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Since its introduction into South Africa by the Communist Party during the 1920s, the debate over the "national question" has arguably been the central organizing framework of left-wing political thought. In this excellent collection, *The Unresolved National Question in South Africa: Left Thought under Apartheid*, the editors and contributors seek to reconstruct the way that different sections of the South African Left, broadly understood to include the major currents opposed to apartheid, conceptualized the national question and envisioned its resolution. In the first part of the collection, the essays address four foundational traditions that cohered by the 1940s and 1950s and framed much later debate: Marxist-Leninism, the Congress tradition of the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies, the revolutionary socialism of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), and Pan-Africanism. In the second section, the essays examine developments from the 1960s to the present, including the implementation of the Bantustan policy and the rise of Zulu-ness, the Black Consciousness Movement, feminism, the independent trade union movement, and liberal constitutionalism. Arguing that the issues posed by the national question debate remain unresolved, the editors offer the volume as a contribution to the ongoing discussion over building national unity and democracy in South Africa.

Chapter 1 considers the contribution of the Communist Party of South Africa (later reformed and renamed as the South African Communist Party). Tracing the concept of "colonialism of a special type" from the Comintern to Harold Wolpe's writings of the 1970s, Jeremy Cronin and Alex Mashilo argue that overcoming the legacy of apartheid is not the principal task of the national question. Rather, they stress the way that South Africa's combined and uneven capitalist development is characterized by two colonial relationships: one international and the other internal, based on the exploitation and marginalization of the black majority. In chapter 2, Robert van Niekerk focuses on the little explored, but unquestionably important, tradition of social democratic thinking in the ANC. Luli Callinicos's chapter 3 traces the gradual embrace of an increasingly inclusive concept of nation by Oliver Tambo, a key

historic leader of the ANC. Among other salient points, Callinicos stresses that historians have underplayed the influence of indigenous African culture, particularly its emphasis on inclusion and consensus-based decision-making, on the political style of figures such as Tambo. In chapter 4, Basil Brown, Mallet Pumelele Giyose, Hamilton Petersen, Charles Thomas, and Allan Zinn describe the NEUM's advocation of a single united nation as a revolutionary, anti-capitalist demand in the context of South Africa's racialized economic structures. In one of the volume's most sophisticated contributions, Siphamandla Zondi's chapter 5 argues that the Pan-Africanist approach to the national question begins with the nation-state's origins in imperialism and therefore understands its resolution in terms of a global process of decolonizing the world system. Correctly observing that there existed a strong tradition of Pan-Africanist ideas within the ANC as well as within the Pan-Africanist Congress, Zondi challenges the idea that the South African national question can be resolved in isolation of the economic, cultural, and epistemological emancipation of Africa as a whole.

These essays are each welcome contributions. As overviews, they tend to underplay the deeply contested histories of their respective traditions and bypass key debates (Callinicos is an exception). Where is, for example, the dispute in the NEUM between Isaac Bangani Tabata and Hosea Jaffe on the national question and African languages? Or where is the fight at the first Pan-Africanist Congress over the membership of Indians? As individual pieces, van Niekerk and Callinicos offer significant interventions. However, they only begin to capture the range and wealth of thinking within the ANC. (It is notable that the ANC, unlike its youth league, did not codify an official position on the national question during this period.) In particular, there existed an important idealist current of African nationalism that characterized the philosophy of figures such as Anton Lembede and Albert Luthuli. There was also a significant liberal tradition exemplified by Z. K. Mathews. In the 1950s, leftists in the ANC-led Congress Alliance promoted a form of civic nationalism based on the struggle for common democratic institutions. Perhaps the ANC's most extraordinary achievement was to bring together these and other currents around a shared vision of inclusive African nationalism.

In chapter 6, T. Dunbar Moodie traces the influence of Afrikaner nationalism on the apartheid ideology of separate development, debates over the status of "Afrikaans-speaking Coloured" within Afrikaner culture, and the ongoing tensions between cultural and racialist conceptualizations of Afrikanerdom. Enver Motala and Salim Valley present an overview of radical intellectual Neville Alexander's seminal contribution to analyzing the national question, *One Azania, One Nation* (1979), in chapter 7. Advocating working-class leadership within the anti-apartheid struggle, Alexander insisted on the political task of forging non-racial national unity and therefore challenged normative European ideas of what constituted nationhood. Martin Legassick's chapter 8 outlines the history of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC and its application of Leon Trotsky's idea of permanent revolution (versus the South African Communist Party's two-stage strategy) to South Africa. In his thoughtful chapter 9, Gerhard Maré questions the limitations of the national question as a discourse, based as it is on a particular homogenizing construction, by discussing the continuing power of Zulu ethnic consciousness. Along similar lines, Ari Sitas's chapter 10 explores the themes of parallelism, inflection, and rupture that characterize the relationship between different articulations of Zulu identity and broader conceptualizations of nation. Emphasizing the active, creative, and subaltern dimensions of the "national idea," he concludes that there is no one correct concept of nationhood.

In his ambitious chapter 11, Xolela Mangcu reflects on the Black Consciousness Movement in order to privilege the epistemological question of who speaks for black experience. Invoking the politics of the 2015 student protests, Mangcu underlines the cultural-psychological dimensions of black consciousness as a form of "civic republican ideal" against class-reductionist critiques and a one-sided Enlightenment rationalism that would simply dismiss the power of race. Shireen Hassim's essential chapter 12 traces the way that nationalist and class politics postponed women's liberation to an indefinite future. She concludes that there exists an inherent, constitutive limit to the extent to which nationalism can accommodate the conditions necessary for substantive equality. In chapter 13 (by Alec Erwin) and in chapter 14 (by Sian Byrne, Nicole Ulrich, and Lucien van der Walt), the authors explore the tradition of radical trade union politics known as "workerism" that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Critiquing the depiction of workerism as narrow shop-floor syndicalism, these chapters emphasize the inextricable connection between class and national oppression while arguing that workerism's efforts to develop a working-class politics and culture represented a much more radical challenge to the apartheid order than the nationalism of the mainstream ANC. In the nuanced final chapter 15, Daryl Glaser explores the interaction between the frameworks of the national democratic revolution and liberal constitutionalism in the post-1994 period.

In the end, it is not clear what it would mean to "resolve" the national question in South Africa. In the framework of classical Marxism, such a resolution took the form of independence or perhaps autonomy within a multinational state. As a whole, the South African Left rejected the country's partition. Rather than identifying self-determination with sovereignty, this volume identifies the national question with the historic tasks of achieving unity and democracy. For the most part, the contributors conclude that truly obtaining these goals would require a radical transformation of racialized (and gendered) class structures and the revision of the country's relationship with the global capitalist economy. This argument is highly compelling. Beyond these essential socioeconomic prerequisites, however, the nature of future national unity (as the contributions show) remains highly contested—indeed, its contest is today a central aspect of South African democracy. What form of unity could respect South Africa's sociocultural diversity while recognizing the historical claim of the African majority to economic, social, and cultural redress? Perhaps the great creativity of thinking about nation in South Africa, which is well captured in this volume, reflects the fact that no single or final resolution of the national question is possible. In that case, nationhood might be less a clear moment of arrival than an open-ended and always-contested project.

Issue Section:

Sub-Saharan Africa