Anthropologist Mary de Haas, of the University of Natal's African studies department, responds to Prof Hermann Giliomee's assertion in the August issue of *Democracy in Action* that democrats tend to "downplay or ignore the fact that we have a competition among nationalisms in South Africa". Ms De Haas argues that Prof Giliomee oversimplifies, failing to contextualise nationalism and to link it to its material base.

Ethnicity in perspective

HERMANN GILIOMEE'S contribution to the debate about nation-building ("One Nation, many problems", *Democracy in Action* August 1989) raises important issues which certainly do warrant more attention than they are receiving at present. His argument is, however, fundamentally flawed because he does not contextualise nationalism and link it to its material base, a point to which I return at a later stage in the course of discussing another problem I have with his argument, namely his tendency to oversimplify the whole question of nationalism in South Africa today.

For example, he speaks of two nations in South Africa today, a "predominantly white and a predominantly black one". Here one could argue that the "last outpost" ideology of many white Natalians would mitigate against a broadly based, white Afrikaner-influenced nationalism. It is, however, the issue of black nationalism which I wish to explore for, quite apart from black nationalistic movements, the potential exists for competing black ethno-nationalisms to play a part in a future South Africa; these ethno-nationalisms are offspring of colonialism, Nationalist government policy, and the concerted efforts of some bantustan leaders to harness the emotional appeal of nationalism for their own political ends.

I shall treat ethnicity and nationalism as similar phenomena, since both involve emotional appeals to personal identity, and in dealing with both in South Africa today, it is useful to posit a continuum, the "cultural identity" of ethnicity crossing "the ill-defined threshold of nationalism" when it becomes politicised, mobilised and ideologised, a process which has been occurring in many of the bantustans. It must be stressed that there is nothing inherently "black" about such ethno-nationalisms; had whites been economically and politically dispossessed in the manner in which blacks have, a similar fragmentation along linguistic lines could be expected.

The naturalness of ethnic groups in South Africa, which form the building blocks of ethno-nationalism, is part of the taken-for-granted knowledge of most South Africans, whites in particular – socialised as they are into thinking in terms of "group" identity. A brief overview of the historical development of these "groups" will serve to remind us that, real as they now are in some respects, there is nothing immutable about ethnic identities. As elsewhere on the continent the emergence of ethnic identities is a relatively recent phenomenon.

When one looks at the African farming communities which the whites encountered and colonised in the 19th century, there was a high degree of uniformity insofar as culture (in the sense of shared norms, values, beliefs, etc.) and customs were concerned. Prior to the creation of ethnic groups as we know them today, personal identity was probably based primarily on clan membership and territory. Political flux was, in most instances, the order of the day, and old settlements were abandoned, ancient chiefdoms disappeared; new groups came

Let us also work to lose our obsession with the supposed 'differentness' which has occupied us for so long.

into being and in turn dissolved. Even the Zulu kingdom which was being forged during the 19th century (and which, for the major part of its existence, was situated north of the Tugela) was marked by social and cultural heterogeneity, the clans which formed this political federation varying in the degree of their allegiance to the king. As elsewhere on the continent, the 19th century saw, as a result of processes set in motion by colonialism, the creation of "tribes", based either on existing territorial groupings, or completely new groupings under new chiefs, formed to establish some sort of claim to land.

Early this century these "tribes" were classified by anthropologists, then preoccupied with taxonomy, into four major groupings, their classification being based primarily on linguistic grounds, viz Nguni, Sotho-Tswana, Tsonga and Venda. It was these essentially anthropological categories which, after the Nationalist government set in motion its "homeland" policy – policy which was reinforced at an ideological level by its untenable "ethnos" theory – were converted into de jure if not de facto political groupings.

What the anthropologist observes today is that black persons speaking different languages continue to share a broadly similar "traditional" (ie perceived as stemming from the past) culture. Whilst differences in this "traditional" culture and custom do exist between different linguistic groups (as they do, for example, between Afrikaner, Portuguese or Jewish white South Africans) such differences are present not only between, but also *within* linguistic groupings, differences in cultural norms and customs occurring from one region to another (eg Natal and Zululand). Furthermore, these linguistic groupings are cross-cut by factors such as differential education, wealth, occupational status, religious worldview and values, factors which are of *far more significance* in daily life than are differences based on "traditional" culture; these significant differences not only cause deep divisions within black (African) society, but also create important cross-cutting ties between black and white.

At the same time, the type of economic and political processes which have occurred have played a crucial role in promoting the development of ethnic identities. The means by which these identities have been formed vary, and include the labelling by outsiders (eg reference books, and constantly referring to people as Zulus, Xhosas etc) and the skillful use of symbols, myths and "tradition" (often recently created) in promoting an identity supposedly based on shared "culture". Of crucial importance has been the link between ethnic identity and access to scarce resources such as housing and jobs. Within this material context it is the emotional appeal of ethnicity, with its implications for personal identity, which has facilitated its manipulation by persons Crawford Young has termed "cultural entrepreneurs", who stand to gain politically and/or economically from its promotion (and this type of manipulation is obviously by no means unique to South Africa).

I must, however, emphasise that this emotional appeal does not operate in a vacuum, but must be viewed in the broader political and economic context; the emotional appeal of ethnicity or nationalism is activated by circumstances, "affect" and "circumstances" being in a state of complex interaction. Thus, asserting, as Prof Giliomee does, that "people . . . are moved more by the emotional power of nationalism rather than by materialist considerations" does not do justice to the complex relationship between the two, and the *situational* and fluid nature of ethnicity and

nationalism. An understanding of these phenomena is not possible unless the specific material conditions in which they come to the fore are taken into consideration. Studies of ethnic conflict, such as that which took place in Zaire in the 1960s, or the sort of nationalism which gave rise to secession attempts such as that of Biafra, confirm the complex interplay between circumstances/ context on the one hand, and affect/ emotional appeal on the other.

HEREIN lies the challenge to constitution makers and policy formulators: because of the pervasiveness of racial and ethnic awareness in our society, which has resulted from our political and economic system, they are both factors which must be taken into account in planning for the future – *not* through building them into the constitution, as some advocate, but through ensuring, insofar as is possible, that political and economic power are not devolved along racial or ethnic lines. Here, for example, one needs to look carefully at the question of devolving power along regional lines, for experience elsewhere suggests that federal political structures are more likely to promote the sort of ethnic nationalism which is potentially divisive than are centralised states.

Here there is a great deal of comparative material, and we are in a position to learn lessons from what has happened elsewhere in the world, including in Africa. Why, for example, do manifestations of ethnicity or nationalism occur only in certain countries and not others? Why, for example, in Uganda and not Tanzania, both of which are ethnically diverse? Why do they come to the fore at one time and not at another (as, for example, in Zaire)?

The building of a broadly based South African nationalism necessitates change at the closely interrelated levels of material base and ideas. Political and economic change, giving all their rightful stake in the country's resources, is essential and, as this process proceeds, there is no reason why the task of building a nation at an ideational level should not be pursued.

The challenge of dealing with racial and ethnic divisiveness should not rest solely with constitutional planners, but should start amongst all sectors of the population right now. Divided as we have been for so long, the sort of bridge-building undertaken by Idasa, and similar endeavours, are essential exercises.

Another, small, step in the process of nation-building involves the unlearning of those pervasive tendencies to think and talk in ethnic and racial terms – a process hopefully facilitated by bridge-building endeavours – and to see fellow South Africans as first and foremost human beings rather than whites, blacks, Zulus, Sothos etc. As we work towards giving all their rightful economic and political stake, let us also work to lose our obsession with the supposed "differentness" which has preoccupied us for far too long, and focus on those many commonalities which unite us all as South Africans.

Unique, comprehensive

By Anthoni van Nieuwkerk

RACE RELATIONS SURVEY 1988/89: SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS, JOHANNESBURG, 1989: 817 PAGES INCLUDING INDEX, R60.

"IF YOU ask a black South African what apartheid has done, he will say it has caused nothing but grief.... If we do not get rid of it, it will crucify us all." – Minister of Law and Order, Mr Adriaan Vlok, July 1989

The research staff of the SAIRR must once again be congratulated on an exceptionally well-researched and comprehensive publication. The survey, published annually since 1936, has pioneered research into the impact of discriminatory legislation on every aspect of South African life.

For many years the survey had little to do but report the enactment of one discriminatory law after another. However, as institute director John Kane-Berman noted in the preface, in more recent years the institute has been able to report the repeal of quite a number of these laws.

A brief perusal of the contents pages confirms the uniqueness of the publication. Although other similar services are available, the survey is the only one systematically monitoring the impact of apartheid right across our society. The survey should therefore be of value to a wide range of researchers and academics. The publication covers an impressive range of topics, including politics, the economy, health and welfare, housing and education, and religion. In addition, a useful overview of some 23 pages puts the detailed contents into an overall perspective.

Apart from being an indispensable source of data, the survey makes for fascinating, if morbid reading. Much of the contents tend to dampen any heady expectations of coming peace and prosperity one might have developed in recent times. Consider, for example, the sections on the financial crisis experienced by the "independent" homelands.

The growing public debts of these four homelands, alleged misuse of public funds and corruption which received much attention lately, are covered in depth by the survey. One reads that the four homelands have run up a total long-term joint public debt of R5 billion. In addition the four have short-term loans of R1,5 billion.

A commentator quoted by the survey attributed this largely to financial mismanagement, and said that a dubious code of ethics had been adopted by elements of the private sector, which had "set out to enjoy the easy pickings afforded" in these homelands. It is furthermore revealed that expenditure increasingly outstripped revenue during the 1980s and budget deficits amounted to 48 percent of revenue by 1986/87, compared to 7,5 percent in 1980/81. In 1986/87 overdrawn accounts amounted to R910 million, and banks refused to give any further loans. Apart from economic underdevelopment and poor management, problems were created by expenditure on prestige projects and "uhuru-hoppers" who had earned millions from inexperienced governments by stimulating interest in major but totally impractical or unnecessary projects.

Of late, South Africans have on numerous occasions been told that apartheid, the "albatross around the country's neck", is to be dismantled as a matter of urgency. Although the contents of the survey partly bears witness to this, it is an eye-opener to read that during 1987 the Department of Development Aid (an Orwellian term) had moved 1 828 African families within South Africa, and the Department of Development Planning (another one!) had resettled a further 47 617 people. It is clear that one of the ugly faces of apartheid, namely forced removals, is still around. In fact, according to statements made in Parliament in September 1988, the government planned to move more than 248 000 blacks in 60 communities throughout South Africa between 1988 and 1995 – at a total cost of over R450 million. The survey gives detailed information on the communities and settlements to be relocated.

THE SURVEY also deals extensively with the crisis in housing and education. The following selective statistics reflect the extent of the crisis in education. Per capita expenditure of the state during 1987/88 on pupils of different race groups are given as R595 for blacks, R1 507 for coloureds, R2 014 for Indians and R2 722 for whites. Estimated pupil/teacher ratios for 1988 are given as 41 to 1 for blacks, as against 16 to 1 for whites. The pupil/teacher ratio for primary schools in the Transkei in 1987 was 62 to 1. School shortages, examination results and teachers' qualifications (or the lack thereof) are also put under the spotlight.

For political observers the section entitled "Political Organisations" should be of special interest. Apart from discussing some 28 political organisations, the main ones – the African National Congress, Mass Democratic Movement, National Party, Pan Africanist Congress and to a lesser extent the trade union federations and religious organisations – are given particular attention. Importantly, these organisations' positions on the question of negotiations are included. For instance, the ANC document outlining guidelines for negotiations in South Africa and adopted by the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) in August 1989, is reproduced in full.

A careful reading of the survey clearly illustrates the trend away from apartheid. Even so, one is struck by the extent to which apartheid has succeeded in creating problems and a degree of polarisation that now seem almost insurmountable. The survey is essential reading, even if it is only to define more clearly the obstacles South Africans face on the road to a non-racial, democratic future.

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