

# Introduction

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South Africa, given its long history of colonialism and apartheid became one of the most racially polarised countries in the world. Institutionalised racism served the economic and social well being of the minority white ruling class through the systematic marginalization of the black majority. In 1994, the ascension to democracy abolished all forms of institutionalised racism giving previously disenfranchised blacks new opportunities and correcting the most blatant social injustices of the past. However, thirteen years into democracy, not all South Africans share equally in the promises made in the liberation manifesto as the gap between the have's and have-not's is increasingly widening. Furthermore these inequalities are still racialised, and while obvious forms of racism may no longer be tolerated in the post-apartheid era, lack of integration between 'racially' defined groups remains a pertinent feature in contemporary South Africa. While the post-apartheid era has raised opportunities for so many in employment and education, large numbers (mainly black Africans) stagger in the stupor unleashed by poverty with little hope of it abating.

Given its history of 'racial', social, physical and economic fragmentation, it is perhaps hardly surprising that South Africa in its post-liberation phases is still characterized by structural inequalities and contestation. New forms of struggle are an inevitable reality as people compete for the fruits of democracy. Some have managed to harvest more than their fair share; others take from those deserving it most whilst for many the tree of democracy has remained sterile for more than a decade. While 'race' continues to be a key dimension of power and inequality in the post-apartheid era, it is by no means the only one. Inequalities are more

complex, opportunities are skewed along the lines of social class, gender and age as well as 'race'. Inequalities in power, as Weber argued, take very different forms – economic, political and social, and in the post-apartheid era one source of power is by no means a guarantor of another.

In this edition of *Alternation*, the articles focus on polarisation in contemporary South Africa. They are diverse, reflecting the wide ranging and complex forms polarisation takes in the post-apartheid era. 'Race' features in all the articles as an important dimension of power, and in this sense, then, the articles take issue with the popular rhetoric which characterises South Africa as a 'Rainbow Nation', with equal opportunities for all 'races'. But rather than simply taking 'race' as the determinant of social inequalities, some of the articles address how 'race' intersects with social class (in often complex ways) and with gender and ethnicity. Some of the articles deal with social, political and economic forms of polarisation and their relations, while others tend to focus on only one particular form of polarisation. While we do not pretend to provide an exhaustive account of the various forms of polarisation in contemporary South Africa we do hope these diverse articles will convey something of the variety and complexity of polarisation in the post-apartheid era.

Mokong Simon Mapadimeng in his article titled 'Organisational Culture, Productivity and Performance in the South African (SA) Workplace: Increasing Polarisation or Cohesion? A Case Study of Cranco Metals Ltd' argues that workers in the post-apartheid factory floor are increasingly marginalized from the means of production. Through a case study analysis, he compares working conditions on the factory floor in the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. He highlights that during apartheid the labour system was characterised by job reservation in which highly skilled and highly paid work was reserved for whites while black workers were excluded and marginalised; the inadequate apartheid Bantu education system for blacks which neglected vocational and general education; the over dependence on the exploitative migrant labour system, the racially skewed consumption market; and high tariff barriers which blocked external competition making low productivity levels a norm. In his case study of industrial relations in a factory in the post-apartheid era he found that attempts at promoting worker participation in decision making with a view to promoting productivity failed. He attributed the general failure of these

participatory schemes to a wide range of factors including sharp conflicts around management's lack of good faith when introducing them as evidenced in unilateral tendencies towards decision making and to use the schemes to by-pass workers' trade unions. The situation is aggravated by the neo-liberal cost-reduction environment that promotes management strategies at the expense of conditions that promote worker satisfaction and increased productivity. In this case study Mapadimeng concludes that even though management has introduced programmes to enhance worker participation and productivity, the use of imported models and extensive use of consultants resulted in no meaningful financial gains to the company, resulting in huge loss in profits. An underlying reason for not achieving desired levels of productivity is the lack of transformation at a management level and reduced participation of workers at a shop-floor level. Referring to the fundamental maxim of apartheid which says '*whites are better and blacks are backward*' has militated against the production culture. This suggests that the past continues to impact on the present and this legacy needs to be addressed.

In the article 'Contradictions in the Construction of Difference and Polarization in Chinese/Taiwanese Industries in KZN: Isithebe, Ladysmith and Newcastle' Sithembiso Bhengu compares three industrial zones using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to illustrate how both during the apartheid and post-apartheid era Local Economic Development was promoted by compromising workers' rights. During apartheid, Chinese and Taiwanese investors served as the political instrument of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) to suppress workers' rights by preventing them from associating with progressive labour movements (COSATU) which they deemed troublesome. However, in the post-apartheid era, the alignment of labour laws in keeping with international standards had a reverse effect of lowering investor confidence. Many of these Asian companies fell short when it came to complying with statutory standards of minimum wage, better working conditions and industrial safety. Like Mapadimeng, this study highlights the negative perception held by investors about workers. The majority of investors complained about '*low productivity*' in their companies which they attributed to laziness and ingratitude of workers to employment. At the same time the study highlights that industrial relations amongst Chinese and Taiwanese industrialists tend to be acrimonious, exploitative

and beset by frequent industrial conflict. The increasing polarization of these industrialists from workers, trade unions and their inability to come to terms with the new labour relations policies and practices is a source of ongoing industrial conflict and strife.

In contrast to Mapadimeng and Bhengu's articles which look at labour issues in a formal organisation, Ercüment Çelik examines the unprecedented and increasing levels of casualisation of work involving women in the context of global restructuring. His concern is with the polarisation and marginalisation of workers, and notably women, in the informal economy. In 'Informalisation of Women's Labour and New Types of Labour Organisations: The Cases of Sewa and Sewu' he argues that the informalisation and feminisation of labour carries important implications for new ways of defining and organizing labour. Drawing on the experience of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India and the Self-Employed Women's Union in South Africa, Çelik argues that in both cases, the traditional trade union movement, and its organizing strategies are inappropriate. Since the informal economy is far from homogenous and workers are widely differentiated in terms of type of work, location, gender, culture and 'race', recruitment to traditional labour unions based on assumptions of common collective labour interests is problematic. The article strongly calls upon traditional labour unions to rethink their 'social movement unionism' agenda to restructure themselves in order to include informal and vulnerable workers who traverse both the streets as their workplace and in the community. Çelik concludes with a call for further research to define a space for informal workers within traditional union spaces.

Fazel Khan's article on 'The Clash of Economic Interest' examines how the post-apartheid government's emphasis on Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) has promoted the self enrichment of Black elites to the detriment of the unemployed and poor (who are largely black). BEEs are one of government's platform programmes to help redress the inequalities of the past by redistributing resources from whites to blacks. Having studied 122 BEE companies in KwaZulu-Natal, using a combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews the study highlights that this initiative has benefited only a few wealthy blacks, while women, youth, rural residents and small entrepreneurs (Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises) have been

largely left out of these initiatives. Corruption in the form of political connections in securing government contracts is cited as one of the major flaws in the implementation of BEE policies and excludes those that chose to do business with honesty and integrity. The study concludes with a call for stricter monitoring of the implementation of policies so that the redistributive principles intended by BEEs do not marginalize those it is intended to serve.

In the struggle for liberation women played an unstinting role although apartheid policies marginalized most disenfranchised black African women to the rural homestead and monolithic townships whilst their husbands, fathers, sons and brothers sold their labour in the urban production zones of the country. In the article 'No Women Left Behind: Examining Public Perspectives on South African Police Services' Handling of Violence against South African Women' Nirmala Gopal and Vanitha Chetty argue that despite a very progressive Constitution on gender issues, the criminal justice system and its management of women victims of crime leaves much to be desired. In more than 50% of reported cases of crime the victims are women who are often alienated and marginalized through the very processes of so-called criminal justice. Using a convenience sample of 50 males and females comprising different race groups in focus groups in the suburb of Adelaide, Eastern Cape, and in-depth interviews with law enforcement officers, the authors confirm that informal legislative processes are often experienced notably by women victims of crime as gendered and discriminatory. The study also highlights how 'race' and social class influence the workings of the law enforcement agencies and the distribution of justice. Law enforcement officers, they found, often responded to crime situations in elite white suburbs to the exclusion of poor black suburbs. Interestingly, the study highlighted that Black law enforcement officers show scant respect for black victims of crime saying '*that they deserve it*' compared to white law enforcement officers. Overall, white female victims of crime were accorded more respect and were much less likely to be short-changed than black female victims in the protection espoused in the criminal justice system.

An effective criminal justice system not only brings perpetrators of crime to justice by appropriate sentencing, but also ensures that their incarceration is humane, appropriate to the crime committed and provides conditions for redemption. In the article titled, 'A World of Darkness:

Polarisation of Prisoners' Shanta Singh argues that prisoners, most of whom come from relatively poor backgrounds, are highly polarised and marginalised, and that their rights and freedoms, as enshrined in the Constitution and endorsed by the South African Human Rights Commission, are habitually violated. Based on four case studies with post-released prisoners and in-depth interviews with prison officials (prison managers, social workers and psychologists) in the Westville Correctional Services, Durban, she examines the human rights abuses and exploitation of prisoners. The study highlights inappropriate living conditions, especially with inadequate hygiene and ventilation, overcrowding in cells, high-risk sexual behaviour, violence, gang activity and corruption within the prison. Drug use, sodomy and rape were reported as regular and normative occurrences in the prisons. These human rights violations became '*an accepted part of life*' within the prison, and the study argues that the incarcerated were excluded from exercising their human rights by virtue of their status as prisoners.

Shanta Singh's article points to an acute disjunction between the rehabilitative aims and intentions of prisons, as set out in the Constitution, and the dehumanising reality of prison life. Focusing on a newly 'racially' merged university (the University of KwaZulu-Natal, UKZN) Elias Cebekhulu, Evangelos A. Mantzaris and Eugenia N. Cebekhulu argue that this also falls desperately short of an envisaged and rhetorical ideal, in this case a site of knowledge, hope and transformation for everyone irrespective of 'race', gender or class. In 'Not yet Uhuru! Power Struggles in a Neo-liberal University', they argue that the merging of universities in South Africa has proved to be a source of disillusionment. Taking UKZN as an example, they assert that increasing levels of corporatisation at UKZN has resulted in institutional failures that are played out in conflict on matters related to good governance. The article concludes by a warning signal that at UKZN deep-seated historical problems are carried over to the newly merged university and these are compounded by the imposition of ideas and values of management on the workers. These, they argue, need to change, and universities such as UKZN need to be run on much more democratic lines, if broad-based transformation and equity are to be achieved.

If governance is such an issue at a merged tertiary institution with different cultures and histories, how do traditional and modern systems of governance fair at a local government level? In 'The Clash between

Traditional and Modern Systems of Governance in the Durban Metropolis – A Tale of Two Administrative Civilizations’, Sultan Khan, Benoit Lootvoet and Evan Mantzaris examine the case of Durban, which is the only metropolitan government in the country to experiment with co-operative forms of governance with tribal authority systems. The article examines ideological and political polarisation between traditional and democratically elected leaders, and questions the effectiveness of such a bifurcated government in advancing the basic service delivery needs of citizens and subjects. It focuses on what it views as an uneasy alliance between traditional and elected leaders, characterized, for example, by the opposition of traditional leaders to the draft Traditional Leadership Bill for being too heavy and for usurping their powers.

Taking seriously the voices of citizens and subjects must feature as a key concern in any participatory democracy, according to Kirsty Trotter. In ‘The Importance of Narratives in South African Policy Work: How to Hear the Voices in a Participatory Democracy’, she argues for the use of narratives as a way of encouraging such voices, and, based on these, formulating ‘bottom-up’ approaches in social policy. She proposes that the failure of technocrats and politicians to engage with narratives from below, when framing and implementing social policy, leads to polarised relations between them and the rest of the population who become like ‘passive spectators’. Drawing on literary analysis and critical theory, she argues for policy makers to encourage and give structure to the ‘voices’ of (often marginalized) groups of people through public participation processes such as those offered by narratives. Consequently, it is argued that polarisation between policy makers, politicians and technocrats and the public can be reduced by the rich sources of information provided by narratives. This approach is in contrast to current policy practices in which policy experts and technocrats draw on particular types of information, ‘data’ which is presented in research reports in the form of survey results and statistics in a manner conducive to making measurable ‘count, cost, deliver’ decisions.

In their article titled, ‘Hostel Re-development and Emerging Conflict for Housing Tenure within the Umlazi Tehuis in the eThekweni Municipality – A Study of Key Social Polarisation Indicators’ M.L. Ngongo and M.N.G. Mtshali points out that Hostels in South Africa were used to curb the influx of Africans into urban centers only in so far as to minister to the needs of the

white capitalist class. It was a system of housing built around the needs of migrant labour. The system was designed to extract cheap labour that was exploitative and socially polarizing for the majority of the urban disenfranchised African labour force. In the post-apartheid South Africa, the state committed itself to provide a new sense of vitality by upgrading hostels that are conducive to family needs, humane and socially acceptable in the reproduction of labour. Whilst some advancement has been made in the redevelopment of hostels, this group of urban community continues to live in squalor on the periphery of South African society. The case of Umlazi Tehuis hostel examines in-depth the real and potential social polarization indicators that are likely to affect development processes and dynamics in the redevelopment of hostels within the eThekweni Municipality.

Ruth Hoskins is also concerned about the lack of voice and participation of substantial numbers of people in the new democratic South Africa. In 'The Potential of School Libraries for Promoting Less Polarised Social Relations in the Post-apartheid-Era', she focuses on the lack of access to school libraries for those previously disadvantaged by apartheid, and argues that this constitutes a key basis of social polarisation since it restricts the flow of different types of information to the community, and is disempowering. She asserts that the provision of library facilities in black schools should be viewed as part of a process of democratising educational resources, and promoting a society which is less 'racially' polarised in terms of opportunities and resources. Drawing on secondary sources of research data (both national and international), Hoskins highlights the paltry investment made by the state in this important educational resource, especially at a time when expectations of young learners from disadvantaged social backgrounds have been raised by democracy. Policy on the transformation of the school library system dates as far back as 2001 and to date very little has been achieved by way of social investment for those historically excluded from this vital learning resource.

In 'Black Boys with Bad Reputations', Rob Pattman and Deevia Bhana address disadvantages experienced by black pupils attending historically black schools. They elaborate not only on lack of resources at these schools, but also the lack of jobs in the communities, and examine how black boys attending an all black township school cope with these disadvantages and how they view school, work, forms of authority, relations



with girls and envisage their futures. The article focuses mainly on an in-depth interview with a small group of such boys, drawn from a wider study of the lives and identities of Grade 11 pupils in different schools in Durban. Pattman and Bhana found that the black boys in this interview in this school were very pessimistic about their futures, and felt cut-off from the job opportunities they associated with a good education. They also expressed anxieties about not being able to live up to the role of breadwinners. Ironically, given their desire to achieve in terms of these conventional norms, they had reputations as 'bad'. This, argue Pattman and Bhana reinforces their sense of marginalisation, and draws on deep-seated racist fears and assumptions in South Africa about black males as bad. In the interview which Pattman and Bhana focus on, teachers were specifically asked to select boys with bad reputations, yet the interview suggested that these boys were surprisingly 'good', displaying conscientiousness and concentration and deep commitment to the school's work ethic. The findings are similar to studies in Latin America and Africa with boys from 'low income' communities with little or no prospect for employment 'for many young men'. This is not only problematic for them economically but also because it undermines their very identities, making them less attractive as potential 'long-term partners' for females and more likely to be seen as bad and irresponsible. The article argues for ways of thinking about and researching black boys which do not polarise black masculinity as bad and as Other. It also critiques the absence of supportive and caring adult models of masculinity at the school and the polarisation of gender identities, as well as the impoverishment of black townships.

In 'Seasons of drought have no rainbows – An Experiential Note on Poverty and Survival Networks in South Africa' Ari Sitas provides two ethnographic accounts on the plight of black working class leaders of the 1980s in the liberation of the country. This article is not only a tribute to all black working class liberation activists, but highlights the plight of those whose charisma and intellect no longer carried the same significance in the process of democratic and neo-liberal transition as it had in the struggle against apartheid, and were not given anything approaching the recognition and respect they had achieved as activists in the struggle. The article documents the profound contribution made by these liberation activists who succumbed to restless deaths. Their pre-liberation voices resonate with

expressions of discontent about poverty and marginalisation in contemporary South Africa. Drawing on a poem from one such working class leader, Sitas concludes that poverty and survival networks in the new democratic dispensation is like *'seasons of drought for some, rainbows for others'* – a new sociological drama that is unfolding in South Africa's transition.