CrossMark

Africa 90 (3) 2020: 587–603

Reviews of books: debating Africa's middle classes

Editorial note

This book review section consists of three sets of debates about three books. Each debate includes two or three reviews followed by a response from the author. All three books deal in different ways with questions of middle-class identity, experience or aspiration, therefore continuing the theme of this special issue on Africa's middle classes.

doi:10.1017/S000197202000011X

Mark Hunter, *Race for Education: gender, white tone, and schooling in South Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (hb £61.99 – 978 1 108 48052 9; pb £18.99 – 978 1 108 72763 1). 2019, v + 304 pp.

This is an important and timely book. Richly researched, it offers a carefully historicized, and analytically nuanced, account of the ironies and complexities of race and schooling in South Africa, from the apartheid years and beyond, to the present. None of the issues it raises are unique to South Africa, with particularly strong resonances with more global trends in the marketization of schooling and how this articulates with the dynamics of race and racialized aspiration.

Its interest and significance extend beyond the milieu of schooling, too, in part through the introduction of the concept of 'white tone'. Hunter uses this concept to identify and explore one among several post-apartheid disappointments. The abolition of formal racial barriers, together with the pursuit of affirmative action, has produced significantly greater racial inclusivity in many institutions – such as the civil service, schools, universities and parastatals – offering black people opportunities previously barred by apartheid. Yet, often, these demographic changes have not been accompanied by a cultural or ideological 'de-whitening' (to use Hunter's phrase). Many (perhaps not all) desegregated institutions have remained 'white' in their ways.

The residual powers of whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa – attesting to the limits of the 'miracle' of the 1994 moment – were the focus of a wave of student protests that broke over South African universities in 2015, producing the #RhodesMustFall movement at the University of Cape Town and #FeesMustFall as a more national initiative. 'Decolonizing' the universities was a central rhetorical theme and ideological demand. Hunter explicitly locates his Durban case study in this context, as a moment in which the politics of whiteness has taken centre stage in the public sphere nationally (as well as in many other parts of the world). For me, one of the major contributions of Hunter's study is his analysis of the variegated and fluid life of whiteness. In many of the other commentaries on the phenomenon, the notion of 'white privilege' drives the narrative. Few writers explicitly define or unpack the concept, presenting its meaning as self-evident. The glossary to Susan Booysen's edited collection *Fees Must Fall: student revolt, decolonisation and governance in South Africa* (Wits University Press, 2016) usefully offers a definition that resonates well with its usage in many other texts. 'White privilege,' she suggests, 'is a set of advantages or access to certain benefits that have been exclusively developed for white people. White people have white privilege because a system of whiteness is present in South Africa and across the globe, which means that society is structured around white

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S000197202000011X Published online by Cambridge University Press