

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to define ‘the right’. Often the right is defined simply by contrast to the left.¹ For a definition of the right to be meaningful, consistent and precise, the right and its protagonists need to be defined in relation to a specific historical and political context.

For example, in some Western societies today the view that distinctions of gender are morally or politically significant, in such a way as to justify assigning different rights and standards of behaviour to the two sexes, is considered right wing and conservative. A century ago such an argument would have been considered progressive in many parts of Europe where the popular view was that women were in some respect inferior to men, in such a way as to justify assigning inferior rights to women. (In Britain women got the right to vote in 1918—provided they were married and over 30!) Similarly such a view would be progressive, even revolutionary, in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran today. (In Saudi Arabia women are not legally permitted to drive!)

Historically right wing radicalism is a product of the association between ethnic identity and territorial sovereignty, which became widely accepted in nineteenth century Europe. During the two decades following the First World War, nationalism achieved its most radical expression in the totalitarian dictatorships in, among others, Italy, Spain, Germany and Poland. The doctrinal underpinnings of these systems varied, emphasising race, cultural and religious heritage.² Associated with them are attitudes of ethnocentrism and an exaggerated form of patriotism. Movements of this sort were active, and continue to be active, in most parts of the world.

Right wing radicalism has a number of characteristics centred around the concepts of nation, race and *volk* (a people).³ Firstly, according to right wing radicals, individuals are primarily creatures of a nation, race and *volk*. Secondly, true identity is found in the community of the nation. Thirdly, nationalism and ethnic bonds are stronger and more natural than class-based bonds, as the nation transcends class divisions. Finally, nationalism bestows legitimacy on

certain senses of democracy. Democracy, when devoted to the primacy of the nation, is superior to bourgeois representative democracy. Worst of all, for right wing radicals, is the mutual contamination of socialism and democracy. "In such a case the best aspects of socialism and democracy—their collective devotion to nation—are lost in the mists of internationalism and the false equality between peoples."⁴

For right wing radicals freedom coincides with the purposes of some wider entity like the nation or state. The stronger the nation, the greater the freedom of its citizens. Freedom is seen as a spiritual idea, contrasted with the materialism of liberal freedom. True freedom is therefore an inner condition of the individual, willing a higher national purpose.⁵

Because of its multi-faceted nature, it is difficult to find a satisfactory definition for the white right in South Africa. According to Van Rooyen the right wing in South Africa is:

[a] segment within the white, and in particular Afrikaner, society which adheres to a specific ideology founded on the dual pillars of the separation of the white and the black races and on Afrikaner nationalism.⁶

Nationalism is the guiding principle of the South African white right. The Afrikaner right considers racially determined nationalism to be an important, but not primary, mobilising force. Generally, and notwithstanding some notable exceptions, the Afrikaner right is as opposed to integrating with, and being dominated by, black people as it is opposed to integrating with other white ethnic groups that are not easily assimilated into the Afrikaner nation/culture such as, for example, British people, European Catholics or white Muslims.

For the Afrikaner right, nationalism entrenches the belief that Afrikaners form a distinct and separate nation which has a right to self-determination. Zille argues that this type of ethnic nationalism is particularly effective as a cohesive force: "Ethnic nationalisms which cleave homogeneous racial groupings are the primary force binding groups with a common historical experience, language, religion and culture."⁷

Ethnic nationalism is a potentially powerful mobilising force by extending the scope of an ethnic community from "purely cultural and social to economic and political spheres: from predominantly private to public sectors...

Nationalism endows ethnicity with a wholly new self-consciousness and legitimacy, as well as a fighting spirit and political direction."⁸

Writing in the early 1990s Van Rooyen distinguished between three categories of the South African white right.⁹ First, the moderate or pragmatic right which favours an autonomous, non-racial Afrikaner region within a united but federal South Africa. Secondly, the traditional right which wants to re-implement apartheid and, failing this, establishing a sovereign white homeland loosely linked to a South African confederation. Thirdly, the radical or extreme right which operates mostly outside the confines of institutional politics, openly propagates racism or white supremacy and has no misgivings about using violence.

Things have changed since 1990. The white right is fighting for ethnic survival. As a result, few on the right are striving for a white state or white supremacy—the essence of the fight today is about achieving an ethnic Afrikaner state or autonomous region.

The contemporary South African white right encompasses a broad range of individuals, organisations, beliefs and attitudes. While the term 'white right' may be too broad, it is used in this monograph to exclude the black right, and include the small group of racially motivated white supremacists. The bulk of the monograph focuses on the Afrikaner right, and in sections of the monograph 'white right' and 'Afrikaner right' are used interchangeably.

Adam and Moodley point out that the extreme white right is but a small component of the broad white right in South Africa. They quote liberal writer, Denis Beckett, to effectively make their point:

For every rightist who breaks up a black picnic, ten anguish over their role in Africa. For every barfly telling Kaffir-jokes, there's a pious householder praying for guidance. For every Terre'Blanche rattling sabres, there's a Boshoff seeking good neighbours through good fences. For every CP farmer who donders [assaults] his labourers, twenty deliver their babies.¹⁰

Perhaps unfairly, not much attention is given to the *relatively* moderate views of the broad white right in South Africa. However, to analyse the threat the white right poses to the country's national security it is necessary to focus on the extreme fringes of the right: its historical roots, philosophy and capacity to create insecurity. This is not to say that the monograph completely ignores the

more moderate right. To contextualise the extreme right it is necessary to sketch the most important developments within the broad white right movement in South Africa.

The aim of the monograph is to focus on the white right's threat to security and stability in South Africa. This came about as a result of extensive enquiries about the extreme white right in the aftermath of a number of bombings committed by a previously unknown right wing organisation in late 2002. The monograph should not be seen as a definitive analysis of Afrikaner nationalism and ethnicity.

For the sake of clarity the reader should note that in the monograph the term 'black' excludes the coloured and Indian communities in South Africa. 'Afrikaner' refers to Afrikaans speaking whites, while 'Boer' refers to Afrikaners in a certain political or historical context.