008) drew on passive revolution – which he defined as ‘a non-hegemonic form of class rule’ – to argue that what he calls an Afro-neoliberal class project within the ANC has used restructuring and globalisation of the South African economy to advance its interests, while at the same time demobilising popular forces and blocking fundamental transformation. Hein Marais sharply contests this analysis, arguing that the “passive revolution” schema paints a tantalising but simplistic picture (2011: 398). Maintaining that ‘one of the great feats of the transition has been the marshalling of sufficient consent to avoid social instability’ (2011: 399), he insists as well that seeing the South African transition as an example of reform from above ‘plays down the extent to which popular energies and organisations eventually helped to shape the terms of the political settlement and bring about key new arrangements’ (2011: 399).

This debate turns around an excessively narrow understanding of passive revolution in terms of domination as opposed to hegemony. In Chapter 6, I address these and other issues related to passive revolution, pointing to the uses as well as the limits of the concept, and suggesting how it needs to be translated in relation to postapartheid South Africa.
Along with a number of other critics of the post-apartheid order, Bassett’s and Satgar’s focus is on what I am calling de-nationalisation. The dynamics of de-nationalisation are crucially important but insufficient for grasping the turbulent forces driving the ongoing crisis in contemporary South Africa. Of great importance as well are multi-dimensional practices and processes of re-nationalisation that, operating in relation to de-nationalisation, are linked to the erosion of ANC hegemony and the ramping up of populist politics.

Accordingly, let us turn to crucial questions about how best to understand complex, contradictory and changing issues of nationalism in relation to political economy.

**Contending with Nationalism/s**

Although the ANC has been an explicitly nationalist movement, few studies have dealt with the specificity of its nationalism. Even fewer studies have taken the next step: to factor nationalism into their analysis of current events (Chipkin 2004: 335).

Nationalism has proved an uncomfortable anomaly for Marxist theory and, precisely for that reason, has been largely elided rather than confronted (Anderson [1983] 1991: 3; emphasis in original).

For many critical observers and activists in South Africa today, dislike of nationalism is producing a dangerous disavowal and neglect. African and Afrikaner nationalisms have long been anathema for the liberal right. At the same time, many scholars and activists on the left dismiss as ‘exhausted’ official expressions of nationalism. There is also a widespread tendency to celebrate oppositional movements as embodying a post-nationalist (indeed cosmopolitan) cutting edge, while refusing to take seriously popular sentiments that fail to fit a post-nationalist mould.

While this combined neglect and disavowal of nationalism is by no means peculiar to South Africa, it resonates with some of the many ironies of South African liberation - its coincidence in the early 1990s with the global triumph of neoliberal forms of market capitalism and liberal democracy, together with the horrendous violence in Bosnia, Rwanda and elsewhere perpetrated in the name of ethnic nationalism. These forces fed into influential claims about the irrelevance of the nation in an increasingly borderless world, combined with the horrors and dangers of nationalism as an atavistic holdover: if nationalism is not already dead, in other words, then it should be.

There are, of course, exceptions to this general neglect of nationalism in South Africa. Prominent among them is Ivor Chipkin’s book entitled *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of ‘the People’* (2007). Its core argument is that democracy (conceived as a form of society) and African nationalism are totally antithetical. Maintaining that in the name of freedom nationalists ‘substitute the goal of a democratic society for that of the nation’ (2007: 119), Chipkin wants us to dispense with nationalism, and opt instead for a radical democratic citizenship. The irony here is that, as one of the very few who have called for careful, serious attention to post-apartheid nationalism, Chipkin ends up in effect wishing it away - in much the same way as those who refuse to take it on.

Forged in the crucible of struggles against colonialism and apartheid, post-liberation nationalisms cannot simply be shrugged off or wished away. The challenge instead is to grasp their popular appeal, and work towards critical understandings that can help to denaturalise increasingly dangerous articulations of nationalism. In other words, we have to think with nationalism against nationalism - and this entails beginning with taken-for-granted understandings in order to denaturalise the meanings of nation and liberation in relation to the rapidly changing world in which we find ourselves.

What are the conceptual tools that we might use for refashioning understandings of nationalism rather than just wishing it away? For this I argue that relational conceptions of the production of space in the work of Lefebvre ([1974] 1991) are extremely useful. In taking issue with what I called ‘impact models’ of globalisation in
Disabling Globalization (2002a), I made extensive use of Lefebvre’s conception of space not as a passive backdrop or empty container, but rather as actively produced through power-laden practices that are simultaneously material and meaningful. Closely related are ideas of place (however large or small) not as a bounded unit, but as nodal points of interconnection in socially produced space, the boundaries of which always need to be critically interrogated (Massey 1994).

These concepts of the production of space are especially powerful tools for dismantling notions of the nation-state as a naturally bounded unit, as Manu Goswami (2002, 2004) has demonstrated in her reconstructions of key theories of nationalism, beginning with Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities ([1983] 1991) – by far the most influential theory of nationalism in our time.16

Nationalism, nation-ness and nationality, Anderson argued, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind, capable of arousing deep emotional legitimacy and profound attachments. These artefacts were not simply invented, as several influential theories would have it. Invention implies ‘fabrication’ and ‘falsity’, whereas nations understood as imagined communities ‘are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined’ (1991: 6). The nation is imagined as a community ‘because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship’ (1991: 7).

In Anderson’s schema, ‘the creation of these artefacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex “crossing” of discrete historical forces; but that once created, they became “modular,” capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations’ (1991: 4). It was the ‘convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language’ (1991: 46) that made possible the proliferation of the modern nation as imagined community.

Anderson then identifies four categories of modular nationalism, beginning with an early form of modern nationalism pioneered in the Americas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The end of national liberation movements in the Americas coincided with the onset of the age of nationalism in Europe (1820 to 1920), which ‘changed the face of the Old World’ (Anderson 1991: 67). Within Europe he distinguishes between popular ‘linguistic’ nationalisms in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, and conservative ‘official’ nationalisms in the second half of the century that ‘were responses by power-groups – primarily, but not exclusively dynastic and aristocratic – threatened with exclusion from, or marginalization in, popular imagined communities’ (1991: 110; emphasis in original). Finally, what Anderson calls the ‘last wave’ of twentieth-century nationalisms in the colonial territories of Asia and Africa have their own character but are ‘nonetheless incomprehensible except in terms of the succession of models we have been considering’ (1991: 113).

Anderson’s positing Asian and African anti- and post-colonial nationalisms as copies of their Euro-American predecessors provoked a storm of critique, as well as a tendency to set aside socio-historical analysis to focus on the symbolic and discursive aspects of nationalism.18 In her critique of Anderson, Goswami (2002, 2004) charts what in my view is a far more productive way forward. The problem with Anderson’s concept of modularity, she argues, is that it delinks the circulation of nationalist models from their ongoing contexts of production – a consequence of ‘Anderson’s almost exclusive focus on print-media rather than the new form of social relations established by capitalism’ (Goswami 2002: 780). This understanding fails to address vital questions: the conditions that shape the openness of actors to particular nationalist models and visions of nationhood; the felt salience of particular national imaginings; and ‘the clustering of nationalist movements at particular socio-historical conjunctures’ (2002: 781).

While not dispensing with a concept of modularity, Goswami outlines a revised understanding that recognises both the durability and depth of the nation form and its reified status in relation to
the changing global conditions of its production. Rather than the linear diffusion of abstract models from a Euro-American West to the rest, she argues, we need a spatio-historical understanding of how the practices, conceptual categories and institutions associated with the nation-state and nationalism have come to appear natural in distinct but interconnected contexts.\textsuperscript{19} The fundamental lineaments of the nation form were set in the era of high imperialism (1870–1914) – the period of rapid capitalist and colonial expansion that coincided with high nationalism.\textsuperscript{20} In addition to nationalist movements in Europe during this period, she points out:

What bears emphasis is the temporal and institutional synchronicity of struggles to establish an internally homogeneous, sovereign space of nationness in a number of imperial-national (Germany, United States, Japan) and colonial/semi-colonial contexts (swadeshi in India, the boycott movement in China, state rationalization in Thailand). While these movements were fashioned by local social relations and power struggles, their temporal simultaneity, structural similarities, and competitive logic were conditioned by their location within a single, increasingly interdependent, and hierarchically organized global space-time (Goswami 2002: 788; emphasis added).

Goswami goes on to note that the centralisation and territorialisation of colonial state power in South Asia (India) and North Africa (Egypt and Algeria) ‘unwittingly made possible and directed the dynamics and character of emergent anti-colonial movements’ (2002: 790).

Although southern Africa does not feature in Goswami’s account, this region that Cecil John Rhodes saw as his personal stomping ground played a central role in the formative period of high imperialism and high nationalism. The South African War (1899–1901) was the defining military conflict of the age of imperialism. It provided Britain with assured access to the world’s largest supply of gold at the height of the gold standard; it inflamed the fierce Afrikaner nationalism that fortified the apartheid project later in the century; the post-war settlement between the British and the Boers from which the black population was excluded propelled the formation of the ANC; and Gandhi’s formative experiences in South Africa forged an important connection between African and Indian nationalisms.

Let me turn now to some broader considerations of what it means to rethink nationalisms in terms of a relational conception of the production of space. Most immediately important is that an explicitly spatio-historical understanding of nationalisms moves us beyond an unproductive impasse between, on the one hand, an economistic and functionalist understanding of nationalism as reflective of – or determined by – the economic ‘base’ (to which Anderson was in part responding); and, on the other hand, analyses focused on the discursive effects and meanings of national territory (many of which emerged as a critique of Anderson).\textsuperscript{21} Both rely, in effect, on taken-for-granted understandings of the nation as a territorially bounded unit. A spatio-historical analysis overcomes the either/or tensions between structural/historical and cultural/discursive understandings of nationalism. Instead, it brings them into an integrated frame of understanding by focusing on the processes, practices and meanings entailed in the production of specific – but always interconnected – national spaces in relation to wider global conjunctures.

The contradictory and dialectical processes of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation that form the focus of this book are firmly located within this spatio-historical frame of understanding. What they also pose is the imperative of extending this frame to come to grips with articulations of nationalism with class and race, as well as gender, sexuality and ethnicity, both historically and in the present. In Disabling Globalization, I made extensive use of the idea of articulation understood in the dual sense of ‘joining together’ and ‘giving expression to’ – an analytical tool that was partly forged in the context of earlier South African debates over race, class and nationalism by Stuart Hall (1980).\textsuperscript{22} Since then I have extended and elaborated the idea of articulation – first in relation to contem-
porary South African debates (Hart 2007), and then to take account of Gramsci’s theory of language (Hart 2013). In Chapters 4 and 5, I will use articulation as a way of setting de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation in motion in relation to one another.

More generally, in developing what I mean by de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation, I will bring Goswami’s skilful deployment of Lefebvre into a frame of analysis that also includes Gramsci, Fanon and strands of feminist theory. Both Gramsci and Fanon were deeply engaged with the dilemmas of national unification at different moments in the twentieth century - Gramsci with how the national unification of Italy in the 1860s led into the rise of fascism in the 1920s, and Fanon with the imperatives and pitfalls of anti- and post-colonial nationalisms in Algeria and other parts of Africa. In The Wretched of the Earth completed shortly before his death in December 1961, Fanon grasped the dangers of post-colonial bourgeois nationalism with remarkable prescience. Both Gramsci and Fanon have figured prominently at different moments in South African struggles - Fanon was an important inspiration for Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness movement in the 1970s, and Gramsci’s ideas helped fuel fierce struggles against the apartheid regime and racial capitalism in the 1980s, as well as analyses such as The Crisis in South Africa. In addition, as we shall see, they share remarkable similarities and complementarities. Indeed, Ato Sekyi-Otu, whose book Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience (1996) was inspired by South African liberation, has gone so far as to call Gramsci a precocious Fanonian!

In Chapter 6, I will focus on how Fanon’s emphasis on the imperative for working through and beyond taken-for-granted understandings of nationalism resonates closely with what Gramsci meant by the philosophy of praxis - namely the practices and processes of rendering fragmentary ‘common sense’ (that which is taken for granted) more coherent, enabling new forms of critical practice and collective action. Both Gramsci and Fanon were attentive to questions of language and meaning in relation to practice, and both provide insights that mesh closely with the possibilities for critically interrogating taken-for-granted understandings of nationalism opened up by Goswami’s deployment of Lefebvre.

The question, then, is what would it mean to put these ideas to work concretely in post-apartheid South Africa - bearing in mind that Gramsci, Fanon and Lefebvre did not present us with abstract models that can simply be ‘applied’ in different times and places? The challenge, rather, is to rework - or ‘translate’ - the analyses they gave us in relation to a different set of circumstances and forces in order to generate new understandings.

Unfolding the Arguments

[How could we come to understand ... the genesis of the present, along with the preconditions and processes involved, other than by starting from that present, working our way back to the past, and then retracing our steps? (Lefebvre [1974] 1991: 66; emphasis in original)]

In this book I am deploying what Lefebvre ([1974] 1991: 65-7) called a ‘regressive-progressive’ method. As suggested in the epigraph, it entails starting with a description of the present and its contradictions; then moving to an explanation of the historical production of the present, and from there to a moment of opening to the future - and to the possibilities present in current contradictions. This dialectical method is grounded in Lefebvre’s understanding of the production of space, which, ‘having attained the conceptual and linguistic level, acts retroactively upon the past, disclosing aspects and moments of it hitherto uncomprehended’ (Lefebvre [1974] 1991: 65). The past appears in a different light, he went on to say, ‘and hence the process whereby that past becomes the present also takes on another aspect’.

What is entailed, in other words, are understandings of the past - or of multiple pasts - that are adequate to the present, and to envisaging different futures. In this book, the idea of rethinking
Rethinking the South African Crisis

the transition from apartheid spatially as well as historically in terms of de-nationalisation in relation to re-nationalisation has grown out of my efforts to grasp, of necessity in a very partial way, how key elements of the past have become the present in a rapidly changing global conjuncture.

Before unfolding the arguments, let me reflect briefly on the relationship of this book to Disabling Globalization (2002a). Beginning in May 1994, I started tracing the first phase of the post-apartheid transition from the vantage points of Ladysmith and Newcastle - two former white towns and adjacent black townships in KwaZulu-Natal that were sites of forced removals of black South Africans from rural areas and their relocation in the townships; apartheid-era strategies of industrial decentralisation; and Taiwanese (and subsequently Chinese) investment. Although research for the book ended with local government elections in December 2000, it was the Bredell land occupation in July 2001 and the ANC’s crackdown on it that brought the book to closure. Although shocking at the time, this sort of display of state coercion has since become routine and banal.

Bredell exemplified that book’s focus on the ‘land question’ - the central importance of histories, memories and meanings of racialised dispossession, and their ongoing reverberations in the present. It also helped to crystallise an argument about the need to delink land issues from agriculture and individual restitution claims, and re-articulate them in broader and more collective terms to demand redistributive social change and livelihood guarantees. At that moment, when a variety of new social movements focused on specific issues were emerging, I tried to suggest how re-articulating the land question could potentially link together diverse demands, and thus help unite a broader opposition to the brutal neoliberal economic policies that were ravaging livelihoods. I also suggested how framing demands in terms of a social wage might contribute to forging alliances between at least some elements of organised labour and the newly emerging movements.

The collapse of oppositional movements combined with the turbulent forces that followed in the wake of Bredell have forced me to go back and rethink the transition from apartheid in ways that go beyond narratives of ‘elite pact ing’ and neoliberalism. In part I have been compelled to engage seriously with the intertwining of race and nationalism in relation to histories of dispossession and accumulation. It has also meant returning to follow carefully the contradictions of local government that became clear in the first phase of my research in Ladysmith and Newcastle. Focusing not just on protest but the everyday struggles over the issues and practices of local government, my purpose is to convey how practices, conflicts and struggles in the arenas of everyday life feed into and are shaped by ongoing, conflictual relations between de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation - and how they have all changed in relation to one another.

Starting with Bredell, Chapter 2 tries to convey as vividly as possible the roiling waves of political turbulence that swept through South Africa in the first decade of the new millennium. A key point here is that what I am calling ‘movement beyond movements’ are not just ‘bottom-up’ responses to ‘top-down’ neoliberalism. In an effort to portray the dialectical processes through which protest and containment have taken shape in relation to one another, I focus on a series of events in specific places over the decade starting with the Bredell land occupation and culminating in the Marikana massacre. My aim is to show how these ‘defining moments’ capture key forces - both material and meaningful - and enable us to catch glimpses of the processes through which they have been (and are being) reworked in practice. I also highlight how new social movements and proliferating forms of ‘movement beyond movements’ have an irreducibly local dimension, each with its own specificities as well as multiple connections to forces at play elsewhere.

In Chapter 3, I follow through the argument that local government has become the key site of contradictions over the decade of the 2000s. Drawing on my ongoing research in Ladysmith and Newcastle since 1994, along with evidence from other regions of
the country, I show how intensifying national efforts to surveil and control local government are rendering it more fragile, and how some of the ostensibly ‘pro-poor’ measures set in place in the 2000s are inflaming the popular anger they were designed to contain.

Understanding the ‘local’ not as a set of bounded units but as nodal points of interconnection in socially produced space means that we cannot comprehend local government contradictions only in local terms – and why it is essential to situate them in relation to how de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation are playing out in practice. Chapter 4 turns the spotlight of attention on the simultaneous, interconnected and tension-ridden processes of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation through which the ‘new South Africa’ was produced. My account points inter alia to the need to go beyond debates over neoliberalism to grasp the devastating dynamics of South Africa’s racial capitalist order, and how it has changed as it has become more fully incorporated into global circuits of accumulation. At the same time, these practices and processes of reconnection were made possible by the multi-dimensional efforts to produce the ‘nation’ outlined earlier – the rainbow nation, Fortress South Africa and multiple articulations of African nationalism – all in tension with one another. Spiralling struggles cast in terms of re-articulations of nationalism are intimately linked with de-nationalising forces propelling intensified inequality and conditions of wageless life. Rife with tensions, these simultaneous processes of re- and de-nationalisation were present at the birth of the ‘new’ South Africa and, as I suggest in Chapter 4, shed new light on some of the key forces that took shape in the first phase of the post-apartheid order (1994–2000).

In Chapter 5, I come back to the amplifying tensions outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 that gathered force over the decade of the 2000s – but equipped this time with concepts of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation, brought together with a careful re-reading of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony informed by recent scholarship as well as reflections on how we think about populism. The focus here is on how the ANC is ‘struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure’ and making every effort to cure the ‘incurable structural contradictions that have revealed themselves’, to borrow from Gramsci’s reflections on crisis in the epigraph at the start of this chapter.

Simultaneous processes of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation are crucial to understanding the ANC’s hegemonic project, and the contradictory ways it plays out in practice. Official articulations of the ‘nation’ and ‘liberation’ are not just cynical manipulations from above, or manifestations of ‘exhausted nationalism’. They carry powerful moral weight and connect with specific histories, memories and experiences 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 racial oppression, they bolster the ruling bloc’s hegemonic project in crucial ways. At the same time, because nationalist calls 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 vulnerable to counter-claims of betrayal – a vulnerability that is intensified by the fallout from processes of de-nationalisation. Accordingly, the post-apartheid ruling bloc’s capacity to tap into deep veins of popular understandings of the ‘national question’ has formed the linchpin of its hegemonic power, as well as a growing source of instability that has fed into the proliferation and amplification of populist politics. Far from resolving the crisis in South Africa, the conquest of Malema has prolonged and intensified it, paving the way either for his return, or for the rise of another demagogic figure.

Chapter 6 returns to debates over the South African crisis, and considers what it might mean to understand the crisis through the lens of passive revolution. Gramsci’s concept provides potentially powerful insights, I argue, but is also necessarily partial and in need of translation. Any effort to translate passive revolution in South Africa today has to attend to anti- and post-apartheid nationalisms. It is here that Fanon’s insights are so important, for
he recognised with great clarity the imperative of working through and beyond articulations of nationalism. Essentially Fanon saw anti- and post-colonial nationalisms as simultaneously crucially important and profoundly dangerous. Rather than just excoriating a comprador bourgeoisie, he pointed to the difficult work entailed in what one might call denaturalising nationalisms: ‘If nationalism is not explained, enriched, and deepened,’ he argued, ‘if it does not very quickly turn into a social and political consciousness, into humanism, then it leads to a dead end’ (Fanon 2004: 142-4).

Carlson (1979) argued that Fanon’s ‘new humanism’ bears close resemblance to what Gramsci meant by philosophy of praxis. Drawing on Sekyi-Otu (1996) I highlight the close complementarities between Gramsci and Fanon, and also suggest how passive revolution usefully strengthens these complementarities. The concluding section, ‘Translating Passive Revolution in South Africa Today’, picks up on these themes to reflect on the political stakes of understanding the dialectics of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation as the specific form of South Africa’s passive revolution.

Notes
3. As I discuss later, Bredell marked the ending point of Disabling Globalization (Hart 2002a: 305-8).
4. As discussed in Chapter 2, these protests date back to the late 1990s but seem to have changed tenor in 2004.
5. For a comprehensive and compelling account of key dimensions of change in post-apartheid South Africa, see Marais (2011).
8. Elsewhere (Hart 2008) I have argued that analyses of neoliberalism in terms of class project, economic policy and governmentality remain necessarily partial, since they take hold on terrains that always exceed them.
9. With the crisis of apartheid in the 1980s, the combination of sanctions and exchange controls gave rise both to conglomerates across the economy ... and the expansion of a huge and sophisticated financial system as cause and consequence of the internationally confined, but domestically spread, reach of South African conglomerates with Anglo-American in the lead' (Fine 2008: 2). See Ashman, Fine and Newman (2011: 12) for a fuller discussion of this process. In 1990 when the ANC was unbanned, five colossal conglomerates - encompassing mining and related manufacturing, banking, retail and insurance operations - controlled 84 per cent of the capitalisation of the JSE (Chabane, Goldstein and Roberts 2006: 553).
10. See Chapter 4.
11. As discussed more fully later, I am using the term ‘articulation’ here in the dual sense of ‘linking together’ and ‘giving expression to’ in a way that is closely attentive to issues of language and translation (Hart 2007, 2013).
12. In recent years there has been a surge of renewed interest in passive revolution in different regions of the world, along with some intense debate over its contemporary relevance that I reference in Chapter 5.
13. This argument builds on and elaborates work with Stefan Kipfer (Kipfer and Hart 2013), as well as an earlier formulation (Hart 2008).
14. I will discuss these more fully in Chapter 4.
15. Chipkin’s rationale is that ‘[t]he citizen is hailed through democratic institutions and acts according to democratic norms – what I will call “ethical values”. The national subject is produced in and through the national movement, supplemented by state bodies if it comes to power ... [T]he measure of the nation is not the degree to which the state realises the nation, but the degree to which the nation controls the state’ (2007: 15).
18. Partha Chatterjee, one of Anderson’s most vociferous critics, put it this way: ‘If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined communy from certain “modular” forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be
perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized’ (1993: 5). A prime example of the discursive turn is the volume Nation and Narration (1990) edited by Homi K. Bhabha. As Goswami observes, ‘Bhabha’s influential essays on nationalism present, in a distilled discursive optic, and from the identity of the nation to its difference’ (2002: 774).

19. In Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space, Goswami sheds new light on Indian nationalism both by placing it ‘within and against the wider historical-geographical field of its emergence’ (2004: 6), and by illuminating in vivid detail ‘the multiple, overlapping, and densely intertwined’ socio-economic and cultural processes and practices in the multiple arenas of everyday life through which the conception of India as a bounded space and economy was brought into being. These practices and processes made possible a language of national unity and development, she shows, while also engendering terrifying violence and conflict in the present (2004: 5). Producing India provides new insights into eruptions of violent forms of Hindu nationalism since the early 1990s, and underscores the political and theoretical importance of denaturalising nationalisms.

20. Of relevance here is Polanyi’s ([1944] 2001) theory of imperialism that emphasises how Germany and other European powers used imperial ventures to protect themselves from the ravages of the gold standard during this period. See also the important caveats laid out by Silver and Arrighi (2003), who emphasise the importance of British dominance of the global economy, and Britain’s access to the resources of India.


22. Anne McClintock (1995) also makes use of the idea of articulation in her innovative analysis of how class, race, gender and sexuality work in and through one another in practice.

23. Relations between Gramsci, Fanon, Lefebvre and feminist theory are discussed more fully in Kipfer and Hart (2013).

24. I am indebted to Stefan Kipfer (personal communication) for pointing out that Lefebvre first used this method in an article on rural sociology published in 1953, which tries to marry different methods (notably field work and structural historiography); that it underpinned his effort in The Production of Space to historicise space in a non-evolutionary and dialectical fashion, drawing on the concept of uneven development; and that Lefebvre wanted to demonstrate (in response to Sartre’s appropriation of the term) that his method builds directly on Marx’s Notes on Method in the 1857 Introduction to the Grundrisse.

25. In South Africa today Fanon is deployed in a variety of ways, often to denounce the comprador national bourgeoisie (e.g., Bond 2011). Nigel Gibson (2011a), Richard Pithouse and others have written extensively on Fanon in relation to Abahlali baseMjondolo (see http://www.abahlali.org); see also the articles in Gibson (2011b), as well as Mbembe (http://mg.co.za/article/2011-12-23-fanons-nightmare-our-reality) and Pithouse (2012a). Fanon also remains relevant to ongoing work on Steve Biko (e.g., Mngxitama, Alexander and Gibson 2008; Mangcu 2012). Relatively little attention, however, has been given to Fanon’s insistence on the imperative to work through and beyond nationalisms.

15. See Chipkin (2007) for a useful discussion of the Freedom Charter, although, as I argue in Chapter 6, it is important to recognise the very different conditions and processes that gave rise to the Freedom Charter and the NDR.


17. Rivonia refers to the suburb north of Johannesburg where Nelson Mandela and 18 other senior members of the ANC and SACP were arrested in 1963.

18. Chipkin is careful to make clear that his is not a conventional historical account, but rather a genealogical analysis focused on the question, ‘What was nationalist about the discourse of the NDR?’ (2007: 64).


21. See also Bond (2000) for an argument about how the RDP White Paper effectively evacuated the progressive elements in the original framing of the RDP.

22. 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.


24. I will develop these arguments more fully in a forthcoming paper that engages as well with re-articulations of race, sex and nation in the time of Zuma.


Insofar as the proletariat perforce begins the construction of its hegemonic project from a subaltern position, its theoretical comprehension must ascend along the same path, beginning from the theoretical dissection of the solidified integral state of bourgeois passive revolution, in order to dismantle it in reality . . . [For Gramsci] the concept of a future and possible proletarian hegemony emerges from a more exact appreciation of the nature of the actual and effective bourgeois hegemony against which it must struggle (Thomas 2009a: 223).

BUILDING ON THE discussion of de-nationalisation and renationalisation in Chapter 4, this chapter turns the spotlight on questions of hegemony. I will argue that articulations of the nation, liberation and the NDR are central to the ANC’s hegemonic project. Far from just a matter of false consciousness or manipulations from above, these articulations tap into and draw upon popular understandings, memories and meanings of racial oppression, racialised dispossession and struggles for freedom. While articulations of the nation and liberation are vitally important to the ANC’s hegemonic power, they are simultaneously a source of weakness and instability because they are vulnerable to counterclaims of betrayal – a vulnerability intensified by how processes of de-nationalisation play out in practice. These instabilities and fragilities are evident in the increasingly dangerous populist politics that have developed over the long decade of the 2000s (2001–12).
This chapter will support these arguments by returning to Chapter 2, and re-interpreting the dialectics of protest and containment in relation to de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation.

Implicit in this chapter is that de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation constitute the specific form of South Africa's passive revolution - an argument that I elaborate on in Chapter 6 along with its wider implications. By focusing on hegemony, I am working with a different conception of passive revolution than one which posits a sharp distinction between domination and hegemony. 1 Like populism, hegemony is a slippery and contentious term. Accordingly, let me start by laying out the understandings of hegemony and populism that I will be using in this chapter.

**Hegemony, Populism, Nationalism: Engaging Debates**

Hegemony is often used simply as a synonym for state power or leadership. In discussions that invoke Gramsci, hegemony frequently refers to consent as opposed to coercion and domination. Both of these understandings of hegemony are problematic. So, too, are related concepts of civil society understood as NGOs and other organisations located between the state and the market (or economy), and counter-hegemony as springing up from civil society, similarly understood as outside or beyond the state.

A more general difficulty lies in views of Gramsci as a Western Marxist that was used to bolster Eurocommunist projects in the 1970s and into the 1980s, and that have also informed some of the ways Gramsci has been deployed in South Africa. According to these interpretations, Gramsci drew a sharp distinction between the East (Russia) and the West (Western Europe). The East, in this reading, is characterised by coercion and the domination of the state over civil society, whereas in the West consent and hegemony are culturally rooted in civil society, which has preponderance over the state. Accordingly, while in the East it was possible to overthrow the state by a frontal attack (war of manoeuvre), revolutionary strategy in the West requires a protracted war of position (or attrition) fought in the trenches of civil society.

In 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', a hugely influential essay written at the height of Eurocommunism in the 1970s, Perry Anderson (1976a) launched a searing critique of reformist and Eurocommunist appropriations of Gramsci - while also pointing to the slippages and ambiguities in Gramsci's prison writings that lent themselves to such appropriations. Gramsci was, of course, aware that capitalist class rule necessarily comprised coercion as well as consent, Anderson argued, but 'his use of hegemony often tended to imply that the structure of capitalist power in the West essentially rested on culture and consent' (1976a: 76). Likewise, his use of the idea of war of position suggested that the work of a Marxist party was simply that of ideological conversion. 'In both cases, the role of coercion-repression by the bourgeois State, insurrection by the working class - tends to drop out' (1976a: 76), thus opening the way to reformist appropriations of Gramsci.

In *The Gramscian Moment*, Peter Thomas (2009a) develops an extended critique of Anderson, insisting that '[i]t is the dialectical unity of East and West, and not their antinomian opposition [as Anderson would have it], that constitutes “the essential terms of [Gramsci’s] theoretical universe”' (Thomas 2009a: 220). 2 For Gramsci (as opposed to Anderson), 'West and East are comparable, just as variations in the West itself, because both participate in the dynamic of an expansive political and economic order that is fundamentally and essentially international in character' (2009a: 203). This alternative reading of Gramsci is grounded in a broader body of recent scholarship. 3 Moving beyond a conception of Gramsci as a Western Marxist has important implications for thinking about and with passive revolution, I will suggest later, because it underscores the profoundly comparative character of his work.

For purposes of the present discussion, what is important is that Thomas corrects several misconceptions of Gramsci’s use of hegemony cast in terms of Anderson’s antinomies. The first misconception is that bourgeois hegemony is a strategy aimed at producing consent as opposed to coercion, along with an understanding of
hegemony/consent as the opposite of domination/coercion. Thomas shows that this is a misreading, and that Gramsci’s true starting point was ‘the dialectical integration of hegemony with domination, of consent with coercion, united in their distinction’ (Thomas 2009b: 164). Rather than a logic of either/or, ‘one emerged from the other and vice-versa, depending upon the specific conditions of the conjuncture’ (2009a: 166).

It is also not the case that for Gramsci ‘hegemony (direction) pertains to civil society, and coercion (domination) to the State’, as Anderson (1976a: 21) asserts. Gramsci did indeed use the term ‘State’ to denote both what he called the ‘integral State’ (a dialectical unity of political society and civil society) and political society (or the state in its narrow sense), but this was not the result of confusion. It was instead ‘an attempt to specify that the identity-distinction between civil society and political society occurs under the hegemony of the state. It resulted not in a blurring of the boundaries of the state, but in a clearer delineation of the specific efficacy of the bourgeois state as both a social and political relation . . .’ (Thomas 2009a: 191).

In other words, far from being ‘located’ in civil society, hegemony traverses political and civil society – but it is political society that predominantly sets the terms of traversal. The bourgeois state will remain the ‘truth’ of civil society, Thomas goes on to note, until subaltern classes become aware of their own capacity for self-organisation and self-regulation. This is not a matter of counter-hegemony – a term that Gramsci never used. Instead, Gramsci was concerned with the formation of an alternative proletarian hegemony grounded in the philosophy of praxis. Nor was ‘philosophy of praxis’ a code word for Marxism that Gramsci used to evade his prison censors. Rather, it was crucial to his profoundly anti-vanguardist concern to ‘rethink the concrete forms in which the materialist conception of history and the critique of political economy can move from being the preserve of small groups of people to becoming the base for a genuine mass culture and civilization’ (Thomas 2012: 19). Philosophy of praxis thus embodies understanding philosophy and ideas as practical activities, and of recognising that ‘everyone is a philosopher’. As discussed more fully in Chapter 6, Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony and philosophy of praxis were heavily dependent upon language and translation.

In a useful exposition of this understanding of Gramsci, William Roseberry proposed that we think of hegemony not as consent, but rather as a process of contention and struggle in which ‘the words, images, symbols, forms, organizations, institutions, and movements used by subordinate populations to talk about, understand, confront, accommodate themselves to, or resist their domination are shaped by the process of domination itself’ (1994: 361). What hegemony constructs, then, is not a shared ideology, but rather ‘a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination’ (1994: 361). To the extent that a dominant order is able to establish ‘not consent but the prescribed form for expressing both acceptance and discontent, it has established a common discursive framework’ (1994: 364) – one in which ‘forms and languages of protest and resistance must adopt the forms and languages of domination in order to be heard’.

In this sense, ANC hegemony is crucially contingent on official and popular articulations of the nation, liberation and the NDR. The meaning and ownership of the NDR, however, is also a key site of struggle within the ANC Alliance, intensified by the dynamics of de-nationalisation. Questions of populism burst on to the public stage in the mid-2000s with the rapid rise of Zuma to political prominence.

Populism is, of course, anathema for many on the left in South Africa and elsewhere in the world. According to many left critiques, populism glorifies the role of the authoritarian, anti-intellectual leader as the protector of the masses, and stands sharply opposed to a progressive politics grounded in class conflict. Ironically, much of the critique of Zuma from the liberal right is also cast in terms of populism. In much recent commentary, ‘populism’ is widely used to contrast Zuma and his followers to an idealised model of ‘normal’,
civilised', 'mature', 'rational' liberal democracy. In short, both the left and the liberal right have converged on a model of populism underpinned by an unquestioned notion of the 'manipulated mindless masses'.

In his book entitled On Populist Reason, Ernesto Laclau proposed a different understanding. Instead of starting with a model of political rationality that sees populism in terms of what it lacks, Laclau maintains that '[p]opulism is the royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such' (2005: 67) – an argument that has sparked intense debate. My own position in this debate is that Laclau ends up endorsing a deeply problematic conception of populism that counterposes an all-knowing theorist to the ignorant masses (Hart 2013). In effect, he reinvents the manipulated mindless masses model.

A more useful approach, I suggest, is to go back to Laclau’s earlier essay ‘Towards a Theory of Populism’ in Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory (1977), drawing on some aspects of his analysis of populism and reworking others. The core of Laclau’s argument is that populism is most usefully understood in terms of its form rather than its content. What is distinctive about populism as a political form is its appeal to the ‘people’ versus the ‘power bloc’ – but in itself this says nothing about its political content. Indeed, it is possible to call Adolf Hitler, Mao Zedong and Juan Peron simultaneously populist because the social bases of their movements were similar; not because their ideologies expressed the same class interests, but because popular interpellations appear in the ideological discourses of all of them, presented in the form of antagonism and not just of difference’ (Laclau 1977: 174). The term interpellation conveys the idea that individuals are ‘hailed’ or constituted as subjects through ideological apparatuses.

Contrary to the standard left position, populism for Laclau is not about an appeal to the ‘people’ over and above class divisions. Instead, populism – along with other non-class ideologies like nationalism with which it is often linked – are elements that only exist in articulation with class discourses and hegemonic projects, with articulation understood here both as ‘joining together’ and ‘giving expression to’ as discussed in Chapter 1. Widely divergent examples of populism – from the extreme right to the left – thus depend on specific articulations of populist and class politics. ‘Popular traditions’, he argued, often carry greater stability and strength than class ideologies because they represent the ‘ideological crystallisation of resistance to oppression in general’ (Laclau 1977: 167). Yet they can only be grasped in relation to class – which is why the most divergent political movements often appeal to the same ideological symbols:

The figure of Tupac Amaru can be invoked by various guerrilla movements and by the present military government in Peru; the symbols of Chinese nationalism were conjured up by Chiang-Kai-Shek and Mao Tse-Tung; those of German nationalism by Hitler and by Thälmann. But even though they constitute mere elements, popular traditions are far from being arbitrary and they cannot be modified at will. They are the residue of a unique and irreducible historical experience and, as such, constitute a more solid and durable structure of meanings than the social structure itself (Laclau 1977: 167).

In developing this argument, Laclau drew a sharp distinction between the populism of the dominant classes and a populism of the dominated classes: ‘When the dominant bloc experiences a profound crisis because a new fraction seeks to impose its hegemony but is unable to do so within the existing structure of the power bloc, one solution can be a direct appeal by this fraction to the masses to develop their antagonism towards the State’ (Laclau 1977: 173). Laclau goes on to note that the populism of a fraction of the dominant class is always repressive because it attempts a more dangerous experiment than an existing parliamentary regime: whilst the latter seeks to neutralise the revolutionary potential of popular interpellations, the former tries to develop that antagonism but to
keep it within certain limits. Yet, for Laclau, populism in the sense of articulations of ‘the people versus the power bloc’ is also crucial to the hegemonic ambitions of dominated sectors. ‘Socialist-populism’ is not an expression of the ideological backwardness of a dominated class, he insisted. It is, on the contrary, ‘an expression of the moment when the articulating power of this class imposes itself hegemonically on the rest of society’ (1977: 196). Hence, ‘classes cannot assert their hegemony without articulating the people in their discourse; and the specific form of this articulation, in the case of a class which seeks to confront the power bloc as a whole, in order to assert its hegemony, will be populism’ (1977: 196; emphasis in original).

The strength of Laclau’s (1977) analysis is his insistence on understanding populism in relation to articulations of class and nationalism. His analysis of bourgeois populism provides a useful starting point for analysing the proliferation of populist politics in South Africa in the decade of the 2000s, although it needs to be qualified. A key limitation of this approach is its reliance on conception of ‘interpellation’. These limits are made clear in an essay by Sitas entitled ‘Class, Nation, Ethnicity in Natal’s Black Working Class’ (1990) that was, in effect, an intervention in the heated workerist/populist debate that dominated oppositional politics during much of the 1980s, and to which we shall return in the concluding section of this chapter. While acknowledging Laclau’s (1977) understanding of class in relation to non-class elements, Sitas launched a sustained critique of Laclau’s uncritical conception of interpellation. Specifically calling into question the way Laclau was being used in the 1980s in South Africa to analyse Zulu ethnic nationalism as the product of ideological interpellations from above, Sitas insisted that the black working class in Natal 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.

What this critique points to are the imperatives for grasping the interconnections between populist politics ‘from above’ and popular understandings arising from the social and material conditions of everyday life. It also points towards a more fully Gramscian analysis of hegemony as process outlined above, in which issues of language are crucial. Gramsci’s understanding of philosophy of praxis also helps us to see the limits of Laclau’s theory of socialist populism (Hart 2013).

In the discussion that follows I draw on a revised version of Laclau’s theory of bourgeois populism to argue that Mbeki sought to neutralise the revolutionary potential of popular antagonisms; Zuma sought to develop them, but contain them within limits – which is always a dangerous experiment, as Laclau pointed out; and that Malema sought to capture and amplify the revolutionary potential of popular antagonisms, generating a dynamic that, the SACP maintains, has tended towards fascism. I am going to flesh out these arguments by revisiting the turbulent ‘long decade’ of the 2000s (2001-12) laid out in Chapter 2, and reinterpretating the amplifying tensions and contradictions through these lenses. In the process, I will show how it is not just a matter of bourgeois populism ‘from above’ and socialist populism ‘from below’, but a dialectical process through which popular antagonisms in the arenas of everyday life and struggles within the ANC Alliance are deeply interconnected, and have been inflected through simultaneous processes of denationalisation and re-nationalisation.

The Dialectics of Protest and Containment Revisited

Phase I (2000-05/06): Neutralising Popular Antagonisms

Any effort to grasp how hegemonic processes have transformed over the decade of the 2000s must start with the Bredell land occupation, and the swift eviction of shack dwellers in July 2001. As we saw in Chapter 2, Bredell represented the moment when the coercive face of the post-apartheid state made its first widely publicised appearance. It did so in a guise powerfully reminiscent of its apartheid predecessor, with images of police with attack dogs...
bundling people into the notorious armoured vehicles known as hippos, and demolition crews pulling down shacks. New to the picture were the well-dressed ANC officials fleeing in their Mercedes-Benzes under police protection – solid embodiments, as it were, of the willingness of the post-apartheid state to deploy coercion to protect private property rights, and of the political hazards that accompanied this project. While the overt violence of Bredell was relatively brief and contained, the fallout in terms of erosion of the ANC's moral authority was massive.

A second key marker of the new millennium was the rapid rise of new social movements in the period immediately following Bredell, representing concerted expressions of popular antagonism directed at the ANC. Framing their antagonism in terms of anti-neoliberalism, these movements made dramatically clear the Faustian bargain through which the ANC and corporate capital had brought an end to apartheid. Coinciding with two major global conferences, the new social movements were of course intensely humiliating for the ANC, as were the transnational connections and support they elicited.

Mbeki’s immediate response, as we saw in Chapter 2, was a coercive crackdown against new social movements, especially the LPM – a move facilitated by the internal disorganisation of the movements themselves. What also happened in the latter part of 2002 was a further rearticulation of the NDR. Having redefined the NDR in terms of creation of a black bourgeoisie in the 1990s (Chapter 4), he now deployed the NDR as a disciplinary weapon against new social movements and left opponents within the alliance. It became, in effect, a means of beating opponents into submission. Going back to Chapter 2 we can see how, in the flood of documents and statements emanating from Mbeki and his henchmen, those who oppose him are accused of ‘conduct[ing] a campaign of terror against the revolution [NDR]’. What is significant here is how the NDR takes on a new and threatening position in what Roseberry (1994) calls the languages of contention through which hegemonic processes operate.

In the post-apartheid period Mbeki’s disciplinary deployment of the NDR represented a novel and significant rearticulation of nationalism. There is, however, a startling continuity with the early 1980s, when some members of the SACP in exile lashed out fiercely against the independent Federation of South African Trade Unions.8 The terms of critique are so similar – including linking the ‘ultra-left’ to the (neo)liberal right – that one is led to wonder whether Mbeki and his loyal assistants hauled out dusty old copies of the African Communist in which many of these critiques appeared.

Following this offensive against those with the temerity to challenge its accommodation with corporate capital, the ruling bloc headed by Mbeki changed tack in 2003 with the discovery of the ‘Second Economy’ and invocation of the ‘developmental state’ (Chapter 2). This was also the moment at which the stringent fiscal austerity of the 1990s started to give way to rather more generous allocations from national to local government – although, as we have seen, municipal indigent policy was tightly linked with ‘credit control’ and separating the ‘can’t pays’ from the ‘won’t pays’ (Chapter 3).

It is, of course, very easy to discern the technocratic, depoliticising thrust of these and other initiatives. The key point, though, is that they were not accomplished in practice, even though several of the most militant new social movements quickly fell into disarray. Following the April 2004 election, we witnessed escalating and violent popular protest and municipal rebellions (Chapters 2 and 3) – notwithstanding the trumpeting of Second Economy benevolence by the Mbeki administration and its intellectuals. While many of these uprisings were directed at local government officials and councillors, and framed in terms of failure to deliver basic services and housing, they extended well beyond specific local grievances to encompass much broader and deeper popular antagonisms that the new social movements had failed to mobilise – but that Jacob Zuma was able to capture and rearticulate in a reconstituted hegemonic process, discussed more fully below.
The beginning of the end for the Mbeki-led ruling bloc came in mid-June 2005, at the National General Council meeting in Pretoria (Chapter 2), which followed shortly after Mbeki’s dismissal of Zuma as deputy president of the country. The National General Council became, in effect, the crucible in which Wolpe’s (1995) prophecy that the meaning of the NDR would become a key site of struggle (Chapter 4) was fully realised. The explosive anger that erupted at the National General Council 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. The National General Council was the moment when the ruling bloc within the ANC lost its grip on articulations of the nation and liberation, and the coalition behind Zuma entered the battle to redefine the hegemonic languages of contention centred on the meaning of the NDR, and augmented by what Gunner (2008) calls the ‘unruly power of song’.

Key contours of these battles to re-articulate race, class and nationalism find clear expression in a special edition of Bua Komanisi! issued by the Central Committee of the SACP in May 2006 and the furious response on 19 June from the ANC. In a rejoinder entitled ‘Is the ANC Leading a National Democratic Revolution or Managing Capitalism?’ the SACP reiterated 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’.

From the perspective of Laclau’s (1977) theory of populism, the National General Council can be seen as the populist moment, when a new fraction of the dominant bloc seeks to assert its hegemonic power by appealing to the masses to develop popular antagonism against the ruling bloc.

Phase II (2005/06-2009/10): Developing but Containing Popular Antagonisms

In the period following Zuma’s victory over Mbeki at Polokwane (Chapter 2), analyses of what has come to be called the ‘Zunami’ (or Zuma tsunami) often depicted it as a ‘rebellion from below’, spearheaded by the left within the ANC Alliance (COSATU and the SACP). The alliance left and those associated with it celebrated the triumphal opportunity for working-class leadership of the NDR, while the liberal right predictably viewed what they saw as a ‘communist putsch’ with fear and trepidation.

In retrospect, this left triumphalism is heavily over-stated. Southall (2009) and others have pointed out that support for Zuma came from a much broader ‘coalition of the aggrieved’ that included as well the ANC Youth League, Umkhonto we Sizwe veterans and provincial leaders on the losing side of ANC patronage. Butler (2009: 69) also identified ‘branch-level discontent about the monopolisation of patronage opportunities by incumbents, poor service delivery, and the general high-handedness and arrogance that characterised the higher reaches – or even the middling one – of Mbeki’s administration’, and Friedman added to the mix former intelligence operatives who had served under Zuma in exile. Crucially as well, the coalition that lined up behind Zuma included key BEE figures. Southall (2009: 324-5) identifies several key groups of black capitalists who threw their support behind Zuma early on, along with many others who quickly switched allegiances following Polokwane.

Southall points to further reasons why the claim that COSATU and the SACP led a democratic ‘rebellion from below’ is deeply questionable:

First, it provides little in the way of evidence of how COSATU and the SACP managed to secure control of the ANC on the ground ... Second, there is an unwarranted assumption of COSATU and SACP internal unity, when it seems that there was considerable dissonance
within both organisations. Third, there is a failure to elaborate the actual relationship between COSATU and SACP, rendering their distinct roles in the making of the tsunami opaque (Southall 2009: 322–3).

This ‘dissonance’ included the sidelining and purging of COSATU and SACP members who questioned support for Zuma. Devan Pillay (2011: 37) describes how a ‘climate of fear fell over the working-class movement, and few dared to publicly question the suitability of Zuma’. Most significantly, in ‘The Road to Polokwane’, Sitas (2010: 190) points out that ‘some of the most mutinous energy and action occurs in areas and wards where neither COSATU and the SACP, nor the new social movements have any sway’.

The question remains, therefore, of the forces driving massive grassroots support for Zuma. Distaste for Zuma on both the independent left and the liberal right has authorised condescending and at times bizarre assertions of the reasons why millions of ordinary people threw (and many continue to throw) their support behind him. The tendency on much of the independent left has been to regard such support as false consciousness, or as an unpleasant populist resurgence of Zulu ethnic nationalism that the figure of Zuma is somehow capable of interpellating from above – an interpretation that fails to take into account support for him well beyond KwaZulu-Natal and isiZulu-speaking populations. Perhaps the most extravagant claim was that of Achille Mbembe, who likened support for Zuma to a collective suicide impulse akin to the 1856–57 Xhosa cattle killings – ‘a populist rhetoric and millenarian form of politics which advocates, uses and legitimates self-destruction, or national suicide, as a means of salvation’. His recommendation was that fractions of the SACP, the trade unions and the ANC Youth League should leave the alliance to form their own political party: ‘What should emerge is a new political mainstream committed to a liberal constitution, to an explicitly social democratic agenda and to an Afropolitan cultural project.’

The imperative for a more adequate understanding of popular support for Zuma is not just one of setting the historical record straight; it bears directly on some of the most crucial issues in South Africa today, including the character, contradictions and limits of ANC hegemonic processes, and the proliferation of populist politics. In my initial effort to come to grips with this issue I argued that part of what Zuma represents is a move to seize the mantle of the liberation struggle, and present himself as its rightful heir.

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 re-articulations 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, anger, 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 shackdwellers’ movement (Abahlali base mjondolo) put it succinctly at a public lecture on June 29 2006, when he urged the audience to understand that ‘our desperation and anger can go in many directions’ (Hart 2007: 97–8).
This argument grew directly out of the palpable and mounting popular discontent that I was able to observe at close quarters in Ladysmith and Newcastle — and that, especially in Ladysmith, contrasted so dramatically with local political dynamics in the first phase of the post-apartheid order. Starting with the imbizo in Bergville in December 2003 (Chapter 2), I also became increasingly aware of Zuma’s capacity to give expression to multiple dimensions of discontent and senses of betrayal, to link them together and to draw sharp contrasts between himself and Mbeki — to become, in other words, the ‘authoritative other’ to which very large numbers of people ‘uploaded’ hope and leadership, as Sitas (2010: 193) puts it.

Drawing on long-term ethnographic research in another region of KwaZulu-Natal, Mark Hunter (2011) offers additional important insights into how Zuma was able to resonate with the everyday lived experiences of millions of poor black South Africans — including very large numbers of women who enthusiastically embraced him despite his having been charged with rape, and young people who flocked to register and vote for him in the 2009 elections. Hunter shows how the long-term contraction of employment that many label the ‘crisis in social reproduction’ is deeply entangled with transformations of intimacy — signified by a sharp reduction in marriage, the inability of a large proportion of the younger generation to ‘build a home’ (ukwazi umuzi), and intensifying gender conflict, ‘as women deride men for failure to marry them and men deride women for their new independence’ (2011: 13). At the time of the rape trial, Hunter argues, women in the settlement where he worked regarded Zuma not as a rapist but as a respectable patriarch, willing and able to support his wives and children, and having offered to pay bride-price (ilobolo) to marry the woman who accused him of rape. This analysis accords closely with my own observations in the areas where I work — namely, that the rape trial served, if anything, to consolidate support for Zuma among women, and underscore a sense of his having been betrayed (Chapter 2). More generally, Hunter argues:

It is precisely Zuma’s ability to talk to society’s tremendous economic and personal upheavals … that allowed him partly to transcend generation, ethnicity, and gender. For the youth, he brought hope of work, service delivery, and a re-mooring of gender relations now in turmoil; for the old, he could also stand for a renewed sense of generational respect. If many South Africans felt a strong sense of betrayal towards their political leaders, Zuma somehow stood inside and outside government he connected in new ways (and quite contrary to the famous feminist slogan) the personal and the political (2011: 20).

Zuma’s capacity to connect with and speak to the painful articulations of race, class, gender and sexuality in the everyday lives of many poor black South Africans is closely linked with his wresting ownership of the liberation struggle from the Mbeki fraction — and, in the process, redefining the hegemonic languages of contention. Central to this process was his signature song, ‘Awalets' Umshini Wami’ (Bring me my machine gun) and events such as the reburial of Moses Mahhida, along with others like those described in Chapter 2. Gunner’s extraordinary article entitled ‘Jacob Zuma, the Social Body and the Unruly Power of Song’ (2008) points to the dangers of dismissing ‘Umshini Wami’ as no more than an unpleasant manifestation of Zuma’s hypersexualised militant masculinity that he used to mobilise the manipulated mindless masses. With its deep links to liberation songs of the struggle era, Gunner explains, people recognised it as part of a language that they knew:

The song … broke into popular public memory by recalling an earlier and more dangerous way of being. It evoked the years of pre-1994 resistance to the apartheid regime, the tense urban gatherings and the mass funerals. It forced back into the public imagination memories and stories of the long marches through the bush, the lost family members, and the camps to the north in the countries which had hosted the freedom fighters. These were all sites marked by song as
an expressive tool. Song was a means of capturing and giving expression to the aspirations, the anxieties and the vision of people in that particularly turbulent and painful moment in South Africa's history (2008: 38).

Like many liberation songs, 'Umshini Wami' is 'embedded in a largely masculinist conception of militarism and nationalism' (Gunner 2008: 40) - one that failed to resolve questions of gender equality as Shireen Hassim (2007) and others have shown. Yet, Gunner argues, it was far more than an ethnic Zulu composition:

It was a song of the dispossessed and of the citizen-to-come. Perhaps at the heart of the song is the verb ‘-letha’ (bring) suggesting a movement of process, of moving towards something yet to be made; suggesting too that the action is sanctioned by the giver or bringer. The instrument of the machine gun, umshini wami, suggests not so much brute power of war but that of agency, and the ability of the individual sanctioned by the group to bring about change (2008: 43).

Yet the machine gun also 'sent a warning to any complacent settling into a negotiated liberal democracy at the very same time that it gave hope to the longing for social and political change' (Gunner 2008: 40).

Far from contradictory, the militant nationalist masculinity of 'Umshini Wami' and the respectable, responsible patriarchy described by Hunter are mutually reinforcing. Both resonate deeply with memories, meanings, experiences and practices in the multiple arenas of everyday life, meshing together to solidify a 'common sense' understanding of Zuma as a powerful and compassionate leader. By linking a militant nationalist past to the promise of a secure familial future, Zuma extended the languages of hegemony and, as Gunner (2008: 28) puts it, enabled the participation of multiple publics in national debates. This point was driven home to me very clearly in December 2007, when I was following the Polokwane drama with friends in Ladysmith. As news of Zuma's huge victory over Mbeki broke, a friend turned to me and said, 'You must understand, Gill, that this is about the masses versus the intellectuals.'

The populist turn not only expanded the languages of contestation; it also transformed the dynamic of hegemonic processes. Returning to Laclau's (1977: 161) epigraph at the beginning of the discussion of populism, hegemony is partly about articulating different visions of the world in such a way that potential antagonism in neutralised. To the extent that what Laclau calls bourgeois (as opposed to socialist) populism entails developing but containing popular antagonisms it is, as he pointed out, an inherently dangerous experiment that is likely to call forth increased repression.

Barely five months after Polokwane, the outbreak of xenophobic attacks in May 2008 was a hideous manifestation of how, as S'bu Zikode anticipated in 2006, the anger of the poor can go in many directions. At least some of those who went on these murderous rampages did so singing 'Umshini Wami' - an ugly reminder of what Gunner calls the 'unruly power of song'. These bloody fields of conflict into which the song was diverted are also a reminder of how the history of militant nationalism evoked by the song were articulated with other dimensions of post-apartheid re-nationalising practices discussed in Chapter 4 under the heading of 'Fortress South Africa'. Also of great significance is the reception Zuma received in shack settlements on the East Rand immediately after the attacks, when a man leapt up and warned him, 'if you are a stumbling block, we are going to kick you away' (Chapter 2). The rise of Julius Malema and his challenge to Zuma in the post-Polokwane period can be seen as another manifestation of the dangers that accompany strategies to develop but contain popular antagonisms. The Malema challenge also represents an intensification of contradictions built into the ANC's hegemonic project, most usefully understood in terms of how re- and de-nationalising forces are playing out in relation to one another in increasingly conflictual ways.
Phase III (2010-12): Capturing and Amplifying Popular Antagonisms

Writing in the New York Review of Books in April 2012 about Malema’s ‘inflammatory and racially tinged populism’, his attacks on Zuma and the bitter splits within the ANC, Joshua Hammer entitled his article ‘A New Crisis in South Africa’. This narrative of novelty focused on an oedipal fight to the death between the young upstart Malema and the old patriarch Zuma obscures a much longer, deeper and intensifying crisis marked by some important continuities.

At the core of Malema’s challenge was (and may well be again) a re-articulation of nationalism in terms of race and nature – the theft by white colonisers of the land and rich mineral resources of South Africa – and linking that to a powerful appeal for ‘economic freedom in our life time’ for the youth of South Africa. Underscoring the compromises that the older generation of ANC leaders had made, his calls for nationalisation of the mines and expropriation without compensation of white-owned land expanded the languages of contention well beyond the terms on which Zuma had challenged Mbeki.

One of the ironies of this seemingly radical re-articulation of nationalism was that the main focus of the Youth League attack was not just Zuma, but his close association with the SACP – an attack in which the Youth League had powerful backing from a fraction of black capital headed by billionaire Tokyo Sexwale. Tying this alliance together was a strong thread of anti-communist African nationalism that stretches back into the first part of the twentieth century. Malema and his lieutenants made extensive use of this history, likening themselves to the ANC Youth League of the 1940s. On the eve of the disciplinary hearings on 30 August 2011, for example, Floyd Shivambu (writing on behalf of the ANC Youth League NEC) called attention to ‘the noble precedent for the League’s actions’:

Mandela, Sisulu and Tambo represent the most outstanding generation of freedom fighters across all liberation movements in Africa and the world ... In 1948, this generation of freedom fighters adopted a programme of action, a tool to mobilise society and structures of the ANC behind the call for real freedom from colonial oppression and exploitation. This programme was adopted at the 1949 national conference of the ANC in Mangaung, and those who know the evolution of the ANC will appreciate the impact it had in changing its character into a fighting mass movement for all the people of South Africa. The ultimate mobilisation and adoption of the Freedom Charter was a consequence of the 1949 programme of action ... These developments were possible because the leadership of the ANC was not intolerant of the leadership of the ANC Youth League. While they were clearly irritated by the new proposals of the league, the leadership of the ANC never resorted to organisational and political mechanisms to silence the voice of the youth.17

Notably missing from contemporary invocations of the first Youth League, Forde (2011: 118) notes, is how ‘after 1949, the young extreme nationalists were forced to modify their rigid, anti-communist stance’. What is significant is that, far from discarding the past, the Youth League rebellion turned around a shrewdly selective deployment of history and reassertion of a narrow African nationalism.

This reassertion went hand in hand with a redefinition of the NDR, and a move to snatch it away from the alliance left. Forde, for example, reports a discussion with Malema, in which he insisted that his plan is to complete the NDR – which he framed as moving from the first stage of political power to economic and social power – while expunging the language of socialism (and justifying his own lavish consumption) in the following terms:

You see, people are afraid of the word socialism and you must not pronounce it a lot. It will scare them. I might have houses. I might have watches. That’s what the economic system dictates now. But when we’ve got an economic system that says that everything we have we need to bring together and share among ourselves, I will be the
first one to surrender. I've got no problem with socialism. I've got a problem with socialists who want to hijack the ANC and without giving this phase of our revolution a chance to unfold. They want to take us immediately to socialism. That will have serious consequences (cited in Forde 2011: 81).

Throughout his first term [as president of the ANC Youth League],’ Forde notes, ‘he consistently criticised the communists and started out his second term by piercing a sharp knife into the back of Blade Nzimande, the secretary-general of the SACP’ (2011: 83).

The SACP lashed out hard against the Youth League attack, starting with a report to a Special National Congress in December 2009 warning of a proto-fascist tendency emerging from an anti-communist axis ‘between BEE elements and alienated youth’:

Elements of BEE capital have been exploring a class axis between themselves and the great mass of marginalized, alienated, often unemployed black youth. The material glue of this axis is the politics of patronage and messiahs, and its tentative ideological form is a demagogic African chauvinism. Because of its rhetorical militancy the media often portrays it as ‘radical’ and ‘left-wing’ – but it is fundamentally right-wing, even proto-fascist. While it is easy to dismiss the buffoonery of some of the leading lieutenants, we should not underestimate the resources made available to them, and the huge challenge we all have when it comes to millions of increasingly alienated, often unemployed youth who are potentially available for all kinds of demagogic mobilization.18

These warnings were repeated in ‘The Road to South African Socialism’, the political report prepared for the SACP’s 13th National Congress in July 2012, which reiterated the dangers of proto-fascism and identified ‘the right-wing, populist-demagogy of the “new tendency” as the gravest ideological threat to our national democratic revolution’.19

At numerous points the document underscores the imperative for ‘advancing, deepening and defending the national democratic revolution’, and devotes Chapter 4 to expounding on ‘The National Democratic Revolution - The South African Road to Socialism’ in terms that insistently distinguish the SACP’s revolutionary nationalism from ‘an elite abuse of nationalism for narrow self-promotion’, and invoke the past in relation to the present, as well as the SACP’s ownership of the NDR:

Since the late 1920s, the Communist Party in South Africa has identified the national democratic revolution as the road to socialism. The rich struggle history that this strategic perspective has promoted over many decades speaks for itself. The wisdom of this strategic perspective is even more relevant in our post-1994 South African and global reality.

What this reclamation of history conveniently glosses over, among other things, are the enormous conflicts and opposition to the Native Republic thesis that Stalin handed down to the Communist Party of South Africa in 1928.

In addition to battles conducted on the terrain of the NDR and selective deployments of history, both sides in this conflict embody key continuities with prior struggles in the post-apartheid era. Undoubtedly the ‘elements of BEE capital’ identified by the SACP latched on to Malema’s capacities for mass mobilisation, given the limitations of their own mass base. Yet the SACP is similarly reliant on Zuma. In the period prior to Polokwane, as I argued earlier, the dynamic was not just that of a ‘coalition of the disgruntled’ shunted aside by Mbeki uniting behind Zuma; of central importance were the complex societal forces propelling widespread popular support for Zuma that has rendered him an essential if ambiguous political asset for the alliance left. Also in the mid-2000s, Mbeki’s efforts to contain Zuma enhanced Zuma’s capacity to mobilise popular support. What Malema did was to steal the trope
of betrayal from Zuma, aided in part by Zuma's moves to contain the threat that he presented by ramping up popular antagonisms. The apogee of this threat came, of course, in the immediate aftermath of the Marikana massacre, which provided Malema with the most extraordinary opportunity to drive home the 'truth' of his re-articulation of nationalism in terms of race and nature, and to connect it directly with the suffering of black workers; the ongoing control of mining by white capitalists (and a few black compradors exemplified by Cyril Ramaphosa); and the moral bankruptcy of the ruling bloc within the ANC.

If Bredell was the moment when the coercive face of the post-apartheid state became visible, it was at Marikana that its militaristic might was unleashed with full force. Over the decade of the 2000s, the proliferation of populist politics has gone hand in hand with tightening disciplinary measures and heightened official secrecy as securcruits close to Zuma have gained an upper hand.

Exemplified in all of this are the contradictions inherent in ANC hegemony: the process through which articulations of the nation and liberation are crucial to organising popular consent, while simultaneously opening the ruling bloc to charges of betrayal. The ongoing and pervasive imperative to inject selective meanings of the past into the present (part of what I am calling re-nationalising practices and processes) operate in tandem and in escalating conflict with a dynamic of accumulation that produces intensified inequality along with accelerating generations of 'surplus labour' populations.

The Stakes of Theory: Moving Beyond Western Marxism

The erosion of ANC hegemony and the proliferation of populist politics that I have traced in this chapter exemplify the depth and seriousness of the crisis in South Africa. Far from resolving the crisis, the conquest of Malema by the Zuma ruling bloc has prolonged and intensified it, paving the way either for his return, or for the rise of another demagogic figure.

In South Africa today we have a situation in which the SACP positions itself as the vanguard of the subaltern struggles, and custodian of a particularly crude version of a theory of nationalism in relation to capitalism that has increasingly come to function as a disciplinary mechanism within the ANC Alliance. Pillay (2011: 41) provides an example of how COSATU organised a 'civil society' conference in conjunction with the Treatment Action Campaign in October 2010, and did not invite the ANC or SACP. Jeremy Cronin of the SACP came up with a furious response, claiming that COSATU was falling into a 'liberal trap' to upset the NDR. Cronin asserted a counter-definition of 'civil society' as the terrain of anti-state, pro-market liberalism, and claimed that, because the conference made no reference to the NDR, it was effectively 'anti-transformation'. This example of how the NDR continues to function as a disciplinary measure is precisely what Mbeki was doing in 2002 in his ferocious response to new social movements. Another illuminating instance is the address by Zwelinzima Vavi, Secretary General of COSATU, to the SACP Congress in July 2012. Vavi reminded his audience of how, in 1962, the SACP had advanced the theory of Colonialism of a Special Type (CST). He then called on the SACP as the 'revolutionary vanguard' to assist us in 'understanding whether we are well on our way in South Africa to dismantle this diabolical capitalist system', and calling for 'the most penetrating, fiercely scientific, disciplined and accurate theoretic Marxist-Leninist critique of the world and SA capitalism, and the resultant correct revolutionary working class political programme'.

While this address can be read as partly tongue-in-cheek, it highlights the official outsourcing of intellectual work to the SACP, and the imperative to toe the CST/NDR line.

For many on the left outside the ANC Alliance, as noted in Chapters 1 and 4, questions of nationalism remain an anathema - understood, at best, as a manifestation of false consciousness. Notably absent from a range of left positions is serious attention to the popular resonances of articulations of nationalism in relation to those that emerge from tensions within the ANC Alliance.

This configuration of forces is deeply dangerous, but far from new. Of direct relevance here is Andrew Nash's (1999, 2009) brilliant
Rethinking the South African Crisis

analysis of the rise and fall of Western Marxism in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, and its relationship to the Soviet Marxism of the SACP. Nash provides a nuanced analysis of the process through which leading figures on the left opposed to the Stalinism of the SACP and committed to a radical critique of capitalism accommodated to the ANC Alliance and the dictates of capital in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He also calls attention to how many of those from the white student movement associated with the independent trade union movement, the Federation of South African Trade Unions, in the 1980s were unable to come to terms with African nationalism, and how these inabilities were accompanied by major organisational limits.

In addition, Nash sheds important light on how the SACP – and, more specifically, Cronin – used a narrow reading of Gramsci as a Western Marxist to clean up its Stalinist image in the late 1980s. He shows how this Marxism presented itself as open to debate, while also setting limits on that debate in the name of the practical necessity for unifying the oppressed: ‘To do this, it was necessary also to draw on the past – on its symbols, sacrifices, heroes ... But it is a struggle only for the recovery of the past, never for its critical interrogation; it seeks inspiration, and never self-knowledge’ (Nash 1999: 75).

Thus, he argues, this Marxism filled the gap left by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of its Marxism. It did away with the crude dogmatism of Soviet Marxism, while preserving its instrumentalism.

If we are to draw on Gramsci to confront the incredibly difficult present circumstances in South Africa, then I suggest we need to abandon notions of him as a Western Marxist. Even Anderson (1976b), who attached the label in the first place, recognised that it did not really apply in Gramsci’s case; and, as Nash (1999) points out, Eurocommunist appropriations of Gramsci in the 1970s and 1980s were even more problematic when they were taken up in South Africa. This is why the more accurate readings of Gramsci in the recent work of Thomas and others outlined at the beginning of this chapter are so important. In addition to emphasising Gramsci’s focus on the relations between the East (Russia) and the West (Europe) rather than their antinomian distinctions, the work of Thomas, Morton and others provides fresh insights into the concept of passive revolution – a concept that is totally missing from Anderson’s (1976a) account of Gramsci’s antinomies. By grounding the concept more fully in the conditions out of which it emerged, this work also enables us to think with greater precision about what it means to translate passive revolution in relation to other times and places.

This is the task that I take up in Chapter 6, where I suggest how passive revolution provides potentially useful leverage into the South African crisis – but this requires an exercise of translation that includes incorporating insights from Fanon.

Notes
1. It is indeed the case that in his analysis of the Risorgimento (Italian national unification in 1860), Gramsci speaks of the role of Piedmont as ‘one of the cases in which these groups have the function of “domination” without that of “leadership”: dictatorship without hegemony’ (1971: 105; Q15 §40). Yet, as Carlos Nelson Coutinho (2012: 179) reminds us in his analysis of Brazil, this does not mean that the state acting as a protagonist of passive revolution can do without some degree of consensus – otherwise it would have to resort to coercion and only coercion, which in the long run would simply prevent it from functioning. More generally, as we shall see, hegemony for Gramsci is about the dialectical relations between coercion and consent, which can only be understood concretely. In addition, as we shall see in Chapter 6, as Gramsci extended passive revolution beyond the Risorgimento, hegemony featured as a central element of the analysis.
2. Thomas argues that far from working with abstracted categories of ‘East’ and ‘West’, Gramsci was drawing on insights from post-revolutionary Russia to reconstruct understandings of bourgeois class rule in Western Europe in relation to the theory and practice of a democratic proletarian hegemony that the ‘last’ Lenin was trying to set in place after the Civil War in 1921. The New Economic Policy, he argues, was not simply a retreat or a defensive measure. It represented a political and cultural revolution as much as an
economic programme, embodying 'an attempt at a practical application of the united front, or the attempt to build a class politics on a mass basis that confirmed the proletariat's capacity to transform the specificity of its allied social forces into a political power of a completely different type' (Thomas 2009a: 237). It was this possibility of democratic proletarian hegemonic politics that the Stalinist dictatorship decisively destroyed - and that, Thomas argues, Gramsci was seeking to recuperate in the Prison Notebooks.


4. According to Anderson, Gramsci's starting point is Machiavelli's image of the centaur, half-animal and half-human, from which Gramsci derives an explicit set of oppositions between force and consent, domination and hegemony, violence and civilisation (Anderson 1976a: 20).

5. '[H]egemony in civil society is necessarily comprehended in political society and overdetermined by it. There must thus be an attempt to forge "political hegemony" also before seizing state power or domination in political society - for, without such an attempt to transform leadership in civil society into a political hegemony or into nascent forms of a new political society, civil hegemony itself will be disaggregated and subordinated to the . . . existing political hegemony of the ruling class' (Thomas 2009a: 194; emphasis in original).


7. For Althusser, who coined the term, 'ideology acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals . . . or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects . . . by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!"' (1971: 48; emphasis in original).

8. See Nash (1999) for documentation of these critiques.


12. When I first broached the argument about the need for a deeper understanding of popular support for Zuma at an International Sociological

Association conference in Durban in July 2006, some of my independent left comrades labelled me a '100% Zuma girl' - a reference to a popular T-shirt bearing the image of Zuma and emblazoned with '100% Zulu boy' that many supporters wore to his rape trial.


15. With 'common sense' here interpreted in Gramscian terms as senso commune, as noted earlier and discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

16. See also Dlamini (2011).


23. Following Anderson (1976b), Nash defines Western Marxism as 'the tradition of Marxist thought which developed mainly in Western Europe - from Lukacs, Gramsci and Korsch in the 1920s through the Frankfurt School in the 1930s and 1940s to the work of Marcuse, Sartre and Althusser who in different registers, provided major impulses to the student and workers uprisings of the 1960s' (Nash 1999: 66).


25. Recent work on passive revolution includes Coutinho (2012); Morton (2007, 2010, 2011, 2013); Thomas (2006, 2009a, 2012); Tugal (2009); and a collection of articles in a special issue of Capital and Class (Vol. 34, No. 3, 2010). This issue contains an interesting debate in which Callinicos criticises Gramsci's stretching of the concept, along with a number of recent efforts to deploy it in different contexts. He expresses concern that 'what had originally been conceptualised as a particular path to capitalist domination - from above, gradually, and without violent rupture - comes to be understood by Gramsci as a principle means of maintaining capitalist domination in an epoch of wars and revolution' (2010: 492; emphasis in original). In response, Morton (2010) points out that Gramsci's extending
and reworking - or as Gramsci would have said ‘translating’ - the concept in relation to changing conditions is very much part of his historicist (or spatio-historical) method, and a strength rather than a weakness. I agree with Morton’s insistence on the value of Gramsci’s method, but I think it is also important to hold on to the core meaning of passive revolution as ‘socio-political processes in which revolution-inducing strains are at once displaced and partially fulfilled’, as Callinicos (2010: 498) puts it, while also attending closely to what it means to translate the concept into different times and places.

Dialectical thought has flourished always in the margins and interstices of society. It seeks to follow the movement of contradictions while the major social institutions are designed to resolve or obscure them. This mode of thought seeks out the hidden cracks in prevailing ideas and conjunctures, anticipates the unexpected, imagines a future vastly different from the present, and examines the potentialities of the present to seek a basis for its realisation. The dialectical tradition in South Africa has been no different from this. But the margins and interstices of South African political and intellectual life are under unprecedented pressure today, as ideas and activities are brought into line with the needs of the market (Nash 2009: 210).

IN THE PREFACE I described how the Marikana massacre erupted on 16 August 2012 just as I was drawing this book to a close, and compelled me to consider a longer lineage of debate around the protracted crisis in South Africa that goes back to Saul and Gelb’s (1981, 1986) important intervention.

Marikana exemplified the deep, ongoing, organic crisis that capital’s ‘revolution within the revolution’ sought to resolve. When Peter Bruce of Business Day saw Marikana as ‘the end of the beginning of the end’ (Chapter 1), he was in effect acknowledging that the capacity of the ANC to manage the fallout of capital’s revolution was running out of steam. This is not to absolve the ANC government from responsibility; but it is to insist that the...