

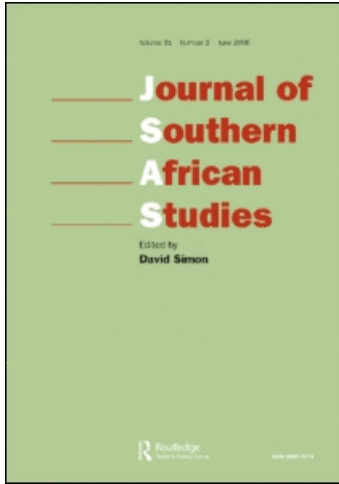
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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

African Leaders, Past, Present – and Future?

Elleke Boehmer, *Nelson Mandela: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), 204 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-280301-6

Peter Limb, *Nelson Mandela: A Biography* (Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 2008), xvi + 144 pp., ISBN 978-0-313-34035-2

Peter Limb's short biography is ostensibly directed at high school students but it contains rewards for more specialised readers. Official archival sources have helped him supply insights into Mandela's father's career as well as the reasons for the Thembu regent's willingness to accept Mandela into his household. Limb suggests that A.B. Xuma, the ANC president, was another important early patron and his explanation of Xuma's motives in initially supporting the Youth League is also insightful. The material on Mandela's subsequent political role is less original, and Limb is perhaps a little too ready to endorse Mandela's 'amazing organizing abilities' (p. 45). An interview with Govan Mbeki adds a fresh claim to the question of who helped Mandela write his speech at the Rivonia trial. The research for the later period was evidently rushed. There are, however, slip-ups in chronology. For example, Winnie Mandela's Brandfort exile is attributed to the years before the Soweto uprising rather than afterwards. A more important error is the claim that Mandela sanctioned the launching of Operation Vula, the secret ANC campaign for internal armed resistance initiated in the 1980s. He was in prison at the time so this is most unlikely, although he may have approved the undertaking retrospectively after his release. Mandela certainly did not agree 'to replace the RDP with GEAR after pressure from ANC conservatives' (p. 113). In general though, Limb's text is a useful introduction to Mandela's life and times. The treatment is straightforwardly chronological, and though Limb raises important general questions at the beginning of his book he leaves it to the readers to answer them. This is a pity because a brief closing reference to the 'dynamic tension' (p. 25) in Mandela's life suggests that given more space Limb would offer useful argumentative insights.

By contrast a richly layered analytical treatment is offered in Elleke Boehmer's contribution to the Oxford University Press's Very Short Introduction series. Why should Mandela's story be important to us today? How is it that he has achieved such an iconic status worldwide? Boehmer's answers to these questions are very persuasive. For a start, Mandela's political triumph coincided with the international consolidation of 'the celebrity culture that marks the new millennium, with its focus on the individual as maker of their destiny' (p. 2). Mandela's ascendancy within this cultural setting is a consequence of his 'remarkably networked' (p. 9) life and the availability of so many different 'readings' of his 'project', readings that 'draw out the different domains of his appeal' (p. 13). Mandela lived his life in a way that yielded a rich harvest of 'form giving images', Boehmer suggests, that readily lent themselves to symbols and metaphor. This achievement was deliberate and self-conscious, as well as the more involuntary product or a rich array of intellectual and particularly literary influences that Mandela encountered in his own 'quest for modernity' (p. 12). Indeed, Boehmer maintains, Mandela's most lasting political legacy in South Africa may be the 'interleaving of African tradition with colonial modernity' and the fashioning of a national identity celebrates black South Africa's 'engagement with world history' (p. 180). As a 'breathtaking' performer and manipulator of images (p. 124), Mandela was able to 'manage different social registers' (p. 115) and bind together an increasingly diverse movement, first within and later outside South Africa. This he did through the enactment or scripting of a life that could embody 'theory in practice' (p. 13). Boehmer provides just enough biographical detail to show why Mandela was unusually well equipped to perform this role, agreeing with earlier biographers on the importance of his relatively sheltered upbringing as well as the role of disciplined institutions in shaping his personality.

Boehmer warns against the tendency of biographers to encapsulate Mandela's life within the Bunyanesque narratives of redemptive pilgrimage that have been such an important trajectory in the portrayal of Africa's public heroes. Her own text 'attempts to refrain from enshrining Mandela as exemplary' (p. 8). She is critical (if sympathetically so) of his relationships with women and of his 'formulaic' public speaking (p. 71), and she is attentive to the moral ambiguities that arise from his 'particular talent to appear to different audiences in a range of convincing guises' (p. 172). Even so, in her final substantive chapter, her depiction of his 'internalization of the rigours of prison life' represents a 'Victorian epic of self mastery' (p. 157). The particular prison environment Mandela experienced 'allowed these intellectually disciplined, politically experienced men to ponder political problems and processes in detail and from every available angle for years' (p. 159). Among these men, Mandela was exceptional, she confirms, in his development of 'rules of engagement' with his opponents, rules that ultimately profoundly re-shaped his nation. Boehmer's book, is exceptional too, both in its methodology and its success in illuminating the cultural sources of Mandela's power.

TOM LODGE © 2008

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Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2007), 650 pp., R225.00, ISBN 978-1-86842-101-5

A 'hedgehog', a 'bat', 'a fish in the stream of history', a 'quick weasel', a 'lounge-lizard': in Mark Gevisser's long and fascinating biography of Thabo Mbeki, the author's fervent desire to understand comes up against his subject's legendary inscrutability, producing an almost unstoppable array of metaphors. Quite apart from all the supposedly analogous small, secretive animals, over the course of 800 pages we also see Mbeki described as a 'seducer', political and otherwise, a 'National Interferer', a 'polished gem' (as opposed to the rough diamond Jacob Zuma), a 'Sussex Man', a 'Moscow Man', a 'modern-day Coriolanus' and a 'black Englishman in tweeds', as well as a perfectionist who in all his briefings, memos and position papers never so much as split an infinitive (the author has checked). Eight years in the making, involving over 200 interviews and six one-on-one sessions with the President himself, the structure of the book 'is that of [Gevisser's] journey through the landscape of contemporary South Africa and the places of Mbeki's exile' (p. xii). We begin in the Eastern Cape at Mbewuleni, his birthplace, where the author is guided around by Mbeki's mother Epainette and later by Olive Mpahlwa, the mother of his son Kwanda, who disappeared almost without trace in the 1980s. We visit the site of Govan Mbeki's trading store, 'the much-mythologised locus' of his son's coming to political consciousness. Thabo Mbeki worked here from the time he could walk, becoming the letter reader and writer for all the illiterate adults in his community. Drawn into the most intimate affairs of broken families, he was, in the words of his father, 'hearing about things at an age when [he] should not have been' (p. 62).

After this we move to Queenstown, the 'Little Jazz Town', where Mbeki lived with his uncle next door to the Matshikiza family and learned to play the piano, a musical education which would benefit him when he came to establish links with the exiled jazz musicians in London. We are given a portrait of Lovedale, the 'African Eton', at just the moment when its traditions were being dismantled by the Afrikaner Nationalists, and from which Mbeki, like many an ANC leader-in-waiting, was expelled after a student protest. We briefly visit the 'Fringe Country' of Johannesburg in the early 1960s where Gevisser quotes Lewis Nkosi's famous description of the jazz that provided a soundtrack to this hastily improvised city: 'a music which has its roots in a life of insecurity, in which a single moment of self-realisation, of love, light and movement, is extraordinarily more important than a whole lifetime'.¹ But if the jazzman's definition of exile is a surrender to the present moment, the author writes perceptively,

1 L. Nkosi, 'Jazz in Exile' [1966], rep. in *Home and Exile and other Selections* (London, Longman, 1983), p. 88.

the other is that of the revolutionary, 'for whom the future is all there is' (p. 252). Maps at the beginning of the book chart the bewildering course of Mbeki's journey out of South Africa, his peripatetic years of workaholic in Botswana and Dar es Salaam, at Sussex University, in London, Moscow, Lusaka and Lagos.

At first disappointed that the ANC had decided not to send him to Oxford, Mbeki quickly established himself as a bona fide revolutionary amongst the Marxist talking shops of the new, reputedly left-wing University of Sussex. In June 1964, he led a march from Brighton to London in an attempt to stave off the death penalty facing his father during the Rivonia Trial. The tale of the two Mbekis is deftly handled, and if Thabo's relationship with Govan was always distant as a result of their political commitments, Gevisser speculates that, as a protégé of Oliver Tambo, the son gained a new father more intimate and venerated than most, precisely because of their lack of biological connection. In the exploration of the ANC leadership as a surrogate, political family, we are given a psychologically acute portrait of Mbeki as a man driven less by personal ambition than the high expectations that have always surrounded him.

Nonetheless, anecdotes and photographs bring out his infectious charm (he was, as Rian Malan admits in his review for *Empire*, a very sexy man) and booze-fuelled affability, albeit laced with an ever-present edge of paranoia. While living in Brighton, he and his adoring housemates adopted as their local a pub named the Star of Brunswick, where Mbeki established a particular ritual: 'as soon as he entered the pub he'd light his pipe. This was the landlord's cue to get him his pint, which had to be placed in front of him before the match went out. He would then drop the burnt match into his pint, and so knew which his glass was' (p. 194).

The metaphorical flourish, the close attention to language, the fondness for anecdote and the often moving pilgrimages and evocations of place – all suggest that, despite its political subject matter, this is in many ways a distinctly literary biography. Gevisser acknowledges Hermione Lee's work on Virginia Woolf as a primary inspiration in crafting a life in writing (defined by Woolf in 1917 as 'the record of the things that change rather than of the things that happen', p. xxi) while his title is taken from a poem by Langston Hughes: 'What happens to a dream deferred?', p. xxxi). It is only one of many literary fragments and quoted refrains that propel this sprawling, intensely researched work, replacing the crude brushstrokes of the press with a nuanced portrait of a man who all remember as a voracious reader and indefatigable drafter. It was Mbeki, we learn, who wrote the majority of Tambo's speeches, as well as the remarkable passage in Mandela's inauguration address which quoted 'The Child' by the Afrikaans poet Ingrid Jonker.

'What happens to a dream deferred?' – Mbeki put Hughes's question to Parliament in 1998 when addressing the crisis of expectation amongst the millions of South Africans who had awaited liberation so long. Ten years later it seems only to have grown in urgency, and in the wake of the recent succession battle with the populist Zuma, it is intriguing to read of Mbeki's identification with Shakespeare's most unappealing tragic hero. As a young man studying *Coriolanus* at Moscow's Lenin Institute in the late 1960s, Mbeki explained to correspondents in Sussex that here was not a cold tyrant but rather a prototype for the twentieth-century revolutionary, a man prepared to go against the mob, and unwilling to take part in the 'heroic' performance of the returning conqueror (p. 284).

To Gevisser, Mbeki explained the reading of a Soviet critic at the Institute which had profoundly affected him: the reason that Shakespearean heroes always die is not due to some outdated notion of a fatal flaw, but rather because through them the playwright illuminated the imperfections and backwardness of a society not yet ready for a visionary. The Roman general's dogged insistence that 'I play the man I am' underwrites an exploration of Mbeki's unflagging and often angry assertion of African self-determination as President, his refusal to 'spin' the media or to compromise on positions that he believed were principled.

But of course there is another, more troubling implication hovering around these words, the idea that all notions of identity (and not only political ones) are a form of surface play; that a sense of self is something perpetually staged rather than internalised. This has always been the real enigma surrounding Mbeki, a man who, in the words of one friend, sometimes seemed to show a lack of a core. Who or what is the president, really – as journalists have been asking for close on a decade – and is there anything behind the political persona?

Into this vacuum Gevisser pours a wealth of detail drawn from this far-flung and intensely busy life, and it is to his credit that he approaches Mbeki's perceived aloofness and absence not as a given, static quality. Instead he recognises it as a strategic tool, evidence of a canny political intelligence that was forced to make the best of available materials in many different locations across the world, to reconcile schisms between hawks and doves within the ANC, and to keep opposite sides talking at all costs. In the hands of a lesser biographer, we might be given only a string of ideological contradictions or a mounting series of paradoxes. Here, the archival detail is used to evoke the particular, human texture of the Struggle, its characters, its opportunism and its peculiar quality of having to keep one foot in Moscow and one in the West, operating from various locations through Africa all the while.

The sheer range of Mbeki's experience in exile is remarkable: mid-interview, he falls into a silent reverie on thinking back to his time in Lagos, and his difficulty in mediating between the Nigerian government and the 'Black President' Fela Kuti, who satirised the government mercilessly while inviting the ANC leadership to attend a psychedelic extravaganza at his Afrika Shrine nightclub. 'Thabo Mbeki opened his eyes again and found himself back in his official presidential residence in August 2000, before him not a musician in underpants holding a saxophone but a biographer in a suit holding a tape recorder' (p. 374). We also learn that the game of Monopoly was a firm favourite with both Thabo in Sussex and Govan on Robben Island; that the young revolutionary was married in a twelfth-century Surrey castle built by the grandson of William the Conqueror; that it was Fidel Castro who stressed the importance of marketing and trademarks when he explained how he might have won freedom for his country; and it is blackly comic to learn that, for all the renditions of *Mshini wam!* which drowned out the President's supporters at the recent ANC conference, it was the urbane Mbeki who taught Jacob Zuma how to use a firearm while recruiting members undercover in Swaziland – 'what it is', Zuma recalls, 'the theory of it, the dismantling of it, all the rules of it' (p. 345).

Perhaps inevitably, towards the end of the book there comes a sense of events being compressed and telescoped as one approaches the present; no doubt there was considerable pressure to bring this huge undertaking to a close before Mbeki was replaced as ANC leader. Readers intent on deciphering contemporary South African politics will no doubt turn to these pages, but here the rich detail of the literary biography subsides. Saxophones are replaced by suits, the anecdotes and insider explanations dry up, while the author's brave attempts to depict crises such as the arms deal, AIDS policy and Zimbabwe's meltdown, from all available angles, means that the biographical arc disappears beneath a welter of competing narratives.

The tortuous progress of the negotiated settlement, the 'battle for the soul of the ANC', the widening rift between Mbeki-ites and 'ultra-leftists' – all this is ground that has been covered by others, such as Allister Sparks, William Gumede and the political correspondents of the *Mail & Guardian*. At such close proximity to the events, it is difficult to imagine how such convoluted blow-by-blow processes could be written up in anything other than a journalistic idiom. In addition, Gevisser's intuition that Mbeki finally 'came home', after years of psychic disconnection at some point in 2004, while on the campaign trail for re-election, is difficult to share considering the embattled situations that the President has found himself in since then.

Yet for all the political uncertainty, this book does reach a powerful, authentic moment of closure in the depiction of Govan Mbeki's funeral in September 2001. The father's wish that he be buried in Zwide, one of the poorest townships surrounding Port Elizabeth, is described by some in the movement as 'Oom Gov's last revenge', an occasion which was to 'force all the apparatus of state into a direct encounter with the poverty of the township and thus compel the new black elite of which his son was part to look it in the eye' (p. 768). Like many of the other journeys in the present day that structure the biography, it provides the setting for a complex meditation on how one of the twentieth century's great liberation movements has changed, and how, even in its political heartlands, so much has remained the same. With his usual ear for the songs and slogans of political rallies, Jeremy Cronin recalls certain elements of the crowd voicing their dissatisfaction with the President:

Thabo, we went and fetched you from the bush,

We brought you back, we elected you.

Look at the mess you are making. (p. 771)

As the convoy of luxury German vehicles rolls away 'through a tight human avenue of very poor people', one man with a bottle of water and a loaf of bread shouts 'I've got my after tears' at the dignitaries. The 'after tears' referred to the wake that, 'in the ever spiralling urban South African confluence of conspicuous consumption and AIDS inflicted early death, has become increasingly ostentatious' (p. 772). As well as a rebuke to the powerful, the old man's words are interpreted as a trenchant comment on how little, really, is needed to celebrate the life of a great man. This may well be true, but at the same time this massive work of scholarship reveals how much needs to be done, particularly in a South African context, when writers seek to move beyond their own cultural background, to bring what is found back with them, and to place it in the public domain. Gevisser confesses early on that political biography was a means of understanding his own place in a changed society, and it is this openness – the sense of a journey undergone by the writer as well as the subject – which allows the particularly sensitive account of the relation between the public and the personal.

Gevisser acknowledges the frustration and resistance encountered in the long project of writing about Mbeki, but also shows a profound understanding of his subject's political impersonality, of what it meant to sublimate large parts of one's self for the cause. In his famous 'I am an African' speech of 8 May 1996, Mbeki claimed descent not only from a lineage of African heroes, but also from 'the migrants who left Europe', 'the blood of Malay slaves who came from the East' and the 'grandchild who lays fresh flowers on the Boer graves at St Helena and the Bahamas'.² For his biographer, it was the apotheosis of a politics which involved not an absence of identity, but rather an extreme dispersal of it, a painful dismantling and reconstitution of the self in a moment which, like this remarkable work, seeks to do justice to all the diverse historical processes and personages which have made modern South Africa.

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Anthony Butler, *Cyril Ramaphosa* (Johannesburg, Jacana, 2007 and Oxford, James Currey, 2008), vii + 442 pp., ISBN 978-1-77009-370-6 and 978-1-84701-315-6

Anthony Butler has produced a thorough, intelligent and useful life of Ramaphosa, packed with observations and opinions from a remarkable range of informants. This book represents a lot of work. Despite its length, it's a lively read. A couple of decades from now, Ramaphosa may write his own autobiography, but Butler's study will remain the authoritative source for many years. Depending on the outcome of the current turmoil in the ANC, it will be more or less widely read, but it deserves a large audience because Ramaphosa has been so much at the centre of events in South Africa from the early 1970s until the present day.

This is not a perfect book. In terms of the areas I know best, Butler has not consulted the considerable literature on black theology and its relationship to the black consciousness movement. Moreover, his account of the 1987 strike, shrewd as is his overall assessment, contains some factual errors. These, however, are minor flaws in a rich tapestry of overlapping interviews that he skilfully weaves together into a story of Ramaphosa's times, which are, of course, the times that many of his readers have also lived through.

Memory is inevitably both a strength and a weakness of contemporary history, especially when there is little documentary evidence available. To his credit, Butler tries not to tinker with oral testimony. Instead, where there are alternative interpretations in his sources he lays them out artfully, drawing his reader into the complexity of the actors' own debates. This interpretive strategy makes the book longer but also stronger. Butler's insistence on naming his sources also increases the scholarly

2 Statement of Deputy President T. M. Mbeki, on behalf of the African National Congress, on the occasion of the adoption by the Constitutional Assembly of 'the Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill 1996' (Cape Town, 8 May 1996). Available at <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/1996/sp960508.html>.

value of the book. Again and again, I found myself thinking, 'that sounds like so-and-so' or 'I wonder who said that?' It was wonderful to turn to the back and discover the answer.

Most surprising to me was the enormous importance of evangelical religion in Ramaphosa's background. There are hints of this in Chikane's autobiography but they convey nothing of the organisational genius of this zealous young man, organising his peers and sending them out on weekend pastoral missions into the country villages to proselytise. My theological student friends and I used to joke that one could always tell a Methodist atheist from a Calvinist one. The point was that even when one's faith disappeared, a certain personal style remained. That is, I think, the importance of Ramaphosa's early religious endeavours. They set his character.

Because Butler is so careful not to tie all the loose ends of Ramaphosa's life together, the man himself does not emerge as a whole in this book. This is both a strength (since the author does not impose an interpretation on the reader) and a weakness in writing biography. In the final chapter, Butler makes an effort to sketch his character, but Ramaphosa as a person is not revealed in the events themselves. One is left to draw one's own conclusions about Ramaphosa's sense of himself. He is a 'visionary pragmatist', but what is his vision? Let me conclude this review by drawing out two strands – one about Ramaphosa's character and one about his leadership style – that stem from his early religious years and remain, I think, throughout his career.

First, for all the chimerical quality of Ramaphosa's presentation of self, I think his life shows a powerful sense of 'calling'. This is manifested in the deepest roots of his character – his capacity for hard work, his attention to detail, his self-control and his occasional bursts of anger when his deepest commitments are slighted. What though is the content of this sense of calling? Clearly, evangelical Christianity has long since gone from his repertoire. What remains, I think, is a deep commitment to respect for human dignity, especially the dignity of black South Africans. But he recognises others with integrity as well, and they respond to his recognition of them. He is a brilliant negotiator because he is able to see things from the vantage point of his antagonists and he respects them. If they cheat on him, however, he scathes them.

The second strand I see throughout Ramaphosa's life is closely related to the first. This is a style of leadership that, following Michel Foucault, I call 'pastoral'. It goes with a sense of calling, especially if one feels called to lead others out of the wilderness. As shepherd, Foucault writes, the Christian pastor 'must be informed as to the material needs of each member of the flock and provide for them when necessary. He must know what is going on, what each of them does . . . Last but not least, he must know what goes on in the soul of each one'.³ Foucault implies that such a style of leadership can be both suffocating and manipulative, and I think this is what people mean when they describe Ramaphosa as 'both arrogant and humble' (p. 390). He tries to lead by serving the needs of his constituency. Pastoral power for Ramaphosa involves institution-building – hence his insistent constitution-writing. As a leader he wants to structure lives so that they retain dignity and autonomy.

Such commitments may seem condescending and controlling, but that is precisely the charge that is often made against Ramaphosa. This man is genuinely humble; however, humble in the sense that he is a leader who sees himself as a servant, one who serves a calling greater than himself. That is why he is able to pick up the pieces and go on after defeats. While he tries to exercise power responsibly, however, he also likes to be in charge. His person is so tied up with his calling that defeats – and he has had his fair share of them – take on existential (almost transcendental) meaning for him.

Butler ends his penultimate chapter with the question: 'Does Ramaphosa want the job of President of South Africa?' If my reading is correct then the answer is simple. If he is called, he will serve. I agree with Butler, that, on the evidence of this book, if that happens, South Africa will be the better for it. Whether the call comes is, of course, another matter.

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3 J. Faubion (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Power, Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 3* (New York, New Press, 1997), pp. 309–10.

Race in South Africa Revisited

Michael MacDonald, *Why Race Matters in South Africa* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2006)

Ten years after the triumph of the African National Congress and the drafting of a democratic constitution in South Africa, it might seem odd to write a book entitled *Why Race Matters in South Africa*. For most people, the words 'race' and 'South Africa' are inextricably intertwined. You cannot talk about one without talking of the other. The ANC, however, is committed to an ideology of 'non-racialism', and in post-apartheid South Africa public discourse is often hamstrung by an inability to speak about what sometimes seems the most obvious fact of life in that land: race. (The locution 'Historically Disadvantaged Person' to describe individuals who used to be classified as 'Black', or 'Bantu', or 'Native', is but one example.) Michael MacDonald's book is a welcome attempt to tease out the various meanings attributed to conceptions of 'race', to figure out how they are put to work in day-to-day tussles of politics in the democratic state, and to examine the political implications of different conceptualisations. It is also a welcome addition to the large literature on race in South African life.

The book is strongest in its anatomising of the various ideological components of identity politics emerging from the struggle against apartheid and informing political life in the post-apartheid era. MacDonald's discussion of the political thought of Steve Biko and Neville Alexander is superb, as is his teasing out the history of the various strands of thinking informing the ANC's doctrine of 'non-racialism'. The discussion of the relations between political economy and ideology in the era of 'Black Economic Empowerment' is also excellent.

Where I part company with MacDonald is in his interpretation of the history of the South African state. MacDonald's argument is primarily focused on the place of conceptions of 'race' in doctrines of citizenship within a 'white supremacist' state. Yet it seems to me that, historically speaking, doctrines of citizenship are products in, large part, of notions and legal formations of sovereignty. What eventually became understood as a 'racial' division of citizenship within the South African state, as it was conceived in the decade after the South African War, was a product of the construction of a divided sovereignty recognising 'Native' sovereignty over distinct 'tribal' territories. The structure of this divided sovereignty and citizenship remained intact for most of the twentieth century, although the ways in which it was interpreted and legitimated ideologically changed significantly in mid-century with the advent of Afrikaner nationalism.

MacDonald provides a generally excellent analysis of the ideological frameworks within which Afrikaner nationalists and their opponents worked. It is a mistake, however, to conceive of the history of the South African state as a singular process of national state formation. There were at least three distinct domains of rule, with related but distinct implications for state formation: a quasi-imperial system governing the remnants of African polities in the 'Reserves/Homelands' system of labour servitude on the farms and mines; and an archipelago of city states with varying regimes that became somewhat unified in the later stages of apartheid. The struggle of the post-apartheid regime is one of attempting to create a national state, democratic and non-racial, out of the legacies of these histories. In my view, speaking of 'white supremacy' within a national state occludes the dynamics underpinning these histories.

The history of racial politics and theorising that forms the core of this book was a product of the anomalous business of governing Africans in urban areas where they could be recognised neither as subjects of 'Native tribes' (although the authorities did their damndest to try to impose this) nor as citizens of cities and the state. A type of elite urban African experience became dominant in late apartheid and constitutes a sort of ruling culture in the post-apartheid era. It is in this domain that the sorts of issues dealt with in this book are salient. But there is much more to South African life that can be slotted into current debates about democracy and identity.

In the post-apartheid era, for example, two aspects of the history of rule pose critical challenges to the democratic state. The first concerns regulating aspects of African life that historically have been left under the purview of what are now known as 'traditional authorities' – such as African family law, or 'traditional healing' and the domain of action relating to what I call 'spiritual insecurity', particularly as

it relates to matters of witchcraft. The second concerns those aspects of African life, particularly as it has emerged from a century of urban experience, that have always evaded state regulation – such as sexuality and reproduction, or the consumption of alcohol. Neither of these sets of challenges can be adequately comprehended in terms of conceptions of identity or debates about multiculturalism, however they might be configured, although they are certainly being shaped by the politics of ‘race’. They are challenges for the present regime precisely because they cannot be adequately framed in the available discourses of contemporary politics.

Why Race Matters is, nonetheless, an important intervention in debates within the world of political theory over democracy and cultural difference.

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