Journal of Southern African Studies

ISSN: 0305-7070 (Print) 1465-3893 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjss20

Friends and Family: Social Cohesion in South Africa

Ivor Chipkin & Bongani Ngqulunga

To cite this article: Ivor Chipkin & Bongani Ngqulunga (2008) Friends and Family: Social Cohesion in South Africa, Journal of Southern African Studies, 34:1, 61-76, DOI: 10.1080/03057070701832882

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070701832882

Published online: 20 Feb 2008.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 1183

View related articles

Citing articles: 5 View citing articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=cjss20

Journal of Southern African Studies, Volume 34, Number 1, March 2008

Friends and Family: Social Cohesion in South Africa

IVOR CHIPKIN
(University of the Witwatersrand and Human Sciences Research Council)
BONGANI NGQULUNGA
(Brown University)

This article considers the notion of social cohesion and reviews the degree to which South Africa after apartheid coheres as a society. We consider social cohesion as an affective bond between citizens. Therefore our assessment must do more than review the political interests, alliances, ideology and discourses that give stability to the public domain. It also examines those institutions and relations that function chiefly on the basis of affect: friendships, relationships and the family. In this context, 'social capital' theory has significant appeal, despite its problems, by examining social cohesion in relation to the performance of state institutions. It suggests that a crisis in the social fabric will be felt, not so much in the political arena, but more broadly in the field of development. Employing this idea, we argue that the key measure of social cohesion in South Africa is the function of state bodies, rather than the stability of the political arena.

Introduction

In 1991 Immanuel Wallerstein famously asked, 'Does India Exist?'.[1] His purpose was to raise certain epistemological problems for the social sciences. If the name 'India' refers to a particular society, then the question might mean 'is there an Indian society?'. This is the question we pose here, although in the South African context. If South Africa refers to a particular society, then does it exist? This article considers the notion of *social cohesion* and reviews the degree to which post-apartheid South Africa coheres as a society. We proceed on the basis of the following hypothesis: social cohesion refers to a situation where citizens of the state share feelings of solidarity with their compatriots, and act on the basis of these feelings.

Once we consider social cohesion in this way, as an affective bond (feelings of solidarity) between citizens, then discussing its state in contemporary South Africa involves more than reviewing the political interests, alliances, ideology and discourses that configure the public domain. What matters, in addition, are those institutions and relations that function chiefly on the basis of affect, namely friendship, relationships and the family. Methodologically, such relations are difficult to handle from the perspective of social contract theory and/or theory that approaches social formations in terms of interests and alliances. This has been the appeal of 'social capital' theory in recent years. It has given the social sciences a vocabulary with which to speak about precisely these things ('relationships', 'trust' and 'reciprocity'). For all its weaknesses – social capital theory is often vague about the meaning and measure of its

---

[1] I. Wallerstein, 'Does India Exist?', in *The Essential Wallerstein* (New York, The New Press, 1998), pp. 310–14.

ISSN 0305-7070 print; 1465-3893 online/08/010061-16

© 2008 The Editorial Board of the *Journal of Southern African Studies* DOI: 10.1080/03057070701832882

key concepts – it asks us to think of social cohesion in relation to the *performance of state institutions*. What it suggests is that a crisis in the social fabric will be felt, not so much in the political arena, but in the field of development broadly speaking: the delivery of services, housing and infrastructure. This is a valuable intuition.

Even though this article does not employ the vocabulary and terms of social capital theory, it draws on this idea. In other words, it argues that the key measure of social cohesion in South Africa is the function of state bodies, rather than the stability of the political arena.

Before continuing, it is worth making explicit the limits of this article. Scholarship on the South African social fabric is both scanty and often anecdotal. Usually it is based on extrapolations from the national census. This reflects the little importance attributed to questions of social cohesion amongst scholars, politicians and policy makers. As a result, and perhaps this is our single most important conclusion, the state of the social fabric requires further research and needs to be integrated into thinking about a host of government programmes including service delivery, development, welfare and policing.

The Meaning of 'Social Cohesion'

Amongst political philosophers, there has been renewed interest in what Montesquieu called *vertu* – the substantive commonality between people in a democratic state. For example, Charles Taylor, the Canadian philosopher, has revived this term in his defence of patriotism. '[Democratic] participation', he writes, 'requires not only a commitment to the democratic project, but also a special sense of bonding among the people'.[2] '[F]ree societies, relying as they must on the spontaneous support of their members, need the strong sense of allegiance that Montesquieu called *vertu*'.[3] At stake is the basis of social cohesion as a condition of democratic government. The argument goes that we can expect citizens to consent to institutions that redistribute resources on the basis of need (raise taxes, for example and/or deliver services, provide welfare), only 'if they regard themselves as bound to the beneficiaries by strong ties of community'.[4] Alternatively, in a democratic society where decision-making happens through a deliberative process, trust (social capital) is required between citizens so that they might be willing to moderate their demands in order to reach agreements. Stated abstractly, we might say that democratic societies presuppose the existence of affective ties among their citizens. The argument goes that:

- In a democracy, individual and social interests must be co-ordinated so that some actors do not systematically and unfairly prevent others from pursuing their interests;
- Co-ordinated strategic action requires institutional rules that structure the incentives for action in a way that makes them mutually compatible;
- Sanctions imposed by an institution are insufficient to fully explain compliance with its rules.[5]

In order that diverse and often conflicting interests are harmonised, there needs to be rules according to which social actors agree to behave. Yet obedience to these rules requires more than the threat of punishment. When do citizens obey rules on their own accord? This question is the topic of extensive writing and is generally approached in terms of the notions of 'ideology', 'discourse' and/or 'hegemony'. The affective conditions of social cohesion are sometimes obscured by these notions.[6] One might be prepared to delay the realisation of one's needs for the benefit of another if one feels a sense of solidarity or empathy for them. If we say that the effective functioning of democratic institutions requires a shared affective relation between citizens, then it is important to understand the conditions of such a relation.

---

[2] C. Taylor, 'Why Democracy Needs Patriotism', in *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism* (Joshua Cohen, ed.) (Boston, Beacon Press, 1996), pp. 119–21.

[3] *Ibid*., pp. 119–21.

[4] D. Miller, 'In What Sense Must Socialism be Communitarian?', *Social Philosophy & Policy*, 6, 2 (1989), p. 59.

[5] A. Abizadeh, 'Does Liberal Democracy Presuppose a Cultural Nation? Four Arguments', *American Political Science Review*, 96, 3 (2002), p. 496.

Until recently, the dominant argument has been that solidarity among citizens presupposed a common national culture. Historically, at least since the American and French revolutions of the eighteenth century, democracy was deemed to lodge in nations.[7] The argument goes that motivating and unifying the polity's citizens requires a common ethnicity, be it of race or language. At least, the argument continues, they must share a common language as a condition of democratic deliberation. Without it, they would not be able to communicate with each other and have access to the same forums for debate.[8]

Yet, the current scepticism about the possibility of social cohesion in diverse societies is not always an alibi for racism. David Miller, for example, argues that democracy and social justice presuppose national cultures in which mutual trust stems from shared identity.[9] Miller is not a traditional conservative. His project was to understand the appropriate political unit in which socialism might be established. At the time of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, he wrote that 'nations are the only possible form in which overall community can be realised in modern societies [. . .] Without a common national identity, there is *nothing to hold citizens together*' (emphasis added).[10] Socialism had failed in the Soviet Union, he seemed to imply, because it had tried to establish itself on an imperial scale in a cosmopolitan society.

---

[6] At least since the rise of social contract theory, the question of friendship, as it related to the integrity of the polis, has been on the backburner. Aristotle devoted two books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to love and Plato approached it in the *Symposium.* There are the dialogues of Cicero and Aelred and Seneca's letters of advice. Thomas Aquinas approached the question of love and charity in his *Summa Theologiae*, and Montaigne wrote an essay entitled *Of Friendship.* In the nineteenth century, Emerson reflected on friendship as did Søren Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*. Then there was nothing for almost a hundred years, until Freud. More recently, but not before the 1970s, the topic has again attracted attention, especially in relation to a renewed interest in Ethics. See, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (translated by T. Irwin), (Cambridge and Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1999). See also the collection of essays on friendship by Kant *et al.* in *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship* (M. Pakaluk, ed.) (Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1991). See, for example, N. Badhwar, 'Friends as Ends in Themselves', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 48 (1987); K-C. Chong, 'Egoism, Desires, Friendship', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 21 (1984); J. Derrida, 'The Politics of Friendship' (translated by Gabriel Motzkin), *Journal of Philosophy*, 85 (1988). See also Alan Badiou's polemical critique of this development in *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (translated by Peter Hallward) (London and New York, Verso, 2002).

[7] See J. Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays* (M. Pensky, translator and editor), (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2001). See also L. Greenfeld, *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA & London, Harvard University Press, 1992). For already 150 years before the civil wars in England, suggests Greenfeld, sovereignty was deemed to lodge in nation-states, power and authority thought to derive from the nation-people. By the eighteenth century, this view was axiomatic for as diverse a group as Johan Gottfied Herder, John Stuart Mill and the French revolutionaries. The Committee of Public Safety, for example, opposed the cosmopolitan character of monarchical society, precisely on these grounds. 'The monarchy', it pronounced in 1794, 'had good reason to resemble the Tower of Babel [. . .] In a free society language must be the same for one and all'. Herder addressed a similar criticism to the Prussia of Frederick the Great: '[. . .] nothing was more manifestly contrary to the purposes of political government than the unnatural enlargement of states, the wild mixing of different human species and nations under one scepter'. Mill too was sceptical of the prospects of democratic government in anything less than the nation: 'Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities [because] the boundaries of governments should coincide in the main with those of nationalities'.

[8] B. Barry, cited in Abizadeh, 'Does Liberal Democracy Presuppose a Cultural Nation*?*', p. 502.

[9] D. Miller, 'The Left, the Nation-State, and European Citizenship', *Dissent* (1998), p. 49.

[10] D. Miller, *Market, State and Community: Theoretical Foundations of Market Socialism* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 245.

More recently, and most famously, liberals such as Jürgen Habermas have sought to unsettle this brand of cultural nationalism. They argue that the conditions of social cohesion amongst citizens need not be a common culture or history (much less a shared ethnicity), but a ‘constitutional patriotism’ through which citizens identify with democratic institutions and/or their values. Ingram summarises it as such: ‘The idea of a post-national identity is of a political identity founded on a recognition of democratic values and human rights as these are contextualized in a particular constitutional tradition’.[11] We might wonder, however, if Habermas’ substitute for national culture – postnational patriotism – satisfies the condition of social cohesion. Does a constitutional tradition provide an object of attachment strong enough to create sentimental solidarities amongst citizens? ‘The charge’, suggests Abizadeh, ‘is that [Habermasian] liberalism does not place enough emphasis on the affective bases of democratic politics required to motivate adequately the democratic citizenry’.[12]

Habermas’s post-national patriotism is especially instructive in the South African situation. The South African constitution recognises eleven official languages and outlaws unfair discrimination on the basis of race, culture, gender and/or sexuality. In other words, it refuses that the unity of the South African people be achieved or even pursued on the basis of any particular culture or language. It seems consistent with the idea, sometimes enunciated by the Constitutional Court, that what unites South Africans is nothing less than the supreme law itself. In short, social cohesion in South Africa is to be achieved on the basis of a common attachment to the ethical principles of the constitution. The South African nation, we might say, is that people are united, not by any racial or cultural trait, or even an attachment to a particular geography, but by a shared commitment to the principles of diversity, equality and justice.

If a shared moral consciousness, instead of language or culture, is supposed to be the basis of social cohesion in South Africa, is it not subject to the same scepticism as that of Habermas above? Are the values enshrined in the constitution a sufficiently strong object of attachment to form the basis of solidarity between South Africans? Scepticism about the likelihood of founding social cohesion on anything other than cultural/linguistic homogeneity is what informs growing cynicism about multiculturalism in the United States and/or cosmopolitanism in Europe.

What matters in the rejection of cosmopolitanism is the revival of an older term: cultural *homogeneity* as the condition of democracy. In this regard, it is not surprising that the ghost of Carl Schmidt has returned to haunt the academic scene.[13] Schmitt rejected liberal democracy precisely because he believed that the project of social diversity and political pluralism was a non-starter. More and more, the conditions of solidarity and social cohesion are regarded as those of a single national culture.

In this vein, several commentators have either observed a weakening of social cohesion in certain European settings or attributed state failure to its absence in the African context. Dominique Schnapper, for example, argues that opposition to redistributive measures in Italy is less about political beliefs or ideologies *per se* (politics) than it is because ‘national solidarity is no longer founded on a common political project, stemming from a common political culture’.[14] What is required, she argues, is a ‘process by which the individual, born in a particular society, internalizes its exigencies, acquires its common values and adopts its norms of behaviour by which the collectivity maintains itself’.[15] In other words, welfare measures are increasingly contested because sentiments of solidarity and community in Italy are fraying. Closer to home, Edward Miguel, argues that corruption, political instability, poor institutional performance and slow economic growth in Africa are symptoms of 'ethnically diverse societies'.[16] Comparing the provision of public goods in Kenya and in Tanzania, for example, he argues that the 'Tanzanian nation-building approach [. . .] allowed ethnically diverse communities in rural Tanzania to achieve considerable success in fund-raising for local public goods, while diverse communities in the nearby Kenyan region typically fail[ed]'.[17] Hence, he concludes that 'serious nation-building reforms can successfully bridge social divisions and affect important economic outcomes, like public goods provision'.[18] We note similar observations in Brazil, where despite appearances of racial equality, blackness continues to be a major obstacle to political access and to the delivery of social and economic goods.[19]

---

[11] A. Ingram, cited in Abizadeh, ‘Does Liberal Democracy Presuppose a Cultural Nation?’, p. 496.

[12] Abizadeh, ‘Does Liberal Democracy Presuppose a Cultural Nation?’, p. 496.

[13] See, for example, Chantal Mouffe’s engagement with Schmitt in *The Democratic Paradox* (London and New York, Verso, 2000).

[14] D. Schnapper, *La communauté des citoyens: Sur l’idée moderne de nation* (Paris, Gallimard, 1994), p. 40.

[15] *Ibid*., p. 40.

The arguments above certainly have worrying implications – suggesting, as they do, that social diversity is or might be a hindrance to development. We do not want to endorse such sentiments. What is important, however, about what they say is the principle they affirm: that there is a definite connection between the state of the social fabric and the performance of public institutions, service delivery and democratisation. In this sense, social cohesion is a proxy measure for the state of governance. It is far more likely that government is effective, transparent and democratic when social cohesion between citizens is high.

The State of Social Cohesion in South Africa

Given the importance of *affective* relations among citizens to the constitution of the political community and the functioning of public institutions, what is the state of social solidarity in South Africa? Given the character of apartheid and the terms that informed analysis of and resistance to it, the most dramatic feature of post-apartheid South Africa is that the major sites of conflict in South Africa are not chiefly along lines of race and class.[20] This is not to say that racism and exploitation are not sites of tension and contradiction in the country. It does mean, however, that, so far, they are *not* the privileged domains of social antagonism.

This is no doubt the 'miraculous' quality that many commentators ascribe to contemporary South Africa. Reflecting on the state of reconciliation, James Gibson, for example, concluded in 2004 that '[f]rom the point of view of a society that formally abandoned apartheid less than a decade ago – a society in which civil war was a very real possibility in the not-too-distant past – *the levels of racial reconciliation discovered in this survey are remarkable*' (my emphasis).[21] Gibson can barely disguise his disbelief: 'Few observers of South African politics', he marvels, 'would have anticipated the findings reported here'.[22] We might share his incredulity in the light of a recent HSRC survey of social and political attitudes. 'Public attitudes in a number of areas', report John Daniel, Roger Southall and Sarah Dippenaar,

---

[16] E. Miguel, 'Tribe or Nation? Nation Building and Public Goods in Kenya versus Tanzania', *World Politics*, 56 (2004), p. 327.

[17] Miguel, 'Tribe or Nation?', p. 328.

[18] *Ibid*., p. 328

[19] A. Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[20] Readers will be familiar with the radical historiography that revolutionised South African studies from the 1970s. What is less well recorded is that this scholarship reflected an academic literature 'catching-up' with the terms and concepts that were already prevalent in ANC and Communist Party circles – in particular, the theory of National Democratic Revolution. At least since 1964, with the publication of the *Road to South African Freedom*, and officially from 1969, the Morogoro Conference in Tanzania, apartheid was analysed as a form of capitalist society: a 'colonialism of a special kind'. If today, academic studies appeal less and less to the categories of Marxism-Leninism, this is not true in government and alliance circles. Indeed, the three major appraisals of the post-apartheid condition – the *State and Social Transformation* of 1996, the *State, Property Relations and Transformation* and most recently, the discussion document of the Central Committee of the SACP of May 2006 – all approach this question as a review of the National Democratic Revolution. What this means is that with rare, though important exceptions, a gulf has emerged between the concerns and vocabulary of university academics and the world of government and policy makers.

> seem unreconstructed, and ten years of democracy seem to have done little to moderate what can be described as hard-line authoritarian attitudes [. . .] South Africans still come across as deeply conservative – racist, sexist, xenophobic and hypocritical in terms of sexual beliefs and practices.[23]

Nonetheless, contrary to what we might expect from the cultural nationalists, there have been no major political dislocations on the basis of race, culture and/or language in the democratic period. In the Western Cape there were isolated incidents of what came to resemble an Islamic attack on the values and institutions of a secular Republic. Even less noteworthy was an attempted white right-wing revolt that ended in fiasco and the arrest of all conspirators.

No less amazed are those for whom the South African transition represents a pragmatic compromise if not a 'revolution aborted'.[24] Martin Legassick, for example, is disappointed by the restraint of the South African working-class in the face of 'counter-revolution' – an ANC government committed to neoliberal structural reform rather than participatory democracy.[25] One does not have to share Legassick's political views to agree that the government's socio-economic achievements are, at best, uneven. 'Black professionals and entrepreneurs', writes Adam Habib, 'have particularly benefited, but poor and marginalised people are really struggling'.[26] Habib quotes the latest statistics to paint a picture of deepening poverty in South Africa since 1994: a 'poverty rate' that has reached 48 per cent, an unemployment rate that stood at 41.6 per cent in 2003, the findings of the Taylor Commission for the Department of Welfare that found ten per cent of African people malnourished and 25 per cent of newly-born African children stunted, and so on[27] What this suggests is that economic growth in South Africa has been achieved, not simply through 'sound' economic policies and management, but because the poor, including the working-class, have shown temperance in the face of deteriorating standards of living. In this regard, the 'fragile stability'[28] of the Tripartite Alliance may be typical of wider processes in South Africa. Despite strains among the African National Congress, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party, solidarities on the basis of political history and race still trump allegiances strictly on the basis of class or socio-economic position.

---

[21] J.L. Gibson, *Overcoming Apartheid. Can Truth Reconcile a Divided Nation?* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2004), p. 167.

[22] Gibson, *Overcoming Apartheid*, p. 167.

[23] J. Daniel, R. Southall and S. Dippenaar, 'Issues of Democracy and Governance', in U. Pillay, B. Roberts and S. Rule (eds), *South African Social Attitudes: Changing Times, Diverse Voices* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2006), p. 20.

[24] This is an expression that Martin Legassick uses to describe the current situation in South Africa. See, 'Armed Struggle in South Africa: Consequences of a Strategy Debate', in H. Melber (ed.), *Limits to Liberation in Southern Africa* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2003).

[25] Legassick, 'Armed Struggle in South Africa', p. 172.

[26] A. Habib, 'The Politics of Economic Policy-Making: Substantive Uncertainty, Political Leverage and Human Development', in P. Jones and K. Stokke (eds), *Democratising Development: The Politics of Socio-Economic Rights in South Africa* (Leiden and Boston, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2005), p. 41.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 42. Similar data are contained in S. Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa 1652–2002* (Durban, University of Natal Press, and Sandton, KMM Review Press, 2002).

[28] This is a term used by Jo Beall, Stephen Gelb and Shireen Hassim in the title of the special issue of the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 31, 4 (2005) to refer to the contradictory character of South Africa's transition from apartheid.

The relative lack of overt racial and class antagonisms *qua* political antagonisms in South Africa has frequently been invoked to explain the integrity, though not necessarily the effectiveness, of political and economic institutions in the post-apartheid period. Some argue, in this regard, that the 'ANC in government has had some success in building the nation in such a way as to obscure these socio-economic faultlines and has thus achieved "stability"'.[29] Michael Macdonald makes a similar argument about contemporary South Africa.[30] In the face of growing inequality and poverty in South Africa, appeals to race serve to reinforce solidarities between black people that increasingly find themselves in different classes.

The extent to which racial and class signifiers do not designate positions *outside* and in *opposition* to the South African state can be gauged by a brief assessment of electoral politics in the country. Simply put, no particular group is systematically excluding itself from elections as a sign of exit from the political community. 'Despite the dire warning of "voter apathy" and electoral disengagement,' wrote Michael Sachs after the 2004 national election, '2004 witnessed another demonstration of the extent to which democratic citizenship is valued in South Africa'.[31] He was referring to the 76.73 per cent of registered voters who exercised their right to vote on the day. While this figure was slightly less than at the first democratic election in 1994, it is impressive by any standards. This suggests that identification with the political community in South Africa is high, even amongst a white population that has lost its exclusive hold on political power.

This is borne out by several surveys interested in questions of identity. According to the Presidency's Macro-social Report, since 2000 there has been a marked drop in the number of South Africans defining themselves in terms of racial or linguistic/ethnic criteria. Instead, by the latest count, more than half of respondents described themselves as 'South African' and a further 17 per cent identified themselves 'African' when asked 'how would you describe yourself?' Significantly, 80 per cent of whites and nearly that percentage of coloureds and Indians responded 'South African' to that same question.[32] 'African' respondents were the least likely to identify with being South African. Only 45 per cent preferred this appellation, a further 22 per cent preferring to identify with the continent as a whole. It is significant that more than a fifth of African respondents identified, not with the national community, but with a linguistic or ethnic group. Yet, these seem to be distinctions without much political import. The overwhelming majority of Africans in South Africa supported the major nationalist movement in South Africa, the African National Congress, in elections. They forsook political parties that appealed either to Pan-Africanism or to regional and/or ethnic solidarities. This suggests that the designation 'African' has more of a historical resonance than a political one.

It is important to add that xenophobic attacks on non-South African citizens, especially those from other African countries, are not infrequent. Social cohesion on the basis of a Pan-African identity is weak in South Africa. Even if many South Africans identify with the continent, hostile *behaviour* towards foreigners is the true measure of Pan-African solidarity in South Africa.

---

[29] D. James, A.X. Ngonini and G. M. Nkadimeng, '(Re)constituting Class?: Owners, Tenants and the Politics of Land Reform in Mpumalanga', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 31, 4 (December 2005), p. 826.

[30] M. Macdonald, *Why Race Matters* (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006).

[31] M. Sachs, 'Voting Patterns in the 1999 and 2004 elections compared', *Election Synopsis*, 1, 4 (2004), p. 8.

[32] This may reflect a complementary process. In the first place, a long-history of Afrikaner nationalism that rallied behind a South African identity in response to an imperial consciousness that was seemingly ambivalent towards the country. Secondly, a 'South African' identity today lends whites some ideological defence against Affirmative Action and other like interventions: 'It is not me that is holding on to a white identity. It is the government that is casting me in racial terms. I am a South African.'

Considered together, these trends suggest that cohesion at the level of the political community is high. In other words, even if there is fierce competition, dislike and mutual distrust between political parties in South Africa and between different social groups, there is nonetheless an overwhelming sense today that differences should be resolved through non-violent deliberation in parliamentary forums. Even in KwaZulu-Natal, political rivalry between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC) seldom now takes the form of armed conflict. There is commitment, at least in principle, that political cohesion should refer to national cohesion. This is certainly a far cry from the state of the political environment during the early 1990s. Then, the very project of a unitary South African state was violently contested.

This is not the place to explain these phenomena, other than to note two things. In the first place, they attest to the importance of institutions. The democratic period would almost certainly have seen greater industrial action if the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) were not in alliance with the African National Congress. It remains to be seen how growing tensions in the tripartite alliance will affect future labour relations on the shop floor. There are signs that Cosatu-affiliated unions are currently more inclined to industrial action than at any other time since 1994. Similarly, counter-revolution in the form of a white right-wing backlash was mostly avoided by the skilful inclusion of conservative political groupings in the final settlement. Indeed, today, organisations like the *Vryheidsfront* play an active role in the parliamentary life of the Republic. In the same way, there is peace in KwaZulu-Natal because a truce exists between the IFP and the ANC.

In the second place, the relatively peaceful state of race and industrial relations is less the product of a 'miracle' than a 'fragile stability' in the political arena. The vulnerability of these unities has sparked current interest in the potential consequences of their dissolution. Jo Beall, Stephen Gelb and Shireen Hassim ask precisely this question in a recent essay in this journal. What would happen, they wonder, if the 'tenuous equilibrium' in South Africa changed? 'Two possible alternatives can be imagined', they argue. '[E]ither a crisis of the state leading to its collapse and social disintegration, or a "high-level" equilibrium reflecting higher levels of welfare, improved equity and inclusion, and stronger state linkages'.[33]

We might wonder if these are the only scenarios. The problem with them is that they neglect a domain of South African society that is already in crisis. If a tenuous equilibrium exists in the public domain, it is in the area of *affective* relations that South African society is frequently at its limit.

(1) Friends very quickly become enemies, places of conviviality (bars, shebeens) are regular sites of bloodshed.
(2) The family is a site of profound contradiction: on the one hand it is a place of ferocious gender violence; on the other hand, it is today the key institution through which attempts are being made to moderate the effects of growing unemployment and poverty.

This speaks to a crisis, not so much in the political arena, but in the social fabric. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that this has become a major concern for the Presidency. In August 2006 it released *A Nation in the Making*,[34] a review of social trends in South Africa, paying especial attention to 'social cohesion'. We will see shortly why disintegration in this domain might have very worrying consequences for South Africa's current development path.

---

[33] Beall *et al.*, 'Fragile Stability: State and Society in Democratic South Africa', p. 698.

[34] South African Government, *A Nation in the Making: A Discussion Document on Macro-Social Trends in South Africa* (Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Services, Social Sector, The Presidency, 2006).

Friends and Family

If we lower our gaze from the political arena to consider the state of social relations in South Africa, then the country looks more fragile than stable. Yet here again the evidence is surprising. Despite the racial character of apartheid society, crime does not seem to obey any racial logic. Nor does it have overt cultural or linguistic patterns. In other words, contrary to what we might expect from South Africa's particular history or from the new cultural sociology discussed earlier, South African society, when seen from the perspective of criminality, is not faulting on racial, cultural or linguistic grounds.

The fault-lines in South African society are in the family and between friends.

Recent statistics from the South African Police Services and other sources, including the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), suggest that the state of crime in South Africa is more nuanced than some reports would have it.[35] For instance, the Presidency's Macro-social Report (2005) shows that while reported crimes in South Africa increased steadily from 1996/7 onwards, they stabilised from 2000/01 and decreased by 5 per cent between 2002/03 and 2003/04. Similarly, property crimes decreased between 1998/99 and 2003/04. Nonetheless, it is worrying that contact crimes and theft have been increasing from 1994/95 – they declined only marginally in 2003/04. The picture is particularly bleak for violent crimes. The South African Crime Quarterly published by ISS reports that violent crimes are 'extraordinarily high' in South Africa. For the 12-month period of 2003/04 alone, the police recorded approximately 20,000 murders, 53,000 rapes, 107,000 aggravated robberies and 266,000 serious assaults.[36]

The Presidency's Macro-social Report observes that the majority of these contact crimes occur in socio-economically depressed areas where there are high levels of unemployment, a proliferation of liquor outlets, an absence of basic community amenities, poor infrastructure and town planning and high levels of recidivism. The first startling result is that more than 80 per cent of these crimes occur between people who know each other. They also tend to occur mostly during the festive season and on weekends. They generally happen near liquor stores, shebeens and clubs. The peak hours for homicide are between 8pm and 11pm. They are most common on a Saturday and occur most frequently during the month of December. Conviviality, it seems, has become a bloody pastime.

What does this tell us about the state of South African society? First, violent crime seems to be concentrated in poor neighbourhoods, and affects women in particular. Indeed, statistics on property crimes (which should presumably affect relatively well-off citizens) suggest that they have declined over time. If criminality is symptomatic of a lack of social cohesion, these statistics suggest that the battleground in the fight for social cohesion in South Africa might be in poor communities, where there is a prevalence of contact crimes such as murder and rape. Secondly, it begs a question: *has friendship become dangerously unfriendly?*

If friends are the biggest enemies, woman friends are most at risk. While noting the severe underreporting of rape cases, Du Plessis and Louw record that, in 2003/2004, there were 114 recorded rapes per 100,000 people in the country. It suggests that the family and/or spaces of intimacy are neither places of solace nor safety. A Medical Research Council study found in 2004, for example, that one out of every two women in South Africa is killed by an intimate partner.[37] Their findings are supported by those of Dunkle *et al.*, who suggest that the

---

[35] A. Altbeker, 'Puzzling Statistics: Is South Africa Really the World's Crime Capital?', *SA Crime Quarterly* (11 March 2005), p. 8.

[36] A. du Plessis and A. Louw, 'The Tide is Turning: The 2003/04 SAPS Crime Statistics in *SA*', *SA Crime Quarterly* (12 June 2005). Available at: http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/CrimeQ/No.12/duPlessis.htm. This same report suggests that crime generally is on the decrease, though this has not yet caught up with public perceptions.

[37] S. Mathews *et al.*, '"Every Six Hours a Woman is Killed by Her Intimate Partner": A National Study of Female Homicide in South Africa', *MRC Policy Brief*, 5 (June 2004), p. 2.

'experience of intimate partner violence was prevalent and included financial (13.7%), emotional (67.5%), physical (50.4%) and sexual (20.1%) abuse'.[38]

There is one important respect in which these findings are surprising. They suggest that social cohesion is weaker amongst poor friends and between men and women than it is between historically white and black South Africans. How do we account for this phenomenon?

Masculinity

Associated with the grave state of gender relations in South Africa, there has been a growing interest in the way that South African men are socialised as 'men'. These studies work with the notion of 'masculinity' to suggest that how men come to understand their social and family roles *as men* is fashioned in the context of class, race and age. At stake, they suggest, is a crisis of South African masculinity.

In the most important of these studies, *Changing Men in Southern Africa*,[39] several authors draw an explicit relationship between crime and 'culturally projected ideals of masculinity'.[40] Being a 'comrade' in the 1980s was not simply a political vocation or calling, suggests Xaba, for example, but was intimately related to the acquisition of esteem, status and power. When these same 'comrades', after having sacrificed 'education for liberation', were unable to find employment in the post-1994 economy, many took to violent crime. Here, crime and rape are symptomatic of efforts to re-establish the status and power that went with being an activist in the 1980s and that today comes more and more with having the marks of a consumer-rich urban lifestyle. Such a perspective allows us to consider right-wing activism in South Africa as the other side of the coin of crime and rape. The loss of white privilege, suggests Sandra Swart, has seen the Afrikaner lower middle class face economic competition from other 'ethnic' groups and classes. Job losses and precarious economic positions make white Afrikaans men socially vulnerable; that is, unable to reproduce their positions of authority and wealth in Afrikaner society. As crime becomes another way for some to recreate their status as 'big men', right-wing politics promises classes of Afrikaners a chance to reproduce the symbolic and material capital they held during the apartheid period.

What this suggests is that violence against women, and perhaps even between friends, might be related to a crisis of patriarchal expectations of masculinity. In the face of unemployment, poverty and/or low incomes, are South African men unable to realise their roles as 'heads of the household' or as 'providers'? Is this driving them to violence and abuse? Is this compounded by the growing confidence of women in South Africa to assert themselves in all domains of life – increasingly bolstered by a legal system ready, even if unevenly, to support them as women; as well as a Presidency keenly interested in gender equity in political and economic life?

Yet the particular character of post-apartheid violence in South Africa – it is not, in the main, political, it is perpetrated chiefly against women and it is committed by intimate partners, relatives or friends – points to a crisis in more than male identities. It suggests that the family in South Africa is under strain.

---

[38] K. Dunkle *et al.*, *Gender-based Violence and HIV Infection among Pregnant Women in Soweto: A Technical Report to the Australian Agency for International Development* (AusAID, June 2003), p. 2.

[39] R. Morrell (ed.), *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press and London and New York, Zed Books, 2001).

[40] Xaba, in *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, p. 107.

The State of Households and Families

Since the 1970s, there has been growing concern, especially in medical and psychological circles, that all was not well in the South African family. Originally this worry was sparked by the discovery of high levels of child abuse and wife battery in white households. In 1974, for example, the South African Paediatric Association dedicated its annual conference to the problem of child abuse. This was followed by various events during the 1970s and 1980s on the same topic. Awareness that the South African family generally was a site of multiple breakdowns culminated in the establishment in 1986 of the Child Protection Units of the South African Police (SAP), later the South African Police Service (SAPS). By 1996, Eddie Harvey wrote that in South Africa '[t]he family is the basic unit of society; the family is the cradle of violence'.[41]

In the 1990s, while acknowledging the scale of the problem, and its potential consequences for the rest of society, scholars nonetheless worried that 'theoretical and empirical work on family violence locally is limited in scope and mainly addresses the physical and sexual abuse of children, wife abuse and family murder'.[42] It is far from clear that this situation has been adequately addressed ten years later. The stick, it seems, has been pushed back too far in the other direction. If, in the 1990s, there were few studies of the family as a demographic entity (that considered, for example, rates of marriage and divorce), these are the questions that have chiefly preoccupied more recent research on the family. In their assessment of the state of the family in South Africa since 1994, Acheampong Yaw Amoateng and Linda Richter, for example, chose to discuss the 'residential dimension' of the family, and patterns of marriage, childbearing and divorce.[43] Surprisingly, there is no mention of the violence that focused the attention of earlier research. As we saw earlier, this is certainly not because the phenomenon has disappeared. It begs the question, what is happening in South African families?

If the state of violence against women suggests that the South African household is not always a site of social cohesion, the picture is more complex when viewed from the perspective of the extended family. Welfare instruments in South Africa are a useful barometer in this regard.

The Child Support Grant (CSG) was introduced in 1998 to cover children below the age of seven living in poverty. This was expanded to include children below the age of eight in 2003, nine and ten in 2004, and eleven to thirteen in 2005. In 2003 it paid single carers earning less than R1,410 per month a stipend of R160 per month. By February 2003, two-and-a-half million children were benefiting from the grant and the Department of Social Welfare predicted that this would increase to 3.6 million.

Interventions like the CSG presuppose that the family is a site of broad social solidarity. It assumes that guardians, be they grandparents, siblings or uncles or aunts, will use the grant for the purpose for which it is intended: the care of a grandchild, sibling or niece/nephew. Despite an ongoing debate about the effectiveness of the grant, there is evidence to suggest that it is working better than detractors claim. In their study of the effectiveness of cash transfers on poverty-reduction, Armando Barrientos and Jocelyn DeJong found that the Child Support Grant scored well both in terms of its reach of, and focus on, the poor.[44] Victoria

---

[41] E. Harvey, 'General Policy and Population Development', in L. Glanz and A. Spiegel (eds), *Violence and Family Life in a Contemporary South Africa: Research and Policy Issues* (Pretoria, HSRC Publishers, 1996), p. 271.

[42] W.J. Schurink, 'Family Violence Policy and Intervention: Policing Strategies', in Glanz and Spiegel (eds), *Violence and Family Life*, p. 291.

[43] A. Yaw Amoateng and L. Richter, 'The State of Families in South Africa', in J. Daniel, A. Habib, R. Southall (eds), *State of the Nation 2003–2004* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2003), pp. 242–67.

[44] A. Barrientos and J. DeJong, 'Reducing Child Poverty with Cash Transfers: A Sure Thing?', *Development Policy Review*, 24, 5 (2006), pp. 537–52.

Hosegood and Frances Lund's study of the of the impact of the grant in a remote rural district in KwaZulu-Natal found that, despite poverty, a heavy burden of disease and death from AIDS and high levels of migration, fully a third of age-eligible children in Hlabisa received the grant in 2002.[45] While the authors commended local officials for their 'commitment to implementation', they nonetheless qualified their general optimism. The probability of a child receiving a grant depended on the presence of the child's mother. In households where the mother had died, children were significantly less likely to receive the grant. They attributed this to bureaucratic reasons – fathers and other family members were less able to compile the documents needed to register for the grant. We have to wonder if this failure reflected more the absence of these men from their children's lives than simply the difficulties of registration.

The Hlabisa findings are complemented by those in Mooiblom, an informal settlement in the Ceres area of the Western Cape inhabited primarily by Xhosa-speakers from the neighbouring province. There, researchers found that residents relied chiefly on support from other family members.[46] Although it is difficult to generalise from these studies, taken together they do suggest that the extended family, especially in rural areas, might still be a site of solidarity and reciprocity. What is less certain is whether such bonds span the rural–urban divide and/or what is happening in urban households. The stakes are very high. At the moment, the social effects of current macro-economic policies are being, in part, offset by welfare provisions channelled in and through the extended family. If, however, affective ties in this domain are weakening, then we might worry about the long-term effectiveness of these instruments.[47] If they fail, what will happen to social relations in rural areas and in poor urban neighbourhoods?

According to the Macro-Social Report, the average size of the South African household is declining (from an average of 4.5 to 3.8 persons per household between 1996 and 2001). In the absence of research, we can only take educated guesses as to what is happening. It is likely that these figures reflect the growth of single-person households in urban areas. David Sam *et al.* argued in 2005 that South African women were indicating a preference for smaller families and placed less value on having children. Even though this conclusion needs to be disaggregated for class and location (city, village), as a general trend, they remarked, 'it is possible that South Africa may, within the next 50 years, find itself with the same alarming [low] fertility rates as occur in many Western countries'.[48] More and more young men and women may be asserting their independence, resulting in the extended family. This seems to be borne out by indications that fewer and fewer South Africans are getting married. The Presidency's Macro-social Report also shows that marriage rates have declined, particularly in the African population.[49] It also suggests that 'Africans' are also least likely to remain in contact with family members, and that they tend to have fewer friends in their communities than other groups.

---

[45] V. Hosegood, and F. Lund, *The Reach of the South African Child Support Grant: Evidence from KwaZulu-Natal*, CSDS Working Paper 38 (October 2003).

[46] A. Arnall, J. Furtado, J. Ghazoul and C. de Swardt, 'Perceptions of Informal Safety Nets: A Case-Study from a South African Informal Settlement', *Development Southern Africa*, 21, 3 (2004), pp. 443–60.

[47] This is a separate concern from the financial sustainability of current welfare provisions. For the moment they are being financed from windfall tax collections. Yet the size of the tax-base is not growing at the same rate as demands for welfare.

[48] D.L. Sam, K. Peltzer and B. Mayer, 'The Changing Values of Children Preferences Regarding Family Size in South Africa', *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 5, 3 (2005), p. 373.

[49] The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, *Macro-Social Report: Draft Update* (May 2005). There is another way of interpreting these statistics. Declining marriage rates, especially in the African community, might have more to do with a general tolerance for out of wedlock pregnancies and the inability to afford the costs of weddings and *lobola*.

We do not know enough about family relations in South Africa to understand fully the import of these changes. We might speculate that it reflects the establishment by younger persons of independent households. It could also reflect the splintering of extended families under conditions of high unemployment. If so, the consequences are potentially worrying. Is the exercise of greater social autonomy amongst this segment of the population associated with their reluctance to contribute financially to the needs of the extended family? Are inter-family remittances decreasing, especially from economically active members in a better position to establish their own households? What effect might this be having on the rest of the extended family? Anecdotally, we have reason to suspect that it is increasing the burden on old-age pensions and other social grants from other, especially unemployed, members of the family. This is particularly important in rural areas where unemployment is extremely high. Johnny Steinberg reports that most people in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands survived, not on the basis of wages, but on the basis of old-age pensions.[50] This may not be atypical. It begs the question: if social cohesion across the extended family is weakening, how will it affect the demands for welfare? Indeed, are we witnessing a new family dialectic in South Africa: the weakening of family ties in the urban areas is accompanied by the intensification of claims on the basis of kin in rural areas?[51]

Whilst we observe changes to the form of the South African household, especially in urban areas, are there basic social units that are replacing or substituting for the family? Is everyone in South Africa raised chiefly in and through family structures? The Presidency's own Macro-social Report found that black South Africans, compared with other 'race' groups, had the least contact with members of their own immediate families. Other evidence also suggests that the family unit is not the principal agent of socialisation in South Africa. In their study of the sexual values of young adults, Clive Glaser and Peter Delius found, for example, 'an alarming failure of communication between parents and children on sexual issues'.[52] This need not suggest the break-up of families. In some households, communication on sexual matters might be difficult for cultural reasons. Either way, on this particular matter, it points to the role of other agents and/or institutions in the socialisation of young South Africans. What might they be?

In the Western Cape, for example, numerous commentators and government officials have frequently referred to the crisis of the family. Ahmedi Vawda, the former director of the Department of Community Development in the City of Cape Town, for example, discussed such families as 'dysfunctional'. By this he meant that parents did not exercise authority over their children who were raised, effectively, on the streets. In these instances, street gangs substituted for the parental role.[53] Do we know enough about the sorts of institutions through which young South Africans are, effectively, raised or that play a significant role in giving content to their identities and imaginations? These questions are especially important given the age-profile of the country. According to the Presidency's Macro-Social Report, South Africans in the age bracket 10–25 constitute almost 23 per cent of the total population. We do not know enough about the values according to which they navigate their lives; what they esteem and what they do not. These questions are doubly important given that this age group is overrepresented amongst the unemployed and amongst those carrying the HI virus. Given the likely disjuncture between their real life possibilities and their aspirations, what sorts of institutions are in place to mediate this potential contradiction? How are people making sense of their situations and what effect does this have on the social fabric?

---

[50] J. Steinberg, *Midlands* (Johannesburg and Cape Town, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2002), p. 162.

[51] If this is happening are we, in effect, witnessing a process of 'retribalisation' of social relations in the rural areas and a process of accelerating individualisation in the cities?

[52] C. Glaser and P. Delius, 'Sexual Socialisation in South Africa: A Historical Perspective', *African Studies*, 6, 1 (2002), p. 27.

[53] See I. Chipkin, 'Functional and Dysfunctional Communities', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 1 (2003), pp. 63–82.

There can be little doubt that the church is playing a very important role in this regard. Eighty-three per cent of South Africans describe themselves as Christians and, according to a survey conducted in 2000, 46 per cent attend services at least once a week.[54] The Presidency suggests that there is a general coincidence between the 'official positions' of the various religious groupings and the 'broad aspirations' of the Constitution. Yet, what this also suggests is that social values are shot through with extra-worldly referents.

Stefan Jensen and Lars Buur, for example, suggest that divine and magical practices are increasingly invoked to explain and ward off crime. They write:

> In the course of our research we have noted that local formations of everyday policing, otherwise so self-assertive, often express deep anxiety about the occult. In many instances people in townships or former homelands confront the formations with questions and complaints about the occult and occult crimes. While recognising the importance of the occult, the formations are often hesitant to engage. Whenever possible they refer to what are called the 'proper channels' – the chiefs, elders, *sangomas* (traditional healers) – all of whom belong to the realm of the traditional. By such referral they acknowledge the occult's importance but suggest that it cannot be dealt with through Western forms of legal arbitration and semi- or official state structures' modes of doing and thinking.[55]

This suggests that questions of trust, relations to neighbours and community might well be mediated by cosmological ideas and references.

Even though religion has been important in the lives of most South Africans for a long time, during the 1980s, civic organisations, the United Democratic Front and other community structures privileged the importance of *political* and *social* action. In other words, they encouraged collective action instead of prayer and/or religious/occult ceremony as a means to attain individual and/or social/political objectives. Even though the participation amongst South Africans in various community bodies remains high,[56] there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that South Africans are turning increasingly to extra-mundane institutions for support and guidance. In this regard, we might note Liz McGregor's recent biography of Khabzela, the Yfm deejay. It reveals, for example, the extent to which young, urban South Africans are appealing to divine aid in their dealings with sickness and death.[57]

The Conditions of Social Cohesion

In concluding, let us return to the intuition with which we began: that fragility in the social fabric will manifest itself chiefly in the performance of public institutions, namely service delivery. Let us consider the example of local government.

It is common in South Africa today to discuss the poor state of municipal service delivery in terms of the deficit of appropriate skills amongst officials and councillors. We have good reason to believe that this is not the key issue.

Despite laws and provisions for popular participation in municipal decision-making, research commissioned by the Department of Provincial and Local Government found the system wanting. Although the report, *Reviewing the Establishment and Operation of Municipal Ward Committees in South Africa*, is effusive about the democratic potential of ward committees,[58] it found that, in the 279 municipalities that it surveyed, there was a general lack of public participation and interest in ward committees.[59] Similar conclusions were reported in the 2004/2005 survey.[60]

---

[54] The Presidency, Republic of South Africa 2005, 'Macro-Social Report: Draft Update', May 2005, slide 82.

[55] S. Jensen and L. Buur, 'Everyday Policing and the Occult: Notions of "Witchcraft", Crime and the "People"', *African Studies*, 63, 2 (2004), p. 194.

[56] The Presidency, Republic of South Africa. 'Macro-social Report: Draft Update', May 2005, slide 81.

[57] L. McGregor, *Khabzela: The Life and Times of a South African* (Chicago, Independent Publishers Group, 2005).

More damning was a report for ACNielsen by Professor Susan Booysen in 2005. Summarising the findings of a survey that interviewed 2,500 respondents from urban and metropolitan areas across South Africa, Booysen wrote:

> The survey indicated experiences of *dismally* low levels of local representation, as measured by visibility of, and contact with councillors and ward committee members. Across all demographics, municipal councillors and ward committee members are virtually invisible to 80 percent of South Africa's metropolitan and urban population.[61]

Three quarters of survey respondents said they 'hardly ever' saw their councillors. Yet the ACNielsen survey drew a more complex picture than simply one of absent politicians. Research was undertaken from July 2005 and thus had the opportunity to include areas recently affected by protests and demonstrations. Ironically the Free State, municipalities that had been the focus of the most aggressive protests recorded the highest levels of councillor 'visibility'. This suggests that even when councillors are present, they do not necessarily represent the concerns and needs of local constituents. Indeed, it suggests that the visibility of representatives in wards and amongst constituents created expectations that were left unrealised. Could this have been a catalyst for protest in the municipalities concerned?

The crisis in local government, over and above the question of skills and local economic development, is a crisis of local democracy. Municipalities are either not 'hearing' the voices of local residents, especially the poor, or somehow ignoring them when they do listen. Why is the existing system of public participation not working? There may not be an incentive for politicians and officials to take the voices of local constituents seriously; especially when expressed through participatory forums. Resources and authority are located elsewhere. This begs a related concern about corruption, clientelism and nepotism as they affect local government.

More importantly, however, it suggests that solidarity, empathy and accountability between political elites (politicians and officials) and local residents are low. We know that this seldom has political consequences. Is this not borne out by the repeated performance of the ANC in local government elections? It does, however, often translate into unsatisfactory levels of service delivery. We can safely dismiss ethnic or linguistic explanations. At local government level, councillors are usually drawn from the very communities they are often failing to represent. Might it be that there are no *institutions* that bind officials, politicians and their constituents in virtuous ways?

Mere identification with the political community (calling oneself South African), and perhaps even the constitution, does not automatically translate into behaviours that accord with the values that they are supposed to instantiate. An emphasis on identity obscures the institutions through which values are translated into meaningful behaviours/practices. In other words, social cohesion (and the affective relations of solidarity and empathy that sustain them) is produced in and through institutions that socialise their members according to these values and norms.

What are these institutions? Two of them are the family and the school. Repeating what is a truism for social psychology, Acheampong Amoateng and Linda Richter, for example, write that families perform a number of vital social functions. They mention, amongst others,

---

[58] DPLG, Reviewing the Establishment of Municipal Ward Committees in South Africa 2002/2003, compiled by Shikanda Business Solutions, 2003, Section 8-1.

[59] DPLG, 'Reviewing the Establishment of Municipal Ward Committees in South Africa 2002/2003', section 8-6.

[60] DPLG, Reviewing the Establishment of Municipal Ward Committees in South Africa 2004/2005, compiled by the Directorate: Institutional Development Systems, DPLG, 2004.

[61] S. Booysen, *The Challenges of Local Democracy* (Johannesburg, AC Nielsen, 2005).

> the socialization of children and the inculcation of moral and social values; [. . .] the control of social and sexual behaviour, including the restraint of aggression, antisocial behaviour and the infringement of taboos; the maintenance of family morale and identity, which creates mutual obligations and responsibilities and the motivation to perform pro-social roles inside and outside the family; and the launch of young people into roles and functions in the wider society.[62]

This conception conforms to what Jacques Donzelot has called, in another context, '[g]overnment through the family'.[63] It implies a social compact between the family and the state: 'You will keep your members within the rules conforming to socially appropriate, if not good behaviour, in return for State financial and other support'. Yet we have seen that the family in South Africa is not a site of such 'virtuous' socialisation. It rarely issues 'moral' subjects into society able to function as ethical citizens. The apartheid legacy is today compounded by the effects of HIV and AIDS as well as high unemployment rates. This begs the further question: is there a correlation between the state of family relations and the quality of social solidarity as measured by public service?

While there is some evidence today that schools in South Africa are becoming places of formal learning – outcomes-based education seeks to produce young adults that are independent, self-confident and socially responsible – there are those who argue that 'not much has changed [since the time of apartheid] and that things may even have become worse'.[64]

Are there other potential sites of virtuous sociability? Historically, what made up for the lamentable state of family and school life in South Africa was the democratic organisation in its various forms: trade unions, community structures, youth organisations, civic bodies and so on. At the height of the 1980s' resistance to apartheid, these bodies played socially useful roles as promoters of democratic values and non-racialism. In the post-apartheid era, this role should be played by the democratic State. To the family and the school, therefore, we must add the democratic organisation as a potential catalyst of social cohesion in South Africa. The value of democracy should be measured in terms of the benefits of a robust participatory dispensation that socialises participants on the basis of democratic solidarity. What is required is that these fora are granted real authority, finances and resources to become sites of democratic conviviality.

IVOR CHIPKIN
University of the Witwatersrand, PO WITS 2050, South Africa, and Democracy and Governance Programme, HSRC. E-mail: IChipkin@hsrc.ac.za

BONGANI NGQULUNGA
Department of Sociology, Brown University, Provident, Rhode Island, USA. E-mail: Bongani_Ngqulunga@brown.edu

---

[62] Amoateng and Richter, 'The State of Families in South Africa', p. 244.

[63] J. Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (translated from the French by R. Hurley) (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 48–95.

[64] L. Chisholm, 'The State of South Africa's Schools', in J. Daniel, R. Southall and J. Lutchman (eds), *State of the Nation. South Africa 2004–2005* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2004), p. 201.