

# Leftist Thought and Contemporary South Africa

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## Introduction

The book navigates the transition from apartheid to contemporary South Africa. In the heart of this narrative are historical accounts of how 'Mzala' Nxumalo experienced South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy. The picture thus painted about post-apartheid South Africa is multi-layered. Many people such as Jabulani 'Mzala' Nxumalo sacrificed all liberties for the liberation of South Africa. Post-apartheid South Africa is currently battling many unresolved socioeconomic and political problems. Nxumalo was one of the leading Marxist intellectuals, a product of the 1976 uprisings. He joined the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) wherein his political ideology and philosophy found expression. He was an advocate of social justice. Race, class, gender oppression, high levels of poverty, inequalities, unemployment, corruption, and lawlessness featured prominently in his agenda. These challenges impeded the country's growth and development. Pivotal to the challenges that continue to plague South Africa is neoliberalism and the rising tide of narrow nationalism. In the context of global nationalism and authoritarian capitalism with emerging leaders such as Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Narendra Modi in India, these questions become even more pertinent. The recent spate of xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals and other related intolerances was another cause for concern. Some political parties in the

country are pro ethno-nationalist. These include, among others, Inkatha Freedom Party, the Patriotic Alliance, the Freedom Front Plus, and Action SA. It is incumbent on South African broader community and the state to confront socio-economic challenges, as well as the failure of neoliberal capitalism to overcome inequalities on a global scale.

## Jabulani Nxumalo's early life and political role

Jabulani 'Mzala' Nxumalo was born and bred in 1955 in Ngoje, a small village outside Louwsburg in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. He drew inspiration from the Freedom Charter adopted by the Congress of the People on 26 June 1955 in Kliptown, Soweto. His political activism manifested in various institutions of learning he attended. These include Bethel College, KwaDlangezwa High School, and the University of Zululand. His parents were teachers as well as Christians. They introduced him to literature on nationalist liberation struggles. 'Mzala' was a Soviet Union-trained uMkhonto we Sizwe soldier, a fearless fighter, and a revolutionary intellectual. He made great strides in the academic sphere. His writings include book chapters, journal articles, and books. In 1988, he published a book entitled *Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a double agenda*. He wrote many articles for the *African Communist*, a journal of the SACP, and several articles on the people's war. While in Europe, Nxumalo worked for the *African Communist* and the Research on Education in South Africa project in London. He also published in *World Marxist Review* in Prague, Czechoslovakia. He became a public intellectual of note, sharing deeper insights into the ANC's perspectives on negotiations.

Class struggle, particularly in South Africa, formed an integral part of his political engagements. He wrote and lectured quite extensively on the subject. Nxumalo believed that socialism is the only system that can fight inequalities in South Africa. He had no appetite for ethno-nationalistic politics despite his deep love for his Zulu history and culture. One understands why he detested the Bantustan system. He died in London on 22 February 1991 at the age of 35. He left behind his wife Mpho, two children, parents, and three siblings. He fought tooth and nail against any form of injustice. His political philosophy as an ardent supporter of a socialist system resonates with the present time. His ideologies are of a classic nature; they stood the test of time. To this day, Mzala's analysis of South Africa's socio-economic and political challenges is still relevant. It is disheartening to see the politically connected elites throw around their patronage network to amass wealth through empowerment while the majority of Black masses continue to wallow in abject poverty. Those were the sentiments echoed by 'Mzala'.

## Underlying issues

### *The National question*

The book has created enough room for a contestation of narratives on South Africa's issues of fundamental importance. The national question is less important in post-apartheid South Africa. The inaction of the state to deal with issues such as xenophobia, racial tensions, and emerging ethnicity are of great concern. The role of the Black working class is cause for concern. These oppressed masses were at the forefront of the struggle for liberation to dismantle apartheid and its policies. Mkhandawire argues that these Blacks became victims of the neoliberal logic of global capitalism. The views of Nxumalo on the national question still resonates with the current political situation in the country.

## Community and the State

It is conceivable that the community and the state are ideal for leftist thoughts. The interaction between the state and the community is important. This would enable the state to establish the needs of the people on the ground and assist. When formulating policies and implementing them, the state should take into account the bearing they have on the people. The dominant class takes the lead. The capitalist class controls the means of production as well as economic aspects such as jobs, standard of living, prices, and so forth.

## The Global World

The global capitalist system is the source of challenges facing the Global South. Extensive reading of capital is required in order to understand its impact and consequences. In the heart of the struggle for economic emancipation lies imperialism with its established empires and colonies. The main concern is the exploitation of weaker and developing countries. It is difficult for African countries to overcome imperialism. It continues to spread its wings across the global spectrum. Some scholars argue that imperialism remains an enemy of human growth and developments. The emergence of neo-imperialism, a new phase of capitalism with similar objectives, is another challenge. China has always been an exception. She has a profound influence particularly in the developing world and the world at large. China's imports for example have had a negative effect on local manufacturing of goods. China's economic prosperity is the result of Western neoliberalism. An in-

depth analysis of the relationship between China, imperialism, and developing countries including South Africa, might be able to mitigate the impact of this global economic crisis.

The book is well structured. The chapters detail different episodes of Jabulani Nxumalo's lived experiences as a revolutionary intellectual. The title is thought provoking. The conclusion sums up the discussions very well.

Finally, the book comes across as a well-thought-out piece of academic writing.