

De Mist, Race and Nation

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The 'Future of the Past' Conference at the University of the Western Cape in July 1996 drew vigorous prescriptions from a range of eminent scholars as to how a post-apartheid history-writing should proceed¹. Rather than engage in detail with those arguments, this article is offered as an attempt to re-read one particular historical figure—Jacobus Abraham De Mist—through the dramatically-adjusted lenses of the 1990s. My argument is that while a concern with race filtered commentaries on De Mist during the apartheid years, his writings might now be re-read with an eye to how he understood nascent forms of nationhood.

Writing about literary criticism, Mikhail Bakhtin (1986:7) has described criticism as a dialogue between different cultures:

We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself, we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and semantic depths Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched.

Extending Bakhtin's suggestive formulation to the writing of history, new questions in the present might be raised for a particular past moment, and the hope is that this past moment might in turn reveal to us new aspects and semantic depths in our present. To apply this to the writings of De Mist: we in 1990s South Africa seek answers in the Cape Colony of 1802 to our present concerns.

Two central questions in contemporary South African debates over the nature and forms of nationhood structure my discussion of De Mist's principal work, *The Memorandum Containing Recommendations for the Form and Administration of Government at the Cape of Good Hope* (1802). The questions are:

- 1) what is the relation between revolution and the post-revolutionary political settlement?
- 2) what is the relation between the nation-as-political-community and an expanding capitalist economy?

¹ These contributions have been collected in a special issue of *South African Historical Journal* 35 (November 1996).

Before moving on to these questions, however, it is necessary to set out briefly the interpretations of De Mist from the apartheid era.

De Mist under apartheid

Born the son of a Reformed minister in Zalt-Bommel in 1749, Jacob Abraham De Mist went to high school in Kampen and to university in Leiden. At Leiden, he was strongly influenced by the patriotten movement, and also commenced his lifelong association with freemasonry. Upon graduating, he returned to Kampen first to work as an attorney and then to serve as secretary to the government in Kampen. With the revolutionary upheavals in the Netherlands in 1795, he rose rapidly, being elected to the National Assembly in 1797. His political allegiances in office were moderate: he defended the traditional Dutch legislative bodies and procedures, and in particular supported autonomy for the provinces. Outflanked in 1798 by a radical caucus in the National Assembly, De Mist after a short spell in comfortable incarceration moved on to a senior position in the state bureaucracy. In 1800, he was selected to serve on the Aziatische Raad, the colonial governing body, and it was this appointment that saw his deployment to the Cape in 1802. After the Cape was returned to the British in 1805, De Mist remained in the Dutch colonial administration, serving in other parts of the Dutch Empire until his death in 1823.

De Mist was for the most part treated kindly by historians writing during the apartheid era. By far the most influential interpretation of his three years at the Cape version has been the one reproduced in school history textbooks¹. De Mist and his Batavian colleague Governor Jan Willem Janssens are described in these textbooks as Enlightenment figures thwarted by the intractable realities of life at the Cape. A.N. Boyce (1960:115ff) in *Legacy of the Past Std VII* notes that '[b]oth men were firm believers in the principles of the French Revolution—liberty and equality—nevertheless they were practical men and able administrators', and he concludes with the judgement: '[t]he commissioner and the governor were anxious to improve conditions in the colony, but their ideas were too advanced for the conservative burghers'. A.P.J. van Rensburg et al (1976:61) in *Active History Std VIII*, which was written specifically for black school syllabuses, make a similar assessment:

Liberals as they were, they nevertheless believed in strong government, and though much attracted to the ideas of equality and brotherhood, they were shrewd and practical men.

In a later edition of *Active History* for the new standard five syllabus, Van Rensburg et al (1989:197,199) repeat these generous judgements of De Mist, making the remarkable claim that the new districts established by De Mist 'did not include the land of any Black nations', and

¹ For a summary of how South African history textbooks recorded nineteenth century South African history, see Elizabeth Dean et al (1983:52-64).

conclude that 'Jacob de Mist did much to improve the political and judicial conditions at the Cape'.

While the textbooks hover between praising De Mist's European refinement and condemning his liberal idealism, University of Cape Town philosophy professor A.H. Murray is unequivocal in his embrace of De Mist's efforts to find enlightened and rational solutions to the perplexing challenges of the Cape³. Murray's work on De Mist approaches hagiography, as he praises De Mist's modernising impulse so sensibly tempered by respect for tradition: 'he preached the freedom of Law and Order; liberty, equality and fraternity were for him not political institutions but moral duties incumbent on man' (Murray n.d.: 14), though at the same time

[h]e was a political fundamentalist in upholding the old principles and the continuity of historical institutions. De Mist was prepared to adapt the old vessels to the new conditions, but he navigated by the old lights (Murray n.d.:18).

Also exemplary for Murray is De Mist's pluralism, which he describes approvingly as an early form of apartheid:

[De Mist] advocates that a separation should be maintained strictly between the native peoples of the Cape settlement and the farmers, thus acknowledging the treaty rights and the sovereignty of tribes In spite of his support of free trade and the fact that he had recommended a small amount of free trade with the natives in the Memorandum, there is no mention here of interpenetration and of mingling of populations for the purpose of markets and commerce and to spread the light of civilisation. Indeed the policy of separation was so basic to De Mist's plans that trade between sections of the population is directly forbidden in an instruction. Natives employed in the colony, and particularly native children, were to be returned to their homeland (Murray n.d.: 119).

De Mist's resistance to extending the franchise is also applauded by Murray. After quoting a statement by De Mist criticising public political meetings, Murray notes that 'De Mist's times did not allow for indiscriminate universal suffrage!' (Murray n.d.: 121). In his conclusion, Murray argues enthusiastically for the continuing benign influence of De Mist:

South African political experience marches on after 1806, when the English take over the Colony at the Cape, but never, in all its vicissitudes, loses sight of De Mist either in principles, institutions or policy De Mist's institutions

³ Also sympathetic to De Mist is G.D. Scholtz (1967:383f), and from an earlier period J.P. van der Merwe (1926). Educationalist E.G. Malherbe (1925:79) is even more effusive, describing De Mist as 'one of the ablest administrators and educational reformers who ever set foot in South Africa'.

and ideas were carried into the hinterland by the Voortrekkers from the eastern parts of the Colony during the third decade of the century. Continuity was maintained and the principles of De Mist's political philosophy were woven into the texture of the political institutions and procedures which are incorporated into the Republic of South Africa (n.d.:137).

Sharing Murray's fear of 'interpenetration and mingling', Sarah Gertrude Millin in two of her novels of the 1950s presents De Mist as an Enlightenment man, who is nonetheless sensitive to the imperatives of racial purity'. In *King of the Bastards* (1950:169), De Mist is described as 'an eager friendly man whom it irked to be haughty', and he weeps at the sight of starving Bushmen pastoralists. In *The Burning Man*, Millin creates the following conversation between De Mist and Janssens, in which De Mist explains how the two of them differ from the missionary Johannes van der Kemp:

'[Van der Kemp] has leapt over our heads on our own path. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: he is, while we are not, absolute in his requirement of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. We clap eyes on the savages of the land and our senses recoil from accepting them as our free and equal brothers, or, indeed, as our brothers at all. Considering European politics, van der Kemp may be reactionary and we the revolutionaries—'

'Assuming he remains an Orangeman—'

'They say he does. But humanly he has crossed the boundaries which still contain us' (Millin 1952:257).

De Mist's position is endorsed in the novel, as Van der Kemp suffers endless hardships because he transgresses the racial boundaries which contain De Mist and Janssens.

A more critical picture of De Mist is presented in the work of historian W.M. Freund. In a chapter on the Cape governments from 1795-1814, Freund (1989:325) notes that many historians have extolled the Batavians, but suggests that they in fact achieved very little, with '[b]oth De Mist and Janssens ... quickly disillusioned with the Cape'. In his unpublished Ph.D., Freund gives due emphasis to De Mist's political conservatism:

He was no democrat. He was the son of the regenten, and, rejecting democracy and monarchy, he naturally opted for oligarchy (Freund 1971:138).

As regards De Mist and Janssens's racial attitudes, Freund summarises as follows:

In their view of the non-white colonial peoples, Batavian officials interspersed sentimentality, sympathy for unfortunates and a paternalism

⁴ For a critical discussion of Millin's novels of the 1950s, see Michael Green's *Novel Histories* (1997:115-137) and J.M. Coetzee's *White Writing* (1988:136-162).

that masked a real lack of regard for the potential of non-white individuals as citizens This attitude, which parallels exactly the feeling of the contemporary white South African who expressed a preference for the 'raw native', shows the strength, even in Janssens, of the belief in the virtues of the men unspoiled by western culture (Freund 1971:272f).

He concludes that De Mist's reforming zeal was moderated as in the course of his experiences in the Cape, with the result that

the powerless non-whites continued unable to participate in administration and justice and remained at the disposal of their white employers and masters (Freund 1971:275).

Taken together, these versions of De Mist produced during the apartheid era share an understandable pre-occupation with race. With a substantial degree of consensus, the history textbook writers Murray and Millin all see De Mist as the exemplary European confronted by obdurate Africa. His racial attitudes—often extrapolated by elaborate conjecture from his writings—are used to justify the policies of segregation and apartheid. Freund's criticisms of De Mist's racial attitudes by the same token might be read as an attack on the apartheid ideology dominant in South Africa at the time⁵. In Bakhtin's terms, the 1960s and 1970s in South Africa were dominated by questions of race, and in looking back at De Mist, these different writers accordingly raised questions, at times obsessively, about the connections between racial ideologies in the Cape of 1800 and South Africa in the 1960s. In the next section, I look at De Mist afresh, with nation rather than race functioning as the organising trope⁶.

⁵ Freund writes at this time in detail about notions of race at the Cape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in his 1976 article 'Race in the social structure of South Africa, 1652-1836'. Freund's main argument is that modern forms of racism cannot be traced unproblematically back to the eighteenth century, and to illustrate this argument he cites numerous examples of black people in positions of authority at the Cape in this period. His Target is I.D. MacCrone's *Race Attitudes in South Africa: Historical, Experimental and Psychological Studies* (1937), but much of his argument applies with equal force to the likes of Murray and Millin.

⁶ Historians of the Batavian period in the past ten years have re-assessed De Mist's generation in a more critical light. Whereas historians of an earlier generation like I. Leonard Leeb (1973) were sympathetic to the Batavian reformers, recent histories have paid particular attention to the connections between the Dutch Enlightenment and slavery and racism, and have also called into question the democratic credentials of the patriotten movement. On the relation between the Dutch Enlightenment and slavery, see Johannes Menne Postma's *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (1990), and Gert Oostinidie's collection *Fifty Years Later*, especially the contribution on the Batavians at the Cape by Robert Ross (1995:179-191). Allison Blakely's *Blacks in the Dutch World* surveys the Renaissance and Enlightenment roots of racism in Dutch culture (1993:1-38). On the limits of Dutch republicanism in the eighteenth century as understood by the patriotten movement, see Martin Prak (1991:73-102), Wayne te Brake (1991:15-23), Wyger R.E. Velema (1997:437-443), and Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt's collection *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century. Decline, Enlightenment and Revolution* (1992). What all these historians emphasise is the need to distinguish between the exclusive Dutch notion of citizenship of the eighteenth century, and the revolutionary concept of republican citizenship after 1789.

De Mist in the 1990s

De Mist's claim on our attentions in South Africa in the 1990s rests upon his abilities as a lucid and fastidious commentator on the emergent and competing definitions of nationhood in Europe after the French Revolution. He has a direct appreciation of the connections between European nationhood and colonial expansion, and his political experiences in the Netherlands bring a distinctive perspective to bear on the community at the Cape. Furthermore, he lived through a particularly interesting period of Dutch history. Simon Schama wryly summarises the sequence of calamities for the Netherlands during this period:

Between 1780 and 1813, after all, the Netherlands was despoiled of its colonies, routed at sea, invaded four times (twice unsuccessfully); driven to the edge of bankruptcy; and finally forced to drain the dregs of its misfortune by becoming mere departments of the French Empire (Schama 1977:16).

Throughout these perilous times for his nation, De Mist was never far from the action.

As regards the first question, namely how De Mist understood the relation between revolution and post-revolutionary settlement, it is clear that it was the French Revolution which dominated his thoughts. Though by nature a conservative man, De Mist saw in the French Revolution and its aftermath certain benefits:

for although, in common with all loyal countrymen, we deplore the misfortunes, losses and humiliations which were our portion during the late war, and although none can have a greater horror of all so-called revolutionary measures than we, yet we feel that this is perhaps the most important, if not the happiest outcome of periods of anarchy, or epochs of war and peace, that at such times, as if by an electric shock, the whole order of things is changed, and sweeping reforms which have been needed for many years are immediately instituted, whereas fifty years of peace and prosperity would not have brought them within reach (De Mist 1920:170f).

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, De Mist therefore approved the salutary 'electric shock' effects of the French Revolution, not only because his own personal elevation owed much to the Revolution, but also because by 1802 it was clear to him that its most radical impulses had been contained. It was also a consequence of the Revolution that the Cape government had been transformed from the Company's inefficient administration to 'the more advanced forms of Republican government' (1920:171), a process he saw the new modernising Batavian government accelerating. Indeed, while the value of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' in the post-revolutionary settlement is duly acknowledged, it is the modernising effect of the French Revolution—the 'electric shock'—that appeals most strongly to De Mist's Enlightenment sensibility.

As regards De Mist's attitude towards revolutions more generally, he is on occasions sympathetic towards rebel causes. In the case of the Graaff-Reinet and

Swellendam settlers challenging the authority of the Dutch East India Company (V.O.C.), De Mist is forgiving'. The blame for settler uprisings 'is solely due to the *ill-conceived intentions and bad statesmanship*' (De Mist 1920:177 c.i.o.) of the Company Directors, and the actions of the rebels are therefore justified:

Was it, then, so very unnatural that designing persons—only too many of them, alas!—are to be found both at the Cape and in the Motherland—tried to advance their own interests by means of the discontent of the colonists, and instigated disorders, risings and rebellions? We thoroughly condemn these deeds, but it is the duty of an efficient Government to investigate the cause for such a general wave of dissatisfaction First restore the happiness of the community by establishing just laws and institutions, and then punish the transgressors (De Mist 1920:178).

An efficient political system (including a modern legal system and the freedom to trade) are seen as the appropriate means to redress for the legitimate grievances of the settlers. In much the same way as the French bourgeoisie and populace were justified in feeling frustrated by the despotic bumbling of the *ancien regime*, so too for De Mist did the settlers have every right to demand a modern form of government attuned to their needs.

While he defends the settler rebels in their dealings with the Company, De Mist is less sympathetic when they plunder their Xhosa neighbours. He is critical of the 'cattle stealing and petty thieving, which the settlers of Graaff-Reinet have lately become accustomed to perpetrate against their Kaffir neighbours', and sees it as inevitable that the Xhosa should have changed from being 'docile and peace-loving' to being 'a nation whom we should fear because we have embittered them' (De Mist 1920:246). Accordingly, he also shows sympathy for the rebellious feelings of the slaves⁷ and native inhabitants⁸ towards white settlers and colonists. Slaves, he argues, must be well-treated, with 'a higher code of morals ... instilled into the masters' (De Mist 1920:252), and further, responsibility for the conflict between white settlers and native inhabitants lies historically entirely with the former:

On what grounds did these poor creatures deserve the persecution and ill-treatment meted out to them by the Company's servants from the very founding of the colony? From the caves of their fathers, they watched a foreign nation take possession of their coasts, offering not the slightest

⁷ The histories of Dutch settler uprisings during this period are traced by Hermann Giliomee (1975:31-37,51-54,70-80). Also interesting in this regard is Giliomee and Andre Du Toit (1983:230-242). Ross (1981:8-10) explores the connections between the uprisings in the Cape and those in the Netherlands and the Thirteen Colonies.

⁸ The most recent studies of slavery at the Cape are Robert Shell's *Children of Bondage* (1994) and Nigel Worden and Clifton Crais's collection *Breaking the Chains* (1994). For more detail on the Batavians at the Cape, see Worden's earlier work *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* (1985).

⁹ There were a number of violent Khoisan rebellions during this period, which are scrupulously traced by Shula Marks (1972) and Susan Newton King (1981).

opposition; they gradually retreated before the advance of the strangers, and provided them with cattle, sheep, and goats; but all this could not sate the white man's greed. Covetous, as we might suppose, to emulate the Spaniards in America ... the colonists hounded down these timid wretches, destroyed their kraals and villages, stole their cattle, seized the men and boys and reduced them to a state of subjection and slavery (De Mist 1920:253f).

In order to accommodate the aspirations of the slaves and native inhabitants, De Mist argues for their gradual integration into the colonial order. In particular, rather than plundering their resources, he argues that efforts should be made to draw them into the colonial economy:

the inhabitants of that remote district could gradually be civilised If no weapons or gunpowder be sold to these people, what harm could there be in teaching them the use of knives, shears, pins, hammers, large nails, thread, ribbons, pipe, tobacco, and all sorts of small wares and women's ornaments [A]n increase of the necessities of life helps in the progress of civilization. By means of barter and exchange, the Kaffirs can be taught to trade in elephants tusk and furs (De Mist 1920:246).

Slaves and native inhabitants rising up against colonial rule in the Cape are never accorded the same stature by De Mist as the revolutionaries in France, or indeed the settler rebels. However, like both the French revolutionaries and the settler rebels, they too can find their place in a modern, post-revolutionary settlement if they learn the lessons of free trade and assimilate the 'civilised' ways of the European¹⁰.

The central place De Mist allocates to free trade in cementing his post-revolutionary settlement is of course of direct relevance to the second question posed in re-reading his *Memorandum*, namely how does he understand the relation between the nation-as-political-community and the expanding capitalist economy? Under the V.O.C.'s rule at the Cape, a mercantilist economic dispensation had dominated a supine political order, but with the V.O.C. going insolvent in 1795, a new form of colonial governance was needed. De Mist (1920:183) recognises this opportunity for innovation:

¹⁰ It is quite clear from these passages that Murray's interpretation of De Mist's policies is inaccurate. Rather than anticipating the sequence of policies from indirect rule to segregation to apartheid (as Murray suggests), De Mist's assimilationist impulse should be seen as a precursor of the Cape system of direct rule introduced by Sir George Grey later in the century. In De Mist's benign version of this policy, there is the gradual assimilation of an elite of the local inhabitants into the ranks of the Dutch citizenry. What direct rule meant in practice in the Cape was something quite different. Mahmood Mamdani (1996:66) explains that direct rule legitimised the 'appropriation of land, destruction of communal autonomy, and establishment of the "freedom" of the individual to become a wage worker'. The very few Africans who were 'civilised' in the coloniser's terms enjoyed European legal rights; for the vast majority, their legal status as second-class subjects was enforced.

upon restoration [of Dutch rule] everything starts afresh, and never did a more favourable opportunity offer itself for the substitution of an improved system of government in place of the former constitution.

For De Mist, there were two fundamental pressures to consider: first, the monopolistic practices of the V.O.C. had been undone as a result of free trade; and the new political order therefore had to embrace the modernising energies of free trade in order to survive; and second, the political revolutions in France and the U.S. had made an equal citizenry (in whatever limited form) a *sine qua non* for any modern nation, and demands for equality in the Cape likewise had to be welcomed as markers of progress and modernity.

Looking first in more detail at De Mist's attitude towards the principle of free trade, it is clear that he sees future governments at the Cape no longer confined to protecting the interests of the Company and its employees; rather, the economic interests of all who lived in the Cape would have to be served¹¹. The *Memorandum* accordingly embraces the principle of free trade enthusiastically:

That in future the political government of the Cape should be wholly distinct from the commercial government, which has hitherto regulated affairs in that Colony; and that the inhabitants at the Cape, under reasonable conditions should be allowed the unrestricted exercise of their trades and occupations, in so far as these can be reconciled within the interests of the Mother Country (De Mist 1920:190)

Although the final qualifying clause retains the allegiance to Holland, his commitment in these passages to free trade echoes precisely the defining principles of the new economic order being established at the same time in the Thirteen Colonies.

As regards the need for a novel political system to supersede the Company's imperfect efforts at political administration, De Mist approves the political forms of republican democracy. What distinguishes De Mist's position from the likes of Jefferson, however, is the continuing attachment to a metropolitan power. In an important passage, De Mist sets out the relationship between Batavia and the Cape, giving due attention to the overlap of political and economic rights:

the Cape should primarily be considered as a distant portion of the Batavian Republic, the welfare and prosperity of which are included in our own, and which, with all the other portions of our Republic, is subject to one and the same government. It is only distinguished from the other integral members of this community by the fact that owing to the distance separating its inhabitants from this Republic, it cannot participate in the decisions and

¹¹ The tension between mercantilist and free trade ideologies continues under British rule. For a useful summary of the conflict between Governor Charles Somerset (defender of mercantilism) and John Fairbairn (proponent of free trade), see Trapido (1992:35-39).

deliberations of the State Parliament. It must be regarded as having made a reciprocal contract with the rest of the citizens of the Netherlands, which, on the part of the Colony, is embodied in the condition *do ut facias*, and on the part of the Motherland *facio ut des*, that is to say, *we will protect and help you if you will bring your produce to our market and provide our ships with whatever they need*. But these citizens, on the other hand, are privileged by possessing not only the same definite rights of freedom in citizenship and religion as are enjoyed by all citizens of the Republic, but also many other advantages, such as smaller taxes, the benefits of mutual free trade with the mother country, facilities for acquiring freehold properties and other privileges which we have not the space to enumerate (De Mist 1920:186 e.i.o.).

De Mist acknowledges that the symmetry between a capitalist economy based on the principles of free trade, and a political community based on an elastic definition of nationhood stretching from Amsterdam to the Cape and beyond, cannot be achieved without some effort. He is especially aware of the constructed nature of national identity, and of the need for ideological labour to be directed to this end:

It will be the work of years to transform the citizens of Cape Town once again into *Nederlanders*, and unless the national spirit is regenerated, and a pride fostered in national morals, customs, dress, manufactures, etc., etc., it will be in vain to hope that any good will result from political reforms (De Mist 1920:201).

In the Cape, the settler community, the native inhabitants, and the slaves had proved fractious and difficult to control, a state of affairs De Mist attributes to the combination of mercantile monopolies and antiquated political institutions. His fervent belief is that a re-negotiated political identity based on Dutch citizenship, in conjunction with a *laissez faire* capitalism, would produce a more efficient dispensation.

¹² There is a vast literature on the relation between race and nation. Three of particular interest for this period are Eteinne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein's *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities* (1991), David Goldberg's *Racist Culture. Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (1993:21-40,78f), and Martin Thom's *Republics, Nations and Tribes* (1995). Wallerstein offers the following distinction, emphasising the economic dimension of definitions of race and nation: 'The concept of "race" is related to the axial division of labour in the world-economy, the core-periphery antinomy. The concept of "nation" is related to the political superstructure of this historical system, the sovereign states that form and derive from the interstate system' (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991:79). Martin Thom's (1995:119) central focus is on the shift from the city-state to the nation after the French Revolution: 'the prestige of the ancient city became tarnished in the aftermath of the French Revolution, and ... the imagined qualities of the noble savage were transferred to the Germanic tribes, the massed origin of the Christian nations'.

conclusion

The relation between 'race' and 'nation' in all contexts is a complex one¹². In De Mist's own time, both terms mutated in important ways, as Nicholas Hudson (1996:258) explains:

Yet over the period of the [eighteenth] century, 'race' gradually mutated from its original sense of a people or a single nation, linked by origin, to its later sense of a biological subdivision of the human species. 'Nation' began to be used as a subdivision of 'race' or, even more commonly, as a term denominating a cultural or a political group of a certain sophistication.

And in the mid-nineteenth century, Hudson continues, they changed fundamentally once again:

['Race'] meant an innate and fixed disparity in the physical and intellectual make-up of different peoples. 'Nation', in turn, was more than a group of people living under the same government. It was the very 'soul' of personal identity, the very lifeblood churning through an individual speaking a particular dialect in one of Europe's innumerable regions. From the often violent coupling of 'race' and 'nation', re-fashioned in these new forms, were spawned the most virulent forms of nineteenth-century racism, and finally the political barbarities of our own century (Hudson 1996:258).

Although De Mist refers to issues of race, his more direct concern in the *Memorandum* is with questions of nationhood, and he deploys the late eighteenth-century sense of 'nation' as denoting a 'cultural or political group of a certain sophistication'. His desire to transform the citizens of Cape Town—he does not distinguish between them on the basis of race—into *Nederlanders*, is symptomatic of this understanding of nation. The apartheid-era apologists for De Mist, however, read back the nineteenth-century coupling of 'race' and 'nation' to the start of century, and produce an ahistorical encounter between past and present, in which (to return to Bakhtin's terms) the racism of apartheid merges with the quite different racism of the Dutch Enlightenment. In the process, De Mist's distinctive articulation of nation and race, his ideas on post-revolutionary negotiated settlement, on nation-building, and on unrestricted capitalist trade, are submerged.

Finally, as to whether De Mist's *Memorandum* answers questions in our present, a couple of suggestions. First, the *Memorandum* shows quite clearly the ability of a conservative imagination to contain the radical idealism of a revolutionary moment, and the intellectual resources used by De Mist to effect such containment remain potent: democratic citizenship (with exclusions occluded), free market economics, and a relentless rhetoric of modernisation and progress, are coded as continuous with (never as distortions of) the revolutionary impulse. Second, De Mist's simultaneous commitment to the political discourse of nationhood and the economic imperatives of free trade produces contradictions which continue to resonate. His efforts to nurture a Dutch national spirit at the Cape while at the same time promoting free trade came to naught as a more powerful imperial power displaced the Batavians.

Whether the current South African government's political discourse of rainbow nationhood can sustain the contradictions generated by its own economic policies of internal structural adjustment and increased free trade remains an open question.

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