

REVIEW ESSAY

Social Transformation in South Africa: The Role of Religion and Education in Resisting Social Oppression

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Joel Cabrita. 2018. *The People's Zion: Southern Africa, the United States, and a Transatlantic Faith-Healing Movement*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 356 pp.

Mark Hunter. 2019. *Race for Education: Gender, White Tone, and Schooling in South Africa*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 304 pp.

Introduction

The period covering the late 19th- through the 21st-century was a time of profound social, political, and economic change in South African society. The elaboration and implementation of the Native Affairs Commission's policies in the early 20th century initiated the legal and social entrenchment of a segregationist apparatus that severely curtailed the rights and freedoms of black South Africans. The National Party's victory in the 1948 General Elections and the resultant development of a strict apartheid system led to the further spatial and social separation of South African society. Within this repressive framework, Africans created and transformed their social institutions to carve out spheres in which they could express their agency and reassert their humanity. Through these transformations, African actors developed different resistance strategies to cope with the intrusive South African state.

Scholars have attempted vigorously to understand how African historical actors navigated this complex and repressive sociopolitical framework to assert their agency. Many academics have focused heavily on the issues of education and religion in their analysis of African social resistance to colonial rule. Scholars like James T. Campbell and Robert Vinson have adopted transnational frameworks to analyze how Garveyism and the Zion church served as institutions of resistance and social transformation in South Africa. Others like Edward Fisk and Peter Kallaway have focused their analysis of South African society on education in the apartheid and post-apartheid periods. Joel Cabrita's *The People's Zion* and Mark Hunter's *Race for Education* represent new and important works within this historiography.

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Christian Evangelism and Social Change

Cabrita's *The People's Zion* explores the "saliency of Christian evangelicalism for diverse societies undergoing profound social changes—industrialization, urbanization, widespread migration, nativist and colonial racially inflected legislation—throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" in South Africa (p. 2). Much in the same vein as works like Robert Vinson's *The Americans Are Coming!* and James T. Campbell's *Songs of Zion*, Cabrita utilizes a transnational framework in his analysis. He traces the development of transatlantic Zion from its origins in Australia, to its spread in the United States, and its eventual flourishing in its South African context. The concept of Zion is developed in this work as a "border-crossing" movement that functions primarily as a "network of exchanges between believers across [southern Africa] (p. 3)." The Zion movement represented an institution through which Africans on the margins of power could establish spiritual authority and challenge the constantly changing social situation in South Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Cabrita stresses the importance of African involvement in directing the development and spread of Zionism in South Africa. Whereas some scholars have argued that Africans merely appropriated and mirrored Protestant practices in the formation of the movement, Cabrita instead argues that Africans played an active role in shaping the spread and practice of the denomination to fit their spiritual and practical needs. Zion, he argues, emerged at the convergence of multiple perspectives and contained elements from African, Boer, and British society, with an underlying Protestant tradition that linked them together. The concern over egalitarianism, the realization of God's Kingdom on earth, and a strong commitment to cosmopolitanism, as well as a penchant for faith-healing practices, defined the movement.

This work is divided into six chapters that follow a chronological order that traces the development of Zion from John Alexander Dowie's activities to a discussion on transnationalism and cosmopolitanism in the twentieth century. Chapter one begins in Australia with an examination of Dowie's inspiration for creating a populist church that focused on the spiritual and material needs of the working class. Here Cabrita delves into the crystallization of the church's doctrine during the Protestant Temperance movement and examines the influence of the Salvation Army on the temperance movement. Throughout the chapter, the concepts of temperance and divine healing play an important role in the conceptualization of the church and its practices. The author argues that during this time, a "new language of redemptive holiness for working-class people" was developed and played a crucial role in the development and popularity of the church (p. 14).

Chapter two undertakes a transnational examination of Zion by tracing the Dowie family's move to the midwestern United States. It was there, in immigrant-laden Chicago, that Dowie incorporated the concept of cosmopolitanism into the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion. Cosmopolitanism proved essential in giving birth to the egalitarianism that came to define the church's doctrine in subsequent years. Dowie's doctrine argued that class distinctions along social and economic lines had little place within the "Kingdom of God." Likewise, the issues of

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nationality, language, and race represented superficial differences that ran counter to the cosmopolitan belief that humanity existed as one community.

The third chapter covers the movement of Zion across the Atlantic Ocean and the way that the church was enthusiastically embraced among miners in the gold fields of South Africa's Transvaal. The chapter takes place in the wake of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and focuses on the role of divine healing in the spread and growth of the church among the industrialized mine workers. "White South Africanism" is central to this chapter, as is the role of cosmopolitanism in bringing the "formerly estranged white 'races'" into the fold and the church's purview (p. 22). Cabrita acknowledges that the success of these attempts was limited, but this chapter provides for a fascinating contrast with the discussion of the movement's spread among rural Africans in chapter four.

Cabrita proceeds to examine the impact of the teachings of Zion on rural African Christian farmers in the South African Highveld. The author performs a deep analysis of the impact that increasingly harsh segregationist policies and attitudes had on African reception of the church's teachings. He argues that African practitioners found the concept of egalitarianism particularly appealing, given the significant threat that the newly enacted segregationist legislation presented to the social, political, spiritual, and economic progress of blacks in South Africa. Within this chapter, a highly important discussion is held on the distinct differences between the faith-healing practices of Zion and the more traditional spiritual-medical practices of non-Christian Africans. Cabrita continues to examine the development of Zion within its black South African context by moving from the Highveld to the immigrant mining areas of Johannesburg. In Johannesburg, Zion found its most enthusiastic audience and experienced a period of immense growth. Although the author argues that Zion avoided direct politicization and confrontation in its early years, it is clear that in Johannesburg Zion was viewed as an institution through which black Africans could challenge institutionalized white supremacy.

The themes of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism are analyzed within their twentieth-century South African context in the final two chapters. Zion flourished particularly within the migrant labor networks in southern Africa, with Johannesburg serving as the central connective hub. Throughout this network, urban youths served as evangelists and advocated for the renunciation of "traditional" African institutions such as chiefs, homelands, and in some cases even their families in the name of cosmopolitanism and egalitarianism. It is clear in these final chapters that Zion was both a Christian reform movement on one hand, and an institution that advocated for profound sociopolitical change within South Africa's fluid context. Zion mobilized resources and diverse factions of South African society in the name of egalitarianism and the recreation of God's Kingdom on Earth.

The People's Zion exhibits few weaknesses. The language and terminology used in this work is easily understandable and when new subjects, terms, or actors are introduced, Cabrita does an excellent job thoroughly explaining the new material. The work is well-structured and its layout work traces the development of Zion across national boundaries and details the fluid nature of the movement's ideology over time. Joel Cabrita has crafted a perfect introduction for undergraduate students into the role of evangelical movements in the construction of social identity in South Africa. This book could be used effectively by college professors in any class

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on transnational history, South African history, or the use of social institutions as a means of resistance to colonial oppression.

Marketized Assimilation and Schooling in South Africa

Mark Hunter's *Race for Education* similarly examines socioeconomic transformations within South African society. However, there are some key distinctions in the two authors' works. First and foremost, Hunter's book deals almost exclusively with the apartheid and post-apartheid periods in South Africa and begins with the implementation of the Group Areas Act in 1950. Conversely, Cabrita deals primarily with the nineteenth century and the period when segregationist policies were implemented in the early-to-mid twentieth century. Additionally, whereas Cabrita focuses on the social institution of religion, Hunter focuses on the socioeconomic institutions of schooling and education. While the works cover different aspects of African society, both contain similar subject matter in that social transformation is central to their arguments and the framing of the scope of their respective studies.

In *Race for Education*, Hunter sets out to study the history of existent inequalities in both South Africa's educational facilities and examination results. He focuses on the marketization of the South African education system and the role that the prestige of whiteness, or as he terms it "white tone," plays in the system's inequalities. He argues throughout the work that "'white' phenotypic traits retain value in society even if some better off 'black' people can now buy prestigious cultural disposition" (p. 2). In his examination of the role of race and class in the opportunities granted to students and their families, Hunter argues that the end of apartheid did not represent a rupture or break in the inequalities of the education system, but instead that educational opportunities for blacks were already appearing as early as the 1970s. The end of apartheid merely led to a more rapid increase in the pace of educational changes as they pertained to one's race or social class.

Hunter's work is divided into four parts consisting of a total of nine chapters. Part one examines the creation of a racialized educational system under the South African apartheid government. The author argues that under apartheid, the schooling system was not only racially defined, but that it was also significantly impacted by class within white society. Chapter two deals with the advancement of Afrikaans-speakers through Afrikaans-medium schools. Through a comparison of schools in the upper-class Berea and working-class Bluff neighborhoods of greater Durban, Hunter examines the built-in advantages afforded to whites in these schools and the schools' formative roles in developing, and in some cases perpetuating, raced and classed cities. Chapter three provides an examination of the expansion of primary schools in Umlazi Township of Durban in the 1960s. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 served as an important framing tool, and special attention was paid to the particular role that mothers and women played in advocating for the education of their children as a means to protect them against the same discrimination they faced in their everyday lives.

Part two of *Race for Education* analyzes the marketization of the educational system with a clear emphasis on the "cultural and symbolic" basis of "marketized assimilation" (p. 78). Growing class divisions, increased competition between schools, and the new-found prestige associated with the use of the English language all feature prominently in chapter four. Schools

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in Umlazi Township and the Bluff make up the bulk of the chapter, and key distinctions are made regarding the expected “assimilation” of black students entering English-medium schools. Hunter’s ability to deal with the complex issue of language within the educational system and the varying degrees of prestige associated with English, Afrikaans, and isiZulu is impressive.

This work’s third part delves more deeply into the economic aspects of South Africa’s schools by looking at how where one attends school impacts one’s socioeconomic prospects throughout life. Chapter five draws comparisons between Umlazi Township schools and schools for white Bluff residents. Hunter found that in Umlazi Township, the type of schooling that one receives is of paramount importance to whether one is able to obtain work. In contrast, in the white Bluff, one’s schooling history does not determine if one can obtain work, but instead what type of work will be obtained. Clear distinctions were drawn between blacks and whites in their job prospects based on their schooling, but Hunter also provides a fruitful discussion on the classed distinctions that developed within white society.

The book’s final part focuses on the physical movement of schoolchildren and how certain “signals of whiteness” were crucial in determining one’s opportunities within the schooling market. Chapter six further develops Hunter’s central concept of “white tone” and schools’ abilities to market that “white tone” to demand higher fees and achieve a certain level of prestige in comparison with other schools. Phenotypic white traits, as well as one’s ability to play a sport like rugby, serve as interesting points of discussion that highlight the highly competitive nature of recruiting students to maintain a school’s reputation. Chapter seven provides a deep contemplation of the way that changes in the schooling system impacted family structures and organization, with a particular focus on the appearance, or disappearance, of domestic laborers in Bluff households. Finally, chapter eight examines the movement of Umlazi schoolchildren to township schools and multiracial schools and utilized sponsorship, or one’s ability to be “fundisa-ed,” as a point of entry into the marketized school system.

Hunter’s work, much like that of Cabrita, is well-crafted and advocates the position that there are more continuities than discontinuities between education systems developed before and after school desegregation in South Africa. Unlike *The People’s Zion, Race for Education* should primarily be used in graduate level courses with advanced students. While Hunter’s discussion on the concept of “white tone” is made readily understandable for students of all education levels, the complexity and depth with which he analyzes the economic basis for South Africa’s post-apartheid education system could be problematic for undergraduates. A certain amount of knowledge on the relationship between school systems and economic systems is needed to truly understand the complex relationship that has developed within South African education systems. However, Hunter does introduce and explore important concepts in a way that few scholars have to date, making his work valuable to the growing historiography on the evolution of education systems in 20th and 21st century South Africa.

Conclusion

These two books provide important insight into the impact that segregationist and apartheid policies had on the social and economic fabric of South African society. Joel Cabrita thoroughly

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examines the development of a religious doctrine based on egalitarianism, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism during the nineteenth and early-twentieth century in South Africa. Mark Hunter, picking up where Cabrita left off, analyzes the spatial, social, and economic impacts of apartheid in the South African schooling system and, subsequently, in the structure of society as a whole. Taken together, these works provide college-level and graduate-level students with interesting perspectives on the transformative socioeconomic nature of apartheid in South Africa, as well as the various methods and techniques that everyday South Africans utilized to carve out a space of influence and agency under an increasingly difficult governmental system.

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