

**NATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES: AN  
INTERPRETATION OF REGIS DEBRAY'S  
CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL REASON**

**Phillip Dexter**

**Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY in the Department  
of Religious Studies at the UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
September 1997**

**Supervisor  
Professor David Chidester**

The University of Cape Town has been given  
the right to reproduce this thesis in whole  
or in part. Copyright is held by the author.

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

For Filipe and Kahlil,

who, hopefully, will never want for a sense of belonging, but will learn that; as Kant put it in his Critique of Pure Reason, "The critical path alone is still open."

## **Abstract**

This thesis is a multi-disciplinary inquiry into the nature and functioning of national identity. By interpreting a single text, The Critique of Political Reason, by the French philosopher and activist Regis Debray, a range of new analytical concepts are located and some standard concepts are recast in new terms. The religious nature of social identities, that is, the role of the sacred in society, is identified and explained. Some mainstream theories of ideology, religion, and nationalism are explored in an attempt to determine whether these tools of analysis are practicable and how these theoretical resources might be reworked in the light of Debray's analysis. As Debray shows, the national question is not a problem to be solved but a persisting dilemma to be engaged at the levels of both theory and practice.

Following an introduction in Chapter One, Chapter Two deals with Debray's critique of ideology. This chapter considers the Marxist origins of the prevailing notion of ideology and shows how this notion is essentially misleading in that it turns ideology into a fetish and leads to a confusion between ideology as ideological discourse and ideology as the science of ideas. Chapter Three considers Debray's theory of the religiopolitical unconscious, which redefines ideology as symbolic efficacy and suggests that myth, religion, and ideology are all manifestations

of the patterns and processes of the sacred that originate in the collective unconscious. Unlike idealist or rationalist accounts of the unconscious, however, Debray's religiopolitical unconscious is given a material explanation in terms of determining factors of biology, territory, and psychology, particularly as these factors are evident in the social production of sacred space and time. As Debray argues, this social physics, or "logic of the sacred," predisposes social organisation towards orthodoxy and thereby towards political conservatism.

Chapter Four considers the predominant modern form of the sacred, nationalism. Reviewing alternative theories of nationalism, this chapter critiques both primordialist and modernist approaches. Arguing that Debray combines elements of both, the chapter considers Debray's work in building a distinctive primordialist theory that sees social organisation as elite-led if not elite-driven. Ultimately, however, Debray's theory points towards a modern political economy of the sacred.

In concluding this study, Chapter Five considers the manner in which this modern religion, nationalism, has manifested in South Africa, particularly during the transition to democracy and in the new democratic dispensation. The discourse of nationalism reveals

the sacred in the formation and founding of the new nation. Debray's warnings about the conservative nature of social organisation and the tendency for all social transformations to degenerate are considered seriously. As this thesis concludes, however, political conservatism, dogmatic orthodoxy, and social entropy can be avoided in the South African nation-building project if the symbolic resources of the nation are located in a vibrant, progressive, and democratic movement that favours the poor and disadvantaged mass of people and is less concerned with the symbolic aspects of the political that reinforce dogmatic orthodoxy than with democratic organisation in its engagement with the political economy of the sacred in South Africa.

# National and Religious Identities:

## An Interpretation of Régis Debray's Critique of Political Reason.

---

### Contents

Abstract

Contents

Acknowledgments

1. Introduction	1
2. Ideology	16
2.1 Ideology, Fetish, and False Consciousness	21
2.2 Marx, Subjectivity, Agency, and Determinism: Base and Superstructure	31
2.3 Relativism	53
2.4 Ideology, Hegemony, and Culture	56
2.5 Power and Discourse: A Political Economy of Symbols	60
3. The Religiopolitical Unconscious	71
3.1 Religion and Politics: A Unified Theory of Power	73
3.2 The Affective and the Unconscious	78
3.3 Biology, Psychology, and Territory	89
3.4 Language and the Collective	90
3.5 Incompleteness: Sacred Space and Sacred Time	93
3.6 Power and Authority: The Substitution Effect	98
3.7 The Collective Unconscious and Natural Religion	110
3.8 The Unconscious	117
3.9 Marxism and Religion	121
3.10 The Sacred and Symbolic Efficacy	125
4. Nationalism	129
4.1 Marxism and the National Question	129
4.2 Nationalism and the Socialist International	133
4.3 The National Question in the Third World	138

4.4 Class Revisited	143
4.5 Primordialist and Modernist theories of Nationalism	144
4.6 Nationalism and the State	153
4.7 Symbolic Efficacy: The Manufacture of Identities	154
4.8 The Orthodoxy of Politics	157
4.9 The Strategic Imperative	164
4.10 A Social Physics	166
4.11 The Frontier	173
4.12 Property and Identity	183
5. The National Question in South Africa	187
5.1 The History of the National Question in South Africa	188
5.2 The National Question and the Transition to Democracy and Socialism	198
5.3 Harnessing the Symbolic and Managing the National Question	206
6. Bibliography	214

## Acknowledgments

This small contribution to the collective intellectual productive output has been a labour of nearly three years. Despite a lengthy period in political activism, it represents one of the more disciplined exercises I have personally undertaken. Not without its frustrations, it has been a truly worthwhile experience. If I could do it again, I would, but not part-time. The stops and starts necessitated by my own calendar were the least pleasant part of the exercise.

That I was able to begin, persevere, and finally complete this exercise at all was largely due to the support and encouragement of my teacher, supervisor, and friend, David Chidester. I only hope that the many hours spent in what was, for me, engaging conversation about the subject matter, were even half as much a pleasure for him as they were for myself. The manner in which he was able to make the subject matter accessible and to provide an environment that continually challenged but never disempowered must be the defining characteristic of the enlightened, professional pedagogue. May many more students pass through his offices.

It would be true to say that I could not have done this without the patience, support, and kindness of Fareeda, my partner and comrade. Bringing up a child with two parents is a trial. Having to do that duty with half of the team in the library, the study, or when at home always thinking about ideology, is above and beyond the call of duty. I can only say thank you and now it's your turn. This work is as much hers as it is mine for those reasons.

I should pay tribute to those who taught me the little politics I have. It was that experience which led me to think about any of these things at all. Commissars Patric, Tito, Pule, and Mzala, the

good bits are due to your excellent grounding in the basics. The bad bits I will have to work on. To my comrades and the leadership in the Party, the ANC, and the unions; the stimulating, disciplined, environment and vibrant debate that are a defining characteristic of our movement that we have inherited are essential to any critical development. Hopefully I have added enough fuel to keep debate going for a little while longer.

Thanks must go to the Centre for Science Development for funding the most important stretch of this work. The opinions expressed and conclusions reached are those of the writer and not attributable to the CSD.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The phenomenon of nationalism has presented a problem to political and social theorists ever since it was recognised as being a distinct form of social identity. While posing a general problem for critical social theory, the national question has presented a particular problem for Marxist theory and practice. Marxists who have adopted a critical perspective have generally been unhappy with Marx's own treatment of nationalism; some have been dissatisfied with Marx's theory of ideology that underlies his analysis. Intense debate has raged. In addition to the theoretical problems concerning the phenomenon, nationalism has, in practical ways, bedeviled every socialist program and revolution since the time of the First International.

This problem of nationalism, along with the related problems of ethnic, racial, and other identities, has still not been entirely satisfactorily dealt with at the level of theory, either within or outside of the Marxist tradition. One of the results of this failure to deal adequately with the problem of nationalism has been that political practice has often been uninformed with regard to the phenomenon. Related is a general problem concerning identity that is recognised as such in social theory which

also affects the political in general. Religious, sexual, age-related, and other identities, together with national identities, confront us with the general problem of the subject that is at the centre of modern theoretical discourse and political practice.

The question of the subject in society is inextricably bound up with a number of other theoretical problems. Most obvious amongst these is the problem of ideology. This problem of explaining how it is that ideas can have effects, or the question of symbolic efficacy, is central to the notion of subjectivity. Any theory that explain a collective identity, such as nationalism, must deal with the problem of symbolic efficacy. The fact that individuals see themselves in a particular way, identify with other individuals, adopt certain perspectives, values, beliefs, and practices, is not adequately explained by simply asserting that these aspects of the subject are defined by identities. In history, the notion of the subject, both in the form of the individual and the collective, is either seen as central to understanding relations and activities, or is regarded as irrelevant and even as fictitious. The question of national identity, together with religious identity, is the most powerful example of this social and theoretical debate in contemporary society. Whether one subscribes to the notion of agency in the form of the subject or not, the fact of the matter is that in contemporary discourse, political events and processes the

world over are more often described in national terms than in any other terms. Politics is therefore inextricably linked to the nation and nationalism in practice.

The transition from an authoritarian, racist, and segregationist political dispensation to that of a non-racial, and non-sexist democracy currently underway in South Africa presents a unique set of problems and opportunities for engaging both the more general difficulties of social identity and the particular problem of nationalism. The effects of approximately 50 years of apartheid and another 300 of colonialism have created a unique situation in South Africa in which social identities play a specific and significant role in relation to the ways in which people work, play, eat, reproduce, drink, sleep, and even die. The problem of nationalism lies at the heart of the social, political, and economic transition underway in South Africa and may determine the success or failure of that process. The issue of identity also places the objective of the transition in perspective, since the very goal of a united, non-racial, non-sexist democracy makes certain assumptions about identity.

The debate about national identity and nationalism in South Africa has taken place in the context of the struggle for national liberation of the descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of the region and those people generally

oppressed and discriminated against in the colonial and subsequent apartheid experience. This struggle has been led primarily by the African National Congress and its allies, the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and was fought against the National Party government in the first instance. The National Party was originally formed as the vanguard of a political movement that was to represent the narrow economic, social, and political interests and aspirations of those inhabitants of the territory now called South Africa who considered themselves to be White Afrikaners. The main protagonists in this struggle have conducted this struggle and articulated their positions with certain implicit and explicit assumptions about identity. Of particular relevance is the fact that, for approximately the last 30 years, the ANC in particular has been guided on the national question mainly by ideas that have their origins in the Marxist paradigm. International experiences and debates about nationalism in the context of colonialism and the anti-colonial struggle have also had a profound impact on the politics of South Africa.

Regis Debray's Critique of Political Reason offers a significant proposal for approaching the problem of social identity in general and nationalism in particular (1983). Debray's reflections on how identities are formed and function enable a theoretical approach which can

help us, if not solve, then at least better understand the problem. His reflections also suggest an approach to the practical issues which the problem of nationalism presents for political activists. Debray's explanation of how ideologies mobilise historical subjects provides a framework for dealing with the problem of national identities and nationalism through understanding the religious nature of these identities and thereby redefining the relationship between religion and ideology.

Debray's thesis, simply put, is that ideology is the consequence of the organising of the social collective. This process of organising necessitates the enclosure of certain people in a group and the exclusion of others from it. Through this enclosure and exclusion an "other" to the individual social subject is created and the subject is constituted as a conscious, social, and cultural actor. The other of a social group is not merely defined by identifying outsiders. More significantly for Debray, the other of any social group is constituted as the group itself. In the process of producing itself as other, a social group generates terms of conditions by which it can be recognised and venerated as sacred. The sacred in society is prescribed by what Debray describes as an archaic political unconscious that arises from the biological, psychological, and territorial conjuncture that is the social.

The title of the original French text, Critique de la Raison de Politique: le Inconscient Religieux, raises the issue as to whether this unconscious is better understood as political or religious (1981). This issue will be considered in more detail below, but the view taken is that religion and politics are only distinguishable by their form and not by their essential content. For this reason, this unconscious is best understood as being a religiopolitical unconscious. Religion and ideology are explained as being expressions of this religiopolitical unconscious and are the sacred aspect of our existence that is articulated in discourse and enacted in practice. Nationalism, for Debray, is the most efficacious form of the ideologico-religious in contemporary society. The obvious historical precursor to nationalism and other contemporary forms of the ideologico-religious is religion, and the relationship between these forms of social identity is explained by understanding them to be different expressions of the religiopolitical unconscious. The dynamic relationship between biology, territory, and psychology that determines the form and character of social existence is central to Debray's explanation of symbolic efficacy. He describes the strategic nature of collective identities and the negotiation and contestation of these identities.

Redefining the problem of ideology, which is usually regarded as essentially secular political beliefs, as being the problem of symbolic

efficacy, that is, how the symbolic in all its manifestations is able to effectively motivate subjects, Debray relocates the subject within the collective. He thereby describes the subject as constituted out of the relationship among three forces: human biology, that is the fact of the constant threat to life posed by any number of variables; human psychology, which is determined primarily by the inevitability of death and the fear of our biological frailty; and the territorial nature of our social existence, which is essentially produced within demarcated spaces that necessarily hold beyond them dangers and threats. In Debray's view, the subject is both given identity and works to determine identity through a preconscious schema that is defined by the operation of the symbolic. Located primarily in language, the preconscious schema is also evident in what are commonly regarded as cultural aspects of social existence, the manner in which we walk, talk, eat, and so on. According to Debray, the preconscious schema determines how human beings experience agency, that is, the ability to act in the world. Subjectivity, agency, and identity, therefore, are all reworked by Debray and explained as being productions of the largely unconscious power of symbolic efficacy.

In developing a new "social physics", Debray finds that social identity is always determined by oppositional relations. Accordingly, identity is always fashioned as a

polarity. The most fundamental polarity in Debray's social physics is the opposition between sacred and profane. Because the power of symbols is derived from ritual acts of setting apart the sacred from the profane, Debray argues that a "logic of the sacred" is a constant feature of social existence. That social logic of the sacred allows two broad principles to be identified. First, the "law of incompleteness" suggests that every collective is based on what Debray calls a "founding absence" around which myths, rituals, and social formations revolve. Since the sacred identity of the collective is defined by its exclusion of the profane, social identity is actually constituted in terms of that which lies outside of its demarcations. Therefore, any collective identity is inherently incomplete. Second, the "law of incompleteness" suggests that the void around which society is constructed—its "founding absence"—is filled by myths and rituals that constantly ensure a return to sacred origins, reinforce sacred space, and assert claims on the legitimate ownership of the sacred symbols of the collective. In this regard, Debray identifies the role of the leader as the primary substitution in the formation of a collective. By standing in for the "founding absence" of the collective, the leader performs this crucial act of substitution. In all these respects, therefore, Debray proposes an analysis of political reason that is grounded in the unconscious, collective, and ultimately material

logic of the sacred. His method, which he has characterised as "religious materialism", reveal "the whole stratum of religiosity which lies dormant, preserved, packed away, and concentrated beneath all our games and fireworks, that underworld of sedimented affective responses and confused values wherein we can always read the struggle of the quick to ward off death, forestall emptiness, and hold back the fleeting of time" (1986:159).

Debray draws on a broad range of disciplines, including history, sociology, and anthropology, as well as political, religious, and cultural studies, to provide a theoretical framework for dealing with the problems of political theory and practice. Primarily, however, he mobilises two sets of theoretical resources; Marxist and Durkheimian. Debray brings these two analytical traditions, which are usually understood to be in tension, into creative conversation. Critically analysing Marx's contribution to theory, and a product of that theory in the form of what was once regarded as "really existing socialism", the socialist world system that was in place prior to reforms initiated by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, led by Mikhail Gorbachev in the USSR, Debray offers an interpretation of Marx's theory that is intended to be more consistent and more materialist than classical Marxism. Drawing on the work of Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and others, Debray brings to the fore our essentially

religious existence, the structural nature of social existence, and the affective aspect of our humanity. Human insecurity, fragility, and mortality are considered to be as responsible for the forms of social relationships and practices that prevail as are such factors as socio-economic class. Debray constructs a theory of the subject which accounts for some of the failures and successes of various attempts at revolutionary and counter-revolutionary activity.

The Critique of Political Reason has to be considered within the context which it was conceived and written, Debray's political activities and subsequent imprisonment in South America, the political and philosophical debates of the post-1968 period, and more specifically those debates in France. Debray is only one of a number of French philosophers who have attempted to reinterpret Marxism in the context of these particular debates and to claim that politics is basically religion in another key, but the experiences and perspectives he brings to these critical issues ensure that his contributions are unique and significant. The analysis of the origins and nature of collective identities that Debray puts forward explains a dynamic that makes any simplistic notion of social progress, revolution, or evolution seem naive. It is arguable that the Critique of Political Reason calls into question the very notion of revolution. At the very least it explains the real limitations the social collective places upon the

attempts that are made to radically improve that existence. The constant contestation and negotiation that follows from the perpetual "state of war" that is created and maintained by the territorial nature of human social existence, as well as the dynamic of the social collective created by the simultaneous biological and psychological factors which construct the subject, makes that existence one that is governed by an oppositional relationship between what Debray calls the "rational-technological" and "irrational-political" sides of humanity. It is this unchanging feature of our social existence that ensures the transhistorical nature of collective identities and provides the impetus for the apparent political fragmentation of society even as it is being economically and technologically totalised.

Debray describes the Critique of Political Reason as an attempt to deal with a number of political and philosophical problems simultaneously. In the first instance it is an attempt to deal with the obvious gap that exists between stated political objectives and actual political practice. The Critique of Political Reason attempts to explain what Debray believes are laws that regulate this failure of humanity to perform up to the standard of the theory that he and others have constructed. This gap between theory and practice is a particular problem in relation to Marxism. Most of the attempts at revolutionary transformation guided by Marxist

theory have been perceived to either have failed or fallen short of the mark.

In considering this problem it became apparent to Debray that his own Marxist theoretical framework did not adequately explain the phenomenon of nationalism because it failed to recognise the religious nature of society. The Critique of Political Reason is also therefore a personal reckoning with Marx and Marxism. In this regard it is both an attempt to deal with the perceived shortcomings of Marxist theory and also to provide a manifesto for revolutionary practice. That Debray had previously made the observation that Marxists could be idealists is recorded. In reply to critics of his Revolution in the Revolution, Debray remarked that "all of us, Marxists included, are more or less Platonists and . . . three thousand years of theological idealism cannot be eradicated overnight from the human brain" (1969:141). The Critique of Political Reason can therefore be located in Debray's own work as an attempt to grapple with this archaic survival.

In approaching Marxist theory critically Debray finds the enduring phenomenon of the nation to be a convenient starting point (1977b:25; 1994:5). Even modern variations of Marxism, Debray alleges, are unable to explain what gives rise to the phenomenon of nationalism (1977b:25-41; 1983:25). They are also unable to adequately provide theoretical rigour in building

socialism itself. Debray asserts that when reality has not accorded with the forecasts of Marxists they have tended, as do most political theorists, to regard the world as wrong for not conforming with their theory, rather than the other way around.

In approaching the issue of organised societies, Debray has identified his larger field of study as being that of mediation or mediology (1983:34; 1995:529). This field deals with the phenomenon of power and authority in society and how these are facilitated through symbolic efficacy. Debray has described the Critique of Political Reason as a study in "mediation per se in its ageless logical necessity" (1986:3-4). What the nation expresses, which was expressed in pre-capitalist society almost exclusively by religion, is seen as an enduring feature of society and a manifestation of what Debray describes as the transhistorical nature of identities (1977b:26). The expression of the sacred in symbolic terms not only suggests the need for a political economy of the symbols involved in this phenomenon, but of the sacred itself. Debray's contribution enables the beginnings of a framework for such a political economy of the sacred.

The specific issues that Debray raises for South Africans are indeed challenging, given the current political conjuncture. Amongst these are firstly, the very problem of nationalism or the

national question. The issue of whether this can be dealt with in such a manner that the interests of all South Africans are simultaneously advanced, and in particular those previously disadvantaged by colonialism and apartheid, is pertinent at this point in our history. Related to this is the issue of what the character of a South African nationalism could and should be and who or what organisation should be the guardian and manager of the symbolic resources that must be the manifestation of the national entity.

In the context of the Post Cold-War, unipolar world, the very notion of revolutionary transformation, not to mention the idea of a socialist project, has been called into question. Debray raises the issue for consideration in a far-reaching but practical manner that even supersedes this analysis by asking not only the question, is revolution possible, but more profoundly, is revolution revolutionary? Debray's conclusions, while sobering, are not as pessimistic as they might at first appear. Whilst they require revolutionaries to reconsider much of what has been standard theory for decades, Debray's ideas are useful resource for developing a radical programme for the transformation of society. If there were ever any doubt as to whether Debray believes revolution is possible or not, his observations on the Zapatista movement in Mexico answer the question in a daunting but honest manner. He observed that the 1994 Zapatista rebellion in

Mexico, which has dragged on with little won in real terms, "was not a surrender", but "a return to the essential: resistance" (1996:137).

## Chapter 2: Ideology

Debray begins the Critique of Political Reason by confronting a particular notion of ideology. While he describes the notion of ideology that defines it as a recent historical intellectual phenomenon and as an analytical tool for understanding how and why subjects act in the manner they do, Debray holds that ideology is, at the same time, an obstacle to better knowledge of the political (61). Debray uses this impediment, which he argues fails to provide a material explanation of human action, as a means to set up his own theory of symbolic efficacy. By reformulating the problem of ideology as the problem of symbolic efficacy Debray revitalises the question of how ideas can have effects and move historical subjects to act in a particular fashion.

The prevailing notion of ideology that describes the phenomenon as mental and imagined, as in some manner reflective of the material world, and as able to direct the beliefs and activities of subjects, seems to provide a relatively simple and convenient way of explaining the obvious role that ideas play in society. As Debray argues, however, this notion of ideology is actually "a vague idea that passes for a clear idea, an animist entity for a scientific concept, a speculative ersatz for a datum of

observation". This notion of ideology has been responsible for obscuring the "self-evident reality" of the role of ideas. While this particular notion of ideology may convince us that political ideas can result in social action, it actually serves to render the problem of symbolic efficacy "inexplicable" for at least two reasons. This notion of ideology functions as a fetish where our theory fails us and as censor and exorcist in ideological discourse.

Debray's argument is that this prevailing notion of ideology performs a particular function in theoretical discourse by filling in the space that exists as a result of our lack of knowledge or understanding of the problem of symbolic efficacy. Debray is obviously prepared to accept that the concept of ideology can be found in the discourse. But this does not mean that it is an actual thing in itself, or even an accurate or helpful characterisation of an actual phenomenon. Ideology is, he argues, a "speculative theme". In other words, there are "concepts, definitions and theories of ideology", but all of this theoretical discourse does not entail the actual existence of ideology (62). Debray characterises the science of ideology as analogous to the science of astrology in this respect by suggesting that both are fictions. Debray proposes that there are, on the one hand, "observable phenomena like phlegmona, fires, attraction, constellations in the sky and systems that interpret the historico-political world." On

the other hand however, there are pseudo-scientific engagements with these realities that form "a set of rational apparatuses such as organic incitability, phlogiston, ether, astrology and ideology" (62). It is worth noting at this point that Debray is not anti-science, since the exemplar against which he is measuring all rival theories is that of science. On scientific grounds, therefore, Debray identifies ideology as a fiction. Nevertheless, ideology has been a potent fiction.

Because the notion of ideology has two uses—ethical and scientific—there is a perpetual ambiguity about its status within theoretical discourse. This ambiguity gives rise to an inevitable and constant equivocation. Debray therefore argues that the notion of ideology needs to be "stripped of its semantic values" to enable us to understand the problem of symbolic efficacy and pose a solution to it (67). To deal with this problem of semantic values, Debray proposes the rather obvious distinction between ideological discourse and discourse about ideology.

Theory about ideology, or the science of ideology, usually attempts to find explanations for humanity's social conditions and situations. But such theoretical discourse is also ideological in itself, since it seeks to put across a particular point of view, and often suggests a political program to actualise that vision. Like religious

and juridical discourse, ideological discourse is "sacred" and in this respect cannot be challenged within a rational framework. It is Debray's contention that the purveyors of various political points of view seek to blame our social ills on something and find a convenient guilty party in the notion of ideology. Identifying the cause of humanity's generally miserable condition enables these masters of the discourse to suggest an immediate solution to the problem. They propose an end to ideology and usually an acceptance of their own putatively superior, scientific, and objective ideas.

Debray attempts to separate the use of the word ideology to describe "a system of signification that accompanies a historically given set of social practices" from the manner in which it is utilised to imply superiority in one's own ideas and some deficiency in those of others (64). He does thereby reinstate the use of the term ideology, but he is only prepared to do so to use it as a short title for the phenomenon he claims to be addressing, the observable fact of symbolic efficacy.

According to Debray, the notion of ideology he describes as prevalent in society presents a problem because with it we cannot explain "the relationship between belief and action" or, "how saying becomes doing". Despite its scientific pretensions, the "science" of ideology actually explains nothing, the science of ideology thus

describes its subject as playing a role within discourse similar to the Melanesian religious concept of mana, which is "a transmissible, efficacious fluid that the sorcerer alone can manipulate" (72). In other words, the power that ideas appear to have to mobilise subjects is seen to be generated by and transmitted through the mysterious force of ideology.

Debray also observes that within the scientific study of ideas the study of the collective is doubly problematic because it deals not only with infinite variables but also with that which is most emotive for us as human beings, our collective psychology. The powers that be within any collective, the elite, also try to see to it that the study of the collective is tightly controlled to ensure that what is perceived to be the mystical power that they wield is not undermined. Ideological discourse performs the function of political censor within this context. A theory about the collective can transform the very nature of the group, thus demonstrating the decisive nature of the ideas that are considered to be ideological.

If we are to study these efficacious ideas free of the inherent bias of any worldview and without prejudging the issue of symbolic efficacy, we must accept that all ideas that have social consequences must be considered on an equal basis. To "respect the autonomy of ideological production", we must consider the object of

study, ideology, and remove the objectives of the discourse (79). This means accepting a version of the philosophical position of relativism in relation to these ideas. But the ideas themselves are not to be considered in the abstract. The key issue for Debray is still to consider what it is that enables ideas to have effects. It is therefore necessary to consider ideas that are "organised, programmatic forces". These arise within society, religion being one of the most obvious forms and nationalism another.

### **Ideology, the Fetish, and False Consciousness**

Debray's critique of the prevailing notion of ideology points to two problems that any theory of symbolic efficacy must confront. Firstly, ideology, as it is most commonly understood, is a vague notion and actually obscures the real nature of the problem of symbolic efficacy by suggesting that the relationship between thought and action is governed through mystical or magical means. The real challenge is to find a materialist explanation of symbolic efficacy. Ideology, as it has been described by Debray, is a fetish. It is seen to have power and interests all of its own. This has created the impression that symbolic efficacy can be removed from the context within which it operates, that is, the human social collective, and be studied on its own. This reified conception of ideology creates both epistemological and ontological problems that the discourse then attempts to grapple with,

but which Debray believes can be avoided altogether through his alternative theory of symbolic efficacy.

Secondly, ideology fulfills a strategic function within theoretical discourse that cannot be ignored. It is both an attempt to explain symbolic efficacy and at the same time an attempt to monopolise the discourse for political objectives. Ideology does this by acting as censor and exorcist. As a theoretical concept, ideology is therefore part of the process of the manufacture and manipulation of symbolic resources. This has to be recognised if purveyors of theory are to be explicit about their own objectives and to recognise the political nature of their theoretical activity. Ideology is manipulated as part of the apparent contest of ideas that characterises any society.

Debray's questioning of the very notion of ideology is an important initiative in the broader collective project that seeks to develop both an understanding and substantial critique of ideology. In his useful introduction, Ideology, David McLellan describes his subject as "the most elusive concept of in the whole of social science" (McLellan, 1986:1). This view is one that confirms Debray's suspicions about the notion of ideology. Despite this, there is no end to the number of academic works that simply accept ideology as a given. Without even offering an account of the concept, or the need

for a theory of ideology, these contributions proceed to discuss anything from the historical period within which ideology has supposedly existed to how ideology allegedly functions in society. It is this self-justified and reified conception of symbolic efficacy that Debray opposes.

This notion of ideology is also problematic because it assumes that there was a time before ideology, when ideas operated significantly differently, for example, when ideas were less rational or scientific. It is also a short step from such a view to the notion that developments in the production and communication of symbolic resources can fundamentally transform the essential relationships between human beings. This view is one that Debray challenges. Central to Debray's explanation of symbolic efficacy is the notion that there are essential features of the symbolic which ensure that society can and does change at a superficial level, but that certain recurring features in relationships of power and authority remain constant despite these changes.

Debray attempts to explain the force of the idea that historical subjects are driven by ideology. For example, Frederick Watkins, writing in a series of books that attempts to serve as a foundation for understanding political science, asks the question: "Why has it been the case that political ideologies . . . gain so strong a

hold over the minds of men" (Watkins, 1964:2)? Debray's description of the scope of symbolic efficacy answers this question by covering what he describes as "variations on a theme". This theme is the "power of words" (73). Watkins describes ideology as essentially optimistic, utopian in its objectives, and prone to oversimplification. This description would not be such a problem if Watkins regarded all socially efficacious ideas in the same way. Watkins presumably sees his own "non-ideological" ideas as sober, rational, and realistic. Such a view is clearly a problem, because the manner in which this judgment of other worldviews is effected is not explained.

By way of contrast, Marxist theoretician, Franz Jakubowski, describes ideology as that element of the superstructure which is distinguished methodologically from the political and legal relations which together make up the "totality, which is the intellectual structure of society, as opposed to the material structure" (Jakubowski, 1990: 40). This view is far closer to that of Debray's, although he does not necessarily agree on the separation of the realm of the ideological from the rest of the world, its definition as non-material, or with the economistic perspective of such a view. That there can be such opposing views on the matter, yet an apparent agreement on the existence of this thing that is described as ideology, means that the concept requires further interrogation.

There is a clear set of ideas that can be detected in Debray's consideration of ideology as a "theme on the power of words" that revolves around the notion of false consciousness as the history of fears. Fetishism, animism, totemism, and mana are all theories and concepts that attempt to explain the religious belief and practices of others. As theories, they are all premised on the similar notion that the subjects holding the beliefs and engaged in the practices that are alleged to go along with holding these beliefs do so out of ignorance and fear, or simply social and intellectual under-development. Accordingly, these theories postulate a wide range of belief systems in pejorative terms. Animism is described as the inability to distinguish between reality and dreaming. Mana is the inability to distinguish between expressive and instrumental acts. Totemism is a feature of the inability to demystify the collective. Fetishism is the inability to evaluate material objects, relations, and exchanges. Debray's interrogation of ideology produces an understanding of the notion as an explanation for the actions of historical subjects in the same category as these theories. The notion of ideology might be characterised as pointing to the inability to distinguish between ideas and their social origins.

The notion of false consciousness is central to Marx's critique of capitalism. In The German Ideology, Marx and Engels explain how

consciousness develops, first as awareness of the subject's physical environment, then as awareness of the power of that environment. With the division of mental and material labour, consciousness is able to develop the false notion that "it really represents something without representing something real" (Marx and Engels, 1970: 51-52). This false consciousness, which has the effect of masking the real social and property relations, and the concomitant extraction of surplus value from workers, is a conception of the world that is not simply an incidental feature of capitalist society. It is part of a philosophy propagated and perpetuated by the ruling class (Marx and Engels, 1970: 64). False consciousness therefore facilitates the system of exploitation by providing an explanation of the world that legitimates the prevailing social relationships, relations of power, and forms of ownership.

The form of false consciousness that prevails in capitalist society has particular characteristics. The division of labour in the production of commodities and the nature of the exchange of commodities, is really the exchange of use values, according to Marx. Since the exchange of commodities is seen as a relationship between things and this relationship is one mediated by money, those involved in the processes of production and exchange do not consider the social relationships that exist between the producers of these various

commodities that are exchanged. Commodities are therefore perceived to have inherent value and even power over one another. Not least of all, labour is treated as a commodity within capitalist relations, giving rise to the alienation that is a feature of capitalism. It is no wonder then that as Marx puts it, "this fetishism of the world of commodities" is one which dominates social existence in capitalist society (Marx, 1976: 165).

In an important series of essays on the fetish, William Pietz identified four themes that give meaning to the idea of the fetish: materiality, historicity, social relations, and the relationship of the fetish to the individual subject (Pietz, 1985: 15). Although it could be argued that the notion of ideology satisfies all of these conditions, it is to this last aspect of the fetish, as an "external controlling organ directed by powers outside the affected persons will", that Debray seems to be alluding in particular (Pietz, 1987: 23). Ideology is described by Debray as being a concept that is attributed all the power of determining not only the actions and behaviour of individual subjects, but of entire collections of people such as religions and nations. The reality, however, is that people are moved by each other. They are organised and mobilised through ideas, but these ideas can only have their origins in individual or collective subjects.

This fetishised notion of ideology erroneously ascribes to the notion itself the power to determine our actions, but it is also a self-undermining notion. The notion of the fetish has been historically deconstructed and its genealogy as a concept explained. Pietz effectively demonstrates the social and political origins of the notion of the fetish. Any fetishised notion can be subjected to the same type of critique and Debray's critique of ideology does just that. Just as the very notion of the fetish has to be located within the context of intercultural conflict over the meaning and value of materiality, ideology has to be located within the context of the relationship of certain theories about society, and thus within particular relations of culture and power. (Pietz, 1985: 5). According to the value system of the sixteenth-century capitalist traders who coined the term, "fetishists" overvalued certain "sacred" objects and undervalued trade goods. Any theory of symbolic efficacy cannot be separated from the economy, politics, gender relations, or any other social situation or relations and ignore the aspects of power and authority in society. Ideologists place essential value on certain theories about society without being able to scientifically determine the real value, truth, or falsity of these ideas.

Pietz demonstrates that the term fetish was appropriated by social theorists "as a theoretical term" from the mercantilists who coined it.

(1987:23). What is of prime importance in understanding the notion of the fetish, however, is to recognise the unsympathetic gaze of the European traders and later colonialists who coined the term and the political objectives of the social theorists who sought to explain away observed African beliefs and practices as being inferior to European, Christian beliefs (1988:105). European colonial expansion into the "New World" was facilitated by the trading relations that arose between the European countries and the inhabitants of that "New World".

Not only was this "New World" seen as bountiful and ripe for exploitation, but the economic relations which arose in the context of these encounters were essentially of a super-exploitative nature. The rationalisation of these terms of engagement sought to justify the fact that trade was on such lucrative terms by describing the inhabitants of the new world as being without religion and therefore as inferior (Chidester, 1996:12-13). They also sought to characterise the "New World's" inhabitants as primitive, lacking intelligence, morals, and even acceptable standards of hygiene. This Eurocentric, prejudiced, mercenary, and patently opportunistic gaze facilitated social, economic, and political relations which were extremely profitable. The fetish theory played a role in justifying this super-exploitation.

What Pietz also reveals is that the notion of the fetish was itself a fetishised notion. It attributed power where there was none and explained away human actions in simplistic and even idealistic terms. Not only were the beliefs, rituals, and practices of the inhabitants of Africa part of a rich and developed culture, but they included notions of the supernatural and relations between the natural and supernatural. It is only with the unmasking of the ideological nature of the study of these beliefs, rituals, and practices that the project of the colonialists has been more reasonably understood (Chidester, 1996).

Debray sees the notion of ideology functioning in an analogous manner to that of the fetish. Like the fetish, the notion of ideology obscures the real relations of power and authority that actually exist in society. Debray's project is to expose these. He therefore attempts to deal with the pitfalls that accompany the notion of ideology by explaining symbolic efficacy in materialist terms. What is of real relevance for a post-colonial critical theory is to determine what enabled the relations which fetish theory sought to justify. No doubt the racist, elitist, self-righteous views that were a central feature of Christianity, feudalism, colonialism, and mercantile capitalism are of relevance, but fetish theory, in general, overlooked these. Theories of ideology suffer from the same problem. They either do not locate

the matter of symbolic efficacy in the context of society, or when they do, offer only an instrumentalist explanation of the relationship between ideas and action. A critical theory, post-ideology, must explain the political, economic, and social relations in a society, and in particular the functioning of power and authority, which are defining features of symbolic efficacy.

Given the problem of ideology, which includes its vagueness as a concept, the plethora of definitions of ideology, and the contested nature of its application, and in view of the fetishised notion of ideology which creates further problems by mystifying the issue of causality in relation to ideas and action, Debray's attempt to redefine the terms of the debate in seeking an explanation for symbolic efficacy is an effort to construct a path through these problems. In explaining his alternative approach, Debray tackles the origins of the particular notion of ideology he has described, which he identifies as being located in classical Marxism. The origins of the problematic features of the notion of ideology, its fetishism and its censorship function, are also to be found in the Marxist theory of ideology.

### **Marx, Subjectivity, Agency, and Determinism: Base and Superstructure**

Debray suggests what at first seems to be a radical relativism or an anarchic "anything goes" position in relation to symbolic efficacy, such as

has been held in relation to scientific theory by Paul Feyerabend, to deal with the problem of ideology as censor and exorcist (Feyerabend, 1975). This relativism allows for the possibility of rising above the ideological nature of ideological discourse and enabling us to treat each socially efficacious set of ideas or theories on its merits. McLellan recognises what he calls the "pejorative connotation" attached to the word ideology (McLellan, 1986:1). He suggests however, that this kind of relativism that demands that the ideological nature of all ideas be recognised, is devoid of any real meaning.

There is a general problem of relativism which Debray does not confront directly which is arguably a serious weakness in his thesis. Debray does place all discourse about ideology on an equal footing. In this respect his method of analysis recalls features of post-modernism that have been criticised by, amongst others, Ernest Gellner. As Gellner argues, post-modern methods actually essentialise meaning by finding it everywhere and thereby relativise the actual locations of meaning and power in reality. (Gellner, 1992: 23).

By way of an alternative, view Alex Callinicos has identified two strands of "textualism" in poststructural theory, one originating with Jaques Derrida and the other with Michel Foucault. The former argues that there is nothing beyond the text, while the latter

allows for both that which is articulated in language and that which is beyond language (Callinicos 1989:68). The type of relativism Gellner is describing would obviously be a feature of the Derridean "textualism", but it need not be of the latter Foucauldian "power-knowledge" theory. If a theory allows for a world beyond the text, then it must allow for the possibility of knowledge of this objective reality, even if such knowledge is actually unattainable in practice. Foucault attempted to construct a critique of "domination and power" and in doing this he studies "genealogies of power" (Poster, 1984:8-9). Debray certainly can be located in the "Foucauldian genealogy" that Callinicos describes, since by his own argument, understanding society is about finding a material explanation for the phenomenon of symbolic efficacy and the functioning of the social collective.

There are other Marxist theoreticians who share a similar approach to the one Debray advocates. Rossi-Landi suggests that "there is no human activity, whether it deals directly with ideology as an object of study or not, which is not potentially ideological" (Rossi-Landi, 1982:6). Rossi-Landi then goes on to suggest at least eleven identifiable headings for classifying ideology. These include everything from mythology, to lies, to worldview (1982:18). While he orders these in a hierarchical manner, Rossi-Landi does acknowledge the reality of all of

these modalities of ideology. The issue that arises from this approach is that none of these modalities can be dismissed without a deeper analysis of what symbolic efficacy is and how it functions.

The issue of relativism is obviously a central one to the development of all theory and to the problem of knowledge in general. What is relevant in this regard is to understand that Debray can be read as proposing a kind of "weak" relativism which seeks to open up a dialogue among discourses. The objective of this strategy is to ensure that no social, political, or economic discourse may present itself in such a manner as to close off the debate about social experience.

Adopting this stance does not mean accepting that in the end relativism rules and therefore holding that claims to knowledge are only contextually valid. In the cultural sense, claims to knowledge can be sympathetically understood by adopting a limited position of relativism. This could mean for example, accepting that the truth claims made in the name of myth, religion, or ideology all have elements of validity, particularly for those who are located in the cultural ambit of any one of these systems of symbolic efficacy. But all of these claims could be subject to a meta-theory of a scientific nature, for example. Such a relativism could also exist within the context of a structuralist type of

system such as that proposed by Levi-Strauss, where the unconscious mind is said to force certain categories upon the way in which we as subjects experience the world. These experiences may be articulated in different ways, therefore requiring a relativist position as a strategy of inquiry but requiring that the underlying forms and processes be somehow uncovered (Dant, 1991:103).

The notion of symbolic efficacy as an alternative characterisation of the observable phenomenon of socially efficacious ideas is one that can also be found in the work of other Marxists, even if it is not explained in quite the same terms that Debray uses. Indeed, the entire effort of attempting to understand ideology hinges on the belief that human subjects are driven to engage in certain behaviour by the force of the ideas that they hold. This takes various forms and may include both the notion of the subject as possessing free will or as being the subject of deterministic outcomes. In both these cases, the role of ideas is central, even if different. In determinist theories ideas are the cause of actions, though they are themselves caused by other stimuli. In indeterminist theories subjects have ideas which they essentially have chosen to motivate themselves in a course of action (Honderich, 1993:3). The interrelated issue of the subject and agency is also one that Debray attempts to address.

The history of the concept of ideology, approximately two centuries long, is a relatively short one. Definitions of ideology tend to want to distinguish it from religion, mythology, and all so-called non-rational belief or thought (McLellan, 1986:3). In the Marxist tradition, prior to Gramsci's intervention, there is a similar tendency. The notion of ideology has to be located within the rationalist project from which it arises. Debray's notion of symbolic efficacy undermines this tendency by suggesting that all ideas that have observable effects in the realm of the social need to be considered when looking for an explanation of symbolic efficacy.

Debray argues that the root of the problem of the fetishised notion of ideology can be traced back to Marxist discourse in which ideology is seen as "false or wrong ideas, illusion, a lack, privation, failure and insufficiency" (93). Although the actual term ideology has its origins in the writings of the Comte Destutt de Tracy, Marx changed the meaning of ideology from "the science of ideas" to the "ideas of anti-science" (85). It has been widely acknowledged that the Marxist theory of ideology has dominated the social sciences. The errors that Marx committed in constructing his theory have subsequently been carried over into the disciplines which consider the problem of ideology. Debray argues that in addition to this, the errors of the rationalist project of the Enlightenment also pervade modern political theory. Since Marxism

is also a product of the Enlightenment, the same weaknesses are to be found in Marxist theory that are general within the rationalist paradigm. Not least amongst these are the attempt to create a total theory of society, the overriding scientism that is central to rationalism, and the inherent imperialist nature of the discourse of rationalism.

Marxist theory was constructed in the context of a contests of ideas. Marx and Engel's critique of Hegel saw them attempting to set up their own theories as "scientific", that is, to claim a particular status for their ideas over and above others. All that had come before, or stood in opposition, was to be considered "unscientific" or "ideological". In other words, Marxist theory operates, in this instance, precisely as "censor and exorcist" by declaring all other theory to be "false" and the cause of society's ills to be "false consciousness".

According to Debray, the dichotomy between mental and physical reality which is central to Hegel's philosophy is carried over into Marxist theory. Whereas for Hegel the idea creates the world, for Marx the world creates the idea. The effect of this "turning on it's head" of Hegel's philosophy is that Marx's epistemology does not allow for consciousness to produce anything. In fact, consciousness is regarded as simply a poor, mirror image of the real. By wrestling with Hegel, Marx's theory of ideology bears traces of an

idealism. Because this theory does not allow for consciousness itself to be active, it makes a fetish of ideology. All that we think and do as subjects is seen to come from outside of us. According to Debray's interpretation of Marx's theory, it is therefore only when we are finally able to "see the world the way it really is" that we will be able to understand how the world needs to be remade (95). How this is possible is not easily explained, unless one accepts an evolutionary development of humanity's ability to understand its situation or a Platonic view of the acquisition of knowledge. In that case, arguing for change and revolutionary activity is self-contradictory, since all change will happen in good time as the veil of ignorance we blindly suffer under is lifted through the inevitable progress towards a better world or by revelation and recognition of the ideal forms that underlie reality.

The problem that Debray identifies is that Marxism does not allow for subjectivity despite arguing for recognition of the subject. According to Debray, there is no room in Marxism for the psychological subject, the thinking, feeling, deciding, scheming, lying, joking person. There is consequently no theoretical location of the mental creativity of human beings. The determinism by which Marx's theory of ideology is straight-jacketed removes the power of thought from thought itself and thereby from the subject. Those who think they are the power themselves

may be conscious, but the form of this consciousness, seen from the classical Marxist point of view, is false.

Debray argues that this error within Marx's thought arises from "a fatal preclassification" of "forms and forces". This flaw in Marxism is a consequence of the historical period within which Marx wrote. Marx's ideas about society were premised upon the outdated framework of classical mechanics. Science has developed from these earlier explanatory models of classical mechanics to those of quantum physics, which has revealed shortcomings in the classical model, not least of all in relation to the notion of determinism. There has not been a similar universally accepted development of social theory in general or of Marxism in particular. Consequently, the problem of ideology that Marxism poses simply does not exist for us in the same sense that it did for Marx. Like all social theory, Marxism only presents us with a particular segment of social reality that is determined by a number of factors. One of these, as already noted, is the conceptual separation of physical activity and consciousness, which results in ideology being conceptually separated from social existence in academic and polemical discourse. This critical point begs the question, can there be a science about society, or can there only be doctrines about society?

The base/superstructure division in Marx's theory that underlies this view of the world results in the perception that all that goes on in the world is "real" and all our representations of this activity are "unreal". The effect of this separation, which runs throughout Marxist theory, and indeed the entire rationalist project, carries with it a "schizophrenia" that causes Marxism to give only secondary consideration to what are "primary structures of social vitality, that is "ethnic groups, nations, languages, religions" (104). In classical Marxism, these are all considered to be mental or social constructions of varying degrees of falsity. They are superstructural phenomena with no actual basis in the "real" material world, other than in the economic relations which are essential to society. In classical rationalist theories, these are ideas that operate in a spiritual or intellectual realm separate from the world.

According to Debray, Marx's error in relation to understanding and explaining symbolic efficacy was to "spontaneously link religions with ideologies as mental representations rather than as organisational processes". Debray argues that as an alternative we need to recognise that thought does not "take place" within peoples heads and it is not "subjective determination". Thought actually has "the objective materiality of an organisational process" (109). What this means is that religious or political doctrines do not "form" groups by creating a situation where

people cling to the (wrong) idea that they are, for example, Christians or South Africans. Doctrines are actually part of, and arise from, the process of the formation of the religious or political group. There can be no effective doctrine without the community which sustains and perpetuates it. Just as he was mistaken about ideology, Marx was wrong about religion. Although Marxist theory was ostensibly founded on the critique of religion, Debray argues that Marx did not go far enough. Marx never considered the organisation of religious institutions and consequently could not see where the force of ideas was actually located. Marx studied the canons of religion but not the church.

Debray's challenge to the classical Marxist view of ideology raises some important matters for consideration. The interpretation he gives of Marx's theory aside, his points about the manner in which thought and action are conceptualised are important ones. The weakness of Marx's model lies in its attempt at appropriating rationalist discourse and then failing to follow this through by revising its assumptions, models, and experiments with the developments in the scientific project that is the standard bearer of rationalism. Not only this, since there is also no theory of the subject and of the imaginary in Marxism. The notion of consciousness as essentially a reflective activity is simplistic. The challenge that Debray has to confront is to

primarily through struggle. Later Marxist-Leninist theory saw the need to actively foster working-class consciousness, but none of this rules out the existence of the subject (Lenin, 1947a:41).

The knowledge of the world, that is of reality, held by such subjects would of course be inferior knowledge in Marx's view. Marxism posits an objective truth and a social teleology in which subjectivity is located. This rationalist aspect of Marxism, which seeks to stake its claim as the advanced theory of the social by ensuring an efficient "method of procuring truth", is a matter that cannot be dealt with fully here. However, theory will only be regarded as efficacious to the extent that it is successful both in terms of its descriptive, explanatory, and predictive features, as well as its ability to shape the course of history. What determines the latter is as much a strategic matter as it is an epistemological question. The subject may be a problem for Marxism, but more fundamental is the fact that Debray identifies Marxism as having to grapple with the notion of agency.

Jakubowski points out that ideology in Marxism is described as a consequence of the essential features of capitalism as defined by Marx. These are the division of labour, commodity production and exchange, wage labour, and the social relations and institutions that accompany these, such as private property, and the state (Jakubowski, 1990:97). It is

because the false consciousness that fails to express reality in its totality is a feature of capitalist society that ideology is a "conscious expression of the objective appearance assumed by capitalist reality" (Jakubowski, 1990:103). Jakubowski understands Marx to mean that "the whole superstructure of human ideas . . . is ideological, as long as these ideas maintain an apparent autonomy of the political and legal superstructure and of the economic base" (Jakubowski, 1990:104).

Despite the fact that there seems to be a failure to differentiate between concepts such as culture and hegemony in such a definition of ideology, what this definition does do is reinforce Debray's own suggestion that we should concentrate on the observable fact of symbolic efficacy. Jakubowski's interpretation of Marxist theory contradicts the somewhat simplistic argument that the Marxist conception of ideology is one that simply counters opposing views with the "discourse of imputation". In Jakubowski's interpretation of Marxist theory, as is in Lenin's, there is room for both bourgeois as well as proletarian ideology, even if one is regarded as a form of false consciousness and the other as scientific knowledge or the truth. This interpretation of Marx does not however grapple with the other criticisms that Debray makes of Marx's original theory.

It has to be recognised that Marxists have been confronted with a number of weaknesses in Marx's theory that Jakubowski's description does not take into account. Various ideas have been shown to maintain an apparent autonomy from the "base". For example, the fact that capitalism seems to be "manageable" to the extent that, despite the regular cyclical crises of the system, or even perhaps because of them, sections of the working class can be co-opted to the side of capital, still needs to be adequately explained. There is no automatic logic of the base that the superstructure follows. Revolutionary practice has also revealed the fact that the relationship between the revolutionary party, the state, and the revolutionary constituency is not always managed to the benefit of the subjects concerned, working class or otherwise, or to maximise the potential of the revolution. The Soviet Union during the reign of Stalin springs to mind as an obvious example.

In a substantial critique of Marxist political economy, Jean Baudrillard pointed out that not only is the Marxist analysis of the productive cycle and the relations of production inadequate, it is also prone towards the same weakness of all totalising and structuralist theories; they end up as studies of order and thereby fail to unearth the processes of power and authority that characterise social existence in all its subtlety (Levin, 1981:10).

Debray's argument that Marx is guilty of idealism is one that cannot be easily dismissed. As a consequence of this problem the history of Marxist theory is littered with attempts to redefine Marx on ideology. Debray's lecturer at university, Louis Althusser, asserted that Marx has no materialist theory of ideology (Althusser, 1984:32). Althusser offered a reformulation of Marxist theory that defined ideology as "representing the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence", and described ideology as having "a material existence" (Althusser, 1984:36-39). In addition, Althusser questioned what he describes as the "edifice" theoretical analysis of Marxism. He argued that by representing the structure of society in purely "spatial" terms, this metaphor is one that can only be regarded as being descriptive (Althusser, 1984:10). In other words, it is of little value, for example, in explaining how society actually functions or the dynamic relationships between thought and action.

The mere fact that Althusser embarked on the project of reformulating Marx gives a clear indication of the fact that he, like many other intellectuals in France at the time, was attempting to rescue Marxism from its perceived impending collapse, an event that according to many commentators has now actually occurred (Ferry and Renault, 1990:xiv). The tradition of critically reinterpreting Marx, which has been described as "Western Marxism", is widely

recognised as a project that seeks to deal with the perceived shortcomings of Leninism and Social Democracy by supplementing Marxism with existentialism, language theory, psychoanalysis, and subject theory (Poster, 1984:1, 20, 28, 32, 37). It has also been read as an attempt at "out-Marxing Marx", thereby attempting to rescue Marxism from the criticisms of the deconstructionists, structuralists, and post-structuralists by creating a neo-Marxism (Ferry and Renaut, 1990:20). Debray can safely be located within this tradition.

Of course, the critique of the deterministic and economistic base/superstructure representation of society goes back further than Althusser. Gramsci not only criticised the interpretation of Marx that reads a mechanical relationship between the base and superstructure (Gramsci, 1988:190). He also argued that the complexity of social existence and the simplistic nature of Marx's theory disguises the fact that the whole set of economic and social relations, together with the ideological expression of these, forms a "historical bloc"; which is a the complex but more effective way of describing society (Gramsci, 1988:191). This view does in effect collapse the base/superstructure edifice and attempts to regard all aspects of society as being material. Roger Simon asserts that Gramsci defines ideology as being that which "organises" humanity. He quotes Gramsci as identifying the ideological as that which

establishes "the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." (Simon, 1982:58). In this sense, ideology has "material existence". Significantly, ideology is equated with religion in this respect.

Later critics of Marx are referred to as having been disenchanted by the perceived reductionism of Marxism, that sees humanity as simply history, and that history is divisible into clearly identifiable stages with a teleological motor anchored in the economic relations of society that will ensure a communist future. Even Sartre's Critique of Dialectical Reason, to which Debray's Critique of Political Reason owes more than just its title, must be read in the context of what Sartre called "a crisis in Marxist culture" (Sartre, 1976:19). Not only was Sartre also preoccupied with the problematic relationship between theory and history, which for Marxism is acute because it defines all history prior to Marxism as essentially pre-historical, but Sartre's entire critique can be read as an attempt to define a path around the impasse for theory that is created by the determinism of the base/superstructure dichotomy (Sartre, 1976:23). In its more recent form in the work of Baudrillard, for example, this critique not only rejects the superstructure but all that goes with it, including the notions of false consciousness, alienation, and even the historical subject. (Levin, 1991:12).

It is clear that Marx's base/superstructure dichotomy is problematic. Debray's critique of the "edifice" representation has a pedigree that cannot be easily ignored. The fact that so much of Marxist theory has been taken up with trying to understand, redefine, or interpret this "topographical metaphor", as Althusser characterised the base/superstructure dichotomy, is reason enough to regard this metaphor and the theory that goes with it with some degree of caution. Debray's critique also reveals problems that follow from the dichotomy created by the edifice metaphor. This view reduces consciousness to being a representation of the real. This has the effect of removing the subject from the social equation and it necessarily forces acceptance of a strong determinism. Since the classical Marxist view recognises the economic relations in society as being of primary determinance, the possibility of other social relations being of significance does not fit easily with this view.

Marx's theory of ideology is responsible for the creation of the problem of ideology, a convenient shorthand for the essential failure of the social sciences in constructing a sustainable, critical theory of the social. It has resulted in a fetishised notion of ideology in which the power of ideology is seen to come from everywhere but society itself. Marx's theory, while having the merits of clarifying the nature of capitalist relations and the class character of society has

the inherent tendency to reduce all social phenomenon to class, or economics, and to explain the continued rule of the bourgeoisie through the medium of a false consciousness. Even if that is ultimately how society functions, meaning that even if the base/superstructure theory is an inadequate description of the actual relations prevailing in society, but that class or economic factors are the real determinants of history, at the level of what people are aware of in their social existence, of what motivates them, such an explanation is not necessarily helpful, since it does not adequately explain the beliefs and actions of subjects.

Similarly, if consciousness is reduced to being essentially a poor reflection of the material, then such a description is limited. Consciousness is certainly the ability to reflect at a personal and collective level on the spatio-temporal and logical nature of our existence, on the social, political, and economic relations in which we are engaged. But consciousness is also the ability to devise amendments and adjustments to the material world in which we function as subjects. In other words, consciousness is an interactive medium between a subject and an environment. It is a channel for agency. Not only can we manipulate our own consciousness through the exercise of our imagination, but such imaginings can be projected beyond our private existence. It is this aspect of consciousness that Marxism must

grapple with and explain if it is to offer an adequate account of symbolic efficacy and ultimately of society. It is also possible that there may be room for error in all worldviews, so that "false ideas" are not the preserve of one perspective but a common feature of knowledge about the world. If this is the case we may be close to the truth but never quite get there.

While Debray's critique of Marxism and its notion of ideology is useful there are weaknesses in it. For one thing his reading of Marx is an unsympathetic one because it does not allow for the fact that within such a vast body of work various aspects of earlier theory were superseded by later developments. A critic could therefore find a quote to justify almost any argument from within Marx's collected works. But the main criticisms Debray makes of Marx in relation to ideology have a substantial tradition behind them. In addition, these comments are not made to simply reject Marx's theory, but are an attempt to apply this theory in a more rigorous fashion in a world that has changed substantially since the theory was first developed.

### **Relativism**

In the course of Debray's critique of Marx's theory of ideology a number of related issues come to the fore. Among these is the issue of relativism in theory. Debray seems, at first sight, to be guilty of accepting the kind of absolute relativism that have been identified as a feature

of postmodernism (Gellner, 1992a:23) and poststructuralism (Callinicos, 1989:6). But Debray's attempt to accord all symbolic systems or worldviews equal status in relation to each other for the purposes of developing a theory of symbolic efficacy does not mean that he does not accept the possibility of objective knowledge or of the ultimate superiority of one of these worldviews. In fact, Debray argues for the supremacy of the scientific method. But he also believes that what we have called political science is a pale imitation of this method in relation to understanding society.

Since his main objective is to understand the phenomenon of symbolic efficacy, Debray presumably accepts that this knowledge can be used to promote a particular worldview. Although he seeks to test his theory by claiming no special status for it in relation to all other worldviews, Debray hopes that this Cartesian rigour will allow for the development of a theory that is free of any normative assumptions, whether conscious or unconscious. This view also allows for the somewhat Machiavellian notion that the truth in politics is what people believe. But the essence of Debray's theory is to provide an explanation for political practice. This could be done even if the application of such a theory is by someone holding strong views themselves, providing these views are not able to unduly influence the outcome of such a critical exercise.

Debray's alternative characterisation of the problem of ideology as that of symbolic efficacy raises the related issues of subject and agency. It is worth noting that this problem is one that runs through the work of a number of influential French philosophers and political theorists. Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut have characterised French theory of the post Second World War period as being essentially a debate between humanism and anti-humanism (Ferry and Renaut, 1990). The crisis of French theory was that both of these views had been accused of having resulted in totalitarian political projects, in the forms of Fascism and Stalinism. The dominant project of French intellectuals was thus one of attempting to find ways out of this cul de sac, primarily by "carrying out a radical critique of subjectivity" (Ferry and Renaut, 1990:15) Like Debray, Ferry and Renaut identify the tension between the subject and history within Marx and Marxism as a "process without a subject".

While Debray has to be read in the context of this discourse, he does himself acknowledge the failings of Marxism. He sees the phenomenon of the nation as the means to reclaim subjectivity and to explain its functioning. It is in Debray's characterisation of the social collective and the functioning of the symbolic that the subject and agency are explained. The basis for this explanation is the argument that Debray puts forward for the religiopolitical unconscious. But Debray's explanation of the phenomenon of

symbolic efficacy blurs many concepts that have been traditionally defined in a number of ways. Not least of these are the notions of culture and hegemony. Anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff have offered a concise definition of these concepts and their relations that is not incompatible with Debray's notion of symbolic efficacy. Their proposals warrant some consideration as possible means for constructing a working model of the relationships between language, consciousness, power, and authority.

### **Ideology, Hegemony, and Culture**

Building on Gramsci's description of the concepts of hegemony, ideology, and culture, the Comaroffs define these terms in a way which they claim can assist in understanding symbolic efficacy. They see culture as the totality of "the shared repertoire of practices, symbols, and meanings from which hegemonic forms are cast - and by extension resisted" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:21). Hegemony, the Comaroffs point out, has been defined by many of those that interpret Gramsci as being the voluntary agreement given by society to the leadership of a particular elite. It is "that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies—drawn from a historically situated cultural field—that come to be taken for granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:23). Much of what is left

unsaid, because it is given, is what is hegemonic in society. As Debray puts it, it is the way in which the subject eats, sleeps, drinks, walks, and talks.

The Comaroffs see hegemony and ideology as being the manner in which power is located within culture. Ideology is the "worldview" of a particular group "that provides an organising scheme for collective symbolic production" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:24). They also see ideology as necessarily being located in the collective. Unlike cultural forms that have already become hegemonic, ideology is part of a not yet successful attempt to get control of the cultural sphere and through this effort to legitimise power.

This perspective on ideology does seem, at first sight, to support Debray's argument. While ideology organises, it reflects that which is not yet necessarily taken for granted. An ideology, represented in a particular symbolic form, which has been accepted by society, becomes hegemonic. All of this takes place within the realm of culture. Most important in this description of the relationship between ideology, hegemony, and culture is the understanding that they exist within a dynamic relationship that is constantly shifting and changing. Nothing is static and the terms of culture are being constantly renegotiated. That which is ideological today can be hegemonic tomorrow,

and vice versa (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:25).

Even if the notion of the hegemonic as being voluntarily accepted is not entirely satisfactory, and the relationship between their concepts of ideology and culture seems fairly mechanical, the schema of the Comaroffs is helpful because it distinguishes between the various states or modalities of the socially efficacious idea. In this description of the relationship between ideology, hegemony, and culture, we can begin to get a sense of how hegemony is about established ritual, practice, ceremony, and observance. Ideology is both the organisational process by which this social aspect becomes hegemonic, or orthodox, and the contest over the symbolic representation of that organisational process, in Debray's terms. Since most of social practice is about the organisation of subjects and the maintenance of hegemony, large amounts of society's activity are spent in the production, reproduction, contestation, and negotiation of symbolic resources. Understanding ideology, hegemony, and culture in this way allows for the recognition that there is much which is common in the discourse of power. This would account for the "constancy" that Debray describes as being a common feature of political practice (324).

The interpellation of the subject, which is the incorporation of individuals and their

location in society, also fits in comfortably with the Comaroffs approach. According to the Comaroffs, subjects are not passive observers or unconscious of their positions. Just as in Debray's view, the subject has to be located in the realm of the collective, that is, within culture. But as an agent, the subject can also influence culture, can use it as a resource, and can play an ideological role. Lastly, the Comaroffs provide a framework that describes in some detail what is effectively Debray's "collective preconscious schematism". Their description of the relationship between ideology, hegemony, and culture provides a means of understanding the relationship between "power, consciousness and representation" at the level of discourse at least (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:25).

The relationship between these three aspects of social existence can explain how the ways in which subjects negotiate their own position in the world is determined by relations of power, that is, hegemonic and ideological cultural practice, as well as the forms of representation these relationships take on. It is noticeable that the Comaroffs terminology does not necessarily coincide with Debray's. What they describe as hegemony Debray calls ideology, for example. But the manner in which these concepts are explained seems to indicate much symmetry between the two sets of views.

Although not explicitly stated in the Comaroffs' description of how ideology, hegemony, and culture operate, the function of language is again of particular relevance. As has already been argued, the notion of a collective schema has implicit in it the idea of language, that is, of conscious symbolic or representational activity. The extent to which this activity can be preconscious needs to be interrogated further however.

### **Power and Discourse: A Political Economy of Symbols**

The suggestion by the Comaroffs of a relationship between ideology, hegemony, and culture raises the issue of the relationship between power and discourse. Unlike the Comaroffs, Foucault sought to locate the power of words in what he described as the technology of the word. In Foucault's view, language is always accompanied by a set of practices of power that are aimed at a social group by other groups or individuals (Poster, 1984:9). The official discourse of any society or social group acts as censor to all other versions of history. The justification of the official version even goes as far as inventing categories such as myth to describe the reality that is "cut out" of the official version of the past (Strenski, 1987:1). The same can be said of concepts such as animism, totemism, fetishism, mana, false consciousness, ideology, and religion, which

operate strategically to elevate or reduce the relative position of those that adhere to certain views. The fact is that we must recognise that even what we describe as myth is "a social phenomenon . . . the product of the life of a people" (Strenski, 1987:154) The important point becomes to define what is said, by whom, on behalf of whom, and for what reasons, within any of these systems of symbolic efficacy.

It is arguable that just because something is no longer said doesn't mean that it wasn't once said. In fact Debray would support this view. He argues forcefully for locating the notion of ideology within a social movement and its ideas. Central to such a notion is the force of command or instruction. But what has become accepted cultural practice, that which is hegemonic, is always contested or is at the very least contestable. What is removed from the official version of the history is what is usually described as myth, in the sense of that which is not real or factual. Even so, all history has a mythical quality in that history is the remainder of a series of possible events and processes and how these were successfully or unsuccessfully manipulated. This category, like all those listed above, relates to the ordering of relations in society. They appear to operate at the level of theory. This involves the use of language. To speak is to be conscious. It therefore needs to be considered how the conscious use of

language can be reconciled with a notion of the preconscious or the unconscious.

Debray's collective preconscious schematism explains how ideology supposedly functions when it becomes accepted, that is, when it is hegemonic. The origin of this hegemony lies in the successful mobilisation of subjects, which requires the effective deployment of symbolic resources but also the ability to consolidate an application of symbolic resources "on the ground". This cultural practice has its basis in the actual activities of society. The reason for these practices is explained by the religious nature of social existence that is characterised by Debray as the logic of the sacred.

The Comaroffs schema falls short of being a complete account of symbolic efficacy for the reason that it does not adequately describe the relationship between a particular application of symbolic resources and the acceptance of a particular application by subjects, as individuals or as a collective. The explanation offered by the Comaroff's of how ideology and hegemony are facilitated through the cultural aspects of existence does not explain why certain ideas have the force of effect and others not. This view ends up being essentially idealist, because although the ideas at play in a particular cultural field may be at any one time hegemonic and always ideological, the relationship to these

ideas and the actual social existence of people is not explained. Neither is a satisfying account given for any one set of ideas being relevant, accepted, rejected, or contested. Such a view does not help us in the end, for while it offers a description of the operation of symbolic resources, it offers no explanation.

Despite his vigorous critique of Marxism, Debray does not necessarily abandon some of the basic premises of the Marxist theory, such as those that relate to the division of society into classes, the exploitation of one class by another, and the possible resolution of this situation in a favourable manner for those exploited. What can be salvaged from Marxism after the critique that Debray makes depends on the extent to which these criticisms are as far reaching as Debray claims they are. In any case, some of Debray's comments suggest that his critique of Marxism entails accepting it as a flawed but nevertheless necessary theoretical framework for explaining society and for guiding revolutionary activity (1977b:25, 46).

A significant response to part of the critique Debray makes has been given by Gregor McLennan in identifying the "Four Sins" that Post-Marxist critical theorists have found in Marxism. These are usually given in a critique of the Marxist notion of ideology. Some of these, "essentialism", "universalism", and "functionalism", are not necessarily criticisms

Debray makes. But one of the criticisms he does make is dealt with by McLennan. That is the charge of "reductionism" and specifically the argument against the historical relevance of Marxist theory and critique (1996:53-74).

Even Debray's own constancy thesis would challenge the notion that society has changed that much that theories about it are only relevant for certain limited periods of time. McLennan goes further to argue that such a critical view of the historical irrelevance of Marxism and the critique of reductionism are both incorrect historically and go against the general trend of seeking knowledge. He argues that society has not changed that fundamentally and that Post-Marxist critiques do not recognise the fact that Marx was criticised for reducing social relations to class even in his own day. In other words the problems that Marxist theory have may well be real ones, but not for the reasons advanced by such a criticism.

McLennan also argues that reductionism, for example in relation to class as the key or major determinant in social relations, is a feature of all scientific explanatory endeavours. He proposes what he calls a "weak" reductionism that allows for other determinants, but places them in a hierarchical relationship in order of priority. In any case, it is difficult to see how Debray could sustain a charge of reductionism against Marxism when his own theory is essentially reductionist.

In Debray's view, all aspects of society are ultimately the result of, or are determined by the centrality of the sacred.

Using Wittgensteinian philosophical arguments, Nigel Pleasants has suggested that the entire Marxist project is an exercise in persuading others of the validity of Marxist perspectives rather than being a scientific project. Giving up the alleged scientific status of Marxism for Pleasants is a necessary step a critical theorist must take (1996:408). Debray therefore does well to argue for the type of limited or weak relativism he does by this account.

This step enables Marxism to be seen as one perspective among many, but it also maintains the claim of the superiority of Marxism, not on the basis of science, but on the basis that it is an effective guide to constructing a better human existence. Marxism in this sense is a guide to action and a catalyst for transformation which is "proven" through its own success in effective organisation (Pleasants, 1996:412). In the process of organisation, the truth, or reality, is therefore socially constructed. This would seem to be a position Debray could comfortably accept. As Pleasants puts it, a revolutionary "can fight, hope and even believe without believing scientifically" (1996:414).

Other commentators, however, have put up a spirited defense of classical Marxism. Alex

Callinicos has argued against the Post-Marxist critiques by first of all presenting a substantial case against the very notion of post-modernity and for the evolutionary, historicist, reductionist, and functionalist reading of Marx (Callinicos, 1989). In fact, Callinicos even argues that there is no such thing as the post-industrial society and that Marxism still supplies the only viable explanation of society (1989:121). If Marxism is relevant even though it is not fundamentally correct in every respect, or basically true apart from a few aspects, then the issue that arises is whether Debray's reformulation adds anything to Marxism. It is also important to decide what relationship there will be between Marxist theory and the theoretical issues raised in Debray's reading of Durkheim.

Debray's reformulation of the problem of ideology as that of the explanation of the phenomenon of symbolic efficacy offers the possibility of developing a political economy of the symbol. Jean Baudrillard proposed just this in his Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign. This exercise sought to deal with the perceived failure of Marxism to explain adequately the nature of the commodity. Why Marxism failed in this respect in Baudrillard's view is because it moved away from the premise of determining of economic relationships by the calculation of use value. Baudrillard argued that the basis of value is exchange. As a result the commodity became the central feature of

capitalism. Within capitalist relations of exchange, the commodity is essentially a sign and even the dominant form of signification. (Baudrillard, 1981:23). But Baudrillard also proposed that the values of exchange were essentially determined by a political economy (Levin, 1981:20). Since language is a system of signs and this system is obviously determined by the relations of capitalism, it has located within it a set of relations that determine power and authority. For Baudrillard, "all the repressive and reductive strategies of power systems are already present in the internal logic of the sign, as well as those of exchange value and political economy" (1981:163).

Even if we do not accept this radical thesis of Baudrillard, and there are important criticism that have been made of his characterisation of what is described as late capitalism, his critique of Marx points to factors which Debray has also identified. The first is that power and authority are not purely economic phenomena. They may be located or deployed in the economy and for economic reasons, but they are also located within other social relationships, for example between the sexes, or between parents and children, or between leaders and followers. Significantly, such social exchanges operate in and through discourse and therefore locate power and authority in that medium. These relationships may even have originally been economic, and may continue to foster certain

economic relations, but they are no longer purely economic, and economics is not their most significant feature.

Secondly, the dominant forms of power relations are to be found in the system of the signs that facilitate social relationships. The origin of these relations of power and authority need to be identified. A political economy of the symbolic, that is, of the production, ownership, distribution, consumption, and management of signs, is therefore essential. Debray identifies these in the relationship between language, signs, and ritual, and between the signified, the sacred, and the social. Baudrillard, like the Comaroffs, can be accused of not grounding the critique of Marxism and capitalism in anything but appearances. Callinicos, for example, has pointed out that for Baudrillard, appearance is everything (1989:145).

Accepting part of Baudrillard's argument however, does not mean giving up the notions of class, class struggle, revolutionary organisation, and mobilisation. But it certainly does mean recognising that the manner in which these activities take place must vary both over time and in specific cultural situations. Ideology is not an entity with its own interests. Ideology is the name given to the observable fact of the power of symbols. But in whose interests these symbols operate is key to understanding the political economy of the sign. How we define a

group, class, elite, or any other collective helps to determine in whose interests symbols are deployed and manipulated. An argument can be constructed to show that, even though symbols are ultimately determined by the sacred, there are still class interests attached to symbols. The development of society from an agrarian to an industrialised stage has been described as having being the transfer of power form one type of ruling elite to another. In this process the form of articulation of the sacred and the attendant relations of power changed, but an elite remained (Gellner, 1983:1, 8, 24, 35). It is reasonable to argue that Debray's critique of ideology is not a critique of all the related claims of Marxism, but is more about correcting the perceived error that Marx makes in describing how symbolic efficacy functions and can be managed in the interests of a ruling elite.

In his critique of ideology, Debray sets out to find a path around the fetishised notion of ideology by constructing a theory of symbolic efficacy. His critique of ideology is a substantial one that at the very least compels us to recognise the limitations of the mechanical, reductionist, or reified notion of ideology that has its origins in the Marxist critique of religion. In it's place, Debray argues for an understanding of ideology that rests on a materialist notion of symbolic efficacy. Such a theory seeks to ground the relationship between thought and action in the material world. Debray provides an account

of the functioning of symbolic efficacy by explaining the relationship between thought and action which is to be found in the organising of social existence. This organising takes place through the delimitation of space and time, and raises a number of other issues which any theory of symbolic efficacy must deal with, including the very idea of the historical subject or the abstract person, the issue of historical agency, the role of language and consciousness, and the relationship between such concepts as class and culture. All of these Debray seeks to deal with by exposing the religious nature of social existence.

Chapter 3: The Religiopolitical  
Unconscious

Debray is of the view that due to the fetishised notion of ideology that has dominated theoretical discourse, and because of the role of ideology as censor and exorcist, the problem of the political condition of humanity persists. Debray describes this political condition as being society's inability to radically transform itself and improve the lot of the collective or even of most of its individual subjects. Debray argues that, despite the classical Marxist view of ideology, as the ideas of "anti-science" and the alternative that Marx attempted to create in the form of his philosophy of the working class, ideology has yet to disappear from the political scene. It has also yet to be explained adequately. By its own account, therefore, the Marxist project has not been successful.

Following Althusser, Debray argues for the position that "the ideological imaginary is coextensive with the existence of social relations" (117). Two consequences follow from this. In the first instance, there can be no system of symbolic efficacy without social relations, that is, without the collective. But it also means that there can be no collective without a system of symbolic efficacy. Because the prevailing discourse tends to locate ideology as being

superstructural, that is as existing "in the discourse", "in the individual", or "in the head", it removes symbolic efficacy from its necessary environment - the social collective. According to Debray, we must look at the functioning of the symbolic in the originating context of group formation. Our conception of the world, the images that appear to drive us, originate in what Debray calls the religiopolitical unconscious of the group (117-118). Given Debray's critique of the notion of ideology and his reformulation of this problematic as that of symbolic efficacy, the issue is not the existence of ideology in all societies. The issue becomes that of the fact of symbolic efficacy as a necessary and perpetual feature of social existence.

It is not unreasonable to accept that there will always be worldviews. What then becomes relevant is where the terms and conditions of these worldviews originate, how they operate in subjectivity, in the collective, and in the interests of certain segments of the collective. The extent to which the various modalities of worldview have been described, however, is also relevant. Where religion ends and ideology begins is essentially a matter of interpretation, just as where myth is distinguished from historical fact. Debray points out that the relationship between religion and politics cannot be crudely equated with the distinction between the sacred and the profane. Debray's approach

therefore challenges conventional definitions of religion and politics.

### **Religion and Politics: A Unified Theory of Power**

Durkheim defined religion as that which mobilises subjects. It is a power that is able to move people in a particular social formation. For Durkheim "a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community . . . all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim, 1976:47). Debray takes this point and develops it further by extending Durkheim's definition of religion to include that which gives rise to all "socially efficacious ideas". This means that, for Debray, the category of political ideas that are able to generate an effect on society are, in Durkheimian terms, religious by definition. Political behaviour, like religious behaviour, is governed by "faith, belief and opinion" (120). Debray uses the term ideologico-religious to define these socially efficacious ideas. He thus extends Durkheim's definition of religion to all "unified systems of belief", but still has to explain how political practices relate to "sacred things".

The physical evidence for the religious nature of politics is to be found in the rituals, ceremonies, practices, and observances that are part of civic life. Civil religion in the United

States, for example, has been an obvious case of the merger of religion and politics. (Chidester, 1988:88-109). Debray believes, however, that the most religious of all societies were the very ones that pronounced themselves to be most "scientific", namely, those socialist societies which had been in existence since the Bolshevik Revolution (9). This view is supported by the Christel Lane in relation to political life in the USSR (1981). Although these societies provide a living laboratory for the political anthropologists and manifest extreme representations of religiosity, all societies are affected by a similar condition. The newly forming states that arise in the developing world are also testing grounds for theories of the political (14). These are important not because they are "primitive", Debray insists, but because they present an opportunity to ensure that "ethnology and history" can be utilised to study "political reality" (15).

The extent to which worldviews necessarily develop distinctions among religion, politics, and war is called in to question by the fact that a case can be made for a "unified theory of power" (Chidester, 1988:8). Debray's assertion that ideology performs the same role as religion did in the past seems self-evident (34-35). A useful case study of the ideologico-religious is provided by the Classical Greek scholar George Thomson, in his Aeschylus and Athens: A study in the social origins of drama. Thomson describes the

development of ancient Greek society from its tribal origins to the city state. In this process, the development of religious belief is of central importance. From the totemic origins of the early tribes to even the relatively sophisticated aristocracy, Thomson indicates the unity of worldview and the absence of the secular-religious dichotomy (Thomson, 1941:68). Indeed, according to Thomson, this dichotomy only came much later with the development of a ruling class that found itself in a crisis it could no longer manage. Therefore, the observation of an increasing secularisation is not limited to contemporary society.

Ethnographers have generally recognised the common features of religion in so-called primitive societies. There is no real distinction between religious and secular life in most pre-capitalist societies. The gods are intimately involved in the daily lives of all. Worldview is determined by a unified conception of existence and the laws governing it. The natural and supernatural are not distinguished in the manner in which they are in modern societies.

In any event, the idea that religion per se represents a separate and distinct social phenomenon emerged out of a particular history. Some scholars have argued for a radical deconstruction of the notion of religion that Western European discourse in particular has bequeathed us. Jonathan Z. Smith argues that

religion is a creation of academia (1982:xi). Distinguishing between monothetic and polythetic forms of classification, Smith points out that the former initially dominated the study of religion (1982:5). The development of the academic study of religion has been a tortured one where comparisons were made and particularly so in the context of the colonial encounter. Despite the claim now that religion is to be found in all societies, during the colonial encounter the most common form of engagement with people was to deny them any religion (Smith, 1989:37; Chidester, 1996:11). The challenge Debray makes to the category of religion, and by virtue of this critique to other related categories in the social sciences, is a credible one that is part of an ongoing debate in the discipline of the academic study of religion, as a recent contribution from Timothy Fitzgerald demonstrates (1996:215-236). By breaking down what he regards as an artificial division in the social sciences Debray is able to present an alternative in the form of a radical analysis of the collective.

Debray points out that when an ideology is functioning, that is when the symbolic is effective, it is a part of what does not need to be said. It informs the habits and manners of its subjects. The "link" that exists between the thought and action of subjects is explained by Debray as being "a collective preconscious schematism" (125). The "schema" is an imaginary

conception of actual activity. It gives subjects knowledge about the world and how they should act in it. In other words, the process of socialisation determines patterns of belief and practice that are not immediately apparent to the conscious subject, but which determine the character of this belief and practice.

Religion and ideology, as usually defined, are the same to the extent that they focus the members of the group in terms of their actions within a particular community. What the subject says, does, eats, and so on, is prescribed and proscribed by the ideologico-religious and an identity is created in this way. It is the "official we" that is not present in the consciousness of the group at all times. It may be called upon, or rallied for a purpose, but it is preconscious in that it is implicitly present in an entire range of social activity (125-126). In these terms, Debray finds that religion and ideology are modalities of the symbolic that focus action.

In the process of defining the community, a "them" is also necessarily created in opposition to the implicit "us". Social identity and polarity are two sides of the same coin. This fact creates the "polemical nature" of political life. The collective, by definition, occupies the terrain of a bipolar oppositional existence characterised by the basic dichotomies: "good/bad, clean/dirty, sacred/profane, inside/outside". This dichotomy creates a logic of "affectivity, efficacy and

community" that prescribes the nature of social existence (128).

What passes for "ideology", and arguably for "religion" as well, is actually a dry attempt at rationalising and justifying our feelings, emotion, belief, and faith that arise out of a social movement. Debray argues that political life is by its very nature an emotive issue. We are driven by what is "right" in politics and against what is "wrong". But the actual justification for these beliefs is provided after the fact. When we come to have a worldview we do so through emotions and patterns of socialisation which link us to the world in which we find ourselves. The system of social forces within which we are located must also include the psychological motivations of the subject if we are to describe the totality that is the world. This of course means that the problem of relativism arises again in a different form for Debray. If our beliefs are so determined, how will anyone change their beliefs? How can someone be convinced of the "correctness" of any other worldview? The answer to this question lies not simply in the contestation of worldviews, that is, in the relationship between what the Comaroffs describe as "ideology, hegemony, and culture", but also in the processes of organisation that are the basis of these symbolic contests.

**The Affective and the Religiopolitical  
Unconscious**

Although Debray admits that he cannot offer a theory of emotion, he insists that the affective must be central to any discussion of ideology. He argues that emotion is at the centre of all belief, whether rational or irrational. Challenging even the dichotomy between belief and knowledge in relation to political ideas, or the distinction between myth and fact, Debray argues that the way ideology is experienced by subjects demolishes the divide between the "pleasure and reality principles" (132). Ideologies operate on myths and dreams. The reductionist rationalist project that is characterised as Western political thought does not consider the affective as a subject of inquiry. Indeed, in the study of politics a distinction is even drawn between the public and private lives of political actors, even though every subject is necessarily both private and public. Debray challenges the dichotomy between affective and intellectual existence that is perpetuated through the animal/human, physical/mental distinctions that operate in the rationalist perspective. In this attention to the emotional dimension, Debray develops theoretical trends found in Satre's outline for a theory of the affective in practical reason and Roland Barthes attention to the affective character of myth. However, he insists on grounding thought, feeling, and myth in social organisation.

The ideologico-religious and the social collective—"ideas" and "groups"—are different

aspects of the same phenomenon according to Debray (140). The one cannot exist without the other. Individuals are constituted in and by the social collective through the "ideal we" that the group projects. Individual subjects are mobilised through the process of enclosure into the group by the members of that group. We are only able to construct a world for ourselves in our group activities, not as individuals, through the ideologico-religious that mobilises us. As Debray puts it, "first comes belonging, then belief" (143).

What Debray calls the "imperative to belong" suggests that our collective means of expression requires us to give up our individuality. The human condition in society is such that the political subject can only be constituted through the other, the group. In this way an idea becomes real, an objective fact, when any group is constituted as an organised force. But for this to happen the relationship between the subject and the group must be mediated, and this occurs, according to Debray when the group, the other, is personified in the form of a leader.

Because of the organic nature of group formation, Debray argues, Althusser's mechanical metaphors for explaining ideology, which have the merit of having done away with the distinction between imaginary and real relations that Marx created, must be misplaced.

He argues that what takes place is better described by a biological metaphor, even if we must accept the fact that any metaphor will suffer from some degree of inaccuracy. The social collective is likened to an organism, in that it is self-perpetuating and must sustain itself against terminal decay by re-organising itself constantly.

There is a founding moment for any organised group, and the subsequent "transmission" of the idea through organisation from that point on (154). The objective of the group, like any organic entity, is simply its own existence. In other words, the group is an end in itself, unlike any mechanical entity which has been constructed for a purpose. According to Debray, the survival and reproduction of a group is a natural phenomenon. We thus cannot determine in advance whether an idea will become a force or cease to be one. Because the characteristics of the group are that of the living system driven by "self-preservation, self-regulation, and self-reproduction", the fact that a particular set of ideas becomes the organising principle of any group is an organic process of birth and survival in the face of death (160). But there must be some criteria that determine which ideas will be successful. Presumably the ideas that work are those that effectively mobilise people and enable them to achieve the core of their objectives. Certainly, this would vary historically and geographically, but if we accept the organic metaphor then certain "natural"

constants could be observed in social production and reproduction.

The result of this organic nature of social collectives is that any theory of symbolic efficacy must explain the process of incorporation. It must recognise that political behaviour is not predictable or subject to direction, since the collective, the agent of political existence, is an autonomous, spontaneous, and organic entity. It must explain how groups act on, in, and through the political subject. The fact that the collective is organic and has characteristics of its own has profound consequences for the study of society and for political practice. In addition, the group can only be engaged for transformation by the very subjects that it has constituted, except for violent engagement from outside of that group. The subject can only experience the collective from the inside. To be part of the group is to be engaged in its activities, its rituals and practices, its ceremonies and observances. Therefore, the religious nature of "organic" social formations is apparent.

As noted, Debray argues that symbolic efficacy and the collective are coextensive. The one cannot exist without the other; they are different aspects of the same thing. All worldviews are the same in their origin and the manner in which they function. This explains the falsity of the distinction usually made between religion and ideology. Ideology and culture are

also to be considered as being coextensive. The explanation of a collective preconscious schematism that Debray puts forward is an explanation of how the subject is given the means to view the world and act in it.

The founding of the collective, the marking out in space and time of a group, ensures that social existence, by its very nature, is territorial. This fact, and that of the opposition between what is inscribed inside and outside, gives the bipolar character of that existence and the contested nature of social existence. Social existence is therefore "affective", according to Debray's account of it. To mobilise the subject, the collective must be able to rouse the emotions. The psychological subject is thus mobilised by the collective, but it is created by the insecurity of human existence and by the certainty of death. In this situation it is given certain characteristics which are commonly regarded as human nature. When constituted in a group, subjects are subordinated to collective imperatives. Like any organism, the collective organism will succeed in perpetuating itself to the extent that it is able to prevent that which is outside from contaminating it. This conjuncture of biological, territorial, and psychological imperatives is central to Debray's explanation of symbolic efficacy.

As we have seen, Debray argues that there can never be a society without the phenomenon

of symbolic efficacy, and therefore without the manufacture and manipulation of symbolic resources. Certainly, this argument recalls Althusser who argued that, to the extent that there will always be subjects, and these exist because society interpellates them, ideology is eternal (Althusser, 1984:49). Since there can be no society without subjects, it follows that in Debray's theory all societies will feature the ideologico-religious. This has profound consequences. Not the least of these is that the notion of a society without division and difference, and therefore conflict and competition, is not one that can be easily sustained. But it is conceivable that we could accept the thesis of symbolic efficacy that Debray proposes without accepting the argument that religion and politics are the same thing. Definitions of either of these phenomenon are bound to be contested. Religious people and theologians in particular tend to want to preserve their area of claimed expertise from the profane political arena. Political theorists are apt to want to distinguish their field as rational and scientific, as opposed to the mystical or superstitious realm of faith.

But Debray's argument is based on a particular notion of religion that has a lot to offer. If we accept that there is an aspect of human existence and activity that is distinct and even of a superior nature, such as religion is often said to be, then that is a philosophical

position which has to be defended. Durkheim's definition of religion challenges such a view by making religion an aspect of the social. It does set it apart, and even elevates it by describing society as God. But it does not mystify the notion of religion. To argue for some special status for religion would be to accept religion on its own terms. In other words, religion can "express the nature of sacred things" (Durkheim, 1965:56), but that does not make religion an aspect of social existence which cannot be studied or even compared with other social activities. It also does not mean that it is the only medium through which the sacred is experienced.

This view is one supported by a number of scholars. Comparative religion is said to be an attempt to be neutral with respect to religion in all its forms (Paden, 1988:36). This necessitates the study of all belief systems on an equal footing. Not only does this mean not accepting the a priori view that some people have religion and others don't, but it also means that whatever is regarded as sacred to a community can be treated as being the central point around which that society is organised.

Marcel Mauss argued that we cannot abstract religion, politics, and economics, but must view these in their totality as a "complex, concrete reality" (Mauss, 1969:viii). He has further argued that there are religious aspects to economic activity, where ritual, myth, and

ceremony are as important to exchange, if not the very reason for certain exchanges taking place (Mauss, 1969:70). Durkheim even proposed that the very notion of economic value can only be properly understood in religious terms. It is therefore not extraordinary to seek to construct a similar argument for the political realm, as Debray does. This presents the possibility of providing an explanation of the political economy of the sacred.

Arising from the observation of social beliefs and practices related to the fetish, or to the "cargo" in cargo movements, or to sacred property, that is, religious artifacts and commodities, it is possible to begin to construct a description and definition of the sacred that lies at the base of all social existence, as Durkheim suggested (Worsley, 1968; Geary, 1986:169-191). These examples graphically illustrate the life of objects and their role in the beliefs and practices of people. But a political economy of the sacred goes beyond simply explaining the religious nature of social existence or the role of a commodity. It seeks to explain the functioning of society in terms of the sacred. A political economy of the sacred would attempt to explain the manner in which production, distribution, and exchange, the as well as the nature of power and authority, were all a function of the sacred.

Debray's definition of the religiopolitical is therefore a broad one. He basically argues that any aspect of social existence is religiopolitical if it involves a collective. This is not necessarily counter-intuitive, since we simply need to rid ourselves of the notion of formal politics that dominates our existence through the monopolising of the terms of political activity and powerful communication media. Most feminists, socialists, environmentalists, and even anarchists would all go along with the notion that the political is everything that goes on inside and outside of the individual subject. The notion that politics and religion are identical is certainly not an obvious fact, but it has been argued that there is a definite similarity by many scholars, as well as no distinction by some. The argument for interdependence and a unified theory of social belief has its origins in Durkheim's sociology and runs through the related discipline of anthropology (Chidester, 1988:3; Wilentz, 1985:1-10).

In contemporary Western capitalist society the religious and the political seem to fall into two different spheres, the private and the public. Notwithstanding the problematic nature of this distinction, it is a view of secularism that prevails. There are however many religious societies, where the distinction between politics and religion is not only done away with but also those where such a distinction is regarded as evil. Jurgensmeyer has described the religious

nature of some nationalisms, the anti-imperialist nature of some religions, and the relatively recent origins of secular politics in the eighteenth century, which is linked to industrialisation and the globalisation of capital (1993:1, 4, 15, 17, 26-27).

There are other scholars who have argued that religion, politics, and war are simply a modern division of labour. Marx and Engels argued that priests were the first ideologues (1970:51). As already been noted, in ancient Greek society no real distinctions were made between religious belief, and political practice, including the use of organised physical violence, in the sense that all were legitimate aspects of human existence bound up with clans and tribal groupings (Thomson, 1942:59). Even if we grant Debray the collapsing of the distinction between religion and politics, it is not the case that the phenomenon he describes of ideas that move people and in which they believe, necessarily arise from any unconscious. The issue of how the sacred is defined has also to be adequately explained if we are to accept the notion of the religiopolitical. If, as Debray argues, religion, politics, and war are just variations on a theme of collective organisation, we need to offer a coherent account of how these appear to have become separated from one another.

The description Debray gives of the relationship between the group and the individual

offers a unique explanation for the subject and the phenomenon of agency. Idealists are usually at a loss to explain how it is that an idea, a "non-material" entity, can cause a person to act, and even be able to get other people to act. The explanations for this process usually invoke some utilitarian argument, some version of rational-choice theory, or rely on the notion of methodological individualism (Callinicos, 1987:4, 9-11).

### **Biology, Psychology, and Territory**

We have already observed that to get around this problem some philosophers have literally done away with the subject. This position of anti-humanism has both Marxist and non-Marxist adherents. Debray argues forcefully against such a position. Locating the subject in the collective, he makes a strong case for the retention of the subject and by explaining the subject's territorial orientation, the psychological basis of the subject, and the biological imperatives.

In the first instance, it is logical to accept that there are basic biological drives that humans have, including the need to eat, drink, rest, and so on. That we must perform certain actions to maintain ourselves physically is obvious and has been noted before (Marx and Engels, 1970:42). What Debray argues is that on top of these physical imperatives, humans are driven by certain psychological factors, primarily

by fear of death. The Freudian notion that there are basic human needs that drive us has many adherents. The entire Freudian movement and subsequent Lacanian school of psychoanalysis is testimony to the resonance of this view. The fear of death would seem to be a logical consequence of self-consciousness. Such a psychological predisposition towards survival, however futile in the ultimate sense, would have the consequence that humans constantly seek the security of physical comfort. But this essential imperative explains much more. The collective gives rise to an existence which is both a haven and a threat for the subject. Within the collective there is security, but there can also be danger, simply by force of numbers, for example. The Sartrean notion of the Terror of the collective is similar to Debray's description of the character of collective existence (Sartre, 1976:15, 18). There is also an ambiguous character to the relationship between the individual and the collective, since the subject must surrender individuality in certain respects, as well as tribute and taxes, which are inevitably forms of coercion.

### **Language and the Collective**

An account of the relationship between these aspects of human existence would be incomplete if we were to ignore the role of language, which arises once more in relation to the social. It is language which in any case

facilitates expression for the subject. It is arguable that without language humans would display only a herd mentality. It is possible that animals that have no language are self-conscious. The quality of that conscious experience, however, must at least be significantly different than our own. For one thing it would be a private world that animals experience. Language, whether in the spoken or written form, and certainly in the vastly expanded forms of communication in contemporary society, is treated literally as a world all of its own. As language becomes more complex, sophisticated and takes on different modalities, it gets a life of its own. The example of cyberspace illustrates this. This system operates by creating a virtual world which represents or mimics the real world. But this world has no existence outside of the wires, plastic, programs, and other features of the technology. What facilitates all of this and why this system exists, is for the purpose of communication. None of that is conceivable without language.

The subject may be driven by physical needs to carry out certain actions, may be psychologically motivated by fears and anxieties, and may even be constrained to act in certain ways by the collective. But it is language which gives the subject the means of distinguishing itself from the rest of the world, including from the collective. It is also language that can provide conscious recognition of the biological

and psychological needs of the subject. Language is the essence of consciousness, since to even be aware of oneself is a reflective capacity that requires abstraction and symbolic representation.

Language also explains agency. Alex Callinicos has quite succinctly described the debate between the adherents of the view that individuals make history on the one hand, and those that subscribe to the idea that structure or history makes individuals, on the other. One of his conclusions is that the structure and agency cannot be separated (1987: 6-7). This seems to support the argument that Debray is making about the collective and the individual. Even if this is true, however, the relationship between the individual and the collective can only be effectively understood if we consider the place of language. For any theory of symbolic efficacy, this is an important consideration. The symbolic is by definition a semiotic modality. But symbolic efficacy must explain not only how ideas have effects, but where ideas come from and must also adequately deal with how these ideas are communicated and what the responses are to them.

According to Pierre Guirard, communication has been described as having six functions, "referential . . . emotive . . . connotative . . . aesthetic . . . phatic . . . and . . . metalingusitic". In Guirard's view, a sign is

something that provokes a response and is defined by the quality of being the bearer of a message. A sign therefore has meaning (1971:22). It is through convention, however, that a signifier and signified develop an apparently stable relationship and meaningful language is produced (1971:24). Guirard also observes that collective communication, within a group is ritualistic. He explains that "the ritual message is emitted both by and in the name of the community" and that in the case of ritual "the sender is the group" (1971:93). Debray's collective preconscious schema cannot be conceived of without language, but it is language spoken by the group that generates this schema.

Debray's collective preconscious schematism explains how the ideologico-religious functions when it becomes accepted, that is, when it is hegemonic. The origin of this hegemony lies in the successful mobilisation of subjects, which requires the effective deployment of symbolic resources. This cultural practice has its basis in the actual activities of society. Once again, these practices are explained in terms of the religious nature of social existence. That Debray calls the logic of the sacred.

#### **Incompleteness: sacred space and sacred time**

Debray argues that the ideologico-religious is the end product of a process, the organisation of a group. The ideologico-religious is an organising principle and not simply a way of

"seeing" the world. The key to understanding the structure and function of the religiopolitical is therefore to be found in the "logic of organisation". What explains belief and also motivates our actions is that which generates belief - the "structural invariant" in the formation and functioning of the social collective. An enduring theme in Debray's analysis is that a clue to the nature of this "structural invariant" lies in the common origin of religious studies and political science. In fact, as already observed, the two were originally not distinguished from one another because there was no distinction between religious and political practice (169).

According to Debray, the fundamental "structural invariant" of social organisation can be stated as a general principle: "there can be no organised system without closure and no system can be closed by elements internal to that system alone" (170). Debray identifies this general principle as the law of incompleteness. The very nature of closure that defines the group is one that relies on an externality. There is therefore a dynamic contradiction in the existence of the group in that it relies not only on that which is inside of it but also that which is outside. Throughout discourse, whether religious, political, or scientific, there is a relationship between pairs of opposites that Debray argues can be explained by the law of incompleteness. "Heaven and earth", "absolute and relative", and many other pairs are

consequences of closure in that the opposite within any of these pairs is given along with the closure that demarcates the enclosed field of opposition.

The law of incompleteness allows for the deduction of political laws of order and even of explanations for hitherto unexplained issues in social, political, and religious studies, such as why all attempts at revolution and transformation usually seem to fall short of the expectations of those that are supposed to benefit from them. The law of incompleteness does this by addressing the interdependent and persistent action of three aspects of organisation on political structures. These are identified by Debray as "lack, closure and the body" (171). Debray explains the social group to be like an inverted cone, the centre being a hole around which its members are kept in adherence. The central point through which the movement is created and on which a community is based is the leader, the individual who traces the line that demarcates the community. Ideology, religion, and worldview are the process of organisation, or that which circumscribes a movement that is fixed to a territory (172). The whole process is one which encompasses the economic, political, sexual, geographical, chronological and other aspects of our social existence, including the symbolic aspect.

For Debray, the act of closure removes the three dimensional space that is created by people from the ownership of those within it. As with the temple, the act of marking out sacred space gives the distinction between what is sacred and profane by means of dividing what is inside from what is outside. Circumscription and consecration simultaneously define the religious nature of the social and the social nature of the religious. Describing what he calls Durkheim's "vicious circle" in this way, the fact that society makes God, and "God"—the setting apart of the sacred—makes society, Debray offers an alternative explanation of Durkheim's paradox in the model of incompleteness that constitutes the "automatic logic of the sacred" (172). Because of the "automatic logic of the sacred", social organisation and religious ecstasy are created at one and the same time. This effect of "assembly" generates a regularity that governs the formation of social collectives. It also gives rise to the notion of civic religion, the ritualistic nature of political life, and explains the relationship between relations of economic exchange and worship.

Durkheim mistook the social movements and their periodic rise as the principle of regularity. Their regularity actually arises from the "structural invariant" of social organisation (173). Embodiment means enclosure, enclosure means circumscription, circumscription creates the individuality of the group and the religious

character of the group's existence. This process results in an inevitable alienation, since subjects must surrender their individuality to belong to the collective and therefore are unable to subject the collective to their own will, except if they occupy the position of the leader. Because delimitation and transcendence are identical, the collective is described as originating outside of itself. This is effectively true, since the experience of the existence of the group is one that only individuals can have, even if it is shared.

The effect of this law of incompleteness enables the understanding that the actual experience of social groups is one which occurs on two planes, space and time. Groups cannot be imagined without their territorial delimitation and their existence over identifiable periods of time. This convergence of geography and history occurs within the context of the necessary sacralisation that arises from the act of closure on the one hand and origin on the other. We are therefore confronted with the consequence of organising being essentially "religious work" (175). Politics is described by Debray as being mediation because it revolves around the process of unification, and the point or body around which that unity is generated is sacred. This sacred point is embodied in the "founding father", or leader, who acts as the mediator between the group and its members.

Since organisation is about the unification of the many, it must be the function of an externality to these many. "Irrationality, mysticism and the supernatural" are essential to groups since the process of organisation is one of abstraction, mediation, and alienation. To the extent that these are religious processes, the existence of the group is therefore a religious one. Debray believes that this religious "structural invariant" is prior to and supersedes such other factors as class for instance. What is commonly described as "human nature" must be looked at as a religious phenomenon and can therefore only be understood in these terms (176).

#### **Power and Authority: The Substitution Effect**

Furthermore, since politics is the consequence of external factors, in the sense that authority is beyond people, this power is seen as mystical and sacrosanct. Not only that, but the very arbitrary nature of power which arises from the gap or absence which is the function of incompleteness, necessitates the legitimisation of power. Power is open to a constant "substitution and repetition", which is created by a logical set of rules according to which politics functions. The "substitution effect" is a result of the structure of social sets that determines the functions of the processes of social organisation and the relations of the members of the collective. Incompleteness

initiates a "representation and repetition" for any social collective that results in a function of power which is of necessity essential and which has negative implications (178).

A "Party" or a "Leader" must stand in for, or represent, such collective entities as the "group", the "nation", or the "working class". Such substitution is necessary because the very "founding absence" of the group requires it. Because power is "representative" it is "substitutive". The driving force of politics is the notion that this "founding absence" was actually present or at one time existed. Political reality is therefore lived as a constant return to a mythical origin. Debray believes this origin to be fictitious, and the function of historical myth is to empower this fiction. Since the point of origin can never be realised, the group is given constant futile activities; it must reconstruct the unreconstructable. The group therefore has a "vocation for failure" that drives social activity. Debray argues that "all ideologies set deadlines that are never met" (183). The discourse of the ideologico-religious resonates in society because it imitates the hollowness of society that is a function of the law of incompleteness. All social activity is essentially symbolic and ritualistic, since even material acts communicate messages, intended or otherwise, that try to fill the gap of the "founding absence" of the collective.

This raises the question as to whether social existence can ever be demystified, since it is open to the manipulation by those exercising control over or directing symbolic activity. The answer to this is not simple. We can demystify social activity by critical analysis and by ensuring as much democracy as possible. This would have the effect of secularising social existence through revealing the origin, nature, and functioning of the sacred. This would only be successful to the extent that subjects are physically and psychologically predisposed towards accepting the organisational imperatives that must accompany such a process. But the effects of this are also ambiguous. Debray points to the "privatisation of the sacred", which removes the sacred from the ambit of the collective and allows the individual the latitude of responding to the sacred without the force of the collective. But this must surely be a purely symbolic exercise. There is a difference between being compelled by the collective to accept a particular ideologico-religious framework and being called symbolically to the same. Unless individuals are conscious of the imperatives that lead them to hold certain beliefs and practices, the extent to which they are organised is superficial.

Debray sets up a number of theses about this essential character of social existence, incompleteness, that need to be examined. In trying to explain the apparently fixed nature of

social groups, Debray derives a "social physics" from his "law of incompleteness". Groups are closed sets and therefore subjected to an externality giving them at once a "closed and open" existence that follows the general principle of "incompleteness" which he describes. Closure initiates the sacred in society by marking out the sacred in space as well as in time, thereby creating a necessary relationship between the geography and history of a group.

Absence or lack, therefore, regulates the functioning of power in society. It enables the necessary representation and substitution which facilitate the arbitrary nature of power and ensure its legitimation in society. The body of the group is the source of the alienation of the members of that group and facilitates the mediation between the group as an "ideal we" and the actual members through leaders or a select group that represent the group. For any group, there is a "founding absence", the necessary enclosure that demarcates the group, and the resultant "body" that is then experienced as that particular group. The religious nature of the group, the structural nature of these three aspects of social existence, "lack, closure and the body", determine what Debray regards as human nature, that is, "irrationality, mysticism and the supernatural". These features of human nature, however, are given a materialist explanation through the law of incompleteness.

It does seem self evident that any group has boundaries that define it and therefore the notion of enclosure that Debray uses seems to be useful. In practice, the actual boundaries may be territorial, but they might also be linguistic or cultural. The members of any group can only define themselves in opposition, since identity assumes difference. But what Debray is describing goes beyond any superficial notion of difference, as in the case of different languages, for example. It is evident from a number of commentators that definition is made possible by the practice of inscription, delimitation, and classification. People give the world meaning by orientating themselves in space and time. Cognition is thus facilitated by the relational. For individuals to even distinguish themselves as separate entities requires the grasping of the fact that one is distinct from one's own environment, including other people. In the same way that the self is perceived through the demarcation of the body, the recognition of this demarcation and the ritual practices that humans engage in that give expression to this process in the formation of a group.

Catherine Bell has remarked that "a consensus of sorts has emerged granting the body a critical place in the social construction of reality" (Bell 1992:95). For now it is not important to enter into the debate as to whether it is the body that has primacy over society in terms of the social construction of reality, though

it would seem logical that it is the case. What is essential is to recognise the fact that demarcation is fundamental in terms of ordering the universe for any subject. David Chidester has proposed that the very notion of worldview is one which necessarily implies "a set of discursive, practical, and social strategies for negotiating person and place in the world" (Chidester, 1992a:4). Fundamental to any worldview is the process of classifying some people as same and others as different. In terms of colonial and imperialist projects, as Chidester has noted, this classification also implies violent, pejorative, and negative connotations in relation to the other (Chidester, 1992a:4). Debray's theses recognise that central to this notion of classification is a relational or comparative ordering, which leaves each of the defined categories dependent on one another for meaning.

Any act of enclosure, any description of an "us", requires a centre around which the group can be defined. Chidester has also described the manner in which sacred space requires a centre. He asserts that orientation in space requires "a central axis around which the world revolves and in relation to which the human world derives its meaning and is experienced as full of significance" (Chidester, 1988:86). There is no reason to doubt that, as it is in relation to actual physical orientation, the notion of a centre, together with the periphery, is essential to any

orientation that is more than one dimensional and to any meaningful worldview ( Chidester, 1988:79).

Of equal importance is the notion of sacred time. All social groups utilise methods of measuring time, be they mythical or otherwise, that designate identifiable periods of time and which thereby orientate the group, as Chidester also explains (1988:105). Debray emphasises the fact that it is the relationship between these two features, space and time, that is the key to explaining the sacred. It is important to recognise, as has been pointed out by several scholars of religion, that even though the demarcation of space as sacred is essential to religion, in the case of marking out the area of the temple, for example, this process is literally arbitrary. Anything can be sacred and does become so if our attention is focused on it for that purpose. Jonathan Z. Smith has pointed out that "there is nothing that is inherently sacred or profane" (Smith, 1982:55). Smith argues convincingly that the sacredness of anything is relational. It must follow that the same is true for sacred time.

Debray argues that the national question is in fact the sacred aspect of social existence. The strategy of delimitation in terms of time and space are anti-death processes that the human species deploys. They are attempts to counter the "irreversible passage from life into death . . .

and spatial disintegration, the dissagregation of a community and its reversion to an arbitrary state" (1977b:27).

Durkheim has to be accorded the recognition due him in describing religious life as the demarcation of the world into sacred and profane domains (Durkheim, 1976:37). Debray deploys Durkheim's revelation of the primacy of religious belief and the social origin of this belief in an attempt to unlock the "structurally invariant" aspects of social existence. Durkheim argues forcibly that society has the effect of generating the terms of the sacred simply by virtue of its relationship to the individual and the members of a community ( Durkheim, 1976:206). This is exactly what Debray concludes is essential to understanding the ideologico-religious.

The consequence of the incompleteness that arises from the circumscription of the group is dramatic. Using the Marxist concept of alienation, Debray describes the ambiguous relationship of the individual to the group and the need for mediation between the subject and the collective. It is this yawning gap that determines the nature of power in society. Like Debray, Chidester and Linenthal have argued that alienation, exile, and exclusion can be important features of how "meaning and power coalesce" in the actual manufacture of sacred space (1995:31).

Arguably, the most eloquent and innovative work on the nature of power has been that of the historian and philosopher Michel Foucault. In Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Foucault describes the relationship between knowledge, discourse, and juridical relations that combine to form the techniques by which power is exercised and experienced in relation to punishment in society. Power and object relations are studied through the interrogation of the techniques of the body in this regard (Foucault, 1977:24). Foucault sees his study as being one in the "micro-physics of power" (Foucault, 1977:28). In this regard power is seen as a strategy that is exercised in "a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess" (Foucault, 1977:26). Of singular importance is the notion that power is invested in both those that deploy it and those that are seen to be devoid of it and is "transmitted by . . . and through them" (Foucault, 1977:27). While this is a richer description of power than is to be found in Debray's description of the phenomenon, it is nonetheless one that recognises power as both representative and substitutive, otherwise it could not be deployed in the manner described.

Chidester and Linenthal have noted that it is not only an elite of a group which can deploy successful strategies to manipulate the symbolic resources that are generated in a society through the sacralisation of space and time (Chidester

and Linenthal, 1995:16). This essentially affirms the point made by Debray in relation to the manipulation of these resources. What Chidester and Linenthal demonstrate, however, is that sacred space is highly contested. While elites may demarcate them, other groups can appropriate these spaces, but also can invert their order, turning what is profane into what is sacred, for example (1995:17). Foucault also makes this point by demonstrating that the management of space is central to the exercise of power. (1977:201) He points out that "power is exercised rather than possessed . . . it is not a 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class" (1977:26).

The production, manipulation, management, distribution, and consumption of symbolic resources is essentially a strategic issue. At no time can it be argued that these resources are purely deployed in and for themselves. What is revealed in this process is the nature of agency and the place of the historical subject. The subject is both constitutive of and constituted by the collective. But because the individual cannot relate to the separate entities that make up the collective all the time, these have to be represented in the form of an individual or an accessible, identifiable group, and by other agreed signs such as flags, banners, badges, or monuments. This effectively means that not all subjects are equal. The position of mediator is strategic and gives considerable power over the

collective, since all have access to the collective via that medium. The relationship of the mediating figure is therefore symbolic since it represents the collective. Because the position of mediator is set apart it necessarily has a sacred aspect. Agency is dependent on the relationship between the collective and the individual and is often facilitated or inhibited by the mediator. The position of mediator, therefore, derives its capacity from the logic of the sacred.

In defining the centrality of incompleteness in generating the terms of the sacred, Debray has placed the subject in a particular relation to the collective. But this does not mean that the individual is determined in some crude fashion by the collective or is unable to impose his or her will on the collective. Obviously, the contest for the position of mediator can be fought at both symbolic and at material levels. It is the material that secures this position in the final instance, however. Precisely by the grasping of the need for a founding absence, the creation of a mythology, and most importantly by the recognition of the substitutive nature of power, individuals and elites are able to effectively deploy symbolic resources for strategic purposes. It can be argued that advanced forms of democracy especially require such practices and are thereby undermined by these same processes as they have the effect of removing actual power and authority from the collective to an individual or an elite.

The notion of myth plays a prominent role in Debray's view of how symbolic efficacy functions in society. Debray argues that myths describe a fictional point of origin for groups. But this distinction between myth and fact is not without its problems. It has been convincingly argued that all official versions of the past perform the same function of myths. In that sense, there are no truths in history, or conversely, as Strenski puts it, "there is no such thing as myth" (1987:1). What Strenski means is that myth must be seen in its historical and social context because it is "the product of the life of a people" (1987:154). The extent to which myth is a qualitatively different phenomenon from an ideology, religion, or a worldview is more a matter of interpretation than anything else. Myths essentially perform the same function as these phenomena. As such they are the same phenomena described in different terms. Myths, in Strenski's view "are reborn in our own time as ideologies or 'political myths'" (1987:132). In the broadest definition, Roland Barthes has argued that myth is essentially a form of language, that is a type of speech that functions on behalf of a particular social class, and depoliticises language in the interests of that class, fabricating a natural order out of contingency. Significantly, Barthes sees myth as being predisposed towards the right politically, that is in favour of the establishment. This is due to the fact that the worldview imposed by the ruling class, the oppressor, is pervasive and strategically positioned to perpetuate the

prevailing order. The oppressed by contrast, has only one language, that of his emancipation. Barthes theory of myth, like Debray's notion of unmasking official discourse, undermines the effect of authority and reveals that there are no truths or falsities in political life, only official and unofficial versions of history and even of the possible futures that are open to a society. While this has the effect of once again giving life to a radical relativism, this understanding of myth is one which can serve to demystify official discourse. Taken together with a democratic, egalitarian approach to politics and history in general, this position undermines the role of experts, professionals, and other ideological technocrats. It allows for the possibility that the people themselves can write their own history and reconstruct their own past to chose a future. But this does not happen so simply. For Debray there is a structural issue in the form of the religiopolitical unconscious that needs to be confronted. According to Debray, this collective unconscious informs the very character of collective life.

### **The Collective Unconscious and Natural Religion**

Debray sets out to explain the structural causes of the religious nature of social existence by deploying the concept of natural religion. These structural factors function at three levels; the "logical, biological and the physical",

although Debray insists that their distinction is purely conceptual to aid understanding (184). The law of incompleteness that Debray describes can only be applied to structured, organisationally coherent groups, those which Debray calls "voluntary, collective formations" (186). Unlike social science in general, which he argues is concerned with difference, Debray's theses are concerned with that which is common to the various forms of these voluntary collective formations.

The idea of natural religion is given by the abstract concept of the group. Despite the dangers of the notion of natural religion, Debray insists that it is a helpful concept because it gives a recognisable form to the existence of the political unconscious. Natural religion, Debray suggests, is analogous to phonology, which he argues considers the laws governing sounds without contradicting the discipline of comparative linguistics. What Debray proposes is a "syntax of the sacred". As universal grammar is to actual language, so natural religion is to the ideologico-religious. This syntax allows the development of endless systems of belief to be created around "a finite set of elements defined by their reciprocal relations and oppositions" (190).

Natural religion is "a universal, innate schema of behaviour deriving from the logical structure of the group" (191). Understanding this

through the law of incompleteness allows us to grasp how the sacred is established as a social phenomenon and how the ideologico-religious is the institutionalised form of this phenomenon. We are also able to observe the historical pattern of social existence which is dictated by the "natural state of dependence" of human beings, for which religion performs the function of a valuable insurance. Fear and anxiety are the definitive characteristics of the social being. These are biological and social "givens" which Debray describes as "natural characteristics" of human beings.

Historically the concept of natural religion has usually been associated with deism. It is taken to mean the way in which nature lends itself to the religious interpretation of existence, the natural religiosity of humanity, and proofs for the existence of God by natural reason rather than divine revelation. As Byrne has shown, natural religion is most often associated with natural theology, in opposition to revealed, civil, mythic, or supernatural religion (Byrne 1991:1). Debray does not use the term natural religion in the sense described by Byrne, although the dynamic between nature and human existence is one which he emphasises as being important. Debray employs the term, natural religion, to revisit the Marxist relationship between nature and history. In Marx and the discourse of the rationalist project in general, there is a tension nature and history. They are given a particular

meaning and relationship depending on the extent to which the one is emphasised over the other. Debray argues that Marx recognised the dialectical relationship between these two factors, nature as given on the one hand, and history as labour or productive activity on the other. But Marx, again unwittingly it is suggested by Debray, facilitated the elevation of history to the position of being regarded as the dominant factor in terms of social existence through the explanation of labour as the "simultaneous transformation of the world and the labourer" (199). The natural object is given a negative existence, again as the opposite in a mutually interdependent pair. Debray believes that Marx did not shake himself free of the idealists that he criticised, but instead only achieved a more narcissistic idealism, an idealism in which the human being is a self-creator. For this flaw in theory to be overcome, "nature" must be accorded its rightful place in the discourse. The law of incompleteness reveals the "formal and natural given" which explains how practice is always undermined by the physical facts of our existence. This natural order limits, conditions, and helps to determine the field and scope of practice.

Debray argues that nature and the ideologico-religious go hand in hand. The need for religion and the institutionalisation of the sacred that follows are constant and universal. In this way the natural is "a constant determinant

of culture" (205). It cannot therefore be removed from society. Religions and other worldviews are the historical forms of a natural, material "invariant". Examples can be found of "theological grammars" that reveal the religious in economics, with money being the classic Marxist illustration. In politics however, the material "invariant of religion" has not yet been demystified, according to Debray.

Debray argues that religions and political ideologies perform the same function since they attempt to preserve the security and individuality of social collectives. They do this through the specialised supervision of the application of ritual and the socially rewarding apprehension of mythology in the collective. Religion requires theology, which is "an intellectual system to rationalise faith" (215). Because religious belief is "experienced and communicated through affectivity" and insecurity is provided in the fact of the mortality of individuals, belief is understood as an "organisational requirement" which, along with the need for safety, determines our social existence.

The influence of Durkheim with regard to Debray's view of society as being naturally religious, as has already been noted, is obvious. In The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Durkheim set out to describe the origins of religious beliefs and practices. He also set out to show that the "fundamental notions of thought

or the categories" were religious and social in their origin (Durkheim, 1976:xiii). Durkheim was of the considered view that "all religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities" (Durkheim, 1976:9). These collective representations find their expression in the individual because she or he has both an individual and a collective intellectual existence. It is a short step from this duality to the notion of an unconscious and for such an unconscious to be a collective one. In his own way Durkheim suggests as much (Durkheim 1976:16).

Debray explains how the law of incompleteness gives rise to the structural nature of the religious in society. A "syntax of the sacred" is identified, which Debray describes as natural religion. The syntax theory which Debray proposes is a way of describing the religiopolitical unconscious. Along with the fragility and mortality of humanity this natural religion is an invariant which can be explained in material terms and must be accorded its rightful place in social, political, and religious theory. Nature and religion are always identified together as they are mutually dependent. Ideology performs the same function as religion. They both preserve the existence, difference, and security of the group.

The notion of natural religion is one that has been part of religious studies for a

considerable period of time. In their efforts to grasp the common essential features of religious belief and practice scholars have been drawn to the obvious neatness and simplicity of such a concept. Of course the dangers of such a concept are that it can lead to oversimplification of the problem of understanding religion and can miss grasping the centrality of ritual and the sacred by looking for hidden essences where there are none. It can also result in religion being considered outside of the causal nexus of its social origins.

But Debray's notion of a natural religion has nothing to do with making a list of the essential characteristics of religion, or discovering the rational essence of faith. Since his definition encompasses all human activity that stands in relation to the sacred and is ritualised, he avoids the error of dividing up human activities into spheres of the religious and the non-religious. Instead, he borrows the linguistic notion of syntax to argue for an underlying foundation that allows for all ideologico-religious belief and practice.

However, another problematic notion is introduced in this regard. Since this syntax is regarded as somehow operating "beneath the surface", Debray argues that this feature of human existence is one that is unconscious. This notion of the religiopolitical unconscious is not simply given. The concept that Debray describes

is one upon which his entire thesis turns and arguably stands or falls.

### **The Unconscious**

The notion of a human unconscious is not new, but it is one fraught with difficulties. A very helpful description of the concept, its origins in Freudian psychoanalysis, and the various criticisms of the notion, has been offered by David Archard. He explains the problem of attributing to the concept of the unconscious purely Freudian terms of reference and particular interpretations of Freud which have their basis in Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the philosophical objections to the notion of thought processes of which the subject is not aware (Archard, 1984:9-11). Archard defines the terms of an unconscious as being of great significance when it is argued that our current mental states are to a certain extent determined and constricted by consciousness which is not apprehended by the subject (Archard, 1984:124).

A substantial critique of the notion of the unconscious has been provided by Alistair MacIntyre in The Unconscious: A Conceptual Analysis. MacIntyre argues that the notion of the unconscious is so readily accepted because it appears to be able to explain so much about human behaviour (1958:1). In that regard, it is a concept not unlike the notion of ideology. It is instructive to note that MacIntyre offers a critique of Freud's notion of the unconscious that

is similar to Debray's critique of ideology. He describes the Freudian concept of the unconscious as lending itself to "spatial metaphors". In this sense the theory of the unconscious is topographical (1958:11-12). MacIntyre argues that classical Newtonian mechanics are the model for Freud's theory, making assumptions about causality and equilibrium in systems that are no longer so simply accepted (1958:17-18). MacIntyre is also critical of the Freudian distinction between the unconscious, the preconscious, and the conscious. He points out that the unconscious is a negative concept that relies on a previous definition of the conscious (1958:29-30). To the extent that these modalities of human motivation are theoretically distinguishable, the relationships between them and the manner in which past experience is preserved and later motivates actions is also problematic. There is an ambiguity in Freud's theory of the unconscious between the phenomenon as the "unknowing" and the "unknown" which MacIntyre identifies (1958:42). He is also of the view that Freud's theory maintains the rationalist Cartesian dualism that leads to the notion of the unconscious as a place which is "distinct and apart, a place or a realm which can be inhabited by such entities as ideas" (1958:45). As an invisible and unfalsifiable postulate, the unconscious is contradictory because its character is rationally determined to the absence of rationality.

This is obviously a substantial critique of any theory of the unconscious. Whilst Archard is also not convinced of the merits of Freudian and Lacanian explanations of the existence of the unconscious, he is prepared to accept that the nature of the human mind is such that the meaning of words and signifiers, in short, of language, has to be found not in relation to one another but in relation to what is meant or signified by the language (Archard, 1984:132). This opens up the possibility for the social determination of the meanings of any language, and thereby the collective's influence over language in general. That some of this may be at a non-conscious level to the extent that we experience it as language is fairly easy to substantiate as is shown by Debray's concept of the collective preconscious schema. There are countless examples of beliefs or practices that have no obvious conscious causality. But that in itself would not constitute evidence of an unconscious. For example, religious belief could and does ascribe the origins of these to be supernatural or divine. But the very essence of Debray's thesis is to find materialist explanations for social belief and practice.

Chomsky describes universal grammar as that creative side of language that "expresses the deep-seated regularities which, being universal, are omitted from the grammar itself" (Katz, 1985:84). The sense in which Debray deploys the notion of a natural religion is

precisely this: Society is religious in a myriad of forms because the universal syntax of religion which gives rise to religious belief is that which underlies all social activities. Of course this thesis not only reinterprets social activity but in the process reinterprets religion as well. It also provides a materialist notion of the unconscious, since it is not a realm apart from the conscious, but is the socially prescribed aspect of our existence. It is therefore part of our psychological makeup and determines our behaviour through configuring our beliefs and practices.

This sense of the ideologico-religious has its origins in Durkheim's definition of religion as a social phenomenon. What Debray has done is to turn this definition around and interpret all efficacious collective social activity as religious. As has been pointed out previously, such a strategy completely undermines the distinction between religion and ideology. There is support among other Marxist scholars for this position of undermining the distinction between religion and politics. For example, as we have seen, George Thomson convincingly demonstrates the development of Greek culture within a society which initially made no distinction between religion, politics, and war. The reverence for the warrior, chief, and gods was practiced in a unified system of ritual that recognised the sacred in relation to all these forces (Thomson, 1980:68). Durkheim himself saw the distinction

between religion on the one hand and science and philosophy on the other as being a later development in society (Durkheim, 1976:9). This agreement in itself does not prove Debray's point, but it certainly reveals the wider recognition of the problematic notion of the distinction between these aspects of social existence.

### **Marxism and Religion**

Debray continues his critique of Marxism by pointing out that Marxist practice, in the form of "really existing socialism", has had the effect of ensuring that religion is no longer thought of as something that will eventually disappear at a given historical moment when a particular level of development has been attained. The religious nature of Marxism, which he argues is witnessed in the practice of Marxists, requires the particular attention of critical theory (218).

By ensuring a dialogue among Marxist theory, anti-Marxist theory, and the sociology of religion, Debray believes the necessary conditions can be created for a proper understanding of the religious nature of social existence. This includes accepting that Marxism itself has failed as a scientific discourse because it appeals to the authority of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and others. Marx himself was highly critical of the attempts by various political theorists and actors to bring "religious attitudes, verbosity and moralism" into the discourse of

social science. This, as Debray points out, surely makes the notion of the creation of a Marxist religion doubly ironic (221).

Debray argues that Marx's treatment of religion as a manifestation of humanity's own limitations and incomplete existence was part of the problem. It makes religion the expression of a "defect" in society which stems from what is regarded as the unnatural cleavage of the human being from society, from the community of others, and even from the self (223). Only when society has been healed of this scar of alienation will religion cease to exist, according to Marx. For this view, Debray accuses Marx of utopianism. He argues that Marx did not provide an analysis of politics but used religion "as a sacred parable for the sacred element in the political" (224). From this Debray concludes that the fetish of modern society may be ideology, but for Marx it was religion.

Debray believes that there is a fundamental contradiction in Marx's theory that is revealed by the law of incompleteness. Society can never be made whole, since it is separated from itself through the fact of organisation. There is therefore a structural constraint on society which will ensure that it cannot be made "whole" and it is therefore always subject to the logic of the sacred (227). This religious structure of society gives a particularly contradictory nature to our social existence. It ensures "archaism in

modernity (and) prehistory in the final struggle" (234). Part of the human condition, according to Debray, is to accept this situation, since nature has, through the structural limitation of the law of incompleteness, a hold over humanity.

Debray is very careful to point out that although the "religious structure of collective action" arises out of the fact that nature cannot be purged from history, just as the conscious cannot rid itself of the unconscious, this should not lead us to a pessimism or cynicism when dealing with social, political, and religious issues. Our "tribal nature" is given by the fact that "the recurrence of religion merges self and other, origins and ends" (234). In social psychology the "I" is always an other, but that is inescapable and therefore something we must come to grips with as human beings.

The constraints of our collective existence must be recognised, just as we must recognise that political failure and renewal are as necessary as any other natural cycles. Debray points out that the situation of a group, its stability and the period of its existence, is an important consideration. Where there is a fairly stable existence of groups, such as the national groups of Western Europe, the nature of existence of subjects within these groups will differ from those in a group which is under threat or in decay. Once these identities are threatened, and this would not mean in the sense

of intellectually challenged but in the real physical sense of a challenge to the continued existence of the identity, then the group would go into the protective mode that is necessary to defend itself (240).

Debray offers an alternative view of social existence to that generally held in the social sciences. The process of inscription and origination of communities creates a structural invariant that determines the religious character of social existence. Because the religio-political unconscious determines these characteristics, Debray is inclined to refer to these features of society as being human nature. Although we need not adopt this position, we have to recognise the powerful case Debray makes for a "social physics". It is this social physics which determines the functioning of symbolic efficacy.

Historically the study of symbolic efficacy has been characterised along the lines of the dichotomy that arises from the omnipresent dualism of the rationalist project. True to form, this has led to an unnecessary distinction being drawn between types of ideas that mobilise subjects. This, together with the effects of the division of labour have resulted in a failure to grasp what is common to all socially efficacious ideas, the sacred nature of these ideas and the rituals and practices that accompany them.

Debray argues that the ideologico-religious is material and is that which organises people.

By extending Durkheim's definition of religion to all socially efficacious ideas, Debray creates a powerful analytical model. This model effectively collapses the distinction between religion and ideology. By making society and the ideologico-religious coextensive and by uncovering the collective as territorial, Debray reveals the religious nature of all social existence. It is in nationalism that we find the most efficacious expression of the religiopolitical unconscious in contemporary society. By allowing scope for the most potent production and manipulation of symbolic resources, nationalism is a modern religion.

### **The Sacred and Symbolic Efficacy**

The manner in which Debray's thesis is constructed raises important issues for consideration. The arbitrary nature of the sacred allows for the endless possibility of the identification and designation of what is sacred to any community. This would explain the variety of expressions of symbolic efficacy, commonly referred to as myth, religion, and ideology. The proliferation of the sacred is attested to by the many rituals that are currently practiced in relation to the home, the family, work, the political sphere, not to mention the worship of the sacred in organised religions. Social organisation, therefore, can be said to have within it the capacity to define the sacred.

These rituals not only reaffirm the sacred, but are also the raw material out of which a particular society is constructed. Crudely considered, social organisation is a matter of some or other leader or leaders embarking on a project to gain political power. This entails establishing rituals that reinforce their project's survival once they have managed to break down the hegemonic grip of another project. This management of the sacred through the strategic manipulation of space and time is what all social activity is about. It is also quite logical from this to deduce that a particular class, or some previously defined community, such as an ethnic group, for example, might involve itself in such a project. It can reasonably concluded from this that Debray's thesis is not incompatible with some Marxist theoretical canons.

Like everything else, the sacred is represented symbolically. The power of sacred symbols comes from what they represent. Symbolism is language and language and consciousness are contingent upon one another. Once a collective has agreed on the sacred, its representation of this gets set down in the discourse. Obviously, agreement is based on the relations of power and authority, originally established by force and ultimately reliant on the capacity for violence. The power and authority located within discourse is essentially anchored in the designation, recognition, and veneration of the sacred.

In this sense science and rationalism may represent the fight against ignorance at any one point. But as these become established, set up relations of power and authority in the relevant discourse, the critical edge of theory gives way to doctrine. Revolutions in science have for some time been recognised as a feature of even this supposedly non-dogmatic activity (Kuhn, 1962).

The relationship between myth, religion, and ideology is best understood as being simply modalities of the symbolic representation of the sacred in history. These are essentially different historical views of symbolic efficacy. It might be argued that all of these are therefore temporary views, contingent upon history and therefore, in a manner of speaking, false consciousness. But such a characterisation does not capture the opposite, positive point of view, which is that all these historically contingent views are, in their own way, correct.

Since each of these views is manufactured through a movement by its leaders and later by its intellectual functionaries, the extent to which each of these views is correct is the extent to which it can mobilise people in support of the particular modality of the symbolic representation of the sacred. The effective manipulation of symbols is therefore located in society and the value of symbols determined by the relations of power and authority that determine their use. To uncover the power of

symbols requires a political economy of the sacred is required. Such a political economy must ask and answer, in whose interests are the various modalities of the symbolic deployed and how are these relations maintained? To answer that we may consider the modern modality of the sacred, nationalism, and see how particular interests are fought for, won, and lost in the quest for power.

## Chapter 4: Nationalism

### **Marxism and the national question**

Debray indicates that the national question has allowed him to interrogate Marxism critically (1997b:25). He observes that in those countries of "really existing socialism", where nationalism should theoretically be a thing of the past, reference to patriotism and the fatherland are not uncommon. If anything these countries are as nationalist, if not more so, than countries described as bourgeois democracies. Debray explains that in interrogating his own beliefs and the recognition of the apparent failure of his own political theory, his "chosen viewpoint was once again the permanence of the nation" (25). It is this survival of nationalist sentiment, of what Debray describes at another point as the "ethnic factor", that first called Marxism into question for him. It also opened up a whole area of study for Debray which he refers to as mediology (1995:531). Debray was not the first to notice the apparent permanence of nationalism. Reference is made to it by a number of commentators. There are proponents of the view that "nationalism and Marxism are philosophically incompatible" (Connor, 1984:1). Early Marxist debates referred to the problem of contradiction between nationalism and the class consciousness of the working class and the differences were

settled by discussants opting for one of a number of options. The first option was to deny that the national question was a problem for socialists. In essence, this argument was that the national question had been solved and society would eventually catch up with the revolutionary consciousness of the vanguard who had made this possible. The second was to argue for a world-wide, permanent revolution to build a socialist consciousness to supersede nationalism. This meant not accepting nationalism as anything but a reactionary tendency and dealing with it as such. The third approach was to try and learn to live with nationalism. In practice, this meant accepting the longevity of the nation-state as a historical form and leaving the question of its development to time. In the view of this approach class contradictions could best be dealt with in the context of the nation-state.

As late as 1987 an official Soviet publication could claim that the "multinational entity-the Soviet people" had been created without any loss of identity for the national and ethnic groups that formed part of it. This was seen as "the first example of the practical solution of nationalities problem" (Zadarnovsky, 1987:18). This example of rigid and doctrinaire Marxism, which was a feature of the "official" Marxism of the USSR, could not deal with the national question because it refused to accept that it existed as a problem in socialist societies.

Karl Brecker has argued that socialism can only be built by bypassing the national question entirely and mobilising workers for permanent revolution. This view sees that revolution as anything but national in character (1995: 66). In fact, according to Brecker, any dilution of the socialist demands of the working class in a national movement amount to reformism (1995:41). Clearly, such revolutionaries can have no truck with nationalism.

At the same time, we are able to observe any number of examples of well established socialist formations that accept, for the time being, however long that might be, the need to contest political power within the ambit of the nation-state. In essence, this "social-democratic" view, which does not seek to extend the revolution beyond the existing borders of the nation state, and which includes anything from the struggle for welfarism of a British Labour Party to the radical socialist demands of the Brazilian Worker's Party, is the dominant view amongst Marxists and socialists today.

These three responses were essentially categorised as the Stalinist, Trotskyist, and the social-democratic, and later, neo-Marxist schools of thought. Ronaldo Munck eloquently discusses these responses to what is recognised as the "stubborn fact of nationalism". Beginning with Marx's own contradictory statements on the national question, Munck traverses the history of

the problem in relation to Marxist theory and political practice right up until the period prior to the demise of socialist states in Eastern Europe. From a Marxist perspective, Munck sees the roots of the formation of nation-states in the expansion in capitalism (Munck, 1986:1).

Munck characterises Marx and Engels as being "very conscious" of nationalism, although he argues that they never specifically dealt with the phenomenon theoretically (Munck, 1986:9). The founders of historical materialism therefore left a legacy pregnant with contradiction in relation to the phenomenon of nationalism. In essence, the view of Marx and Engels that there were nations which could be regarded as "historic", which meant progressive and developing and those that could be regarded as "non-historic", which essentially meant backward and reactionary was unfortunate. Marx's finding that nations were the outcome of "environmental, economic, historical, and other influences", did not detract from the ambiguity that exists in Marxism as a result of this theoretical vacuum he left (Munck, 1986:21).

Connor has detected what he describes as three strands of nationalism in the writings of Marx and Engels. Characterising the Marxist view of nationalism as an evolutionary or modernist one, Connor asserts that "classical" Marxism placed class consciousness and struggle above nationalism in terms of revolutionary significance

(1984:7,19). At the same time, "strategic" Marxism recognised and opportunistically supported the right of nations to self-determination. The Marxist view that recognises the primacy of nationalism in the capitalist mode of production he refers to as "national" Marxism (1984:20). These categories, while somewhat simplistic provide an alternative, less sectarian matrix for viewing the trends outlined in the history of Marxist practice and the national question.

### **Nationalism and the Second International**

Munck identifies Kautsky as the Second International's "expert" on nationalism (Munck, 1986:29). Kautsky recognised the reality of the nation-state, placing language at the centre of nationalism and the ability of a nation to realise the necessary unity to facilitate effective political power (Munck, 1986:30). The split that existed in the Polish socialist movement between two opposed groups on the national question was a precursor to the schism that was to be the most debilitating factor in the socialist project. Called on to "arbitrate" this dispute, Kautsky fudged the issue (Munck, 1986:30). Essentially the Second International adopted a position which recognised the right of nations to exist and to determine their own future. But it saw the nation as a "cultural" issue. The actual debate on the national question turned on the issue of what was the prime objective of working-class

organisations, the struggle to build socialism and advance the interests of the entire working class or the struggle for national autonomy in the face of national oppression. Reducing this to a cultural matter was, to say the least, understating the issue. This reduction of the issue of national self-determination to being "relative and not absolute" continued to put the working class movement in a position of both strategic and tactical weakness (Munck, 1986:32).

Munck points out that not only was the "national question" inside the working-class movement, but the working-class movement at the time was largely based in the imperialist countries of the world (1986:33). Opportunism in the socialist movement allowed for distinguishing between claims to national sovereignty by categorising these as more or less relevant depending on the "civilised" or "savage" nature of the people making the claim (1986:33-34).

What gave rise to the collapse of the Second International in Munck's view was the "Balkans crisis". The movement was torn apart around the issue of "national defense" (Munck, 1986:36). Only Lenin correctly analysed the roots of the conflict and the response that was needed from the working class. He argued for turning the war into a people's civil war against the bourgeoisie, but the socialists vacillated between pacifism and people's war and the

Leninist option was not implemented (Munck, 1986:37-38). It was not until Lenin was to put this strategy into practice in his own country that the proof of its effectiveness would be demonstrated.

Munck describes the development of Marxist theory on the national question through the recognition of the importance of the distinctiveness of "culture" by Otto Bauer, as well as through Bauer's rejection of the distinction between "historic" and "non-historic" nations. Bauer also described extreme national chauvinism and jingoism as "transformed class hatred" (1986:40). He argued that while the working class was international and needed to be united internationally defeat the bourgeoisie, "bourgeois nationalism" needed to be vanquished. For Bauer, this meant finding "the national substance of class struggle" (1986:41).

The debate about the relationship between "psychology and territory" continued after the First World War. Rosa Luxemburg debated the issue of nationalism with Lenin continuously throughout her political life. Luxemburg held "that the working class is the only agency fitted to carry out the task of national liberation" (Munck, 1986:52). This issue was not to settled only by calls for national autonomy, but through alliances among the proletariat internationally. Luxemburg at first strongly criticised the idea of nations having any "right" to anything, but

argued that socialists must fight all forms of oppression, whether national, gender, or otherwise. The crisis of the Second International made her recognise the centrality of the nation-state. Her argument was that only socialism could deliver the objective of national liberation (Munck, 1986:52-53).

It was Lenin's contribution on the national question which has had the most practical effect historically. Munck explains how his often "contradictory and pragmatic" writings on the issue were codified as an "orthodoxy" most notably by Stalin. This in effect meant that the "right to self-determination" was articulated but not necessarily practiced by the USSR (Munck, 1986:69). In the end the handling of the national question by the Second International, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and Comintern did little to advance the theoretical clarification of the issue of the relationship between socialism and nationalism. In the Russian Socialist and Democratic Labour Party, the issue of the representation of Jewish workers in the party initially gave rise to the discussion of this matter (Munck, 1986:69). But it was Lenin's analysis of imperialism that revealed the complexity of the issue and gave rise to his development of a fuller response. Consistent with his view on ideology, Lenin distinguished between bourgeois and proletarian nationalism. This led to him charting a course between what Munck describes as rightist "socialist

nationalists" and the "leftist denial of nation oppression" (Munck; 1986:71).

The issue of the nation is intricately bound up with that of the development of the state in Lenin's writings. Marxism had to recognise two distinct tendencies in relation to nation-states and imperialism according to Lenin. The first was the rise of nation-states on the periphery of imperialism and the second the increasing globalisation of capital, markets, and culture in general (Lenin, 1976).

The history of socialist movements grappling with the national question shows the considerable theoretical confusion over the matter. While Lenin may have analysed the trends in relation to nationalism, his response to the matter was largely tactical. It amounts to a recognition of the psychological state of historical subjects, the fact that they may or may not have revolutionary consciousness, and a recognition of the strategic importance of territory in relation to the overall struggle of the working class internationally. This means that the right of any group of people that regard themselves as a nation, whilst being recognised, may have to be sacrificed in the interests of the working class internationally. Clearly this is a less than simple matter at the level of practical politics. The response of any group will therefore depend on their willingness to play the role of the proverbial sacrificial lamb in such a

situation. If coerced they may well respond by rejecting the interests of the overall working class in favour of their national group. In practice that often seems to have been the case.

### **The National Question in the Third World**

Munck explains how this issue was at the centre of the Third International's experience in relation to the national question. In the era of anti-colonial struggles after the Second World War, the interests of the then Soviet Union and its leader Stalin often seemed to dictate the response of the Comintern on the matter. Lenin had done away with the distinctions between First and Third World nationalisms created by the Marxist legacy of "historic" and "non-historic nations", but this did not settle the theoretical issue of what nationalism is and how it has to be engaged by socialists.

Since the time of the Comintern, the key issue has been whether or not the bourgeoisie in a colonially occupied territory could be revolutionary or not. The most oppressed and exploited sections of the nationally oppressed people, workers and peasants, needed to know how to relate to this class politically in pursuit of their common goal of national liberation. The contradiction for the poor is clear. Will national liberation not simply result in their enslavement by the local bourgeoisie once the coloniser has been defeated? If so, there is little to choose from between these two groups of exploiters. The

working class could maximise its opportunities by struggling for socialism and not national liberation. If the workers had an organisation that could lead the revolution, they were urged to do so by the Comintern; if not, they should support the bourgeois movement, but attempt to build the socialist potential in the revolution.

The experience in the various countries under imperialist rule was so vast and varied that any tactical response was bound to be useful in some countries and useless, or even detrimental in others. In many respects, the debates started by Marx and that plagued the Second International simply continued. Even though Marxist theory was developing, the central issue in relation to nationalism still had not been addressed and some Marxists even began to argue it could not be.

Debates at this period directly concerned South Africa, where the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) had emerged as a significant political force in the then colonised country. Experiences in various parts of the world began to cause the divergence of theory and practice that has come to characterise Marxism in general. Munck explains how debates that extended outside the Comintern all still turned on the issue of whether national liberation or socialism came first. However the issue also began to arise as to what kind of national

liberation could be won in the struggle against imperialism (1986:96).

Global debates and events were by this time so locked into the logic of the Cold War that any contribution on the issue of the relationship has to be viewed in that context. The end of the Comintern saw the rise of independent centers of Marxist thought that led to a number of contradictory developments. While anti-colonial struggles continued to see Marxist theoreticians grapple with the relationship between socialism and capitalism, the responses were as varied as geography and history could ensure. "Third Worldism" literally turned the historic/non-historic nations thesis "on its head" by positing the thesis that the countries that had made the break, or could make the break, with imperialism, were the most revolutionary. At the same time, independent Marxists in Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere began to grapple with the conundrum in their own way, often with positive results. Debray, incidentally, was personally involved in a number of these struggles.

Amilcar Cabral was one of the most influential revolutionaries in this respect. Cabal's anti-Eurocentric stance challenged the reduction of history to being simply that of class struggle. For Cabral, the struggle for national liberation was a social, political, and economic one that allowed people to "regain their historical personality". He argued that the

revolutionary petite-bourgeoisie, who would be the dominant class where the working class was weak, needed to be prepared to "commit suicide as a class" to allow the socialist revolution to triumph. Obviously, that does not often happen in reality (Munck, 1986:109).

In essence, however, the debate still remained locked in the logic of the contradiction left by Marx. Abandoning any hope of resolution, some Marxists have concluded that nationalism is not a theoretical but a practical or political question. In his historical consideration of the practical handling of nationalism by socialists, which is valuable in its own right, Munck never adequately deals with the theoretical issue of nationalism because he does not consider the inter-disciplinary nature of his own subject and the need to consider its history as being determined not only by socialist agencies but also by non-socialist factors. Not only Marxist theory and practice, but also the forces of colonialism and imperialism have determined the term "nation" in Marxist debate. Just as Chidester reveals the contested nature of the term "religion", and the role of the study of religion in colonialism, any consideration of the national question must do the same (1996:3). The category of nation is inherently contested, as are definitions of the state, economy, and even class, because of capitalist, colonialist, and imperialist relations of power and struggles for emancipation and liberation.

Debray argues that Marxism has failed to "reflect the conditions of existence of the national phenomenon". Debray goes further to remark that "the energy of nationalism leaves the apparatus of 'scientific socialism' looking very sheepish" (25). Debray explains that while the nation is a phenomenon which is "historically determined", what the nation expresses, the "cultural organisation of the human collective", is not. It is a permanent, structural feature of social existence. For Debray, as we have seen, the very essence of this existence is the sacred. He states emphatically that the sacred is the "real national question" (1977b: 26). He also argues that no socialist revolution has ever taken place that was not "fused with a national liberation struggle", or where it did not defend "a national identity" (1977b:33).

Some examples of various contemporary views expressed in relation to Marxist practice and the national question reveal the generally accepted truth described by Debray. Gopal Balakrishnan has commented that Marxism has been "confounded" by the failure of the proletariat to defeat its class enemy, internationally or in advanced industrialised countries (1995:57). The historian Eric Hobsbawm sees this as an inevitable result of the universalism of the left project and not just as a flaw in Marxism (1992). This again illustrates the theoretical issue which has to be dealt with, namely, how do we explain the

contradiction between the universalising and localising processes that are observed to be a feature of the development of society?

### **Class Revisited**

In Marxist theory since the Second World War there has been a noticeable shift in debates on the nature of nationalism and the national question. The three noticeable types of responses are augmented by the acceptance of the inability of classical Marxism to explain the durability of nationalism. Some noticeable exceptions do occur. James M. Blaut has put forward some convincing arguments for accepting an amended framework of what is basically classical Marxism. Blaut suggests that "historical materialism is an incomplete theory where it deals with pre-capitalist history and Third World geography: it is still to some degree Eurocentric and diffusionist" (Blaut, 1987:4). Even though Blaut is careful to disclaim comprehensive status for his interpretation of Marxism and the national question, he makes a number of important points. Not least of these is that nationalism does have some relationship to class struggle. Although Debray does not explicitly rule out the notion of class struggle, he does play it down. Blaut reminds us of the fact that national struggles, particularly in the colonial context, have elements of class struggle that are central to these efforts. The relationship between coloniser and colonised is both one of othering as well as

one of exploitation. Indeed, the one relationship facilitates the other. In South Africa, this argument has a specific relevance.

What remains obvious, however, is that Marxists have not got to grips with the fact that nationalism, ethnicity, and racism have persisted and have become more powerful despite the industrialisation of society and the emergence of global culture, markets, and capital. Debray is one of a number of social theorists who concerned to explain this phenomenon. His proposal to deal with this problem by, firstly, recognising the religious nature of social existence, and secondly by recognising the material nature of symbolic efficacy is however, in many respects, distinctive. In order to understand Debray's contribution, however, it will be necessary to review broader trends in non-Marxist discourse on the phenomena of nationalism, ethnicity, and racism. Despite his criticisms of Marxism, Debray's views do not fit easily into any of these approaches, nevertheless, they raise issues that Debray's theory must confront.

### **Primordialist and Modernist theories of Nationalism**

In some academic discussion the phenomenon of nationalism is distinguished from that of ethnicity on the grounds that nationalism relates primarily to claims to the right of self-determination and is usually connected to some

kind of attempt to locate political power in the form of a nation-state. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is seen as related to the determination of differences within a context of a particular nation state (Calhoun, 1993:211-239). However, this definitional distinction between nationalism and ethnicity is not supported by any significant argument. Arguably, any ethnic identity could be regarded as an aspirant nationalism if it articulates the demand for state power. It is also quite obvious that conquered nations do not necessarily have state power. This would not necessarily reduce them to the status of an ethnic group. Such distinctions seem to be affected by the kind of problematic that Chidester explains in relation to the colonial encounter. The main motivation for describing an identity as being "not national" would be the strategic dismissal of its legitimacy.

Benedict Anderson has suggested that a critique of existing theory on the national question needs to start from the position of recognising that even those who seek to do away with the phenomenon are prone to act according to it. He cites wars between socialist states as examples (Anderson, 1983:1). Anderson goes on to argue that both the Marxist and liberal traditions have failed to deal with the "anomaly" of "nation-ness, as well as nationalism", which are in his view a type of "cultural artifact" (Anderson, 1983:4). It is also significant that Anderson does not see nationalism as an

ideology as defined in the sense of the classical modern ideologies such as liberalism or fascism. He prefers to classify it along with categories of social phenomena such as religion and kinship (Anderson, 1983:5). The reduction of nationalism to culture is obviously problematic. Not only is nationalism more than culture, but it is arguable that nationalism informs culture. It may well be the case that nationalism is articulated and negotiated in and through culture, but there is more to the phenomenon than just ways of talking, eating, and drinking.

Anderson is supported in his critique of liberal theorists on the national question by Partha Chatterjee. Chatterjee notes what he describes as the "liberal-rationalist dilemma" in relation to considerations of nationalism (Chatterjee, 1991:2). Where theories of nationalism constructed by Europeans and American theorists do not concur with reality, especially in the colonial situation and in the light of the terrible atrocities and destruction carried out in the name of nationalism, these theorists are apt to start distinguishing between types of nationalisms. They begin to retreat into racist or orientalist positions that provide their arguments no advantage, but which have the virtue of exposing the moribund nature of their thoughts on the matter.

The main debate in liberal theory and in non-Marxist theory generally with respect to the

national question has turned on the issue of whether nations are archaic or modern features of society. Two influential proponents of these opposing schools of thought are student and teacher, Anthony Smith and Ernest Gellner.

Smith defines nationalism as "an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity of a human population, some of whose members conceive it to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'". He defines a nation as "a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and memories, a mass, public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members". Smith goes on to point out that this "kind of social and cultural community" ensures the unique loyalty of its members. He distinguishes the state as a separate "legal and political concept" from nation, though the two are closely related in his view (1996:359).

Smith argues that states preceded nationalism and that the "lack of spatial and temporal fit" between these two phenomena is one of the prime reasons for contemporary conflict of a national character. Smith continues by claiming that nations are not "perennial and immemorial", and while they may be partly "imagined" entities as Anderson has argued, or even "invented" as Hobsbawm suggests, they are not purely the product of "modernisation" or a "feature of modernity" (1996c:360-361). Smith's

point of view is that nations are the "products of pre-existing traditions and heritages which have coalesced over the generations" (1996:361). In other words, they are imagined or invented out of the raw material of the past, which turns out, according to Smith, to be essentially ethnic.

In addressing the relationship between nationalism and modernity, Smith has tackled what he describes as the "conservative" school of nationalism, exemplified by the classical romanticist Kedourie (Smith, 1971:6, 8). Smith has also criticised the Durkheimian notion that nationalism fulfills the role of a "civic religion". He prefers to see nationalism as an ideology, which is in turn a sub-category of "belief systems" (1971:54).

Since Smith has argued that nations are not modern in their origins and not religious in their nature, they are archaic and secular phenomenon. Smith's view is an interesting one. He argues that there are examples of "ancient nationalisms", such as Zealotism and pan-Hellenism, in which it is possible to distinguish between "polycentric" and "ethnic" nationalism (1971:158, 161). It is arguable that this very distinction undermines Smith's theory of primordiality, since it reveals that the raw material of any national identity need not be ethnic. Smith also argues that to understand nationalism we must separate out the "sentiments, consciousness, attitudes,

aspirations, and loyalties" that are to do with nationalism from the "doctrines, ideologies, programs and activities of organisations and movements that are attached to these (1971:168). As Debray shows, it is precisely that separation which allows us to undermine the distinction usually drawn between types of collective identity.

Smith argues that in contrast to the "modernist" position that Ernest Gellner proposes, his position is one that directly links nations to "ethnic" and "cultural" predecessors and even to "pre-modern" versions of these. He criticises modernisation theories as also being too general and of hampered by the economic materialism which they advocate (1996:361). He argues that, while not all nations have these "antecedents", the "prototypes" of European nations did, and all nations since have mimicked these models. He refers to this "perspective" as being "ethno-symbolic", at the same time as questioning the very notion of a single theory of nationalism. In this way he distinguishes the "civic, territorial nationalism of the French Revolution and the West, which sees the nation as a territorial association of citizens living under the same laws and sharing a mass, public culture" from "ethnic nationalism" which sees "the nation as a community of genealogical descent, vernacular culture, native history and popular mobilisation" (1996a:361-362).

Gellner's response to this argument is basically that if the past mattered so much then all nations would have a rich past in the way Smith describes it as being necessary (1996a:365). As Gellner observes, however, the "role of culture in human life was totally transformed by that cluster of economic and scientific changes which have transformed the world since the seventeenth century." He goes on to argue that it is the "incorporation and . . . mastery of high culture . . . a literate codified culture which permits context-free communication" that is essential to nations and nationalism. He continues in this vein to describe how "the mobility and anonymity of modern society and . . . the semantic non-physical nature of work" make this "culture and acceptability in it the most valuable possession a (person) has" (1996a:368). In Gellner's view, people have to become nationalists because economic, political, and even social survival and advancement are tied to this phenomenon. This was not always the case. Prior to the development of capitalism, and arguably the subsequent developments of colonialism and imperialism, people lived in primarily agrarian communities in which culture played the role of ascribing social position and identity differently. (1996:368) Status and identity were expressed in primarily religious terms and in relation to a monarch or leader. Language and other differences were so vast that even villages were distinct from one another in other cultural terms,

making for a variety of culture no longer possible in the world. For Gellner, there is little or no real continuity between the Ancient Greeks and the Greeks of today. In this respect nations do not "have navels", meaning, they do not necessarily have primordial origins in the form of ethnicity. (1996a:369). As has been noted from Smith's own classification of nationalisms into "polycentric" and "ethnic", as well as his definition of "civic" nationalism, Gellner's point is not adequately answered by Smith.

Where agreement can be found among diverse theorists such as Gellner, Hobsbawm, Anderson, and Smith is that they all find that nationalism operates at the symbolic level. Their explanations for this symbolic aspect of nationalism vary, but they share the dilemma of relating the symbolic character of nationalism to ethnicity, culture, economics, or the quest for state power. While useful contributions, these theories of nationalism offered by social theorists not from the classical Marxist school of thought have also failed to deal adequately with the problem of nationalism because they do explain the relation between the symbolic - ethnic, cultural, religious, or ideological symbolism - and power. Debray's strength is that he offers a theoretical framework that explains all "belief systems", as Smith refers to them, without elevating any one to a position of primacy.

A few points will illustrate further weaknesses of non-Marxist theories of nationalism. In the first instance, if as Smith strongly argues but Gellner and others seem not seriously opposed to, nations have ethnic origins, his argument that this is the primary model of nationalism cannot be sustained. Obviously, there are nations that do have a myth or memory of some ethnic past. The problem for such a theory, however, is not only that there are nations that do not have this ethnic perspective, but it also seems not to matter once a nation exists what its origins are. People believe they are American, for example, even though they come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. In addition, such a theory does not explain where ethnicity comes from and only argues that it is different from nationalism because the latter relates to the state. Such a view is wholly Eurocentric, since it sees nationalism "spreading out" from Europe along with the diffusion of the modern state form. It is obvious that states existed in other parts of the world, such as in what are now China and Greece. These were certainly not unlike nation-states in the modern sense, yet they pre-date the nation-states of Europe. Since an argument could be made for these nations having influenced states in Europe, the European exemplar theory cannot be sustained.

The modernist theory on the other hand does not explain how it is that the cultures that

become an essential aspect of any nationalism originate in a previous "low" culture, to use Gellner's phrase. Not only this, but as Smith has pointed out, some "low" cultures perish but others do not (Smith,1996b:380). It is not sufficient to argue that it just is the case that some cultures survive and others do not.

### **Nationalism and the State**

Other theorists have come closer to providing a fuller account of nationalism. Patrick Hall has argued that the nation is itself "a social relation of power and knowledge" that "becomes represented as a discursive regime, where the nation appears to be the historical subject" (1997:3). Hall explains the relationship between institutions such as the state and pedagogy, whose authoritative, and universal functions, as well as the individualist, historicist functioning of culture enable what is a modern expression of a "discursive hegemony" (1997:3). As such Hall's theoretical framework has many of the elements of a fuller account of nationalism, including the manner in which space and time, as well as claims to knowledge and actual physical power operate at the level of a culture to bring about the collective recognition of similarity that is nationalism.

The role of the state in organising people and in the pedagogy of subjects is explained as being an aspect of the nation-state that characterises the "social relation of power and

knowledge" (1997:3) But Hall does not explain the sociological aspects of identity fully. For example, he gives no account of the functioning of religion or other forms of ideology. While he describes the manner in which the state functions as the official "academy", generating the "sovereign objective truth", he explains this purely at the level of the discourse and does not describe the materialist origins of this hegemony.

None of the non-Marxist theorists explain, at a general level, the origins and functioning of the social collective or the specific nature and functioning of social identity and nationalism in particular. It is often not even clear that theorists in the various non-Marxist approaches are talking about nationalism as a single phenomenon, given the varieties of nationalisms alleged to exist and the astrategic nature of the dominant theories. Debray challenges Marxist and non-Marxists alike to rethink the national question. He offers an alternative perspective through his argument for the recognition of the phenomenon of symbolic efficacy.

### **Symbolic Efficacy: The Manufacture of Identities**

As has already been indicated, in Debray's theoretical framework, collective or social identities are produced by the religiopolitical unconscious. The delimitation of space and time, the two strategies that humanity deploys against the inevitability of death, give rise to group or

collective consciousness. Origin and inscription give rise to "ritual repetition, the ritualisation of memory, celebration, commemoration—in short, all those forms of magical behaviour signifying defeat of the irreversibility of time" and the marking out of "the outline of sacred space", which is the mythical birth of a society. In short, according to Debray, myth and ritual make the nation. (1977b:27) They do this by providing an articulation of the biological, psychological, and territorial requirements of the collective and the individuals that constitute it. The strategy for the simultaneous management of these aspects of humanity is that of enabling the location of the individual subject and the collectivity in space and time.

The sacred and politics are one and the same thing. Not only are "national and social liberation struggles" deeply affected by religion (5). The official rituals of the nation-state, which find their extreme case in the cult of personality, reveal the unitary nature of religion and politics. It is "the circle that produces the sacred", and encirclement that intensifies the level of sanctity (312).

But the nation is only one possible "modality of a primary invariable belonging to human nature". Although the nation is the inevitable territory which a group must occupy if it is to exist, cultural identity is premised on difference (1977b:29). This does not mean that

the nation is an idealist category. On the contrary, for Debray "the idea of the nation is the most materialist of ideas" (1977b:29).

In Debray's view the demarcation of territories is essentially a consequence of conflict, or war. The first communities were founded on the principle of defense (270). The state has its origins in this process and identity is created as such communities are founded (280). In other words, the precursor to modern nationalism is the Hellenism of ancient Greece, the Catholicism of the Middle Ages, and modified Protestantism of the Enlightenment (280). It is also the pre-colonial identity of inhabitants of Southern Africa, South America, and as written record shows, of the Chinese empire. Unlike the theorists who see a discontinuity between these various modalities of the collective, Debray argues strongly for the position that, family, clan, tribe, ethnies, city-state, religion, and nation are all variations on a theme. They are all ways of operating at a collective level; in other words they all represent the social aspect of our human existence. Like nationalism, none of these forms of social organisation are merely epiphenomena. As Debray argues, the nation is no superstructure, however. Like language and culture, it is a real infrastructure because it facilitates the social functioning of collectives (1977b:38).

## The Orthodoxy of Politics

Identity is about stereotypes. The ideal types that define the identities that are created through the processes of history and geography are obviously fictions in the sense that there is no person that actually corresponds exactly to an ideal type in reality. Debray develops this point further by adding that the production of stereotypes is itself a stereotyped process, involving the creation of an orthodoxy. He argues that this process is a continuous one that is "hidden" behind the ideologico-religious. What is constantly taking place behind the ideologico-religious, Debray argues, is "incorporation through the production of a lack" (243).

As was explained above, organisation takes place around an absence. This process of organisation and the founding absence creates the power of the other and the opportunity to mediate in this situation. The figure of this absence is the pedagogical father and the absence for the group is death. What is needed for the foundation of a doctrine then, is the death of this pedagogical figure.

All authority stems from the fact that those in authority speak not in their own name but in the name of such a figure. Even the most extreme forms of the cult of the personality require the cult figure to speak in the name of some other

figure or entity. Stalin, for all his power, had to speak in the name of Marx or Lenin. Pol Pot and Kim il Sung suffered the same circumstances. Within organisations, it is the emissaries who wield the power of command, and always on behalf of some higher authority. This includes the function of teaching itself. Debray argues that the communication of truth is dependent on what is "a potentially religious hierarchical matrix". To that end, "belief and transmission are coextensive" (246). Any organised system of ideas that is considered to be true and authoritative by a community is a doctrine. The relationship between what is taught and how it is taught is of great importance, according to Debray, since the history of all belief systems has been about masters or teachers and their disciples or followers. The process of organisation requires "conversion, indoctrination and correction". In short, it requires continuous education (248).

Debray points out the obvious contradiction for historical materialism in this regard. The attempt to define this theory as a science is constantly undermined by the fact that it has to be regarded as authoritative and "all true" if it is to be effective as an ideology. It therefore has had to become a doctrine and like all doctrines a matter of faith, dogma, and orthodoxy. This problem is structural and cannot be overcome by the theory itself, since the theory is subject to the same weakness (250-251).

The sacred enters into politics by virtue of the fact that this relationship between the teacher/authority and the students/followers is premised on a distinction between the profane and the sacred. Those who do not accept the authority of the doctrine and the leader are, by definition profane, and those that do are part of the sacred society. This may involve what can be termed recognised degrees of sacredness, where disciples are promoted until they may be part of an inner circle. Religion and ideology, as far as Debray is concerned, are the institutionalisation of this sacred element in society. The relationship between the teacher/authority and students/followers implies relations of the transmission of the doctrine as well as the content of the doctrine.

Debray argues that there are two key aspects of doctrinal work which are caused by the political unconscious in relation to ideas. These are circumscription and exclusion. Organisation takes place through the inclusion and exclusion of subjects as well as the relationship of those subjects to the sacred ideas and texts of a group. Any idea, if it is to survive, requires a school or a pedagogical institution. Such a body requires an orthodoxy to function, but this orthodoxy stands in contradiction to any notion of the idea as a driving force for change. This inclination towards orthodoxy is particularly problematic for Marxism, since it points to the inherently conservative nature of doctrines.

These "regulate identities and stabilise change" (256). If this is true then the very idea of revolutionary change becomes problematic.

Funerals serve a particular function in the founding of groups, according to Debray. Sacrifice and sacrilisation go hand in hand. Whether by execution or other means, the founding absence that creates a group must be present. This creates the void around which the group can organise itself (258). Debray argues that death has such a power to drive organisation because "it is the basis of the group unconscious and the source of group history" (259). Death is evident in all the myths of foundation for societies, and where necessary this involves a ritual sacrifice. As Debray puts it, "death transforms time into space and a biography into a topology of actions and words punctuated by our memories" (260). Death is both a guarantor for the collective and a reason for the group to congregate.

The ecclesiastical structure of the group is one that Debray believes is necessary for the group to survive. Individual humans are mortal but groups can seem immortal to the extent that they transcend the deaths of individuals. Since we have to organise ourselves to attempt to avoid death, there is a futility to this practice which underlies all social activity. This collective anguish is the basis of collective life that is fashioned in the midst of the chaos and disorder

that surround us constantly. Political work is therefore frustrating, tiresome, and even unproductive, but it is unavoidable (268). All attempts to avoid entropy, which are what the activities of the collective are, are by definition conservative as far as Debray is concerned.

Debray argues that the survival of groups and the definition of individuals within groups are governed by the fact that the "inscription principle" demarcates either "ideal or material territory". This principle ensures that the dimension of the group, namely space, predominates. Inscription allows the definition of sanctuary, which is obviously hallowed as it has life preserving property. That which preserves life is sacred. Debray describes his sacred enclosure as simultaneously "military, political and religious" (270).

Debray goes on to describe effective doctrines that continue to exist as "topographical systems". All space is managed and all management is in terms of the spatial. The organisation of time is managed within the space created through the ceremonial aspects of collective existence. Through these cultural activities the group seeks to "domesticate the unpredictable and to exorcise the future by commemorating the past" (271). As already noted, doctrines function to provide security for the group. Dogmas are therefore the product of fear. But the belief and power necessary for the

doctrinal effect arise from humanity's "biological impotence and logical incapacity" (274). These problems of our sociability are, in a contradictory manner, caused by the very absence of a biological means of historical transmission of group identity. It is because there is uncertainty about the project of any collective that what Debray describes as "bodies of cultural functionaries" arise, which are experts in ensuring the continued existence of any given collective.

Inscription is embodied in the phenomenon of territory, since it cannot be embodied in itself. This territoriality is the necessary reply of the political to the presence of "hostility", the threat which gives rise to the political in the first place. Whether in the form of actual physical territory or the territory of doctrines, this principle is the same. The enclosure of doctrines and cities is described by Debray as being preventative. He calls spatial enclosure "the first anthropological act of self-defense" (276). The need for security is necessitated by the continued presence of war in society. Debray characterises war as being "universal and recurrent" and "inherent in the existence of social groups" (277). The duality of social existence is defined by the existence of the individual and the enemy and this is encapsulated in the principle of inscription. According to Debray, "Enclosure is the basic category of the political world, since the opposition between inside and outside

establishes both its identity and its necessity" (277).

Doctrines are prone to exclusivity because they are themselves founded by the act of exclusion. Any heresy, if it is to survive, must succumb to the orthodoxy effect. This arises out of the need to create a strong community. Debray argues that ideas "come into politics" by a strategic need. Any doctrine is a weapon developed from culture. We can look back over history and recount the creation of any identity by its other, whether in the form of "ethnic groups, nations, religions or classes" (280). For Debray, all movements are born in struggle and involve the use of force, violence, and war in what he identifies as the process of "cultural normalisation".

The exemplar in this regard is Constantine, who combined politics, religion, and warfare in the creation of the unified "sovereign, warrior and theologian". Any movement must imitate this "Constantine effect" and adopt a total approach to organisation if it is to be successful. Constantine is not only the exemplar but also the foundation of modern Western society for Debray. By taking Christianity and making it the hegemonic religion of the "West", Constantine also made Christianity essential to political faith. Christianity allowed for the unilinear direction to history and theory as well as providing the final end point for this process.

## **The Strategic Imperative**

Since political practice is defined by Debray as being about war and strategy, all other aspects of political discourse are discarded as being utopian because they are "atopian", in that they do not relate to territory. Even Marx's communist society is unrealisable in the form in which he proclaims it, simply because it is astrategic and therefore atopian. Marx never considered the theory of warfare in his deliberations and thus made it impossible for people to engage with him. This did not stop his theory becoming a powerful movement, but, as Debray puts it, this was not because of Marx's theory, but in spite of it.

All political programmes announce intentions, but whether these are realisable is a matter of strategy and tactics, according to Debray. The need for strategy creates in turn the need for security. What this need for security does is undermine the very viability of revolutionary change. The absence of progress in terms of communist ideas is explained by Debray as being a result of the astrategic nature of these ideas. According to Debray, it was claimed by Marx that communist society would not be in need of any banners. But without these banners no one could be mobilised. In this sense all social formations must be territorial, and therefore those existing territorial units must be

efficacious, otherwise they would not exist for very long.

It is in this sense that Debray levels a significant charge against Marxism and the theory of historical materialism. Debray makes the suggestion that a synthesis of Marxist ideas and the ideas of Clausewitz, the philosopher of war, would have perhaps cured this problem, but that this synthesis did not take place. This is not strictly true, since Lenin can be described as being the Marxist theoretician that saw the strategic weakness of Marxism. His solution was the formation of the professional revolutionary organisation, the Party. However, as Munck, amongst others, has shown, while this may have solved the pedagogical problem of Marxism and created a strategic vehicle for managing the ideological territory, the Party did not deal with the problem of managing the relationship between geographical territory and the cultural identities which people have acquired. This left Marxism perplexed by the nature of nationalism and how to grapple with it at a practical level. The fact that all collective action is strategic in the final analysis ensures the failure of all utopian ideas. In this respect all revolutions have announced programmes, but have failed to implement them. Debray's criticism is that class is literally "trumped" by nationalism in that individuals will tend to go along with the nationalist option when presented with the dilemma of choosing between the two. Marx

failed to recognise this because of the astrategic nature of his theory.

### **A Social Physics**

Debray returns to the issue of Marxism's lack of a theory of representation in order to interrogate the issue of symbols. He argues that to understand symbols, emblems and banners we need to have "a theory of the imaginary and of the subject, or of the imaginary constitution of identity" (309). All that Marxism says about these is that they are undesirable hangovers from our prehistoric past, but that is not good enough as far as Debray is concerned. All socialist formations and movements have placed a great deal of emphasis on symbolic production and manipulation. What is even more significant in Debray's estimation is the fact that the theory of Marxism has "overlooked" the matter of the nation. Despite socialist revolutions, which have usually taken place within nation states or within a national framework, the nation-state has continued to exist and has been essential to socialism. If the nation, as Marx would have us believe, is a historically determined category, then the fact that these still exist under socialism and even seem to be essential to socialist revolutions needs to be explained.

Debray's own view is that because the need for frontiers is determined by the threat of war, and in that respect socialist groups are no different from any other type of group. For

socialist countries national antagonisms have not withered away. What this illustrates is that the idea of communism being built in one country or in any limited section of the world is one that is unattainable, since this would mean encirclement by other countries, which would necessitate a specialised bureaucracy for the safety and security of the country. This in turn would generate shortages in the society through the "war economy" of such an encampment. Such a situation is the antithesis of communism, according to Debray.

The removal of this hostile aspect of society is desirable as far as Debray is concerned, but it is idealistic. Since religion is "the continuation of war by other means", the same would apply to religion. If we were to do away with war we could do away with religion, but that is the same as arguing for the end of society (312). This proposed "state of nature" is utopian and would mean the end of history. When societies are under threat the sacred is subjected to an intensification as the social physics that Debray has described comes into effect. This "escalation of the sacred" is unavoidable because it is endemic and structural. In this respect Debray also identifies a correlation between religious fundamentalism and the foundation of any political community. Debray argues that the sequence of organisation that follows the configuration of war, religion, and institution, provides a clear exposition of social physics,

revealing the normally latent mechanisms of the establishment of order" (316).

The effects of the social physics Debray constructs are dramatic. Not only can the sacred not be done away with, but the division between what are described as the rational and irrational aspects of our collective social existence are entrenched within the group. The ritualised conflict between the "sacred and profane, irrational and rational, archaism and modernity, universal and local" constitutes a regular contradiction that regulates social existence(323). This creates a "constancy principle" that Debray believes "governs the functioning of the social apparatus". This he also describes as the "spontaneous self-regulation of collective identities" (324).

The traditional consideration of this antithetical relationship between pairs is one that seeks to consider reconciliation of this divide or destruction of one aspect of the divide, usually considered to be negative, as illustrated, for example, in the attempt to conquer irrationality through scientific instruction and education. The notions of progress and evolution are, however, contradicted by what Debray describes as "ethnic factors" that intervene to restore balance to the social apparatus when it has been disturbed (324). But as far as Debray is concerned the very notion of progress is naive, even if it is seen in the

negative sense of the word, where it is considered to be the increasing secularisation of society away from the desirable in the form the sacred. Debray responds to this by arguing that where the constancy principle operates it is accompanied by the "law of the return" (326).

The law of return suggests that the traditional manner of viewing these antithetical properties is flawed. Whereas the matrix of viewing history has been one of considering that society moves from one point to another, Debray's view is that where there is movement it is only in circularity and thus society perpetually returns to its origins. This is symptomatic of the fact that what is regarded as "historical consciousness is lined through and through by the a-historical unconscious" (327). Because of the constant presence of the sacred in society there can be no secularisation of history. All that happens is that where increasing technological complexity demystifies aspects of our existence, the sacred becomes diffused and uncontrollable, or commodified and privatised.

Debray seeks to redefine the notion of the archaic to explain that it is not a chronologically determined aspect of our history, but rather the foundation on which social existence rises. We therefore have to recognise that we all belong to collectives, in the form of families, language and cultural groups, religions and nations. But these are not a matter of anteriority; they are a matter

of authority. The more modern identities are the more superficial they are, since they are created less out of the closeness of the individuals within them than out of the technology that allows for them. When a crisis occurs we retreat into those groups that will afford us the required security. Such a crisis can even challenge our membership of one or more of the collectives, but Debray describes our loyalties as "genealogical" (329). Since the division of society into these groups is not only horizontal, as in the Marxist sense of classes, but also vertical, we have to be able to explain this.

Modernity is characterised by increasing aterritoriality, but this Debray argues is compensated for by the ideologico-religious. These sets of ideas become homes for the homeless in the absence of some territorial ethnicity (332). Provocatively, Debray characterises ideology as "what remains when the acropolis has been razed, the walls have been destroyed and the plane trees have been cut down" (334). The continued appearance of religion and even magic in modern societies is a reflection of the continued presence of the sacred. Our societies may become more complex and relations more abstract but the centrality of this fact cannot be ignored. All that happens with this "decentring of the sacred" is that its incarnation becomes concentrated and individualised (337).

What is true for time is also true for space in the modern world. The "archo and neo" relationship is mirrored by the "micro and macro" and as national identities become greater and more diffuse, so do regional and local identities intensify (337). In this sense the world is "anti-Marxist", since the notions of totalisation and homogenisation that are found in Marxism are undermined by the historical process of the privatisation of the sacred (339). In fact, the relationship between, socialism and nationalism in general is predetermined by what Debray describes as "an obsessional territorial neurosis" (341). In the end, humanity has to reproduce itself by fragmenting and reconfiguring as territory.

A number of the claims Debray makes in relation to the orthodoxy of politics can be tested by observation of ongoing political practices. In defining politics as driven by orthodoxy, Debray argues that all organisation takes place around the founding absence of a society. The idea that the subject is created through the collective is the most cogent argument that can be put forward to explain the relationship between individual and collective. This description is dynamic because it allows for the fact that organisation is an ongoing activity that necessitates the physical and mental engagement of people. It also allows for the explanation of the ongoing tension between the universal and the local.

Our belief in society and even conceptions of truth, are a function of the authority of the founding absence, which creates a particular contradiction for any notion of a scientific social theory. The perpetual presence of the sacred in politics leads to all theory becoming doctrinal and dogmatic. The presence of the sacred is an effect of the political unconscious and the life-death process on which society is founded. This explanation of a subterranean collective sense of identity, though not unproblematic, vividly describes the manner in which the symbolic practices that are a feature of all collectives are generated so that all may recognise them and partake in the manufacture, contestation, and consumption of these resources. The concept of the ideologico-religious allows for the theoretical explanation of all types of social or collective identities. Orthodoxy describes the material basis of the relationship between power and knowledge, through the creation of specialised institutions for managing these functions, as well as for the manufacture of the symbolic resources that legitimate the institutions own functioning.

Societies are defined by the act of inscription which creates identity, but at the same time this means a delimitation of territory. Since groups are territorial, they are also strategic and must be considered as such if we are to understand them properly. Nations and ethnic groups have been ignored by astrategic theories, the prime example being Marxism. The

presence of the sacred leads to the issue of the traditionally defined relationship between antithetical pairs, which needs to be reconsidered in the light of Debray's constancy principle. The regulation of social apparatuses is governed by the fact that any collective must always seek to return to its foundation, and is thus subjected to a constant return to origin which indicates the primacy of the archaic within social groups. This archaism is inherent within any society and is even a feature of modernity, where it lends itself towards the ever increasing fragmentation of society and the localisation of identity.

### **The Frontier**

An important factor in the functioning of nationalism and of collective identities that Debray does not adequately deal with is the issue of the relationship between the economic and the symbolic aspects of society. While it is true that Debray explains the functioning of collective identities at a general level, and even describes the relationship between the universalisation of society while it is being effectively privatised into more local units, he is far too dismissive of the economy. As we have seen, Debray claims that the sacred rather than class is primary. To the extent that the organisation of society takes place in the manner that Debray describes this may be true. But all of this organisation does not take place in the

abstract or without purpose. It cannot be denied that where Marx was absolutely accurate was to describe human activity as being about the competition over the appropriation and consumption of natural resources. Debray acknowledges this by arguing for the restoration of "nature" in our understanding of "history". But he never adequately makes the connection between national and class identities, for example.

The solution to this problem, however, might still be located in Debray's theory. This is to be found in a number of themes that are identifiable, firstly in relation to the notion of the frontier, which locates concepts such as culture, colonialism, imperialism, and even nationalism and socialism in a particular manner that essentially redefines them. Secondly, in dealing with the simultaneous universalising and localising tendencies that exist in our world, Debray interprets history in a particular way that describes the relationship between power and knowledge in institutionalised forms that enables a dynamic definition of these institutions, as well as a dynamic analysis of the relationship between nationalism and class. Thirdly, the designation of the sacred in commodity dominated economic systems can be identified at two separate levels that explains the relationship between the archaic and modern in a manner that can resolve the tension between them.

Chidester has explained how the frontier has functioned both in real and imagined terms as a place where comparisons have developed "a new taxonomy of world religions" (1996:27). This frontier served as an "open zone of intercultural contact" that was subsequently "closed with the establishment of some form of European colonial hegemony" (1996:26). What he points out is that at the same time as this was occurring "tribal, ethnic, or national identities of indigenous people were produced in and through the process of establishing those colonial boundaries" (1996:22). It seems logical to add that at the same time the identities of the colonialists were being reproduced. Chidester points out that the function of religious comparison was part of a broader project of strategically and systematically othering and homogenising linguistic, class, gender, social, and racial differences, for the purposes of maximising the effectiveness of colonial administration. This was a "strategy for simplifying, and therefore achieving some cognitive control over, the bewildering complexity of a frontier zone" (1996:22).

It is clear that Debray's own description of the historical development of identities can be read in the same way. Not only does he describe all society as being regulated by the functioning of frontiers which are essential to all groups. But the very historical development from the initial simple unit of the family through to the modern

nation can be read as one of the extension of the boundaries of the frontier. This process continues through the colonial era, and as Chidester has noted, serves to make the management of human populations economically profitable and administratively viable once they have been militarily conquered. All of this has to be located within an understanding of the role of capital, private property, and the division of labour if it is to be useful as an analytical tool in contemporary society.

In the same way as the colonial frontier functions as a special zone, we can consider the "frontier" between capitalism and socialism, or the nation and class, as the place where the future is being contested. It contains, as Debray points out, both the archaic and the modern, but also, as in the colonial frontier, the possibility of what can be in the future. The issue then becomes how do we forge that future strategically, while at the same time recognising the contradictory nature of the present? Perhaps there is cause for the kind of pessimism that Debray seems to retreat into when he considers the implications of his own theory, but it is possible that the very nature of modernity is such that the genocide or erasure of the collective memory that is part of the colonial experience will not necessarily be a feature of this extra-colonial encounter on the frontier. The very universalising trend of capital may well undermine the localisation trend of identity. As

Gellner observes, the fact that the "rich . . . cultural nuances" of the "agrarian world" have given way to approximately 300 nation-states, seems proof of some kind of homogenisation process (1996:369).

Even if it does not do this at a rapid rate, Debray points out the effect of the universalism of capitalism is such that it creates the space for the "privatisation" of the sacred. By this he means that where the sacred once was rigidly defined, whether in relation to the relevant God or the nationalist Leader, the effect of the increasing universalism of society is such that it allows for individual redefinitions of the sacred. This may mean that, where there has been a limiting of the role of the nation as the space through which people have organised themselves, for example in the former socialist countries, there may be an escalation of this kind of activity. But this trend could just as easily result in new processes of elite formation and consolidation, or to use Marxist terms, the creation of a new ruling class.

None of this suggests that the sacred is not at the centre of all political activity. It simply means that who defines the sacred, which is an arbitrary process but not an arbitrary matter, is best able to do this at a national level in this historical period. This nationalisation of the sacred corresponds to the way in which capital functions currently. Despite all the arguments

about globalisation, the state still plays a central role in the capitalist cycle of accumulation. That the nation-state is the most efficacious form of this apparatus currently is obvious (Amin, 1996:34). But the issue under consideration is why this is the case.

An explanation might be found in reconsidering the economy in relation to identity. In crude terms, the state has mirrored property in the form of capital in terms of its reach in society. Where property has been social or communal, as in so-called primitive societies, meaning those that do not conform to Western technological-military standards, the state is communal. Once the economy becomes privately owned and controlled, by leaders or chiefs, this communal character begins to change. The degree of centralisation of power in the form of the state coincides with the narrowing of the ownership of wealth and the extension of the territory within which such patterns of ownership occur. This function of the state can only be effective where the state has a homogenising role, in other words, where it effectively creates the kind of hegemony for its functioning without necessarily having recourse to the continued direct use of force or violence, although establishing this hegemony certainly seems to entail the use of force. As Debray shows, this process develops from the family to the modern nation-state. But this development is a matter of

the form rather than the principle of organisation.

We have to consider: What are the corresponding forms of identity that coincide with the various moments in the development of the state, private property, and the division of labour? It then becomes obvious that these are the family, the clan/tribe/phratry, the empire and the church, the modern nation-state and the political party. In these examples it is also clear that the localising versus universalising contradiction only becomes an issue between various collective identities when universal culture, in the form of the printed word becomes a significant feature of reality for the vast numbers of people. The most important feature of all these societies is that they all involve elites, in relation to the family the male as dominant individual, the king in the empire, and the national movement and its leaders in the latter. In this respect symbolic efficacy functions to facilitate description of the unit which forms the "us". As development takes place this us take on a different form. The division of labour and the success of various modes of production in generating a surplus all provide the opportunity for redefining the identity of the group. Patterns of these groups are obviously left for social theorists to study and describe. In the context of the expanding frontier of the collective these definitions take place, but are always and

everywhere contested. However, they do not take place outside of the class struggle.

This description of society as the perpetual frontier assists us in understanding claims to knowledge as located in the colonial situations. There are always relationships of power involved, and these need to be considered when we are analysing who is describing the political situation at hand. In this regard, culture is better understood as layers of symbolic opportunities within which people attempt to operate and stake their claims to power and knowledge. What determines the hegemony of these claims is not their authenticity but their material basis, that is, the organised force that vouches for them.

To appreciate this process, it may be necessary to redefine what we mean by colonialism. As frontier relations, colonialism need not necessarily be located in far off lands or be defined without a class content. Colonialism can be discerned in any relational situation where there are two counterposing groups, one aggressive and dominant and the other defensive. This could take place at the level of the development from society as the family to the clan/tribe, or from the feudal village to the nation. The issue is to what extent a discourse successfully articulates the physical process of othering, displacement, and conquest that go along with any colonial situation. Obviously, this does not detract from the unique

experience of those people living in communities which were invaded and occupied physically under the classic colonial conquests. This redefinition serves to demonstrate that the relations of power and knowledge in this situation are very similar, if not identical to those experienced by oppressed groups, even within a nation. Gender oppression serves as a graphic illustration of this relation.

Imperialism is defined by Lenin as being a particular stage of capitalism with specific features (1976:83). It could equally be defined as the outcome of the colonial process, which includes the period of concentration of production, monopolies, the export of capital, and the division of spoils in relation to all aspects of social existence, that is economic as well as symbolic. In this way we can understand that along with the particular economic factors of imperialism there are symbolic features that not only mirror but actually facilitate this system. In this respect, the rigid ownership, control, and utilisation of the sacred should be understood as a significant feature of colonial and imperial projects.

Ownership of the sacred must be located within an effective unit if it is to function and facilitate the necessary cohesion for the market to operate under specific conditions. Here nationalism becomes significant. Not only does it realise the aim of the bourgeoisie by facilitating

the necessary homogenisation that is required for commodity production and exchange, but nationalism also provides the fighting unit which may be called on to protect the sacred in a society and even the aggressive accumulation of the necessary raw material for the satisfaction of the logic of the system of individual ownership of private property. By defining the other, nationalism facilitates the necessary military and political cohesion for the maintenance of private property, that is capital, in a global market. In other words, nation-states cannot be understood outside of the logic of a world system of these states (Amin, 1996:27). They are the necessary unit of capitalist commodity production and exchange,

In this regard socialism can be redefined not as being in opposition to nationalism, but as being necessary to resolve the contradiction of nationalism. Socialism represents the actual and proverbial last frontier, for the time being anyway. It resolves the national question because it requires the negotiation between national units to facilitate peaceful production and exchange. This may be misunderstood as being utopian if it is taken to mean the voluntary commitment to those process by all nation-states. But if taken to mean the extension of hegemony after the physical capture of the necessary strategic terrain to effect such an agreement, then this is not necessarily utopian. Such an approach does not require ignoring or

denying, or negating the national. Nevertheless, it requires entering a frontier where, along with all other identities, the national will be renegotiated.

### **Property and Identity**

Accordingly, the contradiction between the universalising trend of the market and the localising trend of nationalism is revealed not to be a contradiction but a site of struggle. No identities arise out of thin air, as it were. In that respect, the primordialists are correct. But the symbolic material with which such identities are constructed may well be imagined and even fictitious. Where the primordialists must give way to the modernists is in accepting that this process can only take the character it does with the necessary development of productive relations and technology that are to be found in the commodity market.

In reality, the extent of an identity is defined by the function of property. Hence, identity is the same whether regarded as tribal, feudal, or national. It is the territory that differs and the extent of the identity differs accordingly. In modern culture, identity has been individualised by the market and the pursuit of commodities to satisfy individual needs. The confusion between individual identity and class consciousness can only be resolved organisationally. Similarly, the nation is not subdividing into smaller regional and local ethnic

identities. If anything the opposite is true at the level of the homogenisation of culture that is a feature of contemporary capital. What is occurring is that within the broader deterritorialisation of identity, local units of organisation have become more strategic. To that extent identity is fragmenting, but not as an overall feature.

It is in relation to the definition of the sacred that the economic and religious nature of society has to be understood. Firstly, as Marx has pointed out, the commodity takes on a life and power of its own in the cycle of production, exchange, and consumption. There is no denying that the commodity has been demarcated as a sacred aspect of society. Whether in the form of private property or the desired objects of consumer culture, commodities play a central role in the rituals, practices, and observances that identify these objects as sacred. Typically, identities of people, stereotypes, are partly determined by the relationship of individuals to property and to commodities in general. The example of the definition of what it is to be American, which is a national identity, is literally meaningless without the notion of private property, of abundant possession, and consumption of commodities. The emergence of this tendency in Cuba after the reform program has been observed by at least one commentator. According to Francois Houtart, not only have the contradictions of the market and the pursuit of

wealth generated a new individualism, but that the disjuncture between the increasing demands for commodities and the failure of the system to deliver them equitably has resulted in an increased role for religion. In his explanation of the functioning of religion in this context, Houtart asserts that where "individuals cannot resolve problems on the material level they try to find a solution in the symbolic field" (1997:47-48). Following Debray, however, we need to recognise that the material and symbolic operate on the same field as each other.

Secondly, symbolic resources have become commodities in their own right in developed or technologically advanced capitalist societies. The image now plays a particularly important function, because of the increasing significance of the symbolic in the individualising tendency of the market economy, but also because of the technological advances that have made the mass consumption of this form possible. In his recent work on mediology, Debray has investigated what he identifies as the three ages of the image, namely, "writing, printing and audio-visual" (1995:531). These ages of the image represent a history of "the mediations through which an idea or visual representation becomes a material force" (1995:530).

In this respect, the decline in national hegemony is significant only because it flows from the individualisation process of the market.

But this does not weaken the nation-state as an entity, or the nationalist discourse through which power and knowledge are appropriated, articulated, and deployed. The individual space created by the nation is not threatened by the process of exploration of this space. It is only necessary to close this space when the collective is under attack, since this space, the identity that goes with the organising of the nation, stands as defined until it is superseded by another collective identity. Individuals may explore other identities, may even hold multiple identities, but these must be under the gaze of the prevailing identity of the capitalist era. That identity is the national identity.

Nationalism is therefore a feature of capitalist society that articulates the constant process of incorporation and interpellation of subjects. As this system stabilises, the hegemony of nationalism creates the necessary space for individuals to reclaim the part of themselves sacrificed for the creation of the collective. South Africa has been no different in this regard. The history of accumulation and the configuration of current ownership patterns in relation to property contains the riddle of our own national question and perhaps an answer to it.

## Chapter 5: The National Question in South Africa

The South African Constitution declares that the country is founded on the principles of non-racialism and non-sexism, grants all citizens common citizenship, and these principles are described as the foundation for a united and democratic country (1996:1,3). Any outsider who knew little about the history of the country would be tempted to conclude that the national question is not an issue in South Africa. But the same constitution recognises certain rights of "cultural, religious or linguistic communities" (1996:15). Under the section of the constitution dealing with State Institutions Supporting Constitutional Democracy, there is a provision for a Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. While these inclusions do not necessarily undermine the united, democratic, and non-racial focus of the constitution, these described rights and the suggested institution do remain rather curious. It again requires knowledge of the history of the country to understand what are these measures which were taken to manage the national question in the new democracy.

A brief consideration of this history is therefore necessary to locate the national

question in South Africa. Debray's thesis has serious implications for addressing the issue of nationalism in a multi-cultural society, more specifically with the legacy of colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, and capitalism. It is also instructive to note that for a significant number of South Africans, socialism remains a pertinent political issue. Given Debray's arguments on the nature of revolution, this matter requires some attention. Historically, the national question in South Africa must be located in the transition from apartheid to democracy and in relation to the future hopes that many people hold for the trajectory of the national democratic revolution. Debray's theory provides a significant framework for considering the South African experience of the national question. To consider this experience sympathetically it is important to at least consider the relevance of the most important historical occurrences that are relevant to the issue of nationalism in South Africa.

### **The History of the National Question in South Africa**

It should be remembered that there is a history of inhabitants of the country that precedes the era of written record. Pre-colonial South Africa was a thriving society. The formation of communities, and patterns of conquest, resistance, defeat, and incorporation have left their imprints for any observer to peruse. The various communities that existed in

the era before the colonial conquest of what is today South Africa would have been much like those described as existing in ancient Greece by Thomson (1941). The patterns of language, chieftainship, and the residue of development at the time suggest vital communities that were to only later be defined as tribes by the colonists. In so far as these identities were pre-capitalist, nationalities would perhaps be the wrong description, but to the communities at the time, however they described themselves, it is as accurate a description in terms of the subjective experience then and now.

During the era of the colonial conquests a number of features of nationalism that Debray's theory describes emerged. On the one hand, there was the imperialist discourse of the invaders. The main originating strands of this particular nationalism were of course Dutch and English. These settlers spoke of the right to own and develop the land, and to educate and civilise the indigenous people. All of this was done in the name of an allegedly superior identity, that of the civilised European (Chidester, 1996e:5-29; O'Meara, 1996:40-43). But this was not all. As the settlers began to establish themselves, bring up children, build permanent establishments, their own experiences at the hands of the imperialist began to generate an independent articulation of settler interests. This emergent settler nationalism placed the settler population between the indigenous people on the one hand

and the imperial masters on the other. They saw their own interests being best served by expressing their identity as separate from these two other identities.

The response of the indigenous people is as revealing. In opposition to the powerful colonialists an emerging unity between fairly diversified and independent communities is detectable. Where once there were a number of communities, the response to colonialism begins to unify the conquered as their common experience and common enemy becomes the most enduring feature of their changing world. There were of course shifting patterns of identity that were not purely or simply prompted by the colonial invaders. The nation building project of a Shaka, for instance, was due to population expansion and a particular level of development that was reached independently of the colonial intrusion. During the twentieth century, however, the main motor of change that encouraged patterns of urbanisation that began to break down local agrarian and feudal based identities was the economy. Arguably, this process stimulated the birth and subsequent development of an African nationalism (Meli, 1988b:1-29; Mzala, 1988a:30-41; Jordan, 1988:111-114).

The end of the colonial wars and the subsequent experience of the indigenous people is one dominated by forced segregation and later apartheid. In the attempt to liberate their land

from the colonialists the indigenous people formed their own organisations. Essentially it is this period that saw the violent struggle and conflict between, on the one hand racist Afrikaner nationalism, and on the other an African nationalism. This struggle sees the attempt, by force of arms, of the White minority to stop the process of nation formation by the majority of South Africans.

The remainder of the people, the English speaking whites, and the predominantly Afrikaans speaking coloured people, as well as the Indian and other significant black minorities, found themselves somewhere in between these two opposing groups. The groups who found themselves in South Africa for various reasons pertaining to colonialism, articulated their interests in a particular manner, parasitic and contingent on the two main contending nationalist projects. The specific identities of these minorities were later to re-emerge as a survivalist response to the changes brought about by democracy. But during the apartheid era these identities play completely different roles, due also to the artificial and official nature of these sub-national identities. For example, most black people who were not of predominantly indigenous extraction, that is, who came from the coloured or Indian minorities, made a conscious choice to ally themselves with one or other of the dominant nationalist projects or to remain neutral. Early developments made such a choice

seem a simple one, but towards the time of the negotiated settlement the matter became more complicated.

The attempts by the former regime to create sub-national identities out of the remnants of historical identities are a classic example of what results from mistaking the symbolic representation of nationalism for the actual nation, movement, and the process of nation formation. The apartheid regime sought to create independent countries in geographical areas where, in its own view, tribal groupings had originated. The resultant Bantustans were a complete failure, primarily because the people who were allocated to them did not accept the country, its borders, or the identity that went with it. The only examples where there has been some success in this project has been in the creation of a, temporarily, formidable Zulu national movement in KwaZulu-Natal and in relation to coloured people in the Western Cape. These cases have some significant differences, but what is similar is the extent to which organisation was the primary motive force in the development of these identities. It is arguable that coloured identity for example, is actually multiple variants of an identity that is essentially in opposition to the two extremes of Black and White identities created by apartheid. It is therefore not a nationalism as such that binds these people together but a fear of the other (Rasool, 1995).

The anti-apartheid struggle in the post Second World War era saw the articulation of a progressive nationalism by the national liberation forces in South Africa. The call for a united, non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic political dispensation is premised on the idea that all South Africans are equal, regardless of race, religion, sex or creed. There are, of course, responses that reject this identity to some or other degree. But the extent to which South Africans agree that they are a nation now is marked. The apartheid project attempted to separate the people of South Africa physically, by defining them linguistically, in terms of skin colour, religion, and in terms of perceived historical ethnic and tribal identities. In this project a geography and political economy of apartheid was developed. It is this level of organisation that any national project in South Africa must unravel if it is to successfully build an alternative nationalism. The emphasis of the nation building project in South Africa must be on revolution in terms of the geography and the political economy of the country.

What this potted history reveals is a number of things. Firstly, the new nation can trace its origins, but what is significant is that the point of origin can vary, depending on who is tracing the origin and for what purpose. For the generation of African leaders that are the now the elders in the struggle against apartheid it is arguable that the nation was born on January 8,

1912. For the generation of the non-racial defiance campaign era the origins of the nation are at Kliptown in 1955 at the People's Congress that adopted the Freedom Charter. Those that were too young to remember this event and joined the national liberation movement in the 1980's would probably see any of these dates and all of them as relevant. For the rest of the population who either supported the new dispensation post 1990 or 1994, the starting point of the nation is April 27, 1994. Clearly, there are South Africans who have been just that for longer periods than others. All of these markers can be located organisationally and historically.

Similarly the inscription of the nation has varied. It started out being just Africans in response to colonial conquest. In the 1950s it became Africans plus Coloureds, Indians, and progressive White people. In 1994 it became all those who live in South Africa and swear allegiance to the constitution.

But it is not as if the old identities have been completely discarded. They survive to the extent that the people who were mobilised by these identities require them. It is the case that these survivals are the cause of a great deal of anxiety for the new ruling political organisation that seeks to lead the process of building the united, non-racial, non-sexist democracy, for various liberals that see nothing but instability

arising from sectional racial and ethnic interests, and from the various spokespersons, either self-appointed or elected, of the various minorities. The strategy of the national liberation movement has been to relocate the organisations that attempt to articulate the interests connected to these survivals. Hence the location of the Afrikaner self-determination process in the constitution of the new South Africa, the struggle for the location of Zulu identity between the ANC and the IFP in KwaZulu-Natal, and for the mantle of the representative of the Coloured majority in the Western Cape. To the extent that the ANC has adopted this strategy it has been successful, for example in demobilising Afrikaner nationalism. To the extent that it hasn't it is still not in political power, for example in the Western Cape.

The sacred can be detected in the discourse of various movements that exist in South Africa. The democratic movement appeals to the sacred nature of the doctrine of non-racialism, to the blood of its martyrs, to the hallowed ground where the new democracy now functions from (Meli, 1988b:7-14). The Afrikaner nationalists appeal to the sacred Fatherland on which Afrikaner blood has been spilled, to the church and the God that granted them their Israel (Chidester, 1992a:6-8). Various people classified as coloured find the sacred in the spot where the slave tree stood in Cape Town (Weeder, 1996). The Griqua people see it in their forefathers land

of which they have been dispossessed. English-speaking white South Africans may find it in the private school that upholds the values they regard as the cornerstone of "civilisation" as they see it.

All of these beliefs and the practices that go along with them reveal the process of the manufacture of and the manipulation of symbolic resources. Most indigenous South Africans would have at the time of the launch of the ANC defined themselves as either Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, or otherwise. The adoption of a flag, manifesto, and a leadership in 1912 constituted the raw material out of which a nation could be forged. The symbolic acts of constituting an organisation to represent the African people was both constituted by and constitutive of the new national identity.

As time went by and the various individuals mobilised themselves and others in a practical manner against the segregationist policies of the settler community they literally forged a nation. The line can be traced from the first leader, the first meetings and the first declarations of nationhood, in the most obvious case by aggressive, young leaders in the ANC in the 1940' and 1950's, but detectable even at the founding of the liberation movement (Chidester, 1992b:223, 225). The idea of a return to a moral order that had collapsed was clearly audible in the discourse of these founders of the new

nation who insisted that the diverse communities of South Africa were a nation.

Similarly, the functioning of myth and ritual can be detected in the history of Afrikaner nationalism. The myth of the Great Trek, the Covenant between God and the Afrikaner people, the development of the language, Afrikaans, are all manufactured by a movement and, in this case a religious elite at the head of this movement. The formation of various organisations saw the rise of the Afrikaner nation. The origins of Afrikaner nationalism lie in the response of the Free Burghers to colonial dictate, the accepted practice of colonialism at the time. The creation of a political party, the National Party, was only one significant moment in the manufacture of the Afrikaner national identity (O'Meara, 1996).

Debray's schema also enables us to detect a number of other things about the nation building process in South Africa. Not only is it contested, but the forces that are ranged against each other have specific strategic options they may or may not deploy. For instance, many of the perceived ethnic, or sub-national, identities are closely related to the provincial boundaries that have been created in the negotiations process that led to the adoption of the interim and final constitutions. These may in the future be utilised for national movements. The decisions in this regard will depend on the various leadership figures, the articulation of local interests,

distribution of resources, and the extent to which any of these groups of people can effectively organise themselves. The extent to which this is possible is to some degree captured in the predominant theoretical description of the transition and the nation-building project articulated by the ANC and the Tri-Partite Alliance.

### **The national question and the transition to democracy and socialism**

The issues of non-racialism, national sovereignty, national rights for groups, and national unity were all addressed in the Freedom Charter adopted in 1955 and could be traced back to the 1949 Youth League programme (ANC, 1985:72-78). But the main theoretical formulation that has guided the national liberation movement was first clearly articulated in the Road to South African Freedom, the 1962 programme of the South African Communist Party. The formulation of an analysis that guided the building of the national liberation movement was and continues to be a contested issue (Vadi, 1995:171-175). The thesis of Colonialism of a Special Type and the theory of the National Democratic Revolution were systematically articulated in the 1962 SACP programme (SACP, 1962:22-35,42-46). These were later adopted at the Morogoro Conference of the ANC in 1969.

This thesis recognised the formation of communal identities based on the patterns of

indigenous communities, the colonial encounter, the apartheid system, and the dominant features of the capitalist economic system. The programme characterised the situation as a special type of colonialism, where the oppressor and oppressed resided in one territory, but where relations of power were essentially as in any colony. The programme defined the main objective of the revolution to be the liberation of African people. The programme explicitly states that the Party's proposal is not for a "socialist state" but for a "national democratic one" (SACP, 1962:46). This position has its origins in the famous Black Republic Thesis of the Comintern, but the extent to which this was simply endorsed by the CPSA or debated by the structures of the Party is a matter of divergent opinion. Later refinements of this theory begin to grapple with the complex nature of the nation-building project and the qualitative nature of the national democratic revolution (SACP, 1989:35-36; SACP, 1992:17).

Much of this theory has guided the ANC as well. The theoretical development that guided the liberation movement took place across the organisations, but there was and arguably still is a definite Marxist basis to the ANC theorisation of the national question. As the ANC's 1994 Strategy and Tactics document explains, the main feature of the revolution is still the "all round political, economic and social emancipation and upliftment of the black majority", Africans in

particular, and the "achievement of national unity" (ANC Strategy and Tactics, 1994:6.5, 5.5). The mere fact that liberation is premised on the social, economic, and political advancement of the mass of people reveals a strong adherence to many of the views articulated by Marxists in this regard. There is no romantic or idealistic notion of the nation that sees it emerging out of some primordialist ethnic past, for instance.

But what will determine the success or failure of the nation-building project in South Africa is not simply the theoretical formulation of the path of the revolution, although this is important in terms of informing the strategy and tactics of the movement. As Debray shows, what is important is the extent to which a movement is built that strategically forges the nation. The notion of the nation in the making is a persistent theme in the discourse of the ANC and the Alliance (Jordan, 1988:114-119; ANC, 1997:58).

But there is also a clear discourse articulating nationalist sentiments and even the practice of nationalism as religion. In the context of the struggle for national liberation and the violence of apartheid, this nationalism has been characterised as a violent religion, for example, or a force for redemption and liberation (Chidester, 1992b:88, 92, 235).

Chidester has also noted the importance of symbols in the national democratic revolution (1992b:171). As Vadi observed in relation to the

Freedom Charter, none of these symbols is uncontested. Wolpe has also noted the contested nature of nationalism and class, both as concepts and in relation to the trajectory of the transition (1988:48-49).

Alternative characterisations of the transition in the country have attempted to interpret this process as elite driven rather than mass based, as the ANC claims it is (Kotze and DuToit, 1996:1-17). The strategy of these claimants would seem to be to try to reduce the legitimacy of the transition and the ANC by claiming that the organisation is an elite grouping not rooted in a mass base. The answer that Debray seems to offer in this regard is that all movements are led by elites. The issue is what is the character of that elite and the project that they are leading and whether they are accountable to a mass base.

On the other extreme the transition has even been hailed as a miracle. This discourse emanates even from the ANC itself (Guelke, 1996:141). Guelke's response to this has been to try to identify the myths of the political process and to reinterpret this process in terms of the objectives of those propagating the myths. Again one is tempted to cite Debray's point that a movement without myths cannot be a movement. The issue is what is the objective of the movement and who is manufacturing and propagating the dominant myths.

The debates on the national question have in some cases, taken on a hysterical tone. In the province of the Western Cape, for instance, the issue of the national question has been conducted in the context of an ANC defeated at the polls by the NP and the rise of some extreme forms of narrow ethnic identities that have been characterised as being in opposition to one another. At times it has seemed that commentators do not even want to use ethnic terms for fear of mobilising the darker side of ethnicity (Alexander, 1995). The debate on nationalism, ethnicity, and identity is conducted in the open in the Western Cape because of the demographic situation which essentially ensures the political organisation that secures the vote of the majority of Coloured people an electoral victory. But the dominant response to the national question in South Africa, despite the theory to prove the contrary, has been one of superstition, fear, and dread. Generally, until recently, those in the liberation movement have preferred not to even talk about ethnicity, possible national disintegration, or strife, for fear of awakening a phenomenon by mentioning it. This response is not without foundation, given the history of the country and similar situations in the rest of Africa and former colonies, where anti-colonialist struggles have at times led to inter-racial strife, war, and genocide.

There have been some notable exceptions to this trend and provocative contributions on the

national question which have begun to emerge (Nzimande, 1996; Carrim, 1996; Dexter, 1996). The ANC has also released a discussion document for the 50<sup>th</sup> Conference of the movement to discuss which correctly finds that the "national question can never be fully resolved", but then goes on to say that this is not "merely" because the issue is a "material" one "related to various forms of power". In the view of the author(s) of this document, the national question is also "emotional and psychological" and in any case, "people will continue to have multiple identities" (ANC, 1997:57). It is easy to agree with parts of this view, in that it comes to the right conclusions, although not necessarily because of the correct theory and characterisation. Debray's thesis shows that it is precisely because the national question is material and deals with power that it is not easy or even possible to resolve.

The confusion over terms such as nation and ethnicity is also not surprising. Given the history of these terms as deployed by the racist National Party regime, commentators are suspicious of any use of such terms that are not clearly located in the more critical academic framework (Sharpe, 1988:79-99). Any debate that is to resonate in the context of the national democratic revolution must re-appropriate these terms and locate them in the context of the national democratic revolution. There is also the problem of the generally Eurocentric nature of

the discourse in terms of debates (Pieterse, 1996:54). These terms must be re-appropriated from this Eurocentric gaze as well. The debate about these terms has not faded and no doubt is one that will have to be given attention as the issues of nationalism and ethnicity become increasingly significant (Jubber, 1997:156-170).

Perhaps the most eloquent intervention with regard to the national question was made by the Deputy President, Thabo Mbeki, on the occasion of the adoption of Constitution in May 1996. The Deputy President essentially claimed all the identities in South Africa and thus redefined his identity as an African while at the same time redefining the identities of all South Africans (1996). The issue however, is to what extent this identity, that is the nation, can be built in reality.

The view that the national project is taking place in a particular international context and global conjuncture also needs to be interrogated. Previously, the analysis of the balance of domestic and international class forces was premised on the notion that the world was moving towards socialism and that national liberation struggles were part of that movement. This was clearly the view of those attending the ANC's 1969 Conference in Morogoro and the 1985 Conference in Kabwe. The new international context has been characterised in a number of ways. Reference is made to the new world order, the unipolar nature of this order, and the

phenomenon of globalisation. These cannot be properly considered here, but the point in terms of the national liberation struggle must surely be that there is no world tide away from capitalism towards socialism and there is no guarantee of any such movement in South Africa. This raises the issue of the national liberation movement having to address the issue of nationalism in this new capitalist world order that are simultaneously local and global. Some commentators have begun to point to possible strategies in this regard, but these discussions are preliminary and require considerable more detail (Amin, 1997). The notion of an African Renaissance has arisen in precisely this context. Once again, without the organisation to realise this renaissance, merely calling for it is simply reciting a wish rather than implementing a programme.

Debray's theory creates the opportunity to have the debate about the terms we are using to describe the phenomenon of collective identity as well as the manner in which these identities are experienced in society. By reformulating the problem of the national question within a theory of symbolic efficacy, as Debray does, the debate about nationalism can be located in a historical, structural, political, social, and economic context. This could help remove the emotion and vested interests from the theoretical debate for one thing, but more importantly it will allow a sober debate, not so much about whether the

national question is an issue, because that seems to be obvious, but more about managing the national question given the nature of the symbolic.

In short, Debray's thesis puts on the agenda the fact that the national question will not be resolved or dissolved. It is going to be with us for the foreseeable future. For those who propose that the transition should continue and move "in an uninterrupted progression to socialism", the fact of the national question presents a serious challenge (Mzala, 1988a:54). Given the multi-cultural character of South Africa the situation seems infinitely more complicated than theory has catered for. But this need not lead us to a pessimistic position that sees democratic transformation, or even socialism, as a remote or impossible goal.

### **Harnessing the Symbolic and Managing the National Question**

What Debray's thesis does is basically explain the parameters within which any democratic or socialist project must locate itself. Firstly, any political project must be able to grapple with the national question as a real issue. It is not sufficient to dismiss nationalism, national sentiment, or the nation-state as reactionary false consciousness. Secondly, the national question, like all political matters, is essentially a religious matter. Therefore responses to the issue of nationalism will not be

on the basis of science or rationalism. Thirdly, any political project must be able to utilise the national sentiment to further the revolution. At the level of practicality these parameters suggest that for the transition to proceed to any socialist objective, and arguably for consolidation of democracy, nationalism must be given a progressive and even socialist content. This obviously means that those who lead the nation-building project must be democratic, progressive, and must articulate a progressive socialist national agenda. For this to be more than just symbolic it means ensuring that the manner in which the nation is defined "on the ground" is progressive. The sacred is not necessarily or inherently reactionary, but it is biased in favour of power, order, dogmatism, and orthodoxy. None of these degenerate features can be in the interests of the poor, the dispossessed, the marginalised, and the exploited.

Current debates about the national question and the transition in South Africa reveal that there are at least two trajectories for the future of the national democratic revolution. The one sees nationalism as being coextensive with capitalism and even necessary to ensure the success of both capitalist growth and development. The other sees nationalism as a tool for the mobilisation of the South African poor and working class around some kind of a socialist project. While Debray's thesis points

out that the odds are against the second project succeeding, it is also clear that the first cannot succeed without abandoning the radical tradition of democracy and mass participation that has been a feature of the national liberation struggle.

The key issue then is the character of the nationalism that is being built and articulated by the ANC. Other nationalisms may well exist and be articulated by national movements, but given the electoral results and subsequent opinion polls that confirm the strength and unity of the Tri-Partite Alliance, no other serious national movement can arise in the very near future. What is a real possibility if the ANC does not continue to mobilise its constituency behind the revolutionary project, is that this broad South African nationalism might degenerate into a number of sub-national movements based on existing ethno-cultural identities, or on the dictatorship of an unrepresentative, authoritarian elite.

Given that the sacred is created in the process of organisation there may be a temptation to think that the answer is to simply start a movement. There may be times when this is necessary, but in the context of existing organisations, particularly now that they have captured institutions of power, the key strategic issue is to ensure that the sacred and the discourse that it facilitates is not monopolised by

a narrow, bureaucratic, elite. This would result in the degeneration of the national project. Historically, it has been the case that movements have become orthodoxies. Debray asserts that this is unavoidable. Even if it is, the extent to which that atrophy occurs, the pace of this degeneration, and whether there is a possibility of a revival or renewal of the project is dependent on the extent to which this is allowed to occur by people.

Awareness of the extent to which this degeneration is occurring depends on the demystification of the sacred. The primary facilitators of such a demystification are democracy and a radical pedagogy. In South Africa, we have the space to ensure these exist, mainly due to the forces that drive the revolutionary process. While they are united in the ANC, independent organisations exist that ensure a dynamic tension between the elite and the mass base. It is this tension, which never allows an absolute monopoly over the productive and managerial capacity of the sacred, that secures the continued success of the revolution. The continued success of the revolution thus requires a radical managerial project for the sacred. The only possible guarantee for this is to ensure that the national democratic revolution remains genuinely "people driven" and "mass based".

Historically, the South African revolution has suffered from a disjuncture between theory and practice. While the national question has been theorised in Marxist terms, the practice in dealing with it has been anything but Marxist in the classical sense. It is ironic that to end up with a theory that was flexible, marketable, strategic, and effective, Marxists had to construct that theory in terms of the prevailing discourse. But a closer analysis of the Colonialism of a Special Type thesis and the practice of the movement in relation to managing the national question, reveals that it recognises the importance of nationalism, the strategic nature of the symbolic, and the enduring character of the national question. All of this is done without any revision of Marxism, that is, without a coherent Marxist, or any other, theory of the national question.

Even in terms of the national question currently, the ANC leadership display a unique sensitivity in dealing with the issue that ensures an important emphasis on the symbolic. This has led some to characterise the emerging nationalism in South Africa to be a kind of "rugby nationalism" with a flag, two national anthems, three popular sporting teams, and a President everyone loves. All of that is necessary, perhaps, but if the reality of the creation and management of the symbolic resources of the nation is ignored, this symbolism will very soon be found to be, literally, "up in the air". There is

therefore an unhealthy emphasis on the symbolic aspect of the sacred, leaving the production, ownership, and control of the sacred to be dealt with in a rather astrategic manner.

The national liberation movement has generated the terms of the sacred that now dominate. The bearer of the national symbolic resources accepted by the majority has historically been the ANC. As an organisation the ANC now faces the challenge of ensuring it that keeps that historical role, and maintains its character as an organisation. This challenge is linked particularly to the issue of whether the ANC becomes a political party or remains a national liberation movement. It is tempting to say that Debray shows beyond any doubt that the latter option is the most strategic. The current disarray among opposition political parties in South Africa is essentially because they cannot even articulate a counterpoint to the symbolic power of the ANC. The ANC is the new South Africa and everything that is not ANC is part of the terrible past. Evidence of this is to be found in the two provinces that the ANC did not win in the 1994 election. These literally are in the past, both in terms of the political ideas the ruling parties propagate and the manner in which they function.

The tension within the ANC between becoming an orthodoxy, or an organisation of a degenerate elite, as opposed to continuing to be

a revolutionary organisation will be found in the policies that the ANC adopts. The contradiction between the Marxist discourse that dominates the ANC-led Alliance and economic policies that are seen to favour financial capital, for example, is a symptom of this tension.

The only trajectory of the revolution that will resolve this tension is the one that defines the nation in terms of a socialist future. If it is matched on the ground with the appropriate organisation, such a vision defines as socialist everything that shifts resources, power, and influence away from the minority, even if that minority is a new elite, towards the majority, the poor, the dispossessed, the marginalised, and the exploited. The most powerful of these resources will be those that are generated by the religiopolitical unconscious through the organisation of the society in the nation-building process. In this continual process and unending project, the nation has to be defined in a movement that builds socialism in this manner.

Currently, this is facilitated through an alliance between the working class and other classes from the former oppressed communities in an organisational relationship that ensures the working class the right to occupy a strategic relationship that allows them to manage, influence, and even control the sacred, that is, the symbolic resources of the national democratic revolution. The issue Debray raises

is whether they will be able to sustain this advantage. The odds may be against it, because, as Barthes observed, myth, the power of discourse, is "always on the Right". The only possible response to such an assertion is that it is not in this case. If the revolution fails, if it degenerates, if it collapses out of a fear of radicalism, or because of the tension between the pull of orthodoxy and the needs of the majority, it will be because the working class and the socialists in the movement did not speak to the founding absence and did not claim the symbolic resources that are a product of the work of organisation before them. Failure will be all the more ironic if it results from an unwillingness to engage with the obvious shortcomings of Marxist theory that Debray has revealed.

## Bibliography

Alexander, N. 1995. "The Great Gariep: Metaphors of National Unity in the New S. A." Notes for a panel discussion, IDASA, August 1995, Cape Town.

Althusser, L. 1984. Essays on Ideology. London: Verso.

Amin, S. 1996. "The new capitalist globalisation." Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal Number 7, July-October 1996: 25-34.

Amin, S. 1997. "The new capitalist globalisation, Part 2: Defeats in the South and in the East." Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal Number 8, July-October 1997: 107-114.

ANC. 1985. Selected Writings on the Freedom Charter. London: ANC.

ANC. 1990. The Freedom Charter.

ANC. 1995. "From resistance to reconstruction and nation-building." Strategy and Tactics : 49<sup>th</sup> National Conference.

ANC. 1997. "Nation-formation and Nation Building: The National Question in South Africa." Umrabulo: Let's talk politics. Discussion documents for ANC Conference. Johannesburg: ANC 50-58.

Anderson, B. 1983. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. Revised Edition. London: Verso.

Apter, E., and Pietz, W. (eds.) 1993. Fetishism as Cultural Discourse. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Archard, D. 1984. Consciousness and the Unconscious. London: Hutchinson Publishing Group.

Armstrong, J. A. 1982. Nations before Nationalism. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Asad, T. (ed.) 1973. Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter. London: Ithaca Press.

Balibar, E., and Wallerstein, I. 1991. Race, Nation, Class. London: Verso.

Baudrillard, J. 1981. For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign. Trans. C. Levin. St. Louis: Telos Press.

- Bell, C. 1992. Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blaut, J. M. 1987. The National Question: Decolonising the Theory of Nationalism. London: Zed Books.
- Brecker, K. 1996. The Transition in South Africa. n.p.
- Bremner, L. 1994. "Space and the Nation: Three Texts on Aldo Rossi." Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 12: 287-300.
- Byrne, P. 1989. Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism. London: Routledge.
- Calhoun, C. 1993. "Nationalism and Ethnicity." Annual Review of Sociology 19:211-39.
- Callinicos, A. 1987. Making History. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Callinicos, A. 1989. Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Carrim, Y. 1996. "The National Question in post-apartheid South Africa: reconciling multiple identities." African Communist No. 145, Third Quarter: 49-58.
- Chatterjee, P. 1991. Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Zed Books.
- Chatterjee, P. 1993. The Nation and Its Fragments: Studies in Colonial and Post Colonial Histories. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Chidester, D. 1988a. Patterns of Power: Religion and Politics in American Culture. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Chidester, D. 1988b. Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Chidester, D. 1992a. Shots in the Street: Violence and Religion in South Africa. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Chidester, D. 1992b. Religions of South Africa. London and New York: Routledge.

Chidester, D. 1996. Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia.

Chidester, D 1994. "Authentic Forgery and Forging Authenticity: Comparative Religion in South Africa." Cape Town: University of Cape Town

Chidester, D., and Linenthal, E. T. (eds.) 1995. American Sacred Space. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Comaroff, J., and Comaroff, J. 1991. Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa. Volume 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Connor, W. 1984. The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Dant, T. 1991. Knowledge, Ideology and Discourse: A Sociological Perspective. London: Routledge.

Dahbour, O., and Ishay, M. R. (eds.) 1995. The Nationalism Reader. New Jersey: Humanities Press International Incorporated.

Davies, J. K. 1977. Democracy and Classical Greece. Oxford: Fontana.

Debray, R. 1977a. A Critique of Arms. Volume 1. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Debray, R. 1977b. "Marxism and the National Question." New Left Review 105: 20-42.

Debray, R. 1978. The Revolution on Trial (Volume 2 of A Critique of Arms). Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Debray, R. 1970. Strategy for Revolution. Ed. R. Blackburn. London: Jonathan Cape.

Debray, R. 1981. Critique de la raison politique: ou L'inconscient religieux. Paris: Gallimard.

Debray, R. 1983. A Critique of Political Reason. London: Verso.

Debray, R. 1994. Charles De Gaulle: Futurist of the Nation. London: Verso.

Debray, R. 1995a. "The Three Ages of Looking." Trans. E. Rauth. Critical Inquiry 21. 529-555.

Debray, R. 1996. "A Guerrilla with a Difference." New Left Review 218: 128-137.

Debray, R. 1995b. "Remarks on the Spectacle." New Left Review 214: 134-141.

Debray, R. 1986. Media Manifestos. Trans. E. Rauth. London: Verso.

Dexter, P. 1996. "Marxism and the National Question in a democratic South Africa." African Communist No. 145: 59-66.

Durkheim, E. 1965. The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. Trans. J.W. Swain. London: The Free Press.

Feldman, A. 1991. Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ferry, L., and Renaut, A. 1990. French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Anti-Humanism. Trans. M. Schaackenberg Caltani. Amhurst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Feyerabend, P. 1975. Against Method. London: Verso.

Fitzgerald, T. 1996. "Religion, Philosophy and Family Resemblances." Religion: An International Journal Volume 26, No. 3: 215-236.

Foucault, M. 1962. Mental Illness and Psychology. Trans. A. Sheridan. Berkley: University of California Press.

Foucault, M. 1977. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Trans. A. Sheridan. London: Penguin Books.

Foucault, M. 1976. The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction. Trans. R. Hurley. London: Penguin Books.

Forgacs, D. (ed.) 1988. A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Fox, R. G. (ed.) 1990. Nationalist Ideologies and the Production of National Cultures. New York: American Anthropological Association.

Freud, S. 1922. Introductory Lecture on Psychoanalysis. Trans. J. Riviere. London: George Allen and Unwin.

- Furedi, F. 1994. The New Ideology of Imperialism. London: Pluto Press.
- Gane, M. (ed.) 1992. The Radical Sociology of Durkheim and Mauss. London: Routledge.
- Geary, P. 1986. "Sacred commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics." In A. Appadurai (ed.) The Social Life of Things. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gellner, E. 1983. Nations and Nationalism. London: Basil Blackwell.
- Gellner, E. 1992a. Postmodernism, Reason and Religion. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Gellner, E. 1992b. Reason and Culture: The Historical Role of Rationality and Rationalism. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Gellner, E. 1996. "Do Nations have Navels?" Nations and Nationalism 2: 357-370.
- Goddard, V. A., and Llobera, J. R. 1994. The Anthropology of Europe: Identities and Boundaries in Conflict. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Guelke, A. 1996. "Dissecting the South African Miracle: African Parallels." Nationalism and Ethnic Politics. 2:141-154.
- Guirard, P. 1975. Semiology. Trans. G. Gross. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Hall, P. 1997. "Nationalism and Historicity." Nations and Nationalism 3: 3-23.
- Hobsbawm, E., and Ranger, T. (eds.) 1983. The Invention of Tradition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Honderich, T. 1993. How Free Are You? The Determinist Problem. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Houtart, F. 1997. "Religion, Subjectivity and the Market in Cuba." Concilium. 2: 44-58.
- Jakubowski, F. 1990. Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism. Trans. A. Booth. London: Pluto Press.

- Jordan, P. 1988. "The South African Liberation Movement and the Making of a New Nation." In: M. van Diepen (ed.) The National Question in South Africa. London: Zed Books. 110-124.
- Jubber, K. 1997. "Review Essay: E. N. W5ilmsen and P. McAllister (eds.) The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power." African Sociological Review 1:156-170.
- Jurgensmeyer, M. 1993. The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Kant, I. 1990. The Critique of Pure Reason. Trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books.
- Kedourie, E. 1960. Nationalism. New York: Praeger.
- Kertzer, D. I. 1988. Ritual, Politics, and Power. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Kotze, H., and Du Toit, P. 1996. "Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Identity Politics in South Africa: A 1994 Survey of Elite Attitudes after Apartheid." Nationalism and Ethnic Politics 2:1-17.
- Kuhn, T.S. 1970. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kulikov, A. 1986. Political Economy. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Kryukov, M. V. 1996. "Self Determination from Marx to Mao." Ethnic and Racial Studies 19:352-378.
- Lane, C. 1981. The Rites of Rulers: Ritual In Industrial Society—The Soviet Case. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lenin, V. I. 1947a: What Is To Be Done? Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Lenin, V. I. 1947b. One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (The Crisis in Our Party). Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Lenin, V. I. 1954. Socialism and Religion. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Lenin, V. I. 1976. Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Lyons, J. 1991. Chomsky. London: Fontana Press.

- MacIntyre, A.C. 1958. The Unconscious: A Conceptual Analysis. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Malik, K. 1996. "Universalism and Difference: Race and the Postmodernists." Race and Class 37, 3: 1-17.
- Marx, K. 1976. Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One. Trans. B. Fowkes. London: Penguin in association with New Left Review.
- Marx, K., and Engels, F. 1968. Selected Works in One Volume. London and Moscow: Lawrence and Wishart and Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K., and Engels, F. 1970. The German Ideology. Ed. C. J. Arthur. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Mauss, M. 1969. The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies. Trans. I. Cunnison. London: Cohen and West.
- Mauss, M. 1972. A General Theory of Magic. Trans. R. Bain. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Mauss, M. 1979. Sociology and Psychology. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- McLellan, D. 1986. Ideology. London: Open University Press.
- Meli, F. 1988a. "South Africa and the Rise of African Nationalism." In M. van Diepen (ed.) The National Question in South Africa. London: Zed Books. 66-76.
- Meli, F. 1988b. South Africa Belongs to Us: A History of the ANC. Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.
- Munck, R. 1986. The Difficult Dialogue: Marxism and Nationalism. London: Zed Books.
- Mzala. 1988a. "Revolutionary Theory on the National Question in South Africa." In M. van Diepen (ed.) The National Question in South Africa. London: Zed Books. 30-55.
- Mzala. 1988b. Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a Double Agenda. London: Zed Books.
- Nairn, T. 1996. "Breakwaters of 2000: From Ethnic to Civic Nationalism." New Left Review 218: 91-103.

Nzimande, B. 1996. "The role of the working class in consolidating and deepening the national democratic revolution." African Communist No. 145: 12-24.

O'Meara, D. 1996. Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party. Randburg, South Africa: Ravan Press.

Paden, W. E. 1988. Religious Worlds. The Comparative Study of Religion. Boston: Beacon Press.

Pearce, F. The Radical Durkheim. London: Unwin Hyman.

Pearson, M. 1996. "Notions in Nationalism." Nations and Nationalisms 2:1-15.

Pieterse, E. 1996. "Reflections on Postmodernism and Faith in a South African Context." Journal of Theology for Southern Africa 94 : 50-64.

Pietz, W. 1985. "The Problem of the Fetish I." Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics 9:5-17.

Pietz, W. 1987. "The Problem of the Fetish II." Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics 13:23-45.

Pietz, W. 1988. "The Problem of the Fetish IIIa." Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics 16:105-23.

Poster, M. 1984. Foucault, Marxism and History: Mode of Production versus Mode of Information. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Pollis, A. 1996. "The Social Construction of Ethnicity and Nationality: The Case of Cyprus." Nationalism and Ethnic Politics 2:67-90.

Rasool, E. 1995. "Unveiling the Heart of Fear." Paper presented to IDASA Conference: National Unity and the politics of diversity in the Western Cape.

Rose, H.J. 1957. Gods and Heroes of the Greeks. London: Methuen.

Rossi-Landi, F. 1990. Marxism and Ideology. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

SACP. 1962. The Road to South African Freedom: The Programme of the South African Communist Party. London: African Communist.

SACP. 1989. The Path to Power: Programme of the South African Communist Party.

SACP. 1992. Building workers' power for democratic change: Manifesto of the South African Communist Party.

Sartre, J. 1976. Critique of Dialectical Reason. Volume 1. Theory of Practical Ensembles. Trans. A. Sheridan-Smith. London: NLB.

Schlesinger, P. 1991. Media, State and Nation: Political Violence and Collective Identities. London: Sage.

Sharpe, E.J. 1986. Comparative Religion: A History. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.

Segal, D. A. 1988. "Nationalism, Comparatively Speaking." Journal of Historical Sociology 1: 301-321.

Sharp, J. 1988. "Ethnic Group and Nation: The Apartheid Vision in South Africa." In E. Boonzaier and J. Sharp (eds.) South African Keywords. Cape Town: David Phillip 79-99.

Simon, R. 1982. Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Slovo, J. n.d.a The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution. Umsebenzi: SACP.

Slovo, J. 1968. "Latin America and the Ideas of Regis Debray." African Communist No. 33, Second Quarter: 37-54.

Smith, A. D. 1971. Theories of Nationalism. London: Gerald Duckworth and Company Ltd.

Smith, A. D. 1986. The Ethnic Origins of Nations. New York: Basil Blackwell.

Smith, A. D. 1996a. "Nations and the Pasts". Nations and Nationalism 2: 357-370.

Smith, A. D. 1996b. "Memory and Modernity: Reflections on Ernest Gellner's Theory of Nationalism." Nations and Nationalism 2: 371-388.

Smith, J.Z. 1982. Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Starr, P. 1995. Logics of Failed Revolts: French Theory After May '68. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

- Strenski, I. 1987. Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Levi-Strauss and Malinowski. Iowa: University of Iowa Press.
- Taussig, M. 1987a. Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.4
- Taussig, M. 1992b. The Nervous System. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.
- Teich, M. , and Porter, R. (eds.) 1993. The National Question in Europe in Historical Context. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, G. 1941. Aeschylus and Athens. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Turner, B. S. 1988. "Religion and State-Formation: A Commentary On Recent Debates." Journal of Historical Studies 1, 3: 322-333.
- Vadi, I. 1995. The Congress of the People and Freedom Charter Campaign. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.
- Watkins, F.M. 1964. The Age of Ideology: Political Thought, 1750 to the Present. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Weeder, Rev. M. 1996. December 1<sup>st</sup> Movement: Retracing the Path of Memory.
- Wilentz, S. 1985. "Teufelsdröckl's Dilemma: On Symbolism, Politics, and History." In: Sean Wilentz (ed) Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual and Politics Since the Middle Ages. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Wilmsen, E. N., and McAllister, P. (eds) 1996. The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wolpe, H. 1988. Race, Class and the Apartheid State. London: James Curry.
- Worsley, P. M. 1968. The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of 'Cargo' Cults in Melanesia. New York: Schocken.
- Zadarnovsky, B. 1987. "Nationalities Policy and the Advancement of Socialism." Socialism: principles, practice, prospects. No.12: 18-20.