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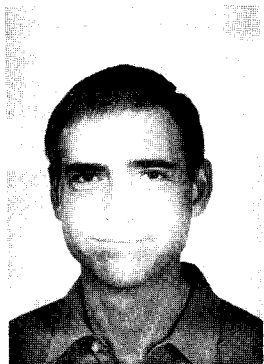
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The Forgotten Conflict in Guinea-Bissau



Historical Research in South Africa



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History has been used extensively in South Africa, both as an instrument for legitimising English and Afrikaner dominance and as a tool in the liberation struggle.

Research in the contemporary history of South Africa reflects the deep conflicts in this country. As a result of unequal access to education, the historiographical tradition is characterised by the almost total absence of black historians and the education and communication of history at university level has been distinguished by the liberal tradition's long-standing predominance. During the last 30 years of apartheid, this situation was however challenged by a new radical, Marxist inspired writing of history.

Numerous attempts have been made to isolate and characterise basic elements in the specific South African social order during apartheid. From the beginning of the 1970s, these attempts took the shape of an academic discussion, mainly about connections between the political dominance by the white population group through segregation and apartheid, and developments in South Africa's economy. The discussants split into two principal camps; the liberal school and the radical-revisionist school. Historians both inside and outside South Africa had a considerable role in this scholarly debate, which, due to the emergence of milieus of exiled researchers, quickly acquired a strongly interna-

tional profile. Both the conventional English-liberal historians and the revisionists tried to reconstruct a historical reality with relevance to contemporary problems. Both schools have used a practice, where the past is comprehended in the light of the present and the present is altered on the basis of historical knowledge. The urgent problems of late apartheid raised the need for the detection of correlations in the reality of history. This coherence has made the research debate around South Africa's history very committed and usable.

Liberals and revisionists

Roughly simplified, it has been the liberal stance that apartheid injured the free potentialities of modern capitalism in South Africa and that it has thereby limited both economic growth and political freedom. From the beginning of this century the liberals built their expectations for a colour-blind future on the economic evolution. Their logic was as follows: The growth of the manufacturing industry would create a need for skilled manpower. The limited size of the white workforce would necessitate the training of a larger part of the black workers. The migrant labour system would not be able to fulfil this requirement, and a growing part of the Africans were bound to be allowed permanent settlement in the cities. They also had to be given some education, a certain level of social security and possibly even some political rights. The new manufacturing industry would blossom in an expanding domestic market and this would call for all South Africans to be admitted and integrated into the society, not just as workers, but also as consumers. Accordingly, South Africa would work herself out of racism's obsolete patterns within a comparatively short space of time. Most liberal historians always believed that apartheid was an economically dysfunctional product of outdated ethnic and ideological factors; race

prejudice coupled with derailed Calvinism and Afrikaner nationalism. Economic class interests seldom entered into their causal explanations.

The position of the radical school on the other hand has basically been that the race system was beneficial to the ruling class, Afrikaans and English speaking capitalists, and that it operated with economic functionality and with political rationality over a long period of time. The high economic growth rates, which characterised South Africa during the 1960s, occurred simultaneously and in close interaction with a rigorous and all-embracing implementation of the race segregation policy, straight from a perfection of *petty apartheid* in its most humiliating forms to *grand apartheid's* bantustan policy and the forced removal of three million people to segregated settlements. Against this background a new generation of young exiled academics evolved in opposition to the pragmatic liberal tradition. They developed an explanatory model for the recognisable concordance between the exclusive race system and the high grade of economic vitality.

The radical school saw apartheid as a rational policy, whose purpose it was to block black social ascent. By keeping the educational level for blacks down, by deterring them from pursuing their interests on the labour market, and by precluding them from accumulation of capital, the system was able to consolidate the recruitment, distribution and reproduction of very inexpensive manpower. The basis of white South Africa's economic prosperity was precisely the cheap labour system with its mechanisms of overexploitation. The race system and economic growth depended on and supported each other. They were not incompatible components. On the contrary, they were inseparable and reinforced one another interdependently. Race oppression had been a condition for rapid growth and white economic prosperity simultaneously strengthened white supremacy.

The radicals revealed migrant work as the key to the development of the cheap labour system in South Africa. By taking advantage of reserves, bantustans and neighbouring

countries, capital exploited the pre-capitalist societies in southern Africa in a kind of internal colonialism.

Research during the last 30 years clearly shows that the relation between economics and the race system was neither as simple, nor as static over time, as the radical historians imagined. The official liberal viewpoint, that economic growth has always been hampered by race segregation may on the other hand be regarded as disproved by the highly qualified research of the radical historians. Development in recent years can undeniably be interpreted as if the liberal argumentation has proved itself in the long run as the historical truth: That the consideration of economic growth finally forced the South African society to end white race hegemony. On the other hand some radical truths are still standing: In spite of economic growth the system did not bring better living conditions to the black majority over long periods of time and black political protest has presumably been the most important single reason for the turn to democracy.

History and development

To make a statement of affairs on the writing of history in South Africa, which in a way is what this research is about, also calls for some reflections on possible research methodologies. For instance, periodisation confronts the historiographer with the question of how to describe and conceptualise the process of alteration and the changes inside the milieu of history research. The experience with the project also points in the direction that it is possible to raise constructive questions by combining methods and thoughts from history and development research: How close is the connection between level of development and authoritarian rule? On which level of development can economic growth be promoted via respectively state intervention or liberalisation? Could forced social stability be necessary for growth under particular conditions and at which stage could popular social demands further productivity and competitive capacity? When does government by the people respectively strengthen or weaken the state? Is the researcher obliged to think out

possible alternative historical models of development, if he insists on condemning a historical course of events?

The research discussion around South Africa's model of development is clearly interdisciplinary and represents some of the best examples on genuine integration between social science and the humanities. Anthropologists, development researchers, economists, sociologists, professional politicians, theologians and political activists have participated in this debate with equally great enthusiasm and in practice it is difficult to isolate historians as having a certain, clearly defined role.

Nevertheless, my research will focus on the historians' scholarly contributions to the research debate. To what extent have historians been seeing race prejudices and racist attitudes, as the decisive factor for the institutionalisation and legalisation of racial discrimination? To what extent have they considered economic control as the main reason for the apartheid system? In what way have they justified their viewpoints as historians? How have their ideas been used to assault or defend the established order and what influence did they have on politics? Why did the South African historians write as they did, and how do the ideas of history of the 1970s and the 1980s generation of historians differ from those of previous and later generations? These are some of the questions this investigation takes as its starting point. It will be the aim of my research to uncover the major positions in the dispute between the historians, to explore the prerequisites and the course of this debate, and to clarify to what extent the

paradigms have been respectively converging or inconsistent. It is, however, the hope that the investigation will also further a wider insight into the nature of the apartheid society as it developed and, despite its official liquidation, to some extent still operates.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the historiographical debate seems to be decreasing. Converging tendencies can be traced and the classification of historians into ideological boxes appears artificial and random. Some of the most recent participants in the debate even consider that the controversy is no longer a controversy and that the discussion has rendered itself superfluous. The point of reference for my project is that the debate on ideas is far from concluded, but will, in spite of inclinations to new kinds of harmony, continue to stimulate dialectics and dynamics inside South African historical research and encourage interaction with the surrounding society.

The relationship between South Africa's social, race related policies and the economic development of the country has a future as a cardinal area of interest for historians, who accentuate interchange between the past and the present. The historical debate on the connections between apartheid and capitalism are clearly relevant during the elaboration of strategies for economic growth and the distribution of wealth in a post-apartheid situation. The ability of the free market economy to give rise to improved social conditions across colour bars could prove decisive to its future in South Africa within a reasonably short space of time. ■