

Economic Ascendance is/as Moral Rightness: The New Religious Political Right in Post-apartheid South Africa

Part One: The Political

Introduction

If one were to go by the paucity of academic scholarship on the broad New Right in the post-apartheid South African context, one would not be remiss for thinking that the country is immune from this global phenomenon. I say broad because there is some academic scholarship that deals only with the existence of right wing organisations at the end of the apartheid era (du Toit 1991, Grobbelaar et al. 1989, Schönteich 2004, Schönteich and Boshoff 2003, van Rooyen 1994, Visser 2007, Welsh 1988, 1989, 1995, Zille 1988). In this older context, this work focuses on a number of white Right organisations, including their ideas of nationalism, the role of Christianity in their ideologies, as well as their opposition to reform in South Africa, especially the significance of the idea of partition in these organisations. Helen Zille's list, for example, includes the Herstigte Nasionale Party, Conservative Party, Afrikaner People's Guard, South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (SABRA), Society of Orange Workers, Forum for the Future, Stallard Foundation, Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB), and the White Liberation Movement (BBB). There is also literature that deals with New Right ideology and its impact on South African education in the transition era by drawing on the broader literature on how the New Right was using education as a primary battleground globally (Fataar 1997, Kallaway 1989).

Moreover, another narrow and newer literature exists that continues the focus on primarily extreme right organisations in South Africa that have found resonance in the global context of the rise of the so-called Alternative Right that rejects mainstream conservatism. In this context, the focus is on those organisations who supposedly represent and speak for those who self-identify as Afrikaners or Boers in the country: AfriForum, AWB, Boer-Afrikaner Volksraad, Boerelegioen, Freedom Front Plus, Kommando Korps, Solidarity, and Suidlanders, as well as the Democratic Alliance (DA). This literature exists primarily in op-ed pieces, written mostly by academics nonetheless. This specific focus on white alternative Right organisations is not surprising given that other BRICS countries such as Brazil, India, and Russia have seen a surge on work that examines the Alternative Right ideology in these countries in light of the global surge of Right-wing organisations generally. That is to say, reflection on the Right in South Africa is slowly garnering interest in light of what is happening in Brazil, the European Union, and the United States in particular. Similar to these international context, local analyses in news media, opinion writing, and academic writing reflect a mixture of concerns with the Right, but primarily the Alternative Right.

As is evident from the above, scholars have primarily focussed on specific organisations and individuals on the white Right in South Africa, which they deem intimately tied to the global Alternative Right (Campbell 2019, du Toit 2019, Friedman 2019, Godinho 2014, Lagardien 2019, McMichael 2019, Rivers 2006, Smith & Lester 2019, Thamm 2019, van der Westhuizen 2018). In making a case for

the significance of their work, local analysts draw on a broader global literature that is concerned with the increasing conservative “backlash” currently *en vogue* in Europe and America in particular. What this assemblage of foci represents, therefore, is, amongst other things, a conflation of the New Right with the Alternative Right, as well as the discussion of populism thrown in there. While the varied discourses of New Right and Alternative Right share some ideological dispositions, they also represent very different political modalities. Therefore, in order to have any fruitful analytical impact on the discourse of the New Right in South Africa, it is important to untangle the knot of how what some of the current discussions relate to might fit within the 'New Right' framework, whilst some focus might be more enmeshed within the populism of the Alternative Right.

To that end, the article aims to do exactly this untangling by tracing the genealogy of the New Right from its earlier inception in the late 1980s and early 1990s, thereby unravelling the core features of the 'New Right' that can be demonstrated to be relevant for current day South Africa. In particular, what is evident from conflation of New Right discourse with Alternative Right discourse is the overdetermination of whiteness as the primary modality of the New Right, to the detrimental exclusion of other factors that also have a great bearing on this global discourse. For those of us concerned with intersectionality in particular, what such a singular focus misses in the case of South Africa is the fact that class inequality (specifically in the form of racial capitalism) figures prominently in post-apartheid New Right discourse and appears in places where it is least expected. In particular, what both the old and new prevalent public discourses on the New Right in South Africa tell is a story of white ultra-nationalism, thereby completely circumventing the question central to New Right ideology, namely, the economy.

Core Arguments and Methodology

The article's main argument is that, a different type of New Right is emerging in current day South Africa; one that is not simply the purview of white nationalism, but has main appeal within the black and white middle-class (bourgeois) and aspiring middle-class (petit-bourgeois). This New Right is economically neoliberal, politically conservative, and religiously Neo/Pentecostal. Whilst not as cohesive as one might wish for the sake of an easily classifiable movement, the article points to a “confluence of factors”, “unofficial accord” and an “undeclared coalition” as some of the vocabulary through which to identify what constitutes the New Right in the contemporary South African context. In other words, what the article presents has very scant specifics due to the nascent nature of this New Religious Political Right. To that end, the argument presented might obscure as much as it reveals, as well as being a bit cagy, including risking overlooking a great deal of difference and divergence. However, in drawing on multiple sources of what informs this New Right in South Africa, the article does not aim to collapse disparate organisations into one, for example, or to present the organisations it analyses as a cohesive whole. Rather, the aim is to explore how despite differences, the organisations explored cohere on some ideological, political, religious, and sociological aspects that warrant that their relation be regarded as demonstrating the rise of the New Right in South Africa. In its re-evaluation of this lacuna, the discussion brings together prevalent themes in

African Studies centred on taking religions seriously, taking belly politics as a social fact, and bringing the ethical to bear on the political.

It is, therefore, in the interstitial space created by the confluence of the conservative political discourse promoted by the white Right of curbing person rights in the name of stabilizing the ever-looming economic crisis (the subject of Part One) with Neo/Pentecostalism (the subject of Part Two) that I locate what I call the New Religious Political Right in South Africa. Such fusion, albeit rather rhizomatic, is resulting in a particular form of New Right ideology that promotes a specifically anti-socialist political economy by prioritizing individual success/salvation over social equity. That is, the logic of connection amongst the various elements identified privileges “ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances” that come together to represent the New Right in South Africa as a “wide array of attractions and influences with no specific origin or genesis” (Deleuze and Guittari 1987, 8; 25). This rhizomatic character of the New Right is what gives it the capacity to be both subtle and hyper-visible, especially as it foregrounds the language of crisis. Thus highlighting both loss and the desire to recover what is “perceived as” lost through glorifying the past in particular.

To achieve its analysis, the article relies on a critical discourse analysis approach by foregrounding the notions of resistance to the current social order and the appropriation of the language of change by the New Right. In particular, to paraphrase Kirsty Williamson, Lisa Given, and Paul Scifleet (2018), a critical discourse analysis approach to the New Right in South Africa asks a number of related questions. Namely, what/who determines the discourse of the New Right; what are its rules, codes, and ideologies and; what particular view of reality does the discourse of the New Right represent? As the article argues below, the best literature on the New Right that best helps to explain this rhizomatic character of South Africa’s New Right is the early literature from the 1980s and 1990s, and its further exposition is therefore necessary in order to set the context clearly.

Global New Right and the Crisis Language

Scholars such as Harvey Kaye in 1987 and Michael Apple in 1990 have demonstrated how post 1970s America and Britain (respectively) fused the neo-liberal discourse of free markets with the neo-conservative Christian discourse of moral rightness to found the New Right. This article applies the analytical models of Apple and Kaye to post-apartheid South Africa. While the reliance on early literature on the New Right might seem dated, the choice is intentional as the aim is to demonstrate that the salience of the Alternative Right and populist movements in Europe and the Americas is not the same as what we are seeing in South Africa, despite the global purchase of the Alternative Right. That is, in order to understand what is happening in South Africa, we are better served by using the earlier scholarship on the New Right because this scholarship is best able to account for the seeming disparity represented by the various organisations whilst giving analytical cohesion to how what we are seeing is more menacing than seems at face value. Indeed, while the New Right “is not a monolithic movement” (Marishane 1991, 73),

there are certain traits that are generally associated with movements labelled as such.

According to Jeffrey Marishane, New Right was a phrase coined in order to distinguish the New Right leadership from “the polished but effete conservative or Old Right leadership” of the East Coast of the United States (1991, 80). Specifically, “Unlike the Old Right, the New Right leadership has learnt to put less emphasis on larger economic issues. At the same time it has decided to stir emotions on those related to family, personal and social life to achieve the same objectives which its conservative forbearers failed to do” (*ibid.*). However, less emphasis on economic issues does not mean an abandonment of economics, but a reconfiguration in social terms as we will see later. To that end, the traditional narrative of the American New Right is very clear on its analysis: society is losing control of children and has gone too far in shifting social and political policies towards the accommodation of minority groups (Apple 1990, 293).

Peter Kallaway notes, for example, that, “The emergence of the politics of the New Right in Britain and the USA, associated with the rise of Thatcherism and Reganism, has frequently been represented as the politics of crisis, manifested in extremely high levels of unemployment, unprecedented levels of inflation, economic recession, a marked decline in balance of payments deficits in most industrial nations, and an alarming growth in the public debt of most western countries” (1989, 256). Moreover, the pursuit of egalitarianism, pursued through progressive state policies, is deemed too expensive since it gives to people who have not earned them, rights that they do not naturally deserve. In other words, “[b]ehind the conservative restoration is a clear sense of loss: of control, of economic and personal security, of the knowledge and values that should be passed on to children, of visions of what counts as sacred texts and authority” (Apple 1990, 306). The New Right’s answer to this malaise (specifically Britain and the United States in Apple’s research context) has been to stop using the state to overcome inequality and simply guarantee the right of the individual to choose, but under an authoritarian regime of some sort (*ibid.*, 297).

Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, Apple argues that this shift in relations reflects “an increasingly close relationship between government and the capitalist economy” (*ibid.*, 299). In particular, as Kallaway notes, “Contrary to its own rhetoric, the market strategy of the New Right in the area of social policy does not mean a lessening of the state’s role in the economic and social spheres, but rather a reorganization of the way in which the state intervenes in peoples’ lives”. In other words, state intervention is acceptable in so far as it advances the interests of the few. That is, the issue of state intervention is not so much the degree of intervention as it is the how of intervention – the perspective of degree hides the real issue of the method, which aims to foreground the advancement of a supposedly state-free capitalist economy that pretends that there is an autonomous market that acts of its own accord. The point being that New Right state ideology is state-centric despite claims otherwise.

Furthermore, “the New Right in Britain and the USA *represents not a weakening but a further strengthening of the authoritarian state required to deal with the weakening of capitalist hegemony and legitimacy*” (Kallaway 1989, 261-262, italics original). In most recent history, the intervention of the governments of various western states in the 2008 financial crisis was the greatest illustration of authoritarianism in relation to a weakened capitalist hegemony that had to be maintained regardless of the cost to the public good. That is, in order to justify its austerity measures, the New Right discourse requires an economic crisis. Which, in turn, requires extraordinary responses that might go against any reasonable political morality of “person rights”. As Marishane further argues, the general line of the New Right is centred on “reducing government spending on social, welfare and health matters whilst at the same time helping corporate and individual private capital to maximise its profits mainly through company tax reductions and the selling off of state assets through privatisation” (1991, 79). To this end, as John Horton attests, “the Right has first of all an economic policy” (1981, 8).

In support of this view, and further illustrating the ways in which New Right leaders in the United State could justify dirty *politricks* while ascribing to a sense of Christian morality, Marishane notes key aspects of the New Right. For “the New Right leadership, socio-moral issues like prostitution, homosexuality, women’s right to have control over their reproductivity and to be a housewife or not merely represent strong ammunition to be used against their political opponents in such vital matters as economics, defence, labour laws and social welfare because of their highly emotional attractiveness” (1991, 81). Whilst perhaps a bit reductionist and slightly dismissive of the value of affect for politics, which has been taken up in recent literature on the Alternative New Right in particular (Ansell 2016, Asahina 2015, Bangstad et al. 2019, Burack and Josephson 2002, Chmielewski 2018, Demertzis 2013, Dörre, Kraemer, Klaus, and Speidel 2006, Grossberg 2019, Janiewski and Morris 2005, Johnson 2019, Klatch 2010, Kintz 1997, Shoshan 2016), Marishane’s point is nonetheless valid. Namely, that the core issue for the New Right is the propagation of anti-Keynesian economic policy and ensuring its further propagation by aligning it with the discourse of moral decay that supposedly augments state-interventionist economic policy. To the end of foregrounding the centrality of emotion for political gain, the New Right relies heavily on the discourse of “crisis”.

In particular, at least according to Apple, “the movement away from social democratic principles and an acceptance of more right-wing positions in social and educational policy occur precisely because conservative groups have been able to work on popular sentiments; to reorganize genuine feelings; and, in the process, to win adherents” (1990, 298). In other words, it is the ability of New Right to skilfully manipulate feelings of predicament (Marishane 1991, 86) that makes them highly attractive. Apple locates this shift in the United States within an increased tension/conflict between property rights and persons rights in times of upheaval that is, nonetheless, a central tension within the American economy (1990, 295). Put another way, in order to solve a powerful economic crisis “on terms acceptable to dominant interests, as many aspects of the society as possible need to be pressured

into conforming with the requirements of international competition, reindustrialization, and [rearmament]" (*ibid.*, 297). It is under the guise of righting an economy in crisis that then, for Apple, persons rights won over long periods of struggle are subsumed under property rights favouring "rightist restoration politics" (*ibid.*, 300). Consequently, the hijacking of moral issues as an avenue through which to raise a particular economic agenda is key feature of the New Right.

Of course, whilst not exhaustive, the above account demonstrates that general and standard accounts of the early New Right focussed mainly on economic questions. However, some scholars did bring questions of sexuality (Smith 1994) and race (Ansell 1997) into the discussion. In fact, writing in 1997, Amy Ansell observed that, "Although there has been a plethora of attention to the New Right in both journalistic and academic accounts of the right turn, there has been a relative paucity of attention to the issue of race" (9). In making this argument, Ansell and a host of other scholars (Edsall and Edsall 1992, Gordon and Klug 1986, Omi and Winant 1994, 1986, Seidel 1987, Seidel 1986, Steinberg and Teles 1995, Taguieff 1993), want to make a contextual link between the racial backlash of 1980s and 1990s America and Britain and the rise of the New Right. As a result, in making reference to the relevance of race argument in the early literature on the New Right, my point is not to rehash the significance of this relevance, but to highlight that race was not as central to the early New Right discourse in ways that it has become central to the Alternative Right. As such, in making a case for the rise of the New Right in South Africa, we cannot rely on the Alternative Right reading of the New Right since such a limited lens elides the salience of other important factors such as class and religion, which remain central to the rise of the New Right in contemporary South Africa. This is not to say that race does not matter in the current rise of the New Right in South Africa, because it certainly does, but to emphasize that its significance lies less in race as biology and more in the intersection of race and class or racial capitalism, which then changes the dynamics of who constitutes the New Religious Political Right as a result.

New Right in South Africa

The IRR and the white Right

In the context of South Africa, my argument is that one of the best contemporary articulations of the "crisis" discourse of the New Right is put forward by the South African Institute of Race Relations (IRR). The main, but by no means sole, source of their discourse analysed in this article being their 2016 report aptly entitled, *The Rise of the New Right: South Africa's Road to 2024*. Whilst traditionally a liberal think tank, many interlocutors have come to label the organisation more Right than Centrist (Friedman 2019). In fact, Marie-Louise Antoni (2019) captures this sentiment well in her article defending Afriforum, the IRR, and Helen Zille as victims of the vilification of liberals in South Africa. She notes, "A more recent target is the Institute of Race Relations (IRR). Just a few short years ago, journalists and other writers described the organisation as a 'liberal think-tank'. It has consistently been a liberal think-tank since the 1930s – and it espouses the same values it did during the fight against apartheid. At some point in the past few years, however, progressives shifted

their sights to take aim at this organisation” (n.p.). Moreover, according to *BizNews* editor, Chris Bateman, such vilification of liberals and centrists is the result of “the degrading and ‘othering’ terminology that dominates our modern South African politics. The entire home terrain has taken a shift to the left, in stark contrast to the global shift to the right.” A position that, “leaves the local centrists, whose political philosophy has remained comparatively consistent, pushed in public perception to the right, lumping them in with some of the world’s most abhorrent right-wing politicians and activists” (2019, n.p.).

Therefore, whilst it might seem odd to attribute extensive significance and weight to the IRR given its lack of political power, ambition, resources, supporters, and general influence, there are three good reasons for doing so. First, it is important to recall the argument of the eclectic nature of New Right ideology proffered earlier in the article. Second, the IRR has had quite the influential list of South African liberal and centrist academics grace its halls and write its policy reports. As a result, despite seeming obsolete, the IRR has quite a strong online public presence. Moreover, their research is constantly used by influential Right-centred news outlets to inform opinion in South Africa. The news outlets includes *BizNews*, *Business Day*, *BusinessLIVE*, *Business Times*, *Financial Mail*, *MoneyWeb*, *Politicsweb*, and *The South African* amongst others. This is not to mention the direct involvement of the IRR in the political disputes of the Democratic Alliance Party in South Africa, including their 2019 campaign #SaveTheOpposition, as well as the fact that Afriforum (Daniel 2018) and Freedom Front Plus (Alberts 2018) have counted the IRR as a reliable policy source for their positions on land expropriation for example. Consequently, although limited in only referring to the IRR, my analysis below demonstrates that it is through neo-conservative think tanks such as the IRR that New Right discourse is finding its way into post-apartheid South African public discourse despite the country’s geographical location. Clearly then, the ideology of neoliberal conservatism has grown and shows deeper reach beyond simply the Euro-American backlash context (Cornelissen 2019, n.p.).

In this 2016 report referred to above, the IRR describes the current mode of the country in the following way:

The full gamut of indicators we track to develop an advance[d] view of the South African economy appear to be in some considerable trouble at this point. These range from mining and manufacturing production indices to residential property prices, vehicle sales, credit extension and default numbers, business confidence indices, consumer confidence indices, and consumer spending itself. The most telling number of all is that, in real GDP terms, South Africans are again becoming poorer – as they did in the volatile and very violent 1980s. (2016, 4)

An iteration of the same argument regarding the crisis status of the economy and stagnation prevalent in the current South African context is expressed by R.W. Johnson’s analysis in his 2015 book entitled, *How Long Will South Africa Survive? The Looming Crisis*. In short, Johnson points to a number of pathologies in the current South African political economy and offers a state-centric solution concerning the significance of the state to both economic prosperity and political well-being.

In fact, in terms commensurate with the global New Right discourse described above, the IRR notes that, in sacrificing economic performance “in pursuit of ideological goals, the ANC has created rising new demand for a political alternative” (*ibid.*, 5). In other words, South Africa is underperforming economically because of an over-concern with persons rights rather than property rights (Apple 1990, 295). The IRR puts this tension very well when asking a particular set of questions. “How is this possible, we are often asked by outside observers? Why does a country with such obvious potential continue to promote policies that are so harmful to its economy and the prosperity of its people?” (2016, 6). While in this report the IRR does not spell out what the harmful policies are, one needs only to look at their website to find out what these are. For example, in its description of what it stands for, the IRR highlights the following: Real economic empowerment; Property rights for all; Choice-driven healthcare, policing, and education policy; Reconciliation and social justice; Tax justice; Free thought and speech; Accountable politics; A small and effective government (<https://irr.org.za/what-we-stand-for>).

For the IRR, the pursuit of these aforementioned “liberal” principles means, amongst other things, stopping race-based policies and laws – i.e. getting rid of affirmative action; stopping the new National Health Insurance; limiting the power of unions by privatising healthcare, education, and policing; discrediting land reform aimed at restitution; extending free speech and setting limits on it in terms of only when it poses physical harm; and limiting tax on individuals (<https://irr.org.za/what-we-stand-for>). It is interesting to note that the IRR’s answer to the question of South Africa’s economic potential and prosperity is framed in very similar terms to traditional New Right discourse of the 1980s and 1990s. In fact, according to Kaye, Sir Keith Joseph’s answer to the question “What’s wrong with Britain?” foregrounded history and the importance of paying attention to it (1987, 338). Importantly, “His repeated answer was that: 1) 'the economy is overburdened with government' and 'state expenditure is greater than the economy can bear'; 2) the trade unions are resisting the changes necessary to increase productivity but expecting and demanding more and more from the economy; and 3) there has been a 'running vendetta conducted by the Socialists against our free enterprise system and those who manage it" (*ibid.*). As can be seen from the IRR’s concerns highlighted above, there are direct similarities in the ways in which current day New Right discourse highlighted by the likes of the IRR follows in the traditional and historical global discourse of the New Right.

Consequently, in highlighting the successful history of “the era of 1994-2007 [as] characterised by gradually rising economic growth rates and falling debt levels”, the IRR uses recent post-apartheid history to oppose what it sees as a clear shift in the ANC government’s policies towards greater restitution politics rather than purely neoliberal politics (2016, 4). The IRR’s projection is that the modernist reformist faction within the ruling African National Congress government that has authoritarian tendencies and the ability to make conservative economic decisions still has the best chance of righting the economy. This faction is “made up of a new class of successful black entrepreneurs, the emerging urban black middle class, and a cross-section of older party stalwarts who, despite being raised and schooled in Marxism,

are beginning to understand that policy reform will be necessary to secure the future of what they see as Africa's grandest liberation movement" (ibid., 8). In this uncanny fashion, one supposedly finds a conglomeration of traditionally opposed elements coming together to produce a "positive" economic outcome for a government and a country in crisis.

Not surprisingly, the IRR's position is reflective of a classical New Right position that, "the economic freedom of the capitalist market economy is a prerequisite to political freedom" (Kaye 1987, 337). This is because, in similar ways that Kaye describes how New Right economists actively militated against anti-Keynesian "social democratic policies and programmes of post-war governments" (ibid., 338), institutions such as the IRR in post-apartheid South Africa are keen on asserting that "economic growth depends on lowering upper and middle class tax rates to inspire saving and investment" (ibid., 342-343). Kallaway puts it more bluntly by noting that, "'Particularistic and even divisive *appeals* replace the integrative universalistic norms of the welfare state'. This shift in policy reflects the move from Keynesianism to monetarism and supply-side economics (i.e., competitiveness, anti-inflationary policy and growth at all cost as against a concern for full employment and an equitable welfare distribution) (1989, 257). If this description is sounding familiar, that is no coincidence for it matches one of the IRR's scenarios put forth concerning how South Africa might get itself out of its current economic and political crisis.

In other words, the language of economic crisis is now deeply entrenched in the post-apartheid South African lexicon through various channels. One common phrase of this lexicon that has become commonplace of late is the notion of a "fiscal cliff". For example, Mbeki, Rossouw, Joubert and Breytenbach (2018, 29) have argued that, "South Africa is headed for a fiscal cliff due to declining revenue and rising expenditure, the bulk of which is composed of social assistance payments, public sector wages and debt service obligations". They call for "greater competition in the political and economic system as well as a strong commitment to curb expenditure of the three large components". Adding voice to this concern is Anne Bernstein (2019, n.p.), Executive Director of the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE). Writing for *BizNews*, she has recently observed that, "The most likely scenario on present trends is not a fiscal cliff but descent into a swamp: a slow growing reduction in standards of living, economic growth less than population growth, fewer jobs, less money to maintain infrastructure, less dynamism and change in our society". Furthermore, predictions from the South African Institute of Professional Accountants put the fiscal cliff hanger's end at 2042 if there is no immediate change by the government to curtail the tip-over (IOL 2019, n.p.).

However, the crisis language has also been part of some scholarship on the left as well. In particular, Gillian Hart's (2014) book, *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony*, is of importance in this regard. In this book, Hart argues for the need to rethink the transition from apartheid in terms of what she calls "simultaneous and ongoing processes of de-nationalization and re-nationalization that are playing out in relation to one another in increasingly conflictual ways" (xv). These conflictual ways are evident in that, "While this book primarily focuses on South Africa, the processes and challenges it grapples with are

far more widespread. South Africa is an extreme but far from exceptional embodiment of forces at play in many regions of the world: (1) massive concentrations of wealth alongside the mushrooming of 'wageless life' (or what an administrator of the Bundesbank calls 'populations with no productive function'); (2) oppositional politics that are assuming a multiplicity of forms" (5). In other words, as part of the process of rethinking globalisation, South Africa is participating in the same politics of the rise of nationalism evident elsewhere.

For Hart, this rise of global nationalism is evident in "the Tea Party in the United States (US), explosive Hindu nationalism in India, widespread anti-Muslim and xenophobic sentiments in much of Euro-America, the re-emergence of fascism in Austria and other parts of Europe on the one hand – and, on the other, the uprisings in the Arab world, the Occupy movement and the anti-austerity movements in Greece, Italy and Spain; and (3) official efforts at containment" (*ibid.*). Consequently, for Hart, this crisis context represents a ripe moment to evaluate how the contradictory ways in which various ANC governments have handled the transition from the apartheid to the post-apartheid era has "played into amplifying populist politics, and how we cannot understand these processes simply in terms of domination as opposed to hegemony and manipulated mindless masses" (220). That is, the tension observable in the "Proliferating expressions of popular discontent over the decade of the 2000s" (4) has meant an opening up of space for what Hart refers to as a Passive Revolution. Meaning, a space where struggles in everyday life feed into and are shaped by simultaneous processes of de-nationalization and re-nationalization.

Taken together, these two processes are key to understanding the erosion of ANC hegemony and the proliferation of populist politics. More importantly for our context, Hart locates the passive revolution on the left. In particular, she argues that, "Both Fanon and Gramsci were relentlessly focused on the processes through which subaltern classes might become active participants in the production of new forms of critical understanding and collective action" (225). However, despite the great emphasis on translating such insight into the South African context, Hart never imagines the subaltern class and their populism manifesting in non-leftist terms. As such, she also misses out on the opportunity to see how rethinking the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid has taken a Right rather than Left turn. That is, the subaltern on whom hegemonic influence is being exerted is a Right-minded citizen who is disgruntled with the post-apartheid condition and seeks to escape this condition by instituting a new form of domination, albeit not passively so. To that end, the economy becomes a key battleground for the centring of Rightness in post-apartheid South Africa.

The RSA Economic Context

In 2004, in describing "The post-apartheid economy", the COSATU economist Neva Seidman Makgetla noted that:

South Africa's post-apartheid economy has been characterised by low growth and investment, and a rise in unemployment (at 30%, higher than any other middle income country). Government economic

policy has stressed the encouragement of investment through deregulation, privatisation and fiscal restraint. However, the failure of this strategy to promote growth and create jobs points to the need for a more interventionist strategy, one in which government must do more to stimulate equitable growth. This proposition is highly contested. Nonetheless, in response to the crisis within the economy, the government has adopted limited reforms involving increased spending on basic social services and housing, greater emphasis on job creation and equity, a renewed stress on planning and coordination and greater support for cooperatives. Yet these new initiatives do not constitute a systematic plan for transforming the economy and more integrated policies are required to overcome dualism and stimulate job-creating growth. (263)

Fast forward to the present and the story has not changed. As noted earlier, discussion of the fiscal cliff pervade public discussion of the economy. In fact, this is a position reiterated by the National Treasury of South Africa in its latest policy iteration verbosely entitled, *Economic transformation, inclusive growth, and competitiveness: A contribution towards a growth agenda for the South African economy* (2019).

Moreover, Vishnu Padayachee (2019) also highlights the three factors of low growth, rising unemployment, and increasing inequality in defending an approach to macroeconomic policy that balances growth and the reduction of inequality. Specifically, he notes that,

Despite some successes, including at reducing poverty, the South African economy has been characterised by low growth, rising unemployment and increasing inequality, which together with rampant corruption and governance failures combine to threaten the very core of the country's stability and democracy. The neo-liberal economic policies that the African National Congress-led government surprisingly adopted in 1996 in order to assuage global markets sceptical of its historical support for dirigiste economic policy, have simply not worked. (2019, 3)

What is needed in response, according to Padayachee, are "Appropriate progressive macroeconomic interventions" (*ibid.*); by which he means "post-Keynesian, macroeconomic policy ideas" (4) that support progressive state-led economic policy.

For Padayachee, such an approach would be a shift away from the conservative Treasury View whose core features include: "Fiscal restraint, holding down expenditures and public debt, tightly controlling and directing the public purse, opposition to capital controls, support for sound money and private bankers" (6). Generally, the maintenance of these conservative fiscal foci has come at the expense of education, health, and programmes aimed at addressing inequality. In fact, given how the last two national budgets of South Africa (2019, 2020) both showed increase in education and health spending, one would not be wrong in thinking that South Africa is actually doing a good job at state-led fiscal policy and not heading in a conservative direction.

Indeed, as Hart notes with respect to how South Africa has engaged some forms of progressive macroeconomics:

Since 2001 we have witnessed intensified official efforts to manage poverty; rising expenditure at all levels of government; and amplified official 'pro-poor' and 'developmental' rhetoric. Together with a number of other shifts in official discourses and practices, these moves represent significant departures from harsh home-grown structural adjustment in the first phase of the post-apartheid era (1994–2000). While it may be tempting to dismiss such efforts as sheep's clothing draped over a neoliberal capitalist wolf, we do so at our peril because they represent part of an ongoing official battle to contain and control popular discontent. (2014, 4)

However, as the letter critiquing the constitution of the Economy Colloquium in 2018, addressed to Finance Minister, Tito Mboweni, along with other ministers and the president illustrates, despite such efforts, South Africa is generally headed in the direction of non-progressive economic policy.

In particular, the letter signatories write that, "We concur with your stated opinion that "out of the box" thinking is required in order to rejuvenate the South African economy. We are in favour of inclusive, robust debate and exchange on our economic and social policy future, based on the best available evidence and policy-oriented scholarship, across a range of scholarly and other views. However, the profiled inputs, international invited economists, and local participants are disappointingly skewed towards economic orthodoxy" (Turok et al. 2019, 7). The orthodoxy referred to is one which the panel of writers believe "has come under severe criticism since the 2007/8 Global Financial Crisis and South African economic policy engagements need to move beyond an adherence to the policy status quo" (*ibid.*). As Smith and Lester (2019, n.p.) point out: "The Budget Speech by Finance Minister Tito Mboweni that followed shortly after confirmed the trepidation of progressive economists. The budget declared that 'fiscal prudence provides the basis for economic recovery.' It included spending cuts on vital social programs including education, health, and housing, and no tax increases on businesses or the wealthy."

To the end of demonstrating the negative implications of neoliberal conservatism, Kallaway's warning in 1989 is still relevant today and conservative think tanks such as the IRR would do well to consider these implications. Writing in the context of analysing the shift in education policy towards greater privatisation in apartheid South Africa, Kallaway notes the contradictions inherent in neoliberal conservatism. He writes, "When liberal democrats advocate the rights of the individual, equality of opportunity, and the virtues of the free market...it must be recognised that this appeal has to be understood in the context of the evolving synthesis between liberal democratic ideology and the politics of the New Right in the eighties, which is in fundamental conflict with the values and programmes of social democracy as expressed in the idea of the 'welfare state' or in such documents as the *Freedom Charter* (1989, 259). While not a welfare state in the classical sense described in the literature of the 1980s, the post-apartheid state is

slowly reneging even on its residualist commitments to its least capable and highly disadvantaged communities in the name of having to right the economy in ways described by Kallaway above in the context of an apartheid state.

In essence, what institutions such as the IRR elide (including the current government in its conservative economic policy restructuring), is that “What is efficient and productive and enhancing of individual choice is by the same definition detrimental to the public good” (1989, 268). This is especially true in a context like South Africa, where “class boundaries are reinforced by the politics and economics of exclusion in a historically racist state” (*ibid.*). Therefore, as Kallaway further astutely argues, “there would be little chance of convincing the mass of disenfranchised people that such changes would be to their benefit – even if a few select blacks are conspicuously incorporated into the ‘new middle class’” (*ibid.*). Unfortunately, Kallaway’s prediction has come to fruition in the form of Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). In 2003, the BBBEE Act, No. 53 came into effect with the fundamental objective of advancing economic transformation and enhancing the economic participation of black people in the South African economy (DTI).

That is, while not framed as such, the BBBEE was a response to another post-apartheid crisis, that of economic inequality. I will not discuss the merits of this economic empowerment tool in detail here, but note a few points in relation to it that are relevant for the article’s discussion of New Right ideology. BBBEE has been a subject of critique from the white Right in particular as it is deemed as reverse racism by organisations such as Afriforum, Freedom Front Plus, and the IRR. As Freedom Front Plus leader Pieter Groenewald made it clear in one of his 2019 election speeches: Minorities are bullied in South Africa and Affirmative Action and Black Economic Empowerment disadvantage whites and coloureds. Moreover, neither is any longer necessary because there are now more black university graduates than whites, and black economic empowerment has benefited only a tiny elite (Campbell 2019, n.p.). Moreover, as Campbell further notes, while Groenewald’s scepticism around BBBEE is shared by many South Africans across the spectrum, it remains primarily a weapon of the white Right. That is, Groenewald, amongst many others, does not “address the persistence of black poverty, white wealth, and the inequality between the two, a persistent blind spot among the Freedom Front and white groups on the right. Instead, he tapped into an Afrikaner sense of grievance—if whites in general have done well in post-apartheid South Africa, English speakers have done better than Afrikaners” (*ibid.*).

The critique of Groenewald et al. notwithstanding, there is indeed a shared sense that BBBEE “has only produced an elite black class nurtured by extraordinary corruption and cronyism” (Smith and Lester 2019, n.p.; Southall 2016, xvii). As a result, as Smith and Lester continue to argue, “South Africa’s deep social and economic crises provides fertile ground for all sorts of opportunists” and, specifically, for their argument, the New Right kind. Charles Simkins, Head of Research at the Helen Suzman Foundation, draws the link to the black left clearly when he notes that, “Black economic empowerment and preferential procurement pose a more complex problem for the left. BEE has oscillated between the great enrichment of a

few, to a more broad based approach, and then to an increased emphasis on what makes middle class hearts beat faster: ownership and the composition of senior management” (2019, n.p.). That is, the rising influence of the black middle class poses a problem for the problem of economic inequality. This because the success of this class (whether as those who have made it on their own, benefited from black economic empowerment in its various forms, or those who have built up assets through corruption and other forms of illegal activity) feeds into the white Right’s argument of perceived inequality based on the cases of a small elite.

Black Conservatism in South Africa?

It should be acknowledged, however, that to speak of a homogenous black middle class is problematic. As various scholars have noted, the lack of clarity of how one measures middle class identity is but one main reason for avoiding classificatory homogeneity (Burger, Steenekamp, van der Berg, and Zoch, 2015, Modisha 2008, Southall 2004, 2014, 2016). However, despite such warnings these scholars, along with a few others, agree that the black middle class constitutes an important identity to which scholars should pay attention in studies of modern day South Africa. In particular, Ronelle Burger et al. see value in focusing on this class because “of the economic, political and social significance of the middle class for South Africa’s emerging democracy” (2015, 41). In other words, the same “crisis” language identified above as a key aspect of the traditionally white New Right is also being invoked by the black middle-class to ground a new sense of shared middle-class belonging with their white counterparts in line with the post-apartheid neo-liberal agenda (Bond, Pillay, and Sanders 1997; Williams and Taylor 2000; Cheru 2001; Narsiah 2002; Desai 2003; Schneider 2003; Ashman, Fine and Newman 2011; Bond 2013; Vally and Motala 2017).

Roger Southall sees value in paying focus to the black middle-class in South Africa, especially when levelled “Against the background of celebrations about the rise of a middle class in Africa and its widely posited role in promoting democracy.” For Southall, which is also a significant argument for this article, “while the black middle class may indeed play an important role in furthering democracy, its political orientations and behaviour cannot be assumed to be inherently progressive” (2014, 647). That is, as part of a global class that has been labelled as preoccupied with consumption and status (Burger et al. 2015), its significance in contemporary South Africa “revolves overwhelmingly around the extent and consequences of black upward social mobility” (Southall 2014, 649). As such, its interests are likely to align with modes of self-preservation rather than plebeian politics. To this end, the buy-in of this class into conservative Right economic discourse does not need much defending – the issue of diversity of interests within this class notwithstanding.

Writing in 1986, in the context of Reagan’s America, Cornel West decries the rise of black conservatives and locates this rise in what he call the “crisis of black liberalism” (644). In particular, West notes that, “The crisis of black liberalism and the emergence of the new black conservatives can best be understood in light of three fundamental events in American society and culture since 1973: the eclipse of U.S. economic and military predominance in the world; the structural transformation of the

American economy; and the moral breakdown of communities throughout the country, especially among the black working poor and underclass” (*ibid.*). That is, according to West, in line with traditional New Right discourse of the time, black American conservatives were articulating the argument “that the decline of values such as patience, hard work, deferred gratification and self-reliance have resulted in the high crime rates, the increasing number of unwed mothers, and the relatively uncompetitive academic performances of black youth” (*ibid.*). Consequently, such perspectives meant that the black American elite who belonged to this conservative circle could easily side-line the poor amongst them in pursuit of what West calls “middle-class respectability based on merit rather than politics” by attacking programmes such as affirmative action for example (*ibid.*). The point being that, as a core aspect of liberalism and the neoliberalism, self-interest drives the agenda of conservative middle class economic mobility and black people are not immune to this class tenet.

In the case of South Africa, it is arguable that the latest national election (2019) results reflect a general trend towards such middle class economic conservatism. One would of course need more hard data to make the following point stick better, but it is worth noting nonetheless. As Kotze and Bohler-Muller (2019) note, “The 2019 General Elections marked a watershed in South Africa’s political landscape. The ANC under the banner of a narrative of regeneration and getting back on the moral path dipped below the 60% mark for the first time in South Africa’s democratic history” (365). While remaining leader of government and the official opposition respectively, the ANC and the DA dropped significant votes in the election, thus leaving some popular political analysts in the country to wager that multiparty democracy is in demise (McKaiser 2019). On the other hand, the Economic Freedom Fighters (generally labelled as a left populist party in both academic literature and popular discourse: Essop 2015, Hart 2014, Hurt and Kuisma 2016, Mbete 2015, Satgar 2019) and Freedom Front Plus, with whom they are ideologically at polar ends, registered growth in all nine South African provinces and nationally when compared to their 2014 election results. The general argument is that disgruntled DA supporters threw their lot with the Freedom Front Plus as a signal of support to the right shift within the centrist party (Kotze and Bohler-Muller 2019, 366). Moreover, another traditionally conservative black party, the Inkatha Freedom Party also grew its support nationally, as well as in the two major provinces of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.

Furthermore, the newly-formed church based party, the African Transformation Movement (ATM), with its “South Africans First” motto managed to secure an eight position nationally on its first try. ATM is a church-based organisation that, nonetheless, claims to follow the philosophies of humanism and ubuntu. Upon closer reading of its policies, the ATM believes in the return of capital punishment, building a “society founded on Divine-based Values”, promoting “Moral Regeneration”, and reinvigorating the role of traditional leadership in governance (ATM 2019, n.p.). As is clear from the list, the organisation espouses ideas found commonly in New Right discourse. Interestingly enough, ATM’s economic principles are more in line with the EFF’s nationalisation of Reserve Bank approach. In its

policy description, the ATM notes that “A State Bank is one of the tools that will economically transform the country through the state having a mechanism to fulfil its financial and economic obligations using a state owned institution. Our vision focuses on state affairs relating to budgeting, distribution of funds to various departments in order to curb wasteful expenditure” (*ibid.*). Importantly, however, and in line with traditional Right economic principles, the role of a state bank is to curb wasteful expenditure and not necessarily transforming the economic system itself.

In addition, another conservative Christian organisation garnered enough votes for a sixth place in the 2019 elections, namely, the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), founded in 1993. Led by Reverend Kenneth Moshoe, the ACDP promises a fresh start based on Christian and family values. In reading their policies, it is clear that “The ACDP promotes, upholds and defends Christian family values” (ACDP 2019, n.p.). Moreover, the ACDP proclaims that: “We adhere to a moral philosophy that is based upon the Word of God, and measure the interpretation of our policies against the prerequisites of biblical standards” (*ibid.*). More importantly, the ACDP economic policy foregrounds traditional Right economic principle. It does so by advocating for commitment to: “reducing government debt and spending; job creation and economic growth through an open-market policy with as little government interference as possible; becoming competitive in the global economy and global markets; lowering inflation; state enterprises operating in open competition with private providers; and doing away with complicated tax forms, laws and expensive monitoring” (*ibid.*).

While focusing on only a few organisation, the point of the analysis above is to illustrate the very eclectic nature of what constitutes the black enclave of New Right discourse in current day South Africa. In fact, in making a case for why the 2019 elections matter and doing so in a way that highlights the key aspects of our current discussion, Kotze and Bohler-Muller note the contentious contexts within which the elections took place. In their view, “This particular election came at a time where South Africa faced multiple challenges: a stagnant economy; the increasing politicisation of race; protests around the delivery of basic services; increased corruption and a flagrant lack of accountability (most notably under the Zuma Administration); and pressure to restore investor and international confidence in the future developmental trajectory of South Africa” (366). As such, they conclude with a question that foregrounds the concerns of this article. They ask, “How will our electoral democracy progress? Will we follow a path of apathy that opens the space for populist politics as seen in other countries?” (*ibid.*). Thus leaving open the possibility that the South African crisis remains fertile ground for new politics, albeit mainly populist in their estimation.

The Affect of Nostalgia and the New Right

Consequently, in reading not only the literature of the 1980s and early 1990s on the New Right, but also that of the contemporary era, one constantly apprehends the *admixtural* nature of the New Right institutions and discourse. For example, historian Kaye notes that, “The term ‘New Right’, referring to the intellectual developments of the 1970s in Britain, actually comprehends two quite distinct politico-ideological

currents which were, nevertheless, united in Thatcherism, These two are ‘neo-liberalism’ and ‘neo-conservatism’” (1987, 337). Apple notes that, “One of the major aims of rightist restoration politics is to struggle in many different arenas at the same time, not only in the economic sphere, but in education and elsewhere as well” (1990, 300). Furthermore, in highlighting the New Right’s merging of political economic issues with social policy issues, traditionally not a conservative forte, and drawing on Stuart Hall, Apple notes that, “Reaganism and Thatcherism did not create some sort of false consciousness...they ‘operated directly on the real and manifestly contradictory experiences’ of a large portion of the population” (*ibid.*).

Specifically, the particular two political leaders connected with the “needs, fears, and hopes of groups of people who felt threatened by the range of problems associated with the crises in authority relations, in the economy, and in politics” (*ibid.*). That is to say, as Kaye concludes, what brings neo-liberals and neo-conservatives together, as bizarre as this might sound, is the “immediate need for ‘social discipline’ to begin to reverse the developments of the past few decades” which is achieved “through a combination of the rigours of the market and the authority of the government” (1987, 340). My argument is that we see the same coming together in the post-apartheid context through the neoliberal agenda of the ANC government and the neoconservative agenda of white Right wing organisations and black Conservative political parties on questions of the economy, education, morality, and sexuality.

The other point is that the confluence of *prima facie* seemingly irreconcilable positions is what gives the New Right (in both its former and current iterations) its scare-factor – it is truly Medusian in this sense. In further describing this Medusian confluence, Kaye notes that, “Thus, it is arguable that what has provided for the American New Right ‘coalition’ of neo-conservatives, New Right conservatives, and neo-liberals around Reagan Republicanism is not unlike that which enabled the similar coalescence of groups in Britain around Thatcherism; that is, history” (1987, 343). For Kaye, what these groups share is a yearning for the past. In fact, for Kaye, it is arguable that what the New Right signifies is an attempt to “‘unify’ politically their seemingly contradictory sources of support through historical rhetoric” (*ibid.*). In the South African context, one can observe this focus on history and yearning for the past in both black and white camps in the expansion of the concern with nostalgia.

As Duncan, Stevens, and Sonn (2012, 205) note in their work, nostalgia has found its way not only in academic and literary circles. “Allusions to the “good old days” can also be discerned in the everyday accounts and meaning-making strategies of South African citizens as illustrated in many of the narratives collected from within the Apartheid Archive Project.” Moreover, there is acknowledgement within the scholarship of nostalgia that the concept constitutes a number of modalities, including “remembering and forgetting, witnessing and testimony, and mourning and melancholia” (Worby and Ally 2013, 457). Drawing specifically on the work of Jacob Dlamini (2009), Eric Worby and Shireen Ally argue that, “Dlamini decodes their nostalgia for life under apartheid in part as a desire for the order and authority paradoxically represented by the apartheid police state, and in relation to which people now contrast the absence of moral community in the present” (459).

That is, as Dlamini puts it himself, “To be nostalgic for a life lived under apartheid is not to yearn for the depravity” of apartheid, but “It is to yearn, instead, for order in an uncertain world” (2009, 14). This yearning for order in black communities in post-apartheid South Africa is a theme supported by other research on security in the townships, for example (Gordon 2004, Kynoch 2003).

More importantly for the context of this article, such yearning for the past is also present in white communities. As early as 1996, John Nauright already wrote about white cultural retreat into nostalgic representations of the past in resisting cultural assimilation within a black dominated new South Africa. More recently, Martha Evans (2009) has written about white South African nostalgia on the internet. Specifically, Evans argues that “Unsurprisingly, Afrobarometer surveys measuring public opinion within the country found that levels of nostalgia for the apartheid regime were highest among white South Africans (Quinn, 2002). Dissatisfaction with the present is frequently posited as a reason for apartheid nostalgia, particularly in the context of personal security” (50, see also Steyn 2004, van Zyl-Hermann 2018). Moreover, and further contributing to the literature on white nostalgia, Gary Baines (2013) has noted that in the context of Afrikaner lionisation of figures such as General De la Rey, “nostalgia is less about the past than about the present. And nostalgic distancing sanitises as it selects, making the past feel complete, stable, coherent, safe from ‘the unexpected and the untoward, from accident or betrayal’ – in other words, making it so very unlike the present” (256; see also van der Waal and Robins 2011). That is, the sanitization of the past is also part of the dissatisfaction with the present.

However, I would contend that the use of history as nostalgia in this context should not be limited to looking backwards, but also in understanding how the New Right invokes a particular future. That is, it is a future that is precisely what current-day resurgence of New Right globally is concerned with – viz., righting a past that has failed to prepare us (the current generation) for the great future that we were promised. So now, we have to ensure that future in very certain and exclusionary terms. As Baines (2013, 256) notes, “nostalgia is both backward- and forward-looking, as well as being both reflective and restorative. Nostalgia, then, is a particular kind of memory; it is essentially an emotional response to changed circumstances”. In the contemporary South African context, the dissatisfaction with the slow change experienced by black South Africans, coupled with the dissatisfaction of loss of political power (despite economic success) of white South Africans, create a perfect storm for an ideology that speaks to both needs and can point to a different future.

Preliminary Conclusion

Ultimately, what the focus on the earlier scholarship on the New Right does, especially through its focus on the notion of crisis, is to serve as a good counterpoint (in the musical sense of independent interdependence) to the prevalence of a focus on populism (both Left and Right) in the current mode of New Right discourse in South Africa. Whilst the focus on populist use of race for example, is important, its narrow focus misses the broader picture of the rise of a new coalition of Right-centred civil society groups, institutions, organisations, and political parties in

response to the “crisis” situation in South Africa. As such, by turning to the early scholarship of the New Right that highlights the *admixtural* nature of the New Right, including the focus on the moral foundation of the New Right’s political economy agenda that comes from Conservative Christianity, the article has invites us to see how similar trends are prevalent in the current South African context. Specifically, the article call for a rhizomatic reading of the discourse of the New Religious Political Right in South Africa by showing how the New Right draws on a particular ideology of conservative economic rightness that cuts across traditional lines of political difference. Such a shift in alignment is especially important to pay attention to in terms of its portent, especially for a country with strong politics of racialized enmity. That is, there is the strong possibility that non-racialism is manifesting in a rather problematic version of New Right Charterists.

NB: There is a Part Two that delves specifically into the role of Neo/Pentecostalism in the rise of the New Right that I have not provided for this Seminar.

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