

IS SOUTH AFRICA DIFFERENT?

Sociological Comparisons and Theoretical Contributions from the Land of Apartheid

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ABSTRACT

For most of the past 50 years, South Africa served as the outlier in sociological discussions of racial inequality: From the late 1940s, when most of the world was moving away from strict racial classification and segregation, apartheid provided social scientists with their most extreme example of the dynamics of racial segregation and exclusion. Yet while apartheid South Africa was unique, social scientists have also used it in comparative studies to explore the underlying dynamics of racial capitalism: Insights from South Africa have offered sociologists new ways to think about migrant labor; the construction of ethnicity; racial exclusion and colonial relationships; relationships between business, white workers and capitalist states; and oppositional social movements. With the end of legal apartheid, South Africa is poised to move into a new position in the annals of social science. From being an outlier, it is increasingly used as an exemplar, in discussions of democratic transitions, development strategies and globalization, and post-colonial transformations. Still to come, perhaps, are comparative studies that draw on insights from other parts of the world to re-examine aspects of South African society that have been left relatively unexplored — ironically including issues around racial identities and changing patterns of race relations as South Africa constructs a new non-racial democracy.

INTRODUCTION

As everyone knows, South Africa is unique: For fifty years, it stood in the annals of social science as a monument to racial inequality. It appeared in most discussions as the place where white supremacy, authoritarian labor controls, and draconian security laws blocked normal patterns of gradual integration and modernization, where white privilege was entrenched and implacable. Since World War II, as the rest of the world tried to meet the challenges of civil rights movements and decolonization, apartheid symbolized resistance to the winds of change; South Africa consistently anchored the end point of the spectrum of racial orders, the place where racial inequality stood still (Massey & Denton 1993, Rex 1971, Marks 1998).

Given this almost axiomatic position, it would be surprising that South Africa's subtle transformation as a comparative case has gone unnoticed, were it not that other changes have been so much more dramatic. The thrilling release of political prisoners, the end of apartheid's strict racial segregation, the first democratic elections—all these have been far more visible than the re-invention of South Africa as a more-or-less ordinary society, which may serve as a basis for making larger claims about racial capitalism in an era of globalization, post-colonial state formation, social movements and democratization, migrant labor patterns, even race relations.

But this shift deserves a closer look. For some fifty years, South Africa has occupied a distinctive status: To social scientists, the country that produced apartheid appeared unique, a case that should be compared to others only in an attempt to explain its unusual trajectory—in contrast to the more ordinary social science assumption that most societies have at least a few common, or at least comparable features. To some extent, of course, this status was shaped by politics. Apartheid's opponents sought to isolate South Africa, distinguishing apartheid from other forms of racial capitalism. But South Africa's unique status also reflected a theoretical bias. More industrialized than any other part of Africa, yet more colonial than any other industrialized society, South Africa fit uneasily into ordinary social science categories; instead, it served as the case that demonstrated that racial divisions do not always disappear with industrialization. By the late twentieth century, of course, most analysts were willing to accept that racial inequalities had not disappeared in any society—industrialized or otherwise—yet South Africa's outlier status generally remained unquestioned.

Since South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, however, comparisons have taken a very different tone: South Africa now seems to offer new insights into a larger set of cases, as social scientists bring South Africa firmly into the mainstream. Instead of treating South Africa as the last bastion of a dying order, or the place where social processes follow a unique logic, social sci-

entists are increasingly treating South Africa as almost paradigmatic: as a site for exploring colonial ambiguities and post-colonial legacies, as a model for democratic transitions, or as a site for exploring development possibilities in the context of globalization. Just as South Africa itself has reinserted itself into international affairs on a new basis, social scientists are beginning to reinsert South Africa into broader debates, both as a way to explore new, hitherto-overlooked questions about South African society, and to use insights from South Africa to open new questions about broader social processes (Greenstein 1997).

South Africa's changing status in comparative studies alters the kinds of questions social scientists can ask about its society, and the lessons they can draw from it. In this essay, I first look at earlier comparative studies, where South Africa's unique status determined the logic of comparisons, as most studies sought to explain South African exceptionalism. Yet even at the height of apartheid, some comparativists used apartheid's extreme character to pursue broader theoretical questions about the relationship between race, class, and the state, exploring the character of racial capitalism, migrant labor systems, ethnicity, and social movements. In the present moment, South Africa often appears as something of an exemplar, suggesting new possible avenues for democratization and development. But finally, I suggest that perhaps the moment has come when South Africans may be able to look abroad, to reconsider South Africa's own most unusual feature, its strict racial hierarchy.

THE HIGHEST STAGE OF WHITE SUPREMACY

For decades, South Africa's unique status rested on the extreme character of apartheid: It represented a conscious system of social engineering, gradually constructed following the Nationalist Party's election victory in 1948, explicitly designed to maintain white supremacy. To an unparalleled degree, South Africa demonstrates the persistence of racial inequality despite industrialization—the case that disproved any lingering tendency among modernization theorists to treat racial oppression as atavistic or vestigial. At a time when decolonization movements were spreading and civil rights movements were challenging racial discrimination in the United States, South Africa was moving toward intensified segregation and toward complete disenfranchisement of its African majority—to the point that it denied its African inhabitants not only the right to vote, but even the right to call themselves South African.

The outlines of apartheid are well-known. Under a series of laws passed after the 1948 election—by a parliament that represented only the roughly twenty percent of the population classified as “white”—all South Africans were assigned at birth to a racial category (broadly: white, Asian, Colored, or African). Most legal and political rights were tied to racial status. Segregation

was extreme: Interracial sex or marriage was prohibited, and public facilities—from schools and libraries to parks and restaurants—were strictly divided along racial lines. Inequality was built into the system: Even the curricula used for students of different races reflected the state's official vision of white supremacy. Residential areas were completely segregated by law: Under the Group Areas Act, blacks were moved to new townships far from the centers of town. Blacks could commute into work by day, but under apartheid, South Africa's cities were expected to be "white by night"—except, of course, for the nannies and waiters, janitors and domestic workers who continued to provide services to white citizens.

But apartheid went beyond exclusionary politics, urban segregation, or unequal public facilities. Long before the Nationalist Party took power in 1948, the British colonial government had passed the 1913 Land Act, creating native reserves which set aside 13% of South Africa's land area for the roughly 75% of the population classified as African. After 1948, these reserves became "homelands" for black South Africans: Blacks could work in white-designated areas, but they could never hope for citizenship in a larger South Africa. Instead, they were officially assigned to one of the African areas that were one day to be set adrift as "independent" countries. Blacks working in "white" South Africa were required to carry passes to show they had permission to live, work, or travel in white-designated areas, and faced prison terms if they were caught without passes. Apartheid's policy of "separate development" treated rural Africans as a temporary sojourners, who would leave their families behind while they came to work in white South Africa's mines, farms, and factories, but return to their "homelands" at the end of their working lives. This circulatory migrant labor system was apartheid's cornerstone: Black South Africans were denied citizenship in the land of their birth, but would continue to provide cheap labor to white-ruled South Africa.

For most of the apartheid era, comparisons between South Africa and other countries emphasized the unique characteristics of South African segregation. Apartheid was "the highest stage of white supremacy," a carefully constructed scaffolding designed to protect white domination of the black majority far into the future (Cell 1982). Not surprisingly, most comparisons sought to explain why South Africa was different, offering reasons for South Africa's peculiarly virulent form of racial control. Before the mid-twentieth century, South Africa had not seemed so different from other European colonies, where white domination was unquestioned, and where white settler control over native populations was ubiquitous (Cooper 1996); but when decolonization began to take off after World War II, South Africa seemed to take a divergent path. Why, when the "winds of change" were sweeping across Africa in the 1940s, did South Africa turn toward new racial restrictions, rather than moving toward integration? From a similar starting point—a relatively similar racial order, in which

white minorities controlled black majorities through political exclusion, through strict segregation, and through racialized controls at the workplace—South Africa moved in a different direction.

South African exceptionalism was generally traced to dynamics in the white population, primarily in the relationship between mine-owners, white state officials, and white workers. Many studies attributed South Africa's odd trajectory to the character of the state. While some analysts argued that apartheid emerged out of the dynamics of Afrikaans nationalism and an unusually autonomous state bureaucracy (O'Meara 1983, Posel 1991), most comparative analysts link racial concerns more explicitly to economic ones: Whites were protecting racial privilege, but they were also reinforcing a system that provided cheap black labor to white-owned mines and farms (Evans 1997). White supremacy involved not only racial discrimination, but, just as importantly, a specifically racial class system, where racial identities marked class status. Conscious state policies recreated the racial character of South African capitalism: policies to uplift "poor whites" or to limit black farmers' opportunities consistently reinforced racial inequality (Bundy 1979, van Onselen 1982).

This perspective stimulated a series of detailed historical studies exploring the character of a state that permitted citizenship only to whites. The relationships between different factions of capital and the state, between white workers and the state, between white farmers and white industrialists, all helped explain the rigid character of South African minority rule. Careful historical studies helped explain how institutions that were common to many colonial situations—racial hierarchies, native reserves, vagrancy laws, and the like—developed into the apartheid system, as different segments of the white population promoted sectoral interests under the umbrella of white domination.

Some comparative studies viewed apartheid as the outcome of white workers' appeals to a racially-motivated state. Early in the twentieth century, as the mining industry emerged around Johannesburg, white workers sought to preserve a privileged position in the labor market by blocking black workers from semi-skilled positions. Enlisting the help of the state and white mineowners to prevent the displacement of white workers by lower-paid blacks, white workers organized around the infamous slogan, "Workers of the World, Unite! And Fight for a White South Africa" (Simons & Simons 1983). Researchers disagree on explanations for white workers' racialized vision, sometimes emphasizing the way a racially exclusionary state reinforced racially divided labor markets (Bonacich 1981, Fredrickson 1981), sometimes emphasizing the way upper-class white politicians could manipulate working class racial attitudes (Cell 1982). But clearly, through most of this century, white workers generally allied with their employers and white politicians, rather than seeking to build a class-based coalition with the Africans who were increasingly joining the wage labor force.

Rejecting the emphasis on white workers, some researchers focused instead on business elites and the state, emphasizing elite concerns about sustaining white supremacy (Posel 1991) or state and business concerns about maintaining control over a black workforce (Burawoy 1981, Davies 1979, Johnstone 1976). In a study comparing South Africa, the United States, Ireland, and Israel, Greenberg (1980) argued that South Africa's peculiarly racial capitalism had a sectoral basis. Agricultural and mining capital were far more interested in retaining racialized controls over workers than was manufacturing capital. Many of apartheid's peculiarities—especially the combination of a migrant labor system, the pass law system, and the job reservation system, which blocked black mobility into even semi-skilled jobs—were attributed to white farmers' and mineowners' concerns that manufacturers would pay higher wages, drawing black workers to cities and raising the cost of labor throughout South Africa. In the United States, southern manufacturers finally abandoned strict segregation and racially defined labor markets in order to stabilize an industrial workforce. South African manufacturers, in contrast, appeared unable to persuade other whites to abandon racial controls over workers and were forced to learn to live with the high turnover, skills shortages, and instability that came with strict apartheid.

Yet while some analysts suggested that these pressures would, over time, lead to conflicts between industrialists and state bureaucrats (Adam 1971, James 1987, Lipton 1986, Price 1991), Greenberg (1987) suggested these conflicts might be exaggerated. South African manufacturers often worked closely with government officials to bend the rules, reducing inefficiencies while retaining tight control over black workers.

Apartheid as Prism

Yet even while some social scientists sought to explain South African exceptionalism, there has always been another side. South Africa has also served as a prism—in part, perhaps, because the extreme character of apartheid lays bare the underlying dynamics of racial capitalism. South Africa's contribution to a broader sociology has, rather surprisingly, rested in large part in some of those areas where apartheid makes South African society unique: migration, ethnicity, and discussions of class formation and social movements.

Probably South Africa's most important contribution to a broader understanding of racial capitalism comes from a series of studies of Southern Africa's migrant labor system, beginning with research suggesting that African families' subsistence agriculture subsidized capital by supplementing the wages of migrant workers (Arrighi 1973, Levy 1982, Wolpe 1972). Burawoy (1977) was one of the first researchers to use South Africa as a prism into broader patterns of racial capitalism: he compared the role of the South Afri-

can and Californian states in perpetuating and controlling circulatory migrant streams, arguing that in both cases migrant labor subsidized capital and states by pushing the costs of education, pensions, and other social services, along with the costs of feeding workers' families—across the border. Together, the South African studies contributed to a new approach to migration, emphasizing questions of labor supply, labor control, and the structural position occupied by migrants in the receiving area. By the mid-1980s, sociologists were drawing on insights derived from South Africa to examine migration in cases as far flung as the West Indies, Europe, and Mexico, looking at how states control the flow and circulation of migrants in terms of labor supplies and labor control, and at how migration flows are deeply intertwined with the racialization of labor streams (Miles 1993, Portes & Borocz 1989).

This structuralist view can, of course, be overstated. Even in South Africa, recent studies have offered a slightly less schematic view, emphasizing the active role that migrants themselves played in shaping the migrant process and exploring the gendered character of South Africa's migrant stream. Several recent studies have described the circulatory migratory pattern as an employer response to worker demands, instituted because workers sought to maintain a rural foothold as they moved into waged labor (Atkins 1993, Harries 1994, Crush et al 1991, Crush & James 1995, James 1992, Moodie & Ndatshe 1994). Similarly, studies by feminist sociologists have emphasized agency, stressing black South African women's responses to the constraints imposed by a gendered migrant process. Under apartheid, African men were hired to work for cash, while African women were expected to remain in rural areas, engaged in subsistence agriculture unless they found jobs as domestic workers in white households. Over the century, African women have regularly moved to urban areas, legally or illegally, undermining the strict household division envisaged by apartheid's planners, finding new opportunities in the interstices of the urban economy (Berger 1992, Bozzoli & Nkotshe 1991, Cock 1989, Walker 1990, Ramphela 1993).

If South Africa's migratory labor system provided new insights into migrant labor patterns world-wide, so too did apartheid's attempt to reinforce tribalism among blacks. In much of Africa, colonial administrations assumed that ethnic (often called "tribal" or "customary") identities were fundamental to Africans' worldview, and "traditional" bonds are frequently used to explain political dynamics in post-colonial societies. In South Africa, however, ethnicity among Africans has been politicized from above: Apartheid planners explicitly sought to link ethnic identities for Africans to specific "homelands" in an attempt to legitimate "separate development." Rejecting this process, black South African politicians asserted a national South African identity for blacks, insisting that ethnic identities had been broken down through urbanization and delegitimated through white efforts to manipulate and separate blacks. South

Africa's township culture was a celebrated mix of elements long before globalization became a buzzword in cultural studies (Coplan 1995), and urban anti-apartheid activists often rejected ethnic labels as irrelevant (Greenstein 1995).

For social scientists, Southern Africa proved a fruitful site to explore the construction of ethnicity. Africa played a key role in international historiographic debates in the early 1980s, as European historians began to acknowledge the way nineteenth-century colonialists invented traditions around the world (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). Researchers in Southern Africa demonstrated how colonial administrators in the early twentieth century tended to codify as "customary" practices that had previously been flexible and contested—often, strengthening the power of chiefs over subjects, and husbands over wives (Berry 1993, Channock 1989, Klug 1995, Griffiths 1997). In a remarkable study, Wilmsen (1989) dramatically demonstrates the extent to which anthropologists, too, contributed to the reification of Southern African ethnic identities: The much-studied Kalahari "bushmen," often treated as the last isolated remnants of paleolithic culture, may in fact represent simply a desert underclass, pushed out of farming into hunting and gathering while their more successful cousins managed to find a foothold in the rapidly changing colonial economy along the edge of the desert.

As historians began to explore the way colonial states manipulated and redefined the ethnic categories that appeared so naturalized by the late twentieth century (Vail 1991), Southern Africa provided an important test case. But South Africa also demonstrated the way ethnic categories took on new meaning in the context of social change. As apartheid's framework channeled rural Africans through ethnically defined political institutions, these newly constructed identities—however artificial or invented—took on real importance in individuals' lives: Bantustan authorities became the source of work permits and drivers' licenses, as well as providers of education for rural black children (Mare 1992). Ethnically divided labor markets and circulatory migration reinforced links to rural settings; rural South African life became dependent on miners' remittances, but miners also interpreted their experiences at work through an ethnic lens (Guy & Thabane 1988, Moodie & Ndatshe 1994).

In a recent and important study of the post-colonial state in Africa, Mamdani (1996) argues that contemporary South Africa offers an archetypal illustration of the legacies of indirect rule: The bifurcated, racialized colonial state granted citizenship to whites in urban areas, but placed rural Africans under the control of strong rural chiefs, who used claims of ethnicity and tradition to legitimate domination. In struggles between rural-based migrant workers and township residents, he argues, we see dynamics common to most post-colonial societies in Africa: The legacies of ethnically defined colonial state institutions play out in urban settings. Contemporary politicians and ordinary citi-

zens alike view ethnic allegiance as a reasonable basis for claims on the central state.

Again, however, just as recent research has challenged some of the most structurally determinist perspectives on migration, recent research on ethnicity in Southern Africa has shifted somewhat, moving beyond the strict instrumentalism embodied in a vision of ethnicity-as-invention, or even the subsequent notion that invented ethnic institutions channel political aspirations in the present. Recently, researchers have begun to examine the ambiguities of the colonial encounter, exploring the way African intellectuals, even traditional chiefs, used the cultural repertoire offered them by colonial society to contest power within African society as well as within the colonial environment (Landau 1995, Comoroffs 1997, van Onselen 1996). Traces of what Marks (1986) aptly termed the "ambiguities of dependence"—the reliance of African bantustan leaders on the support of a white-minority regime in Pretoria—can be seen throughout Southern African society, as Africans sought to use aspects of European literacy, religion, medicine, even architecture, for their own benefit. Indeed, contrasting the anti-colonial discourse of black South Africans with the Palestinian movement for self-determination, Greenstein (1995) suggests that black South Africans' aspirations were fundamentally shaped by colonial encounters, to such an extent that from the turn of the century, few black South Africans could envisage a future that did not include a white presence (see also Younis 1999). And finally, some researchers are beginning to explore the other side of this relationship, asking when and how white South Africans have drawn on and reinterpreted certain facets of indigenous African culture—including, recently, in settings such as a Zulu theme park, designed to attract tourists to a specific, commercialized interpretation of "traditional" culture (Hamilton 1998).

If South Africa illustrated the role of settler minorities in reshaping and re-inventing "indigenous" culture, it has also provided a site for exploring oppositional social movements, where subaltern groups sought to create new cultures of resistance and challenge. Most studies of the anti-apartheid opposition have been quite historically specific. Not surprisingly, many have focused on the racial dynamic of apartheid, looking at how black activists mobilized a national resistance to white supremacy. Yet recognizing the complicated relationship between colonizer and colonized, the most historically nuanced of these studies have acknowledged a persistent tension between the street-corner appeal of calls of black supremacist rhetoric and the insistence by more respectable South African leaders that whites would be welcome in a future South Africa (Bradford 1987, Beinart & Bundy 1987, Callinicos 1987, Gerhardts 1978, Lodge 1983, Marx 1992, Peires 1989).

Several studies explore white involvement in the anti-apartheid resistance, acknowledging the contradictory situation in which sympathetic whites could

provide important resources and support for black nationalism, but where issues of leadership, autonomy, and alliances are constantly framed in racialized terms (Simons & Simons 1983, Lazerson 1994). Conversely, several studies explored the way life in a militarized white society and white nationalism affected white South Africans, looking at the impact of racial tension on individuals' psyches, on definitions of masculinity and femininity, and on understandings of class identities (Crapanzano 1985, Cock & Nathan 1989).

Recently, a new dimension has been added to our understanding of the South African anti-apartheid movement, as analysts begin to explore the transnational side of black activism. This kind of transnational study may reflect a very immediate concern with globalization and transnationalism in the late twentieth century; but as historians Campbell (1995) and Fredrickson (1995) each demonstrate, interactions between black South African activists and African-American activists have been important throughout this century, providing intellectual and financial resources to movements on both sides of the ocean. Similarly, foreign funding has played a key role in the internal politics of the anti-apartheid movement, specifically in strengthening women's voices (Seidman 1999).

But while these studies raise interesting issues, they are more specific to the South African situation, perhaps, than studies that look at a range of other dynamics in the mobilization of the anti-apartheid resistance. Interestingly, the militant labor movement and most of the new urban groups that emerged to form a legal opposition in the 1970s and 1980s generally rejected racial identity as a basis for mobilization: Although they mobilized communities in racially segregated townships, activists generally used nonracial principles in defining social movement constituencies. Obviously, racial discrimination and exclusion have been key issues, from the point of view of social movement mobilization, but anti-apartheid groups have frequently framed their concerns in other terms, as students, workers, township residents, women.

In the 1980s, oppositional social movements in South Africa provided an important corrective to international social-movement theories that limited their vision to industrialized societies. Many of the South African studies explored the relationship between industrialization, urbanization, the changing character of the black community and its growing ability to challenge the apartheid state. Much research focused on the changing role of African workers in the economy and their ability to disrupt production as a consequence of industrialization. Before the 1970s, discussions of the labor process in South Africa tended to emphasize the apartheid state's control over workers. Rapid growth in the nonracial trade union movement, however, prompted sociologists to examine the character of labor militance. Rapid industrialization changed the experiences and racial composition of the industrial workforce over the century, increasing the capacity of African workers to assert demands

at the workplace; changing patterns of production, with changing skill requirements, altered the ability of African workers to challenge employer and state control over their lives outside the factory (Freund 1988, Crankshaw 1994, Webster 1985).

South Africa's militant labor movement challenged many of the assumptions made in the literature about democratization and development, suggesting that unions can play a key role in democratic change (Lambert & Webster 1988). South Africa's racially segregated communities are unusual, but the links between union activism and community groups that were organized during the 1980s are not unique: A comparison with Brazil's democratization process suggests that despite an authoritarian pattern of industrialization, workers in both cases were able to use workplace organizations in support of community demands for political and economic change (Seidman 1994).

Despite the racial dimension of South African society, the concerns expressed by social movements within the anti-apartheid coalition echo the kinds of concerns expressed during democratization processes elsewhere: Poor communities insist that full citizenship must involve the provision of basic services such as health care, education, and infrastructure as well as the right to vote (Abel 1995, Escobar & Alvarez 1992, Marx 1992, Mayekiso 1996, Murray 1987, Murray 1994, Seidman 1994). Despite the repression that marked apartheid's last years, South Africa's urban movements provide an unusually visible site for exploring the character of oppositional social movements during democratization, and they offer new insights into the emergence of demands for a redefined, inclusionary citizenship in post-colonial settings.

Post-Apartheid, Post-Colonial

Since its first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa has moved into a new category: Instead of appearing as an outlier, it is now increasingly treated as an exemplar, a case that illustrates the post-colonial condition. Led by an unusually articulate and self-conscious group of reformers and blessed by an unusual degree of international legitimacy, South Africa in the 1990s appears to offer new ways to think about both the consolidation of democracy and strategies for development at the turn of the century. Conversely, South African social scientists are beginning to look beyond South Africa's borders for new insights into some of the most thorny issues of South African sociology—including, perhaps most ironically, issues of race and racial politics.

Perhaps the most obvious area where South African scholarship promises new insights lies in the general area of democratization. Early studies of the democratic transition in South Africa tended to draw heavily on Latin American examples, suggesting that anti-apartheid activists should steer a careful course between the *dictaduras* and *dictablandas* of the apartheid regime to

avoid provoking a white backlash (Van Zyl Slabbert 1992, Adam & Moodley 1993). But South Africa's popular social movements gives discussions of the consolidation of democratization an unusual tone. Thus, for example, Adler & Webster (1996) suggested that in contrast to Latin America, where trade union leaders were advised to restrain their followers' demands during the democratization process to avoid pushing elites into the arms of authoritarian generals (Przeworski 1991, Valenzuela 1989), South African unionists can insist on demands for redistribution, because their claims may receive sympathetic attention from reformist policymakers. While scholars from Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the rest of Africa have increasingly recognized limits to the transition from authoritarianism (e.g., Jelin & Hershberg 1996), South African discussions continue to stress the possibility of rapid change in institutional framework and political culture.

Thus, for example, South Africa in the 1990s serves as an exemplar for how post-authoritarian regimes might deal with the legacies of human rights violations and repression. Most democratization processes have involved burying the past; authoritarian figures are frequently granted full amnesty and permitted complete integration into the new democratic order. South Africa, by contrast, took a firmer stance, offering amnesty only to those who fully disclose their participation in gross violations of human rights and threatening prosecution of those who did not cooperate. Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission drew on examples from around the world, its planners sought to avoid some of the pitfalls of similar commissions—particularly, to avoid the powerlessness that prevented many such commissions from exploring the participation of still-powerful authoritarian figures in acts of repression and violence (Asmal et al 1997). Steering a careful course between forgetting the past and provoking further social conflict, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has changed the debate about how to deal with the painful memories of the authoritarian past. Although the process is hardly complete, the South African TRC has already become a subject of much discussion among activists and social scientists around the world, as they begin to analyze what appears to have been a relatively successful innovation.

This kind of institutional innovation is not limited to the truth and reconciliation process. The thorough-going reform of the South African state provides other examples of similar innovation, as South African policy-makers build on examples from around the world, but add their own adaptations. Specific innovations—ranging from the successful integration of two previously-opposed armed forces, to the creation of a Gender Commission that will examine the implications for gender equity of every new law—have made South Africa's democratic transition unusually far-reaching. South Africa's experiences seem to stand apart from the "show elections" that have marked so many transitions; as a result, general discussions of democratization are likely to

seem oddly incomplete if they overlook the South African experiences over the next decade.

Similarly, South Africa is likely to become an increasingly visible example in the literature on development, illustrating the possibilities and constraints inherent in a newly globalized world economy. Historically, South Africa's developmental trajectory has been rather anomalous: Although like most former colonies it depends on the export of a single primary commodity, that commodity—gold—long occupied a unique position in international markets. Further, South Africa was able to develop a relatively diversified industrial base during the period of strict apartheid. Despite one of the highest gini coefficients in the world, South Africa under apartheid experienced rapid spurts of economic growth—although South Africa's white minority regime could not shift its position within the hierarchy of the world system.

But in the 1990s, democratization coincided with another dramatic shift in South Africa's relationship to the rest of the world. Gold is no longer the backbone of the international financial system, and, as a result, South Africa is no longer the uniquely wealthy late-industrializer it once appeared to be. Changes in the international prices of gold have revealed that among the legacies of apartheid is classic underdevelopment. Since 1987, a steep drop in the world price for gold—largely the result of the collapse of the Bretton-Woods system of international exchange rates—makes gold just another commodity, and South Africa faces fluctuating international prices for a commodity that makes up about half the value of its exports. In the context of the democratic transition, the gold industry cannot rely on its historic response of simply further reducing wages for black workers (Martin 1983, James 1992). Instead, it has a new response: restructuring the industry to increase productivity and reduce the labor force in the mines (Freund 1993, Leger & Nichol 1991).

The impact on rural Southern Africa has been devastating: From independent Mozambique and Lesotho to former bantustan areas like the Transkei, households that previously depended on miners' remittances are now virtually without incomes. Repeated studies have shown the perverse effect of long-term circulatory migrancy in rural areas, as remittances from migrant workers have become essential for families to purchase the basic inputs needed for subsistence agriculture. Without remittances, hiring a plough or purchasing seeds becomes prohibitively expensive (Murray 1992, Moodie & Ndatsche 1994). Although mining is low-paid, dangerous work, the mines long provided jobs for blacks denied literacy and other skills; the industry's current downsizing closes off an option on which households across rural southern Africa had come to depend. Among apartheid's legacies is the collapse of the very industry that lay at the heart of the system. Ironically, one of the first demands made on South Africa's first democratically elected government by the militant black mineworkers union involved support for failing mines, as a way to sus-

tain rural black communities that have become completely dependent on miners' remittances (Commission to Investigate the Development of a Comprehensive Labour Market Policy 1996).

As gold becomes more vulnerable to price fluctuations, South Africa looks like many other developing countries. Its strategists hope to diversify exports, moving away from dependence on a single commodity to find new market niches for manufactured and agricultural products. Somewhat paradoxically, South Africa's reintegration into the world economy may build on the fact that South Africa had developed a relatively successful manufacturing sector through import-substitution policies during the post-war era. One reason why the mining crisis has been ignored by many commentators is that South Africa appeared relatively successful in diversifying its economy. Had it not been for its racial inequalities, its record of manufacturing growth might well have been envied by other late industrializers around the world. Through high tariff barriers and subsidies to local manufacturers and joint ventures—very much along the lines that would be called import-substitution industrialization in places like Mexico or India—a developmental South African state successfully promoted domestic industries and joint ventures, buying technology and supplying cheap inputs like electricity, steel, and petrochemicals (Clark 1994).

In the 1990s, however, those strategies appear less appealing; international pressures for open economies are changing the context of development, creating new constraints and possibilities for developing economies. South Africa's new government is finding itself forced to reconstruct its relationship to the outside world. The new pressures of economic integration and globalization have prompted a wholesale revision of South Africa's trade and export policies, as it seeks to position itself in competitive global markets. Instead of protecting domestic markets, the South African government now expects local producers to compete on a global scale; meanwhile, local producers are struggling to deal with a flood of new imports on local market shelves. Debates in Pretoria about economic policy and the impact of a global world economy on South African consumers and producers echo debates around the world at the turn of the century: How can any developing country attract new investment, restructure its industries to make them more productive, and find new international markets for their products, in ways that will both sustain economic growth over the long term and raise workers' wages (Baker et al 1993, Evans 1995, Guimaraes 1996)? For developing countries everywhere, the unfolding of South Africa's economic trajectory over the next ten years will reveal a great deal about the possibilities and constraints facing democratic developmental states in an era of globalization.

South Africa is not just another developing country, of course; it stands out from the rest, in its visibility and in the legitimacy of its current reform efforts. South Africa offers a remarkably visible and transparent example of restructuring.

Since the 1994 elections, the wholesale reconstruction of state institutions have involved open and heated public debate. What should the new government do about inherited inequalities of wealth and power? Can representatives from labor unions, business, and the state reasonably hope to arrive at mutually acceptable policies in some kind of merger of corporatism and democracy (Patel 1994, Baskin 1996)? Given the persistence of racial divisions at work, can labor and management work together to replace the authoritarian labor practices of the past with the kind of cooperative arrangements often considered essential for higher productivity and industrial flexibility (Joffe et al 1993)? Especially since the highly mobilized anti-apartheid opposition spawned an energetic and vocal public sphere in post-apartheid South Africa, these debates are remarkably vivid, involving public discussion and commentary on state policies that might go unremarked elsewhere. In contrast to the rather opaque processes familiar from other developmental states, the design of development policy in a democratic South Africa is a highly visible process, offering the possibility of new insights into the dynamics of negotiations between states, business, and citizenry in the process of restructuring.

South Africa thus also holds out unusual promise, both to its citizens and to the rest of the developing world. Having defeated a system regarded as uniquely evil, the South African government retains extraordinary legitimacy, with internationally respected leadership and international acknowledgment that the inequities inherited from the apartheid era demand redress. In this context, South Africa's trajectory over the next few years will be of great interest. Its efforts to deal with the legacies of apartheid—with an authoritarian culture that remains riddled with racial hierarchies, with extreme inequalities of income and wealth, with rapidly growing squatter areas whose residents have been denied basic education or health care, and, of course, with the legacies of migrant labor and land dispossession—will resonate throughout the post-colonial world. Apartheid was indeed extreme, but many of its patterns are paralleled elsewhere; especially given the general good will and support accorded the new government, South African experiments may illustrate new strategies for addressing problems of growth or persistent inequalities in a globalized world.

Rethinking Race

Yet while South Africa may hold up a mirror, even a beacon, for the rest of the post-colonial world, it is also possible that South Africa's integration into global scholarly discourses could shed new light on South Africa. Ironically, that light may shine precisely on the area where South Africa has been considered most unique: The dynamics of race remain perhaps more unexplored in South Africa than anywhere else, and South African scholarship is only now

beginning to problematize questions around the racial identities, racial politics, and racial formations that would appear so central to a divided society.

It is ironic that in a situation where racial differences have been so visible—and in a situation where complexities of racial identities and racial politics were played out in daily newspapers, as individuals confronted the tension between rigid legal racial categories and the more fluid reality of human lives—discussions about race have generally been left out of progressive scholarly work. For many social scientists, the omission reflected a conscious decision to avoid any link to the scientific racism so rampant in South African science. Although some of South Africa's most internationally renowned scholars demonstrated that racial categories cannot be physically defined (Tobias 1972), conservative white South African scientists were often deeply complicit in the reification of racial difference (Dubow 1995)—often to an absurd extreme, as when mining industry researchers experimented with different racial abilities to withstand heat, as if melanin somehow altered the fundamental functioning of the human body. And, of course, for many South African social scientists, racial identities hardly seemed problematic: Racial categories were so explicitly built into the legal and social framework that they seemed almost biological (van den Berghe 1978).

But even in South Africa, racial identities are fluid; racial politics are not set in stone, and racial dynamics merit more specific attention than they have often received. South African racial politics have not been static, but we have little sense of how and why they changed. Over time, we know that changing racial visions—among white nationalists, black consciousness activists, and nonracialists—were rooted in specific social movements, at specific conjunctures of South African history, but this area remains a fruitful site for further investigation (Greenstein 1993).

At the individual level, we have remarkably little sense of how South Africans experienced, responded to, or even challenged apartheid's rigid racial categories in their daily lives. Yet over the nearly fifty years that these categories carried legal implications, thousands of individuals were re-classified, either at their own behest or by official decree. Myriad complicated sagas of hidden relationships across "color lines," of corrupt officials and bribery, of "passing" and exposure—these issues underscore the social construction of race, both in terms of delineating categories and in terms of assigning social meaning to those categories. Yet few social scientists have thus far explored what this seamy underside of apartheid's neat schema meant for individuals, or how South Africans conceptualized or responded to the dilemmas posed by a messy reality. We know little that is not anecdotal or fictionalized about how people "passed" in more privileged racial categories, or, sometimes, rejected the possibility of "passing"; conversely, we have only a few faint glimpses of how people have managed to retain pride and culture in the face of white domi-

nation—or of the compromises made along the way. Similar questions can be asked of those classified "white": In the United States, some groups of immigrants found it easier to be included as "white" than did others (Roediger 1991), but we know little of those dynamics in South Africa. How did individuals deal with the contradictions created by classification: The situation of "poor whites," for example, or the "honorary white" status granted some people who might, in a less rigid system, have been called Japanese? Colonial racial categories must be dissected in relation to concerns over sexuality, class, and control (Stoler 1995), but these issues have scarcely been touched in South African historiography (see, however, McClintock 1995). Such questions cry out for serious inquiry—not, of course, the kind of fatuous generalization offered in work like Degler's 1971 study of Brazil's much-proclaimed but never substantiated "mulatto escape hatch," but a serious investigation of how individuals living under apartheid strategized, accommodated, and resisted the categorization that determined their life chances, and the racial domination that pervaded their lives.

At the more aggregate level, there is a crying need for more serious historical investigation of the construction of group political identities across apartheid's racial categories. As Omi & Winant (1986) have shown for the United States, racial identities are often malleable, as activists mobilize new constituencies to promote a racial political project in a specific setting. South Africa offers a remarkable setting to explore the tensions and obstacles to this process. Activists have long proclaimed unity among the "non-white" majority, especially since the Black Consciousness movement emerged in the 1970s, but in fact, these claims obscure real racial tensions within the "black" population. Incorporated on very different terms into South African society, people classified African, Indian, or Colored often express deep racial prejudice against other groups. Under apartheid, few anti-racist scholars were willing to even acknowledge such sentiments, fearing to reinforce divisions. But since the first democratic election, an explosion of new claims based largely on racial identities—claims to "real" indigeneity, to protected minority status, to restitution—has underscored the persistence of these divisions. Accepting the rhetoric of nonracialism, or the democratic fiction that all citizens are individuals with equal status, could create an explosive tinderbox for South Africa; conversely, understanding the underlying dynamics of how racialized group identities are constructed and maintained may be crucial to dealing with apartheid's divisive legacies.

These issues are not simply of historic interest. Without a better sense of the dynamics of race in South Africa—the lived dynamics, that is, not simply the legal categories described so often in discussions of apartheid—we have no way to conceptualize potential changes in the future. For now, we have no real sense of how racial patterns might change in the post-apartheid era, or how

best reformers might seek to change them. In less than ten years, for example, a black elite has emerged in South Africa, staffing the top levels of the civil service and taking seats in corporate boardrooms; but we know little about the character of their interactions with white subordinates, or the extent to which racial hierarchies really change. How will white civil servants work with new black politicians? How will white South African mining managers respond to the new political context, as they restructure the mining process in the context of democratization and downsizing?

As yet, there are no studies of the impact of national affirmative action policies on racial hierarchies; we have only preliminary studies of persistent racial discrimination in hiring, training and promotion. Similarly, the remarkably complicated processes of South African school desegregation cry out for research: How do teachers raised under apartheid—and often deeply implicated in the racial thinking so prevalent in South African societies—deal with the problems of integration, when students come from wildly different backgrounds, different cultures, different languages? To what extent, and how, can universities challenge the racial hierarchies of skills and accreditation that have so long marked even the most liberal white institutions, when faculty remain committed to retaining “standards” developed under apartheid? These kinds of questions cry out for comparative studies. South Africa is hardly the first country to experience decolonization, or even to attempt redress for racial dispossession and discrimination in the context of consolidating a new democracy. Other experiences may well suggest new perspectives, new approaches to the challenges of confronting apartheid’s multiple legacies.

But while comparisons are inevitable, they would be most useful if they employed a true comparative metric. South African scholars have moved away from the presumption that their society is unique, but they remain relatively eclectic in their approach to other cases. Throughout the democratic transition, academics and policy-makers have drawn selectively on examples from around the world, using comparisons to bolster an argument rather than to explore seriously the similarities and differences across cases. To help shed new light on South Africa, comparative studies will have to beware the danger of superficial comparisons that may obscure more than they illuminate.

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