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A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652–2002. Sampie Terreblanche. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002. 527 pp.

Sampie Terreblanche has the erudition and unique insights into both sides of the political divide in South Africa to make him an excellent choice to attempt this ambitious book. A leading South African economist, he was until 1987 a member of the ruling National Party, the party of apartheid, but later became one of their fierce critic, becoming a founding member and economic adviser of the Democratic Party, while also being involved in clandestine meetings with the ANC in the 1980s.

At one level this book is a detailed economic and political history of South Africa. At another, it is a sustained critique, from a social democratic perspective, of the entire history and contemporary significance of inequality and globalization in a South African setting. This dual approach helps explain both the length and the complex structure of the book, which consists of four parts: “Power, Land, and Labour”; “The Transition and the ‘New South Africa (1990-2002)’”; “Colonialism, Segregation, and Apartheid (1652-1994)””; and “An Incomplete Transformation: What’s To Be Done?” The book darts backwards and forwards in time. This structure, together with numerous cross-references and abbreviations, may irk some readers but accords with the author’s aim to write committed history and pose practical strategies for genuine transformation.

The book is based solely on secondary, rather than archival, sources and is intended as a broad synthesis, although Terreblanche was privy to some hidden facts on the transition period. On the “incomplete transformation” from 1994 he is adamant: enormous problems of poverty, health, land hunger, and lingering racism and exploitation remain. The question he poses is whether these challenges might have been better met by a more comprehensive, state-centered approach in the best tradition of European social democracy rather than over-reliance on building a “new black elite” wedded to neo-liberalism. In this regard, Terreblanche exposes the little-known informal meetings between white big business and ANC leaders that in the transition period allowed for a less overt economic victory of the Old Guard alongside an impressive political victory for the ANC (Terreblanche narrates this thesis in a new Canadian film, *Madiba: The Life & Times of Nelson Mandela* (CBC, 2004). Even if global trends have rendered radical options less realistic, it is a persuasive argument and one not without champions in the South African academy and even in some echelons of state power.

Terreblanche’s definition of, and elaboration on, the history of the “black elite” is at times somewhat simplistic: there is little, for example, on the complex historic ties between different black social strata. The black elite is treated as a passive end-product of entrapment by the white bourgeoisies and the new black “petit bourgeoisie” mysteriously uses trade union power (pp. 135-7). Even so, the focus on elites serves his purpose well. The more contemporary parts of the book compare favorably with other recent critiques of the status quo, such as Patrick Bond’s

Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000). Terreblanche also criticizes the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for failing to confront systemic exploitation (p. 124). Despite some controversial formulations, for example the contention that affirmative action has fed black elitism (p. 136), he is always thought provoking. His Afrikaner establishment origins and an elision of the pantheon of African nationalist history leave him open to charges from such quarters that he downplays the ANC government's very considerable achievements. Yet the evidence of a long history of inequality is there in its historical "warts and all," and for this the author must be commended.

Although the author likes to think of this as primarily a history book, it is much more an engaged dialogue between past and present. Whilst some historians may begrudge the nuances lost through the author's inattention to archival research or fashionable trends in social history, Terreblanche's focus on inequality and on historical, rather than supposedly innate, causes of poverty (pp. 42-44), together with his own background, give this book greater potential, particularly among white South African readers, for impact beyond cloistered scholarly studies. And although the author is careful to acknowledge ANC achievements, it will be interesting to see the reception accorded the book in the black elite circles he trenchantly criticizes.

Generally, the author has made a solid attempt at analyzing the work of numerous scholars across an enormous span of 350 years to achieve his task of writing a history of inequality relevant to today's South Africa. Some notable authorities, such as Charles van Onselen, are strangely absent, but most of the usual suspects are discussed together with a representative host of new generation political economists such as Bond and Julian May, as well as works in Afrikaans. In emphasizing the continuing theme of economic exploitation and disempowerment of indigenous peoples by settler capitalism, Terreblanche joins the wide river of committed anti-apartheid scholarship typified by scholars such as Martin Legassick, Shula Marks, and Bernard Magubane, but he writes more in the provocative style of recent revisionist historians, if on a more sweeping scale.

Technically the book is well produced if arranged somewhat schematically. A baker's dozen of tables add quantitative value and ease the tedium of a long text, though they cover only the last century. Numerous other statistics also are adduced. We learn, for instance, that in a country crying out for urgent state services to confront HIV-AIDS and poverty, corporate taxation declined from 27% in 1976 to only 11% in 1999: a weak fiscal base for any transformation. Some tiny typographical errors have crept into the index: "Sizulu" for Sisulu and "Moshweshe" for Moshweshwe.

The deep and justified respect for liberation heroes of the Mandela generation will persist. So too will the need to know more about the history and significance of today's burning problems. This important and intensely compassionate book will aid that understanding and deserves wide readership among historians, sociologists, economists and political scientists—and also among the young white South Africans whom the author targets to make substantial sacrifices to tackle poverty (p. 5)—indeed all interested in South Africa should read, and act upon, this book.

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