Critical Response

I

No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida's "Le Dernier Mot du Racisme"

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Jacques Derrida's "Le Dernier Mot du Racisme" (*Critical Inquiry* 12 [Autumn 1985]: 290–99) leaves no doubt as to his signal opposition to the South African regime.[1] Certainly the essay is tendered as a call to action, an urgent injunction to "save humanity from this evil" *apartheid;* besides exposing the "truth" of *apartheid,* its purpose is to "fling back an answer" (*riposter*). If, then, Derrida seeks not merely to prize open certain covert metaphysical assumptions but also to point to something *beyond* the text, in this case the abolition of a regime, then the strategic value of his method has to be considered seriously. This entails, in particular, pondering the political implications of both his extended reflection on the word *apartheid* and his diffuse historical comments.

As it stands, Derrida's protest is deficient in any sense of how the discourses of South African racism have been at once historically constituted and politically constitutive. For to begin to investigate how the representation of racial difference has functioned in South Africa's political and economic life, it is necessary to recognize and track the shifting character of these discourses. Derrida, however, blurs historical differences by conferring on the single term *apartheid* a spurious autonomy and agency: "The word concentrates separation. . . . By isolating being apart in some sort of essence or hypostasis, the word corrupts it into a quasi-

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1. The English translation of the title—"Racism's Last Word"—does not quite do justice to the original. "The Last Word in Racism" might have been a preferable rendition, at least keeping in play Derrida's double sense of *apartheid* as not merely the last remaining word of racism but also racism's apogee.

ontological segregation" (p. 292). Is it indeed the word, *apartheid,* or is it Derrida himself, operating here in "another regime of abstraction" (p. 292), removing the word from its place in the discourse of South African racism, raising it to another power, and setting separation itself apart? Derrida is repelled by the word, yet seduced by its divisiveness, the division in the inner structure of the term itself which he elevates to a state of being.

The essay's opening analysis of the word *apartheid* is, then, symptomatic of a severance of word from history. When Derrida asks, "Hasn't *apartheid* always been the archival record of the unnameable?" (p. 291), the answer is a straightforward no. Despite its notoriety and currency overseas, the term *apartheid* has not always been the "watchword" of the Nationalist regime (p. 291). It has its own history, and that history is closely entwined with a developing ideology of race which has not only been created to deliberately rationalize and temper South Africa's image at home and abroad, but can also be seen to be intimately allied to different stages of the country's political and economic development. Because he views *apartheid* as a "unique appellation" (p. 291), Derrida has little to say about the politically persuasive function that successive racist lexicons have served in South Africa. To face the challenge of investigating the strategic role of representation, one would have to part ways with him by releasing that pariah of a word, *apartheid,* from its quarantine from historical process, examining it instead in the context of developing discourses of racial difference.

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The word *apartheid* was coined by General Jan Smuts at the Savoy Hotel, London on 27 May 1917 but had barely any currency until it rose to prominence as the rallying cry of the Nationalist party's victorious electoral campaign of 1948. Derrida has reflected on the word's "sinister renown," but as far back as the mid-fifties the South Africans themselves began to recognize that the term *apartheid* had become sufficiently stigmatized to be ostentatiously retired. The developing history of South African racial policy and propaganda highlights the inaccuracy of Derrida's claim that South African racism is "the only one on the scene that dares

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to say its name and present itself for what it is" (p. 292). For in striving both to win greater legitimacy for itself and to justify ideologically the Nationalist bantustan policy,[2] South African racism has long since ceased to pronounce its own name: *apartheid*, the term Derrida misleadingly calls "the order's *watchword*" (*mot d'ordre*) (p. 291), was dismissed many years back from the lexical ranks of the regime. From the 1950s onward, the Nationalist party has radically rephrased its ideology, first tempering the grim rhetoric of *apartheid* into talk of "separate development," then into the even more insidious language of "multinationalism" and "self-determination," and most recently into the self-congratulatory discourse of "democratic federalism." These changes in the language of racism are closely, though not always symmetrically, allied to changes in Nationalist party policy.

F. A. van Jaarsveld, an apologist for the Nationalist regime, divides South African racial policy since 1948 into three phases. From 1948 until 1958, he argues, there was the "ideological, doctrinaire and negative" phase of *apartheid,* a period he admits was "severely racist." Second, between 1958 and 1966, this mellowed into the "homeland phase of separate development," a phase he characterizes as one of "internal de-colonisation." Third, the period from 1966 onward has seen what he considers to have been "the unobtrusive dismantling of *apartheid*," "the movement away from discrimination," "the elimination of color as a determinant," and the introduction of "democratic pluralism."[3] As a very general way of periodizing changes in the *official discourse,* van Jaarsveld's schema may be instructive. But if one is to understand the political role that the regime's justificatory ideology has played, one must expose the contradiction between the uneven, somersaulting evolution of the official discourse in a "democratic" direction and the actual process of deepening brutalization and oppression which it belies.

Prior to the unexpected Afrikaner victory in 1948, South African society had been rife with racial discrimination, but much of it had been ad hoc rather than legislated. From 1948 onward, however, the official policy of *apartheid* ensured in a doctrinaire, unapologetic fashion that the old colonial racist edifice was buttressed with more methodical legislation. That *apartheid* came to supplant the earlier English term "segregation" was symptomatic of the waning influence of English speakers in political life; ever since 1949, the leadership and bureaucracy have been securely in Afrikaans hands. The 1950s were an era of strident *baasskap* ("mastery" or "domination"), but as early as 1953 a certain defensiveness began to creep into the regime's representation of its policies.

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2. We here follow the practice of using the term "bantustan" in place of the more glamorous and euphemistic "homelands."

3. Our translation from the Afrikaans. F. A. van Jaarsveld, *Die Evolusie Van Apartheid* (Cape Town, 1979), pp. 1–2.

The attempts by Prime Minister D. F. Malan to rationalize the language of *apartheid* can be seen to prefigure the movement toward abandoning a rhetoric of *racial* for one of *national* difference:

> Europe, itself the matrix of Christian civilization, is the out-
> standing example of apartheid. The map resembles a Joseph's coat
> of some twenty-five sections, each represented by its own nationality,
> and for the most part also its own race with its own tongue and
> its own culture. . . . Apartheid is accepted in Europe as natural,
> self-explanatory, and right.[4]

Such efforts to improve South Africa's image abroad were, however, hampered by the word *apartheid* itself, which was already dragging a train of sinister connotations. It was in 1958, with the election of Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd as prime minister, that a truly decisive turn took place in the rhetoric and ideology of South African racism. References in the official discourse of the regime to the inferiority of blacks to whites started to be phased out, and the country was no longer referred to as "multiracial" (which would imply a single political entity) but as "multinational." White leaders were careful to speak of the "peoples" of South Africa, not the "people," and, most important, the rhetorically more benign "separate development" came to replace *apartheid*. Here is Dr. Verwoerd's plodding, patronizing explication of the new language before a group of black councillors:

> "Separateness" means: something for oneself. The other word refers
> to what is bigger still, viz. "development", which means growth. . . .
> Development is growth brought about by man creating something
> new in a continuing process. Therefore, separate development
> means the growth of something for oneself and one's nation, due
> to one's own endeavours.[5]

The ingeniously bipartisan phrase, "separate development," expresses in miniature the acute schizophrenia which marked both the ideology and practice of South African racism under Verwoerd, proclaiming to the world at large that there would be changes and whispering to the white folks at home that there would be no changes at all.

Verwoerd's attempts to whitewash the rhetoric of racism were closely bound to his Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959, which involved the extension and deepening of the migrant labor system into the bantustan policy. After 1959, under Verwoerd, the restructuring of

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4. D. F. Malan, *Die Burger*, 6 Mar. 1953, quoted in Martin Legassick, "Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa," in *South African Capitalism and Black Political Opposition*, ed. Martin J. Murray (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), p. 505 n. 74.

5. Quoted in M. T. W. Arnheim, *South Africa after Vorster* (Cape Town, 1979), p. 23.

the bantustans gathered momentum, overlapping broadly with the ideological shift from *apartheid* to "separate development." From 1963 until 1964 there was a major overhaul of the urban areas legislation in order to provide a more powerful apparatus for channeling the flow of labor and controlling its every movement. Under Vorster in 1966 the system was deepened. General Circular No. 25 of 12 December 1967 became the basis for massive forced removals and resettlements. As the circular noted:

> As soon as they [Bantu] become, for some reason or another, no longer fit for work or superfluous in the labour market, they are expected to return to their country of origin or the territory of their national unit where they fit in ethnically.[6]

Since the development of the bantustan policy, the Nationalist party has strained to couch its policies in the language of *nationalities* rather than that of *color*, creating the impression that South Africa's difficulties are the same as those of modern Europe and that it could overcome them similarly. As one cabinet minister put it:

> The problem in South Africa is basically not one of race, but of nationalism, which is a world-wide problem. There is a White nationalism, and there are several Black nationalisms. . . . My Government's principal aim is to make it possible for each nation, Black and White, to achieve its fullest potential, including sovereign independence, so that each individual can enjoy all the rights and privileges which his or her community is capable of securing for him or her.[7]

Verwoerd's replacement of the alienating racial language of *apartheid* with the more conciliatory rhetoric of multinationalism was sustained by Prime Minister B. J. Vorster. But neither Verwoerd nor his successor managed to create a perfectly watertight discourse of multinationalism, caulked against any seepage of racism. For the dominant ideology of race in white South Africa proved so insistent that it could not be suppressed entirely, even at the level of discourse. Despite the Nationalists' contention that their new egalitarian ideology of multiple nations had supplanted the purportedly outmoded ideology of race, it was manifest that the two ideologies coexisted, often in grinding contradiction, as dramatized by references to "biologically demarcated tribal states."[8] Contradictions aside, the general drive toward a more palatable idiom continued and, during

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6. Quoted in Legassick, "Legislation, Ideology and Economy," p. 496.
7. R. F. Botha, *The Star*, 2 July 1976, quoted in No Sizwe, *One Azania, One Nation: The National Question in South Africa* (London, 1979), p. 12.
8. J. A. Coetzee, quoted ibid., p. 85.

the latter years of Vorster's rule (from roughly 1970 onward), the discourse of multinationalism graduated, in turn, into the even more desperately appeasing rhetoric of "plural democracy." The pace of this discursive transformation has increased markedly under Vorster's successor, P. W. Botha. By the end of 1981, South Africa had implemented the bantustan policy so relentlessly that the majority of the country's blacks had been officially declared citizens either of the four "independent" states or of the six "self-governing" territories. In the ideological realm, too, the Nationalist regime had moved well beyond Verwoerd—by now its official discourse had, as far as possible, been purged of open references to race.

Under Botha, the domestic and international campaign to gain acceptance for the Nationalists' wretched, inequitable partitioning of the land has been conducted not so much in the solicitous rhetoric of multiple nationalities as in the new proud language of democratic federalism. Verwoerd's was a language of promises, of "nations" to be; Botha's is the language of achievement, of an allegedly full-blown "confederation of independent states." In the words of one government publication:

> . . . 20 years ago it was postulated that . . . the need for segregation or discrimination, as a protective measure for Whites, would begin to fall away, since the Black peoples would . . . have their own bases for political hegemony and sovereignty.[9]

The pages of such publications resound with choice phrases from Botha's new lexicon: "the policy of multinational development [is] assuming the dimensions of what may be called a plural democracy—i.e. a democratic solution to the plural population structure of South Africa."[10] In this vein, the Department of Bantu Administration and Development (BAD) was rechristened Plural Relations and Development, and the names of other state departments were similarly disinfected. And in an attempt to ground the rhetoric of "plural democracy" in a less political, more homely idiom, Botha persistently describes his regime's relation to the black pseudostates within South Africa's borders as one of "good neighborliness," a phrase that banishes all thought of race and racism, and offers in its stead images of the lending and borrowing of lawn mowers in an atmosphere of suburban goodwill.

If an examination of South Africa's representation of racial difference is to be at all politically enabling, the changing hegemonic functions of the word *apartheid* and its kindred terms must be investigated in the context of an active, social language. Here, with Gareth Stedman Jones, we should underscore the prefigurative capacity of political discourses,

9. *South Africa 1983: Official Yearbook* (Johannesburg, 1983), p. 210.
10. *South Africa 1979: Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1979), p. 211.

their power not merely to address preexistent constituencies but to re-constitute them, or even to generate new ones.[11] While the new discourses of South African racism may seem pitifully transparent, they have proved far from innocuous in bracing and rationalizing policies at home and in marketing them abroad. Conveniently for the Nationalists, their latest set of vocabulary—that of democratic federalism—is consonant with the political idiom of the country they need most urgently to impress: the United States. Reagan, for his part, has capitalized on this correspon-dence, at times even hinting that beneath their common language the two countries may have comparable histories—all the more reason for sympathy and patience. Complaining of "a failure to recognize . . . the steps they [the South Africans] have taken and the gains they have made" in moving toward the abolition of racial discrimination, Reagan has de-clared, "As long as there's a sincere and honest effort being made, based on our own experience in our own land, it would seem to me that we should be trying to be helpful."[12] In following a diplomatic course eu-phemistically described as one of "constructive engagement," then "quiet diplomacy," and most recently "active constructive engagement," Reagan and his subordinates in the State Department too often have given credit to the claims of that insidious Nationalist idiom which conveys the illusion of bodying forth democratic progress, reform, and "self-determination." This complicity between the Reagan administration and Botha's regime reached a new pitch with the State Department endorsement of South Africa's constitutional changes. Far from paving the way for full democracy, this new constitution sealed the disenfranchisement of the country's black majority and centralized power to an unprecedented degree, granting Botha personally, as state president, frightening authority. Yet George Shultz could say of this very constitution:

> We have tailored our programs, our diplomatic exchanges, and our rhetoric to the facts. Let us be candid with each other. Changes are occurring. . . . South Africa's white electorate has given solid backing to a government that defines itself as committed to evo-lutionary change.[13]

As the past two years have shown, white South Africa's endorsement of Botha's new constitution did not open the sluice gates of *political* reform. But it has proved a pivotal event in the development of a legit-imating *language* of reform. For the centerpiece of the new constitution

11. See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 23–24.

12. Ronald Reagan, "Interview with the President: Question-and-Answer Session with Walter Cronkite of CBS News, Mar. 3, 1981," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 17, 10:235.

13. George Shultz, *Department of State Bulletin* 84, 2085 (Apr. 1984): 12.

is the notion of "power-sharing," whereby select Indians and Coloreds are admitted as junior members to the previously all-white parliament and govern the country in unison with the whites. With the advent of this attempt to disperse the regime's opponents by coopting the Indians and Coloreds, the resilient ideological opposition between white and nonwhite became more unpronounceable than ever. If the Coloreds and Indians were to be persuaded that they were entitled to white privileges, they could not be lumped together with the disenfranchised blacks under the category "nonwhites." So the opposition was (theoretically) to be between a "power-sharing" nonblack alliance and the blacks. Of course, the ruse has failed politically. Nevertheless, the discursive reforms remain and are gauged to present policy as pragmatic, reasonable, and transcendent of mere racial ideology.

The latest phase in Botha's attempts to institute a nonracial language has corresponded not only to the strategy of coopting Coloreds and Indians but also to the regime's unprecedented concern with persuading both foreign investors and the liberal, predominantly English-speaking capitalists at home that the old brittle racism has been rationalized into a flexible responsiveness to the "law" of the marketplace. Correspondingly, the regime's most pressing crisis—how to appease the millions of urban blacks barred from power under the constitution—has been transformed, through Botha's new technocratic language, into a crisis which has nothing to do with blacks, with South African racism, or even with politics. Where in the mid-seventies the Nationalists would talk of the need to remove unproductive, unwanted "foreign citizens" (that is, blacks) from the cities, the crisis is now couched as a purely structural one of a generic Third World sort; it is, in Botha's favorite catchphrase, a problem of "orderly urbanization."

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Derrida's indictment of Western complicity with South Africa is possibly the most valuable contribution of "Le Dernier Mot," but his passionate condemnation remains troubling for a number of reasons which stem largely from his blindness to the unfolding of the racial discourses in their historical context. Rightly denouncing the discrepancy between rhetorical condemnations of South Africa and the West's economic and strategic stakes in shoring up the regime, Derrida suggests that pressure on South Africa for liberal reform may be prompted by motives less ennobling than concern for human rights. Far from being the flower of humanist outrage, liberal protest may be nothing more than an economic reflex of "the law of the marketplace" (p. 296). But Derrida's apparently pragmatic and economistic argument—that "segregation hurts the market economy, limits free enterprise by limiting domestic consumption and

the mobility and training of labor" (p. 295)—is less a "fact" than it is a very frayed liberal strand of a controversy that has been tightly woven into the center of political and economic debate on South Africa since the 1930s. This controversy bears directly on the Nationalist's bantustan policy, in turn the only context in which one can understand the laborious ideological efforts the Nationalists have made to replace the racial language of black and white with a language of national difference.

Very simply, two rival interpretations of South African history have emerged over the past few decades. The debate turns on whether the rational forces of capital are in contradiction with the irrational, archaic policies of white racism, or whether *apartheid* can profitably coexist with modern capitalism. The liberal-reformist school, which emerged during an optimistic period of uninterrupted growth in the 1930s, has argued that *apartheid*'s cumbersome racial laws serve only to hamper the forward-thrusting momentum of the country's capitalist economy. Since the 1950s it has been a liberal tenet of faith that the "progressive force" of an efficient market economy will inevitably compel South Africa to slough off the heavy trappings of white racism and spell the demise of *apartheid*.[14]

In the late fifties and early sixties, in the wake of the African nationalist movements, the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, and the Treason Trial, and throughout a decade of brutality, bannings, torture, and crushed resistance, a powerful counterargument began to be raised. The "revisionist" school (living for the most part in exile) has argued that *apartheid* and modern capitalism are bound in a flourishing blood brotherhood, a pragmatic and flexible alliance which is collaborative and of spectacular mutual benefit. The revisionists argue, against Derrida, that far from hurting the market economy, "racial policy is an historical product . . . designed primarily to facilitate rapid capital accumulation, and has historically been used thus by all classes with access to state power in South Africa."[15] They charge that South Africa's "economic miracle" cannot be explained on economic grounds alone, as the liberals would have it, but must be seen in terms of a shifting alliance between capital and racial ideology which has, to be sure, created acute internal tensions, but which has nevertheless successfully safeguarded both economic privilege and white racial supremacy.[16]

14. The liberal reformist literature is legion. Some representative examples are: Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, eds., *The Oxford History of South Africa*, 2 vols. (New York, 1971); Leo Marquard, *Liberalism in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1965); and M. C. O'Dowd, "The Stages of Economic Growth and the Future of South Africa," in *Change, Reform and Economic Growth in South Africa*, ed. Lawrence Schlemmer and Eddie Webster (Johannesburg, 1978), p. 28–50.

15. Dan O'Meara, "The 1946 African Mine Workers' Strike and the Political Economy of South Africa," in *South African Capitalism*, p. 362.

16. The revisionists, however, do not present a monolithic front. See David Yudelman, "Industrialization, Race Relations and Change in South Africa: An Ideological and Academic

The Nationalist bantustan policy, central to any understanding of this debate, places in perspective not only Derrida's assertion that *"apartheid also* increases nonproductive expenditures (for example, each 'homeland' must have its own policing and administrative machinery)" (p. 295) but also the changes in the racial discourses of successive regimes as outlined above. It is misleading to claim, as Derrida does, that "no doubt *apartheid* was instituted and maintained against the British Commonwealth" (p. 294). A color-caste system became deeply entrenched after the abolition of slavery in 1834 through vagrancy laws, a pass law, and the Masters and Servants ordinances (1841, 1856, and 1873) preventing strikes and desertion. Moreover, as early as the mid-nineteenth century two British governors, George Grey in the Cape and Theophilus Shepstone in Natal, had recognized the bounty to be reaped from creating native reserves from which white farmers could draw labor at will. The discovery of diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) dramatically increased the need for more African workers, and hut and land taxes were levied on African farmers to force them to enter the white wage economy. An intricate system of labor controls subsequently developed, laying the ground for modern *apartheid.* The Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 allocated to blacks thirteen percent of the most arid and impoverished land, reserving for whites (sixteen percent of the population) eighty-seven percent of fertile and productive South Africa. The bantustans consist of eighty-one scattered pieces of land divided along artificial "ethnic" lines, where people live under conditions of deprivation that are barely possible to describe. There is virtually no running water or electricity and health conditions are disastrous, with malnutrition and disease resulting in an infant mortality rate of 220 per thousand. According to Nationalist policy this meager thirteen percent of the land is to be the destined home of all South Africa's black people—seventy-two percent of the population.

The reserve system came to serve two major functions. It coerced into existence a malleable and immiserated black migrant force to guarantee a constant, controlled source of labor. At the same time it drove the costs of reproducing labor as low as possible. Since it was argued that black workers could supplement their wages with food grown in the reserves, "family" wages rather than individual wages were paid. These were forced lower than the minimum needed to eke out a precarious survival, thereby reaping disproportionate profits for white farmers, industries, and mines. The system yields a number of other advantages. The bantustans are

Debate," *African Affairs: Journal of the Royal African Society* 74 (Jan. 1975): 82–96. See also Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid," *Economy and Society* 1 (Nov. 1972): 425–55; Frederick A. Johnstone, "White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today," *African Affairs: Journal of the Royal African Society* 69 (1970): 124–40; and Barbara Rogers, *White Wealth and Black Poverty: American Investments in Southern Africa* (Westport, Conn., 1976), pp. 60–83.

not only a constant source of cheap labor: they are also the places to which are banished the aged, the sick and broken people who are no longer fit to serve the needs of whites; professionals who are not "needed" in South Africa; strikers and dissidents; and, most critically, women and dependent children ("superfluous appendages" in the official terminology). The bantustan system bears most cruelly on women. Very limited job opportunities, low wages, and the fact that urban residence leases are given only to men make circumstances for women seeking work in urban South Africa especially difficult. This, together with forced removals, has meant that by 1982 fifty-seven percent of all black South African women were living in the bantustans under appalling conditions. Critical employment problems can also be shifted onto the shoulders of black bantustan governments as their own "national" problems to be solved outside South Africa. Similarly, social welfare becomes the responsibility of the bantustans which do not figure in official employment, health, or census statistics, but which are de facto economically impotent and politically at the beck and call of South Africa.

In 1948, the year the Nationalists came to power, South Africa was at a turning point in its economic development. The primary economy based on the gold and diamond mines was replaced by an economy based on the secondary industry of manufacturing. The paradox was that gold mining and farming had traditionally battened off a migrant black work force drawn from the reserves. The manufacturing industry, on the other hand, required a more skilled and stable black urban work force. The changes in the economy generated a major dilemma: who was to fill the new semiskilled roles created by mechanization? Manufacturing needed semiskilled operatives for factory work, but the central problem was that the uninhibited substitution of cheap black labor in place of white workers would not only give black labor some measure of bargaining power but would also bring black workers into direct competition with the white workers who had helped bring the Nationalists to power. Indeed, after the price of gold fell in the wake of World War I, miners had cut costs by substituting cheaper black labor for the more expensive whites, a state of affairs white workers had always feared deeply. Strikes and violent unrest among white workers erupted in 1922 (the Rand Revolt), resulting in a compromise between white workers and capital which limited certain jobs to whites (the infamous "color bar") and prohibited the formation of legal black unions. Thus white workers came to constitute a labor aristocracy militantly committed to preserving their privileges against the encroachment of black labor. Traditionally, the electoral triumph of the Nationalists in 1948 has been seen as a victory of backward racism over liberal British capitalism. But the Nationalists were in fact borne to power on an alliance of white mine workers, petit bourgeois and professional Afrikaners, and Afrikaans farmers. Thus, as Ruth Milkman points out, "while the Nationalist government was strongly committed to challenging

the power of the British mining capitalists, it never opposed the development of South African capitalism."[17] It was rather a question of who was to control the process.

After 1948 the Nationalists chose a route which gives the clearest sense of how *apartheid* policy has adapted itself to the double goal of retaining access to black labor for manufacturing while protecting white cultural and political power. In apparent conflict with the manufacturing industry's need for a stable, urban work force, they chose to expand the system of migrant labor. It is in the context of this extremely profitable compromise between capital and *apartheid* that the allied changes in the justificatory Nationalist ideologies can be seen.

In 1952 the reserves were systematized on a national basis by the Orwellian Natives (Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents) Act, which bars from urban areas blacks who are not "ministering to the needs of whites." The system was enforced by a ruthless and constantly refined machinery of state legislation: through the hated passes which blacks have to carry at all times, by the registration of all black workers through labor bureaus which can terminate employment at their own discretion, by laws binding farm workers to their jobs and making desertion a crime, by the job reservation system, by the mesh of influx control legislation which makes it illegal for blacks to stay in a white urban area for more than seventy-two hours without government permits, and by forced removals to the bantustans.

The linchpin of Nationalist policy became the gradual enforcement of black citizenship in the bantustans, with the intention of depriving blacks forever of the right to demand the benefits of South African citizenship while not forgoing their labor. As the Minister of Bantu Development put it in a 1978 speech: "if our policy is taken to its full logical conclusion as far as the black people are concerned, there will not be one black man with South African citizenship."[18] Since 1960, the government has forcibly resettled 3.5 million Africans and effectively deprived 8 million of their citizenship by means of statutes carefully worded to avoid defining citizenship on racial grounds.

In the mid-seventies radical governments came to power in Angola and Mozambique, internal and external resistance increased, and large-scale civil unrest culminated in the Soweto riots of 1976. Certain elements in big business and the military began to press for labor policy changes that would relieve some of the tension by creating a black middle-class elite with a stake in shoring up the capitalist state. In 1979 the government-appointed Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions set the stage for a renewed

17. Ruth Milkman, "Apartheid, Economic Growth, and U.S. Foreign Policy in South Africa," in *South African Capitalism,* p. 427.

18. Quoted in Kevin Danaher, *In Whose Interest? A Guide to U.S.–South Africa Relations* (Washington, D.C., 1984), p. 31.

compromise between capital and state *apartheid*. The Wiehahn Commission proposed the legal recognition of black unions which would bring them into the industrial conciliation system while tightly curtailing their activity through legal restrictions, vetoes, prohibitions on political activity, arrests, detentions, and murders. The Riekert "reforms" amounted to a refinement of state labor control by means of two principal factors: controlling jobs and limiting housing to certain privileged groups of urban African workers. As Kevin Danaher puts it:

> At no time were the proposed reforms intended to improve the lot of the African majority. Rather, the changes were designed to 1) meet the needs of the white business community for a more well-regulated African workforce, and 2) divide the African workers into several distinct strata with a hierarchy of rights and wealth, thus dividing Africans along class as well as ethnic lines.[19]

Ultimately, the alliance between capital and *apartheid* was refined, not undermined, and the overall goals of *apartheid* remained the same. As the Riekert report declared: "Every black person in South Africa . . . is a member of his specific nation. . . . The fundamental citizenship rights may only be enjoyed by a Bantu person within his own ethnic homeland."[20]

In this way, the bantustan system, constantly refined and strengthened, has buttressed the capitalist economy while simultaneously serving the ideological purpose of justifying Nationalist claims that their policy is no longer one of racial discrimination but of safeguarding the sovereignty of distinct "nations." The deliberate efforts to fragment the black community into mutually antagonistic "ethnic" communities, into those with limited residence rights and those without, feed the perverse argument that South Africa is indeed a "working democracy." By pointing to the ten bantustans, the government can claim that "numerically the White nation is superior to all other nations in South Africa. . . . It demonstrates the folly of saying that a minority government is ruling others in South Africa."[21]

The progressive force/revisionist debate has a number of crucial implications which are left out of Derrida's account. The crux of the matter for the liberals is that the triumph of the impersonal "law of the market" over racial ideology will take an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary course and will be aided and abetted by deepening capital

19. Ibid., p. 15.
20. Quoted ibid., p. 19.
21. *HAD* 11 (13 Oct. 1966), quoted in Legassick, "Legislation, Ideology and Economy," p. 506 n. 88.

investment—that is, they believe that one can invest one's way to nonracial democracy. For the revisionists, on the other hand, as Martin Legassick points out, there is something troubling in the a priori faith (which Derrida appears to endorse) that such beneficial fruits as the demise of *apartheid* might be borne from the mere fact of capitalist growth alone.[22] Of paramount importance, moreover, is the influence of the debate on foreign investment policies toward South Africa. Derrida's optimistic vision of *apartheid* brought to its knees by a liberalizing capitalism has been staunchly defended by many in the South African business community; by Michael O'Dowd, for example, for whom capitalism is an "equalizing" factor with a "strong tendency" to overcome the color bar.[23] Indeed, if Derrida takes to its logical conclusion his argument that *apartheid* may be abolished by the imposition of the "law of the market," he will find himself in the position of advocating accelerated international investment in order to hasten the collapse of the regime.

But the business community's faith in the logic of capitalism has lost much of its clout over the years for, as Greenberg points out, "the historical record on African living standards is reasonably clear: nearly a century of capitalist development between 1870 and 1960 brought almost no gains to the African majority." Despite South Africa's "economic miracle," the "basic pattern of income inequality and racial income shares has proved remarkably stable in this century," and the discrepancy in living standards remains staggeringly disproportionate by almost any international standard.[24]

3

It must be emphasized that to question the strength of Derrida's method is not to question his commitment to change in South Africa. His repugnance for the policies of the Pretoria regime is never in doubt. However, we have argued that for anyone concerned with the cultural component in national and international politics, it is crucial to supplement the kind of symbolic vigilance embodied in the Exhibition with another kind of watchfulness entirely absent from "Le Dernier Mot," an alertness to the protean forms of political persuasion. For most of the essay, Derrida allows the solitary word *apartheid* to absorb so much of his attention that the changing discourses of South African racism appear more static and monolithic than they really are. Paradoxically, what is most absent from Derrida's essay is an attentiveness to racial and class difference: his insights

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22. See Legassick, "Legislation, Ideology and Economy," p. 468.
23. See Stanley B. Greenberg, "Economic Growth and Political Change: The South African Case," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 19 (Dec. 1981): 669.
24. Ibid., pp. 678, 680.

are premised on too uniform a conception of South Africa's discourses of racial difference, while his historical comments are too generalized to carry strategic force.

To remedy these shortcomings, an alternative approach is required, one which integrates discursive, political, economic, and historical analyses. The lineaments of such a method are traced by Stedman Jones when he enjoins us

> to study the production of interest, identification, grievance and aspiration within political languages themselves. We need to map out these successive languages . . . both in relation to the political languages they replace and laterally in relation to rival political languages with which they are in conflict. . . . It is clear that particular political languages do become inapposite in new situations. How and why this occurs involves the discovery of the precise point at which such shifts occur as well as an investigation of the specific political circumstances in which they shift.[25]

For an analysis of racial representation, at least, this would mean abandoning such favored monoliths of post-structuralism as "logocentrism" and "Western metaphysics," not to mention bulky homogeneities such as "the occidental essence of the historical process" (p. 295) and a "European 'discourse' on the concept of race" (p. 294). Instead one would have to regard with a historical eye the uneven traffic between political interests and an array of cultural discourses—a traffic at times clandestine, at times frank, at times symmetrical, at times conflicting and rivalrous, but at all times intimate. Derrida's call to fling back an answer to *apartheid* is inspiring, but until one recognizes, with Dan O'Meara, that "racial policy is open to a sequence of somersaults, deviations, and permutations which endlessly confuse those who regard it as the product of a monolithic racial ideology," and until one embeds the analysis of racial policy in the dense everyday life of South Africa, such calls to action will remain of limited strategic worth.[26]

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25. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class,* p. 22.
26. Dan O'Meara, "The 1946 African Mine Workers' Strike," p. 363.