

Michael MacDonald: Why Race Matters in South Africa, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2006, 245 Seiten.

Rezensiert von
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In his wide-ranging response to the question ‘Why Race Matters in South Africa’, Michael MacDonald traces the history of race in South Africa, from its origins in the era of the Dutch East India Company, through the Boer Wars and the founding of the new Republic, to the mining industry and the apartheid state, and into the present. In short, the answer to his question is that race matters in South Africa because it has long been intertwined with politics and economics and, more tellingly, because it still is. Notwithstanding the much-vaunted transition from apartheid to “non-racial democracy,” race and racial solidarities – this time among black South Africans – continue to play a central role in propping up the contemporary political economy and the elite (both white and black) who benefit from it. This book offers a searing critique of the ANC government and of the way it manipulates race to justify substituting the interests of black elites for the economic well-being of the black poor. By grounding the account historically and ideologically, MacDonald also suggests however, that the ANC may not have had much choice in determining this outcome.

This book is a tour de force. It covers the entire racial history of South Africa, reviewing practically all of the literature, and offering a series of novel interpretations of the key questions that have focused the study of race in South Africa. When and how did racial awareness come into being? When and why did racial awareness turn into racism? What is the relationship between race and capitalism? Did the apartheid state support or undermine the market? What is the meaning of non-racial democracy?

In answering these questions, MacDonald traces the history, and contradictions, of liberal thought in South Africa, points out some of the inconsistencies and dangers of contemporary multiculturalism, and takes on the Marxists, whose attempts to blame capitalism for apartheid distorts the experience of both race and class in that country. His book goes beyond illuminating the present role of race in South Africa’s free-market democracy to shed light on the persistent links between identity, politics, and economics.

The argument picks up steam in the pre-transition era. MacDonald credits business with ending apartheid. As he describes it, “the power politics of reform apartheid, as it was unfolding, was that white supremacy could not survive without capitalism; capitalism could not survive without blacks; and blacks could not abide white supremacy. But blacks and capitalism might become partners” (p. 81). Which, in MacDonald’s re-telling, is precisely what happened. Because “apartheid afflicted business with a deteriorating economy” (p. 72) business leaders (in the form of Anglo-American chair Gavin Relly) conceded that transition from apartheid was inevitable and cal-

led for negotiations with the ANC. Relly, he says “was sketching the contours of the new order: a capitalist democracy governed by representative – that is, black – elites” (p. 82). MacDonald ends the chapter on the democratic transition with a hint of the argument to come. Once in the negotiating seat he says, the ANC changed, and began to see civil society – its own base of support – as a rival and a threat.

Moving into the era of ANC leadership, MacDonald poses the central question of the book: what is non-racialism? He explores the history of the concept, from its origins and subsequent bankruptcy in the Cape franchise, to its appropriation and transformation by the African National Congress. Non-racialism, he shows, means both the rejection of racism, and the negation of the political centrality of race. In its present incarnation, non-racialism also affirms liberal democratic ideals. The ANC’s non-racial nationalism advances several promises: all citizens have the same political rights; the state does not recognize race; and universal citizenship makes minority protections redundant (p. 112).

As white liberals in South Africa are quick to point out however, non-racialism in the context of an African majority is not racially neutral. It is a legitimating cloak for black domination. [The irony of this critique is not lost on the author. White liberals in pre-dominantly white countries have long insisted on the neutrality of universalism against minority critics who argue that neutrality favors those in the majority.] And this is particularly true when the non-racialism of the ANC is tempered and influenced by Black Consciousness, as it has been since the 1980s. In the post-

apartheid era, non-racialism co-exists with ideas of racial solidarity and empowerment, sanctioning race-consciousness within the ruling party and from those who seek official patronage (p. 122).

Which brings us to the crux of the argument, regarding the role of race in South Africa’s contemporary democratic capitalist system. The ensuing politics, MacDonald tells us, affirms specifically racial interests while disclaiming race, and de-racializes black interests while racializing those of whites. In this context, the main role of the ANC is to mediate between the demands of capital and the requirements of democracy. It does this through what the author calls racial nationalism. The ANC uses so-called racial nationalism to legitimate democracy, and democracy to legitimate capitalism. The formation of an African bourgeoisie gives Africans reasons to favor both democracy and capitalism even if the vast majority of black citizens do not benefit from the post-apartheid dispensation (p. 127). The political economy of identity politics also means that the economic interests of whites benefit from an emphasis on representing African identities (p. 133). Because a minority of those who benefit from such policies are black, the capitalist system – which works mainly to the advantage of whites – is legitimated.

But why, given its long-term ideological commitment to redistribution and nationalization, if not exactly socialism, did the ANC turn to neo-liberal economic policies on taking office? MacDonald gives two answers. The first is that leaders like Mandela and Mbeki generally accepted the principles of neo-liberal economics and hoped to attract capital investment. But ANC leaders also had political rea-

sons for excluding trade unions and civic associations from economic decision-making and empowerment. The ANC government was drawn from the exile wing of the organization, whose power base did not lie with South African civil society (p. 145-160). The ANC, MacDonald argues, has political reasons for preferring to cater to the interests of a black elite over those of its popular base. Nevertheless, given its limited ability to do much more than it already has in the way of redistribution, the government is compelled to offer voters racial nationalism in lieu of economic security.

This book is complex and multi-layered because MacDonald's analysis of post-apartheid South African politics engages history, political economy, and philosophy. MacDonald makes no attempt to fit his answer into the contemporary mould of method-driven comparative politics and provides, as a result, a rich, subtle, and analytically powerful account of the persistence of race in political and economic systems that are ostensibly race-blind. In so doing, he makes theoretical points that are empirically grounded and empirical points with theoretical reach. This book is an important contribution to literatures on race, on identity, on race and democratic capitalism, and on post-apartheid South African politics. It ends with a note of caution. Theories of democracy and multiculturalism that celebrate participation and the recognition of difference must be careful to take power politics into account, mindful of the fact that the empowerment of some rests on the disempowerment of others.

Brigitte Andersen (Hrsg.): Intellectual property rights. Innovation, governance and the institutional environment, Cheltenham, Northampton / MA: Edward Elgar Publisher 2006, 359 Seiten.

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Die Patentierung genetischen Materials, der Streit zwischen China und den USA um Softwarepiraterie, die rechtlichen und welthandelspolitischen Hürden bei dem Versuch, Afrika mit preiswerten AIDS-Generika anstelle teurer Pharmaprodukte aus den Ländern der westlichen Welt zu versorgen, und nicht zuletzt die Auseinandersetzungen um Napster und andere Musikaustauschbörsen im Internet haben einer breiten Öffentlichkeit gezeigt, dass die Rechte geistigen Eigentums ein heftig umstrittenes Terrain sind, von dem Großregionen, Staaten, Industrielobbys, Erfinder, Künstler, private Nutzer und Aktivisten gleichermaßen betroffen sind. Im Zentrum der Auseinandersetzungen stehen Fragen sozialer Verteilungsgerechtigkeit, der Wert gemeinschaftlicher Güter im Verhältnis zu einer Wirtschaftspolitik, die die jeweiligen Industrien durch weit reichende und exklusive Eigentumsrechte stützen möchte, und grundsätzliche Fragen nach dem Motor wissenschaftlichen, künstlerischen und gesellschaftlichen Fortschrittes.

Diesen im hohen Grade schwierigen wie heiklen Auseinandersetzungen widmet sich der von Brigitte Andersen herausgegebene