

Nihilism in Black South Africa: The New South Africa and the Destruction of the Black Domestic Periphery¹

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Introduction

Surely the most lamented and, possibly, the most unexpected feature of the 'new' South Africa is the exploding rate of crime and non-political violence. This phenomenon is over-coded by issues of race and class, with the majority of 'offenders' and victims coming from groups previously excluded. For some this has led to a strengthening of stereotypical views of Blacks as being prone to crime. I don't think I will be faulted for neglecting to address the 'merits' of arguments such as these. Others have focused primarily on the economic causes of crime, pointing out that in a country with huge income inequalities, high unemployment and where delivery to the poor is, to put it mildly, very slow—crime and violence can be expected.

What the latter already well-documented level of analysis leaves out, are the subjective factors that have an effect on crime. While acknowledging the explanatory force of economics, it is in the arena of culture and psychology that this article will attempt to come to a fuller understanding of crime than mere statistics can provide.

In attempting to provide answers at this level it is necessary to distinguish my approach from that of certain politicians, religious leaders and government officials who have been lamenting the 'moral decline' in South Africa of late. From the refusal to pay rates, to poor school attendance, to land invasion and violent crime has all been blamed on a 'moral degeneration' amongst, particularly, the disadvantaged in South Africa who are purportedly guilty of these 'crimes'. The solution to these problems are that communities and individuals once again climb the ladder of social

¹ 'Black South Africa' refers to the residential areas of the African peoples of South Africa, i.e. African townships and reserves. The term 'Black Domestic Periphery' is used interchangeably with 'Black South Africa'. The concepts 'Black' and 'African' are used interchangeably and refer to the African people of South Africa as 'ethnically' defined.

and individual responsibility to reach former high standards of lawfulness and obedience to authority. The obvious problem with such an approach is that it ignores a simple fact. Most black people in South Africa have tried, legitimately, for years to be as ungovernable as possible. Apartheid, separate development, capitalism, exploitation were all seen as systems which deserved only grudging support and, when the opportunity presented itself, actual undermining. This attitude stemmed from a moral framework, which envisioned an egalitarian and just future.

The reason for the lack of support for law and order in South Africa is not because of a moral degeneration along one axis, but because an entirely different and opposing axis along which the co-ordinates of right and wrong used to be plotted, has been ripped down. There has therefore been the destruction, through various means and for various reasons I will touch upon, of an entire moral framework, not the simple descent downward along an always-existing one. The task of the new leaders of society has been to attempt to get black people to accept this new moral framework and to urge them to begin evaluating their behaviour according to its terms. As I will argue below these are the values of individualism, consumerism, materialism, delegation of authority, objectification, a deification of technicism and violence.

But I would go further. A major part of the problem resides in the fact that many black people are unwittingly reluctant to embrace the new moral framework. The old framework of communalism, service, sacrifice, struggle, opposition, independence persists against the new values. For poor people, excluded from the fruits of the new society, this is an obvious choice. To make matters even worse, the institutions that would have guided these values, (SDU's, civics, People's courts, street committees) have been dismantled. And thus there is neither the form nor the content of the morality that once existed in townships on the one hand, and on the other a new alien, impossible to achieve morality that is being urged. It is out of the loins of this situation that nihilism is born.

Black Psychologists on Psycho-cultural Dimensions of Black Personality

Since this work is primarily an inquisition into the causes of mass psychological depression, personal worthlessness and social despair so rampant in black South Africa, the field of Black Psychology, will be traversed. Psychology is defined as the science that systematically studies behaviour in its relationship to the complexity of mental, emotional, physical and environmental factors, which shape it (Karenga 1993:439). Black psychology developed out of a need to restore the sanity and personality of the African which was (and still is) threatened by white racism, cultural oppression and degrading exploitation. The primary objective of Black Psychologists

has been to 'transform Africans into self conscious agents of their own mental and political liberation' (Karenga 1993:439f).

There are three schools within Black Psychology: the Traditional, Reformist and Radical Schools. For the purposes of the study, it is one constituent of the Radical School that is briefly examined. This particular strand is associated with Joseph Baldwin (1992; 1980; & 1976), who focuses on the function of definitional systems of liberation and oppression. He asserts that definitional systems are central in explaining human behaviour since 'they determine how we experience the various phenomena that characterise the ongoing process of everyday life' (Baldwin 1980:96). Furthermore, 'the definitional system or worldview represents the ideological or philosophical base of a social system or a people and thus determines the meanings or values a people attach to their experience including their experience of themselves and how they will react' (Karenga 1993:453).

The fundamental problem that arises out of this argues Baldwin, is when an alien worldview is imposed on and/or accepted by people, leaving them at the mercy of definitions negative and detrimental to their image and interests. For instance, Africans' acceptance of the Eurocentric worldview has resulted in their decentering, dislocation on to the fringes of European society (Asante 1993). This dehumanisation of blacks is carried out through a denial of their history and thus a denial of their humanity (because only humans have history, dogs and other animals have pedigrees). If blacks are less than human, they become things to be used and abused with the sanction of society. This European definitional system is not only diametrically opposed to black interests, but reinforces a distorted reality in the image and interest for the Europeans (Asante 1993:453). This system is easy to perpetuate, since 'Europeans control the formal process of social reinforcement' (Baldwin 1980:101), which are economic and political power. This is not the same as saying that blacks cannot fight against this system.

Radical Black Psychologists, who include Baldwin (1992), Linda Myers (1992) and Wade Nobles (1980) have developed an Afrocentric theory of African personality. Their major argument is that a healthy functioning African personality has a bio-genetic tendency to affirm rather than deny African life, makes group a priority, including survival of culture and institutions, and engages in activities that promote this survival as well as the dignity and mental health of African people (Karenga 1993:454). Drawing on an Afrocentric theory, Baldwin has identified two major components of the core African personality, which are: African Self-Extension Orientation (ASEO) and African Self-Consciousness (ASC) which derives from the former and engages in mutually interactive process. These psychological components are rooted in and reflective of African culture or an Africa-centred worldview which is characterised by three basic concepts: 1) holistic spiritual unity; 2) communalism; and 3) proper consciousness or self-knowledge (Karenga 1993:455).

In this article an attempt is made to demonstrate that the 'definitional system' of the new South Africa has engendered nihilism in Black South Africa. This definitional system or structure is market culture—which can be defined through its values: individualism, consumerism, materialism, accumulation, objectification and self-aggrandisement. This definitional system has shaped a new political culture and cultural lifestyle in its own image. This (structural) market culture is capable of reinforcing its worldview through its.

corporate market institutions [which are a] complex set of interlocking enterprises that have a disproportionate amount of capital, power, and exercise a disproportionate influence on how society is run and how culture is shaped (West 1993:25f).

Nihilism here refers to the 'monumental eclipse of hope, the unprecedented collapse of meaning, the incredible disregard for human and especially black life and property' in much of Black South Africa (West 1993:19).

Historical Roots of Nihilism: Land Dispossession, Exploitation, Racism and a Legacy of Terrorising the Black Domestic Periphery

The roots of nihilism in Black South Africa are directly traceable to white conquest. Land dispossession, racial oppression and super-exploitation of cheap black labour culminated in national humiliation. Land dispossession alienated Africans from their subsistence resources. They consequently lost control of their labour to the white economy. The transformation of African labour into mere commodity—commodity owed by whites—not only undermined the complex role labour played in pre-colonial Africa, but alienated the African from self. The African population was devastated by the cheap labour system. The sights of unprotected, helpless, poor and exploited African labourers who work and live in in-human conditions created an increase in feelings about the worthlessness of African life. While successive white regimes passed numerous policies to protect and privilege white labour, the opposite has been the experience of black labour (Lipton 1985). The wretchedness of the African labourer and devastation of African life have been in sharp contrast to the affluence of white society—a reality which tends to reinforce the inferiority of one group and the superiority of another.

The inferiority complex of Africans was systematically reinforced by institutionalised racism that permeated every aspect of South Africa life. Institutionalised racism, though a feature of South Africa since its inception, found substantial expression in the Apartheid policy which was enacted in 1948. The philosophical underpinnings of Apartheid are white superiority and black inferiority.

Politically, Apartheid has translated into the denial of civil and political rights for Africans. The denial of political space through the criminalisation of political activity hindered the capacity to create responsive cultural, social and political institutions. The perpetrators of apartheid legalised and consolidated the dispossession and subjugation of Africans. As an economic doctrine, Apartheid has ensured that Africans remain 'hewers of wood' and whites 'captains of industry'. This has resulted in South Africa becoming one of the most unequal societies in terms of the distribution of power and wealth. The major problem posed by this definitional system is that Africans have accepted the negative meaning, values, image and interests about themselves imposed by this alien worldview (Biko 1987; Karenga 1993).

It is true that the African has always lived in an environment that is not only hostile to the dignity of self, but also open targets of brutality, experienced on a daily basis through constant police and army savagery—not to mention the inhumaneness and harassment at the hands of ordinary white South Africans'. This enforced the perception that African life is cheap. For instance, the white farmers have frequently taken African life with impunity. That ordinary white citizens have easy access to all sorts of guns and have not hesitated to use them against Africans at the slightest provocation, has contributed to the devaluing of African life. However, it is the Apartheid State's brutality that has contributed greatly to the devaluing of African life through the police beating Africans on arrest, arresting them without summons, detaining witnesses, brutalising them in jails—with such claims dismissed by the courts—and their houses invaded by the police at anytime (Xaba 1995: 70).

Historical Responses to the Nihilist Threat

The National Liberation Struggle: Hope, Identity, Meaning, Mission/Purpose and Institutions—The Ward against Nihilism

The discussion above demonstrate that Black South Africa has always offered the fertile ground for nihilism. Here, the intention is to demonstrate that it is the National Liberation Struggle that has been a mitigating factor against nihilism. Through partaking in it, Africans in general have not only been able to maintain hope in the midst of abject poverty. They could also construct positive identities, meaning, and mission/purpose, but also, create institutional structures which served their needs. All these factors have acted as a ward against nihilism.

Why the Oppressed Joined Liberation Struggles

Reasons that motivated individuals and groups to participate in the liberation struggles are many and varied. Some joined because of the prospects for a better life that national struggle promised. Some joined because they needed to create an

identity to define themselves because definitional systems of the dominant group negated their humanity.

Once an identity has been constructed, life becomes meaningful and purposeful. All in all, this raises the self-confidence of subjugated individuals and groups. These are some factors that explain the participation of the lower segments of the black population in the national liberation struggles in South Africa, particularly the youth. Apposite to this discussion, Essien Dom (1962:83f) in his study of why African-Americans join Mohammed's Nationalist Nation of Islam, observes that:

The need for identity and the desire for self-improvement are the two principal motives which led individuals to join and remain in the Nation of Islam ... although they were three discernible groups of joiners, the majority were alienated from themselves and estranged from their community

Relevant to this discussion also, is Vilas' statement (1993:39) in his study on the rejuvenation of civil society in Latin America, that:

What is distinctive about recent re-activation of civil society is the broadening of the socio-cultural reference points for collective action. The spectrum of identities that people construct in the course of social action has been significantly extended.

The Black Consciousness Movement and Civic Movement: Constructing Identity, Meaning, Purpose and the Restoration of Hope, Pride and Collective Action in the Black Communities

At the end of the 1960s, the Black Domestic Periphery, under the leadership of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), was able to break the silence that had characterised the decade. The 1960s was a period of fatalistic silence in the black communities². The fatalistic silence followed the banishment of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1960, the incarceration of political leadership on Robben Island and the criminalisation of political activities—not to mention the unprecedented state terror that followed the Sharpeville massacre. These factors, combined with apartheid proclamations on black inferiority and white invincibility, were able to anaesthetise and conquer the mind and soul of the black people.

In these circumstances, black response was political silence and the emulating of whites. For instance, black women using lightening creams trying to whiten

² See Chapter 12: 'Fear - An Important Determinant in South African Politics' in Biko (1987).

their skin, only burnt it. Youth turned to crime. Led by the charismatic black leader, Bantu Biko, black students organised themselves under the banner of the philosophy of Black Consciousness. Biko (1978:29) and other leaders of the movement eschewed black complicity in their oppression through silence and preached black pride, black dignity and demanded the rights of blacks to self-determination.

To further their objectives; black students formed the South African Students Organisation (SASO) in December 1968. SASO formed cultural and community organisations from which the people could benefit. These organisations provided institutional mechanisms to break the inertia and restore hope and black pride. Arguably, it was largely through the influence of this philosophy that black Soweto students challenged the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools. Through this challenge—that culminated in the June 16 student massacre—black youth sent a simple yet profound message to white South Africa: 'The African will never again anyone, any government nor any institution to impose the white world on him/ her.'

The post-June 16 1976 uprising gave way to the Civic Movement. It is the Civic Movement, under the direction of the Liberation Establishment—which included the ANC and its partners (Mayekiso 1996)—that transformed the struggle into a fully-fledged national liberation struggle. It is the youth from the townships who fled South Africa, who formed the core of this movement.

Most probably, the township youth was the most alienated and marginalised group in the Black Domestic Periphery. They have been associated with crime and other vices and are often pejoratively referred to as 'Skhotheni' (scoundrels) by members of their own communities. They had been victims of marginalisation and stigmatisation. Since the 1970s, however, participation in the national liberation struggles was to usher in a new township youth image and identity. This was the identity of a 'freedom fighter', a 'comrade', 'defender of the community', etc. They thought themselves energetic, flexible and the country's future (Marks & Mckenzie 1998:224). Indeed, the total liberation of the African majority became their primary purpose in life, as exemplified in the life of Mzanele Mayekiso³. For this role in the community, the youth became the direct target of state terror (Marks & Mackenzie 1998:222). The youth responded by either establishing self-defence units (SDUs) or by leaving the country to join the liberation armies—especially uMkhonto Wesizwe (MK). It was participation in these para-military armies that truly transformed a 'skhotheni' into a 'defender of the community'. This helped to cement a positive identity of self and inculcated a culture of service to others.

³ For a full picture of the participation, transformation, commitment and sacrifice of the Township Youth during the national liberation struggles in the 1980s, see Mayekiso (1996).

The Civic Movement created vibrant community structures that were governed democratically by local residents. These civic structures organised bus boycotts, protested against corruption of council members and operationalised the ANC's strategy of making the country 'ungovernable'. All in all, participation in the national liberation struggle engendered a true African personality characterised by African Self Consciousness and African Self-Extension Orientation that were mutually interactive.

The New South Africa: Its Political Culture

With the opening up of the Apartheid state, the unbanning of political organisations, releasing of political prisoners and returning of exiles—in short: the political liberalisation initiated by President De Klerk in 1990—the duty to liberate the African majority became the prerogative of the 'heroes of the struggle'. The concerted demobilisation of the civic movement and the collapse of civic structures—e.g. the United Democratic Front (UDF)—accompanied the usurpation of civic structures and their functions. This usurpation rendered the comrade redundant. Thus, those who were once 'defenders of the community', lost that which accorded them not only identity, meaning and purpose but also provided institutional structures through which they could operate interactively, collectively and constructively. This led to the destruction of hope, the death of collective ethos, a lack of purpose and a loss of faith in leadership; in short, a crisis in black leadership. This raises the question as to the reasons which led to this new political culture of nihilism.

Broken Promises, Shattered Dreams and Tarnished Futures: The lost Faith in the People

The African majority expected a 'lot' from the ANC's 1994 60.2% election victory. So did their petty nationalist leaders, as manifested in the ANC's election manifesto. It promised, *inter alia*, freedom from land hunger through the redistribution of 30% of arable land in 5 years; freedom from homelessness through the provision of 1 million houses in 5 years; freedom from joblessness through the creation of 100 000 non-agricultural jobs per year; etc. The overwhelming support that the African majority gave the ANC in the 1994 election could only prove that they did believe these promises. The strategy to be adopted to ensure that these promises were fulfilled was said to be 'growth through redistribution'.

In a dramatic twist of events, the ANC in government began to urge the masses of African people to be 'realistic and patient'. Some academic commentators suggest that the ANC in government, instead of challenging capital to give concessions to its poor constituency, chose to work 'with capital' (Callinicos 1996:

Marais 1998). In fact, the macro-economic framework of the ANC-led government is said to represent the very opposite of a transformed vision of South Africa it promised to its poor constituency (Adam et al 1997:206). While it promised 'redistributive transformation', it now bravely pursues 'free-market transformation'. The result of the change of vision and strategy has been the breaking of promises, unrealised dreams and tarnished futures.

The promise of job creation has been replaced by the reality of job losses amounting to 500 000 thousands formal jobs (*Sunday Times*, April 4 1999). The dream of owning a spacious house as articulated in the RDP (1994) has been shattered by the reality of having to do either without a house or to put up with one-roomed incremental houses which have been dubbed 'kernel' houses by the poor. The RDP promise of 'human resource development' and free ten-year transitional education has translated into the financial exclusion of students from especially historically black institutions catering for the poor ANC constituency, amongst other predominantly Black Parties. Since the 'free-market transformation' dictates that there should be user chargers for all basic services, poor communities have had to do without water, for instance. Above all, the market-driven land reform process has translated to the redistribution of a mere 1% of the land by 1999 (*The Sunday Independent* May 23 1999).

These broken promises, shattered dreams and tarnished futures have profoundly affected the psyche of the African majority. If the 'heroes of the struggle' who sacrificed almost everything during the liberation struggles have backtracked on their own promises, the masses may justifiably ask themselves 'Who else can we believe?' By the same token, the people who sacrificed so much for their delivery from apartheid oppression may further ask themselves 'Which amount of collective struggle and sacrifice is needed in order for one to live just a modest life?' This intractable disappointment creates a culture of cynicism, disbelief and distrust in collective action and in a leadership which has destroyed hope of deliverance from oppression and exploitation for the masses of ordinary Africans. In the end, if life is devoid of hope and meaning, the struggle becomes unnecessary and undesirable and the *status quo* is naturalised.

The Politics of Selective Payback: The Nurturing of a Me Attitude and Value

One of the greatest achievements of the national liberation struggle was the reinforcement of a traditional African collective ethos and values. This was largely achieved through selfless sacrifice by the leadership and emulated by the masses of African people. To do something for the community, irrespective of the price to be paid, was encouraged and highly valued. The sacrifices were committed for the good of the entire community—liberation of Africans from the yoke of apartheid.

However, with the birth of the New South Africa, collective struggles for the good of the community gave way to selective payback.

Selective payback is ultimately reflected in the 'meteoric rise of SA's black middle class'. These new black rich are themselves members of the liberation establishment/aristocracy who include Cyril Ramaphosa (resigned ANC Secretary-general and one with probably the highest profile), Saki Macozoma, Tokyo Sexwale (former Gauteng Premier), Marcel Golding and John Copelyn (former trade Unionist), and more than 30 former Members of Parliament. The two conspicuous constants among them are to belong to the liberation aristocracy and to become millionaires. The ANC-led government supports their ascension to wealth. In other words, they are a creation of this government. Its procurement policies look like a 10-point plan, where black-owned companies get 10 extra points as they vie for lucrative contracts which range from road construction to computer system installation in hospitals (*Mail and Guardian* April 1-8 1999). Thus, the explanations of 'insufficient resources' and 'inadequate time for delivery' are unacceptable in the context of the 'meteoric rise' of these new 'filthy rich'. For example, it took Afrikaner capital 10 times longer to achieve the level of listed corporate ownership that the new deal-makers have notched up in the past four years (*Mail and Guardian* April 1-8 1999).

The creation of 'liberation millionaires' is regarded as selective payback because the benefits of black economic empowerment have yet to trickle down to the African majority. Yet, for now, this seems to be a far-fetched dream, because 'most black economic empowerment deals are limited to existing economic activities and do not create new employment' (Adam et al 1997:218). One of the results of this kind of black economic empowerment has been the closing of the income gap between the whites and the black new rich. In 1998 this also contributed to the richest 20 percent of the population taking home 63% of the wealth, while the poorest 20 percent made to do with just 3 percent (*Sunday Times* March 21 1999).

For the poor, the sights of the new black rich, in a very short period of time drove home the point that they have just been used as cannon fodder. They have been the means to an end for those enriching themselves. It is not true that South Africa lacks resources for the improvement of the standard of living of its citizens. Maybe, one can achieve economic mobility if one becomes a self-centred individual climbing on the backs of others. For the millions of ordinary masses though, who had put their hope of delivery from abject poverty on the democratic state, this destroyed their faith in collective struggles.

The Market Culture and the Collapse of Civil Society

Another equally unexpected feature characterising the New South Africa, is the collapse of civil society. Broadly, civil society can be defined as a variety of

groupings and organisations operating outside the state, excepting the business sector (Kotze 1998). These groupings and organisations must champion the cause of the disadvantaged members of society. Civil society in South Africa fully emerged in the 1980s (as discussed earlier) and played a crucial role in the dismantling of apartheid. Its role during the anti-apartheid struggle coupled with the almost universal acceptance of the importance of the role that civil society is supposed to play in the new South Africa: to address the unresolved issues of transformation, reconstruction and development. This link, however, has collapsed, and the question is: 'Why?'

Available international evidence seems to suggest that the concept 'civil society' has been appropriated by capitalist classes and that civic structures like NGOs have been co-opted into the neo-liberal paradigm. In the words of the World Bank vice-president, the bank considers NGOs—there are about 80 000 NGOs in South Africa - as 'important co-workers in a common cause' (MacDonald 1995:33). The capture of civil society by capitalism has resulted in the transformation of civic structures into market structures that stress and promote market values and moralities. NGOs that used to encourage the poor to fight for a just and egalitarian society, now

advocate the merits of market-led strategies for economic recovery and see their role as assuaging the worst suffering caused by economic structural adjustment, in order to ensure social stability (MacDonald 1995:32).

In South Africa, the transformation of civic structures into market structures was preceded by the decimation of NGOs with vast experience. The assault on the civic structures was propelled, on the government side, by their insistence that the democratic state must redress past imbalances and deliver basic services to the poor (Kotze 1998:92). This was done through the channelling of funds and other resources away from NGOs into consultants in the private sector. The majority of NGOs that have survived this onslaught have been converted (reluctantly) into mere market structures that exude market values and moralities unable to deliver on reconstruction and development:

Increasingly, development organisations have also been forced to start charging communities that they have traditionally worked with for their services. This has caused outrage and despair in these communities. A number of CBO people interviewed complained that many NGOs have turned into consultancy firms themselves and no longer have time for development facilitation and implementation. NGOs and CBOs are also increasingly being urged to resort to voluntarism. They are expected to recruit volunteers to work for them, and development programmes are to be implemented by volunteers. In a country with extremes of inequality

between rich and poor as well as high levels of unemployment, such urgings border on the unethical and smack of typically neo-liberal trends. It also brings up the long contentious notion of self-help, first associated with the community development movement of the 1950s. Although this notion was always misrepresented as a kind of empowering process, in reality, it usually amounted to shifting the responsibility of poverty alleviation right back on the poor (Kotze 1998:97).

With the stark reality of the conversion of civic structures into market structures that exude market values and moralities, it is not difficult to understand why young Africans have a don't-care attitude and have lost interest in community structures and politics (*The Independent on Saturday* April 17 1999).

The New South Africa and its Cultural Life

Consumer Materialism: The Inculcation of Individualism, Accumulation and Artificiality

Collective ethos and values underpinned the cultural life that characterised the national liberation struggle. This is reflected in the verbs that defined the virtues of the era: 'serve, suffer, and sacrifice'. There was little room for expression of shallow materialism. However, the advent of the new South Africa has led to the saturation of 'market forces and market moralities' in South Africa. In turn, these market forces have engendered new values: individualism, exclusivity, accumulation and artificiality. This new market culture 'celebrates rootless and ruthless profiteering, eschewing civic connectedness and national sacrifices as old-fashioned virtues' (Adam et al 1997:202).

Members of the liberation aristocracy in particular, and their black middle class fellows in general, are the carriers and transmitters of the market culture. This they achieve through their daily displays of flamboyant lifestyles and luxuries, a behaviour that is characteristic of an undeveloped middle class (Fanon 1963). They ride in 'luxurious sedans' and wear 'faux fur jackets and diamond-encrusted shoes' and display an 'attitude that exudes confidence and ownership' (*Mail and Guardian* April 1-8 1999). They are after 'quality' and 'name' and shop, in places like 'Disiel' where a single purchase costs anything between R700 and R1000. Some of them, like Peter Mokaba the deputy minister of environmental affairs and Tony Nyengeni the chair of the parliamentary committee on defence buy their clothes directly overseas and the latter also works as a promotion agent in one of the expensive and elegant shops in Cape Town. This kind of market co-option, which has created a crisis of value with the black community, confirms Karenga's dictum: 'Ours is a cultural crisis' (Karenga 1993:278).

Inevitably, this new market culture has invaded and conquered the Black Domestic Periphery. It has drastically changed the aspirations and attitudes of the youth. The 1996 study conducted by P. van der Reis for the Bureau for Market Research entitled 'Aspirations, values and other marketing considerations among metropolitan black youth' has been most revealing. In support of the thesis that the 'heroes of the struggle' in particular and their black middle class fellows in general, are carriers and transmitters of the new market culture, Van der Reis (1997:8) writes:

They [the youth] aspire to be like their heroes: educated, successful, prosperous and living in a beautiful home with a spouse and two or at most, three children.

Unlike bygone eras, spare time is reserved for self and mundaneness:

Free time on weekdays is largely home-orientated for the youth and spent studying, watching television, listening to music, or reading books when household chores have been completed. Weekends are largely devoted to watching soccer and to socialising. Going to movies and reading newspapers are popular too (Van der Reis 1997:8).

Like their 'heroes',

metropolitan youth appear to have a generally favourable attitude toward the quality of products in the shops ... which confer status ... their whole shopping environment has expanded, with access to a wider range of products and shops'.

The drive for material acquisition among the masses of ordinary youth, however, is challenged by the disappearance of work and the diminishing of job opportunities, which in turn drives the youth to commit violent crime against members of their own communities. Since status now is largely conferred through material possession, the struggle for meagre resources has intensified in the Black Domestic Periphery, which poses another element to this nihilistic threat I am attempting to articulate.

Consumer Militarism: The New South Africa and the Promotion of Lethal Consumerism

The sociologist Jacklyn Cock defines 'consumer militarism' as the normalisation of, legitimisation and even glorification of war, weaponry, military force and violence

through television, films, books, songs, dances, games, sports and toys. How does a government promote 'consumer militarism?' The most effective way to promote this is through the 'normalisation of the notion that private gun ownership is legitimate, a right, not a privilege' (Cock 1998:131f). This notion is materially reinforced through the institutionalisation of highly armed security forces, which confirms that the gun is the only guarantee of protection. Furthermore, 'consumer militarism' is promoted when access to arms and the ownership of guns are made easier—(as is the case in South Africa), where 'licences are easily available and enforcement is minimal' (Cock 1998:131). No wonder, that at the end of 1996 the sociologist reports that there were 4.1 million South Africans in possession of firearms. In a society where guns are promoted, they become central in 'identity formation', and function 'as [a] marker of status', as a 'signal of particular style' and as a 'signal of affluence'. These factors only propel citizens to look for guns or to be 'in love with guns'.

More importantly though, guns are a symbol of the failure to create a good, just and egalitarian society. In other words, a gun is symbol of the failure of the new South Africa to extend social citizenship to more than half of the population whose life remain miserable. Therefore, the New South African society is not a secure society. Even though illusory, guns provide the only form of security in a climate of insecurity. The dilemma is that most of the legal guns end up in the hands of criminals making armed violence the 'fastest growing form of violence in South Africa' (Cock 1998:125).

The easy access to guns have meant that the poorly policed areas that are in the Black Domestic Periphery are more in danger in 1999 than it was in 1994. Demobilised youth who were either members of MK or SDU's find themselves unemployed and excluded from the new South African dream. The unemployed youth whom this society has excluded is not only denied love and dignity. For identity and dignity, their only hope is to resort to guns. In a struggle for survival, such youth end up terrorising their own communities (which care less for them anyway). Some carry and use guns because of the status it confers. To many members of Soweto crime syndicates, to ostentatiously display firearms, indicate the status of being a 'big man' (Wadrop 1996:8). This creates a climate of absolute insecurity which subjects the township resident to a state of terror. The situation is exacerbated by the inability of the police force to curb this crime which continues to induce defeatism among the ordinary helpless masses. This also forces many members of the black middle class to emigrate to more 'decent neighbourhoods' depriving the townships of remaining stable families. All these factors contribute to plunging the townships into ever deepening poverty without hope of ever-escape. As such, they contribute substantially to nihilism.

Conclusion: Manifestations of Nihilism

The nihilistic threat in the Black Domestic Periphery is manifested in the losing of hope in upward social upliftment through formal and legal means. There are many factors: the legitimisation of the use of violent crime for survival; the loss of faith in collective political activities for social emancipation conditioned by the current crisis of black leadership; the terrorising of black communities; the rise in domestic violence and other vices like depression and alcoholism; the loss of collective ethos that are being replaced by market moralities.

The loss of hope in upward social upliftment through legal means is structurally conditioned by the economy that is not only failing to absorb new entrants to the labour force but continuously retrenches thousands of workers without any hope of finding employment. In many black townships, unemployment is reported to be above 60%, e.g. Alexandra. Informal and illegal means seem to be the only way in which thousands of Africans in the Black Domestic Periphery can survive. The article by Ferial Haffajee which appeared on the *Mail and Guardian* (May 15-21 1998), entitled 'Crime is the only business providing jobs', addresses exactly this point. In the same article, France Khawula is reported to be speaking on behalf of the many when he points out that a number of the unemployed youth 'have all got good matrics' and some have 'exemption in physics and maths' but cannot find jobs. In the same article, another spokesperson for the youth, Thulani Makhubo is reported as saying, 'we end up being tempted by crime' because there are no jobs. Moreover, 'our parents are unemployed'.

The legitimisation of violent crime results in the rise of crime in the black communities and threatens community destruction. For example: On a 'normal' weekend, especially at the end of the month, an average of 9 murders, 19 rapes and 43 robberies take place in Soweto alone (Mokwena 1992:30). It is needless to point out that this violence is fuelled by the disappearance of work and the marketisation of life, propelling a minority to material possession and disenfranchising a majority without any hope of the improvement of the quality of their lives. These factors are leading to the emigration of the members of the black middle class into decent neighbourhoods such as Sandton City. It must be pointed out, that this 'outmigration' is fuelled by the collapse of the group areas act regime. In turn, these factors contribute to the impoverishment of the black communities.

Yet, the most disturbing development is the decline in collective efforts for collective benefits. This is largely caused by the current crisis of black leadership - nationally but also in the Black Domestic Periphery. It is difficult to convince Africans to demonstrate faith in the leadership even through casting a ballot. The collaboration in the creation of the conditions of possibility for this apathy and nihilism, especially if it was created in a period of less than five years, is not excusable. It is the masses of ordinary African youth who bear a disproportionate

brunt of these conditions and therefore of nihilism. The conditions that have given rise to nihilism in Black South Africa must be eradicated. The only alternative is a new black leadership grounded in African culture and capable of removing the defeatist attitude from amongst the Black Periphery. The immediate challenge for true leaders is to convince the masses of ordinary Africans that it is only through collective struggles that they can remake themselves and this society in their best image. As such, they will have to reinforce the social justice tradition which developed during the struggle years, at grassroots level.

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