

# ***Introduction***

## **Race in Southern Africa**

**M. W. Murphree**

The objective in the organization of this particular series of lectures, given at the University of Rhodesia's Vacation School in 1972, was to provide a comparative perspective on the different formally sanctioned policies regarding race relations to be found in various representative political units in Southern Africa. To this end several eminently qualified speakers were invited to the School, and the University was fortunate in obtaining the services of Professor S. B. Ngcobo, currently of Lesotho, Professor N. J. J. Olivier of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. J. L. R. Torres of Moçambique and Senator W. R. Whaley of Rhodesia to speak on the policies of their respective countries. It had been hoped also to obtain the services of an eminent scholar from Malagasy to provide a perspective from a Francophone area in Southern Africa, but this attempt was in the event frustrated by the repercussions that this participation would have had on the career of the man in question, a fact which is in itself an oblique commentary on the importance at a personal level of the subject of this volume to the people who live in Southern Africa. In addition to the guest speakers mentioned, a number of lectures were presented by members of the staff of the University, and some of these are included in this volume because of the apposite nature of their contents to the comparative perspective involved.

Certain points should be taken into consideration in the reading of these articles.

Firstly, it should be borne in mind that the authors do not necessarily personally represent the policies and perspectives that they present; the lecture series was an exercise in academic analysis and the writers are to be personally identified only with those value judgements which they specifically espouse in what they write. Secondly, it should be remembered that in their original form these articles were delivered as lectures to an academically 'lay' audience which could not be presumed to have any specialist background in history or the social sciences. Thus the lecturers had to deliver their material at a relatively broad level of generalization which did not permit an in-depth analysis from their own disciplinary specialities. Finally, the lectures on which these articles are based are now well over two years old, and the reader has the benefit of knowledge of more recent events which the writers could not at the time have predicted with accuracy. This gives the advantage of allowing us to test what was said in 1972 against the measure of subsequent developments; additional data is now available for analysis and we can perhaps improve on the understanding that our authors provided over two years ago. On balance, however, the conceptual tools that they used, and the conclusions that they drew, stand the test of our subsequent knowledge remarkably well. The comparative approach taken by the series, covering as it does most of the contemporary alternatives available for race relations policy in racially heterogeneous states,

has in this instance provided a good base for the study of the subject as subsequent events have shown. In the 'slippery' arena of social science data, where a plethora of variables confront us in bewildering profusion, the comparative method still remains perhaps our best, albeit imprecise, tool for giving insight into the complex dynamics which motivate and inform our societies.

This is not the place to give a detailed summary of the points of analysis put forward by our authors — on this the articles speak for themselves. I do wish however to point out certain factors which are common to the treatment given in each paper, variables which provide the comparative contrasts and similarities in the various societies studied. The first of these factors is the set of historical sequences which have led to the present racially heterogeneous populations of the polities under scrutiny. In each of these the sequence has varied but, as Torres points out (p. 40), they have all involved a period of colonization during which a fundamental division in society has been created between the colonizer and the colonized which has invariably placed the colonized in a subordinate position. Furthermore this division of superordinancy/subordinancy has a racial aspect in that it consistently corresponds to a segmentation that is defined in terms of racial criteria. In a passage quoted by Torres (p. 41) Kennedy states: 'The first of the universal traits of colonialism is the colour line. In every dependent territory a true caste division exists, with the resident white population separated from the native masses by a social barrier that is virtually impassable. The colour line, indeed, is the foundation of the entire colonial system, for on it is built the whole social, economic and political structure.' Even if one accepts Torres' caveats concerning the universal applicability of all of Kennedy's assertions, this statement must be taken as having a certain general validity, and the importance of the way in which the colonizer, racially defined, has historically reached his position is something which is acknowledged, either implicitly or explicitly, by all of our authors.

A second important variable is the demographic one, a factor especially emphasized by Ngcobo (p. 55). The intensity and the nature of racial conflict varies, he asserts, with the relative numerical size of the different racial

groups within a population. Any comparison between the different societies of Southern Africa must, therefore, keep this item in consideration.

Finally, there is the factor of culture, the different perspectives on man and society inculcated by the ideologies and value systems of the various parent societies of the colonizers, be they Anglo-Saxon, Iberian or Dutch in origin. Refined and modified by the historical sequences mentioned above, these various cultural traditions are held to be a critical variable which has differentiated the course of race relations in the different societies of Southern Africa. Indeed Torres makes it the most important of all his variables, and asserts that the *lebenswelt* of the Portuguese is so different from that of the British and the Afrikaners that 'it allows for contacts between White and Black to take place on a level of tolerance and equality that has never been possible in South Africa, or what was British Central and East Africa' (p. 51).

In laying such stress upon the cultural factor, Torres is in danger of obscuring what is fundamental to all racial contact situations, the fact that race relations are power relationships, that racially defined groups meet as groups representing segmental interests, in competition for the same scarce resources. A good illustration of this fact is to be found in Torres' own article, where he shows (p. 48) that in spite of ostensible egalitarianism in labour legislation in Mozambique, the non-black-dominated labour syndicates have managed to exclude large numbers of Blacks from qualifying for open competition in certain sectors of the labour market. Olivier's article illustrates the same point. The historical sequence he describes for South Africa shows (p. 24) how menial labour came to be associated with Non-Whites, a process which strengthened 'the self perceived role of the white man as an overseer and supervisor. Manual labour on the whole was regarded as being unsuitable for Whites; it brought about and reinforced a social and economic stratification in which the Whites were regarded as superior and Non-Whites as inferiors'. The racial differentiation had an economic objective, an objective implemented by the manipulation of political power. Thus Olivier states: 'As is almost inevitable in a situation where the Whites are in exclusive political control,

differentiation between White and Non-White . . . would be a matter of common occurrence, sometimes amounting to factual discrimination. In the provision of funds . . . it is to be expected that the Government of the day should first and foremost consider the interests of those people who have the power to vote them in or out of office' (p. 26).

The colonizer, racially designated by self-definition in various historical sequences, is thus in a politically and economically powerful position. He has, however, also the problem of maintaining his position in the face of increasing pressures, both internal and external. As Dixon puts it (p. 63): 'Unless their interests can be protected, the minority has no reason for existence in the Southern African environment; they will lose their individual and collective identities'.

In seeking to preserve these identities various policies have been evolved by the white superordinate minorities which are described in this volume, notably Separate Development and Multiracialism. Both have their own sets of problems. Separate Development has its economic inconsistencies, which are discussed by Olivier. Multiracialism has its own conceptual inconsistencies, perhaps best illustrated by Whaley's article, where at one point (p. 32) it is stated that, 'The belief is that the co-existence of people comprising a number of groups can only be achieved when groups and communities have the rights and the opportunities to preserve their own identities, their own traditions and their own customs', and at another (p. 32) it is stated that, 'The hope is that with the passage of time the boundaries of politico-racial cleavage may become blurred and finally eliminated.' How, one is led to ask, is the hope to be realized when legislation is shaped to reinforce the belief?

Much more damaging, however, to the viability of Multiracialism is the inherent instability of a society built upon this principle. Dixon's article, in my opinion, well substantiates this point of view.

There is left, among the alternative policies provided in Southern Africa, that of Non-Racialism, described by Ngeobo. Is it a viable alternative, or is it, as Dixon implies (p. 65) simply another guise for racial sovereignty — black racial sovereignty in this case? Perhaps only a further development of this particular historical sequence can yield an

answer. Human societies have a ubiquitous propensity to segment themselves into interest groups stratified according to differential access to rewards and to opportunities. Where such societies are comprised of more than one racial group the alignment of interest groups and that of racial groups seems almost always to be inevitable. A racial interest group in a super-ordinate position then evolves a racist ideology to buttress its position. The racial interest group in a subordinate position then evolves in response a counter-ideology leading to further conflict, as Patel describes.

In such societies there appear to be only two viable long-term alternatives. One alternative is to make such a society mono-racial. This is the kind of solution that General Amin in Uganda is moving towards. Another variant of this solution is partition or fragmentation. The other possibility is to create within the society new cross-cutting interest groups in which the racial visibility factor is less significant. There is some evidence to demonstrate that in some countries, particularly since the Second World War, this kind of approach has produced new social and political alignments in replacement of older and racial ones. R. W. Mack's study, 'Race, class, and power in Barbados' (in *Social Change in Developing Areas*, ed. H. R. Barringer *et al.*, Cambridge (Mass.), Schenkman, 1966, 131-54), indicates the emergence of certain status aggregates which cut across racial boundaries, even though they are aggregates of persons similar in income, education, occupation, religion and amount of social power. None of these was an integral part of the old status structure, but their presence is vital to explain the mechanisms of change. Because of the similarities in the life-style of members, these status aggregates are gradually becoming status groups, and as they do the emerging class structure obliterates the old meaning of race.

In citing a Barbadian case study I am of course suggesting a wider comparative study than that presented in this issue of *Zambezia*. It is a necessary one, for we must constantly see Southern Africa in a wider, global context. But to do so effectively, we must first gain an understanding of the policies that exist here, and the dynamics that have shaped them. It was towards a contribution to this understanding that this series of lectures was first designed, and is now published.

