Identity as a social construct of empire: then and now

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Abstract

Identity has played a role in the maintenance of every empire throughout the centuries. Empires such as the Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, Greek under the leadership of Alexander the Great, as well as the Roman Empire, maintained their unity through identity. This was precisely because at the heart of identity was the social, cultural and moral formation of an empire which were also characterised by various rituals. Thus one may argue that identity played a role in the stability of empires. One of the strengths of colonialism was to perpetuate a mindset that sought to preserve an imperial identity through Christianity. In the 21st century, imperial identity as an ideology seems to be one of the pillars of countries such as America, China, and Europe. One can argue that there are such fragments in the manner in which Africa seems to be addressing issues of economy and political autonomy. The American use of biblical texts forms one of the ideologies that seek to safeguard imperial identity through political and economic authority and hegemony. In this article I attempt to show how identity plays a fundamental role in sustaining the imperial ideologies as well as political authority and hegemony. I further argue that the theoretical framework of Black Theology and Black Consciousness could be used to underpin the deconstruction of Neo-colonialism through identity formation.

Introduction

The epistemological explanation of empire finds its origin from the Latin word *imperium* referring to power and authority.

> Etymologically, the political usage of *empire* denotes a strong, centrally controlled nation-state, but in the looser vernacular usage, it can denote a large-scale business enterprise (e.g. a transnational corporation) or a political organisation of either by a person (a political boss) or a group authority (political bosses) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empire).

Motyl (1999:148) defines empire in three characteristic ways: firstly, empire consists of distinct regions, secondly, there are those that are at the "core" and thirdly, those at the "periphery". He further makes the following observation: empire is inhabited by culturally differentiated elites and the population. Such an establishment is maintained in two ways, namely: Firstly: As a territorial *empire* of direct conquest and control with *force* (direct, physical action to compel the emperor's goal), secondly: As a coercive, *hegemonic empire* of indirect conquest and control with *power* (the perception that the emperor *can* physically enforce his desired goals). The former provides greater tribute and direct political control, yet limits further expansion because it absorbs military forces to mixed garrisons. The latter provides less tribute and indirect control, but avails military forces for further expansion (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empire).

One can therefore argue that the role of the imperial elite is to co-ordinate, supervise and protect the peripheral societies, with one another only via core institutions. Throughout history one sees how identity has maintained empires; this includes South Africa during apartheid and also post-apartheid. This is witnessed in group membership, which creates a socially constructed identity.

Bernstein (2005:59) argues that identity as a concept, particularly relating to social movements, has at least three distinctive analytic levels. The first level according to Bernstein is that a shared collective identity plays a vital role in mobilising any social movement. Secondly, identity at a collective level can be used as a political strategy. Thirdly, identity can be used to gain social acceptance or to deconstruct categories of identities such as man, woman, gay, straight, black and white.

According to Oyĕwùmí (2005:339), colonisation produces two types of people, the coloniser and the colonised. They are differentiated by not only the colour of their skin but also their state of mind. Identity is one of the fundamental characteristics of being: without an identity one cannot define one's personhood. According to Mama (see Mothoagae & Prior 2009:4), the English word "identity" refers to a singular, individual subject with a clear ego boundary.

Identity and empire in antiquity

Identity played an essential role in the construction of any empire. Such an identity was multifaceted in forms such as culture, economy, society, hierarchy of classes and slavery. It is for this reason that, as Garnsey and Saller (1987:5) would argue, the rise of the Roman Empire is characterised by its identity, which was grounded on the moral character, political institutions, military talent as well as good fortune of the Roman people. Garnsey and Saller (1987:6) further observe that: "Strabo's message is in line with the

political ideology of the Augustan age, which stressed the cultural unity of Greece and Rome".

It is evident from the above statement that identity played a vital role in constructing cultural unity of Greece and Rome. Perhaps that is why, in the eyes of the Greek world and Aristides, there was an effort to promote a renaissance of Hellenic urban culture and civilisation, argue Garnsey and Saller. Thus the identity of the Roman Empire was seen in a world unity which was signified by the spread of Roman citizenship under Roman rule.

Religious cult as a social construct of the Roman Empire

According to Preller (cited by Grether 1946:222), the growth of the Roman imperial cult came after the death of Augustus. He further argues that "Chronologically, the history of her[1] cult extends from the early years of Augustus' principate down into the period of the Antonine dynasty" (see Grether 1946:223).

Perhaps one can ask what the role of emperor worship was. In what way did such a cult sustain the empire? Did such a cult maintain the collective identity of the Roman people or did it rather construct a social identity of the people of Rome, even those outside Rome? What is observable is that the cult of honouring not only the goddess *Roma* but also the human representatives of Rome's power began as soon as various states started to feel the power of Rome. Preller makes the following observation "*Marcellus, Flamininus, Lucullus, Sulla, Pompey*, and others were the recipients of divine honours or honours bordering on the divine" (see Grether 1946:223).

One of the interesting phenomena regarding such a cult, as noted by Preller, was that it seemed not to be of any relevance for the people of Rome to honour those in power or rather the imperial family. The violent death of Julius Caesar witnessed by the Roman populace could have been one of the reasons why they were not yet ready to offer supreme honour to a mortal. While on the other hand, those in the East saw a need to honour the emperor and his wife. This was because they were accustomed to paying homage to the wives and daughters of their Hellenistic monarchs. Such a tendency under Augustus came to be centred on the imperial family; in this case, Livia and her husband Augustus received such honours. It is observable that one of Rome's many exports to the empire was the cult of the emperors. This cult was the only Roman intrusion in the area of cult that was tolerated in the Greek world (see Grether 1946:223).

It is interesting to note that though the cult was not popular in Rome, Augustus was careful enough not to impose such a religion but slowly intro-duced the populace of Rome to it. He adopted the policy of encouraging the

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[1]   Livia, the wife of Emperor Augustus.

cults of deified Julius, of Venus Genetrix and Mars Ultor, which were a veneration of the great abstractions symbolising the blessings of his rule; the most popular was the cult of his genius. One of the notable things about such a cult was that though the populace were not ready to give honour to the imperial family, the poets on the other hand raised Augustus to the highest deity. Vergil spoke of him as ever a god, to whom sacrifice is due. While Horace praises him to be Mercury incarnate who came to save the Roman world from the penalty of its sins, Ovid addressed him as Jupiter (see Grether 1946:228). Literature seems to have legitimated the rule of Augustus and thus enabled the cult to take root amongst the Roman people. It in this way gives a new identity to the collective.

I would therefore argue that the official Roman religion was a cluster of beliefs. Imperial cult forms part of this official religion; this is because religion expressed these various cults through institutions and rituals. This was because as Garnsey and Saller (1987:163) argue, they accepted that the safety and prosperity of their communities depended upon the gods. While on the other hand the state religion was under the hands of political authorities' supervision. This is because religion was embedded in the political structure of the state. In other words, it formed the identity of the Roman people. Furthermore, religious offices as well as others fell under the control of the emperor.

Imperial identity as a colonial social construct

The 1885 Berlin Conference on the division of Africa endorsed an act referred to as the general act of Berlin; this brought to the Europeans a new world order. Its purpose was for the Europeans to finally lay claim to the whole of Africa.

> In November 1884, the imperial chancellor and architect of the German Empire, Otto von Bismarck, convened a conference of 14 states (including the United States) to settle the political partitioning of Africa. Bismarck wanted not only to expand German spheres of influence in Africa but also to play off Germany's colonial rivals against one another to the Germans' advantage. Of these fourteen nations, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Portugal were the major players in the conference, controlling most of colonial Africa at the time (http://wysinger.homestead.com/berlinconference.html).

Firstly, one of the fundamental ideologies surrounding empire is that there is a thin line between religion and politics. It is for this reason that one cannot but speak of religion as a political resource. I would like to argue that religion

has legitimated regimes, siphoned potential grievances, provided support for organisation for social movements as well as offering concepts of justice that seek to mobilise participation for change. I concur with Williams (1996:368) that because religion has been and continues to be a political resource, its role has and still is "identity marker". This view is observed by Kleppner (1970) and Menendez (1977) "have found religion's role as an 'identity maker' to be remarkably robust in qualitative analysis of political behaviour" (see Williams 1996:369). In other words, as Williams (1996:369) notes, identity particularly collective identity has an important political impact different from any given set of religious beliefs or even political opinions.

It is for this reason that in all the newly colonised countries, the European colonists became empowered as a privileged landowning class. Terreblanche (2005:8) argues that from 1652 to 1800, land was in abundance and therefore it could be easily occupied. This was because of their military capacity, as well as the poor epidemiological condition of the indigenous people. The Christian religion during colonialism was a vehicle that was used in constructing an identity for those who were considered not to be civilised. Their cultural practices were deemed to be superstitious (Biko 2002:29). Thus the indigenous people of South Africa were made to see their traditional practices as inferior, while Christianity was made to be seen as a superior religion over and above their traditional practices.

When the settlers occupied the coast of South Africa there were many methods that were used to gain land as well as for importing slaves from the East and also finding various mechanisms for exploiting the natives of the land. Terreblanche, in his book, looks at the six successive systemic periods in South African history. He argues (2005:5):

> That the South African economy was sustained by slavery and serfdom for 250 years as well as labor repression and discrimination for another 100, testifies to the highly unequal distribution of power between the class of white masters and employers on the one hand, and that of black servants and employees on the other.

One can therefore argue that identity as a social construct of colonialism in South Africa can be attributed to the inequality of various classes particularly the role slaves and serfdom played in the sustainability of the country's economy. Systems, such as racial capitalism that were instituted by British colonialism as well as its imperialism during the "long 19th century", led to imperial social construction simply because in many of the wars fought against the natives the colonial masters were mostly victors in group conflicts (Terreblanche 2005:6). 1890–1948 marks a period of British imperialism and the political and economic hegemony of the English establishment. The

colonial power mechanism can be deduced in perhaps three ways (Terreblanche 2005:6):

> Firstly, by creating political economic power structures that put them in a privileged and entrenched position *vis-á-vis* the indigenous population groups; secondly, by depriving indigenous people of land, surface water, and cattle; and thirdly, by reducing slaves and indigenous people to different forms of unfree and exploitable labour.

One could argue that these three methods were creating an identity that distinguished the masters from the slaves. This would have been imperative for those who were privileged to maintain their imperial identity. This imperial identity is a collective identity that is distinct from any other identity as well as religious beliefs or political opinion; furthermore, at the heart of social identity and social cognition was the imperial identity as a colonial social construct. Secondly, memory played a role in constructing this imperial identity. One of the elements that can be identified in colonialism is that group identity was essential for conquering the natives and slaves as well as maintaining unity. This needed to have an understanding of what they were like. For example, the laws of segregation and later apartheid, and many other laws as well, marked how we are similar to and different from others. The authors[2] argue that "All three are theories of social identity and therefore focus on how our self-concepts reflect our memberships in social groups" (2000:90).

The construction of social identity through imperial identity still continues to be used widely as one of today's ideologies. In the United States of America, for example, many people speak of the "American dream". 1948 to 1994 marked the systematic period of the political hegemony of the Afrikaner[3] establishment in South Africa when the "Afrikaner empire" was constructed in such a way that group membership had benefits, such as "self-esteem", "self-understanding" and "optimal distinctiveness", leading to a sense of a superior social construction of identity. For example, there was the day of the "Vow"[4] which distinguished the Afrikaners from the rest of the people. This was because on 16 December 1838:

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[2]   Sherman, SJ, Hamilton, DL and Lewis, AC perceived entitativity as the social identity value of group memberships.

[3]   The name used to refer to the descendants of the Dutch settlers.

[4]   It was celebrated on 16 December. In Pretoria they erected a monument called the Voortrekker Monument, a pilgrim place where they renewed their commitment to their "God"

> The deeply religious Boers did not ascribe the military victory to their technically superior armaments, but interpreted it primarily as a sign of God. Before the battle, they had prayed and made a vow that if God would grant them victory over the Zulus, they would commemorate the event annually. With that battle behind them, they believed even more strongly that white predominance over blacks is God's own will.
> (http://www.southafrica-travel.net/history/eh_blood.htm)

On this day they celebrated how their socially constructed "God" protected them and gave them the land that he had promised and thus this day signified their social identity value that is based on self-categorisation.

The false interpretation of Scripture played a fundamental role in the construction of these social identity values as well as this self-categorisation. The same can be argued about the United States of America where the Christian Testament is used to justify imperial ideologies. In endorsing this notion, Samuel P. Huntington[5] (2005:123) observes the following:

> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Americans defined their mission in the New World of biblical terms. They were a "chosen people" on an "errand in the wilderness", creating "the new Israel" or the "New Jerusalem" in what was clearly "the promised land". America was the site of a "new heaven and a new earth, the home of justice", God's country. This sense of holy mission was easily expanded into millenarian themes of the America as "the redeemer nation" and "the visionary republic".

Fiorenza[6] (2005:134) makes a similar observation by arguing the following:

> Christian religion and Scripture have been used consistently to legitimate American expansionism and military rule as well as to inculcate the mentality of obedience and submission to the power of the imperial word.

I would suggest that the use of biblical rhetoric and images does not only legitimate American expansion but also the American Empire through political discourse. This would also apply to the apartheid ideology. Fiorenza further argues that the use of Christian Scripture and its interpretation has been made to be at the service of empire and colonialist expansion. One of

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[5] See Ruiz, JP *Of Walls and Words: Twenty-First Century Empire and New Testament Studies.*
[6] Fiorenza, ES *Empire and Christian Testament Studies*.

the interesting things is that the countries where the discipline of the Christian Testament studies has flourished during the last two centuries are countries that have claimed large sections of the earth as their empires. Can we then argue that the discipline of the Christian Testament studies has been one of the tools of imperialism? Or could it be the church? If that is the case that both academy and the church were or still are the tools of imperialism could they then tolerate a thorough accounting of their abuses of power? (Fiorenza 2005:134).

Empire and power

One could ask a question: can we speak of empire with no reference to power? It is evident that one cannot refer to either of them without referring one to the other. Throughout the history of empire, both empire and power have been intertwined, perhaps because empire thrives on political authority, domination, and ideological identity. This is one of the characteristics found in various empires throughout history even today in the 21st century. One of the observations made by Hardt and Negri[7] is that there are four manifestations of empire in contemporary society. Firstly they suggest empire as a concept has various manifestations rather than a specific nation. They argue that the twenty-first century empire has no fundamental boundaries: no limits for the empire's rule. They further argue that, "The concept empire, posits a regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality, or really that rules over the entire 'civilised' world" (see Aymer 2005:141).

Secondly, according to Hardt and Negri the concept of empire suspends history; in so doing it fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity. It therefore presents itself as ahistorical or as the very *telos* of history. Thirdly, an empire does not only extend its rule to human bodies but to human psychology also. Thus the conquered experience not only the power of their conquerors but they also experience an imposed identity. Empire, one can say, creates the very world it inhabits, both the external and the internal as an ultimate biopower. The last manifestation of an empire, argues Hardt and Negri, is that it is always dedicated to peace, perpetual and universal peace outside of history (see Aymer 2005:141). This is because according to Aymer, it is in studying "*Pax Romana*" that one understands that imperial peace often meant "bathed in blood"; this would be in service to the imperial promises of peace of justice for all is the "*bellum justum*" that is war fought against the "barbarians" or the "rebels". In the 21st century such rhetoric seems to re-appear again in the manifestation of empire particularly in the so-called "just war" (Aymer 2005:142). An example of this would be in South Africa during apartheid when people were detained and accused of being

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[7]   See Aymer. MP *Empire, Alter-Empire, and the Twenty-First Century.* Pg 141. 2005

communist therefore they were regarded as the enemy destabilising the country's "peace". The 2003 invasion of Iraq was regarded as a "Just War" by America and Britain the basis of this was that according to the then President of the United States of America, George W Bush and the then Prime Minister of Britain Tony Blair it was to "disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's alleged support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people"(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_invasion_of_Iraq).

I would like to suggest that the observation made by Biko[8] that segregation and apartheid psychologically impacted on the African people to the extent that they were "reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the inevitable position" (see Biko 2002:78). Such an identity sustains the power of the empire yet at the same time renders those under the political authority and hegemony of the empire powerless and this breeds a race of beggars who smile at the enemy and swear at him. One can therefore argue that such an identity leads to a schizophrenic identity that is sustained by an ideological identity, simply because those under oppression call upon the other's authority with great respect and humility, yet at the same time they call them names in their hearts. This is precisely because they have in some way become a shell, a shadow, completely defeated, and drowning in their own misery. They are slaves with no identity and citizenship. They belong nowhere. They have become a commodity like an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity (Biko 2002:29).

Post-apartheid identity as a deconstruction of empire

I would like to argue that one of the legacies of the "Apartheid empire", as well as many other empires, is the social construction of ideological identities. Thus the ideology of the "Apartheid empire" has fractured the identity of both the white and black people of South Africa. More so the black people particularly through religion, education, and economics. As a result it has psychologically weakened the self-esteem of black people. It is for this reason that their children were taught to hate their heritage and to find solace only by identifying with the white society (Biko 2002:29). An example of fractured identity would be young black children being unable to express themselves in their own mother tongue (see Tantum 1999:126).

Therefore, identity in the post-apartheid period could become a vehicle in the deconstruction of the empire. Yet at the same time one of its challenges is how does it render itself as a new paradigm shift, at the same

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[8]   Biko, S. *I write what I like*. 2002. Pg78. See also Wimberley, R. C. & Christenson, J.A. 1980. *Civil Religion and Church and State*. Fiorenza, ES. *Empire and Christian Testament Studies*. Pg 134: 2005.

time finding itself in a new imperial ideology of Neo-Colonialism[9] or Neo-Liberalism;[10] it adopted the latter as its political ideology. Neo-Colonialism reinvents itself and therefore becomes a hindrance to the rediscovering of authentic white and black identities as well as the national identity.

Colin Stoneman,[11] in making a parallel study of South Africa and Zimbabwe, argues that in both cases, the transfer of political power to the majority was not accompanied by an equivalent transfer of economic or structural power to the democratic state. Hence he maintains the following (see Terreblanche 2005:456):

> When the whites indicated to their willingness to surrender their monopoly of political power from 1979 in Zimbabwe and 1990 in South Africa most international pressure seems to have been immediately redirected to ensuring that blacks did not gain a monopoly of power, and that white economic interests should survive the loss of political power largely intact.

In trying to correct the 350 years of oppression and segregation the new government of South Africa post 1994 came with the idea that affirmative action was the answer. It was the hope of the ruling party that economic emancipation would be achieved through programmes such as the above mentioned. Such a programme instead constructed class from the under-privileged black communities. Wise[12] observes that affirmative action was created as a way to ensure opportunity for the people of colour and for white women who were left out in participating fully in the job market and higher education. Even though it has served as an important reform, yet at the same time affirmative action efforts have not reached their intended goal. This is reflected in the way America's political, economic and educational hierarchies remain dominated by the white race. Such a phenomenon is argued by the critics of affirmative action in South Africa. For it to be effective Reagan argues that (see Wise 2005:164):

> Time and experience have shown that laws and edicts of non-discrimination are not enough. Justice demands that each and every citizen consciously adopt and accentuate a real and

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9   In this article I refer to neocolonialism as the use of political, economic pressure by the powerful countries to obtain influence as well as to keep it over other countries.

10 It can be defined as a set of economic policies that have become widespread during the last 25 years or so, imposed around the world by powerful financial institutions such as e.g. IMF and WB. (http://en.wikipedia.org//wiki//Neoliberalism).

11 See Terreblanche: *A history of inequality in South Africa 1652-2002*, pg 456: 2005.

12 Wise, T *Affirmative Action: racial preference in black and white*. 2005. Pg 11.

> personal commitment to affirmative action, so as to make equal opportunity a reality.

Yet at the same time, affirmative action, though it seeks to address 350 years of exploitation, further creates a new empire. It is for this reason that the powerful, black middle class seem to have a perpetual inclination to seek justification of why they continue to enjoy their extravagant lifestyle; a recent example is the President of the ANC Youth League who is building a R16 million mansion is Sandton in the midst of abject poverty, yet advocating for the poor (see Tshaka & Makofane (2010:539). Frazier,[13] on the other hand, observes that the black middle class are the result of the education they received, and this has made them perceive themselves as superior to those of their own group. Formal education has become one of the principal social factors responsible for the emergence of the black bourgeoisie (Frazier 1997:23-24). Not only has it created black bourgeoisie as Frazier would suggest, but in the context of post-apartheid South Africa both education and political involvement of the fore-bearers it has created the black middle class, for example, names such as *Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki, Zuma, Malema* and many others seem to have assumed a new form of empire.

This has led to the black bourgeoisie losing their own cultural past, in other words, their African traditions which they refuse to identify with. Yet, at the same time, they are not accepted by the white world which refuses to permit them a share to its life. Beverly Daniel Tatum, in the title of her book,[14] asks this question *Black families in white communities: who succeeds and why*? Tatum argues that acculturation could cause emotional strain and identity problems since society wants black people to be as white as possible because white is superior. It is for this reason that possessing less than one's culture of fullness becomes better when one acculturates oneself to other cultures (Tatum 1999:126).

Thus, raising black children in the manner that many whites do, leads to children looking down upon their own race or ethnic background. Though affirmative action was a means of addressing 350 years of economic ex-ploitation, it has at the same time constructed a social identity of the rich and the poor amongst the latter for decades. It further constructed a 'new empire' which according to Fanon,[15] the black man is "comparaison". This sense of "comparaison" indicates that a black person is constantly preoccupied with self-assertion and the ego ideal. Such a person, when in the presence of someone of another culture, is always conscious of their own worth and

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[13]   Frazier, E. *Black Bourgeoisie.*
[14]   Tatum, BD Black Families in White Communities: who succeeds and why?
[15]   Fanon, R. Black Skin, White Masks. See also De Kock, W. 1986. *Inkatha and the Fight for a just South Africa: Usuthu! Cry Peace*. Cape Town . See also Bond, P. 2005. *Elite Transition: From apartheid to neo-liberalism in South Africa.*

merit. This leads to their personal value being always dependent on the "Other" (Fanon 2008:185-186).

This attitude towards "blackness" can lead one to loathe being black. Fanon substantiates his statement by citing various views on the issue of colour and striving to want to be white. Fanon argues that this pain of a black person unfortunately leaves him/her with only one solution, namely to prove his/her whiteness to others and especially to him/herself. He[16] argues that: "If I cannot change my colour, I want adventure." As a result, black persons acknowledge that they belong to an 'inferior' race and so wish to resemble the "superior" race (Fanon 2008:189).

The theoretical framework of Black Theology and Black Consciousness: a paradigm shift for the deconstruction of empire in South Africa

It is evident that, in order to deconstruct various forms of empires, the issue of identity has to be an integral part of the debate. Perhaps a question such as "Can empire be deconstructed?" is a vital question simply because ideologies such as globalisation or the global village impact on the identity of a people and further perpetuate other forms of colonialism. Such an influence is observed by Terreblanche,[17] who points out that "Our politico-economic system is an African elite democracy cum first world capitalist enclavity". The argument presented by Terreblanche in the above statement is that neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism cannot rectify the repression, social de-struction, exploitation, neglect and the maladministration of the past 350 years. One cannot speak of socio-economic transformation without at the same time guaranteeing a long-term stability and legitimacy of South Africa's new democracy. Terreblanche (2002:456) further argues that the South African system is in a dilemma precisely because its liberal capitalist version of democracy is dysfunctional, regardless of its power and its privileged position. This is because:

> The white controlled capitalist enclave is unable and unwilling to serve all sections of the population, unable to create enough job opportunities, and unable to alleviate poverty. Our dual politico-economic system is also dysfunctional because the African elite democracy is too unassertive; it is doing too little to create additional job opportunities, and transfer enough income from the middle classes to the lower classes.

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[16]   Fanon, R. Black Skin, White Masks. 2008. Pg 189.
[17]   A history of inequality in South Africa 1652-2002.

I would therefore like to argue that the use of the theoretical framework of "Black Consciousness" as a new paradigm, as well as the continual discourse of "Black Theology" in the deconstruction of imperial identity found in ideologies such as neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism, can be used to engage such ideologies and create a platform for constructive criticism rather than critical solidarity. This is because "Black Theology" as a discourse, argues Maimela, "will play an important role in the future because there will always be elements in society who, for a variety of reasons, will feel themselves deprived, somehow oppressed and therefore in need of liberation, be it political, economic or socio-cultural" (see Tshaka & Makofane 2010:533). In other words, Black Theology has to denounce the mentality of entitlement amongst the elite in South Africa. Thus the economy remains an important aspect for the church and theology, argue Tshaka and Makofane (2010:536). Chimhanda concurs with Tshaka and Makofane and argues that (2010:436):

> The point of departure for Black Theology of liberation is critical reflection on black experience of marginalisation and oppression in the light of biblical faith. The method includes identifying pockets of marginalisation and oppression, and critical analysis, taking into account the Old Testament and New Testament liberation paradigm for the Christian God who identifies with the oppressed and engages actively in the liberation process.

The contribution of Black Theology as a theoretical framework for the deconstruction of empire in its various forms requires a new hermeneutics of blackness (identity), marginalisation, democracy and leadership. Such a framework will create dialogue with politics that will create and explore authentic black empowerment for inclusive multicultural living. In other words, it will lead to reading the Bible within a black context and as well as its theologising. This includes identification of the ideological world of the author which suppresses and oppresses the voice of the marginalised group (see Farisani 2010:516). This will challenge the ideology of neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism that seek to universalise a distinction between the poor and the rich. Mosala defines ideology in the following manner: "It is rather a harmonisation of contradictions in such a way that the class interests of one group are universalised and made acceptable to other classes" (see Farisani 2010:510).

Black Consciousness needs to challenge the socially constructed identity that has impacted on the lives of those who have experienced colonialism as oppression. It brings back the black person to him/herself. In other words, it revives their lost identity and thus gives people pride and dignity. It calls upon the black people to continually make an introspection of

their own life. It will further challenge critical solidarity with the state that black theologians seem to have taken by their silence. Critical solidarity with the state, Motlhabi argues, is dangerous if allowed to degenerate into a blind and uncritical following of the state in everything (see Tshaka & Makofane 2010:543). If the theoretical framework of Black Theology and Black Consciousness in the deconstruction of empire in South Africa today is to remain relevant, it ought to cover broader issues of social justice instead of focusing solely on matters of racial justice, although race in my view is not be marginalised or minimised as it remains a significant factor today. This will lead to what Motlhabi calls "reorientation and adjustment" (see Tshaka & Makofane 2010:544). Thus fighting for justice becomes a social issue, a communal endeavour; it challenges the dominant voice and brings out the voice under domination and deconstructs the art of political disguise [18] (Scott 1990:136-182).

Conclusion

In this article I discussed identity as a social construct of empire. I outlined the etymology of empire, defined so as to ascertain the hypothesis of identity as a social construct of empire. I further argued that in antiquity identity played an essential role in the construction of empire. Such an identity was multifaceted in forms such as culture, economy, society, hierarchy of classes and slavery. Religion as an ideology contributed and continues to contribute to identity as a social construct. Such an ideology is evident in the colonial social construct of identity. It is for this reason I have argued that religion has been and continues to be a political resource and thus as a result its role has been that of an "identity maker". I further argued that empire and power are intertwined. Furthermore, one cannot speak of empire without reference to power. This is perhaps because empire has thrived and continues to thrive on political hegemony, domination as well as ideological identity. Post-1994 South Africa defined itself as a rainbow nation; this notion was to construct an identity of a country as a means of deconstructing the apartheid-constructed identity. Neo-colonialism and Neo-liberalism as ideologies have rendered themselves an obstacle to the authentic rediscovery of the South African populace. At the same time, the new regime, in trying to reverse the 350 years of exploitation and economic marginalisation, introduced a programme referred to as affirmative action, and as a result constructed a new empire of black elites while the majority of the black population continues to live in poverty. I proposed that the theoretical framework of Black Theology

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[18]   See also Scott, JC Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts. Pg.136-182.1990.

and Black Consciousness could be a paradigm shift for the deconstruction of empire in South Africa.

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