Review

*Racial Redress and Citizenship in South Africa.*
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Kevin Durrheim
durrheim@ukzn.ac.za

The single biggest challenge facing South Africa is overcoming the legacy of racial poverty and inequality. This imperative, firstly, because human dignity and social justice have always been the objectives of the struggle for liberation, and secondly, because racial inequality threatens to profoundly destabilize the society and the nation state (as Desai and Ramjettan, this volume, argue so cogently). Since coming to power, the ANC government has embarked on an extensive program of affirmative action by means of laws (e.g., employment equity, broad-based black economic empowerment, land reform) and policies (quotas for sports teams; content and language of public broadcasting) to achieve redress. In contrast to the ‘minimalist’ version of affirmative action used in the USA and many other contexts, Modisha (this volume) argues that South Africa has adopted a ‘maximalist’ version which aimed not only to change the composition of the workforce but is concerned with ‘transforming the economic system of society so that every racial group of the population is represented in all levels of economic activities’ (154). The programme of redress in South Africa has been maximalist and race based.

This book is a stock taking exercise. What has been the impact of more than a decade of profound social change and redress? This collection of essays provides an instructive series of probes into the implementation and consequences of redress in four contexts: the public service, the economy, education, and sport. Like many edited collections, the chapters are rather disparate, having different methodologies, purposes and foci, written by authors from different disciplinary backgrounds: sociology, political science, history, and law. Some chapters present statistical data of employment
demographics in the public service (Naidoo, Chipkin) and the wider workplace (Modisha); there are case studies of transformation in the mining industry (Bezuidenhout), schools (Chisholm), historically black universities (Morrow), and global football (Desai); and policy analyses focusing on the history and ideological underpinnings of racial redress (Ndletyana), Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (Sanchez), and sport (Desai and Ramjettan). Friedman and Erasmus critically review survey data (and interpretations of the data) of attitudes towards redress of black (subcategorised as ‘black African’ and ‘Indian and coloured’) and white South Africans. Bentley and Habib provide introductory and concluding chapters in which they reflect on the process of implementation and the outcomes of redress, and make proposals for transforming redress polices.

This kaleidoscopic collection of fragments and perspectives actually works quite well. It leaves the reader with thought provoking questions and a general impression of the state of things, supported by some concrete detail and a number of striking facts. For example, did you know that black Africans comprise about 73 per cent of the civil service as a whole, about 55 per cent of senior managers and 60-65 per cent of those in highly skilled categories (Naidoo)? Did you know that the biggest beneficiaries of employment equity in terms of increased representation in top management have been white females (Modisha)? Did you know that more than a quarter of workers in the mining industry are employed by outside contractors and labour brokers and some have been reported to earn as little as R700 per month (Bezuidenhout)? Did you know that ‘the number of households considered deprived of access to good basic services increased from 5.68 million to 7.24 million between the 1996 and 2001 censuses’ (Desai and Ramjettan: 309)? And did you know that today’s debates about redress and citizenship can be linked to a longstanding tension between non-racialism and Africanism in the intellectual tradition of the ANC (Ndletyana)? Certainly, this book is a little treasure trove of snippets of life in post-apartheid South Africa.

Three big and interrelated tensions define this field of transformation. First, as the title of the book suggests, citizenship and redress come into conflict with each other as (on the one hand) racial criteria for redress have the potential to exclude the historically advantaged from full participation and cosmopolitan citizenship, and (on the other hand) inadequate redress keeps the historically disadvantaged in conditions of marginalization and poverty that exclude them from participation in cosmopolitan citizenship.
Amid all the heated rhetoric, securing our future requires a careful balancing act. Second, there is the hoary old chestnut of whether affirmative action undermines efficiency and standards. Another of the striking facts I learned from reading this book was the high proportion of vacant posts in the public service – an average of 25.3 per cent of posts are vacant, including 45.2 per cent of the posts in Home Affairs (Naidoo)! Refusing to appoint members of ‘non-designated’ groups is certainly a way of massaging racial demographic statistics to give the impression of transformation, but this must certainly undermine service delivery! Third, many of the chapters drew attention to the fact that ten years of redress has produced an expanding black middle class and elite, the re-emergence of poor whites, and a rapid increase in unemployment, poverty among the black majority. Inequality, in short, has increased. In part, this may be attributed to redress. We have already seen how service delivery to the poor might be compromised by the policies, but consider too the case of East Rand Proprietary Mines (ERPM) whose financial turnaround was heralded as a success of black economic empowerment, but which allegedly used labour brokers to avoid paying workers minimum wages (Bezuidenhout). This raises serious and sensitive questions about who the beneficiaries of redress are and who they should be.

Bentley and Habib conclude by reviewing three consequences of redress as it is currently being implemented: it ‘tends to’ advantage the more privileged sections of historically disadvantaged communities; in some cases; it has compromised service delivery, and it has the unintended consequence of heightening racial consciousness. As remedy they propose that the relative emphasis on race and class be switched, in a ‘nuanced class-defined redress program, supplemented by race-based initiatives’ (348). They are careful to distance this ‘progressive’ refocus on economic marginalisation from the more ‘subversive’ arguments against racial redress of the official opposition, which deflect attention away from the implementation of affirmative action.

I confess I was left with lingering doubts. The problem is the complexity of the matters at hand. Firstly, it is not always clear who the beneficiaries and victims in the system are. On the basis of her investigation of redress at six Gaugeng schools, Chisholm concludes that ‘it is hard to say who were the “beneficiaries” and who were the “victims”: were the African children moving into more privileged but unfamiliar and often hostile school environments beneficiaries or victims; and were the coloured, Indian or
white children whose families chose to move them from familiar to unfamiliar schooling environments beneficiaries or victims...? ’ (259). Second, the best strategy to achieve redress is not always easy to determine. In the context of higher education, for example, is redress best served by supporting under-resourced historically black institutions, or by channelling funds into the more functional historically white institutions? And then, there are the complex personal benefits and costs of affirmative action, which ‘places extra burdens on black players who labour under the cloud of preferential treatment’ (306). None of these complexities will go away with the shift in emphasis from race to class, and a number of new complexities may be introduced. I certainly don’t believe that some form of affirmative action or redress policy will eradicate poverty and inequality. Much stronger medicine, with more severe contraindications, may be needed for this.

One thing that the book did convince me of is that we have a serious shortage of research in this field. For example, Sanchez concedes that ‘there is not enough available data to support board generalizations’, but then goes on to make them anyhow, concluding that ‘it seems clear that small enterprise start-up initiatives, growth, diversification and transformation are being encouraged through preferential procurement...’ (223). Surely we should be studying the effects of BBBEE policies on enterprises, identifying and modelling the factors that mediate or moderate the success of the ventures. Likewise, Friedman and Erasmus’ analysis of survey data suggests that survey questions about redress have typically been of secondary interest in surveys, the research has often been strongly agenda driven, and there has been no interest in developing and testing theoretical models of the factors that explain the opinions. In fact, all the data presented in the pages of this book are purely descriptive.

The HSRC Democracy and Governance research program and the editors and contributors to this book are to be commended for their efforts to investigate the process of redress, in taking stock, and in presenting some subtle and sophisticated reflections on the challenges and possible reasons for trouble. But we are still in an extremely data impoverished environment. Also, there are big gaps in the coverage; most notably, the issues of land, housing and redress are missing from the book entirely. It seems premature to make proposals for new policies with so little data and analysis at hand? Hopefully, this book will stimulate interest among social scientists. Here is a challenging field of research into the most pressing question of our time: how to marry redress and citizenship in South Africa?