The singularity of the post-apartheid black condition

Abstract

Informed by Césaire's awareness on the singularity of the black situation as well as Biko's sense of the consequence of black-conscious solidarity for overcoming white racism, I present some notes concerning social cohesion. I counsel against social cohesion without socio-economic justice. I would like us to consider how we might radically rework what I see as the sentiment urging the discourse of social cohesion into socially-just solidarity in relation to the peculiarity of the black condition. I argue that even if social cohesion is considered a preeminent social ideal, it remains an empty signifier if not preceded by policies and programmes to overcome persisting socio-economic inequalities, especially because of the history and contemporary facts of colonial, apartheid and neo-apartheid injustices. I contend that projects intended to foster cohesion might do best if they are prefigured by a radical politics of socio-economic justice. In turn, a politics of social justice needs grounding in an understanding of our unique situatedness as a historically and currently unjust society.

Introduction

In his letter of resignation addressed to Maurice Thorez, the general secretary of the French Communist Party, in which he terminates his membership of the Party, Aimé Césaire (2010/1956: 147) illuminates the problematic nature of initiating any social, political, cultural, or economic project without considering "the singularity of our 'situation in the world' which cannot be confused with any other. The singularity of our problems, which cannot be reduced to any other problem. The singularity of our history, constructed out of terrible misfortunes that belong to no one else. The singularity of our culture, which we wish to live in a way that is more and more real".

Kopano Ratele

Institute for Social & Health Sciences, University of South Africa

& Medical Research Council-University of South Africa's Violence, Injury and Peace Research Unit

Kopano.Ratele@mrc.ac.za

Keywords

What fuelled Césaire's grievance against and resignation from the French Communist Party's seems to have been the Party's reluctance to denounce Stalin's crimes. It was, however, what he had to say about the "colonial question", his situatedness as "a man of colour" while being a communist with which we shall concern ourselves as we search to develop a critical, African-centred psychology perspective in a post-colonial society.

In his conference paper "White racism and black consciousness", initially published in **Student perspectives on South Africa**, edited by van der Merwe and Welsh in 1972, and upon his murder by the apartheid regime collected in the famous collection **I write what I like**, Steve Biko relays this idea of the "peculiarity" of the black condition, of the absolute consequence of black-conscious solidarity, for overcoming white racism: "At about the same time Césaire said this there was emerging in South Africa a group of angry young black men who were beginning to 'grasp the notion of (their) peculiar uniqueness' and who were eager to define who they were and what (Biko, 2004/1978: 72-73)".

Following Césaire's problematisation of the assimilation of black singularity into communism, Biko had realised that white racist structures demanded black solidarity. Both were exercised by the peculiar position of blackness, one in the folds of French communism, the other under South African liberal student politics. The one was writing from the context of colonialism and the Caribbean, the other was mobilising against apartheid. The peculiarity of blackness is then, without contradiction, elementary and polygonal. The problems faced by blacks are local and universal. In the context of this paper the peculiarity of post-apartheid black condition is seen as principally defined by the fact that South Africa is a historically colonised, multiracial, multicultural country with significant socio-economic inequalities wherein blacks run the government and whites run the economy. Against this backcloth I propose to use this space to present some notes concerning social cohesion. Specifically, I wish to counsel against the discourse on social cohesion without addressing socio-economic injustice. The conditions under which the majority of black people exist and struggle to make meaning of their present condition as emancipated subjects persuades us to reject social cohesion as a just strategy towards radical black liberation. As such, I would like us to consider how we might radically rework what I see as the sentiment urging the discourse of social cohesion into socially-just solidarity in relation to the peculiarity of the black condition in neo-apartheid South Africa. In other words, I wish to pose questions as to how what circulates as social cohesion sits on the terrain of ongoing struggles against social, political, cultural and economic injustice, specifically environmentally-degrading, capitalist, white, heterosexist and patriarchal injustice. Above all, then, this essay contends that any project intended to make South Africa a cohesive society has to be informed by a nourishing, critical, and African-centred understanding of the singularity of post-apartheid black condition.

In trying to critically understand and go beyond social cohesion projects initiated by the state (e.g., Department of Education: Republic of South Africa, 2008; Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation: Republic of South Africa, 2014) we are confronted by at least three intertwined problems. First, there appears to be lack of clear agreed-upon definition about the meaning social cohesion in a peculiar, historically colonised, multicultural country in which blacks as a group run the government yet whites as a group run the economy. There is even less consensus how to achieve a cohesive society given these facts. Second, where there is an attempt to rigorously conceptualise social cohesion, it tends to be viewed as dependent on or associated with overcoming socio-economic "inequalities, exclusions and disparities" (Department of Arts and Culture: Republic of South Africa, nd: 1). Third, whilst there are some definitions of social cohesion which include within themselves the objective of social justice, the relationship is not always clear how they are related.

Whilst the problem of clear definition is a serious issue on its own as it hinders any potential progress to reach what will be regarded a satisfactory level of a cohesive society, the problem of the relation between cohesion and socio-economic justice begs a crucial question. That question is, if a cohesive society depends on the elimination of these problems should overcoming inequalities, exclusions and disparities not be the primary goal towards realising an egalitarian society? Is it not suspicious that the government is not pursuing strategies that would radically reverse the historical and contemporary socio-economic injustices? And so, even if social cohesion were considered a pre-eminent social ideal, it remains an empty signifier if not preceded by policies and programmes to overcome persisting socio-economic inequalities, especially because of the history and contemporary facts of colonial, apartheid and neo-apartheid injustices. In short, what is argued here is that given that socio-economic justice is more likely to lead, but does not necessarily flow from, social cohesion, it appears that projects intended to foster what is understood as a cohesive society might work, if at all, if they are prefigured by a beautiful radical black politics of socio-economic justice. In turn, a politics and psychology of socio-economic justice cannot but be grounded in an understanding of, as each of Césaire's and Biko were to realise for their own conditions, the unique situatedness of the majority of black people in history.

I would like also to contribute towards making sense of the politics and psychologies of and for "a group of angry young black men (women)", as Biko (2004/1978, 72) wrote, and what they might have imagined to be "the envisaged self" (74) in a free society. The concern with the anger of young black men and women resounds in the current excitement, or depending on how one views it, the crisis, generated by a group of young black university students who, at the time of writing these notes (in

early 2015), are trying to imagine how to be free in a space that privileges ecologically destructive, capitalist, white heteropatriarchal (il)liberal supremacist values as they occupied Bremner House at the University of Cape Town. The students' 'occupy movement' rallied around the immediate objective of bringing down the statue of the colonial capitalist patriarch Cecil John Rhodes which occupied a place of pride on the University's grounds. The statue eventually came down, but the capitalist white heterosexist patriarchal values prevail. So, how might a decolonised, gender-critical, non-exploitative, sexually-liberated, black-centred self and society develop and thrive in such a context, and what does such a project have to do with social cohesion?

Why social cohesion?

Why do we need social cohesion? Why social cohesion now? Under the present social conditions and times of, to take one example, food insecurity, to pursue strategies for social cohesion is to support the well-fed over the hungry.

Consider for the moment what a taxi driver, a former teacher, in Ethiopia might say when told that her country's gross domestic product (GDP) is high – in the words of then president of the African Development Bank Donald Kaberuka: "Well, I don't eat GDP" (Blas, 2014; Anderson, 2015). Like GDP, social cohesion very possibly ranks very low in the daily reality of many poor people in countries as diverse as Ethiopia, South Africa, and others of our continent. The reference to lack of food is advisedly chosen precisely because hunger does not always figure in mainstream psychology on group cohesion or in policy discussion on social cohesion. That is, whereas social inequality and poverty do receive some attention in mainstream psychology and policy-making, to draw attention to hunger in the face of world that can but elects not to feed everyone concretises the problem of a discourse of social cohesion without overcoming socioeconomic in justice.

This does not mean economic growth and the things the idea of social cohesion is supposed to address are trivial issues. Countries need a healthy economy, of course. Society benefits when they are less overtly violent – where interpersonal violence is one of the social problems that cohesiveness is intended to preclude. However, it is common cause that a high GDP does not automatically translate to decent jobs or reduction of economic inequality. There are societies where the homicide count is high, but since homicide tends to be typically concentrated among young, black, poor men, these are still considered cohesive. There are societies characterised by gender and sexual discrimination and still be thought as integrated. There are societies marked by racial inequality and yet they are regarded as good. In short, it depends on how social cohesion is defined, why governments might want to pursue social cohesion projects, and what sort of projects would these be.

Instead of social cohesion, it is contended that an anti-capitalist, green, gender-critical, and sexually-liberated solidarity that recognises the singularity of post-apartheid blackness is what South Africa needs today as much as it did when Césaire wrote from the Caribbean and Biko wrote on South Africa. Recognition of an oppressed blackness in a free black-led republic is, I posit, the first condition for mutually respectful inter-racial, cross-gender, cross-class, and multicultural cohesion. It seems that the peculiarity of a capitalist, and/or racialised, and/or patriarchal, and/or cultural hegemony in a supposedly free society with a black majority is indicative of the need for better tools, for a critical, black-conscious psychology better suited for our absurd state.

All this is not to negate the potential favourable consequences of social cohesion, of a united working society. Social psychology, among other disciplines, has long demonstrated the benefits of cohesive groups for their members (e.g., Tajfel, 1982; Brewer, 1999). Yet it is probable that for those who exist on the margins of divided societies, social cohesion is precisely the least exigent among a set of given options. Consider that former teacher when confronted with choosing between food security or social cohesion. (To those who would answer that it is not a question of either/or, I say those without an abundance of choices are always forced to choose: a new school or pedestrian bridge; housing, a new hospital, or feeding scheme). In our country, as a case in point, food insecurity is a real problem for at least the 13 million people who daily go hungry. Reports such as those by South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey from the Human Sciences Research Council's attest to the fact that a significant percentage of South Africans are at risk of hunger (over 28%) or experience hunger (26%) (Shisana et al, 2013). There have been improvements, according to Statistics South Africa, but in 2013 the percentage of households with inadequate or severely inadequate access to food was approximately 23% (Statistics South Africa, 2014). South Africa is said to be a "food-secure" nation, meaning its produces adequate food calories to feed all of its people. However, as Oxfam has reported, the daily reality is that "today, more than half of all South Africans are either facing hunger or are at risk of going hungry. If they obtain food that is sufficient in quantity to assuage their hunger, it does not supply the essential elements that make it nutritious, and it may not even be safe" (Tsegay, Rusare & Mistry, 2014: 32).

Even though cohesiveness can be generally positive for individual members of a cohesive society as it can reduce violence, the most serious weakness about privileging social cohesion without a focus on socio-economic structures that reproduce inequality, in a post-colonial society with a poor black majority, is that violence gets to be conceived in a very restricted sense. Food insecurity, to persist with the example, is usually not thought as violence by the well-fed ruling political and economic classes Food is a political issue, an economic concern, a social problem – that is, not simply a private matter.

Food can be used as weapon to render the poor complaint. When the poor become conscious that others have more food than they need and can waste it, as one among several instantiations of socio-economic poverty and inequality, hunger can be used as a rally point to rage against social cohesion projects that do not address historical and contemporary material-discursive injustice.

Critical psychology needs to encourage a suspicion as to why there is a foregrounding of social cohesion as a potential remedy of new and ongoing socio-economic problems. Rather than getting side by the privileging of social cohesion critical psychologists might want to work with other progressive groups on issues of food, shelter, quality public education, health system, and well-paying jobs, and always social justice, before turning to social cohesion. Instead of being harangued about the lack of social cohesion, black and poor people require a well-run and corruption-free state. Contrary to lectures about the need for a united nation, those on the margins of society can do with and efficient and reliable public transport system and safe neighbourhoods. It is precisely these issues that generate a sense of social instability. The intensifying contradictions between the major social groupings in post-apartheid South Africa, and the failure of the state to adequately plan for and address them, may have made the ideal of social cohesion attractive. The country is beset with often violent protests against the lack of, poor or mismanaged basic services. Xenophobic violence, in which black South Africans aggress against blacks from other African countries and their property, is a recurrent problem. All this suggests that the government did not anticipate the deepening and novel contradictions that plague society. Social cohesion is supposed to address these problems. However, perhaps social is the worst mechanism to do so. What, then, lies beyond social cohesion?

What's beyond social cohesion?

The concept of social, community, or group cohesion has been extensively discussed within psychology, sociology and other academic disciplines (e.g, Pahl, 1991; Hogg, 1992; Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997). It also enjoys currency in formal politics, policymaking circles, community and social spaces, and media platforms (e.g, Jenson, 1998; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs - Economic and Social Council, nd; The Presidency: Republic of South Africa, 2010). While it is not my aim to go over the debates on social cohesion, I should point out that there is wide disagreement and on-going debates about the definition and meanings of the concept (Friedkin, 2004). Notwithstanding, some agreement exists that it is a multi-dimensional concept. The proliferation of indicators makes it difficult to know what domains to look at when measuring and initiating policies concerning social cohesion. Due to current intense political, community-based and policy discussions around the world because of national worries around, for example, migration and the arrival of new groups on the

shores of Europe, but also in countries like South Africa because of longstanding issues around intergroup discrimination and more recent issue of xenophobia, I am particularly interested with state-driven projects and policymaking addressing social cohesion.

The OECD Development Centre calls "a society 'cohesive' if it works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and the marginalisation of people, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust and offers the opportunity for upward social mobility to all its members". Social cohesion is viewed as characterised by three different but overlapping domains, namely: "social inclusion, which is measured by various shortfalls in meeting societal standards (perceived or real); social capital, which combines measures of trust (interpersonal and societal) with various forms of civic engagement; social mobility, which measures the degree to which people believe or are capable of changing their position in their society" (Brillaud and Jütting, 2011: 4).

The United Nations' (UN) Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (no date, no pagination) offers the following working definition of social cohesion: "A socially cohesive society is one where all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy. Such societies are not necessarily demographically homogenous. Rather, by respecting diversity, they harness the potential residing in their societal diversity (in terms of ideas, opinions, skills, etc.). Therefore, they are less prone to slip into destructive patterns of tension and conflict when different interests collide".

The Scanlon Foundation surveys, which focus on social cohesion in Australia, also include measure of legitimacy in assessing social cohesion. In addition, its definition mentions social justice. The survey defines a cohesive society as one characterised by "(i) belonging (meaning shared values, identification with Australia, trust); (ii) social justice and equity (indicated by evaluations of national policies); (iii) participation (referring to voluntary work, political and cooperative involvement); (iv) acceptance and rejection, legitimacy (meaning experience of discrimination, attitudes towards minorities and newcomers); and (v) worth (referring to life satisfaction and happiness, future expectations)" (Markus, 2014: 13).

Locally, the Department of Arts and Culture (no date): "defines social cohesion as the degree of social integration and inclusion in communities and society at large, and the extent to which mutual solidarity finds expression among individuals and communities (1)." It goes on to explain that "in terms of this definition, a community or society is cohesive to the extent that the inequalities, exclusions and disparities based on ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, age, disability or any other distinctions which engender divisions distrust and conflict are reduced and/or eliminated in a planned and sustained

manner. This, with community members and citizens as active participants, working together for the attainment of shared goals, designed and agreed upon to improve the living conditions for all" (1).

It is interesting and hard to explain why a government department in a country that was defined by apartheid and the struggle against racial discrimination omits race among the distinctions that engender social distrust and conflict. On the positive side, this definition underlines mutual solidarity between communities, not only individuals. The Presidency in South Africa sees social cohesion as: "a useful prism through which we can gain insight into how South Africa functions, whether well or not, at the level of society's primary institutions, networks, organisations and communities, such as families, the state, and the economy" (The Presidency: Republic of South Africa, 2010: vii).

Social cohesion is seen as primarily about people's inclusion in social relations as well as their membership in the various institutions and formations. Social cohesion is said to be "a relational reality that is grounded in the human connections, exchanges and networks of participation, solidarity, cooperation, dialogue and partnership that make social institutions function" (The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2010: vii-viii). Interestingly, the Presidency also observes that social cohesion is more than simple inclusion but instead linked to social capital and social justice. Whereas social cohesion is taken to mean "the extent to which a society is coherent, united and functional, providing an environment within which its citizens can flourish," social capital is seen as referring "to the assets accumulated through various social networks and relationships, based on trust, which enable people to work together to achieve common goals". Social justice is viewed in turn as "the extension of principles, enshrined in our Constitution, of human dignity, equity, and freedom to participate in all of the political, socio-economic and cultural spheres of society" (The Presidency, Republic of South Africa 2010: i). Could you have a cohesive society where trust runs along where some groups have more assets than others, or where some groups' freedom to fully participate in socio-economic sphere is more restricted than other groups'? If no, is the fundamental problem not one concerning social cohesion but addressing question social justice?

What is left vague (by what is a promising document) in considering why there might be a need or not for putting money on social cohesion is the question of what ought to take precedence between social cohesion, social capital and social justice. Thus, beyond underlying the value of inclusion, mutual solidarity, and connectedness, as well as an acknowledgement of the links between cohesion, social capital and social justice, what is unclear is the plan as to how, for example, blacks might be brought together with whites, the poor with the rich, women and men, those who would exploit the environment for super-profits and those who espouse sustainable and green

economies. That is the crux of the problem: how, as an example, to create solidarity between black women as a group and white men as a group, given the glaring inequalities between the two parties. Is this even possible? Related to this, something else of particular relevance from the Presidency is the observation that "colonialism, apartheid, patriarchy and capitalism have all contributed to the erosion of social cohesion, the destruction of social capital and to conditions of social injustice" (2010: viii). And yet there is little about how the Presidency will go about challenge capitalism and patriarchy.

The above definitions of social cohesion point to several key factors. There is a common view that a society is cohesive if its people feel included in socio-economic development projects, enjoy mutual trust as well as being engaged in civic life, and individuals perceive the possibility of moving up the socio-economic ladder. In the light of this, which is a view expressed by the OECD Development Centre, we might infer that social disintegration, intergroup antipathy, and high levels of violence could be the result of people experiencing or perceiving themselves as socially excluded, lacking trust in social institutions and with reduced bonds to others, and socially immobile. What the working definitions from UN's DESA and ECOSOC as well as the Scanlon Foundation surveys adds to this view three crucial dimensions: a sense of recognition, worth, and legitimacy. The first two are significant insofar as they directly address identification and self-esteem issue. The third raises the question of whether or not the structures and uses of power are perceived to be legitimate and equitable. Thus, we ought to ask whether the current socio-economic structure is just or not, given the persisting historical structural violence against black people in which land was stolen, communities displaced, the majority disenfranchised, and families fractured. The answer is no.

In so far as they define the peculiarity of the black South African condition, while at the same time grinding down black ingroup pride, solidarity, and the attractiveness of black groups and institutions, I turn to call attention to colonial, apartheid, and neo-apartheid informed white patriarchal structures and values. Of course, these anti-black structures and values intersect with homophobic, environmentally-destructive, capitalist institutions and ideologies. Instead of going along with the reheated "rainbow discourse" of intergroup cohesion, I propose that we realise the right of building and maintaining social justice-informed cultural institutions that nourish values, traditions, preferences and tastes of those who identify with such institutions. South Africa desperately needs beautiful, critical, black cultural institutions. But so that this contention is not mistaken for something it is not, a good place to start the argument for building beautiful critical black institutions to address the peculiarity of an abject post-apartheid blackness is to begin by arguing for the right of white-identified people to associate with other white-identified people around white values.

The right to associate around white values

In South Africa, white-identified people – whom I shall refer to mostly simply as whites – have a natural right to associate with other similarly-identified people. They are entitled to enjoy white stuff – which means pursuits, places, and other phenomena of cultural interest to white people. They are free to build and maintain what in effect may be whites-only institutions, meaning institutions created to serve the values, traditions, preferences and tastes of those who identify with whiteness as a culture.

Even after this caveat, I suspect that to argue for the right of whites to build institutions that advance their cultural interests in a society that experienced a history of racist discrimination might be viewed as an objectionable idea. Even after stating that white-identified people include people of darker skin, it may sound suspicious in a country still dealing with the effects of colonialism and apartheid. However, there are instructive lessons, perhaps unintended, in whites-only or white dominated institutions – for reviving the feeling of 'black as beautiful' – and perhaps in that way reimagining other ways to achieve that liberated black self and a just society.

The context for these contentions is that in the last twenty years of freedom the country has witnessed a number of highly intriguing legal cases and high profile news reports that touch on the issue of the right to exist of *de facto* white institutions, such as schools. The instinctive reaction by some people has tended to be outright rejection. We have to appreciate the history of the sentiment and reasoning around the potential racist exclusionism of white institutions. However, there is a different way to think about the issue. It has been a mistake to mechanically denounce white institutions.

In racist societies, race and culture become intertwined. Therefore, it makes sense to talk of racialised culture, in this immediate case white culture. Given that institutions that serve a predominantly black or blacks-only constituency, such as historically and still black universities, township schools, churches, and sports teams, are not seen as racist, culturally white institutions cannot be thought to be jingoistic *per se*. An illuminating question critical psychologists might ask is whether it is possible and desirable to create something like a church, trade union, sports team, or school that predominantly caters for people who are white, even though the main aim of the institution is to advance the cultural interests of the group, say, Afrikaners, Jews, or Greeks. The answer is yes. Principally, this is because of the persistence of spatial segregation, which grounds class, and racial difference. The point to keep in mind is that the aim of the institution should not be a cover for racist discrimination, for this is quite feasible, though prohibited by the constitution (see Republic of South Africa, 1996). Anybody who identifies with those cultural interests would be welcome. And the same principal should apply to people who racially identify as black: if they wish

to build a university that advances the best of their culture as Zulus or Vendas, the constitution allows them to do so.

Institutions that to all intents and purposes are white exist already. The fact that there are many institutions that are white in itself is of course not justification for segregation. However, the realisation that despite our admirable constitution the solution to the problem of exclusion has been narrow and legalistic is a good reason to re-examine the purposes and endurance of self-segregation in the country. Is it not odd to want to solve questions of (racialised) cultural belonging by going to court so as force an ingroup to include members of the outgroup? There is something, therefore, in the desire of whites to create and maintain institutions that service "whiteness" as a racialised culture that critical African-centred psychologists might wish to openly consider and perhaps support. While deeply conscious that the everyday ideology of capitalist white heteropatriarchal supremacist structures can and does exclude, marginalise, and victimise "others", there is something illuminating in studying how such structures build institutions, networks, bodies to entrench discursive hegemony.

The right to rally around the peculiarity of being black in post-apartheid society

Black-identified people – whom I shall refer to simply as blacks – have a natural right to associate with other black-identified people and create black-centred institutions. They are entitled to enjoy pursuits, places, and other phenomena of interest to their culture as blacks. They are free to build and maintain what in effect may be blacks-only institutions (which indeed exist already), by which it is meant institutions created to serve the values, traditions, preferences and tastes of those who identify with the culture.

Again though, even after these qualifications, to argue for the right of blacks to establish and maintain institutions that advance their interests might be viewed as racist and exclusivist. Once again, it needs pointing out that black institutions for black-identified people do not have to exclude people of lighter skin colour.

An objection can be raised that white institutions cannot avoid being exclusionary and even supremacist. The corollary is that blacks ought to avoid associating on the basis of black-identified culture because an identification may perpetuate racism.

There are three problems with the objection. First, in the face of global racism and violence against black bodies, the restoration of black-centred pride, worth, sense of belonging, beauty, and ingroup solidarity cannot be equated with racism. Since, "the problem of blackness" is generated by white colonial and racist ideologies, and even

though whites have a right to associate around whiteness, black solidarity and white solidarity cannot be viewed from the same vantage point.

Second, although there may be a case that there could be attitudes that support the ideology of white supremacy within white-identified cultural institutions, the constitution prohibits unfair discrimination. The same applies to black cultural institutions. The authors of the constitution warned that the right to one's culture may not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with the founding vision to establish a society based on human dignity, equality, non-racialism, non-sexism, democratic values, social justice, fundamental human rights, openness, and the desire to improve the quality of life of and free the potential of each person (see Republic of South Africa, 1996). Each of these constitutional ideals and values – and of particular interest in light of the example of food, the concept of human dignity, as well as equality and of course socio-economic justice – precede any project of social cohesion.

Third, and most crucial of all, is the point by Césaire (and then Biko) with which we started. What Césaire was in fact raising is a problem that survives to this day, in South Africa as in many other parts of the world, where blacks are a cultural, economic or political minority: that is to say, where as black people do you begin radical projects of liberation (or, if you wish, social cohesion)? Do you foreground blackness or centralise communism, for instance? This tension, whether to be black and to be communist, which extends to other political positions (such being black and being liberal, or being black and being a critical psychologist) endures and troubles the present South African condition. Actually, it is a tension that interrupts other multi-racial countries, including those under black political leadership. In a word, an affirmative yet critical awareness of blackness brings to realisation that social justice cannot be thought without challenging the global and local hegemony of white men.

Attentiveness to the peculiar circumstances of black people in South Africa – a peculiarity which, it has been said, is defined by the fact that it is a historically colonised, multiracial and multicultural democracy where much of the economy is controlled by white men and the national government is led mostly by black women and men – facilitates an appreciation why it is unwise to pursue social cohesion without seriously considering socio-economic injustice and the position of the majority of blacks. It could be contended that blacks may have gotten confused by the very moment over two decades ago when they got political enfranchisement. This confusion may have been reinforced by some of their leaders, because they may not have imagined otherwise, who ended up misreading the arrival of multiracial democracy with the need to include blacks into white-centred institutions and discourses of

democracy from which they had been excluded. And yet the black conscious "group of angry young black men" had warned of the idea of white-black liberal integration (which is another way of achieving social cohesion) (Biko, 2004/1978). It turns out that the kind of society we yearn for, institutions we would like to have, education system for which we wish for black students, the energy infrastructure, health ecology, transport framework, spaces of leisure and play – a society that privileges social justice, and solidarity based on social justice – still needs to be realised. It turns out that current social and psychological forces make it attractive for black people to choose white patriarchal capitalist values, in other words, to assimilate, rather than (re)build black conviviality. More consideration needs to be given to the dominance of white cultural values in contemporary society.

No black-centred solidarity, no social cohesion

In leading towards the conclusion, it is my contention that the privileging of social cohesion without seriously addressing problems of historical and contemporary socio-economic injustice first and more strongly, will not stem the erosion of black ingroup solidarity and high levels of violence. It may be that black political, cultural and business leaders may have thought freedom from racial oppression will by itself translate into economic, cultural and psychological liberation from the hegemony of white racist patriarchy. I have in mind here the kinds of work for black ingroup cohesion that was done by the churches. You do not have to be a believer to realise that the churches, even if god is dead, have contributed to holding together black groups in times of great social distress. Therefore, I call for building new nourishing critical African-centred institutions and supporting those that served blacks when their cultures were under assault from white patriarchal racist capitalism. A critical African-centred psychology has a key role in this work. The pre-eminent role of critical African-centred psychologists is to lead us in the search for tools better suited for our incongruous post-apartheid reality. As far as projects on social cohesion are concerned, a role for critical African-centred psychologists is to find for us and develop alternatives beyond the dominant discourse on social cohesion.

I propose that blacks, especially the black poor, the black gender-nonconformists and the black female-bodied subjects and the black women, have to build and enhance institutions where black people can advance their culture and other institutions in which we learn and raise families and reproduce society. They have to begin not by focussing on social cohesion. They begin by building radically just and progressive technological, social, political and economic infrastructure within black neighbourhoods, increasing quality mass mobility, designing affordable places where people live. In a word, they begin by rebuilding a socially just and beautiful diverse black cultural life.

Conclusion

To better grasp the intractability of the oft-violent farce that permeates black lives we might need to relearn to appreciate the unique fact of the South African situation, specifically the abject conditions of poor, black, queer, female-bodied subjects. To more fully understand the conditions under which the poor, blacks, queers, and female-bodied subjects make sense of their lives and learn to be free, we must not confuse the model of oppression, marginalisation, and inequality under which they become human again with some other model of subjugation. The poor, the blacks, the queer, and the female-bodied subjects are still struggling to rid themselves of the effects of that singular South African experience of oppression and inequality under colonialism and apartheid. They – no, we – we do not need social cohesion as much as we simply and ultimately need to build a new society in which each of us can and is enabled to flourish. That society begins with an attempt to fully understand the singularity of the black condition in post-apartheid South Africa.

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