Introduction: the poverty question in South Africa

Since the end of white minority rule, South Africa has taken important steps to deal with poverty. Approximately fifteen million citizens now receive some kind of social grant, such as a non-contributory old age pension, a disability grant, or a child support grant. Some economists argue that the social assistance benefits expanded and extended to all race groups in the last two decades have significantly reduced absolute poverty and that the government should now focus on job creation.[1] Indeed, the state has provided millions of people with access to water, electricity, and other basic services. However, poor people still struggle to afford adequate water, housing, and electricity. Twenty years after apartheid, poverty remains a huge problem. In contrast to those who want the state to focus on growth, other experts point to the need for even more aggressive interventions in the economy. One surveyor recently concluded that overall levels of destitution are the same as they were when the African National Congress (ANC) took power in 1994.[2] Young people feel totally excluded from the economy. And South Africa is now undisputedly the most unequal nation in the world, with the bulk of the nation's wealth remaining in the hands of the white minority and a new black business elite.[3] Colonial violence is partly to blame for this, but we

[1] Servaas van der Berg, "Redistribution through the Budget: Public Expenditure Incidence in South Africa, 1993–1997," *Social Dynamics* 27, 1 (2001): 140–164. What counts as a significant reduction is a relative judgment. Patrick Bond argues that these policies are more tokenistic than transformative.

[2] Using a poverty line of $43 per month based on current prices, in late 2013 Haroon Bhorat estimated that 47 percent of South Africans were poor–slightly more than the 45.7 percent who were poor in 1994. Haroon Bhorat, "Economic Inequality is a Major Obstacle," December 6, 2013, www.nytimes.com. In April 2014, Pali Lehohla of Statistics South Africa announced that, in 2011, 45.5 percent of citizens (some 23 million people) were living below the poverty line. Lehohla also called for economic growth and warned that "social grants can't be there forever." Natalie Greve, "Four-million people lifted out of poverty in SA since 2006," April 3, 2014, www.engineeringnews.co.za. As readers will discover, there are many competing poverty lines now in use in South Africa.

[3] Jeremy Seekings, "Poverty and Inequality in South Africa, 1994–2007," in *After Apartheid: Reinventing South Africa?*, Ian Shapiro and Kahreen Tebeau, eds. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

must also look to twentieth-century state policies that disproportionately delivered wealth and opportunities to white workers, white school children, and white households while treating indigenous people as a source of cheap and expendable labor, not citizens or full members of society.[4]

In 1998, when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) concluded its three-year investigation into the causes and consequences of human rights abuses under apartheid, it came to the conclusion that 60 percent of the population lived below the poverty line.[5] The TRC also warned about the widening gap between rich and poor, and called on the business sector to help reduce inequality. If these trends continued, there could be "no possibility of meaningful economic growth or national stability," it warned.[6] A few years later, after officially retiring from public life in 2005, former president Nelson Mandela spoke out against global poverty. Advocating for "trade justice" and an end to the debt crisis imprisoning developing countries, he described poverty as antithetical to human rights:

> Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom.[7]

In 2013, Ahmed Kathrada, a former anti-apartheid militant and close associate of Mandela during his long imprisonment, told a journalist that ending poverty might well prove more difficult than ending the notorious system of racial segregation and labor exploitation that South Africa's white-minority government enshrined into law beginning in 1948. "Our challenge is poverty,

[4] Along with high old-age pensions for white workers, white households benefited from racialized wage-scales, job reservation, superior schools, and access to career advancement. See Nicoli Nattrass and Jeremy Seekings, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

[5] In the late 1990s, Statistics South Africa concluded that 57 percent of the population was living in poverty (Sampie Terreblanche, interview with the author, May 29, 2000). Terreblanche attributes this to slavery, indentured servitude, land deprivation, and apartheid laws. Sampie Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652–2002* (Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 2002). More recently, he has blamed neo-liberalism and Western transnational corporations, drawing on the work of David Harvey and others. See Sampie Terreblanche, *Lost in Transformation: South Africa's Search for a New Future Since 1986* (Johannesburg: KMM Press, 2012); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford, 2005); Sam Ashman, Ben Fine, and Susan Newman, "The Crisis in South Africa: Neo-liberalism, Financialization, and Uneven and Combined Development," *Socialist Register*, 47 (2011): 174–195.

[6] "The perpetuation of the gap – indeed its possible widening in a pressured economic environment – is a very real threat to peace and stability. It is in the interest of the private and the public sector alike to ensure that this situation is redressed." *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume Four* (1998), 57–58, http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%204.pdf.

[7] "In Full: Mandela's poverty speech," February 3, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4232603.stm. The speech was delivered in Trafalgar Square, London at the invitation of "The Campaign to Make Poverty History."

hunger, unemployment, disease, children without schools, street children who haven't got homes, AIDS orphans, thousands of them," he said. "So perhaps the challenges now are greater than smashing apartheid."[8]

This brings us to the central paradox of this book. In South Africa, public discussion about poverty seems ubiquitous.[9] Media representations of homelessness, joblessness, and material suffering are pervasive. On the other hand, no one seems to agree about what "poverty" means. South Africans disagree wildly about how to define poverty, how to measure it, and what kinds of economic policies are needed to address it. This book seeks to shed light on this paradox by providing historical perspective on framings of the poverty question in South Africa since the mid-nineteenth century. This book defines *poverty knowledge* – used synonymously here with *the poverty question* – as public representations of material deprivation and inequality that inform, and are informed by, scientific research.[10] This book examines poverty as an object of scientific study, governmental policymaking, and philanthropic intervention, and also as a subject of everyday discussion, political advocacy, ethnic nationalist lobbying, and grassroots organizing in pursuit of democracy, health, freedom, racial equity, economic justice, social inclusion, and human rights.

Doing all of this requires looking at poverty with a kind of double vision. This book approaches poverty as a real and violent condition that destroys people's lives, limits their contributions to society, and harms their relationships with each other. Poverty is an injustice that demands immediate and effective collective action. At the same time, I approach poverty as a fluid and layered conceptual space akin to what Michel Foucault termed a *discursive formation*.[11] Like an ancient city marked by repeated renovations, the poverty question can disorient visitors attempting to navigate its twisting passageways.

[8] Marcus Mabry, "Where Mandela Kept Hope, Guide Tells Their Shared Saga," *New York Times*, July 6, 2013.

[9] Andries du Toit has suggested that "poverty talk" in South Africa comes in three flavors. First, there are moral discourses of depredation and obligation with roots in Victorian-era religious traditions that cast the poor as deserving and assume society has a responsibility to redistribute wealth. Second, there are technical discourses focused on measurable lack (food insecurity, multi-dimensional poverty, capabilities, and bio-medical conditions). Amenable to "technocratic" responses, this discourse expects experts to give unbiased advice to policymakers. Third, there are political discourses that treat poverty as the outgrowth of historical processes and are well represented by "Marxist, socialist or populist approaches," but also by "liberal and nationalist discourses," all of which frame poverty as a symptom of capitalism's unending crises and proof of the need for benign management. This book traces the social roots of these discourses and shows how they became mutually supporting. Du Toit, "The Trouble with Poverty," 5. Also see Louwrens Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek: 'n Sosiologiese Studie (South African Commissions of Inquiry: A Sociological Study)," PhD dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 1985.

[10] Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[11] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Alan Sheridan trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

Deep deposits of thought lie hidden beneath its surfaces and disruptions at the top can expose old materials to light, yielding surprising new combinations of ideas. In the chapters that follow, readers will learn about the ways in which ordinary people were affected by poverty in South Africa, as well as the ways in which poverty's meaning became the site of interpretive clashes and technical innovations. For those interested in the development of scientific knowledge, this book illustrates what Ian Hacking calls *looping dynamics*.[12] In South Africa, expert knowledge, poverty lines, and household survey data – especially the influential Poverty Datum Line (PDL) – looped back on society when liberal social reformers, radical activists, and so-called "organic intellectuals" absorbed what experts said about inequality, about the economy, and about minimum needs, and then used human science knowledge to speak back to employers, to white society, to the apartheid state, and to international organizations.[13] Household surveys, cost-of-living statistics, and Gini coefficients enabled activists and organizers to make political claims and to legitimate contentious protest campaigns. Today, poverty knowledge remains deeply unsettled. This is partly because experts do not agree about survey methodologies and partly because Western notions of relative poverty have never applied easily to post-industrial Southern Africa.[14] (What counts as a decent minimum standard for living for a migrant worker who continually travels between the city and the countryside? What counts as relative? Relative to whom?) Yet it is also because economic indicators have social origins and social effects. *Quantitative objectivity* – the notion that the public should trust experts and their rules – enabled people in South Africa

[12] Three decades ago, Barry Barnes posited that scholars trying to understand the impact of science on society consider the metaphor of a courtroom that turns some people into "witnesses" and others into "suspects." But he also pointed out that, in everyday life, feedback loops are much messier. We must expect "a tangle of diverse and conflicting usages," a "spaghetti junction" where "the roots of self-assignation are buried and obscure." Barry Barnes, "Social Life as Bootstrapped Induction," *Sociology* 17, 4 (November 1983): 524–545, 526. On looping dynamics in the human sciences, see Ian Hacking, "The Looping Effect of Human Kinds," in *Causal Cognition: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Dan Sperber, David Premack, and Ann Premack, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Also see Kurt Danzinger, *Naming the Mind: How Psychology Found Its Language* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997).

[13] One of this book's final recommendations is for progressive scholars to collaborate with "organic intellectuals" and those most affected by poverty in the search for timely responses to what Antonio Gramsci called *hegemony*. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971). For a recent attempt to use Gramsci to analyze finance capitalism, neo-liberalism, and "the residuum," see Gavin Smith, "Selective Hegemony and Beyond-Populations with 'No Productive Function': A Framework for Enquiry," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 18, 1 (2011): 2–38.

[14] On relative poverty, see Peter Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979).

to make arguments that challenged racial segregation and that sometimes challenged the logic of capitalism.[15] Poverty's meanings also remain highly contested because, for so long, colonized, disenfranchised, and under-paid people and their allies took actions that challenged the conditions of their oppression in addition to appropriating human science research in ways that forced experts to rethink their social categories. Through an interactive process, ordinary people and organized workers altered the norms by which global corporations and government agencies evaluated social and economic relationships in South Africa.[16]

By making this argument, I am building on the work of other historians of Africa. As Saul Dubow and others have shown, science in Southern African evolved as a mixed patois. Transnational scholarly networks and colonial ties meant that human science disciplines in South Africa absorbed diverse Anglo, German, American, African, and African-American influences.[17] After the Second World War, officials in Pretoria displayed as much enthusiasm about the power of centralized planning to manage social problems as experts in London, Paris, or Washington DC. However, the history of statistics in South Africa offers some unique lessons, plus good reasons to rethink the cliché that knowledge equals power. In its simultaneous – yet conflicted – quest for white racial hegemony and capitalist accumulation, the apartheid state generated voluminous statistics without gaining the kind of total control state managers clearly desired.[18] By the end of white minority rule in 1994, South

[15] On quantitative objectivity, see Theodore Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). On national styles of statistics, see Libby Schweber, *Disciplining Statistics: Demography and Vital Statistics in France and England, 1830–1885* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Also see Donald MacKenzie, *Statistics in Britain: The Social Construction of Scientific Knowledge* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982); Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth Century France* (Ithaca: Cornel University Press, 2000).

[16] Of course, statistics were not always used in liberating ways. Apartheid ideologues routinely insisted that numbers should, in Daston's words, "command assent." Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 66. On state surveillance in South Africa, see Keith Brekenridge, *The Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[17] Saul Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility, and White South Africa, 1820–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[18] Deborah Posel, "A Mania for Measurement: Statistics and Statecraft in the Transition to Apartheid," in *Science and Society in Southern Africa*. Saul Dubow, ed., (New York: St. Martins, 2000).

Africa's black trade unions, decentralized civil society networks, and the global anti-apartheid movement were wielding poverty and inequality data in ways that neither experts nor state officials could contain or direct.[19] This suggests that activists and civil society leaders today have an important role to play in broadening public discourse at a time when "poverty" is discussed continually, yet critical questions about history and power tend to get swept under the carpet.[20] To the extent this book looks to the future, it raises questions about how intellectuals and experts can best advocate against poverty and inequality. This book is not a polemical condemnation of neo-liberalism, although it sheds light on some of the technocratic practices attributed to it.[21] Nor do I want to suggest that economic statistics are so socially constructed and so politicized that they should be dismissed out of hand. Instead, I argue that poverty is a concept with a rich legacy animated by specific struggles over power. Intellectuals and experts need to see how poverty's ambiguities have accumulated over time in order to see how people still attempt to exploit these ambiguities by, for example, defining poverty as a matter of GDP growth as opposed to a moral and ethical issue, or as a question of citizenship and belonging.[22] This book resists the urge to bring closure to the debate about whether "neo-liberalism" is the best

[19] For a related argument, see Jean and John Comaroff, "Figuring Crime: Quantifacts and the Production of the Unreal," *Public Culture*, 18, 1 (2005): 209–246. I use the term *human scientist* to discuss social scientists (such as economists, historians, anthropologists, surveyors, opinion pollsters, and urban planners) as well as other experts who propagate interactive categories, models, and tools (such as medical doctors, conservationists, psychologists, and social workers). On civic associations, see Elke Zuern, *The Politics of Necessity: Community Organizing and Democracy in South Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

[20] By civil society, I mean associations, street committees, religious groups, non-governmental bodies, and political and social movements in which people debated issues, imagined alternative worlds, and made demands on the state and each other (although "state," "civil society," and "market" are not neatly bounded spheres). Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2009). Also see Jean and John Comaroff, eds., *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[21] James Ferguson, "Declarations of Dependence: Labour, Personhood, and Welfare in Southern Africa," *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2013): 223–242. Ferguson notes that proposals in South Africa for a Basic Income Grant relied on the seemingly neo-liberal notion that the state can be everywhere at once, yet also envisioned forms of citizenship exercised through dependence, not formal waged employment. He sees this as preferable to a situation in which the poor cannot make effective claims on any patrons. The case of the (as-yet unsuccessful) campaign for a Basic Income Grant also begs the question of how radical anti-poverty campaigns might successfully engage with the state and other institutions involved in the distribution of resources. On representations of dependence, see Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A genealogy of dependency: tracing a keyword of the US welfare state," *Signs* 19 (1994), 309–336. Also see Michael Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: America's Enduring Confrontation with Poverty: Fully Updated and Revised, Second Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013 [1989]).

[22] Instead of a proposed "wealth tax," for example, the ANC allowed South Africa's interconnected mineral and energy corporations to write off what some called "apartheid debt."

concept we can use to understand contemporary South Africa. This study shows that the kinds of technical solutions to political problems we now associate with "neo-liberalism" have a long history, and that efforts by the state to use scientific knowledge to suppress populist anger have tended to yield unexpected outcomes.[23]

Our story begins in the 1850s, when famine struck the Eastern Cape of South Africa and the British government offered relief, but only in exchange for hard labor. By this time, indigenous and colonial understandings of wealth and deprivation were in dialogue with each other. When the Dutch East India Company established a re-supply station at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, company owners looked forward to profitable Indian Ocean trade. It was not long, however, before a new class of settled farmers migrated to the Cape, and company administrators needed to avoid costly conflicts with indigenous Khoikhoi people. In addition to importing slaves, Dutch officials penned detailed descriptions of the putatively discrete "tribes" of the Cape in which they estimated the size of their herds, recorded their quarrels with the company, and assessed their value as trading partners.[24] For their part, the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa expressed their own understandings of dependence, obligation, and status. Archaeologists believe that Bantu-speaking pastoralists first appeared in the region between 200 and 500 C.E. where they intermingled, intermarried, and traded with nomadic Khoi and San hosts. In the process, Bantu-speakers spread their languages and agrarian customs throughout the region, and they absorbed Khoisan cultural and linguistic practices in turn.[25] In contrast to Western myths about idyllic changeless African societies, free from the pressures of modern life, poverty did exist in

In 1997, South Africa's wealthiest corporations shifted their listings to London and New York, enabling them to escape oversight by a government poised to insist that the historical beneficiaries of apartheid and South Africa's migrant labor system pay compensation of some kind to its victims. Terreblanche, *Lost in Transformation*, 72, 137–8, note 26.

[23] For a critique of neo-liberalism as a framing, see Gillian Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony* (Durban: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2013).

[24] Jan Van Riebeeck and Z. Wagenaar, "Of the Native Tribes of South Arica," in Robert O. Collins, *Documents from the African Past* (New York: Markus Weiner, 1991). This book uses the term *African* more or less interchangeably with indigenous, black African, and black. In the 1970s, the Black Consciousness Movement redefined blackness to include Indian and Colored (mixed-race) people, making "black" a preferable term for those who identified with the liberation movement. The word *indigenous* avoids the sectarian idea that only dark-skinned people can be "African." See Deborah Posel, "What's in a Name: Racial Categorisations under Apartheid and their Afterlife," *Transformation* 47 (2001): 45–74; Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

[25] Martin Hall, *Farmers, Traders, and Kings: The People of Southern Africa, 200–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: Norton, 1997).

pre-colonial Africa. However, pre-colonial poverty resulted primarily from political disputes, not from land shortages.[26]

European conquest did not squelch indigenous understandings of wealth, health, security, patronage, and honor.[27] To give just one example, in the 1820s, a duplicitous ivory prospector posed as an official representative of the English Crown before the Zulu nation-builder Shaka. After healing a superficial wound and reportedly winning the king's trust, this Englishman participated in an annual gathering that doubled as a pastoral audit. Shaka apparently commanded his sub-chiefs to parade their cattle before him while he expostulated on their beauty and their numbers.[28] Well into the twentieth-century, white observers bemoaned African investment in livestock, dubbing it an irrational "cattle complex." In reality, Africans societies used cattle logically, as a form of savings, to make bride-wealth payments, to protect against misfortune, and to demonstrate military power through cattle raids against their neighbors.

A trickle of written references to "poverty" became a deluge in the late nineteenth century when white settlers grew alarmed about a rising numbers of poor whites.[29] The discovery of diamonds in the 1860s, followed by gold in the 1880s, caused rapid industrialization in the Transvaal, intense land competition, and an influx of skilled white workers from the West. Profiteers pushed white and black farmers off the land and created a new cohort of landless farm tenants.[30] Historians are now challenging the notion that the mineral revolution delivered the final deathblow to South Africa's independent African "peasantry."[31] Nevertheless, industrial capitalism dramatically changed peoples' lives; it enriched mine owners, commercial farmers, and long-distance traders while imperiling small-scale farmers and the remaining independent African kingdoms. Mining monopolies dispatched labor recruiters across the sub-continent. Initially, migrants traveled willingly to the mines in order to return home with guns, marriage payments, blankets, and other locally meaningful commodities. As colonial regimes imposed new tax laws, irregular migration gave way to extended stints in mining compounds,

[26] John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For a more recent examination of pre-colonial poverty, see Rhiannon Stephens, "Birthing Wealth? Motherhood and Poverty in East-Central Uganda, 700–1900," *Past and Present* 215 (May 2011): 235–268.

[27] John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[28] Henry Francis Fynn, *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn, Compiled from original sources and edited by James Stuart and D. McK. Malcolm* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1950).

[29] On anxieties about white poverty, see Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). I can never thank Ann Stoler enough for her inspiration.

[30] Charles Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa: Conquest, Discrimination, and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[31] Crais also calls for more attention to the connections between colonial violence and poverty in the present. Clifton Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

followed by large-scale relocation from the countryside to the city. In the midst of these transformations, white church leaders noticed larger numbers of destitute white farmers.[32] Clergy described them as a distinctive and worrisome social type.[33] As in the American South and other colonial settings, paternalistic experts felt that these "poor whites" needed protection from their darker-skinned neighbors, from an enervating and overly abundant natural environment, and from demoralizing charity or doles.[34] Without a concerted effort, poor whites would drag down the entire race, they warned. White poverty became a kind of Rorschach blot in which some saw dire peril, yet others saw hope for the wholesale regeneration of European culture in the peripheries of Empire.

The creation of the modern South African nation catapulted the "poor white problem" to the forefront of public debate, making it a becoming the centerpiece of sustained governmental and academic scrutiny. The South African War of 1899–1902 (Anglo-Boer War) pitted South Africa's two English-dominated colonies, the Cape and Natal, against its two breakaway Afrikaner (Boer) republics, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. Black Africans served on both sides of the war, which was fueled by competition over tax revenue from the lucrative gold trade. Notably, the war broke out at a time when colonial governments were already collecting voluminous statistics on trade, crime, labor supply, and immigration; these colonial data-collection routines continued after a peace treaty ended the war, leading to the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, and making South Africa a self-governing dominion within the British Empire.

Meanwhile, unification destroyed the prospect of an expanded African franchise. European men would remain the dominant master class, according to the new constitution. Women would remain subjugated to fathers and husbands. Servants would have few legal protections from masters. People of Indian descent, who came to Natal as indentured sugar plantation workers in the 1860s, and later as entrepreneurial traders in the 1890s, would be slotted alongside mixed-race or "colored" people, and granted only marginally more economic opportunities than the vast black African majority. Unification ushered in a new era of state centralization coupled with intense industrial

[32] Colin Bundy, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism," in *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850–1930*, William Beinart, Peter Delius and Stanley Trapido, eds. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986). For an excellent alternative account of the poverty question in South Africa, including debates about poor whites and the government policies that distributed wealth along race lines, see Iliffe, *The African Poor*.

[33] Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[34] J. M. Coetzee, "Blood, Flaw, Taint, Degeneration: The Case of Sarah Gertrude Millin," *English Studies in Africa*, 23, 1 (1980): 42–58; Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," *The Journal of American History*, 88, 3 (December 2001): 829–865, 859; Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health, and Racial Destiny in Australia* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

conflict that would make way for race-based policies governing education, employment, and social welfare.

In sketching out this rough picture of the past, it should be kept in mind that South African society remained riddled with tensions that racial ideologies never fully resolved. After the South African War, the country's founders agreed not to infringe upon the hard-fought freedoms of mine owners and white commercial farmers to accumulate wealth and to lobby the government to protect their interests. On these kinds of "freedoms," see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954). Yet the desires of capitalists did not fit neatly with one other, or with those of white voters or white workers.[35] On the one hand, the Department of Native Affairs worked to remove black Africans from urban areas on the grounds that they threatened white public health. The state made only minimal investments in the urban "native locations" and the rural "native reserves."[36] By the 1920s and 1930s, the Departments of Labour and Social Welfare were explicitly attempting to boost white incomes.[37] On the other hand, by the 1930s, other branches of the state wanted to satisfy the desire of an increasingly powerful manufacturing sector to reproduce a healthy, docile, and skilled work force that would not be migratory, but stabilized in industrial urban areas. These conflicting expectations led to conflicting policy initiatives and tensions within the poverty question as a discursive formation.[38]

Building on the work of Alice O'Connor, Lorraine Daston, Ted Porter, Sarah Igo, Thomas Stapleford, and other historians of the human sciences, this book attempts to write a biography of poverty in South Africa.[39] To do this, I develop three major themes: co-production, the limits of invention in

[35] On contradictions, capitalism, and the state, see Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (New York: New Left Books, 1973 [1968]); John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, "Coping with Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895–1914," *Journal of African History*, 20, 4 (October 1979): 487–505.

[36] On tensions within the apartheid state, see Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948–1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[37] Pensions were initially created for whites and coloreds, although at steeply scaled rates and not without debate over who deserved assistance. Seekings suggests that social scientists in the 1930s wanted to limit the state's involvement in poor relief. Jeremy Seekings, "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash *against* Welfare-State Building in South Africa, 1931–1937," *The Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, 3 (September 2008): 515–537. On the different ways states actively distribute wealth through social provisions, see Gösta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

[38] This book suggests that the poverty question evolved analogously to the labor question in Africa. Labor strikes created demand for knowledge and caused officials to rethink their categories. See Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[39] O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge in the United States*; Daston, "Introduction: The Coming into Being of Scientific Objects," in *Biographies of Scientific Objects*, Lorraine Daston, ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Theodore Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton, Princeton University Press,