Forgotten Connections, Unconsidered Parallels: A New Agenda for Comparative Research in Southern Africa and the Caribbean

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Introduction

To many the Caribbean is known only as a tourist paradise of sun, sea and sand, or else as the home of calypso, reggae and West Indian cricket. Since the phenomenal rise to world-wide prominence of reggae music which began with Bob Marley in the 1970s, the many territories and diverse cultures scattered across thousands of miles of ocean which make up the Caribbean region are often represented in the popular consciousness internationally by the single island of Jamaica. In Southern Africa, extensive Cuban involvement in the Angolan Civil War between 1975 and 1988 may have modified this consciousness somewhat, although in the Cold War rhetoric of the period Cuba was more usually known for its status as an ally of the Soviet Bloc than for its geographical location as a Caribbean island.

By comparison, over the past thirty years, popular knowledge of Southern Africa in the Caribbean seems to have been more extensive than that of the Caribbean in Southern Africa. The bulk of this knowledge (with the obvious exception of Cuba) has been derived from western media reports pertaining to the struggle against apartheid and its aftermath. For a time in the 1980s, South Africa's troubles were a nightly feature on Caribbean television screens. It is questionable, however, whether knowledge of South Africa gained from such sources was any more accurate than the average South African's view of the Caribbean, especially since much of the information arrived pre-digested by international media houses based in Europe and North America which had little reason to take account of the concerns and sensibilities of a Caribbean audience.

An interesting example of the impact of the media on popular perceptions of South Africa in the Caribbean can be seen in West Indian attitudes to the Zulu. At first glance, a fishing boat called 'Isandhlwana' pulled up on a Caribbean beach, or a football team in a local league called 'Shaka Zulu', might be seen as testimony to the importance of the Zulu as a symbol of black pride and black power in the region - as in much of the rest of the African diaspora. However, the image of the Zulu celebrated in these examples proves to be problematic, since it was not derived in the first instance from knowledge of the historical struggles of the Zulu against British imperialism or the rise of the apartheid state; rather it was a reflection of the pervasive influence of the controversial SABC film 'Shaka', which was shown by television stations throughout the Caribbean during the late 1980s. Far from promoting the theme of black pride and solidarity, which was explicit in the anti-apartheid struggle, the film lent plausibility to racist international media explanations of so-called 'black on black' violence in South Africa (Davis 1996:167-182).

In such circumstances it is clear that the scope for mis-understanding, mis-communication and even deliberate mis-information was vast; at several critical moments in the struggle against apartheid attitudes in the Caribbean were based on false or at best partial information on the nature of South African society

and events there. As late as 1989, one right-wing Barbadian commentator (who made a 'fact-finding' trip to South Africa as a guest of the South African Government) had this to say about conditions in South Africa's black townships:

> Yes, there are cardboard homes... But what the media fails to point out is that they are the homes of the many thousands of black refugees who annually flee the poverty of their own black dictatorships to live in rich and free South Africa (*Sunday Sun* 19.3.89:1).

Over the years of the anti-apartheid struggle one thing above all else saved the debate on South Africa in the Caribbean from the mire of confusion - throughout the bitter debates on the scope for, and validity of sanctions, for example. There was a constant popular pan-Africanist sentiment which kept the issue alive and on track. This sentiment proved deeper and more pervasive than even the power of the media in Caribbean society. It made the ordinary person in the street a partisan for black rights in Southern Africa, whatever the details of the particular issue might be. At the same time the anti-apartheid struggle was often influential in domestic politics in the Caribbean, where it informed the struggle for black social and economic enfranchisement in the 1970s and 1980s. South Africa became a mirror in which the Caribbean saw its own enduring inequalities and injustices (Marshall 1990).

Caribbean/South African Connections

Notwithstanding limited popular knowledge of the Caribbean in South Africa, and of South Africa in the Caribbean, people and ideas have been moving between the two regions for centuries. The earliest of these exchanges, and the most important in terms of sheer numbers, consisted of hundreds of thousands of slaves from Central-Southern Africa who were shipped to the French and Spanish speaking islands of the Caribbean from ports in Angola and Mozambique. This movement occurred throughout the period from the late sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. It is therefore little exaggeration to say that Afro-Caribbean people and the Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa are linked with ties of blood.[1]

Evidence can also be found of numerous voluntary labour migrants who crossed the Atlantic in the opposite direction. They include seafarers, who founded small but influential Afro-Caribbean communities in ports all along the Southern African coast from Windhoek to Lorenco Marques in the period from the late nineteenth century onwards. When South Africa's first mass black trade union, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), was formed on the docks in Capetown in 1919 a number of its founder members were West Indians. At least five of the ICU's twelve-member National Council were West Indians, including its president, J.G.Gumbs. West Indians could also be found on the Gold Fields of the Witwatersrand; working as skilled artisans on the sugar estates of Mozambique and travelling to various parts of the region as soldiers or administrators (Cobley: 1992). They operated in Southern Africa as missionaries (both black and white), as educators, and as businessmen (*Weekend Nation*: 17.6.94).

During the 1970s and 1980s, as the anti-apartheid struggle intensified, a new category of West Indian labour migrants were attracted to South Africa. By 1970 international sanctions had isolated South African sport from the rest of the world. The South African government's response to this was to attempt to break the boycott by sponsoring a variety of schemes to buy in international sporting talent. Among those who made the trip to South Africa in the 1970s were several black players from the West Indies, including John Shepherd, Geoffrey Greenidge, Keith Barker, John Holder and Rohan Kanai. This was also the era in which Gary Sobers went to Rhodesia (Crowley 1983:131-135). The biggest coup for South Africa's white cricket establishment was the West Indian 'Rebel' tour of 1983 led by Lawrence Rowe, a team dubbed by one enthusiastic white South Africa commentator the "Calypso Cavaliers"(Crowley

1983:130).[2] The tour was immensely controversial and the players were vilified in the West Indies for defying the boycott; several stayed on in South Africa to play club cricket in the later 1980s after they were banned by their home associations for taking part in the tour. It is ironic in the circumstances that following the legal ending of apartheid in the early 1990s an eminent former West Indian cricketer, Conrad Hunte, was put in charge of the development of youth cricket in the Black townships of South Africa (Hunte 1999).[3]

Caribbean influences in Southern Africa have also extended to the realms of ideas and culture. Pan-Africanism, that phenomenal political hybrid born of the African diaspora in the Americas during the nineteenth century, owed much of its character to Caribbean progenitors, and was carried to Southern Africa in large part by Caribbean people. The pioneering pan-Africanist, Henry Sylvester Williams of Trinidad, moved from his role as secretary of the first Pan-African Conference in London in 1900 directly to a law practice in Capetown, where he became the first black lawyer the sub-continent had seen. His hope, soon to be dashed, was that the defeat of the Boers by the British would open the way for the liberalisation of race relations at the Cape. A generation later, in the wake of the First World War, West Indian seafarers introduced Southern Africa to the pan-Africanist teachings of Jamaican Marcus Garvey. At its zenith in the 1920s the Garveyite movement not only linked black communities throughout the Americas; it galvanised and radicalised African nationalist movements throughout Africa, including the African National Congress in South Africa. In the same period Barbadian Kenneth Spooner took his message of black spiritual redemption to the Bafokeng people in the Rustenburg district of the Northern Transvaal as a missionary for the Pentecostal Holiness Church. He was one among several West Indian and African American missionaries to ply their trade in South Africa in these years (Mathurin 1976; Hill and Pirio 1987; Mokgatle 1971:73-84).

Thus, West Indians were influential in a variety of ways in black South African society during the crucial thirty-year period from the end of the South African War to the onset of the Depression. Above all, they brought a black perspective from the Americas to politics in South Africa which helped to shape and energise an emerging modernist political consciousness among the black South African petty bourgeoisie. As Ntongela Masilela argues,

> the New Africans appropriated the historical lessons drawn from the New Negro experience within American modernity to chart and negotiate the newly emergent South African modernity: The Africans learned from African Americans the process of transforming themselves into agencies in or of modernity (Masilela 1996:94).

Pan-Africanism, of course, takes many forms. Since the 1930s, Rastafarianism, a broad and diffuse popular movement based on a yearning for Africa - which was born in the Caribbean - has become entrenched throughout the African diaspora. It is a religion, an Afrocentric cultural movement, a lifestyle, a socio-political consciousness, even, symbolically at least, a 'Back-to-Africa' movement (Hebdige 1987). It is ironic, yet wholly consistent with the history of pan-Africanism, that Rastafarianism should evoke a popular response in Southern Africa, just as earlier pan-Africanist movements had done. Thus, one of the biggest stars of reggae to emerge in the 1980s was the South African Rastafarian Lucky Dube, who reinterpreted the message of redemption contained in reggae in the context of the liberation struggle in South Africa. Though his recordings and through his performances at 'Reggae Sunsplash' in Jamaica he in turn brought the rhythms and idioms of the township shebeen to the international mainstream of reggae music. The emergence of several large and well-established Rastafarian communities has become a notable phenomenon in post-independence South Africa.

There was also a Pan-Africanist element in black responses to cricket in both regions. In the Anglophone Caribbean cricket was always more than a game; during the twentieth century the extent of black

penetration into the white establishment which had traditionally dominated the game became one of the key indices of black social and political advancement in the region. This is one reason why the feelings against the West Indian 'rebel' players were so bitter. When South Africa and the West Indies played for the first time after the ending of the boycott during the cricket World Cup in 1991-92, West Indies captain Richie Richardson had ignominy heaped upon his head for describing his team's defeat at the hands of the all-white opposition as 'just another match'. It was followed by a boycott by the West Indian public of the first test match played by the two teams in April 1992 (Beckles 1998b). At the same time black spectators in South Africa tended to cheer on the West Indies and other black cricket teams against their national team. More recently, many have seen attempts to promote racial integration in, and to 'democratise', South African cricket as a direct parallel to the West Indian experience (Hunte 1999).

The extent and variety of contacts between two such widely geographically separated regions may seem at first surprising, until the rise of Western capitalism to a position of dominance in the world system, allied to the globalising project of imperialism, is taken into consideration. In the British empire, the greatest imperial machine the world has ever seen, personnel were constantly being exchanged at all levels between widely separated colonial administrations, and ideas and experiences derived from one part of the world were often applied in another. Contacts of this type between the Caribbean and Southern Africa at a time when British possessions could be found in both are legion, and should not require extensive illustration. However, two examples may be offered to illustrate the point.

In 1898 one of the great hurricanes that periodically rampage through the Caribbean hit the island of Barbados, causing much destruction and considerable loss of life. Funds for relief work were collected at public meetings held in Natal and the Cape Colony. Two of the largest donations, one of £250-00 and another of £ 460.17.3, were sent on behalf of the people of Natal by Governor Walter Hely-Hutchinson. His personal interest in the disaster was not surprising since he had previously served as Governor in Barbados, as well as in the Windward Islands. The Colonial Secretary in Barbados who acknowledged receipt of these gifts was Ralph Williams, who had served previously in South Africa. He had connections with both Sir Alfred Milner, then High Commissioner in South Africa, and with his successor, Lord Selborne. During the South African War Barbadians were kept well informed of events and were rallied to the British side by Williams, who gave public lectures on the South African issue. News of the relief of Ladysmith in February 1900 was met with rejoicing and public illuminations in the island, but this response paled into insignificance compared to that which greeted news of the relief of Mafeking in May. Williams wrote proudly in his autobiography: "At night the enthusiasm was greater than ever, and both the Governor and I paraded through the town amidst the wildest scenes of rejoicing".
When Lord Selborne was seeking to revitalise and expand the colonial administration in South Africa after the end of the South African War in 1902, Williams was a natural choice for the post of Resident Commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Williams was also a friend of Cecil Rhodes, and attended his funeral as a guest of the Southern Rhodesian Government. As the case of Ralph Williams indicates, the movement of colonial officers around the empire provided important practical opportunities for cross-fertilisation in the areas of policy and administrative practice - not to mention inter-colonial imperial solidarity, which supplemented the coordinating role of the Colonial Office in London.[4]

My second example concerns the ending of slavery in the British empire. Driven by the logic of the capitalist free market, against the background of unceasing black resistance to slavery, and after a long and vocal anti-slavery campaign in England, the British Government had decided to free all slaves in the British Empire as from 1st August 1834. The debate leading up to this decision focused almost exclusively on the horrors of the middle passage and on plantation slavery in the British West Indies. However, a policy designed by the British government with conditions in the Caribbean in mind was applied wholesale elsewhere, including South Africa, with divergent and historically important results. Here I will mention

only two. To sweeten the pill for the former slave masters who would lose a substantial amount of property through emancipation, provision was made for compensation to be paid. However, the rates of compensation were fixed according to the market value of slaves in the West Indies, which was considerably lower than in South Africa, and the money was payable only in London, where many absentee West Indian plantation owners resided - but which made the funds inaccessible to most South African slave owners. These issues added to a wave of discontent at the arbitrariness of British rule then building among the Boers in South Africa, which culminated in that dramatic explosion of white settlers into the interior known as the Great Trek (Davenport 1991:41-44). The second unanticipated result of the emancipation policy in South Africa arose from the effort to reclassify black workers in the wake of the abolition of slavery. In order to ease the transition to a 'free labour' market, it was agreed that a four-year period of 'apprenticeship' would be served by the ex-slaves, and that, thereafter, legislation would be enacted to ensure that the large scale movement of labour would be discouraged. These provisions were designed specifically to allay the fears of West Indian planters that their labour force would simply melt away after Emancipation. However, after 1838 a series of Masters and Servants laws were enacted throughout the British Empire on the West Indian model. In the Caribbean these measures did not halt the decline of King Sugar, and merely added to the climate of economic stagnation; in the South African context the Masters and Servants laws would become the cornerstone of an elaborate legal system of racial segregation.[5]

Given the history of contact and of exchange between the two regions it would be surprising if some effort at comparison and of contrast had not been made between them. Given also the role of Western capitalism and of the British empire in both regions, such parallels can sometimes be very striking. An early example can be found in the writings of the nineteenth century Methodist missionary William Shrewsbury.

William Shrewsbury had worked in Antigua, Tortola, Grenada and Barbados (acquiring a Barbadian wife, Hilaria, along the way), before being driven from the latter by an angry mob pro-slavery mob in October 1823. In 1826 he was posted to South Africa to minister to the Xhosas under Chief Hintsa. This was not an arbitrary posting on the part of the Methodist Church in England, which felt that a proven champion of black rights was needed in the Eastern Cape to counteract the hostile influence of the white settler community on the policy of the colonial government towards Africans. In a letter home not long after his arrival Shrewsbury pointed to the contrast between his West Indian and South African experience:

> The work in this country is widely different from that to which I have been accustomed in the West Indies, and the state of society is exactly the reverse. There white men bear the rule, here black men have authority and power, and I must say they are far less disposed to be tyrannical towards us than we are towards them in the West Indies.

He continues:

> It would be very instructive for a high-handed planter - I speak not of moderate and honourable men, such as we sometimes met with in the colonies - to be necessitated to live in the heart of Kaffir-land for one year. If it did not cure him of that supercilious scorn he feels towards every man whose skin is black, it would at least humble him, by constraining him to feel his dependence on men of the same shade of colour with those who have been taught to own his lordly sway. Any man, yea, any missionary, in the least tinctured with the West India prejudices, would be completely miserable if sent to this land. Thank God for His grace which has delivered me, and my wife too, though of Barbadian lineage, from so great a curse (Shrewsbury 1871:246).

It seems odd to hear the 'West India prejudices' contrasted with the South African context in this manner. However, at the time Shrewsbury was writing, the Xhosas were still a sovereign and independent African people, whereas the West Indies were characterised by slave societies dominated by small white minorities, noted even in their own day for the virulence of their racial attitudes. The extent to which these minorities and the vestiges of their racial attitudes continue to govern social and economic life in the Caribbean continues to be a subject of much political controversy in the region.

The most famous work to link the West Indies and South Africa in comparative perspective is of much later vintage, although still within the frame of the colonial era. W.M. Macmillan's *Warning from the West Indies: A Tract for Africa and the Empire*, was published in 1936. Macmillan was a well-known South African academic who travelled to the Caribbean in 1935 on a study trip funded in part by the Carnegie Corporation and the Phelps-Stokes Fund. His self-proclaimed purpose, however, was to serve the interests of the Empire. In the course of a letter to the Secretary of State asking whether the Colonial Office in London would be willing to provide some support for his trip, he wrote: "You know I am doing this from some, possibly wrong-headed, ideas of public duty !"[6] Although Macmillan was a convinced supporter of the British Empire, he believed it should have a strong sense of social and moral responsibility to the colonised. Only then could it realise its potential as a force for good in the world. His stated objective in travelling to the Caribbean was to look at the cumulative effects of British colonial policy in some of Britain's oldest colonies, in order that he could make judgements about the potential long term effects of British policy in other parts of her empire, and especially in British Africa.

In his book Macmillan was highly critical of the British approach in the West Indies since the nineteenth century. He argued that it had been a disastrous combination of self-congratulatory trusteeship and economic *laissez faire*. The slaves had been given legal freedom amidst a welter of moral denunciation of slavery and of the planters who sought to perpetuate it. But the British omitted to provide any economic base or social welfare safety net for the newly freed population, arguing that their colonies should be financially self-supporting entities which would not put a strain on the imperial purse. For their part, the planter elite had little incentive to provide alternatives to plantation labour for the majority black population. The result had been long term economic and social decay, resulting in endemic poverty, ignorance and disease among the black labouring poor. Macmillan concluded that unless the British government abandoned its laissez faire approach to colonial government and launched a massive reconstruction programme in the Islands there would soon be widespread social and political unrest (Macmillan 1936:15-20).

At the heart of Macmillan's book is the parallel he saw between the West Indian experience and that of the white settler-dominated colonies of Africa, such as South Africa, where the black majority lived in similarly unheeded, and, in the long run, equally untenable conditions. He was writing at a time when the South African government had committed itself to a comprehensive segregation system that was morally justified by its defenders as a policy of 'trusteeship' in the interests of both white and black. However, he recognised that 'trusteeship' in South Africa was rooted in the same spirit of economic *laissez faire* as that in the West Indies had been. As a consequence it was breeding long term structural inequality and was consigning the majority black population to a permanent state of degradation and grinding poverty. Though South Africa and the other white settler colonies of Africa had not yet reached the level of degradation of those in the West Indies, he argued that the same social and political explosion would ultimately result in British Africa as he had predicted for the West Indies if nothing were done (Macmillan 1936:198-200).

Macmillan's prediction of imminent unrest in the West Indies made him a celebrity - and his book a best seller - when a wave of riots broke out across the West Indies in 1937, only a few months after his *Warning* was published. The book became required reading in the Colonial Office and his advice was often sought by officials thereafter on aspects of colonial policy. Many of his findings and recommendations were echoed in the report of the Moyne Commission which investigated the causes of the unrest in 1938. John Flint has gone so far as to argue that it was the wave of riots in the West Indies and Macmillan's interpretation of them - rather than the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 - that account for the dramatic change in British colonial policy that occurred in the early 1940s during the tenure of Colonial Secretary Malcom MacDonald. As a result of this change the laissez faire approach was abandoned by the British Government in favour of a policy of massive intervention to sponsor economic,

social and political development in the colonies. The centre-piece of this new policy was the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 (Flint 1989:229-230).

Macmillan's work is a rarity in its linking of the Caribbean with South Africa, but it is not quite unique. A study dating to the early 1970s which examines parallels between the two regions was by a South African exile named D.E.H. Russell. Like Macmillan's work, Russell's study was intended to supply practical lessons which could be applied in the South African case. However, his work was the product of very different times, and his interest was in rebellion rather than reform. In the introduction Russell wrote: "I grew interested in the subject of rebellion when I finally became convinced that the radical change so desperately needed in South Africa - the country of my birth - could not be achieved through traditional political channels" (Russell 1974:1).What, he wondered, makes for a successful revolution ? His case studies ranged across Europe, Asia, and Latin America, but he gave pride of place to the case of Castro and Cuba, not only because the Cuban Revolution had been an obvious recent success, but also because he believed that the racial composition and structural inequalities of Cuban society in the 1950s made it comparable to South Africa. The structure and content of Russell's book, with its 'Armed Forces Disloyalty Scale', seems sadly dated now, and he could not have anticipated, as he looked to Cuba for historical precedents applicable to the South African case, that the Cuban revolution was about to have a direct impact on the course Southern African history. Nevertheless, the concept of a comparative project linking the Caribbean and South Africa, is, I would submit, more relevant now than ever before. It is to this point that I wish now to turn.

Comparative Voices on Southern Africa

"Comparisons," said Dogberry in Shakespeare's, *Much Ado About Nothing*, "are odorous".[7] It would seem that many historians agree with this assessment, judging from the number who figuratively hold their noses and head off in another direction whenever comparative analysis is mentioned. Traditionally, historians have gloried in the uniqueness of their work, building their analyses around the particularities and peculiarities of each lovingly reconstructed case. But in practice, without some concept of the comparability of human experience across time and space, historical writing is a meaningless exercise. Thus, comparison, albeit more usually implicit than explicit, is inherent to the historian's craft. We could go further, and argue that the use of extrinsic concepts and themes as a heuristic device is a methodology to be embraced and celebrated by historians, rather than being unacknowledged, hidden, or buried in footnotes. However, in this paper I do not propose to spend much time discussing the merits of comparative historical analysis, which have been the subject of a long and exhaustive debate. From my own reading of that debate, I take its value as given. Rather, in the latter half of this paper I wish to examine the current state of the comparative project as it relates to Southern Africa, and to go on to suggest ways in which it can be reoriented, using the Caribbean/South African connection, to take cognisance of our post-colonial and post modern world. In the process, I will seek to show that, given the current state of transnational and postcolonial discourses, such comparison is not merely desirable; it is quickly becoming essential.

In a review of the comparative literature on Southern Africa since the 1950s Ran Greenstein identified four broad, overlapping phases (Greenstein 1998:2-4). In each phase there was a shift in the themes studied and the case studies selected which was related, Greenstein suggests, to developments in South Africa itself. During the 1960s, when the elaboration of apartheid in South Africa stood in stark contrast to the wave of decolonisation elsewhere in Africa, the comparative focus was on other societies with significant white settler populations such as Southern Rhodesia and the Portuguese colony of Angola. This phase included a classic pioneering study compiled by Louis Hartz with the title: *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia* published in 1964. The section on South Africa was contributed by Leonard Thompson. George Frederickson, later a most

distinguished comparative historian of South Africa and the United States, credits this book with awakening his interest in the comparative project (Frederickson 1995:593).

According to Greenstein, the next phase was ushered in by the growing tide of militant internal opposition to apartheid in the 1970s, culminating in the Soweto Rising. This spawned a series of comparative studies pairing South Africa with settler societies facing acute political crisis at the same time, such as Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine. Examples include R. Stevens and A. Elmessir (eds), *Israel and South Africa: The Progression of a Relationship* published in 1976. The coincidence of a new wave of township violence and the Palestinian *Intifada* in the late 1980s gave this Israel/Palestine - South Africa comparison a new lease of life. Publications which fed on this included Greenstein's own work, entitled: *Genealogies of Conflict: Class, Identity and State in Palestine/Israel and South Africa* (1995). In the late 1970s and early 1980s the focus shifted again, to the comparative study of segregation, and of struggles for freedom and equality in racist societies. In this phase major prominence was given to comparative studies of South Africa and the American South. A crop of brilliant work emerged out of this US/South Africa nexus, including Stanley Greenburg's *Race and the State in Capitalist Development: Comparative Perspectives* (1980); George Frederickson's *A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (1981); and John Cell's *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (1982). An important work published around the same time, though with a somewhat different theme, was the collection by Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson entitled: *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared* (1981).The fourth and most recent phase identified by Greenstein, which also had its roots in the 1970s but developed particularly in the 1980s, looked at comparative experiences of economic development and working class organisation, and took Latin America as the site for comparison. Examples include Gay Seidman's *Manufacturing Militance: Workers Movements in Brazil and South Africa* (1994) (Greenstein 1998:3-4).

To Greenstein's list we may add a fifth, more eclectic phase of comparative analysis, which began in the early-mid 1990s and continues to date. In this phase the themes and sites taken for comparison have ranged widely, sometimes reprising familiar ground, sometimes heading off in entirely new directions, perhaps reflecting a growing confusion in the academy over the direction of historical discourses on South Africa consonant with the country's transition to majority rule. Much of this work was presaged in Donald Denoon's interesting book, *Settler Capitalism* (published in 1983), with its comparisons drawn from Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, New Zealand and Australia. Notable contributions include James Gump's *The Dust Rose Like Smoke: The Subjugation of the Zulu and the Sioux* (1994); George Frederickson's *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (1995); and William Beinart and Peter Coates' *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa* (1995). This phase has also seen at least two important conferences which devoted attention to the comparative project in South Africa. The first was a conference on 'Social Movements in South Africa' at the University of Natal in February 1996 at which the 'intensely localised' focus and lack of 'international and cross-national analysis' of much of the work on social movements was discussed. This led to a the publication of a special section in *African Studies* edited by Tom Lodge in 1997 on 'Social Movements in Comparative Perspective'(Lodge 1997). The second was a symposium in London on 16 and 17 May 1996 on the theme 'Beyond White Supremacy: Towards a New Agenda for the Comparative Histories of South Africa and the United States', held under the aegis of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and the Institute for Historical Research (Institute of Commonwealth Studies 1997).

Greenstein's survey of comparative literature on South Africa gives rise to several methodological questions. The first, which he himself raises in the introduction to his edited collection, *Comparative Perspectives On South Africa*, is the relative absence of comparison between South Africa and other African states. He suggests that this is the product in part of an unchallenged assumption of

'exceptionalism' in South African studies - the mirror image of the same traditional problem in American studies - which causes researchers to look outside Africa for comparative purposes. The ahistoricity of this attitude is thoroughly exposed by Jon Lonsdale in his conclusion to the same collection (Lonsdale 1998: 287-289). The other reason for the neglect of African comparisons, Greenstein suggests, is a deeply rooted Euro-centrism in the academy and in traditional historical discourses. The solution, he argues would "entail of necessity an intra-national struggle over academic power, resources and paradigms - a development that is likely to occupy our attention in the coming years":

> Establishing non-metropolitan intellectual links, with other Africans as well as with those who face similar challenges in other parts of the world - Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia - is thus a prime task. A South-South dialogue which does not involve a mandatory passage through the metropolis for purposes of academic legitimacy would be of great benefit to us all (Greenstein 1998:13).

Fundamentally, the task Greenstein defines of promoting South-South dialogue was the prime objective of my recent trip to Southern Africa (July 1999) and is the professed objective of the SEPHIS foundation which provided such generous funding for me to make it . However, there is more than a little irony inherent in the fact that SEPHIS derives its resources primarily from the Government of Holland, a former western colonial power with more than a passing historical interest in both the Caribbean and South Africa. Perhaps this is what Chakrabarty meant when he said "it is impossible to simply walk out of the deep collusion between 'history' and the modernising narrative"(quoted in Prakash 1994:1489).

The second point is, of course, that not all the comparative literature on Southern Africa over the past forty years fits neatly into Greenstein's packages. For example, Stanley Trapido's article entitled 'South Africa in a Comparative Study of Industrialisation,' published in 1971, can be seen essentially as a homage to Barrington Moore Jr's classic text, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, which had been published in 1966. Trapido's debt to Barrington Moore is evident in his eclectic choice of comparisons - ranging from industrialisation in Tsarist Russia and Imperial Germany to the mechanisation of the cotton industry in the American South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is an example of an exercise in comparative history which had at least as much, if not more, to do with international trends and fashions in the academy as it did with current events in South Africa (Trapido 1971).

Thirdly, not included in Greenstein's survey is the enormous influence of perspectives taken from the historiography of other societies and regions in the world on much South African historiography with no overtly stated comparative agenda. A few examples include Colin Bundy's pioneering work on the South African peasantry, which adapted perspectives drawn from the writings of Theodore Shanin and others involved in the founding of the *Journal of Peasant Studies*; the work by Shell, Worden, Ross, and Rayner on South African slavery and slave resistance, which draws very heavily on the extensive literature on slavery in the Americas; and that outstanding study of the sharecropper Kas Maine by Charles Van Onselen, the origins of which can be found in a much earlier biography of a sharecropper in the American South, and which seeks to explore Genovese's work on paternalism in a South African context (Bundy 1997). Such implicitly comparative work may not share the same methodologies as explicitly comparative analyses, but are often similar in objective.

Missing also is a discussion of comparative literature in disciplines other than history and closely allied fields. Comparative study of black education in South Africa, for example, has a long and chequered history, going back to Charles Loram and possibly even earlier (see for example Mugomba and Nyaggah 1980). Since the new theoretical perspectives identified as key by Greenstein in his call for more comparative analysis had their origins in disciplines such as literature, gender and cultural studies, or in the interstices between them, it is a pity that he does not mention some recent fascinating comparative work in these areas. The collection edited by Shula Marks and Dagmar Engels with the title '*Contesting Colonial*

Hegemony; State and Society in Africa and India, is a ground-breaking work which attempts to marry the work of the Subaltern school in South-east Asia with the growing post-colonial literature in Africa. Another example is Hildi Hendrickson's edited collection, *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-colonial Africa* : it sets out to 'investigate popular, political, economic, and spiritual meanings assigned to treatments of the body surface in a variety of African colonial and post-colonial contexts.' The contributions, which include pieces on Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, seem to mirror precisely the kind of 'Afro-centric' agenda for comparative research that he advocates. Such work also suggests that the task of reorienting academic discourse in light of post-colonial perspectives would be a good deal easier if we left behind from our disciplinary strait-jackets to seek usable cross-disciplinary perspectives.

Another methodological question which arises from Greenstein's work concerns the usefulness or otherwise of cross-national comparison. While there may be a case for using this kind of model when reviewing the nature of the colonial and post-colonial state, comparative economic development, or nationalist politics, it is much less persuasive as a tool for comparative study in a post-colonial and post-modern context in which identities are constantly being renegotiated locally and regionally, in which community consciousness is therefore fluid, and in which technology and the media are increasingly transnational. I will return to this point later.

Finally, Greenstein's concept of phases of development in the comparative literature on South Africa prompts an observation that ought to be obvious. It seems probable that the choice of the site of comparison often had less to do with the historical moment in South Africa, or the 'scientific' validity of a particular comparison, than it did with the existence of direct physical linkages between South Africa and that site. These linkages often suggested the possibility of a comparison in the first place, and sometimes provided the means to make it possible. Thus, scholars who engaged in comparative analysis often did so, wittingly or unwittingly, as actors in their own historical dramas. One only has to look at the long and complex history of interchange between South Africa and the United States, and especially that between intellectual elites (black and white), to explain the lasting popularity of that particular comparative project, and to appreciate the extent to which the act of comparison between these societies is a reflection of current power relations in the international academic establishment. These observations should by no means be taken to suggest that comparisons between these societies are invalid, but they do suggest that there is a serious methodological issue to be addressed in all such work.

James T. Campbell's book, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (1995) stands out in the comparative literature precisely because he is sensitive to these important methodological issues. On the basis of his work on that remarkable 'transnational' phenomenon known as the AME Church, Campbell points, firstly, to the weaknesses inherent in the time-honoured use, even by comparative historians, of the nation-state as a unit of analysis: "This nationalist inheritance if I can call it that, has left us ill-equipped to understand, and in some cases even to see, phenomena that do not conform to the borders of the nation state"(Campbell 1997:23). He argues that as our awareness grows about the nature of diasporas, and of the pervasive historical influence of inter-cultural exchange, new fields of study are emerging such as Diaspora Studies and International History which are breaking down this 'nationalist' paradigm. He adds: "Given my own research interests, I am particularly struck by how important (and how neglected by historians) this pattern of movement and exchange has been in the history of black people" (Campbell 1997:23). Any historian of the Caribbean or of Southern Africa, where all our societies are profoundly the product of movement and exchange, should endorse that point.

The second substantive point made by Campbell is based on the realisation that his study of the AME was not of "two discrete sites or movements that could be compared side by side - but rather a single

transatlantic institution which linked the histories of two distinct yet densely interconnected societies". This realisation threw up new comparative questions "more empirical and closely grained than those generated by more abstract or traditional comparison" and led to the further realisation that "the historical actors themselves were engaged in a comparative exercise." He experience leads him to conclude that comparative analysis should embrace 'intrinsic' as well as 'extrinsic' comparison - or what he dubs "a transactional comparative approach":

> I believe that the comparative enterprise would be much enriched if we paid more systematic attention to comparisons of the 'intrinsic' as well as 'extrinsic' kind. If we did nothing more than juxtapose the two - here are the parallels or contrasts that strike us today, and here is what struck them - it would make us better historians; if only because it would force us to become more reflective about how we frame comparative problems and questions (Campbell 1997:25).

Based on my experience over the last twelve years of viewing South African history from the vantage point of the Caribbean, I would argue that there is major scope for comparative research on the Caribbean and Southern Africa of the type espoused by Campbell. In my own work I am looking increasingly not at national histories, but at regional and transnational histories. This is driven not only by a growing realisation of the massive inter-connectedness of our (post-modern) world, but also in response to a much trumpeted 'new world order' in which globalisation can be seen either as a threat to cultural diversity and meaningful development in the South, or as an opportunity to be seized and reshaped in the service of all our futures. Secondly, in seeking to design a new agenda for comparative research in Southern Africa and the Caribbean, I believe the extensive historical links and parallels between the two regions noted earlier in this paper mean that Campbell's concept of 'intrinsic' as well as 'extrinsic' comparison is key. To ignore rather than to embrace and celebrate the historical linkages would be to cheapen the comparative exercise.

However, my own approach to comparative analysis parts company with Campbell in two critical areas. Firstly, Campbell is an advocate for the continuation of the comparative study of South Africa and the United States, despite criticisms that it is over-researched and that its dominance under-develops other potential areas of study. While I would not seek to argue that this comparative project is played out - which historian worth his salt would argue such a thing ? - I do feel that the US/South Africa pairing tends to promote a form of tunnel vision in the comparative historiography. Many historians argue, for example, that for an important part of its history the American South should be considered as an extension of the slave plantation complex of the Caribbean rather than as part of North America. Yet the dominant paradigms which are current in US/South African comparative history leave little scope for such a perspective.

Secondly, Campbell is an unrepentant modernist, who dismisses the intellectual contribution of post-modernist, and to a lesser extent, post-colonial theory to the discipline of history. Yet no comparative researcher can afford to treat those discourses with cavalier disregard, especially since they re-open the question of the validity of extrinsic comparison as a tool of analysis. The question is re-opened for this reason: if the comparative historian is an historical actor in her/his own right, steeped in the action they are seeking to analyse - as Campbell implies in his concept of 'intrinsic' comparison - then surely 'extrinsic' comparison as a concept is deeply compromised and must disappear as a category of analysis altogether. A jaundiced assessment of much traditional comparative history might even conclude that it has functioned as little more than a form of intellectual collusion though which the international elite of academic historians has managed to reproduce itself - and the power structures that first gave them voice. Anguished debates of this kind may be familiar from the pages of the journal *Subaltern Studies.* During the mid-1980s a group of young South Asian historians used the journal as a key site in their struggle to come to terms both with their profession and with their region's history from a post-colonial perspective. Fortunately, most ultimately stepped back from the brink of abandoning historical analysis altogether (Prakash 1994).

However, if we are to follow Greenstein's proposal, which promotes comparative history as a tool and as a project to orient the academic discourse away from the power centres of the North, then historians of Southern Africa and of the Caribbean may need to follow the example of the Subalternists and do a little soul-searching of their own.

Some Topics for Comparative Study

In this section of the paper I wish to set out briefly some proposals for areas of comparative research on Southern Africa and the Caribbean. Most are virtually virgin territory, so these can be taken as a series of challenges to any who may wish to take them up.

Indigenous Peoples and Colonial Conquest

The parallels between the fate of the Amerindian population of the Caribbean islands - the Tainos and the Kalinagos ('Caribs') - and that of the Khoi and San peoples of Southern Africa are striking. Both lived in simple societies which were first overwhelmed then virtually wiped out by western colonialism. In both cases the remnants were absorbed largely into local 'coloured' communities. However, while some outstanding work has been published on the Southern African context, comparatively little has been done on the Amerindian population of the Caribbean. A related question concerns the impact of pre-colonial identities on the process of colonisation and, ultimately, the nature of the colonial societies which emerged (Greenstein 1995).

Slavery and Slave Resistance

It was noted earlier that much of the work on slavery in South Africa owes some debt to perspectives on plantation slavery and its aftermath in the Americas. Despite this, direct comparison between the two regions has so far been very limited. In 1985 a special issue of *Slavery and Abolition* was published on the theme 'Out of the House of Bondage: Runaways, Resistance and Marronage in Africa and the New World*':* this demonstrated some interesting parallels in resistance to slavery on both sides of the Atlantic. One area of particular comparative interest in the context of a West Indian/South African comparison is maritime marronage, which was a feature of slaves societies both in the Caribbean and at the Cape. The possibility for more detailed comparative work on this and other aspects of slavery - on urban and domestic slavery, for example - should be evident.[8]

Identity Formation

Much of the literature on post-colonial theory has addressed this question and it is one proposed by Greenstein as an obvious area of comparison with other African societies. Multi-ethnic societies in both Southern Africa and the Caribbean have struggled historically with this problem. The category of 'white', for example, and what constituted whiteness in each region, would make a fascinating study. Each had a white minority divided into elite and 'poor white' communities; in each, to borrow a phrase from Jeremy Krikler, "'white' has been an extraordinarily slippery designation" (Krikler 1994:664). The framework for a preliminary comparison already exists with the publication of the first systematic study of the white minority in the Caribbean recently (Watson and Johnson 1998). A related issue is the historical role of the brown-skinned people in both regions - the 'Mulattoes' in Caribbean society and the so-called 'Coloureds' in South Africa.

The Colonial State

As indicated earlier, connections between colonial administrations in both regions were extensive, and the cross fertilisations between them were explicit. Some comparative work is already being done in this area - for example the project on the Masters and Servants Laws and recent work on Indentured labour (Northrup 1995) - but much more needs to be done. It would be an added bonus if such initiatives served to open up the limited but increasingly fashionable field of imperial history. As Neil Parsons wrote in a review of a conference on Imperial History held at Oxford in 1995:

> The insights of African (or, for that matter, Asian or Caribbean) history can do more than simply add a few more strands to the colourful pageant of imperial history. They can add another

dimension to an otherwise flat, two-dimensional tale and thereby transform it into a saga with much greater subtlety, complexity and meaning (Parsons 1996) .

Segregation

Segregation in the Caribbean never rivaled the comprehensive legal system of segregation or apartheid in South Africa, but a colour bar in social and economic spheres was an accepted part of life in most Caribbean societies before the Second World War. It's influence was sufficiently pervasive that vestiges still remain in some parts of the Caribbean today, while in others it has re-emerged in new forms in the service of the tourist dollar. The perception that 'apartheid was worse in the here than in South Africa' remains widespread in several Caribbean countries. A comparative study would help to uncover what makes segregationist practices so peculiarly tenacious in some societies and could contribute to a debate on how these practices have been/are being broken down both in South Africa and the Caribbean.[9]

Social Issues

Topics for comparative analysis under this heading include the evolution of education systems; the rise of public health care; debates over the provision of sanitation and water supply; social welfare provision; sport and public policy - the 'moralising of leisure time'. All of these public policy issues were worked out in South Africa and the Anglophone Caribbean in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within a common milieu of black political struggle, philanthropy, liberal (usually imperialist) paternalism, missionary endeavour and white settler discourse. Another important area, not only in terms of historical research, but which could have important implications for future policy and planning in both regions, is the comparative history of epidemic disease - ranging from tuberculosis to AIDS. Comparative work on AIDS is particularly worthy of attention in any current research agenda since the rate of infection in the two regions is among the highest in the world, while the cost of most treatments remain out of reach in both regions (Bonds et al 1997; Howe and Cobley 1999).

Others

Other possible themes for comparative research include: the anti-colonial struggle; social and political movements; comparative economic development; comparative experiences of regionalism; comparative gender issues; the environment; popular culture; tourism and the commodification of culture.

Conclusion: Future Relationships

The SEPHIS-funded exchange earlier this year allowed me to lift the curtain on a wide variety of historical connections and possible issues for comparative research between the Caribbean and South Africa. Looking to the future it is my hope that substantial work will be engendered which will help us to re-conceptualise and reorient the world in which we live. Numerous practical exchanges have been discussed already since the fall of the apartheid regime. These have included institutional links at the level of governments; links between our regional universities; offers to provide training in key areas and the provision of trained professionals to meet manpower shortages in areas such as education; the opening up of trade and business opportunities; cultural and sporting exchanges; even the establishment of an air bridge and the promotion of inter-regional tourism. All that is needed to make these things possible is the commitment of the peoples in both regions. But in a world in which the prevailing orthodoxy is compete or starve, it is equally possible that in the future the two regions will be seen as rivals for such things as trade preferences, financial loans, and other forms of aid in the gift of the major industrialised countries to the North. By nourishing our historic connections and promoting mutual understanding I believe we can help our people to avoid that fate.

Endnotes

1. While extensive linguistic evidence shows that many of these slaves were taken from Bantu-speaking groups, it should be noted that few - if any - originated from south of the Limpopo. Detailed - if conservative - estimates of Africans caught up in the slave trade are given in Curtin (1969). For a useful summary see Inikori (1992). Extensive data on slave voyages from various African ports to specific Caribbean destinations can be found in an on-line data archive: "Slave Movement During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries": *Http://dpls.dacc.wisc.edu/slavedata/index* .

2. The tour was 'immortalised' on a record released in 1983 on the EMI (South Africa) label by a group called 'Albie Doubleyou and the Fielders'. The lyrics of 'The Cricket Song' written by 'A Fan' read in part:

> Have you heard that we are causing quite a shindy/ By inviting out these chaps they call the Windies / Well they've come here to bat and take out wickets/ But the world is crying/ 'Hang on, it's not cricket'/
> If not cricket then, I don't know what to call it/ I suppose the problem's really with the wallet/ But it's the only way that we can break their picket/ If they don't like it then they know where they can stick it !

3.Hunte first visited South Africa in 1976 as a member of the Moral Rearmament Movement. In Soweto he stayed at the home of P.Q.Vundla, a former radical township politician and fast bowler for the Crown Mines Cricket team (Hunte 1999). For more on Vundla and black cricket in South Africa see Cobley (1998).

4. Ralph Williams to Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, 21 November 1898; Sir James Shaw [Governor of Barbados] to Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, 11 January 1899 in Barbados Registration Office, 'Records of the Colonial Secretary's Office: Despatches and Letters, 1898-1899 - 1. Miscellaneous Correspondence'(Barbados National Archives).

5. Another example of cross regional linkages which impacted on the post Emancipation climate in South Africa is Benjamin D'Urban, who was appointed governor of the Cape Colony after a stint in the same position in British Guiana. Recent research from Alvin Thompson indicates that D'Urban had been an opponent of Emancipation during his time as a Governor in the Caribbean. He therefore arrived in South Africa with a strong conviction that 'free blacks' needed to be strictly controlled.

6. W.M. Macmillan to M.MacDonald, 27.4.34, CO318/414/12. In the end the Colonial Office decided, on the advice of Dr F.P.Keppel of the Carnegie Corporation, to alert Governors to his coming but not to provide him with financial support. The Head of the West Indies Department, H. Beckett wrote to Sir Claude Hollis, Governor of Trinidad (4.10.34):

> We should be glad if you would extend to him the usual courtesies and afford him such facilities as you properly can.
> I think I ought to mention to you that we are advised that while Professor Macmillan is very fertile in ideas and original, he is a little lacking in judgment, and apt to seize on and develop ideas somewhat carelessly. I should like to make it quite clear that he is no commissioned even unofficially by the Colonial Office; neither are any of his particular views known to or endorsed by us.

7. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Act 3 Scene 5.

8. An introduction to the extensive Caribbean literature of these issues can be found in two excellent collections: Beckles and Shepherd (1991); Beckles and Shepherd (1993). See also Blackburn (1996).

9. See for comparison, Thompson (1997): esp. Chaps 7 and 8.

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