

EDITORIAL / REDAKSIONEEL

The Caught in the Maelstrom: Globalization, Nation and Identity

Remember the days of classifications, re-classifications and population groups? In order to jog our collective memories, Pieter Dirk Uys, in his show Truth Omissions recalls the madness of apartheid by reading from a list of the number of people who were racially reclassified not too long ago. 3 coloureds became white, 5 whites became coloured, 6 Indians became white, 4 whites became Indian, 1 Indian became Malay, 7 Coloureds became Black, 30 Blacks became Coloured, 1 Japanese became an "Honourary White," and so on. For a moment the madness of apartheid shimmers in the air and then is dispelled by the laughter of an audience who rightly find it ludicrous that racial identity should be seen as a possession, something one can categorize, re-categorise, place, replace, and even, lose. Under apartheid, racial identity was as certain as cultural, national, and gender identity. Everyone had an identity and a place in the national space even though some identities were better than others (which accounts for the re-classification attempts) and some spaces a lot more congenial than others. But what happens to identity in post-apartheid, post-colonial South Africa, in what Achille Mbembe has described as the "chaotic plurality of the post-colony?" Here all signs of race and culture and even gender are mutable and competing for semantic space.

The problems of negotiating cultural and other identities in a new nation being born amidst the globalization of identities, cultures, languages, images and work forces are central to issues of democracy and the structuring of new social systems capable of responding to new social interests. In South Africa there is the heady excitement of an historical moment of profound transition. In that moment, things become quite clear (apartheid was immoral and idiotic) and also quite opaque. The boundaries have blurred making labels such as inside and outside, home and abroad, third world and first world, global and local, descriptively inadequate. Worse, such labels can serve to disguise ongoing inequities. The old rhetoric of imperialism: "they" are doing it to "us" ignores the fact that some of "us" are doing it to "us" as well. And who, in fact, are the "us"? The boundary between the inside and the outside has dissolved. The barricades have fallen and those who wish to resurrect them do so often as a protection against investigation. The "thing" we are discussing in this issue of *Communicare* – the making of a new culture capable of responding to all – is difficult because the subject is delicate, intricate and unpredictable. South Africa is not alone in this uncertainty. All social institutions everywhere – and the nation is a social institution of the largest kind – are facing these uncertainties, call them, in the words of Anthony Giddens, the consequences of modernity.

One cannot write oneself out of modernity, but one can write one's own version of it. So said Stuart Hall at a recent conference on Identity and Democracy held at the University of Natal, Durban. Part of that writing is the discovery of one's identity or rather, set of identities. For although identity is not fixed (as in the old apartheid system), it is not entirely wandering either. It does devolve upon a set of shared

histories; a set of historical, social, cultural and psychological positionings to which one assents (rather than into which one is categorized).

These themes are interrogated and analyzed in very different contexts in the articles which follow, proving that South Africa is no longer a "world apart" but rather part of the modern world with all its problems and discontents. In their discussion of Indian immigrant communities in Great Britain and the United States, Bishnu Ghosh and Bhaskar Sarkar look at the cinematic representations of "home" and "host" country to see how the nation is re-defined from the outside, from the point of view of exilic communities. They interrogate the automatic postmodern assumption that heterogeneity and freedom from the yoke of nation hold out the potential for a utopianism. Using Raymond Williams's idea that technology is not neutral but is both cause and effect of the social order as a beginning for her paper, Cristina Venegas looks at the appropriation of the Internet and its technologies by Cuba and the way these forms have been positioned within the complex social and political matrix of the socialist state. Moving from cyberspace to the simulacrum, Daniel Herwitz sends out what might be called a signal or warning to South Africa from the USA on the colonization of reality by the media's simulacrum. Rejecting the totalizing view of the simulacrum proffered by Baudrillard, Herwitz argues that reality in the USA has been colonized to produce a set of social types in much the same way as products are produced for consumption in the marketplace. In this way, people market themselves under specific ethnic or gender identities in order to get their place in the sun. Multiculturalism is reduced to nothing more than supermarket of social types all vying for buyers. For Isabel Balseiro, the imagined community of the nation is more of a motley patchwork than one single vision, and not everyone's imagined place finds its mark on the official national map. Journeying from Cape Town to the place of Bessie Head's exile in Botswana, she examines the ways in which the ideal unity of the nation is challenged by the writings and experiences of the exile and the visitor. From this vantage point, the unified nation as in the SABC logo: "SIMUNYE -- WE ARE ONE" exists only in televisual space. In my essay, I sketch some of the current theoretical debates on nation and national identity by a number of theorists; the problem of finding a new set of terms for national identity after the collapse of the colonial narrative; and the special case of integrating women into the national space. Finally the idea of a national cinema capable of representing and responding to the unique circumstances and conditions of the county; a cinema able to be distinguished from, yet at the same time be a part of, global (Hollywood) cinema is interrogated in an interview with Marsha Kinder, whose book, Blood Cinema, used the cinema of Spain as a case study to problematize "the concept of a national cinema, claiming it must be read against the local/global interface which has become increasingly important in the new world order of the 1980s and the 1990s."

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