MAKING SENSE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION:

REFLECTIONS ON THE POLITICS OF RACE

AND IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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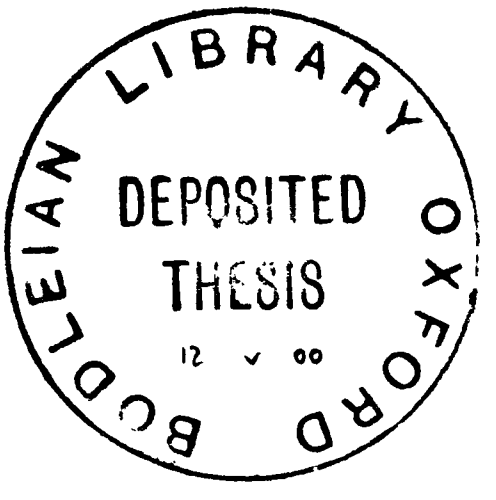
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Affirmative Action
AAPDF	Affirmative Action Policy Development Forum
ABET	Adult Basic Education Training
AHI	Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut
ANC	African National Congress
AWB	*Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (Afrikaner Resistance Movement)
BMC	Black Management Caucus
BMF	Black Management Forum
BPR	Business Process Re-engineering
BSA	Business South Africa
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
Codesa	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
Cosatu	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CST	Colonialism of a Special Type
DP	Democratic Party
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Fedsal	Federation of SA Labour Unions
FF	Freedom Front
GM	General Manager
HR	Human Resources
Idasa	Institute for Democracy in South Africa
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
ILO	International Labour Organization
Jodac	Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee
JSE	Johannesburg Stock Exchange
LRA	Labour Relations Act
MD	Managing Director
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MK	*Umkhonto we Sizwe*
MWU	Mine Workers Union

NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Nactu	National Council of Trade Unions
Nafcoc	National African Federated Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Nedlac	National Economic Development and Labour Council
Netu	National Employees Trade Union
NP	National Party
Numsa	National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa
Nusas	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan African Congress
Pawu	Paper and Allied Workers Union
PF	Plant Forum
Ppwawu	Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union
PFP	Progressive Federal Party
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
Sacob	South African Chamber of Business
SACP	South African Communist Party
Sansco	South African National Students Congress
SHC	Stakeholders Committee
TPM	Total Productive Maintenance
TQM	Total Quality Management
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
Uwusa	United Workers Union of South Africa
WCM&S	World Class Manufacturing and Services
WPF	Workplace Forum

ABSTRACT

Making Sense of Affirmative Action: Reflections on the Politics of Race and Identity in South Africa

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This thesis examines organizational programmes designed to manage racial identities in the South African workplace. It focuses on race-based affirmative action (AA) programmes.

The AA debate has become a proxy for a more fundamental contest over the political boundaries of legitimate action and discourse. Notwithstanding pockets of resistance, there is consensus (amongst business leaders) on the need for AA policies. This is explained, in part, by post-1994 shifts in the boundaries of legitimacy. Rejection of AA is no longer a legitimate course of action.

The AA controversy seems to be serving as a litmus test for the state of race relations in SA. The political transition has been accompanied by attempts to reconstitute political identities. It is suggested that the language of Africanism is providing the conceptual grammar with which to understand these processes. Race has become the primary axis through which an African identity, apposite to the 1990s, is being theorized. In the face of economic uncertainty and inequality the temptation is to naturalize identities. Hence the appeal of strictly defined race-based AA programmes.

Despite the moral lexicon which has sprung up around AA, many companies are arguing that AA makes good business sense. It is needed to meet changes in the demographic profile of the consumer and supplier markets. The political and legislative imperative to implement AA means that companies need to make sense of it economically. This is not to suggest that managers are simply having to make a leap of faith with regards to AA. The issue is more complex: whilst many are making a virtue out of necessity, this necessity may prove to have its virtues.

AA programmes cannot be understood in isolation from the economic 'realities' that enable, shape and constrain them. Given these adverse economic conditions, AA will, in all likelihood, have limited individual impact. At most, its gains will be modest. It will not eliminate the apartheid legacy of racial and gender inequalities, nor can it alone overcome the effects of other economic forces. AA needs to be located within a broader policy agenda aimed at promoting economic equity. It is in this respect that it has the potential to be an effective policy tool.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The end of apartheid did not entail a concomitant reconfiguration of political identities and relationships. Unlike constitutions and sunset clauses, these are not *ipso facto* generated by the politics of transition. Indeed, the political practices of apartheid and the myriad mythologies they produced will in all likelihood live on well beyond a second ANC term in government. This thesis examines the ways in which this struggle to redefine individual and collective identities plays out in the workplace. It examines the organizational programmes introduced to foster employment equity, and the strategies initiated to manage race and gender identities. This takes the form of a multi-pronged inquiry. It focuses particularly on race-based affirmative action (AA) programmes in the workplace. In the last few years, a legislative framework designed to secure employment and occupational equity has begun to take shape. The employment arena is the focus of this study because it, more than other areas, is giving definition to AA. Public and private discourse is primarily concerned with the implications of AA for job creation and performance and its likely impact on the career trajectories of existing staff. It is in this area that the conflicts and contradictions of AA are most clearly illuminated.

The concept of 'AA' is 'essentially contested'. Gallie notes that there are 'concepts which are essentially contested, concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users.'[1] He suggests that for a concept to count as essentially contested (something different from a concept that is simply confused) it needs to possess seven characteristics. Of import here are the following two criteria: (1) the concept is a derivation from an original exemplar whose

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[1] **W.B. Gallie**, 'Essentially Contested Concepts,' in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. LVl, 1956, 169.

authority is acknowledged by all contestants; and (2) continuous competition for acknowledgement (between contestant users of the concept) enables the original exemplars' achievement to be sustained and/or developed.[2] The exemplar is not singular, precise or immutable. A tradition of thought may be regarded as an exemplar, for instance. There may be different or independent (and possibly vague) traditions. Moreover, the various contestants may differently weight different features of the exemplar(s).[3]

Gallie's treatise is useful in the analysis of AA precisely because it admits of a variety of different interpretations, more than one of which are reasonable. This is not to assume that all of these interpretations are equally compelling. One interpretation of an essentially contested concept may be better than another.[4] Even if some concepts are essentially contestable because their very nature makes the interpretation of them open to dispute, they may only be contested if certain social and political conditions permit individuals to dispute their use. In this sense, (essential) conceptual contestation may be a permanent possibility but may only be realised intermittently.[5]

1.2 Affirmative Action as a Contested Concept

This approach can be applied to the struggle to define AA. This thesis suggests that the very fluidity of the current political context (a nascent post-apartheid South Africa) provides the moral legitimacy for concepts to be contested. Some actors within elite circles fear that that this opportunity will be short lived. This fear is, in part, responsible for the emotionally charged AA debate, and the acrimony with which different policy

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[2] **W.B. Gallie**, 'Essentially Contested Concepts,' 171-172, and 180.

[3] **W.B. Gallie**, 'Essentially Contested Concepts,' 176-186.

[4] See, for example, **Andrew Mason,** *Explaining Political Disagreement*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 53.

options are debated. Indeed, given the modest gains AA can achieve, AA has assumed a significance that is not commensurate with its (probably) limited impact as a social or redistributive policy tool. AA does not have the power to overcome global economic forces, nor does it have the ability to eliminate all racial and gender disparities. This thesis asks: What lies behind AA? For what other concerns or issues is it used as a proxy? And, what insight can the AA debate provide into the nature of identity politics in post-apartheid South Africa?

The trope of race has been and continues to be the key organising principle of South African society. The interview material I gathered is replete with references to an (often unspoken) struggle to determine the language with which we talk about and understand race. For these reasons, and to preserve analytical focus, race is the focal point of this thesis. Women and people with disabilities are to be included, *de jure*, as AA beneficiaries. Whilst not dismissing the significance of the promotion of black women to positions in the public (and in some instances, private) sector, the issues of gender and disability are largely absent in the AA debate.[6] AA has emerged foremost as a mechanism to redress the legacy of apartheid-inspired *racial* inequalities.

Race is not a biological or natural category. It is a socially constructed and strategic concept that takes different forms in different historical and social contexts. The meanings 'race' assumes are shaped by the institutional structures of power and systems of meaning with which its meanings are articulated. These 'material', and 'ideological' conditions help explain why, and under what conditions, race becomes a sign or marker of otherness. These conditions frame the discursive and non-discursive struggles over the symbolic meanings that attach to this representation of difference.

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[5] **Andrew Mason,** *Explaining Political Disagreement, 58-59.*

[6] Where relevant to the central thesis, gender considerations are taken into account. Issues pertaining to disability are not. There is a lack of reliable data in this area, and not many specific recommendations. It has been suggested that the best way of promoting employment of disabled people is 'not via employment targets but via provisions that require employers to make workplaces accessible to the physically handicapped, and which establish the legal right of access.'(*Restructuring the South African Labour Market,* Report of the Presidential Commission to Investigate Labour Market Policy, Pretoria: Government Printer, June 1996, chap. 8, secs. 478-479).

As a contested identity, racial boundaries are both self-constructed and other-imposed. Individuals or groups play some (active) role in fashioning their self-image and collective identity, often in opposition to attempts to impose fixed racial categorisations. Race is in part a social process that shapes subject's views - both of themselves and of others. Subjective notions of self-identification are important to an understanding of the relationships between racial and other identities and why it is that race often takes precedence over different forms of self-identification (such as gender). As with other identities, racial identities are the product of negotiation and are therefore contingent on their context.

Despite all this apparent fluidity and invented-ness, racial identities often solidify. Subjects cannot simply step in and out of different subject positions and identities at whim. Our physical and phenotypic constraints help to explain the continued appeal of racial identities - both for their bearers and for those who seek to mobilise the populace around racially based political projects.

Public discourse in SA is characterised by bifurcated understandings of race. The multiple theories put forward to explain race can be divided broadly into two separate approaches. The first approach, articulated by opponents of the apartheid regime, is the ideology of non-racialism. This seeks to discredit the idea that race is the primary mechanism through which individuals know and organise the world around them. Stress is placed on the ways in which races and racial communities are constructed and *imagined* (invoking the category 'black' as a political statement unifying those classified as 'black', 'coloured' and 'Indian', for example).

The second approach, which has its roots in segregationist practices and discourse, tends to view race as the primary means through which to classify groups. Race becomes an objective term of classification and is used as a proxy for other pieces of information about an individual or community. In the 1990s, this approach manifests in the numerous public references (from different sides of the political divide) to the 'white way of doing things' or the 'black way of doing things'. This thesis suggests that, ironically, this latter approach

resonates with many ideas in the discourses and practices of diversity management and African management.

These bipolar approaches to race frame one of the dilemmas that characterise the post-apartheid political landscape. The moment of cohesion against the 'enemy camp' (the apartheid state and its functionaries) is over. In the 1980s, the United Democratic Front (UDF) and, subsequently, the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) attempted to inscribe 'the people' (construed as all those discriminated against by, and opposed to apartheid) within a single political project. This was done in opposition to alternative projects for political representation that were reliant on apartheid-inspired (and supported) channels of political representation. These included the black local authorities and the bantustans. This project to articulate the Other within a single identity was fostered and given credence by apartheid forms of social division and political frontiers. Hence, throughout the 1980s, contestatory discourses sought to conceal the fiction of the unity of 'the people'.

Since the 1994 election allowed all citizens a vote for the same legislatures, the symbolic register of the unity of the people has been faced with the multiplicity of our differences. This leads to the second part of the dilemma. This is based on the desire to forge some sort of nationhood out of the markers of difference that were inscribed by, but are not simply coterminous with, apartheid. This nationhood is still in the making. Fostering national unity out of multiple identities is a contested process. Different collectivities compete to ascribe to their particularisms a function of universal representation of (South) Africans.[7] For some the task is one of certifying that the six genes which code for colour give their bearer a nation to belong to. For others, it is mapping a national passport that is not contingent on the level of activity of an individual's melanocytes (or melanin granules).[8]

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[7] For further discussion on this point see **Ernesto Laclau**, 'Political Frontiers, Identification and Political Identities,' paper presented at the Conference on Ethnicity, Identity and Nationalism in South Africa: Comparative Perspectives, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 20-24 April 1993.

[8] Jones notes that the number of melanocytes is the same in whites and blacks, they are just far more active in black skin. For more on melanin, and the politics of the melanin movement, see **Steve Jones**, *In the Blood: God, Genes and Destiny*, London: HarperCollins, 1996, 184-196.

Both the African and South African identity need to be constantly fought for and rethought. Both are subject to continual reshaping, and neither has a permanent nor fixed meaning.

The politics of representation is about the politics of power. Hence, forms of representation in and of themselves seek to constitute new kinds of subjectivities and identities. Hall avers that '(w)ithout relations of difference, no representation could occur. But, what is then constituted within representation is always open to being deferred, staggered, serialised.'[9] Whilst social relations, meanings and practices are discursively established, no discourse can totally fix meanings. There is a 'surplus' of meanings and a potential for their articulation with diverse discourses.[10] The crux of the contest is that identity is unstable - it is an 'ongoing process of self-making at a time when myths of origin are so appealing.'[11] Meaning and the positioning of identity are thus not permanent, but merely temporary closures. What is of significance are the nodal or privileged points of reference which exist for articulation, and the hegemonic discourses within which meanings become (temporarily) fixed.

This thesis examines attempts to develop, redefine and reframe the discourses and imagery used to describe differences. The ubiquitous rainbow metaphor (the constant refrain is that we are all members of the Rainbow Nation) is in the process of being reconceptualized.[12] The quest for self-definition is encapsulated in the ANC's statement on the adoption of the new constitution, delivered to the Constitutional Assembly by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki:

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[9] *Ibid*, 397.

[10] **Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe**, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London: Verso, 1995, 1-5, and 147-193.

[11] **Paul Gilroy**, *Small Acts*, London: Serpent's Tail, 1993, 202.

[12] A rainbow is ephemeral; and, rather than symbolizing the calm following inclemency, it may be emblematic of a hiatus between storms.

> Whatever the circumstances [our people] have lived through and because of that experience, they are determined to define for themselves who they are and who they should be. We are assembled here today to mark their victory in acquiring and exercising their right to formulate their own definition of what it means to be African. The constitution...constitutes an unequivocal statement that we refuse to accept that our Africanness shall be defined by our race, colour, gender or historical origins.[13]

The AA debate has emerged as one proxy for this struggle to redefine the content of the people and to determine new forms of identification. At the level of popular discourse, the AA controversy seems to be serving as a litmus test for the state of race relations in SA. The increased legitimacy of 'multiculturalism' has resulted in the blurring of the idea that racial identity is fixed or primarily a matter of skin colour. The assumption of homogeneous and unchanging black communities and of an invariant racial identity has proved to be a fantasy. Ironically, it is at this very time that 'the ideal of racial purity, the appeal of phenotypical symmetry and the comfort of cultural sameness' have become highly prized attributes of black political life.[14] Subtending many demands for equal demographic representation within corporate structures is a discourse which seeks to re-essentialize race, to privilege one axis of identity. This is coupled with an attempt to weave race, culture and nationality into a seamless fabric. Clifford Barrett, the group human resources director of SA Packaging, contends that AA strategies which focus on '"almost white" darkies' are less effective than those which rely on 'comrade managers'. To wit:

> With a lot of our affirmative action managers I asked them what they did in the Struggle and to tell me about their blackness...Those managers who haven't succeeded in SA Packaging are the golf-club managers, those who've forgotten their blackness and their roots - who try to be white.[15]

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[13] **Thabo Mbeki**, 'ANC Statement on the New Constitution,' speech delivered to the Constitutional Assembly, Cape Town, 8 May 1996, African National Congress Department of Information and Publicity, Johannesburg.

[14] **Gilroy**, *Small Acts*, 1.

[15] **Clifford Barrett**, SA Packaging group human resources director, interview by author, Johannesburg, 17 April 1996.

Two distinct claims are at stake. The first is that cognisance needs to be taken of race (and gender) because of past inequalities and differential group treatment. This is race as remedy. The second claim attaches value to race as an independent variable: race as merit. Barrett's remarks reveal an attempt to shift AA rhetoric from a vision of race as compensation to a vision of race as a component of merit.[16] As is discussed in Chapter Five, many critics of AA fear that this type of hierarchization of difference is a trojan horse for projects premised on ethnic or racial domination.

It will be shown that race has become the primary axis through which an African identity, apposite to the 1990s, is being theorised. A doyen of the African management school, Lovemore Mbigi, instructs South Africans 'to accept who they are - Africans - and abandon the neurotic desire to be American and European.'[17] These rhetorical oppositions which play the theme of African-ness against European-ness are not very enlightening. The following sets of questions emerge: Should we see African-ness as more than simply a label attached to those residing within a particular continent? Is it a matter of race, of blackness, or of a sign of ideological commitment to or engagement with Africa and specifically African concerns? Can we so easily merge what it is to be African with what it is to be South African? And does one's whiteness or blackness automatically give one a common register of interests and way of self-identification?

1.3 Collective Identities and Affirmative Action

To Appiah, an 'identity' is 'a coalescence of mutually responsive (if sometimes conflicting) modes of conduct, habits of thought, and patterns of evaluation; in short, a

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[16] For an elaboration of this distinction see **Viet D. Dinh**, 'Multiracial Affirmative Action,' in *Debating Affirmative Action: Race, Gender, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Inclusion*, edited and with an introduction by Nicolaus Mills, New York: Delta, 1994, 281-283.

[17] **Lovemore Mbigi with Jenny Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1995, 60.

coherent kind of human social psychology... '[18] Individuals are constituted by multiple, changing and often crosscutting social identities: we are members of different religious, cultural, racial, and gendered communities. Identities are constructed. So too are histories and cultural affinities. The ways in which we integrate our disparate identities may change from situation to situation. So too will the bases through which identities are theorized. For a nascent 'African identity' that is coming into being in SA, these bases include a biological conception of race, a common experience of historical disadvantage and, in some cases, a shared metaphysics.

This thesis suggests that the distinction between collective and individual identities is blurred, and purportedly collective identifications may, indeed, be better understood as individual self-identifications. So, for example, if I identify myself as a South African, being South African is a central component of my individual identity. But the sign 'SA' has no necessary or fixed content. Therefore, its significance for the ways in which I self-identify may be better understood within the framework of an individual identity, as opposed to some overarching collective identity. This is not to argue for a focus on 'individual' as opposed to 'collective' identities. This would be to assume that individuals can be plucked out of the collective networks and institutional matrixes within which they are constituted. Subsequent chapters explore the ways in which individuals self-identify and negotiate and reintegrate their multiple identities.

Affirmative action strategies, which remain, on the whole, locked within a group definition of the problem they seek to address, illuminate the above-mentioned problems. These strategies often rely on the explicit use of an individual's group identity as a criterion in making selection and promotion decisions. Proponents justify affirmative action measures as a means to address the equal opportunity goal. The claim is that they redress 'past and present factors that tend to systematically advantage or disadvantage individuals based on group identities like gender and racio-ethnicity.'[19]

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[18] **Kwame Anthony Appiah,** *In My Father's House,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1992: 174.

[19] **Taylor Cox,** *Cultural Diversity in Organizations: Theory, Research & Practice,* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1993: 250.

So, for example, because all blacks were discriminated against by apartheid policies, all should be beneficiaries of measures taken to remedy this. This view fails to examine the ways in which disadvantages may have been differentially distributed amongst individual blacks.[20] As Shubane notes, '(i)nsisting on group solutions to inequality also ignores the reality that it is specific individuals from affected groups who benefit from AA.'[21] Group preference policies are not extended to all members of that group: the utilisation of identity-based measures in corporate promotions will not, for example, benefit the rural poor. It is to this privileging of a static conception of 'group rights' (defined *a-priori*) over individual rights that detractors of AA object. Through an examination of the AA measures implemented in the case study organizations, this thesis suggests that the distinctions between group and individual identities are fluid, and that one cannot assert, a priori, what can be said to be a 'group' as opposed to an 'individual' identity.

Two broad projects of representation can be identified in the public terrain of political discourse: the first is a 'unicultural' project that offers a singular representation of the black African subject (such as 'African management'). The second can be termed a 'multicultural' project. This celebrates difference and offers multiple and hybrid representations of blackness. These two projects of representation – a homogenising identity politics on the one hand and the celebration of difference on the other – are uneasy allies. Some proponents of an identity-based politics (bell hooks, for instance) criticise the concept of a decentred and multiple subject, arguing that 'it's easy to give up identity, when you got one.' The fear is that the denial of the validity of essentialised and homogenous identities is surfacing 'at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time.'[22]

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[20] **Khehla Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure: Affirmative Action and South Africa's Search for Racial Equality', *Policy: Issues and Actors* 8, no. 4 (1995): 11.

[21] *Ibid*, 2.

[22] **bell hooks**, 'Postmodern Blackness', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited and introduced by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, 421-427. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, 425.

Identity politics often makes recourse to a definition of 'cultural identity' as one, collective 'true self' that hides within the many other, superficial and artificially imposed 'selves'. This shared self (for example, the 'black experience') reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes that provide the 'us' with stable and continuous frames of reference and meaning.[23] The task of cultural workers (or African management theorists) becomes one of excavating and bringing to light this identity. Against this attempt to hold up a second-order mirror to reflect an imaginary coherence that purportedly already exists, a second view of identity is that which recognises the hybridity and negotiated and provisional nature of subjectivity.[24]

This second strand recognises multiple identities and the fragile, constructed and unstable nature of 'blackness', 'whiteness' and 'African-ness'. This strand seeks to mainstream difference in a way that retains the validity of particular differences, and rejects the idea that the onslaught on totality needs to entail moral and political indifference and political quietism. It may start to provide the space for an alternative 'left' vision (when 'the left' is in disarray and attempting to redefine its boundaries, programme of action, and conceptual framework).

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[23] **Stuart Hall**, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited and introduced by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, 392-403. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, 393.

[24] **Hall**, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' 402.

Refusing to acknowledge the prior claims of particular metanarratives and rejecting the promise of foundational guarantees is one thing. It is quite another to convert the insight that race is not the only axis of identity into *the* authoritative insight or privileged theoretical matrix. If we are to seriously interrogate the real-life applicability of deconstructionist tools then we need to recognise that there is no such thing as a neutral play of language games outside of institutional matrixes, power relations and structural sources of inequality. In the quest to extol the virtues of multiplicity, the significance or impact of one difference (over the many others) may be overlooked. This may lead to a less balanced analysis, or perhaps more importantly, to policy choices that underplay the importance of one axis of identity vis-à-vis other axes. There is thus a danger in too wholesale a commitment to multiplicity (and multiple grids of analysis), just as there is in the more widespread, and perhaps more mendacious, commitment to unicity.

Against registers which homogenise identities (such as Black or Woman), we need to employ a topography of subjectivity which is multidimensional. The self is partial, never finished, and not simply there. Haraway claims that because what is sought is not a subject position of identity (a total immersion of self) but a partial connection, that the self is 'able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another.'[25] Universality is replaced with a politics and epistemology of location, partiality and positioning; the 'god trick' or full vision is replaced with the view from the body, partial sight and limited voice.[26] Haraway submits:

> The search for...a 'full' and total position is the search for the fetishized perfect subject of oppositional history, sometimes appearing in feminist theory as the essentialized Third World Woman. Subjugation is not grounds for an ontology. Only those occupying the positions of the dominators are self-identical, unmarked, disembodied, unmediated, transcendent, born again. It is unfortunately possible for the subjugated

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[25] *Ibid.*, 193.

[26] *Ibid.*, 195-196.

> to lust for and even scramble into that subject position - and then disappear from view.[27]

The imperfectly stitched together self cannot simply and freely move from one subject position to another, as individuals do not have some sort of unified prediscursive essence that enables them to enact this process. Haraway sometimes comes dangerously close to endorsing this notion. The conception of the subject as a decentred and dispersed agent may result in '(d)iscursive subject positions becom(ing) *a priori* categories which individuals...occupy in an unproblematic fashion...'.[28] One implication is that there are a multiplicity of subject positions that are freely available. This fails to consider the role of ideology in maintaining asymmetrical social relations. Similarly, the socio-institutional context within which different subject positions are embedded is neglected, and the impact of gender, ethnic and racial relations of subordination remain unthought. As Laclau and Mouffe put it:

> From here, it [is] but one step to transform [this] *dispersion* of subject positions into an effective *separation* among them. However, the transformation of dispersion into separation obviously creates all the analytical problems...especially those inherent in the replacement of the essentialism of the totality with the essentialism of the elements.[29]

It is this analytic position - the espousal of an 'essentialism of the elements' - that has been the lightning rod for many of the objections to deconstructionism. This position descends into a valorisation of all differences and can lead to a complete *indifferentiation* and *indifference*. It disallows for criteria to discriminate between differences, and obscures the varying significance and import of the many differences.[30]

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[27] *Ibid.*, 193.

[28] **Lois McNay**, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, 77.

[29] *Ibid.*, 115-116.

The general field of the interdiscursive constitutes a complex set of elements available for integration into specific discourses. Whilst social relations, meanings and practices are discursively established, no discourse or strategy can totally fix meanings. This implies that no element is totally without some points of articulation with other discourses. Nodal or privileged points of reference must exist for articulation.[31] As global strategies (such as systems of rationality) have no *a priori* and necessary unifying function, what is required is an interrogation of the ways in which these strategies or nodal points become hegemonic.[32] To illustrate: in South Africa, what it is to be 'African' is articulated with a biologically rooted discourse of race. This racially-founded meaning (nodal point) of what it is to be African has the potential to become hegemonic. There are, however, other points of articulation and contending discourses of 'African-ness'. These range from displaying a compelling interest in, and contributing to addressing the continent's problems, to demonstrating 'ubuntu' in one's behaviour.[33]

This thesis suggests that it is possible to abandon the quest for an undifferentiated unity and espouse a politics of difference that is 'a politics that neither denies nor capitulates to the particularity of group identity.'[34] Subsequent chapters revisit these themes in light of the case study research conducted in various companies.

1.4 Chapter Overview

Chapter Two outlines the research strategy used and discusses some of the methodological and theoretical issues that arise in doing qualitative research. The study quotes liberally from the interviews I conducted with more than 100 respondents. Allowing respondents to

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[30] **Chantal Mouffe**, 'Democratic Politics Today'; in **Chantal Mouffe** (ed), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*, London: Verso, 1992, 13.

[31] **Laclau and Mouffe**, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 1-5, and 147-193.

[32] See **Bob Jessop**, *State Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, 243 and 290.

[33] Chapter Ten provides a more detailed examination of 'ubuntu'.

[34] **Anne Phillips**, *Engendering Democracy*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991, 5.

'speak' in their own words through such excerpts provides significant insights into the everyday world and practices of the different AA protagonists. This also helps illuminate the language games at play and the contests over defining and describing difference(s).

Not all the respondents' accounts or narratives can be substituted for one another. Some are specious, and some are more internally consistent than others. Chapter Two thus suggests that relativism is a dangerous political position and debilitating theoretical stance. The relativist approach was (and in some respects still is) useful in debunking ethnocentric explanations of other racial and cultural communities and practices. By disabling attempts to adjudicate the validity of divergent claims, it negates genuine political dialogue between the self and the Other.[35] To suggest that meanings are contested is not synonymous with claiming that meaning is always and everywhere indeterminate. Reasonable opinions can be formed about research problems, even if these opinions are uncertain or contested.[36]

Haraway's doctrine of a feminist or embodied objectivity is of use here. Haraway seeks to move away from unlocatable and irresponsible knowledge claims to particularise objectivity.[37] Her project is to reclaim 'vision' that has been turned into 'a conquering gaze from nowhere...to represent while escaping representation'.[38] The notion that there is infinite vision is an illusion. The call for the particularity of vision and *situated knowledges* accepts that we are responsible and accountable for our visual practices and our knowledges: 'only partial perspective promises objective vision'.[39] This is not,

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[35] **Satya P. Mohanty**, 'Us and Them: On the Philosophical Bases of Political Criticism,' in *Cultural Remix: Theories of Politics and the Popular*, edited by Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995, 226.

[36] See **Steve Linstead**, 'Deconstruction in the Study of Organizations,' in *Postmodernism and Organizations*, edited by John Hassard and Martin Parker, London: Sage, 1993, 66-67.

[37] **Donna J. Haraway**, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association, 1991, 190.

[38] *Ibid.*; p. 188.

[39] *Ibid.*; p. 190.

however, to privilege, romanticise or appropriate the vision of the less powerful. As Haraway puts it:

> To see from below is neither easily learned nor unproblematic, even if 'we' 'naturally' inhabit the great underground terrain of subjugated knowledges...The standpoints of the subjugated are not 'innocent' positions.'[40]

Identity politics and non-traditional epistemologies do not render 'being' into an unproblematic state: 'One cannot "be"...a woman (or) colonized person..."Being" is much more problematic and contingent.'[41]

Chapter Three provides an overview of the organizational and social contexts of the five companies in which I conducted case-study research. These descriptions of the organizational context add to the explanatory framework against which the empirical evidence collected can be assessed. The empirical examination of AA programmes in these organizations reveals recurring themes and problematics that may have a wider applicability.

Part of the legacy of apartheid is acute racial inequality in the labour market. Chapter Four assesses the impact of extra-market discrimination (unequal access to education, infrastructure, and other societal resources) and labour market discrimination (as manifest in, for example, skills, income and wage disparities). The 1996 Constitution of the Republic of SA, the Bill of Rights, the Labour Relations Act (LRA) of 1995, and the Employment Equity Act of 1998 proscribe unfair discrimination. Combined with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1998 and the Skills Development Act (to be passed in 1999), this legislative framework provides a set of employee's rights and lays the basis for a reversing apartheid's legacy. This chapter suggests that the repeal of discriminatory laws will not, in

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[40] *Ibid.*; p. 191.

and of itself, end the disadvantages and inequalities they generated. This is the basis of a compelling argument for adopting temporary interventions to address the legacy of past disadvantages and inequalities – such as AA programmes.

Chapter Five focuses on AA, and contends that there is no universal understanding of AA. This chapter explores the different definitions of AA, including the arguments for class-based AA and equal employment opportunities. It submits that competing visions of AA serve as a proxy for contests over the nature of the democratic transition in SA.

In many organizations, AA programmes have been driven primarily by political considerations. Corporate policies are being realigned with the moral boundaries of a post-apartheid order. Business leaders are faced with the need to address and placate different audiences. This results in potentially conflicting 'legitimacy imperatives'. For instance, congruence with the demands of a post-apartheid moral order may come at a cost to existing organizational members. Hence the reasons advanced for implementing AA are often couched in 'bottom line' terminology. Business considerations thus become the justificatory discursive framework for AA initiatives. Chapter Five examines these reasons and concludes that, whilst business people may be making a virtue out of a necessity, that necessity potentially has many virtues.

Organizations are merely provisionally constituted. They have no essential formal or substantive unity or institutional fixity, and the unity, if any, of organizational structures, far from being pregiven, must be constituted politically.[42] Organizations are the sites, generators and products of strategies. Organizations, as systems of strategic selectivity, favour certain types of political strategy over others. The relational character of this selectivity is manifest in the differential impact of the organization on the capacity of different groupings to pursue their interests – for instance, an AA policy that

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41 *Ibid.*, 192.

42 See **Bob Jessop**, *State Theory*, 8 and 267.

specifies annual stretch targets. Different forms of organization privilege some strategies over others, and within a given time horizon, the types of strategies favoured may change.[43] Organizations initially opposed to AA may, over time, cleave to these policies as a means to attain desired ends (government tenders, for instance). Part of this change may be attributed to the role of 'change agents.' Individuals entering organizations are not unencumbered; they bring with them political strategies and social and personal interests. As the history of a number of the case studies illustrates, these individuals and their strategic and social 'baggage' impact the organization.

Organizational culture refers to 'a configuration of rules, enactment and resistance...which are manifest in and through a number of artefacts, processes and behaviours.'[44] An organization's systems, shared values, and style influence its tolerance of ambiguity and conflict. These, combined with the discourses that constitute organizations (and the effects of these discourses and the resistance they provoke), are important variables in shaping the details of AA policies. What the case study companies illustrate, however, is that when it comes to AA, the similarities between companies (with different organizational cultures) are more striking than the differences. Thus, whilst organizational culture is a significant variable, it is not the most important variable in determining the content of corporate AA policies. Where an organization's culture has more import is in the *implementation* of AA policies. Many of the obstacles and resistance encountered in the implementation phase of AA find their roots in a company's culture. It is in this arena that the intimate knowledge of a company, about 'how we do things here', gets transmitted. It is within the folds of an organization's culture that the unspoken and unwritten rules and norms (often the most critical information about getting along in an organization) reside.[45] And it is this that is hardest to change. Chapter

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[43] *Ibid.*, 260.

[44] **Albert J. Mills**, 'Man/aging Subjectivity, Silencing Diversity: Organizational Imagery in the Airline Industry. The Case of British Airways,' *Organization* 2, no. 2 (1995): 244

[45] **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 165.

Nine examines policies and programmes (such as managing diversity efforts) which have as their central focus changing organizational culture.

The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 has a dual-pronged approach. It aims to eliminate the effects of unfair discrimination (in recruitment, training, compensation, promotion and retrenchment) by removing past or current barriers to equal employment opportunity, and to transform organizations by accelerating training and promotion for individuals from historically disadvantaged groups. To this end, the Act specifies three categories of AA beneficiaries: black people, women and people with disabilities.[46] Who should benefit *de facto* from AA, however, is contested. Chapter Six summarises these debates and addresses three sets of questions: should coloureds and Indians be regarded as black for AA purposes? Does AA simply create a black elite? And, should gender and race be treated on an equal par?

Since 1994, the politics of race have become more explicit and the politics of ethnicity have been muted. In the debate about AA beneficiaries, this translates into rather old-fashioned African nationalist claims to divide resources along racial lines. Chapter Six suggests that this Africanist emphasis is used to justify sidelining gender in the AA debate.

Talk of quotas is a red flag, even amongst AA supporters. Chapter Seven surveys the arguments in support of and those against implementing targets and quotas. In particular, accusations of tokenism and window dressing are investigated. Attendant areas of inquiry include: the shortage of skilled AA applicants, the premiums paid on black skills, the continuing *baasskap* mentality in many companies (which allows managerial prerogative to remain unchallenged), and the reasons for and problems associated with job-hopping. This chapter also considers attempt to redefine human resources practices and policies. It provides a brief overview of recruitment, selection, promotion and merit criteria; and development and training programmes.

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[46] Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, section 1(23)(e).

Chapter Eight is concerned with the obstacles and resistance likely to be encountered in implementing AA. It draws attention to issues of responsibility and accountability for AA. The potential role and functions of black management caucuses are discussed. This chapter examines black and white fears: the former linked to the constraints sluggish economic growth places on AA; the latter to truncated career horizons. Finally, it assesses whether organizations can reconcile the need to improve operational performance (through, for example, business process re-engineering programmes) with AA objectives.

Chapter Nine examines the politics of managing diversity strategies in select South African companies. Managing diversity generally refers to 'planning and implementing organizational systems and practices to manage people so that the potential advantages of diversity are maximized, while its potential disadvantages are minimized.'[47] Best practices and theory developed in the US provide additional insights into the material. In 1988, a study of the US labour force, *Workforce 2000* (commissioned by the US Department of Labour) was published. Its central claim was that demographic changes in the labour force and national consumer markets were going to change the face of corporate America. By the year 2000, minorities, women and immigrants would constitute the bulk of new labour force entrants.[48] Following its publication, conventional wisdom held that managing diversity was no longer a social ideal. Because it allowed companies to take advantage of the changing demographic profile of the consumer and supplier markets, it was a practical business mandate.[49] Diversity became good business sense.

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[47] **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations* , 11.

[48] **William B. Johnston and Arnold H. Packer**, *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century*, Indianapolis: Hudson Institute, 1987, quoted in **R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr.**, *Beyond Race and Gender: Unleashing the Power of Your Total Work Force by Managing Diversity*, New York: AMACOM, 1991, 5.

[49] See for instance **R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr.**, 'From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity,' *Harvard Business Review* 90, no. 2 (1990): 107; **Robert L. Lattimer**, 'The Case for Corporate Diversity: An International Perspective,' in Adèle Thomas, *Beyond Affirmative Action: Managing Diversity for Competitive Advantage in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1996, 17; and **Richard Bernstein**, *Dictatorship of Virtue: Multiculturalism and the Battle for America's Future*, New York: Vintage, 1995, 155-157.

Similar sentiments are increasingly being echoed in South Africa's corporate corridors. The claim is that managing diversity creates an environment that taps the capabilities of all employees (regardless of their differences). Central to the modern organization's agenda is the containment of complexity and ambiguity, as these are seen to undermine its capacity to control its internal and external environment.[50] Pivotal to these disciplinary mechanisms are assimilationist strategies, which hinge on effacing difference. Organizational strategies that rely on alignment, congruence and adaptation are ill suited to deal with the challenges of an increasingly diverse workforce. Diversity theorists submit that organizations that regard ambiguities as legitimate are more likely to tolerate divergence from the norm. This, in turn, may facilitate the structural and informal integration of culturally diverse individuals. The belief is that free of assimilationist pressures, the entire work force will be able to achieve their potential in pursuit of corporate objectives and goals.[51] Chapter Nine critically interrogates this assumption. It questions whether or not managers are simply rationalizing the inevitable or, even, if the 'benefits' of diversity are merely plain wishful thinking? An attendant area of inquiry is whether or not the impact of diversity can in fact be measured effectively.

Given that managing diversity is touted as a critical competency for managers in the 1990s, it is surprising that the management literature addressing problems of identification in the workplace is, with a few notable exceptions, superficial. There is a dearth of theoretical and empirical work that encompasses both the field of politics and that of management studies. Given that many theorists and practitioners unquestioningly assume that these two disciplines are unrelated, this lack of interdisciplinary work is unsurprising. This thesis contributes to interdisciplinary work in this field. It uses concepts developed within the discipline of politics to engage with the body of literature developed within management studies. This interdisciplinary work helps expose the inadequacy of most of management focused accounts. It also identifies points of overlap between the different disciplines, and highlights areas of fruitful interdisciplinary inquiry.

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[50] *Ibid.*, 97.

Chapter Nine discusses some of the management literature that addresses managing diversity. Socially and politically constructed categories (such as 'race' or 'gender') remain unthought. This literature does not seem adequate to the task of critically engaging with a central problematic of our time: how can we preserve spaces for generalist critique whilst ensuring that attention is paid to complexity, nuance and difference? This would involve keeping in play two seemingly conflicting intellectual projects. The first seeks to preserve racial and gender identity as a source of organizational unity and alternative vision; whilst the second is predicated on the deconstruction of gender and racial prescriptions which homogenise and colonise difference and limit choice and possibility.

Increasingly diverse workforces demand a more rigorous investigation of the different forms that racial, ethnic and gender conflicts assume within organizations. Even if such interest groupings are organised and engage in coalition politics, differential access to sources of power within the organization may result in the silencing or muting of their voices.[52] What is required is an analysis of power 'at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations'.[53] Power is not a commodity or a possession, it is relational. Power does not have a necessary central point or locus (it is not clearly localizable); and relations of power are always contestable. As Foucault puts it, they are 'changeable, reversible, and unstable'.[54] Power is not unidirectional, it is ambiguous and plurivocal, a site of conflict and contestation.[55] 'Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization.

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[51] **R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr.**, 'From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity,' 112-117; **R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr.**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 167-173; and **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 11.

[52] See **Deborah M. Kolb and Linda L. Putnam**, 'Introduction: The Dialectics of Disputing,' in *Hidden Conflict in Organizations*, edited by Deborah M. Kolb and Jean M. Bartunek, 1-31, California: Sage Publications, 1992, 9.

[53] **Michel Foucault**, cited in Barbara Townley, Reframing Human Resource Management: Power, Ethics and the Subject at Work, London: Sage Publications, 1994, 8.

[54] *Ibid.*, 7-8.

[55] *Ibid.*

And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power.'[56]

Foucault's thesis raises key questions: If we are all imbricated in relations of power, and if power is everywhere, how are we to analyse the ways in which it is exercised? If power is everywhere, does it speak from nowhere? Foucault's analysis makes it difficult to identify the central locus of power within an organization. Indeed, the danger of his analysis is that the concept of power 'loses its explanatory content and becomes a ubiquitous metaphysical principle.'[57] The recognition of a plurality of power centres is, however, a powerful tool. It helps illuminate the margin and underside of organizations, with its conflicts, ambiguities and 'non-rational' behaviours. Such an approach to power may allow for a more nuanced consideration of the contours of the field of power relations that enable, constrain and privilege particular meanings in the organizational context.[58] It highlights the need to develop multiple strategies to manage the conflicts (and resistance to AA) that arise within the crevices and crannies, the 'liminal spaces' of organizations.[59]

A discursive affinity is discernible between critical theory (encompassing but not identical with postmodernism) and managing diversity rhetoric. The rhetorical similarities encourage a critical examination of the latter through the prism of the former. This thesis suggests that in recapitulating many postmodernist gestures, managing diversity

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[56] **Michel Foucault**, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, 1972-77, edited by Colin Gordon, translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper, Sussex: Harvester, 1980, 98.

[57] **P. Dews**, 'The Nouvelle Philosophie and Foucault', 1986, 166, cited in Paul Thompson, 'Postmodernism: Fatal Distraction', in *Postmodernism and Organizations*, edited by John Hassard and Martin Parker, London: Sage, 1993, 201.

[58] See **Steve Linstead**, 'Deconstruction in the Study of Organizations', in *Postmodernism and Organizations*, edited by John Hassard and Martin Parker, 49-70, London: Sage, 1993, 64-65.

[59] See **Kolb and Putnam**, *Hidden Conflict in Organizations*, 20-26 and *passim*.

programmes may end up replicating postmodernist's conceptual blind spots (or, in Terry Eagleton's words, its textual silences).[60]

Chapter Ten picks up on these themes and examines attempts to 'Africanize' the workplace. Such efforts are categorised together, and fall under the auspices of the African management project. A key flaw of the latter approach is the tendency to collapse the categories of race, gender and ethnicity under the general rubric of 'culture' or 'cultural groups'. Culture is reified. This analytical strategy results in the a priori homogenisation of women and blacks. In this way, a composite, singular category is produced and represented. The assumption is that these groupings are pre-constituted, coherent and have identical interests. This is to confuse race as a category for organising analysis with the universal instantiation of this category. Categories such as 'race' may be universal in the sense that they organise the universe of a system of representations; their universality does not lie at the level of empirical truth that can be investigated through cross-cultural field work.[61]

Chapter Ten suggests that in their prescriptive and descriptive form, strands of African management writings manipulate myths. These commentaries feed into the idealising fiction of indigenous ethnic or racial identities and the attendant cultural practices. As Lessem expounds:

> Having discredited this ancient [African] way of living, the white man has not yet put an honourable alternative in its place. Perhaps this is the distinctive role that our southern African management project has to play, that is to uncover and realize such alternatives.[62]

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[60] **Terry Eagleton**, *Marxism and Literacy Criticism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, 34-35; quoted in Joanne Martin, 'Deconstructing Organizational Taboos: The Suppression of Gender Conflict in Organizations,' *Organization Science* 1, no. 4 (1990): 340.

[61] **Chandra Talpade Mohanty**, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,' in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited and introduced by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, 211.

Attention is drawn to this desire to remap the indigenous body politic via (newly unearthed) discursive configurations. This chapter argues that coupled with this frontier impulse is an unquestioned belief in the authority of the author-turned-emissary. So we have Lessem admiringly telling us of that other New World reconnoiterer, Laurens Van der Post, 'who has entered more explicitly into the soul of southern Africa than any other.'[63] Indignant at those who laughed at 'Bushmen' stories, in 1952 Van der Post started to 'decode' those stories.[64] The idea that decoding an Other's stories is an uncomplicated procedure obscures the extent to which power relations are imbricated in the process of cultural translation itself.[65] Moreover, it erroneously assumes that 'native voices' can speak alongside the author in a direct and equal way, without the author intervening in, and impacting on this process of representation.[66]

In conclusion, Chapter Eleven draws together the various strands of the arguments advanced throughout this study. It explores the unstable nature of 'blackness', 'whiteness' and 'African-ness'. It recognises identity as contingent, provisional and unstable. The appeal of homogeneity clashes with this conception of identity. The compelling myth of common origins manifests in the idea that deconstructionism (particularly in its postmodernist guise) is potentially dangerous. The argument, advanced by amongst others, Linda Human, is that apartheid 'has created or reinforced an 'us' and 'them' syndrome where black culture is looked down upon as inappropriate to the business world.'[67] A reinforcement of cultural differences (via the celebration of diversity) would

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[62] **Ronnie Lessem**, *From Hunter to Rainmaker: The Southern African Businessphere*, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1996, 143.

[63] **Lessem**, *From Hunter to Rainmaker*, 143.

[64] **Lessem**, *From Hunter to Rainmaker*, 144.

[65] See **Satya P. Mohanty**, 'Us and Them,' 223.

[66] See **Linstead**, 'Deconstruction,' 54 passim.

[67] **Linda Human**, '"Black Advancement", Affirmative Action and Managing Diversity: What South Africa can learn from the USA,' in *Educating and Developing Managers For a Changing South Africa: Selected Essays*, edited by Linda Human, 319-330. Cape Town: Juta, 1991:322.

simply perpetuate these schisms. According to Human, moving too quickly to 'the less threatening process of "managing diversity" would...leave some fundamental issues [of racism and sexism] untapped and unaddressed.'[68] As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, this claim has some empirical resonance. Of greater concern, perhaps, is that the eschewal of difference in the name of 'national reconciliation and unity' harbours a re-totalising temptation and, for that reason, ought to be resisted.

Indeed, to deny a mythical unity to African identity is not to dispute that for their bearers, racial or ethnic identities are real (they are believed in and life is lived through such idealizations). This point holds true for most, if not all identities. To some extent, we cannot live except *through* such identities. What this chapter questions, however, is the idea that racial identities are the only salient mode of being, that it is only their spoor that should be followed - as if the ground bears no trace of other marks of identity.

Acknowledging the radical contingency and ambiguity of racial identities does not in and of itself diminish the power of these identities.[69] Indeed, despite (or because of) their origin in myths and lies, despite a 'misrecognition' of their genesis, they flourish:[70]

> (T)here is, in consequence, no large place for reason in the construction - as opposed to the study and management - of identities. One temptation, then, for those who see the centrality of these fictions in our lives, is to leave reason behind: to celebrate and endorse those identities that seem at the moment to offer the best hope of advancing our other goals, and to keep silence about the lies and the myths.[71]

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[68] **Human**, 'Black Advancement', 322.

[69] **Gilroy**, *Small Acts*, 14.

[70] **Appiah**, *In My Father's House*, 175.

[71] **Appiah**, *In My Father's House*, 178.

And it is here where the African management discursive tangle fails: it conflates the myths and fantasies of identity construction (the ceremonies and magic and spirits it trumpets) with the management of these identities.[72] The latter can be divested of fictions and falsehoods - particularly those that speak of (or to) naturalised racial identities. And it is in these fragile spaces that remain, poised between the idea of race as a shared metaphysics and the denial of race as anything but a simulacrum, that Africa can be divested of the fantasy of biologized blackness.

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[72] See **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 17-27; and **Lovemore Mbigi**, *Ubuntu: The African Dream in Management*, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1997, 49-61.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

The conceptual framework and theoretical premises upon which research is grounded influences the research design, strategy and methods employed. As Bulmer puts it: 'Methods are rather like a kaleidoscope; depending on how they are approached, held and acted toward, different observations will be revealed.'[1]

The research methods employed are grounded in the assumption that there is no one, true knowledge or God's eye view from which the researcher can unearth the 'facts'. This has a number of implications. Most importantly, this research utilises qualitative research methods. This preference for qualitative techniques stems from my research topic, which cannot be meaningfully formulated in ways that permit statistical testing of hypotheses with quantitative data.[2] This is not to suggest that qualitative work is in any way ad hoc. Firstly, a large part of the research conducted is replicable. For example, the interview schedule used for both the intensive interviews as well as the focus group discussions is fluid enough to allow for individual specificity, but at the same time is relatively standardised. Secondly, the use of five case studies facilitates comparative work. Thirdly, my research methods rely on triangulation, which is the use of three or more methods of collecting evidence in research. This reduces the chance of unintentional bias and can compensate for the unreliability of a single method by complementing it with material collected in different ways and from different perspectives.

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[1] **Martin Bulmer**, *Sociological Research Methods*, London: Macmillan, 1984, 28.

[2] **George King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba**, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inferene in Qualitative Research*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 6.

The research strategies I used included semi-structured intensive interviews; focus group discussions; participant observation; and the content analysis of documents and secondary material. This multiple strategy approach facilitates in-depth qualitative research, the aim of which is 'not to explain human behaviour in terms of universally valid laws or generalisations, but rather to understand and interpret the meanings and intentions that underlie everyday human interactions.'[3]

The overall approach of this thesis is to critically analyse discourses and the ways in which discourses shape practices. This implies both a descriptive and analytical approach. The latter is about identifying social processes and the (un)foreseen and (un)intended consequences discourses have on practices and social polices. I rely on textual evidence to illuminate the complex nature of these relationships. In so doing, I have interpreted and analysed texts, interviews and documents. This approach reveals the ways in which an individual's views and aspirations are shaped by discourses. The primary criterion of interpretation was my own judgement. This is because it would be very difficult to statistically 'test' management discourses and practices and processes of identity construction.

A methodological stance that questions universalism offers an attractive way into analysing discourses and identity formation. It does not, however, prove as useful in offering a way out of complex policy questions. Moreover, employing this approach as a central plank of research design has its limitations. Just as conceptual or theoretical tools are inescapably 'centric' in one way or another, so too are research methods. The activity of writing is a medium of representation. The rhetorical logics of the disciplinary discourse(s) within which one writes frame the boundaries of the knowable and the sayable.[4] As Gergen puts it:

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[3] **J. Mouton**, 'The Philosophy of Qualitative Research,' in *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods*, edited by Monica Ferreira *et al.*, Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1988, 1.

[4] See **Marta B. Calás**, 'An/Other Silent Voice? Representing "Hispanic Woman" in Organizational Texts,' in *Gendering Organizational Analysis*, edited by Albert J. Mills and Peta Tancred, London: Sage, 1992, 204.

> How can theoretical categories be induced or derived from observation...if the process of identifying observational attributes itself relies on one's possessing categories? How can theoretical categories map or reflect the world if each definition used to link category and observation itself requires definition?[5]

Accepting that meaning is not universal, but fragmented and locally grounded, should not be construed as a descent into arbitrariness. It is necessary to avoid the slippery slope of relativism (which is the underbelly of postmodernism). The relativist thesis was (and in some cases still is) useful in debunking ethnocentric explanations of other racial and cultural communities and practices. In its extreme form, however, relativism is internally confused. Mohanty notes that if all truth-claims are context specific, what should make us believe or buy into the relativist claim itself? There is a self-refutation built into the argument. This 'renders relativism less a significant philosophical position than a pious - though not ineffectual – political wish.'[6] More importantly, however, are the unspoken or unacknowledged political implications of the relativist position. As Mohanty suggests, if my space is separate to yours, and I cannot adjudicate between the two spaces (I cannot develop a set of general criteria that would have interpretative validity in both spaces) then the claim is rather substantial:

> Quite simply, it is to assert that *all spaces are equivalent*: that they have equal value...I cannot...think about how your space impinges on mine, or how my history is defined together with yours...Plurality instead of a single homogeneous space, yes. But also, unfortunately, debilitatingly insular spaces.[7]

Relativism becomes a dangerous political position and debilitating theoretical stance. By disabling attempts to adjudicate the validity of divergent claims, it negates genuine

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[5] **K. J. Gergen**, 'The social constructionist movement in modern psychology,; *American Psychologist* 40 (1985): 266-67; quoted in *Constructing the Social*, edited by **Theodore R. Sarbin and John I. Kitsuse**, London: Sage, 1994, 6.

[6] **Satya P. Mohanty**, 'Us and Them: On the Philosophical Bases of Political Criticism,' in *Cultural Remix: Theories of Politics and the Popular*, edited by Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, 215-240. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995, 225.

[7] **Satya P. Mohanty**, 'Us and Them,' 226.

political dialogue between the self and the Other.[8] Not all accounts are substitutable. Some are specious, and some have priority over others. To suggest that meanings are contested is not synonymous with claiming that meaning is always and everywhere indeterminate. Reasonable opinions can be formed about research problems, even if these opinions are uncertain and contested.[9]

Despite eschewing any pretence to universality, reliable research is possible. The different ways in which knowledge claims are advanced can be critically interrogated without undermining our ability to assess the validity of any of these claims. Within the research setting, the ability to contest the accuracy of divergent narratives is important. It assists the researcher in prioritising (or conferring factual or theoretical superiority to) one account over another. It bears repeating, however, that these types of decisions are still a *choice* the researcher has to make. Hence, we need to recognise that research of this nature inevitably contains an element of selectivity.

2.2 Process

As both a theoretical construct and a corrective strategy, affirmative action (AA) is hotly contested. To clarify some of the more pertinent areas of research, in April 1995 I conducted a series of preliminary interviews with eighteen individuals in South Africa. These included managers, consultants and academics working in this field of study.

The insights gleaned from this pilot study enabled me to modify my interview schedule and informed my subsequent research - conducted in August and September 1995, February-May 1996, and June-September 1996. In addition, during 1995 I had numerous tutorials at Templeton College, the Oxford Centre for Management Studies. These were of

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[8] **Satya P. Mohanty**, 'Us and Them,' 226.

[9] **Linstead**, 'Deconstruction.' 66-67.

particular help in enhancing my understanding of organizational theory and management practices.

It was through the generous assistance of many individuals, primarily human resources managers, that I was able to gain access to the case study companies. In September 1995, I met with Francois Theron, training and development divisional manager of SA Insurance, to discuss my research agenda. Professor Linda Human (a diversity consultant) was about to embark on an AA follow-up audit in the company. Francois Theron suggested I assist Human, a request to which she graciously agreed. Human and Theron arranged for me to participate in all the focus group discussions and interviews (conducted during September 1995), and to be privy to conversation at the highest levels of the organization.

During this period, I had discussions with Heather King, SA Packaging group management development manager. She was exceptionally helpful in facilitating my research at SA Packaging. King introduced me to many of the main players in the Group (both within head office and the divisions) and generously gave of both her time and resources. I decided to conduct research in three plants in the SA Packaging group: SA Can, SA Tin, and SA Paper. King put me in contact with key figures in each plant: at SA Can, Andre Pienaar, the human resources manager; at SA Tin, Lazarus Maseko, the managing director; and at SA Paper, Pierre van Rensburg, the human resources manager. They were all extremely accommodating and helped to expedite my research.

Access to SA Engineering was gained with the kind assistance of John Barron, SA Contractors engineering group personnel manager. Subsequent to our discussions, I met with Allan Le Grange, SA Contractors industrial relations director and Anton Jordaan, the managing director of SA Engineering. Jordaan agreed for me to use SA Engineering as a case study. Thereafter, my primary liaison was the human resources manager, Mandla Gumede, who kindly arranged for me to interview a cross-section of SA Engineering staff.

2.3 Case Studies

In selecting and gaining access to research settings, account needs to be taken of the following criteria: permissibleness, accessibility, simplicity, unobtrustiveness, and participation.[10] Given the politically sensitive nature of my research topic, fulfilling the first two criteria took precedence. In the years immediately after the historical 1994 election, companies were understandably sensitive about their internal employment equity and affirmative action practices. Securing permission to conduct research into these topics was an arduous process. Out of the many companies that had initiated change management processes (including AA and/or some form of valuing diversity), I selected three companies in which to conduct case study research: SA Packaging (research was conducted at three separate plants, as well as at head office), SA Insurance, and SA Engineering. SA Packaging is a Group structure, and has various subsidiary business divisions reporting to it. In turn, each of these divisions is comprised of a number of local plants. I conducted research at the Group (head office) level, and used three local plants (SA Tin, SA Can, and SA Paper) as case studies. In total, I conducted five in-depth case studies. The primary basis for selecting these companies was their willingness to provide me with relatively unrestricted access to conduct my research.

Interviews were also conducted with various individuals charged with implementing AA and diversity management programmes in other companies, both in SA and in the US. In particular, I conducted a series of interviews in the SA Banking group, which has amongst the best AA statistics in the financial sector.[11] SA Banking has embarked on a range of democratisation initiatives. These range from company-wide 'valuing cultural diversity' workshops to establishing a division dedicated to socio-economic empowerment, workplace democracy and AA. These initiatives are described in greater detail in Chapter

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[10] See **Chris van der Burgh**, 'The Methodology of Participant Observation,' in Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods, edited by Monica Ferreira *et al.*, Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1988, 66-67.

[11] Based on statistics compiled by the Breakwater Monitor, UCT Graduate School of Business, cited in **SA Banking**, 'SA Bank's Free State Government Banking Tender,' Johannesburg, 1995.

Nine. Kevin Herbert, SA Banking's executive director of strategic alignment, was particularly helpful in facilitating the interviews. The insights gleaned from these discussions provided the backdrop for a more detailed examination of the core case studies.

The 'African Management' school of thought has been gaining currency in academic and corporate spheres in SA. Some familiarity with these ideas was therefore a further consideration in selecting case study companies. The African Management Project at the University of the Witwatersrand Business School (under whose auspices much of the African management theory has been generated) is sponsored by, amongst others, two of the case study companies.

Different organizational forms and the dynamics of different industries affect the nature, scope and outcome of AA programmes. The sectors in which the case study companies operate vary widely, as does the composition of their workforce, customer base, and suppliers. At the risk of stating the obvious, this complexity makes it very difficult to draw generalizable inferences about AA programmes in corporate South Africa.

The companies selected as case studies are discussed in Chapter Three.

2.4 Interviews

Prior to embarking on my research, in-depth discussions were held with the various human resources managers to clarify the aims, nature and scope of the proposed research. Interview schedules were jointly devised. My primary consideration was that the interviewees were reflective of a cross-section of organizational members, the aim being to canvass as wide a range of opinions on AA as possible. I used a non-probability, purposive sampling method. This entails judging certain cases as 'typical' of a category of cases of interests. The probability of the selection of each respondent is not known as some

individuals have a greater chance than others of selection. De Vaus submits that a researcher may be interested in a 'tentative, hypothesis-generating, exploratory look at patterns...(in order to obtain) an idea of the range of responses or ideas that people have.'[12]

The issues addressed in this thesis lend themselves to this form of sampling: the use of a probability sample - in which each person has an equal probability of being selected - may hinder the articulation of a diversity of perspectives. Purposive sampling was therefore selected as the preferred method. The choice of this research strategy does not imply an acceptance of the assumptions informing it (viz. that it is possible to identify, *a priori*, categories of individuals who necessarily have identical interests). What it does provide is an idea of the range of responses or ideas that people have on AA and not a statistically representative sample.

I interviewed a total of 126 individuals, 98 in South Africa, and 28 in the United States. This included individuals tasked with promoting and taking responsibility for AA, those who stand to benefit from AA, and those who perceive AA as inimical to their interests.

The duration of the interviews varied from one to four hours, averaging about two hours. In SA, interviewees included workers (unionised and non-unionised) and shop stewards; supervisors and foremen; middle and senior managers; AA and African management consultants and practitioners; academics and researchers; the vice-president of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu); and the director of the Black Management Forum (BMF).

Given that many US companies have been implementing AA for the last couple of decades, and have been experimenting with diversity management programmes for at least the last

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[12] **D. A. De Vaus**, *Surveys in Social Research*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1986, 68.

ten years, I felt it would be beneficial to conduct interviews in the US. Of particular relevance to me was the ways in which the recent backlash against race and gender based programmes in the US is being addressed on a day-to-day basis within companies. The interviews I conducted gave me insight into the reasons why the AA debate is often a proxy for the debate about the state of race relations in the US. This resonates with the SA experience - a theme to which I return throughout the thesis. In addition, my American research findings were suggestive of how racial, gender, and ethnic identities may better be managed.

In the US, interviewees included the former executive director of the Glass Ceiling Commission (U.S. Department of Labour); the staff director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights; a former director of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (U.S. Department of Labor); officials from the Equal Employment Opportunity Council (EEOC), National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), National Organization for Women (NOW), U.S. Department of Justice (Civil Rights Division), Equal Employment Advisory Council (EEAC), and NAACP Legal Defence Fund; a former director of the Office of Personnel Management; human resources managers; gender researchers; and diversity consultants, including the President of the American Institute for Managing Diversity.

Given the sensitive nature of the research, tape recording the interviews was inappropriate. Respondents were unwilling to be taped divulging confidential information or voicing contentious opinions. The substantive content of the interviews was thus recorded through extensive note taking. Only minor stylistic changes have been made to the interview material.

Many respondents were only willing to be interviewed if their right to confidentiality was upheld. By agreeing to this proviso, I obtained a remarkable degree of co-operation from interviewees, who gave generously of their time. Respecting individual confidentiality means that most respondents have been given pseudonyms. Exceptions are individuals who are public or highly visible figures, and individuals whose views have been published

or have been given media coverage. A confidential list of interviewees has been placed with the examiners. This identifies the respondents by name and pseudonym, and contains other relevant information pertaining to their occupation and position within their organization, and the place and date on which the interview took place.

The interviewing procedure was conversational in nature. This provided the space to probe more controversial issues and to gain greater clarity when the responses seemed inconsistent. Key themes and topics were covered in each interview. A non-schedule standardised interview structure was used. This means that standardised questions are asked of each respondent, but may be asked in different ways or in different sequences.[13] The questionnaire consisted of qualitative and quantitative questions, which permits individual specification whilst maintaining a coherent and comparable framework. Open-ended questions allowed interviewees to formulate their responses in their own terms.

The limitations of semi-structured intensive interviewing include the use of chain referral or snowball sampling, problems with replicating the researchers techniques, language and 'interviewer effects'.

Snowball sampling has the potential of producing a biased sample.[14] Researchers may only be referred to respondents who espouse similar viewpoints to those of the original interviewees, leading to an analysis that is informed by a single perspective. Being aware of this problem, and actively ensuring that a diversity of viewpoints is canvassed, lessens potential bias.

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[13] See **J.B. Williamson, D.A. Karp, J.R. Dalphin, and P.S. Gray**, 'Intensive Interviewing,' in *The Research Craft*, edited by J.B. Williamson *et al.*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1982, 173.

[14] **K.D. Bailey**, 'Survey Sampling', in *Methods of Sociological Research*, London: Oxford University Press, 1978.

A further limitation of this research method is that it may preclude rigorous comparisons between responses. I attempted to reduce this problem by using a relatively standardised interview schedule, which is replicable. Specifically, the interviews focused on the dimensions of cultural, ethnic and gender diversity; and the design and implementation of organizational change processes that seek to enhance the capacity to manage this diversity. Attendant questions included the reasons for the implementation of AA/diversity management programmes; the nature and scope of these programmes; possible pitfalls and obstacles encountered in their conceptualisation and implementation; and their relationship to broader corporate strategy.

Language and interviewer effects are a research hazard in many multi-lingual and multi-cultural research settings. The definitions accorded to terms often differ. Hence, a central part of the interview process involves establishing equivalences of meaning. Cultural meanings and symbols have no necessary unity or fixity; there is no necessary identity between signified and signifier. I conducted the vast majority of the interviews in English, a second-language for some of the respondents. Whilst most of these respondents asserted that they felt comfortable expressing themselves in English, the problem of translatability remains.

There is no simple, uncomplicated communication between the production of meaning and the act of interpretation. The transfer of meaning between different languages is never total. The following sets of comments illustrate how this conundrum might play out in the research setting. The first capture a dialogue between two SA Paper employees: one white, one coloured. A coloured foreman at SA Can said the second. Of relevance is that SA Paper is situated in Cape Town, SA Can in Gauteng:

(1) White SA Paper employee:

> The foremen still talk about *boere*...

coloured SA Paper employee:

> It's just a term that people use, they don't mean it. In the coloured culture we still use the word *kaffir* - our culture is very much racist. Maybe in the past we were spoiled because we were privileged. It's acceptable for me to call a white man *boer* and a black guy *kaffir* but it's not fine for a white to do it. Also, it depends on when and how you use those terms - and how people mean it. People respect each other's feelings. When people are in their own groups they talk about *kaffirs* or *boers* or *houtkappers* or *hotnots* or *malaui* but when we're together we respect each other and don't use those words.[15]

(2) Coloured foreman at SA Can:

> I've asked the whites to forget about these two names: *hotnots* and *kaffirs* but they told me they're used to speaking like that and that's all. As soon as we can stop that we'll win a lot of ground and be on the right track...they must stop using words like *kaffirs* and *hotnots*.[16]

An interviewer's race, gender and perceived socio-economic status influence the perceptions and responses of those interviewed and surveyed. Unobtrusiveness is an unattainable, and probably undesirable, goal. The very presence of the researcher may affect the ways in which respondents relate to one another and express themselves. Interactions may be modified to suit the perceived interests of the researcher.[17] This limitation is unavoidable, and its effects difficult to gauge. The more problematic interviewer effects may be minimised by being alert to the problem and being aware of both parties' non-verbal messages. Above all, a researcher needs to be vigilant in not

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[15] **SA Paper employee**, focus group interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996.

[16] **Leon Kleinhans**, SA Can foreman, interview by author, Vanderbijlpark, 27 March 1996.

[17] The following comments from Yster en Staal shop stewards at SA Engineering illustrate this effect: 'we wanted to go on a shop stewards course (run by Yster en Staal) and management said they'll only pay for one of us but now, because you're here, they say we can talk and they'll probably pay for all three of us to go.'(**Jan Harmse, Willie Ferreira and Kobus Wessels**, interview, 18 April 1996).

disclosing personal biases. A caveat is that this may be deemed necessary to build rapport or may be an appropriate technique to elicit information alternative methods have failed to uncover.

Identities attributed to the researcher do not necessarily hinder independent research. All identities are relational and involve the assertion of difference. Which identities come to the fore are, in part, context-dependent. In particular settings, I sought to establish rapport on the basis of subject positions (such as gender) which were sufficiently similar to the self-identifications of the interviewee as to allow for 'bonding'. In other settings, by affirming the differences, I was able to foster my status of researcher as outsider. This worked in a variety of ways: in the US, being of a different nationality (and one that was, at that point, rather 'fashionable') allowed for the emergence of a respectful distance between researcher and interviewee. This, I believe, engendered a degree of trust and created an environment in which the respondent felt comfortable to disclose controversial viewpoints and sensitive information. In the South African case studies, I constantly affirmed my credentials as an outsider to ensure that I was not perceived as representative of management (or indeed, of any other interest group).

The interview schedules used are attached in Appendix A.

2.5 Focus Groups

During September 1995, as part of the AA follow-up audit at SA Insurance, thirteen focus group interviews were held, with over 130 company employees participating in these discussions. The Corporate Human Resources division had randomly selected the focus group participants, with an emphasis on their racial, gender, and status level diversity. In addition, in April 1996, as part of my case study research at SA Paper, two focus group discussions (in which 14 employees participated) were held.

The focus group discussions at SA Insurance and SA Paper were relatively unstructured. A generic interview schedule formed the basis of discussions, but focus group participants were given the freedom to direct the conversation towards areas they believed important. This flexibility provided respondents with the opportunity to introduce their own grievances and suggestions. Key focus areas (such as clarifying the content, scope and beneficiaries of the AA strategy; reconciling conflicting organizational objectives; and instances of racial discrimination) were probed. Care was taken to ensure that all participants felt comfortable to voice their opinions.

The key strength of this method - its informality and reliance on group dynamics - is also its primary weakness. In the focus groups, the general pattern was to let the often-heated debates continue unabated. Participants would begin to let down their guard and reveal sensitive information they might otherwise not have aired in public. In this way, I gained important insights into the deeply held beliefs and feelings of different organizational members. This assisted me in unearthing what lies behind the corporate rhetoric on AA, and enabled me to develop a more comprehensive understanding of informal and generally unspoken organizational dynamics.

The limitation of this method is that the converse might also hold true: instead of acting as a safety net within which to articulate grievances, a group environment can inhibit participants from revealing their true feelings. Individuals who are uncomfortable talking in groups, or those who fear being identified with a particular position may choose to stay silent. Creating a comfortable environment that places a premium on confidentiality may go some way in reducing what is an unavoidable limitation of this method. Despite this potential obstacle, the vast majority of respondents assured me that they had no qualms about participating in focus groups - an assurance to which their vocal and heated discussions testified.

2.6 Participant Observation

Practical constraints limited the amount of time I was able to spend in the case-study companies. The role I generally adopted was that of 'observer-as-participant'. The exception being the three days I actively participated in a SA Insurance valuing diversity workshop. This is explained in greater detail below.

Being unable to immerse oneself in the research setting may limit the extent to which one is able to gain insight into the discourses and practices through which respondents comprehend the organization; its programmes and policies; fellow employees; and their own subjectivity.

'Partnership': Valuing Diversity Workshop

SA Insurance agreed for me to attend a three-day 'Partnership' workshop 'in cross-cultural understanding and interaction' in March 1996. The stated aim of the workshop was to enable participants to express their attitudes and values on matters of culture; acquire skills to manage preconceptions and develop cross-cultural understanding, interaction and trust; improve communication skills and channels (both horizontally and vertically).[18] Delegates were divided into small groups (diverse in terms of race and gender) which become the primary focus of the 'Partnership' learning experience. Cross-cultural relationship building is encouraged through social events throughout the course.

For the duration of the workshop, I assumed the role of a 'Partnership delegate'. The majority of the course participants did not know that I was a researcher, and interacted with me as though I was a colleague. This role of 'participant-as-observer' (actively

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[18] 'Partnership,' delegates package for Partnership workshops, Johannesburg: SA Insurance, ca. 1994.

participating in, as well as observing the research setting) enabled me to establish an easy rapport with the other course participants. The rather intense and personal nature of the course allowed me to gain insight into the thought processes of fellow delegates. This proved extremely useful in developing a thorough understanding of the actual workings of diversity management programmes.

Towards the end of the course, a couple of delegates had learnt that I was a researcher. This did not radically alter their interactions with me. I presume that the primary reason behind their continued acceptance of me lay in the highly personal nature of the course. By this stage, along with the other delegates, I had divulged personal trivia to the group. This form of group bonding is aimed at de-emphasising organizational hierarchies and occupational status. Against this backdrop, my status as researcher was given less importance than it might otherwise have attained.

Managing Diversity Skills Training Workshop

During September 1995, I observed a managing diversity skills training workshop for SA Insurance (Asset Management) managers conducted by an external consultant, Linda Human. Nearly all the approximately 25 participants were white males.

Human's thesis is that individuals are multidimensional. She likens social identities to a 'kaleidoscope' (they comprise 'a variety of changing and dynamic identities and personality factors').[19] She claims that stereotypes are eroded when individuals become more flexible in their outlook, flexibility being increased by an awareness of multidimensionality. Human believes that by exploring the concept of diversity through a range of exercises 'which highlight the unidimensionality and expectancy communications

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[19] **Linda Human**, *Contemporary Conversations: Understanding and Managing Diversity in the Modern World*, Senegal: The Goree Institute, 1996, 47.

associated with maximalist perspectives', individuals will be able to experience 'multidimensionality through a process of differentiation and integration as well as the value judgements (s)he is imposing through the unidimensional approach.'[20] The aim is to increase 'cognitive complexity' within individuals: to assist managers in understanding that being able to differentiate between various individual identities and thereafter integrate on the basis of information relevant to a particular context is a key step towards effectively managing diversity.[21]

Above all, Human stresses the importance of 'conversational routines' and 'empathetic listening' and 'empathetic questioning' skills.[22] Conversations imply interaction, and involve the conversations individuals have with others as well as the conversations they have with themselves. Crucially, they provide opportunities for discovering multidimensionality. To Human, this is not about imposing stereotypical assumptions onto the person with whom one is conversing (for instance, assuming that because your conversational partner is Japanese, he will want to save face above all else), nor is it about emulating his culture. Rather, '(d)iversity communication...involves...suspending my stereotype of Japanese culture and finding out sufficient (sic) about the person before me in order to treat him/her as an individual and with dignity and respect.'[23]

Human stresses that managing diversity is not about 'managing them, out there', but about 'managing me, in here.'[24] The managing diversity training was presented as a means to equip managers with basic skills to facilitate an understanding of how the positive/negative expectancy communications they communicate to themselves or their

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[20] **Human**, *Contemporary Conversations*, 56.

[21] **Human**, *Contemporary Conversations*, 46-47.

[22] **Human**, *Contemporary Conversations*, 64.

[23] **Human**, *Contemporary Conversations*, 63.

[24] **Human**, *Contemporary Conversations*, 5.

direct reports impact the motivation, performance, development and self-confidence of others.[25] The workshop sought to examine the factors that affect the development of employees - particularly the personal management style of delegates. The individual and group exercises were designed to make participants aware both of their prejudices and of their characteristic use of power. A managing diversity case study and related role-play (focusing on an employee appraisal and development review) sought to transfer practical skills in this area.

2.7 Document Analysis

I used corporate materials from many companies in my research. These include internal memos, corporate strategy documents and communications, and mission statements. These documents constitute the physical artefacts of organizational culture. Examining them helped make visible a particular company's symbolisation of reality - particularly 'how things get done around here'.

In addition, I relied on secondary literature (periodicals, theoretical articles and unpublished case studies) and newspaper reports to provide the background to the insights gleaned from the empirical data. Of particular relevance are the texts that form a corpus that has become known as 'African management'. This emerging body of work is significant because it has begun to influence the ways in which top management in various companies conceptualises AA and diversity management. During my research in the case study companies, I realised the increasing currency of the ideas contained within the 'African management' paradigm.

2.8 Conclusions

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[25] **Human**, *Contemporary Conversations*, 56.

The results generated from the research methods used do not lend themselves to quantitative analysis. Nor do they permit statistical inferences to be made about the populations from which the respondents are drawn.[26] The lack of standardisation in sampling and interviewing curtails the generalizability of the results. Perhaps what we should seek to establish are patterns of relationships one would expect to find in a situation on the basis of a guiding theoretical framework, past observations, and an index of reliability.[27] Reliability refers to the extent to which a research instrument or technique yields a consistent or reproducible result.[28] The cumulative responses of the interviews conducted all fall within a given range - despite attempts to identify deviations from this range. The research results thus provide what Williamson *et al* term 'the sort of stability that can inspire a high degree of confidence.' They submit that in studies not based on quantitative, observable phenomena, 'this kind of confidence may be more important than the statistical reliability attributed to survey research.'[29]

The methodological techniques used assist in surfacing discursive constructions of race, gender and culture. They provide a set of practical and analytical tools through which aspects of organizational culture, management practices and interpersonal relations can be interrogated. They assist in examining the silences – that which is not said or written about in annual reports. The combination of research methods used form a powerful analytic strategy to decipher the implicit taboos within an organization – the limits of the permissible and the sayable. Corporate materials – both physical documents and participants' narratives - tell a story about the company that can be used to augment or undermine the 'stories' told by respondents during the interview process. These corporate narratives are part of the discursive regime that helps gives meaning to

[26] **Williamson** *et al.*, 'Intensive Interviewing,'187.

[27] This closely parallels Cronback and Meehl's (1955) discussions of 'construct validity' as cited in **Bulmer and Warwick**, *Social Research*, 157.

[28] See **Bulmer and Warwick**, *Social Research*, 156-157.

[29] **Williamson** *et al.*, 'Intensive Interviewing,' 172.

organizational participants' actions and behaviours. They help us interpret the multiple meanings that attach to the myths and metaphors that are part of any organizations internal scaffolding.

This thesis seeks to critically analyse discourses and the ways in which they help shape organizational practices and policies. The research methods used enabled the theoretical insights to be employed in dialogue with the research findings. A multi-pronged research strategy assists the researcher in tackling a problem from many different angles. Through surfacing a variety of organizational discourses, this research design helped populate a robust field from which to select the most cogent account(s). These research tools helped define the parameters within which one narrative was prioritised over another. These parameters do not safeguard this analysis from critique. What they do provide, however, is a confidence in the process through which these choices were made, and in turn, a belief in the reasonableness of the opinions formed about these research problems.

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDIES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief synopsis of the case study companies. The discussion of these organizations is of necessity limited by my commitment not to identify specific companies.

There are a number of common themes that can be identified in the case studies. Of significance are the similar ways in which unionists have responded to management inspired worker participation initiatives (the broad framework within which AA and managing diversity programmes are often nested). Many of their responses are illustrative of the difficulties the union movement is facing in adjusting to the demands of a post-apartheid era. The onerous task of transforming political freedom into some sort of 'economic freedom' is the fulcrum on which many of the organizational conflicts around worker participation revolve.

Whilst the new labour relations framework seeks to give practical effect to the Constitution and Bill of Rights, it is still about a politics of (adversarial) participation, and can be understood as a new terrain of struggle. Worker participation or co-determination is a central pillar of the new legislative framework. Throughout the 1990s, however, the union movement has had an ambivalent relationship with worker participation initiatives. Indeed, the debate has often been defined more by its silences than by its polemic.[1] Despite its key role in anti-apartheid resistance, and the rights it has won

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[1] For example, Cosatu's Fifth National Congress failed to discuss issues pertinent to co-determination at the workplace (see **Karl von Holdt**, 'Cosatu Congress: challenging elite anxieties,' *South African Labour Bulletin* 18, no. 5 (1994): 42-43).

for workers in the post-apartheid period, the union movement seems to lack the leadership, influence and vision necessary to effectively exploit these new opportunities. Political unionism, which has been central to Cosatu's self-definition, is to all intents and purposes on the wane. In common with many other organizations within 'civil society', the union movement is struggling to redefine its role(s) in a democratic society. This search for a post-apartheid identity is occurring at a time when many workers are finding it difficult to keep pace with SA's re-entry into the global economy and the accompanying workplace restructuring. As Baskin puts it: 'Unions now have an institutionalized role in policy-making and are recognised as social partners by the democratic government. Ironically, the labour movement is struggling to make the most of these dramatic gains.'[2]

Many unionists believe that the joint structures found in the case study companies, such as the plant forums at SA Packaging, are threats that will undermine and ultimately supplant existing shop steward structures.[3] Ideologically motivated fears are based on the assumption that these forums will co-opt workers and their putative class project. What is sometimes forgotten amidst the anti-plant forum vitriol is that these types of joint forums are only a second channel - running parallel to union/management meetings. They are not, *ipso facto*, a substitute for collective bargaining structures.

As was evidenced in the case study companies, a lack of skills is often coupled with a lack of initiative amongst shop stewards, and a failure to take responsibility for developing an understanding of the new framework of labour relations.[4] Ignorance curtails unionists' ability to understand and contribute to the proceedings of committee meetings. This, in

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[2] **Baskin**, 'Unions at the crossroads,' 8.

[3] See **Baskin and Satgar**, 'South Africa's new LRA,' *SALB*, 50; and **Karl von Holdt**, 'Workplace forums: can they tame management?' *South African Labour Bulletin* 19, no. 1 (1995): 32-34.

[4] For instance, many SA Engineering shop stewards are ignorant of the provisions of the new LRA (**Numsa shop stewards** (SA Engineering), interview, 18 April 1996; **Mandla Gumede**, interview, 11 April 1996; and **Jan Harmse** *et al.*, interview, 18 April 1996).

turn, hinders their capacity to negotiate and engage with this new terrain. These difficulties have led many shop stewards in the case study companies to opt for the familiar and to rely on a politics of resistance (and the threat of withholding their labour). They have found it difficult to effect the shift from adversarial bargaining to co-operative strategies. This reflects a deeper concern with the union movements' willingness, preparedness and capacity to deal with this shift. Pinning their faith on a (rhetoric of a) politics of resistance may end up hindering, rather than furthering unionists ability to develop strategies apposite to the new industrial relations framework. The key challenge lies in abandoning strategies based on sheer power (symbolic of past confrontations) and adapting to a legalistic framework, governed by rights and obligations.[5]

The case study material illustrates that the move towards increased co-operation demands that unionists rethink their strategies. They need to develop novel and sophisticated strategies apposite to the new rules of the game (however ill defined). According to Ppwawu shop stewards at SA Paper, in the past 'we used to count on resistance and revolutionary moves as a tactic but now we have to change our tactics the whole time. Our old moves don't work - our members demand more from us.'[6] This latter point is crucial. SA is now a democracy. Employees no longer need to look to the union movement to fight for their political and civil rights. Workers rights are protected by a medley of legislative instruments. These include the Skills Development Bill (to be enacted in 1999); the Basic Conditions of Employment Bill which, amongst other measures, stipulates a maximum working week of 45 hours and four months maternity leave;[7] and the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993. Used effectively, this

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[5] See for example **Gwede Mantashe**, 'Participation: the Eskom experience,' *South African Labour Bulletin* 18, no. 5 (1994): 110; **von Holdt**, 'Workplace forums,' 33-34; **SWOP**, 'Workplace Representation,' 56; and **Ntshangase and Solomons**, 'Adversarial participation,' 32-35.

[6] **Wilmot Gabriels** *et al.*, interview, 1 April 1996.

[7] Admist much controversy and opposition from many quarters, this Bill was passed in the House of Assembly on 6 November 1997. It is due to be enacted in May 1998. See **Tito Mboweni**, 'Cabinet Decision on the Basic Conditions of Employment Bill,' speech by the Minister of Labour, Carlton Hotel, Johannesburg, 17 April 1997, available from http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/speeches/1997/titosp1.html, Internet, accessed 20 April 1997; **Craig Doonan**, 'Two years of labour pains,' *Sunday Times*, 9 November 1997; **Stephen Mulholland**, 'Interfering government is not doing workers any favours,' *Sunday Times Business Times*, 9

new legislative framework has the potential to enhance the role and ability of the unions to jointly determine the nature and trajectory of work place strategies (including AA). Unless unions adopt a proactive stance to take advantage of this potential, however, they run the risk of being increasingly marginalized.[8]

3.2 Individual Case Studies

SA Packaging (South Africa)

The SA Packaging Group is South Africa's largest packaging group and the second largest in the Southern Hemisphere. The group has in excess of 16 000 employees, and turnover exceeds R6 billion. SA Packaging consists of 130 business units, making up 17 divisions. These manufacture and market a diversified range of primary and secondary packaging and paper products, including metal, paper, plastic, glass, and paper making and printing operations. Each division is responsible for a relatively discrete line of business (for example, glass bottles or tin cans for edible foodstuffs). SA Packaging holds over 40 percent of the overall packaging market in South Africa and enjoys significant market share in a number of other key manufacturing segments.

In 1989, SA Packaging embarked on a Total Quality Management (TQM) drive. The aim of TQM is to enhance the quality of products and services through a commitment to total quality and customer satisfaction.

November 1997; and **Sipho Pityana**, 'State has a duty to entrench human rights,' *Sunday Times Business Times*, 23 November 1997.

[8] On this point, see **Baskin and Satgar**, 'South Africa's new LRA,' *SALB*, 12.

In 1990, there was a bitter nine-week strike by Paper and Allied Workers Union (PAWU) workers. SA Packaging's share price declined and Barlow Rand, at that time the controlling shareholder, instituted a restructuring programme. SA Packaging was split into 15 divisions, and a participative process entitled 'people-driven-growth' (PDG) was introduced. Within six months, SA Packaging's earnings per share showed a 21 percent increase.[9]

Since 1992/1993, SA Packaging has focused on moving towards World Class Manufacturing and Services (WCM&S).[10] WCM&S does not refer to a single programme. Rather, the term incorporates a range of different initiatives and objectives. These include, *inter alia*: ensuring that plant equipment and group technology matches international standards; increasing the skill base of employees; and introducing participative management and consultative processes.[11] To this end, individual factories have embarked on a variety of initiatives. These include the implementation of training schemes; the appointment of facilitators tasked with initiating and monitoring the shift to WCM&S; and efforts to improve production. Of import have been the various restructuring programmes. These include physical restructuring (of factory layout and machinery); organizational restructuring (introducing work teams and flattening hierarchies); and numerical restructuring (changing the ratio of permanent to temporary workers and retrenchments).[12]

Other initiatives which fall within the WCM&S umbrella include: TQM; benchmarking against national and international competitors (areas benchmarked include waste,

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[9] **Piet Roos** (pseud.), 'Total Quality Management as a major pillar in World Class Manufacturing,' diss., University of South Africa, 1995, 4.

[10] **Roos** (pseud.), 'Total Quality Management,' 1.

[11] See **Swop and Ppwawu**, 'Restructuring at SA Packaging: A Strategy for Worker Involvement,' internal Swop and Ppwawu research report, Johannesburg, November 1994, photocopied, 2-3.

[12] **Swop and Ppwawu**, 'Restructuring at SA Packaging,' 5.

throughput and operating standards); and Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) - aimed at ensuring that all equipment is productive by enhancing the maintenance systems, and empowering employees through teamwork.[13]

As part of the move towards a less hierarchical management style, SA Packaging Group began to implement co-determination structures.[14] In 1995, the Group reached separate agreements to establish national and plant level joint consultative committees with its majority unions, Ppwawu and Numsa. The National Forum and National Consultative Committee will focus on processes related to WCM&S. Other issues to be covered by the national and plant forums include, *inter alia*: workplace democracy; a code of conduct; education, training and skills formation; productivity enhancement and payment schemes; retrenchment procedures; and information sharing.[15] Wages and conditions of service bargaining issues will continue to be covered by the collective bargaining arrangements in place.[16] Management at SA Tin, SA Can, and SA Paper all initiated plant forums, representative of all stakeholders.[17]

The plant forums have provided a less confrontational space within which managers and worker leadership can co-operate.[18] Despite this, many unionists expressed opposition to

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[13] **Roos** (pseud.), 'Total Quality Management,' 7.

[14] Clifford Barrett claims that SA Packaging conceived of plant forums prior to the LRA. 'We pre-empted the LRA...collectively, we decided we'd ignore the new LRA because both parties brought in what they wanted from the new LRA. The role of unions is well defined.'(**Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996).

[15] **Isaac Nkomo**, SA Packaging group manager for labour issues, interview by author, Johannesburg, 5 March 1996; and *Agreement between Ppwawu and SA Packaging Operations where Ppwawu is Recognised on the Process of World Class Manufacturing and Service within SA Packaging*, Johannesburg: 7 August 1995; and *Record of Understanding between Numsa/MWU and SA Packaging Operations where Numsa/MWU are Recognised on the Process of World Class Manufacturing and Service within SA Packaging*; Johannesburg: 12 October 1995.

[16] *Record of Understanding between Numsa/MWU and SA Packaging Operations*, 12 October 1995.

[17] According to Clifford Barrett, about 50 percent of SA Packaging plants have established plant forums (**Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996).

[18] **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996.

these forums. Their fears stem, in part, from a lack of consultation in the early stages of WCM&S. A joint 1995 study of SA Packaging's restructuring initiatives conducted by the Sociology of Work Project (Swop) and the Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (Ppwawu) found that throughout the Group, workers are not consulted about the introduction or implementation of WCM&S. 'Management in all the SA Packaging factories visited expect workers to just implement the strategy as they are instructed by their superiors.'[19] As will be seen in Chapters Five to Eight, the reticence amongst some unionists to buy in to change processes can, in part, be attributed to their initial exclusion from what comes to be perceived as a management initiative.[20]

Other fears stem from the widespread recognition that shop stewards lack the capacity (including technical skills and knowledge) required to participate effectively in joint forums.[21] At a Group level, SA Packaging, in conjunction with the unions, is attempting to address this skills gap. National shop steward and management training is being developed to build capacity and develop a better understanding of the spirit and letter of the new Labour Relations Act.[22]

To ensure that all plants understand the practices and principles of WCM&S, and share internal best practices, the Group established a 'SA Packaging College' – the first of its kind in South Africa. On a quarterly or semi-annual basis, individual plants identify key personnel who attend the four phases of the college programme. Each phase includes

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[19] **Swop and Ppwawu**, 'Restructuring at SA Packaging,' 91.

[20] This was the case at SA Can. Chris Wiese noted that 'by and large it [the change process] was management driven' (**Chris Wiese**, interview, 26 March 1996).

[21] **George Nkadimeng**, interview, 7 March 1996; and **Swop and Ppwawu**, 'Restructuring at SA Packaging,' 92.

[22] **Isaac Nkomo**, interview, 5 March 1996. There have been sporadic local-level initiatives to build capacity. For example, in 1995, the full-time shop steward at SA Can attended a two week course at Rhodes University. Subjects covered included: budgets; financial management; socialism; industrial relations; computers; and Afrocentric approaches to management (**Sipho Shabangu and Musi Langa**, interview, 26 March 1996).

formal learning (focusing on operational, technical, organizational, change management and coaching skill development) combined with a practical period during which students apply in their workplaces the skills and knowledge acquired during their classroom studies.

Piet Roos outlines the six pillars required to support WCM&S: a customer-based focus, continuous improvement, fluid and flexible organizations, technological support, creative human resources management, and an egalitarian culture.[23] Participative management is seen as key to the success of WCM&S. As will be demonstrated in forthcoming chapters, in the case study companies studied, relations between management and shop stewards have improved. There has been a real shift away from past adversarial relations to a more consensual, participative framework. This is not the case with many other SA Packaging plants. The joint study conducted by Swop and Ppwawu found that in the SA Packaging plants they visited, industrial relations were still conflictual. The study claims that SA Packaging's managerial style has traditionally been authoritarian and racist, and '(d)espite the rhetoric about change there hasn't been a serious shift away from these practices.'[24]

WCM&S is driven by SA Packaging head office and interpreted by each plant to suit their particular conditions. In the last year SA Packaging has begun to develop an AA policy. In earlier years, AA was implemented in an ad-hoc manner. In common with many other companies, unionised employees, on the whole, have not been consulted in the initial formulation of SA Packaging's AA policy. According to Adele Thomas's 1995 survey of 213 companies, only in the minority of cases (between 5-10 percent) were trade unions intimately involved in the AA process.[25] This problem is widespread. For instance, South

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[23] **Roos** (pseud.), 'Total Quality Management,' 29-35.

[24] **Swop and Ppwawu**, 'Restructuring at SA Packaging,' 97.

[25] **Adèle Thomas**, 'Political freedom in South Africa but it's business as usual: Workplace challenges beyond window-dressing,' paper presented at the Global Conference on Managing Diversity: At the Frontier of Managing Diversity Integrating Practice and Research, University of Georgia, Georgia, 7-9 September 1995.

African Breweries (SAB) - consistently rated among the top three companies in AA by UCT's Breakwater Monitor - failed to adequately consult unionised employees about their AA drive.[26]

The flip side of this is many unionists' attitudes towards AA on the shop floor. What seems to be missing from Cosatu's approach to AA is a strategy for engaging management on this issue. There is a dearth of specific, detailed proposals on AA for plant level shop stewards to negotiate with management.[27]

The various AA initiatives that have been adopted by the case study companies are examined in Chapters Five to Eight.

SA Can (Vanderbijlpark)

The SA Can Division manufactures tinplate cans for fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, petfood and other processed foods. It is made up of four operations, of which SA Can (Vanderbijlpark) is the most diverse and complex. The factory is situated in Vanderbijlpark, an industrial area some 40km to the East of Johannesburg. It is close to Boipatong – the township from which it has historically drawn a sizeable percentage of its labour.

The operations are comprised of four core processes: a coil shearing operation for manufacturing cut tinplate sheets for metal containers; a lacquering operation for coating the tinplate with a protective lacquer; an ends department; and a can line department (the

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[26] **Duncan Innes and Richard Davies**, 'Affirmative Action in the Workplace: A case study for implementation,' *The Innes Labour Brief* 7, no. 3 (1996): 14.

[27] Some attempts have been made to address this problem. For example, CWIU has drawn up step by step guidelines for AA. See 'CWIU Strategy for affirmative action,' *SA Labour Bulletin* 18, no. 4 (1994): 46-47; and **Deanne Collins**, 'Affirmative action: tokenism or transformation?' *SA Labour Bulletin* 18, no. 4 (1994): 44-49.

latter two departments manufacture ends and cans, respectively). SA Can Vanderbijlpark is the sole supplier of all components and raw materials to the other three plants in the Division. It has a total turnover of approximately R500 million per annum and a market share of 95 percent.[28]

The plant has approximately 420 workers; 70 percent of whom are black. Approximately 80-90 percent of the workforce are National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) members, with about 9-10 percent of white workers belonging to the Mineworkers Union (MWU). The management:workforce ratio is about 1:19-20. The illiteracy rate is approximately 22 percent.[29]

SA Packaging took over the site from its English-based parent company in 1985. During the 1980s, the organizational culture was highly autocratic. Chris Wiese, the current General Manager, remembers that 'at that stage, management was untouchable. They came in in their pin-striped suits and the slaves danced down there...so to speak.'[30] Racism was rife, and the idea of worker participation did not feature on any agenda. Management was 'a very close club - they would rather spend money on covering up their mistakes...than expose another manager.'[31]

Unsurprisingly, labour relations were highly antagonistic. In 1985, with the national formation of Cosatu, trade unions began to organise at the plant. Management (at both the plant and the Group level) was opposed to giving the trade unions stop order facilities. Wiese claims that at that time management's philosophy was 'shoot them as

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[28] **Andre Pienaar**, SA Can human resources manager, interview by author, Vanderbijlpark, 19 March 1996; and **Roos** (pseud.), 'Total Quality Management,' 3.

[29] **Andre Pienaar**, interview, 19 March 1996.

[30] **Chris Wiese**, SA Can general manager, interview by author, Vanderbijlpark, 26 March 1996.

[31] **Chris Wiese**, interview by author, 26 March 1996.

they come over the horizon, they must lose.'[32] Having been brought in as the human resources manager in 1984, Wiese's personal philosophy was that 'it's better to work with the unions than against them - but it was really hard to convince management...and the unions of this.'[33] In 1987, the company signed a recognition agreement with Numsa (the majority union). Annual wage bargaining is conducted at plant level.[34] This agreement did not ameliorate the conflict. As Andre Pienaar, the human resources manager, notes: 'it was a very us versus them thing here. There was a lot of labour unrest and wildcat strikes...'[35] For example, in February 1987, the company experienced approximately 27 work stoppages in one month.

In 1990, workers embarked on the longest strike SA Can has experienced to date. The strike was instigated by the retrenchment of workers. In 1989, SA Can had embarked on a series of efforts to improve competitiveness. The company benchmarked against similar operations in the UK, and realised that they were overstaffed. Retrenchments, however, were only carried out at the lower levels of the organization: whites and managers were not affected. The strike was highly acrimonious. It was characterized by incidents of arson and assault. Management called the riot police in to the factory grounds. Images of workers being chased by police dogs were seared into the town's memory.

Immediately after the strike, the Group and divisional executive took action. Many of SA Can's senior managers were transferred, demoted and retrenched. A new, younger management team was brought in. The average age of the new executive team is mid thirties. Wiese became GM. He recalls:

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[32] **Chris Wiese**, interview by author, 26 March 1996.

[33] **Chris Wiese**, interview by author, 26 March 1996.

[34] Initially, the company held separate wage negotiations with the two unions: Numsa and MWU. In 1992, management and the unions negotiated a new agreement that integrated the two unions and bargaining units. There is now one session of joint wage negotiations held annually (**Andre Pienaar**, interview, 19 March 1996).

[35] **Andre Pienaar**, interview, 19 March 1996.

> We wanted to change the culture and make it a place where people were proud and happy to work. I walked out on the floor the first morning I came and put my hand out to greet people and some of the blacks thought that I wanted to assault them...Hopefully I've been able to break down that image of management as untouchables.[36]

In 1992, the various management initiatives aimed at improving competitiveness were incorporated within the broad umbrella of the Group's WCM&S drive. These included: implementing quality systems, policies and procedures to be listed as an ISO 9002 supplier (necessary to compete internationally); risk control management (including ergonomic surveys, environmental studies, and risk control audits); total quality management; technological improvements; total productive maintenance; and benchmarking against world class manufacturers.

In 1993, SA Can reorganised production in line with its new team-based approach. The primary objective was to improve productivity through participative management and joint decision making. The emphasis on teams was a by-product of management/union discussions post-1990. According to Numsa shop stewards, after the strike, managers and unionists 'sat down and spoke...until we were considered as stakeholders. And then we had to have structures and procedures for stakeholders.'[37]

Level one teams (Continuous Improvement Teams - CITs) are formed within functional departments. Each production department is a process and each has a process facilitator. The teams have a generic agenda of operational and organizational issues, and tend to meet on a weekly basis. Level two teams were formed to manage functional departments (and include representatives from service departments). They meet approximately three times a week to make decisions about the day-to-day running of the department. Team members include CIT facilitators, quality and safety representatives, coaches, technicians, union representatives, trainers, and planners.

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[36] **Chris Wiese**, interview by author, 26 March 1996.

Level three teams manage the production departments that fall under an executive manager. They meet weekly to co-ordinate and integrate different processes in the value chain (such as customer-supplier relationships). Members include senior representatives of all production and service departments (operations manager, Continuous Improvement manager, process facilitators, safety officer, QA manager, and senior planner) and shop stewards. Level four is the executive team. Comprised of the executive management team and senior unionists, the team meets monthly to discuss the performance of the factory, to evaluate the change process, resolve burning issues, and formulate strategy.[38]

These self-directed teams were enthusiastically adopted by most of the workforce. This approach encourages autonomous work and rewards both collective and individual achievement.

SA Can's approach to AA is 'bottom up' – skilling employees to ensure that they fulfil the entry requirements required for any future job opportunities which may become available. The emphasis is on growing an internal pipeline of qualified, skilled employees who can then be promoted internally. Management asserts that this process will take a long time. Unionists are less patient. They assert that management is dragging its feet in establishing an AA committee to draw up a formal AA policy document that would include annual targets. Despite this area of contention, the two sides share a similar understanding of AA. Both management and shop stewards are opposed to tokenism and to giving black employees 'soft jobs' without real responsibilities.

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[37] **Sipho Shabangu and Musi Langa**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[38] **Andre Pienaar**, interview, 19 March 1996; and **Roos** (pseud.), 'Total Quality Management,' 13-15.

A competency-based training programme has been implemented. This includes recognising prior learning through training and certification in core job competencies; compensating employees for acquiring, applying, and maintaining new skills; motivating employees through an incentive scheme and recognising high performers through a performance management system which pays for performance. This programme has had successes. Multi-skilling is on the increase: in 1996, almost 20 percent of employees had acquired five or more skills and more than 48 percent of skilled artisans are now black.[39]

Senior management at SA Can has attempted to move away from the past reliance on exclusive governance to a more inclusive and participatory management style. SA Can faces three main challenges in this transition. Firstly, in 1996, the total, end, and lacquering processes were centralised in the Vanderbijlpark factory. Employees from the other three plants were relocated to Vanderbijlpark, bringing with them different organizational cultures. Teams needed to be re-established and different ways of working standardised. Secondly, some fear that the change process has gone too fast. Voicing a concern shared by others, Piet Roos believes that some employees 'couldn't take it all in and have been left behind.'[40] The change process has been 'slowed down' to give employees an opportunity to absorb and internalise the new approach to organising work.

Thirdly, union representatives do not participate in joint structures to the full extent possible. The reason given is that because management drove the change process, unionists felt excluded and did not fully buy-into the process. Piet Roos claims that during the first stages of the move towards WCM&S, the unions were simply a 'rubber stamp'. SA Can's change process is 'top-down driven. The unions and labour force don't have the experience to drive the process - they can only drive basic wages and working

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[39] **Piet Roos**, interview by author, 26 March 1996.

[40] **Piet Roos**, SA Can operations manager, interview by author, Vanderbijlpark, 26 March 1996.

conditions which is critical to them but not for business survival.'[41] This approach fostered mistrust, vestiges of which still linger. Commenting on the need to consult the unions about change initiatives, Andre Pienaar argued that 'you can't implement anything if you don't have a mandate; therefore everything we've done we're talking to the unions and consulting with them. They've been involved in 99 percent of these initiatives.'[42] This has gone some way to building a culture of trust between unions and management. According to the Numsa shop stewards: 'we've done away with the "us and them": we're 75 percent there in terms of democratisation. Nothing's being implemented down the throat of the people or without consultation.'[43]

SA Tin (Gauteng)

SA Tin is one of five factories that make up the SA Packing division of SA Packaging. The division produces metal, aluminium, and paper products including aerosols, pails, drums, and cans for household and industrial products. SA Tin is one of the most labour intensive SA Packing plants. It has about 260 employees. Of these, approximately 70 percent are Numsa members.

In February 1995, the head of the SA Packing division restructured the divisional board of directors and the executive team at SA Tin. According to Lazarus Maseko, SA Tin's general manager, the old management team was 'a boys club, all Afrikaans, a pale male clique. They had personal private agendas that were driving the business - they were like a Mafia...'[44] The plant was under-delivering and was being cross-subsidised by other

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[41] **Piet Roos**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[42] **Andre Pienaar**, interview, 19 March 1996.

[43] **Sipho Shabangu and Musi Langa**, SA Can Numsa shop stewards, interview by author, Vanderbijlpark, 26 March 1996.

[44] **Lazarus Maseko**, SA Tin managing director, interview by author, Johannesburg, 12 April 1996.

factories within the division. Resistance to change coupled with a track record of poor performance led to a changeover of the management team. Old team members were transferred and demoted, or resigned, and a new executive team of seven was brought in. A black general manager and human resources manager were appointed.[45]

The new GM, Maseko, is a strong believer in WCM&S. He wants SA Tin to become 'customers first choice', and proposes to do this by driving a 'back to business basics' programme. The major stumbling block he has encountered is the unproductive historical baggage left by the previous managerial regime. Maseko claims that in the past:

> the Afrikaner clique were very powerful. In order to get a job you had to behave like a moron - you couldn't show you had a brain. We need the opposite of that now. They didn't want people who were inquisitive or curious. And that's what we need - people who question and ask, "what do the customers want?"[46]

Managers did not 'walk the talk'. For example, the plant has a problem with employees drinking alcohol on the job. In the past, workers would be forced to take breathalyser tests whilst managers would be seen drinking in their cars. As Eric Jones, the production manager, puts it: 'it was a classic case of us and them. Management was mostly white and workers were mostly black. Segregation was the order of the day.'[47] This behavioural double standard led to a generalised lack of ownership of the business. The workforce disregarded quality in favour of quantity, and the engineering and production departments worked as functional silos.

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[45] **Lazarus Maseko**, interview by author, 12 April 1996.

[46] **Lazarus Maseko**, interview by author, 12 April 1996.

[47] **Eric Jones**, SA Tin production manager, interview by author, Johannesburg, 24 April 1996.

This lack of credibility meant that the previous management team had been ill equipped to manage relations with the union. According to Maseko, line management had 'abdicated responsibility. They were...emasculated...The union guys were above the law: people drank at work, they came late; they didn't care. They lost their safety record - there were loads of injuries.'[48]

In stark contrast to the old, hands-off managerial style, the new team brought in a 'hard-nosed' negotiating style. They were firm but fair with the unions. The wage negotiations in July 1995 were the first negotiations to be settled without a work stoppage or strike at the plant.

In February 1995 a Leadership Forum was established. Comprised of management and union representatives, it met monthly to discuss issues of worker involvement and Total Productive Maintenance (TPM). The Forum did not meet regularly - a victim of erratic union attendance at meetings. At the end of 1995, a dispute over disciplinary procedures (to deal with alcohol abuse) instituted by the human resources manager led to a union boycott of the Forum. The boycott was a manifestation of a broader struggle for control over role redefinition. The new management team, and in particular, the new HR manager, wanted to prove to the unions that the right to discipline employees is vested within management. The shop stewards were unwilling to relinquish any of the power they had under the previous managerial regime. The dispute was eventually resolved. The Forum is, however, still in abeyance.[49]

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[48] **Lazarus Maseko**, interview by author, 12 April 1996.

[49] Its resumption is contingent on the outcome of a debate on restructuring the Forum into a WPF as envisaged in the LRA (**Dan Sebake**, SA Tin human resources manager, interview by author, Johannesburg, 25 April 1996).

Union representatives are somewhat suspicious of participative structures. As Dan Sebake, the HR manager, notes, shop stewards 'aren't sure where it's taking them to.'[50] The history of the relationship between managers and unions is a history of conflict. Management is suspicious of the intentions of workers and vice-versa. Co-operative or participative structures have the potential to become a new battlefield of industrial conflict. According to Mgenge Zulu, an ex-Numsa member and now a TPM facilitator at SA Tin:

> There's no trust between management and the union.... [When I got] a job as a TPM facilitator...the guys became suspicious of me and saw me as a management tool. Every time there's a conflict with management they'd boycott the World Class initiatives...They used World Class Manufacturing as a tool to boycott to get management to accede to their demands.[51]

In a move that management hoped would foster more co-operative relations between the two sides, in March 1996, the union elected a full time shop steward. He will be a member of the executive Steering Committee, a participative management forum initiated to oversee the implementation of a WCM programme in the plant.

AA has a rather ignoble history at SA Tin. According to Eric Jones, in the past AA appointments were not made on the basis of capability but on the basis of colour. Some people were appointed into positions for which they lacked the necessary qualifications. In this way, the previous management team held on to its' power base. There were changes, but these were cosmetic.[52]

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[50] **Dan Sebake**, interview by author, 25 April 1996.

[51] **Mgenge Zulu**, SA Tin total productive maintenance (TPM) facilitator, interview by author, Johannesburg, 25 April 1996.

[52] **Eric Jones**, interview by author, 24 April 1996.

The Group lays down the AA guidelines SA Tin follows. The SA Packing division sets annual targets and these are adhered to. In line with Group policy, financial incentives (and disincentives) are in place to drive desired behaviour and motivate managers to reach AA targets. Maseko is personally committed to AA – 'it's in my interest to have diversity. It works for me to have other cultures to break the white male culture...'[53] SA Tin has already achieved divisional AA targets. Moreover, awareness of the AA policy is high – in part because AA has primarily been about high-profile AA appointments.

There are many challenges facing SA Tin. The changes that have been made are at the top: the management team has changed, and management has initiated the process. What is evident is that the new team is passionate about driving change. They have introduced many new initiatives, and are fervent believers in participative management. For example, the MD introduced a monthly feedback/communication session with the workforce to facilitate more effective bottom-up and top-down communication. The biggest challenge lies in demonstrating to employees the benefits of moving away from conflict-ridden labour relations to more co-operative relations. Only then will the new management team begin to experience the joint ownership they seek.

SA Paper (Western Cape)

Situated in Belville, an industrial area in the Western Cape, SA Paper is one of the factories in the Paper and Tissue division of SA Packaging. The factory manufactures paper products - from the raw material (pulp) to the finished products (tissues, toilet paper, serviettes, and sanitary towels). SA Paper has over 50 percent of the local market share.

In January 1994, two of SA Packaging's plants merged to form SA Paper. This led to a clash of management styles and organizational cultures. The two organizational cultures

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53 **Lazarus Maseko**, interview by author, 12 April 1996.

reflected the very different personal styles of their respective General Managers (GMs). Jim Smith, GM of Plant 1, is a 'people-person': his personal style is very easygoing. He places a high priority on customer satisfaction. By contrast, the GM of Plant 2, Henry Barclay, is strictly a results oriented person. He is first and foremost a performance manager – he believes measurable targets should be set and if not achieved, the person(s) responsible should face the (negative) consequences. According to Len Munro, 'their two styles clashed and they clashed.' In 1995, Jim Smith took early retirement and Barclay became GM of SA Paper.

The conflicts between the two sites have not, as yet, been fully resolved. A 'one-upmanship' mentality regularly surfaces in discussions amongst employees of both sites. For example, in 1996, there was still a wage gap between the two sites. Trapped within old mindsets, some ex-Plant 2 workers justified the wage gap by arguing that they have a higher skill and productivity level compared to workers previously employed by Plant 1.

SA Paper has 475 full time employees and a host of contract workers (who were to be phased out due to automation). Of the full-time employees, 75 percent are coloured, 16 percent are white, and about 9 percent are black. Unskilled and semi-skilled workers, almost all of whom are coloured, black and Asian, make up approximately 63 percent of the workforce. About 66 percent of the workforce are Ppwawu members, with approximately 6 percent belonging to the National Employees Trade Union (Netu), which is predominantly representative of skilled artisans.[54]

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[54] **Wilmot Gabriels, Daria Swartz, Yunus Alexander, and Neville Adonis**, SA Paper Ppwawu shop stewards, interview by author, Cape Town, 1 April 1996; and **Leon Adams**, SA Paper Netu shop steward, interview by author, Cape Town, 1 April 1996.

In the early 1990s, performance was poor, the sites periodically operated at a loss, and the company went through a number of retrenchments.[55] The external environment was characterised by increasing domestic and foreign competition, diminishing government protection, uncompetitive prices, poor quality, and the need to retain market share.

During this time, conflictual management-worker relations, low levels of trust, and poor communication characterised the workplace. To counter this, a variety of management plans aimed at fostering shared values and a shared company vision were initiated. Their impact was negligible. Employees saw them as management fads, and quickly lost interest. Meetings' adjourning because of lack of attendance was common. Len Munro, one of the company's continuous improvement facilitators, claimed that 'since I've been here (1987), we have tried loads of management techniques and initiatives but they fizzle out after about three months and then a new fad comes along and it's the same story. We land up sounding like a broken record...'[56] A lack of legitimacy sunk the first few attempts (in 1993 and 1994) to establish a Stakeholder Committee (SHC) comprised of union and management representatives.

In 1995, unionists, managers, and representatives of the Association of Mixed Class Management and the Unrepresented Disadvantaged (an ad-hoc grouping of non-unionised employees) agreed to hold a *'bosberaad'*. The aim was to address the challenge of becoming a World Class Manufacturer. The *bosberaad* was, by all accounts, an emotionally charged watershed. Discussions surfaced the organizational barriers to change at SA Paper: an 'us/them' syndrome existed between managers and workers; a 'what's in it for me' mentality was coupled with a lack of ownership amongst employees; an autocratic management style resulted in a risk-averse culture and a 'we please our bosses and not our customers' mentality; and the protection of (departmental) turf undermined the internal

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[55] **Pierre van Rensburg**, SA Paper human resources manager, interview by author, Cape Town, 1 April 1996; and **Len Munro**, SA Paper continuous improvement facilitator, interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996.

[56] **Len Munro**, interview, 2 April 1996.

sharing of best practices. The stakeholders agreed to re-establish the SHC as a legitimate, representative forum. The SHC would address a smorgasbord of issues ranging from affirmative action (aligning SA Paper with Group policy and monitoring progress) to workplace practices and restructuring. It met for the first time in January 1996.[57]

The SHC's promising revival did not last. It's brief, responsibilities, and powers are ill defined, its agenda unfocused and unwieldy. Agenda items range from booze in the boardroom to WCM; from safety and security to developing a common set of values. This fosters the perception of the SHC as an unproductive 'talk shop', generating lots of hot air and little action.[58] Decision-making powers remain the prerogative of senior management. This had led many workers to caricature the SHC as a 'toothless structure.'[59]

Shop stewards want to clarify the SHC's agenda. They are concerned that it will become a negotiating forum, thereby arrogating the role and power of the union. There is little clarity about which issues should properly be termed 'union issues' (to be addressed through traditional collective bargaining structures) and which should be discussed within the SHC. Workers assert that there is a schism between 'soft issues' (those dealt with by the SHC) and 'hard issues' (those that remain management's prerogative). The SHC discusses total productive maintenance (TPM) but not business process engineering (BPR). Both strategies, however, fall within the ambit of World Class Manufacturing. In February 1996, at a BPR *'bosberaad'*, Henry Barclay admitted that he 'could not guarantee that BPR would not end in retrenchments.'[60] The union interpreted this comment to mean that BPR will result in retrenchments, and declared a dispute. Excluding BPR from the ambit of the SHC engendered much ill will, resulting in the delegitimization of the SHC. In March

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[57] **Len Munro**, interview, 2 April 1996; and **Pierre van Rensburg**, interview, 1 April 1996.

[58] This criticism is not entirely valid. A new incentive scheme is one positive spin-off from the SHC which has been positively received (**Wilmot Gabriels** *et al.*, interview, 1 April 1996).

[59] **SA Paper employee**, focus group interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996.

[60] **Henry Barclay**, SA Paper General Manager, interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996.

1996, the committee's inability to obtain quorum threatened its very existence. As Len Munro put it:

> The problem was that there was no clear agenda for the Stakeholders Committee...[It] was tackling all issues [including] bargaining and union issues, some of which they should not have been tackling.[61]

Some shop stewards are concerned that the SHC may ultimately usurp the union. They believe that the SHC is part of a management strategy to undermine union activity. Ppwawu shop stewards claim that 'the Stakeholders Committee is hitting our minds, they can't hit us physically anymore so they use the Stakeholder Committee to hit our minds...Workers are just falling in with their point of view.'[62] They point to the case of the ex-chief shop steward. He strongly bought into the idea of participative management and the team concept. The other shop stewards perceived him as being too close to management, a sell-out. He was ousted and replaced by more militant shop stewards.[63]

Suspicion of management's motives and fear of retrenchments abound. Many employees feel that management does not communicate effectively with the workforce. Attempts to improve channels of communication through the SHC have had mixed results. SHC representatives communicate decisions to their constituencies but have difficulty procuring information from non-aligned interest groups. Employees have little understanding of what the various change initiatives (BPR, AA, the SHC and so on) involve and how they interrelate. Management has not been successful in bringing the 'big picture' down to the shopfloor.

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61 **Len Munro**, interview, 2 April 1996.

62 **Wilmot Gabriels** *et al.*, interview, 1 April 1996. Similarly, Lehulere posits that, by making 'workers...co-responsible for managing the capitalist crisis unions become identified with management...'(**Oupa Lehulere**, 'Workplace forums: co-determination and workers' struggle,' *South African Labour Bulletin* 19, no. 2 (1995): 45).

The distrust engendered by a history of (what many employees see as) dishonesty pervades the workplace. The half-hearted moves towards participative management seem to have created yet another battlefield for management/union conflicts. According to an employee: 'the union says if you retrench us we'll break down the world class or boycott the initiative - we'll boycott the Stakeholders Committee or ABET[64]. These are the tools and weapons we can use.'[65]

Affirmative action is a contentious issue. According to Henry Barclay, SA Paper's AA policy is has dual prongs: bring in external black appointments and develop (for internal promotion) existing coloured employees. This has not been clearly communicated to employees, many of whom believe that AA is 'apartheid in reverse.' There is a lack of awareness of the AA policy (its' strategic objectives, target population(s), and time frame) at all levels of the organization.

The lack of awareness of AA is symptomatic of a broader lack of consultation throughout SA Paper. Many employees contend that decisions are made at the top; obstacles and resistance are encountered when these decisions come to be implemented; and it is at this stage that consultation with all stakeholders occurs. These employees' hypothesise that if decisions were consulted more widely at the initial stages of the decision-making process, it would be easier to obtain buy-in to and ownership of change initiatives.

Despite the problems, the relationship between managers and workers is more co-operative than in past years. An ethos of joint problem-solving and joint ownership is developing.

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[63] **Pierre van Rensburg**, interview, 1 April 1996.

[64] Adult Basic Education Training (ABET).

[65] **SA Paper employee**, focus group interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996.

SA Engineering (Wadeville)

SA Engineering is part of the SA Contractors group. The Group is currently invested in four major business sectors: contracting, engineering, materials and transport.

SA Engineering is a structural steel and heavy engineering workshop situated in Wadeville, an industrial area about 20km east of Johannesburg. In the 1990s, SA Engineering went through a number of mergers and acquisitions. This process failed to merge the different organizational cultures, resulting in ongoing tensions.

The company employs approximately 600 hourly paid workers - about 350 are permanent and about 250 are on temporary contract. About 75 percent of workers are Numsa members. The United Workers Union of South Africa (Uwusa) has approximately 20 members; SA Iron and Steel (Yster en Staal) about 50 members; and Netu approximately 45 members.[66]

In the early 1990s, these unions had strong ideological profiles and varied political allegiances. The largest union, Numsa, is a Cosatu affiliate. It has strong ties to the liberation movement (and in particular, to the ANC and SACP through the tripartite alliance). The smaller unions are similarly aligned. Launched by (the then) Inkatha Party supporters in 1986 to counter the growing influence of UDF-aligned unions, Uwusa members tend to belong to the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). Yster en Staal is a traditional whites-only union. Its members are on the more conservative end of the political spectrum (many supporting the ultra-right wing AWB). Of the unions, Netu members are perhaps the least ideological, generally espousing what they see as a 'pragmatic' line.

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66 **Mandla Gumede**, SA Engineering human resources manager, interview by author, East Rand, 11 April 1996; **Numsa shop stewards**, SA Engineering, interview by author, East Rand, 18 April 1996; **Oupa Ngobeni and Thami Mabalane**, SA Engineering Netu shop stewards, interview by author, East Rand, 18 April 1996; and **Jan Harmse, Willie Ferreira and Kobus Wessels**, SA Engineering Yster en Staal shop stewards, interview by author, East Rand, 18 April 1996.

In the early 1990s, SA Engineering went through lean times: productivity was low, labour relations were highly conflictual, strikes and work stoppages were a regular occurrence, old and faulty machinery compounded inefficiencies, and the company was running at a loss of around R400 000 a year. Skill and education levels were low throughout all levels of the organization. In 1992, management called in consultants to improve productivity. On the basis of their recommendations, 30 percent of staff were retrenched during October-November 1992. As a result, morale of employees and trust in management was extremely low. Throughout the mid-1990s, high levels of job insecurity have continued to confound trust-building efforts.

During the early 1990s, SA Contractors head office issued an edict. The writing was on the wall: SA Engineering had to transform its adversarial organizational culture into something more aligned with that of a world class company. The East Rand company embarked upon a 'democratization initiative', run by an external consultancy. The objective of the programme was to change the discriminatory and conflictual work patterns of previous years. The 'democratization initiative' included an audit of corporate culture (which highlighted a strong correlation between race and viewpoint, with black and white employees demonstrating marked differences in opinion), and a series of 'value-sharing' and 'managing diversity' workshops.[67] Despite management's initial resentment at having production disrupted by these workshops, attendance was mandatory for all employees.

For top management, the focus on 'changing attitudes' and building trust was insufficient. The MD felt the need to refocus on increasing (and measuring) productivity.[68] Hence, in late 1994 another consultancy was called in to implement 'Integrated Workplace Advancement' (IWA). This programme focuses on the implementation of twenty keys to 'world class competitiveness'. These include efficiency; zero-defect; workspace cleanliness;

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[67] Chapters Eight and Nine provide a more detailed description and analysis of SA Engineering's diversity management programme.

[68] **Mandla Gumede**, interview, 11 April 1996.

benchmarking; and multi-skilling.[69] By devolving decision-making and managerial responsibility to supervisors, and emphasizing team work (through 'Green Areas'), the programme hopes that supervisors will become flexible and cost-conscious shopfloor managers.[70] The aim is to achieve quality, waste and delivery targets.

The implementation of IWA has been a highly politicized issue. Management failed to consult the unions about this initiative. Given IWA's unilateral implementation, the resistance it has engendered is not surprising.[71] The discernible anti-union mentality that continues to permeate managerial levels has fostered the belief amongst some many workers that IWA is a subtle attempt at union bashing. Giving some credence to these fears, Mandla Gumede, the human resources manager, claimed that 'if IWA works, then you don't need a trade union. Because of all these committees, the supervisors will know what's going on with their workers...'[72] IWA established 'Green Areas' - discussion forums aimed at facilitating problem solving and decentralizing the decision making process to the frontline. Many workers perceive these joint worker/manager structures as places where they 'get instructions' from supervisors, not as participative management forums. The interface between the frontline manager (the supervisor) and workers is burdened with apartheid baggage: unilateral decision making, a reliance on command and control strategies, minimal on-the-job coaching, no systematic development system for employees, and the absence of a risk-taking culture.

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[69] According to John Barron, 'all the ideas are taken from the Japanese - and the document was prepared by a Japanese company.'(**John Barron**, SA Contractors human resources director, interview by author, Johannesburg, 5 September 1995).

[70] **Adrian Stucke**, SA Engineering (quality assessment) manager, interview by author, East Rand, 19 April 1996; **Clive Evans**, SA Engineering general manager (works), interview by author, East Rand, 18 April 1996; and **Mandla Gumede**, interview, 11 April 1996.

[71] An additional area of concern is the widespread belief that supervisors lack the skills and training necessary to effectively implement IWA.

[72] **Mandla Gumede**, interview, 11 April 1996. These issues are addressed in greater detail in Chapters Five through Eight.

In 1996, Numsa shop stewards at SA Engineering embarked on a boycott of Green Areas. According to these shop stewards, 'in SA Engineering, there's no communication between whites and blacks and before the thing comes all right we have to strike. Then it'll come alright.'[73] By relying on the threat of withholding their labour, these shop stewards are trapped within the narrow confines of past practices, pinning their faith on a (rhetoric of a) politics of resistance. They have been unable to develop strategies apposite to the new industrial relations framework that stresses co-operation, consultation and joint decision making.

The main areas of dispute between workers and management centre around material grievances: management's refusal to upgrade the status of temporary workers to that of permanent employees[74]; the lack of company subsidized transport; management's failure to deliver on promises of higher production bonuses; the level of qualification(s) required to be considered for promotion; the lack of a standardised and clearly defined training programme; and the low level of job rates. The key area of contention remains low wages. According to supervisors and shop stewards interviewed, this affects levels of morale, productivity and trust. Many workers fear that in the longer term, increased productivity will be achieved through simultaneously multi-skilling workers whilst reducing their numbers. Many workers believe that the high levels of absenteeism, low productivity, and instances of sabotage are symptoms of low levels of morale.

The two-pronged change process at SA Engineering has had its successes. It has led to a shift away from the highly adversarial culture that characterized management/union relations in the past. Instances of overt racism have decreased, management is more willing to negotiate, there are fewer wildcat strikes, and fewer disciplinary and dismissal cases. IWA has led to increased productivity and improvements in housekeeping. The

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[73] **Numsa shop stewards** (SA Engineering), interview, 18 April 1996.

[74] More than 30 percent of the workforce are temporary employees. According to some respondents, they lack ownership of the company and the change process. The belief is that this will ultimately jeopardise IWA (**Numsa shop stewards**, interview, 18 April 1996).

introduction of an adult basic education programme has begun to make inroads into the high levels of illiteracy amongst the workforce.

The organizational culture is still one that reveres the MD, Anton Jordaan. He is perceived as a strong-willed and powerful leader. Initially opposed to the change process, he eventually bought into it and became one of its most vocal proponents. SA Engineering's culture continues to be shaped by the machismo and patriarchal mentality that characterizes many organizations in heavy industries. The mixture of fear and respect, which the MD engenders amongst all levels of employees, is manifest in the perceived sanction against voicing dissent. Throughout the company, employees believe that change can only come from the top. Jordaan has the ability to either drive or hinder change. Indeed, the least successful areas of the change programme appear to be those to which he has been the least personally committed. Communication channels throughout the organization are poor. There is a perception that because information is shared on a 'need to know' basis, rumour mongering is rife. This breeds misinformation and promotes a 'who you know, not what you know' mentality.

The company's AA effort overlaps with the 'democratization initiative.' It did not begin as a coherent, discrete effort, but as an initiative to 'strengthen...and address some of the loopholes not addressed by the democratization process.'[75] The draft AA policy states that an AA Action Team (comprising management and union representatives) will drive the AA strategy. The strategy consists of realigning HR systems and policies (recruitment, selection, education and training, succession planning, and promotion) with AA objectives; and developing action plans with targets, due dates, and mechanisms to monitor progress.

The ad hoc nature of the AA effort manifests in low levels of awareness of the policy amongst employees. Many workers claim that the AA committee is ineffective; has failed to deliver anything concrete; and does not communicate satisfactorily. Employees are

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[75] **SA Engineering**, 'Affirmative Action Policy: Draft,' internal company memo, Wadeville, 1994.

unclear as to where or with whom accountability for AA lies. Moreover, many workers feel that the company pays lip service to AA but that in reality, little (if anything) is being delivered. As will be discussed in Chapters Five through Eight, the initial results of this AA programme are, at best, mixed. Various departments (such as finance) remain predominantly white. Other areas, such as the administrative offices, have seen changes in their racial profile.

An overriding perception amongst white and Indian employees is that AA will trammel their career opportunities. This may result in (covert) attempts to subvert the initiative. For example, workers assert that some supervisors feel threatened by AA and therefore impede the training prospects of black employees. Others suggest that career and succession planning for AA appointees' needs to be undertaken in a more rigorous manner.

In 1996, the executive committee of SA Contractors group adopted an AA policy that applies to all its companies. The key planks of the policy include: creating a conducive environment for all staff (identifying and eliminating all forms of discriminatory behaviour); developing a recruitment and selection process and training and development system that support AA; and putting in place measures to evaluate the success of AA efforts. The policy states that all companies will be required to develop plans for implementing AA with 'realistic targets for future achievements built into them.'[76] Progress of individual companies and managers is to be monitored to ensure achievement of targets. Management rewards will be linked to progress in AA: 'AA will be regarded as a method of measuring business success.'[77] It is still too soon to assess the effectiveness of this policy within individual group companies.

SA Insurance

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[76] **SA Contractors**, 'Affirmative Action Policy: Executive Brief,' internal company memo, Johannesburg: 28 March 1996.

[77] **SA Contractors**, 'Affirmative Action Policy: Executive Brief.'

SA Insurance, which began business in 1958, is SA's third largest life assurer. It has a market capitalization of over R30 billion, and assets in excess of R100 billion. It ranks in the top five companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Its customer base consists primarily of middle to high-income earners.

Situated in Johannesburg's business district, the demographic make-up of SA Insurance employees mirrors that of other financial services institutions. Most of their staff is semi-professional or professional. Whites represent 55 percent of the approximately 5 000 staff members (this figure includes executives). The remaining 45 percent are roughly divided between blacks on the one hand, and coloureds and Indians on the other. Whites occupy about 85 percent of managerial and executive positions. Of the forty directors on the Board, thirty-seven are men and thirty-nine are white. Whilst 55 percent of the workforce are women, they make up only 4.7 percent of executives and 37.6 percent of managers.[78]

The target oriented performance ethic of the insurance business shapes the company's organizational culture. The company has a systematic performance management system that tracks key performance indicators, rewards performance, and ensures that corrective actions is taken when an employee underperforms (there are clear consequences for failure). This performance driven business orientation has implications for the SA Insurance's AA programme. Lack of progress in AA is justified by the need to meet targets and keep up pre-determined levels of productivity. Coaching and people management are not key performance indicators. They are not formally measured or evaluated – promotion is based primarily on technical skill levels and achievement of hard targets, not on people development objectives.

This lack of effective people management systems is coupled with the absence of a risk-taking culture. A poor understanding of risks that could influence the achievement of

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[78] These are 1995 figures. **Harry Bristow**, SA Insurance human resources general manager, interview by author, Johannesburg, 10 April 1995; and **SA Insurance**, 'Affirmative Action in SA Insurance Status Report: July 1995,' internal company document, Johannesburg: SA Insurance, July 1995.

targets and the extent and likelihood of their occurrence has resulted in the lack of a rigorous set of measures to control risks. One consequence for AA is the absence of a low risk method in place to spot and develop hidden talent.

There is a lack of systematic career and succession planning and performance evaluation systems. Hence, many employees are skeptical about advancement opportunities. SA Insurance has not yet successfully managed to build a strong bench of truly high performing/motivated managers and a large crop of 'up and comers'. The company culture fosters a tension between the formal system of job assignment and promotion (which is based on skills, performance, abilities and potential) and what many employees experience as homosocial reproduction. Many female and black employees believe that a glass ceiling exists. A lack of transparency in the criteria used for promotion and job grading is believed to exclude women and blacks from joining managerial ranks. The claim is that it is 'who you know, not what you know' that counts in promotions.

Gender-related issues were more prominent at SA Insurance than at any of the other case study companies. The probable explanation is that compared to the other companies, SA Insurance has a significant number of women employees in semi-professional/professional positions. The discrepancy between a critical mass of women in the promotion pipeline and their rather insignificant presence amongst the top managerial echelons fosters frustration amongst employees.

A strong assimilationist ethos permeates the company culture. How an individual speaks, dresses, and acts is seen as a critical career success factor. This is manifest in, for example, the idea that black employees need to cultivate a 'proper' English accent in order to develop an affinity with (and secure additional business from) the company's high income customer base. What many black, coloured and Asian employees perceive as racist attitudes and low expectations, many white employees perceive as sound career advice.

Many non-managerial employees experience the organizational culture as autocratic. Communication is top-down. Information, which impacts career opportunities (such as promotion criteria), is not imparted in a straightforward, transparent way. Upward feedback is viewed as career limiting. Many employees believe that there are sanctions against voicing dissent, that there are recriminations for criticising management. Many employees toe the line because SA Insurance is seen as a secure employer offering a good package of benefits.

In 1994, SA Insurance embarked on an AA programme. The first stage involved an AA audit conducted by two external consultants. They interviewed approximately 400 company members to assess the status of employment equity. This included examining workforce composition figures; human resources policies and procedures; and the attitudes and perceptions of staff towards the critical success factors for AA. The audit helped define future goals and direction, and led to a revamp of corporate AA policies. According to Harry Bristow, then human resources general manager, the key principles of SA Insurance's AA programme are: no tokenism; AA needs to be integrated into SA Insurance's business (and should ultimately be a line responsibility); quality and productivity are not to be sacrificed; and the AA effort needs to concentrate on existing staff (through skills training and internal career pathing).[79]

In August 1994, a document outlining the findings and recommendations was distributed to all staff members. In September 1995, an AA follow-up audit was conducted to assess the extent to which the recommendations had been implemented. Awareness of AA remains low throughout the organization. Whilst there have been some notable successes in changing the racial demographics of some departments, on the whole, the AA initiative has encountered many obstacles.

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[79] **Harry Bristow**, interview, 10 April 1995.

Senior management sets the tone in the organization. Some managers are sceptical about AA and this scepticism filters through the ranks. Harry Bristow succinctly captured this cynicism in his claim that 'there's this "impending doom" sale scenario which is used to sell AA. It's just like life insurance, which is also sold on the basis of impending doom...'[80]

Top management has a 'hands off' style when it comes to dealing with divisional managers. Responsibility and accountability are decentralised. The overriding perception is that divisions need to meet their targets – how they do it (the parameters within which they act) is their business. This freedom to act (within certain constraints) has impacted AA. The various departments and divisions have interpreted corporate AA guidelines in different ways. Some have reinterpreted AA as an equal opportunity policy, which in turn has been used to justify inaction. This is compounded by what many view as conflicting organizational objectives: a renewed stress on increasing profitability, ensuring 100 percent of employees add value, reducing headcount, and simultaneously implementing AA. Given that this is occurring at a time when jobs are being redefined and job content is becoming more complex, employee anxiety and uncertainty is marked. This has negatively impacted the AA programme. The belief amongst many employees is that it is a 'nice to have' but takes second place to meeting stretch targets.

The existence of a 'Chinese wall' between HR and line management reduces the effectiveness of AA efforts. HR provides training opportunities for AA candidates, but the lack of promotion and development opportunities for these employees leads to frustration and demotivation. Moreover, there is a meagre skills pool from which to draw potential AA candidates. Many middle managers are perceived as cynical of AA, and are seen to disparage HR as a 'soft skill'.

These issues are discussed in greater detail in Chapters Five through Eight.

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[80] **Harry Bristow**, interview, 10 April 1995.

The second prong of SA Insurance's change process has been the 'valuing and managing diversity' angle, termed 'Partnership'. Implemented in 1994, this initiative consists of three-day workshops, attended by almost all the company's employees. It aims to increase cross-cultural understanding and tolerance of diversity amongst all members of the organization. This is done through a series of group exercises and games during which participants are encouraged to express their views, values and attitudes, develop an understanding of the cultural values and perspectives of other delegates, and improve communication skills. Whilst the programme has had some successes, these have been difficult to maintain once employees return to the daily corporate grind. Changes have occurred on an individual level (some delegates find that the workshop fundamentally changes their outlook), but not, as yet, at the level of company culture.[81]

3.3. Conclusions

There are a number of similarities in the corporate cultures of the case study companies, and in the responses of management, unions and workers to the various AA initiatives. These are particularly strong in the case of the three SA Packaging business units and SA Engineering. Given their manufacturing focus and a strong union presence on the shopfloor, workers at all four of these plants have demanded a say in the formulation and implementation of company AA policies. This has not been a simple demand for inclusion, but has often been about fundamentally challenging the tenets of the new labour relations' dispensation. An overriding fear is that worker participation initiatives (whether they be the plant forums at the SA Packaging case studies, or SA Engineering's Green Areas) will undermine and ultimately supplant existing shop steward structures. An unfortunate consequence of this difficulty in transitioning from a politics of resistance to a politics of participation is that unionists in the case study companies sometimes fail to grasp the opportunities promised by these structures (particularly in the realm of AA and diversity management initiatives). This has been compounded by management's failure to consult unionised employees in the initial stages of the formulation of AA policies.

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81 'Partnership' is explored in greater detail in Chapter 2.6 and Chapter Nine.

A further similarity between the companies is the seemingly common understanding, amongst managers and employees, of the content of AA. At a superficial level, the broad-brush strokes of what AA should ideally entail are articulated in a similar language: AA is about providing the necessary training and career opportunities for previously disadvantaged employees to advance within organizations. It is not about tokenism or window dressing. The veneer of consensus that the commonality of language provides is often misleading. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the devil of the disagreements is in the detail of the AA policy, its scope, timeframe for implementation, and possible consequences for non-delivery.

Within all the case study companies, AA has been driven by the top (by the SA Packaging and SA Contractors head offices, and by the SA Insurance corporate centre). Each business unit or corporate division has interpreted the AA edict in a way that suits their particular conditions. In consequence, AA has been implemented in an ad-hoc manner. A result is low levels of awareness of the policy amongst employees. This has been coupled with dissatisfaction about the lack of rigour in the implementation of AA programmes.

The extent to which AA is used as a measure of business success of individual managers and divisions differs within the case study companies. The SA Packaging business units were the first amongst the case study companies to track AA progress, and to provide financial incentives (and disincentives) to ensure achievement of targets. This has been a recent development in SA Engineering. The head office line is that management rewards will be linked to the achievement of AA plans and targets. Within SA Insurance, however, progress of individual divisions and managers is only recently being monitored. Negative consequences to do not attach to the lack of delivery of AA targets. A possible reason for this difference amongst the companies is the extent to which a performance ethic is entrenched in the different corporate culture. SA Insurance has historically had a strong, performance driven culture. This is sometimes used to justify lack of progress in AA. The tension between these two organizational imperatives is a lot starker than it is in SA Engineering and in the SA Packaging plants. Chapter Eight discusses the dilemmas posed by conflicting organizational objectives.

Case study research features prominently in my methodological tool kit. A key reason for choosing this research design is that it assisted me in gaining an understanding of what Peter Christie terms the 'collective story of the organization'.[82] Corporate culture is an elusive concept. It is within the ordinary language and practices, in the thousands of little stories told everyday in an organization, that the grammar of organizational discourses is made visible.[83] This foregrounds the metaphoric and symbolic bases of organizational life, central to which is the management of meaning.[84] Systems of shared meaning facilitate organised action and frame participants' behaviour. The stories of different participants in an organization may support, contradict or ignore what are touted as the company's core beliefs and values.

In the South African corporate world, competing interpretations are offered of the historical development of the business sector, its current practices, and its future trajectory. Given the bifurcated worlds from which organizational participants are drawn, it is not surprising that the stories they tell diverge. Under apartheid, only one perspective was officially sanctioned and given the space to speak. Part of the post-apartheid project is to enable 'the margins' to speak. In an attempt to allow these multiple voices to be heard, I have tried to avoid sanitizing or being too selective in my representation of these voices. Weaving the disparate stories into a multivocal narrative enriches attempts to develop a more comprehensive understanding of organizational culture(s).

The task of assisting previously disqualified and marginal knowledges come to voice is not, however, an innocent one. We need to be particularly weary of the assumption (made by

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[82] **Peter Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1996, 24.

[83] To use the jargon of postmodern organizational studies: organizations are multi-authored texts, interpellating or partially inscribing the subjectivities of their readership.-viz. organizational members. The latter (the 'readers' of the text/s) bring with their awareness of other texts and cultural forms to the reading of this text, and thus change the nature and re-produce the organization (text) as they consume it. See **Linstead**, 'Deconstruction,' 59-60; and **Christie**, *Stories*, 28.

[84] See **Linda Smircich and Charles Stubbart**, 'Strategic Management in an Enacted World,' *Academy of Management Review* 10, no. 4 (1985): 724.

Christie, for instance) that because all participants have spoken we have an 'authentic' picture of the organization.[85] This fails to recognise that stories can be invented, individuals may tell fables, fibs, or make believe. By giving all the stories equal weight, we are deprived of a set of evaluative criteria with which to examine the narratives and judge their validity (or lack thereof). Christie assumes that by speaking to both managers and workers, to both blacks and whites, we can create an entirely new story line, 'one that incorporates all sides of the story.'[86]

Subtending this fiction of being able to tell the 'whole story' is the assumption that organizations have an 'authentic' essence, waiting to be disclosed. The stories from the margins are those which are seen to provide this authenticity. The liminal subject is valorized and acquires virtue and authenticity simply by occupying a marginal subject position. This also overlooks the extent to which organizational participants may face constraints in narrating their stories; the desire to come to voice is rarely more powerful than the perceived or real threat of censure for doing so.

We need to question the idea that by bringing in a cacophony of voices the authority of the author is eroded. As Linstead recognises, non-traditional voices cannot 'speak alongside the author in a direct and equal way'.[87] What Geertz terms 'the burden of authorship' remains.[88] The inevitability of acquiring partial (and often conflicting) sets of accounts thus needs to be faced and acknowledged upfront. Chapter Four sets the social, economic and political context that forms the backdrop to the AA debate, and from which the many conflicting and partial accounts emerge.

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[85] Christie contends that once all the disparate organizational stories have been woven together, 'the collective story of the organization then captures the culture of the organization in a far more meaningful and authentic way.'(**Christie**, *Stories*, 24).

[86] **Christie**, *Stories*, 127.

[87] **Linstead**, 'Deconstruction,' 54.

[88] **Clifford Geertz**, *Works and Lives: the anthropologist as author*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, 140; quoted in **Linstead**, 'Deconstruction,' 54.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONTEXT OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

4.1 Introduction

The Report of the Presidential Commission to Investigate Labour Market Policy (1996) states:

> It is common cause that the linchpin of the apartheid political, economic and social regime was the purposive control and manipulation of the labour market in a manner which privileged the white minority while disadvantaging and discriminating against the black majority...the legacy of apartheid is one of extreme racial inequality in the labour market...[1]

This chapter provides a brief overview of the discriminatory barriers and forms of disadvantage that have resulted in a labour market dominated by asymmetrical power relations. It shows how differential access to education, training and the acquisition of skills has resulted in continuing racial and gender inequalities in employment. Income distribution in SA is one of the most unequal in the world. This stems, in part, from the racial division of wage labour and the attendant occupational segregation. The repeal of apartheid legislation has not eradicated all forms of discrimination nor has it led to the erosion of many extra-market disadvantages. For instance, the removal of influx control and job reservation did not imply an end to the institutional barriers to labour mobility. Indeed, this is one of the primary reasons for employment equity legislation in SA. Despite the demise of apartheid the South African workplace continues to be defined by inequality and discrimination based primarily on race, gender and disability. As President Mandela observed:

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[1] *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 426.

> The primary aims of affirmative action must be to redress the imbalances created by apartheid. We are not ... asking for handouts for anyone nor are we saying that just as a white skin was a passport to privilege in the past, so a black skin should be the basis of privilege in the future. Nor ... is it our aim to do away with qualifications. What we are against is not the upholding of standards as such but the sustaining of barriers to the attainment of standards; the special measures that we envisage to overcome the legacy of past discrimination are not intended to ensure the advancement of unqualified persons, but to see to it that those who have been denied access to qualifications in the past can become qualified now, and that those who have been qualified all along but overlooked because of past discrimination, are at last given their due. The first point to be made is that affirmative action must be rooted in principles of justice and equality.[2]

President Mandela's statement captures the government's concern that reliance on labour market voluntarism to redress disparities and end discrimination would have limited impact. Hence, legislation has been formulated to compel employers to take steps to redress disadvantage and inequality. In addition, the government was propelled by the Constitution to enact laws that would prohibit discrimination and promote the economic advancement of the majority. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, employment equity legislation as a means of addressing economic inequality has become an urgent moral and political imperative of the government.

The Constitution, the Labour Relations Act, and the Employment Equity Act currently regulate equality, employment equity and anti-discrimination in employment. Section 9 of the Constitution guarantees the right to equality and freedom from unfair discrimination. Section 9(2) lays the constitutional basis for affirmative action:

> Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedom. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.[3]

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[2] President Nelson Mandela, opening statement to the ANC Conference on affirmative action, Port Elizabeth, October 1991.

[3] Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, ch. 2, sec. 9.

The Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 (hereafter, the LRA) and the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (hereafter, the EEA) translate this constitutional guarantee of equality and non-discrimination into specific protection for employees and job applicants against unfair discrimination in the workplace. The LRA proscribes unfair discrimination that is covered within the definition of an unfair labour practice. [4] The EEA largely mirrors the prohibition on unfair discrimination in the LRA. It repeals Item 2(1)(a), 2(2) and 3(4)(a) of Schedule 7 of the LRA. The EEA prohibits direct or indirect unfair discrimination in the workplace. Unfair discrimination includes any distinction made between employees or job applicants on one or more grounds, including:

> race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibility, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, HIV status, conscience, belief, political opinion, culture, language and birth.[5]

These grounds cannot be used as the basis for distinguishing between employees or applicants in any employment policies and practices, including recruitment procedures, job classification and grading, employment benefits, working environment and facilities, performance evaluation systems, transfer and disciplinary measures.

The EEA does, however, state that it is *not* unfair discrimination to take affirmative action measures that are consistent with the purpose of the Act; and distinguish, exclude or prefer any person based on the inherent requirements of a job.[6]

This chapter will outline the other key provisions of the EEA which, together with the LRA, form the principal legislative measures that will regulate empowerment within the workplace. As a broad policy directive, the notion of empowerment incorporates employment equity, affirmative action, and other initiatives designed to address the

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[4] Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, Schedule 7, Part B, 2.(1)(a). The Constitution spells out a range of criteria that employers may not generally use in making employment decisions - race, gender, religion, and so on.

[5] Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, section 6 (1).

[6] Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, section 6 (2).

inequalities in wealth, status and income that arose under apartheid. In this sense, it incorporates other legal instruments such as the Skills Development Bill (to be enacted in 1999), the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997, and the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993.

4.2 The Legacy of Apartheid

The International Labour Organization's review of the South African labour market (hereafter, ILO Review) observes that the legacy of apartheid needs to be disaggregated into its various components for effective and targeted remedial policies to be developed.[7]

Labour market discrimination can be said to occur when criteria such as race, gender, ethnicity, and religion inform decisions as to the allocation, utilisation and compensation of labour. This relates to recruitment, remuneration, firing and retrenchment, and any other terms, conditions, or privileges of employment.[8] The ILO Review identifies various forms of labour market discrimination practised by employers. These include explicit discrimination; statistical discrimination (certain groups are excluded on the basis of 'past experience' which suggests members of said group perform to a below average standard); and impositional discrimination (as a screening device, employers impose criteria for recruitment which go beyond those required to do the job).[9]

Pre-entry labour market or extra-market discrimination refers to factors existing prior to the labour market, which affect the supply of and demand for labour. The ILO Review

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[7] See **Guy Standing, John Sender, and John Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market: The South African challenge: An ILO Country Review*, Geneva: International Labour Office, 1996, 381.

[8] Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.Code, section 2000e *et seq*, as amended) states: 'It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer...to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin ...'; and *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 427.

[9] **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 384.

outlines the multiple forms of labour market disadvantage in SA, of which only a few will be discussed.[10] A key form of disadvantage relates to differential access to education, training and the acquisition of skills. Under apartheid, lower grading standards and inflated achievements matched the very low per capita spending on schooling for black pupils. This complicates attempts to interpret the statistical picture of the educational system.[11] Despite the lack of reliable data, the differences between the racial groups are stark and cover the educational ambit, from rates of literacy[12] through to university-level degree attainment.[13]

Past levels of investment in skills training have been low. According to a joint study by the BMF and management consultants Ernst & Young, the mean expenditure in SA on training as a percentage of payrolls stood at 2 percent compared with 4 percent in the US.[14] In a belated attempt to counter this, all the case study companies - generally in co-operation with the unions - offer basic skills training (in literacy, numeracy and language skills). Adult Basic Education Training (ABET) is a central plank of Cosatu's programme of transformation. Hence, these programmes have generally been well received and have begun to achieve some success.[15]

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[10] The Green Paper lists the panalopy of factors which undergird and reinforce inequality. These include disparities in the ownership of assets and poor levels of basic household infrastructure (*Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, Department of Labour (Directorate: Equal Opportunities), Notice 804 of 1996, 1 July 1996,available from gopher://gopher.polity.org.za:70/00/govdocs/green-papers/equity.txt, Internet, accessed 20 April 1997, chap. 3, secs. 3.2.1-3.2.15.3, 3.3.1-3.3.6). For a fuller exposition of the available evidence of various forms of discrimination and disadvantage see **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 19-24, 385-418.

[11] **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 64-66, 386.

[12] The ILO Review suggests that in the early 1990s, a plausible estimate of adult black literacy was about 45 percent (**P. Fallon, A. Aksoy, Y. Tsikata, P. Belli and L. Pereira da Silva**, 'South Africa: Economic performance and some policy implications,' *Informal Discussion Paper on Aspects of the Economy of South Africa, No. 2*, World Bank Southern Africa Department, Washington, DC, 1993; quoted in Standing, Sender, and Weeks, *Restructuring the labour market*, 65).

[13] In 1991, over 90 percent of whites had obtained a junior secondary certificate, while only 20.8 percent of blacks had done so (**Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 65).

[14] **Ingrid Salgado**, 'Support for Affirmative Action,' *Business Day*, 11 March 1996. Similarly, a 1996 study by FSA-Contact found that more than 60 percent of organizations surveyed spend 2 percent or less of their annual salary/wage bill on training and development (see **FSA-Contact**, quoted in 'Affirmative Action,' *Financial Mail* (online), available from http://www.atd.co.za/fm/issue, Internet, accessed 18 October 1996).

[15] For example, about four or five years ago, 70 percent of the workforce at SA Engineering had a Standard 2 or less. Since the introduction of the Community Education Programme (CEP) programme, functional

The ILO Review notes that levels of institutional vocational training have been low, and are declining.[16] What little there has been is maldistributed, with statistics demonstrating a continued racial and gender bias. The apprenticeship and technical training systems have been racially determined. In 1989, only 6 percent of artisans and 14 percent of apprentices were black.[17] This white predominance continues in the 1990s. In 1994, in the 130 firms covered by the Breakwater Monitor, 65 percent of apprentices and trainee technicians were white, 27 percent black, with coloureds and Asians making up the remaining 8 percent.[18] At SA Can, however, there has been a move away from a wholly white skill base. Prior to the introduction of AA in 1992-93, about 10 percent of the skill base were black. In 1996, about 48 percent of skilled artisans were black.[19]

Attempts to fast-track AA candidates may offer a more promising alternative than traditional apprentice routes. SA Packaging, for example, has an internal college for fast-track learning and career-pathing for black recruits. The college combines in-classroom learning with on-site focused implementation of concepts learned. As Heather King, group management development manager, notes: 'this is the way we'll build new managers. These people learn about changed management and related concepts in the college and then go back to plant level to implement the new ideas.'[20] In many SA companies, creating and expanding the internal pipeline of talented black and female staff for promotion into senior categories is central to their AA efforts.[21]

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literacy has increased and now stands at around 70 percent of the work force.(**Clive Evans**, interview, 18 April 1996).

[16] **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 66.

[17] **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 387. Chris Wiese, MD of SA Can, notes that in the 1980s 'the Vanderbijl College for toolmakers and technical qualifications didn't accept blacks.'(**Chris Wiese**, SA Can general manager, interview by author, Vanderbijlpark, 26 March 1996).

[18] **F. Horwitz, A. Bowmaker-Falconer, and P. Searll**, 'Employment Equity, human resource development and institution building in South Africa,' paper presented to International Industrial Relations Association World Congress, Washington, June 1 1995; (Breakwater Monitor, September 1994); quoted in Standing, Sender, and Weeks, *Restructuring the labour market*, 387.

[19] **Piet Roos**, SA Can operations manager, interview by author, Vanderbijlpark, 26 March 1996.

[20] **Heather King**, SA Packaging group management development manager, interview by author, Johannesburg, 1 September 1995.

[21] This parallels corporate best practices to shatter the glass ceiling in US companies. Best practices are in

Whilst career-pathing and training are important, caution is required to ensure that black recruits are not ghettoised into endless cycles of training, without being given opportunities to exercise these new-found skills.[22] Some SA Insurance employees believe that AA has, in effect, been reduced to a never-ending cycle of training.[23] By confining training to basic skills provision, employees who wish to advance beyond supervisory levels become frustrated.[24] Moreover, there is often no evaluation of whether, and in what ways, training has affected performance. This can result in high-cost, low-impact training. Regular performance evaluations, coupled with individual succession planning, could assist in evaluating the effectiveness of current training and development programmes. In addition, training needs to link into internal career paths.

A further problem encountered is the persistence of racially separate training programmes. These may inadvertently stigmatise training and reinforce negative perceptions of the abilities of black employees. For instance, SA Engineering's Community Education Programme (CEP) appears to have become the focus of resentment amongst some workers. According to Numsa shop stewards, 'only black people attend [CEP] and we think it's harassment. There are lots of whites and coloureds who aren't educated and they don't go. Therefore, they make out like it's only blacks who're illiterate and uneducated.'[25] What is required is recognition of the need for individually focused training programmes, which take cognisance of the different needs, competencies and aspirations of black employees. Arguing against blanket AA training, Harry Bristow, then SA Insurance's human resources general manager, commented that 'you can't say all blacks

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place in companies such as Allstate Corporation, Motorola, Proctor & Gamble, and Xerox Corporation. Practices include ensuring that high potential women and minorities have mentors, participate in executive and management development programmes, and are tracked for developmental and promotable job opportunities. See **Chicago Area Partnerships (CAPS)**, *Pathways & Progress: Corporate Best Practices to Shatter the Glass Ceiling*, Chicago: CAPS, 1996, 5-6, 61-63.

[22] This was a common complaint amongst many SA Insurance employees.

[23] According to a black employee, 'all we see with affirmative action is training, training, training.' (**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 22 September 1995).

[24] For instance, at SA Engineering many respondents believe that there are insufficient opportunities for career mobility and more should be done to send current employees on courses to acquire higher qualifications.(**Thomas Maluleke**, SA Engineering quality control inspector, interview by author, Wadeville, 19 April 1996).

[25] **Numsa shop stewards** (SA Engineering), interview, 18 April 1996.

need literacy training. You need to say Joe the driver needs literacy training - whereas Pete the messenger may not...'[26]

A promising trend is the shifting racial composition of Paterson Grade C Lower (includes supervisory, artisan and technician) and C Upper (assistant management, senior supervisory and junior professional). These grades provide the bulk of the skill pipeline, and thus constitute an important avenue for black advancement.[27] Breakwater Monitor statistics from 1994-1996 show increased BCA (black, coloured, Asian) representation in the Paterson C pool, from 20.6 percent in 1994 to 27.7 percent in 1996. The representation of women remained at 25 percent.[28]

The racial division of wage labour and the attendant occupational segregation have not, as yet, followed in apartheid's demise. The 1994 October Survey states that over two in every five employed blacks were in labouring jobs, whereas for whites the corresponding figure was one in every fifty.[29] At the other end, in 1994 a white man was 5000 times as likely to be in top management as was a black woman.[30] In manufacturing firms, the South African Labour Flexibility Survey (SALFS) indicates that, in 1995, blacks comprised 77.1 percent of unskilled and 65.2 percent of semi-skilled workers yet accounted for only 3.4 percent of managerial employees. Conversely, whites accounted for a mere 1.8 percent of unskilled workers whilst comprising the bulk (86.5 percent) of managerial employees.[31] The Breakwater Monitor Report published in September 1997 confirms these inequalities: of a

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[26] **Harry Bristow**, interview, 10 April 1995.

[27] See **Business South Africa**, 'Position Paper on Affirmative Action Legislation,' Johannesburg: BSA, 1995, photocopied, 3.

[28] *Breakwater Monitor: Monitoring Employment Equity in South Africa*, compiled by Angus Bowmaker-Falconer, Cape Town: University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business, September 1996, 42, 59-60.

[29] *October Household Survey* (1994); quoted in **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 390.

[30] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 2, sec. 2.2, and Appendix to chap. 2.

[31] *SALFS* (1995); cited in **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 392-393. In the early 1990s, whites accounted for four out of every five management posts in the economy as a whole (Central Statistical Services, South African Statistics, Reports for 1982, 1990, 1992, Pretoria: Government Printers; cited in **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 391).

selected sample, less than 5 percent of senior managers are African and only 11 percent of African women are in senior managerial positions compared to 66 percent of white women.[32]

Sectoral segregation has resulted in the disproportionate representation of blacks in poorly paid, insecure sectors with a high incidence of casual or contract labour. These are sectors with high levels of manual employment - such as agriculture, mining and domestic service. In recent years, blacks have come to be more concentrated in the manufacturing sector.[33] Correspondingly, blacks are underrepresented in the more lucrative sectors, such as finance. According to South African Labour and Research Development Unit (SALDRU) Survey data, in 1993 just 1.2 percent of employed blacks was found in this sector, compared with nearly 12 percent of whites.[34]

A key indicator of inequality in the labour market is the differential rate of unemployment by race. Accurately measuring unemployment in SA in the 1990s is a difficult task. Given statistical deficiencies and the inconsistent and diverse methods employed, the ILO Review states that '(a)ll data sources are questionable.'[35] An estimate often relied upon by government, and used by the Labour Market Commission, reckons that in 1994, the black unemployment rate was 41 percent, more than six times that for whites (6.4 percent).[36]

According to the ILO Review, '(i)ncome inequality in South Africa is perhaps greater than anywhere for which there are comparable data.'[37] Income inequality is closely linked to

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[32] Breakwater Monitor report, September 1997, UCT Graduate School of Business.

[33] **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 394-395.

[34] Cited in **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 393; and *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 438.

[35] For example, the October Household Survey for 1994 estimated that 4.66 million people were unemployed, a rate of 32.6 percent. According to a stricter definition of unemployment, however, the number was 2.45 million unemployed or 20.3 percent (**Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 107-108).

[36] *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 437.

[37] **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 19.

racial inequality. In 1994, 30 percent of African men earned less than R500 per month, compared to a mere 2 percent of white men.[38] In recent years, however, inter-racial inequality has decreased whilst intra-racial inequality has increased.[39]

In some organizations, wages are still determined along racial and gender lines. The Labour Market Commission cites one set of data which suggests that even after holding constant factors such as education, language, type of employer, sector and occupation, whites earn an estimated 104 percent higher wages than blacks. Men receive 43 percent higher wages than do similarly qualified women in similar occupations.[40] This does not necessarily imply that white and black employees doing identical jobs in the same establishment are paid differently. Rather, the Labour Market Commission notes that these disparities reflect 'a combination of the effects of disadvantage and of discrimination in compensation and in hiring.'[41]

Anecdotal evidence pointing to wage disparities was found at some of the case study companies. Many respondents allege that black SA Engineering employees are paid lower wages then their white and coloured counterparts. According to a Numsa shop steward, 'there are some whites in there who're doing the same job I'm doing but they're earning more because of their colour. Now, whites that are hired get a higher rate...they think just because they're white they should get more money.'[42] Adrian Stucke, a manager, attempted to justify this discriminatory practice: 'I don't believe it's racism as such. Whites would get a better salary than blacks only because they've always had a better salary and

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[38] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 2, sec. 2.2 and Appendix to chap. 2.

[39] For a discussion of the evidence and various studies, see **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 20-24.

[40] Figures based on staff calculations from the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development (PSLSD) data set; cited in *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 441.

[41] *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 441.

[42] **Numsa shop stewards** (SA Engineering), interview, 18 April 1996. A 1992 company culture audit found that 75 percent of blacks, and 50 percent of managers believed rewards were racially-biased (**Diversity Consultants**, *SA Engineering Culture Audit*, confidential company document, Wadeville: July 1992, 46).

to reverse that will take time. Industry dictates how much workers should get'.[43]

4.3 Legislative Measures to Redress the Legacy of Apartheid

In the absence of concerted policy interventions, the legacy of apartheid and the disadvantages it bequeathed tend to be self-reproducing and self-reinforcing.[44] The Labour Market Commission notes that '(t)his observation provides the fundamental justification for corrective measures or affirmative action.'[45] Such measures would include both employment equity and non-labour market interventions.

The Employment and Occupational Equity Green Paper (hereafter the Green Paper) cautions against seeing employment equity as the panacea for all of apartheid's ills: 'For one thing, inequalities in race and gender do not arise solely or even primarily because of discrimination in employment.'[46] Non-labour market interventions required include the reform of the education and vocational training systems; infrastructural investment; land reform; and support for small and medium businesses.[47]

The LRA distinguishes between these types of corrective action and unfair discrimination. It stipulates anti-discrimination provisions, but states that

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[43] **Adrian Stucke**, interview, 19 April 1996. Clearly, such practices are legally proscribed. The Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity stipulates that employers need to ensure equal pay for equal work. Proven discrimination and/or non-compliance will result in administrative and legal sanctions (*Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 4, box 3; chap. 5, sec. 5.11.3).

[44] *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 434.

[45] *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 434.

[46] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 2, sec. 2.5.2.

[47] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 1, sec. 1.1.4.

> an employer is not prevented from adopting or implementing employment policies and practices that are designed to achieve the adequate protection and advancement of persons or groups or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination, in order to enable their full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms.[48]

The apparatus in place to deal with discrimination include the tripartite Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA); Labour Court; Human Rights Commission;[49] Gender Commission;[50] the Constitutional Court and ordinary courts.[51] Such constitutional guarantees have, for the reasons outlined above, been deemed insufficient to eradicate past inequalities. AA legislation has therefore been formulated. The Black Management Forum (BMF) was an early and vocal advocate of AA legislation.[52] Business South Africa (BSA), however, were initially more circumspect. Their central objection to the above-mentioned constitutional clause and to AA legislation lay in what they saw as the a priori privileging of race and group rights:

> While the Constitution opens the door to the ongoing endorsement of group rights, it should be noted that this is antithetical to a society striving to be non-racial and individualistic. In essence such a concept is the other side of the apartheid coin of job reservation and race classification. Employers in South Africa should not be asked to judge any future employee by the colour of his or her skin...[53]

4.4 Employment Equity Act

On March 3, 1995, Tito Mboweni, the then Minister of Labour, established the Affirmative

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[48] Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, Schedule 7, Part B, 2 (b).

[49] Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, ch. 9, sec. 184.

[50] Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, ch. 9, sec. 187.

[51] Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, ch. 8, secs. 167-172.

[52] **Black Management Forum**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, Johannesburg: BMF, 1993, 29-31.

[53] **BSA**, 'Position Paper,' 6. These objections are examined in further detail in Chapter Five.

Action Policy Development Forum (AAPDF). This comprised representatives from organised business, organised labour, women, youth, and disabled groupings, as well as government officials and researchers. This non-statutory advisory forum was briefed to debate key issues of employment equity. In February 1996, the AAPDF concluded its work after establishing a drafting team to prepare the Employment and Occupational Equity Green Paper.[54]

Out of this process emerged a number of departmental drafts on national policy options for AA and employment equity. These were distributed and discussed amongst key constituencies.[55] On 1 July, 1996, the Directorate of Equal Opportunities in the Department of Labour published the Employment and Occupational Equity Green Paper. As it's name suggests, the Green Paper no longer employed the terminology of 'affirmative action', but invoked the broader concept of 'employment equity'. This notion, developed by the Canadians, highlights the removal of barriers to the advancement of disadvantaged groups. Skill development and flexible targets for the recruitment and promotion of designated groups is similarly emphasised. A central aim of the Green Paper (and subsequently, the Act) is to give practical effect to the constitutional guarantees of equality. This is to be achieved through addressing the apartheid legacy of inequality, workplace discrimination, and a skewed labour market.

Subsequent to the Green Paper being published, public comment was invited and approximately 80 submissions were received from stakeholders including business, unions, women, people with disabilities, religious organizations, industrial psychologists, human resources practitioners and health professionals. In February 1997 the Minister of Labour appointed a team of legal drafters to draft the Employment Equity Bill. On 26 November 1997 the Draft Bill was published in the Government Gazette for public comment and in May 1998 was negotiated between government, business, labour and representatives of civil society groupings in the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac). In August 1998 the Bill was debated and passed by Parliament.

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[54] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 1, sec. 1.2.

[55] See, for example, **Affirmative Action Policy Development Forum**, 'Affirmative Action and Employment Equity Workshop,' fifth draft, Pretoria: Department of Labour, 16 February 1996.

The President assented to the Act in October 1998 and it will come into effect in 1999.[56]

The Act has a twin focus: promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and implementing affirmative action measures to redress disadvantage in employment experienced by designated groups in order to ensure their 'equitable representation' in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce.[57] As used in the Act, the term 'employment equity' represents a holistic approach to workplace transformation that is based not only on demographic transformation, but also on changing organizational culture. Employment equity is concerned with opening up opportunities to ensure that employees are brought into a workplace through non-discriminatory mechanisms and are given the opportunities to utilise and develop their skills. It encompasses the removal of discriminatory barriers and the provision of fair and equal employment opportunity, with the proviso that merit is not undermined. This implies eradicating unfair discrimination of any kind in the hiring, promotion, training, pay, benefits and retrenchment of employees, as well as encouraging employers to undertake 'organizational transformation' to remove barriers to the employment of historically disadvantaged groups. This would include measures to accelerate the training and promotion of these groups.[58]

The provisions of the Act apply to all employers, including the state. The only exceptions are the National Defence Force, the National Intelligence Agency, and the South African Secret Service. The prohibition on unfair discrimination in employment applies to all employers, irrespective of size or turnover. Every employer is required to promote equal opportunity in the workplace by eliminating unfair discrimination in any employment policy or practice.[59] The obligation to implement employment equity by

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[56] **Reneé Grawitzky**, 'Job equity bill "to ensure fair deal",' *Business Day*, 27 November 1997; **Reneé Grawitzky**, 'Organizations not convinced by government's arguments,' *Business Day*, 27 November 1997; **Frank Nxumalo**, 'Mboweni unveils equity bill,' *Star Business Report*; 27 November 1997; and **Sapa, and Fred de Lange**, 'Affirmative action: Firms face big fines,' *Citizen*, 27 November 1997.

[57] Employment Equity Act, sec. 2(b).

[58] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 1, sec. 1.5.

[59] Employment Equity Act, sections 4 and 5.

way of employment equity plans and reports to the Department of Labour on implementation of said plans applies only to designated employers in respect of designated groups. Designated employers are defined as persons employing 50 or more employees; persons employing less than 50 employees but having a total annual turnover applicable to a small business in terms of the National Small Business Act, 1996 (Act No. 102 of 1996); all municipalities and organs of State; and employers designated in terms of a collective agreement, to the extent provided for in the agreement. Designated groups are defined to include black people (used in the generic sense to include Africans, Indians and coloureds), women and people with disabilities.[60]

The Act compels designated employers to submit employment equity plans. These equity plans will outline methods to remove discrimination and ensure the creation of a more demographically representative labour force. Such measures will include numerical goals to achieve the equitable representation of people from disadvantaged groups in all job categories, particularly in senior positions; timeframes within which numerical goals will be achieved; and measures to train, retain and develop employees.[61]

The Act recommends that employers discharge certain duties. These include: consulting employees and representative trade unions on employment equity measures, conducting an audit or analysis and preparing a work force profile, preparing and implementing an employment equity plan, and reporting annually to the Department of Labour.[62]

The analysis or audit is designed to identify existing shortcomings and barriers to change.

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[60] Employment Equity Act, chap. 1.

[61] Employment Equity Act, section 20.

[62] Every designated employer must report to the Department of Labour on progress made in implementing its employment equity plan (section 13(2)(d)). A designated employer who employs fewer than 150 employees has to file its first report within 12 months after the Act comes into effect or it becomes a designated employer. Thereafter it must submit a report every two years on 1 October. A designated employer who employers 150 or more employees has to file its first report 6 months after the Act comes into effect, and thereafter on 1 October every year. A minimum period of 12 months must elapse between the submission of the first and second reports (section 21(3)). Employment Equity Act, sections 16-27.

Ideally, it will provide information on the following areas: employment, pay and benefits in major categories by race, gender and disability; programmes and policies on human resources development; organization of work in terms of skills and responsibilities required by different positions, and hours worked; transport, housing and caring arrangements and preferences of employees; languages used and language competence; physical facilities for disabled people and women; procedures for hiring, training, promotion, retrenchment and transfers; and grievance and internal appeals procedures.[63]

In consultation with employees and other stakeholders, designated employers will have to draw up and submit an employment equity plan for approval by the Minister of Labour. The plan must be one that would achieve `reasonable progress' towards employment equity in a specific workforce. This plan will lay out measures to reduce barriers to historically disadvantaged groups, accelerate training and promotion of designated groups, and provide key indicators of success in ensuring equity. The Act indicates that employment equity plans should include: a profile of employees by race, gender and disability; measures to restructure procedures for hiring, training, promotion, retrenchment and transfers to prevent discrimination; measures to identify and minimise aspects of work and training that hinder members of designated groups; measures to accelerate recruitment, training and promotion in order to achieve a more equitable representation of designated groups, measures to develop an organizational culture that welcomes diversity; goals and timetables for implementation; and details on the role of employee representatives in the formulation of the plans.[64]

The Act establishes a nine-person advisory Commission for Employment Equity, consisting of Nedlac nominees and a chairperson appointed by the Minister. Parties in Nedlac nominating Commissioners must have regard to promoting representivity of people from designated groups. The role of the Commission is to advise the Minister on codes of good practice, regulations and policy matters; make awards to good employers in

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[63] Employment Equity Act, section 19; and *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 4, sec. 4.6, and Box 1.

[64] Employment Equity Act, section 20; and *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 1, sec. 1.1.6, and Box 2.

the area of employment equity; and conduct research on matters relating to the Act, including norms and benchmarks for setting numerical goals in various sectors. The Commission can hold public hearings and must prepare and submit an annual report to the Minister. [65]

Employees and trade union representatives are required to play a role in monitoring compliance with the Act and reporting non-compliance. Enforcement takes place through a combination of administrative and judicial mechanisms which build on the existing institutional mechanisms established under the Labour Relations Act and Basic Conditions of Employment Act. The labour inspectorate ensures compliance with the formal requirements of the Act.[66] Inspectors have extensive powers to enter the workplace, question and inspect.[67]

Disputes around unfair discrimination will be processed through the CCMA or the Labour Court. The CCMA will deal with disputes concerning employment equity. As discussed above, monitoring and compliance will be the purview of the Labour Inspectorate. The Director-General is given wide responsibilities in reviewing compliance with the Act. The Director-General may, in conducting the compliance review, request documents (including the current analysis or employment equity plan); and request meetings with relevant persons involved in the consultation and implementation process.

In conducting the compliance review the Director-General is required to take certain

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[65] The Commission's composition, functions and powers are contained in sections 28 to 33.

[66] These include consultation, analysis, preparation of the plan and successive plans, implementing a plan, reporting, publication of the report, assigning responsibility to senior managers, informing employees and keeping records.

[67] Inspectors can issue a compliance order to a designated employer for failure to provide a written undertaking or comply with one. Designated employers are required to display compliance orders in the workplace, and have a right to object against such orders by way of written representations to the Director-General. In the absence of an objection, the Director-General may apply to the Labour Court for an order making the compliance order issued by the labour inspector an order of that Court. The designated employer has a right of appeal to the Labour Court in respect of a compliance order confirmed or varied by the Director-General. The order is suspended pending final determination of the issue by the Labour Court or Labour Appeal Court (Employment Equity Act, sections 35-45).

economic and labour-market factors into account. Central amongst these is the extent to which 'suitably qualified' people from and amongst the different designated groups are 'equitably represented' within each occupational category and level in the employer's workforce in relation to: the national and regional economically active population; the available skills pool; economic and financial factors relevant to the sector; the economic and financial circumstances of the employer; and the number of present and planned vacancies and labour turnover. Other factors include comparative benchmarks set by employers in the same sector or industry; reasonable efforts made by the employer to implement its employment equity plan; and progress made in eliminating barriers to the advancement of designated groups. Subsequent to a review, the Director-General can approve the employment equity plan or make recommendations to the employer (these may include specific steps an employer may need to take to ensure compliance). The Director-General also has the ability to refer non-compliance to the Labour Court.[68]

Whilst the Act stipulates that AA measures 'include preferential treatment and numerical goals, (they) exclude quotas.'[69] Employers are thus *not* obliged to appoint persons not suitably qualified for the job,[70] nor are they encouraged to establish 'absolute barrier(s)' to the prospective or continued employment or advancement of people who are not from designated groups.[71] The definition of a `suitably qualified' person is (unsurprisingly) contested. The debate as to what constitutes a qualification and how to determine who is 'suitably qualified' is discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

4.5 Labour Relations Act

The other key piece of post-apartheid legislation aimed at transforming the labour market is the Labour Relations Act that emphasises increased co-operation between the social

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[68] Employment Equity Act, sections 42-44.

[69] Employment Equity Act, section 15(3).

[70] Employment Equity Act, section 20(3), (4) and (5).

[71] Employment Equity Act, Section 15(4).

partners. The LRA aims to 'promote economic development, social justice, labour peace and workplace democratisation'.[72] The LRA was assented to on 29 November 1995, and came into effect on 13 September 1996. For the first time, SA has a LRA based on a negotiated consensus between business, government and employee representatives.[73] As George Nkadimeng, then Cosatu vice-president, put it: 'From the very beginning, before it was even tabled at Nedlac, the new LRA has been worker-friendly. Both labour and business were part of developing it - it says to employers, you have no more prerogatives, you have to consult...'.[74]

The new LRA provides for a more structured collective-bargaining system, greater certainty of rights and obligations, and the inclusion of new rights and concepts (such as unfair discrimination).[75] To give effect to its emphasis on resolving disputes through conciliation and mediation, the system of dispute resolution has been overhauled. Several new institutions, such as the CCMA, were established.[76] The LRA is, in essence, an attempt to shift from an adversarial and zero-sum approach to a more consensual (and 'win-win') framework for industrial relations.

To this end, the LRA makes provision for the establishment of workplace forums (WPF) in workplaces with 100 or more employees. Any representative trade union (having a

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[72] Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, ch.1, sec. 1.The rationale for a new LRA arose from the need for greater simplicity and coherence in labour law; bringing South African law in line with the relevant international legislation; and the need to give effect to the new Constitution and government policy (**Nedlac**, 'Labour Relations Act, 1995,' available from http://www.nedlac.org.za/agree1.html, Internet, accessed 23 April 1997).

[73] **Jeremy Baskin and Vishwas Satgar**, 'South Africa's new Labour Relations Act: a critical assessment and challenges for labour,' Naledi discussion paper, Johannesburg: National Labour and Economic Development Institute, September 1995, 1.

[74] **George Nkadimeng,** interview, 7 March 1996.

[75] To some, the absence of gender-specific rights is a lacuna. Roseline Nyman criticizes the Act for being 'gender neutral...There is no specific focus on gender.'(**Roseline Nyman**, gender researcher for the National Labour and Economic Development Institute, interview by author, Johannesburg, 28 March 1996).

[76] See Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995; 'Labour Relations Act Strives for negotiation instead of confrontation,' *Financial Mail* (online), available from http://www.fm.co.za/96/061296/LA.3.html, Internet, accessed 23 April 1996; **Nedlac**, 'Labour Relations Act, 1995'; and **Duncan Innes**, 'Establishing Workplace Forums: A beginner's guide,' *The Innes Labour Brief* 7, no. 2 (1995): 5-6.

majority of membership in the workplace) may apply to the CCMA for the establishment of said forum. The Act is not overly prescriptive as to the specific structure and form of worker participation. Rather, it promises what Baskin and Satgar term 'flexible regulation' - laying down a minimal framework while encouraging bipartite consensual opting out of the Act.[77] The rationale for WPFs is that they allow distributional issues (which are largely conflictual) to remain within the ambit of collective bargaining, freeing this 'second channel' to focus on workplace co-operation and joint decision-making. As stated in the Act:

> They [workplace forums] are designed to perform functions that collective bargaining cannot easily achieve: the joint solution of problems and the resolution of conflicts over production. Their purpose is not to undermine collective bargaining but to supplement it. They achieve this purpose by relieving collective bargaining of functions to which it is not well suited.[78]

A workplace forum is entitled to be consulted by the employer over a range of issues including workplace restructuring; plant closures; mergers and transfers (in so far as they impact on employees); retrenchments; job grading; criteria for wage increases or bonuses; education and training; production plans; and promotions.[79] The Act stipulates matters that will be subject to joint decision-making. Significantly, these include 'measures designed to protect and advance persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination'.[80]

The injunction to consult is an attempt to empower unionized employees who, on the whole, have not been consulted in the formulation of AA and managing diversity initiatives. According to Adele Thomas's 1995 survey of 213 companies, only in the

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[77] See **Jeremy Baskin and Vishwas Satgar**, 'South Africa's new LRA: A critical assessment and challenges for labour,' *South African Labour Bulletin* 19, no. 5 (1995): 46.

[78] *Explanatory Memorandum*, 35.

[79] The Act's definition of what constitutes a consultative process is slow and time-consuming and could impede efficient decision-making (Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, ch. 5, sec. 84 (1), sec. 85 (1-4); and **Innes**, 'Establishing Workplace Forums,' 12-13).

[80] Recognizing that the government lacks the resources to monitor compliance with employment equity legislation in every workplace, the Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity suggests that other stakeholders (such as unions and workplace forums) be involved in enforcement efforts (*Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 3, sec. 3.8.4.3). Other matters to be decided jointly are: disciplinary codes and procedures; rules regulating non-work performance related conduct; and changes to the rules of benefit funds. See Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, ch. 5. sec. 86 (1).

minority of cases (between 5-10 percent) were trade unions intimately involved in the AA process.[81] This problem is widespread. For instance, South African Breweries (SAB) - consistently rated among the top three companies in AA by UCT's Breakwater Monitor - failed to adequately consult unionized employees about their AA drive.[82] As will be seen in Chapters Five to Eight, the reticence amongst some unionists to buy-in to change processes can, in part, be attributed to their initial exclusion from what comes to be perceived as a management initiative.[83]

As was highlighted in the discussion of the case studies, worker participation structures hinge on the assumption that employer and employee interests can coincide, that there is no necessary, a priori, (and mutually exclusive) viewpoint which attends to either of these two subject positions. Premised on pluralist precepts, plant forums allow for a greater diversity of interests to be articulated than do the traditional bipartite collective bargaining structures. Diversity can, however, dilute the articulation of interests - thereby diluting a unions claim to speak for and represent the workers - writ singular. In the previous chapter, it was observed that despite the emergence of a less adversarial relationship, many shop stewards find it difficult to effect the shift from adversarial bargaining to co-operative strategies. Indeed, these problems highlight the extent to which the new labour relations framework may be unable to achieve its objectives. Baskin argues that the 'regulated flexibility' approach embodied in the Act may be unsustainable in that

> it contradicts other aspects of government fiscal and industrial policy which are, to a large extent, de-regulationist...[I]t requires organised labour to become internally stronger, which is obviously not happening...These problems may push the system towards a weak form of corporatism.[84]

The attempt to merge different (and oftentimes conflicting) projects into a coherent labour

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[81] **Adèle Thomas**, 'Political freedom in South Africa - but it's business as usual: Workplace challenges beyond window-dressing,' paper presented at the Global Conference on Managing Diversity: At the Frontier of Managing Diversity Integrating Practice and Research, University of Georgia, Georgia, 7-9 September 1995.

[82] **Duncan Innes and Richard Davies**, 'Affirmative Action in the Workplace: A case study for implementation,' *The Innes Labour Brief* 7, no. 3 (1996): 14.

[83] This was the case at SA Can. Chris Wiese noted that 'by and large it [the change process] was management driven' (**Chris Wiese**, interview, 26 March 1996).

[84] **Baskin**, 'Unions at the crossroads,' 16.

relations framework may lead to internal rifts within union structures – at precisely the time when a more coherent union response to workplace restructuring is required. The new legislative environment has attempted to create a more level playing field, to remove discriminatory barriers which a-priori privileged one set of players over another. What it cannot do, however, is coach and cajole the players into becoming a fitter, leaner side. The onus for this lie with the teams themselves – and with those they choose as their representatives. The opportunities that inhere in the rather wide margins of ambiguity surrounding the new labour relations regime need to be harnessed. This fluidity and ambiguity can be interpreted as a hiatus, a temporary space in which to redefine the terms of the debate on workplace restructuring. As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, many managers have recognized this and are seeking to exploit the opportunity to reframe the debate – with or without the union movement's input.

4.6 Conclusions

A robust legislative framework aimed at securing employment equity is emerging. The objectives of the various legal instruments designed to regulate the workplace are not, however, always in synch. As noted above, a deregulationary framework, coupled with a commitment to fiscal discipline, governs most aspects of the government's monetary and industrial policy. The aim is to promote a more flexible labour market, greater economic openness and competitiveness and enhanced productivity. This does not always sit easily with the government's promises to create employment on a large scale, invest in people and infrastructure, promote employment equity and organizational transformation, and design a system of social security and social development to protect the most vulnerable groups in society.[85] Chapter Five examines the ways in which these strains echo in the debates over the definition and nature of AA.

Another area of tension is that of 'fair' versus 'unfair' discrimination. The EEA is the first major piece of identity group based legislation to be enacted by the first democratically

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[85] See *A Draft Framework for a National Growth and Development Strategy*, confidential draft, SA Government, 20 February 1996, 13-14 passim.

elected government. This legislation privileges a-priori designated groups over non-designated groups, and over the individual. Ironically, in its attempt to efface the effects of previous discrimination, it has invoked accusations of being an unfortunate parallelism of apartheid inspired legislation. Whilst workable compromises can be developed within organizations, these tensions will not be easily resolved. Compounding this challenge is an additional tension within organizations: the need to simultaneously grapple with the requirement to transform workforce demographics (and implement the training, coaching, and effort this requires) whilst struggling to become world class companies. These complexities are discussed in greater detail in Chapters Five to Eight.

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the legislative landscape against which the case study companies are implementing AA programmes. These legislative measures constitute a constraining environment: certain procedures and practices are mandated, others proscribed. The ways in which the courts will interpret this legislation, and the implications this will have for practice is, at this point, still largely a matter of conjecture. The LRA and EEA contain certain prescriptions, but are not the final word on AA best practices. The critical success factors of AA programmes are more complex than this. They are not simply a set of distinct parameters against which AA programmes, and perceptions of the programmes, can be 'tested'. The ways in which the legislative context frames the AA debate, and impacts upon company policies and practices, is addressed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 5
THE POLITICS OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

5.1 Introduction

There is no universal understanding of AA. It is an essentially contested concept. This chapter argues that the very struggle over the definitional boundaries of the concept illuminates the more profound struggle over the contours of the New South Africa - a contest over the delineation, articulation and nexus of power, class and racial privilege. The transition has been marked by 'institutionalizing uncertainty.'[1] The various participants in the negotiation process consented to a set of rules and procedures that do not, in and of themselves, predict any set outcome(s). Different interests have been subjected to competition and compromise. In Przeworski's words: '(d)emocratic compromise cannot be a substantive compromise; it can only be a contingent institutional compromise. It is within the nature of democracy that no one's interests can be guaranteed.'[2] Democracy is about playing by the rules of the game. The negotiations process of the early 1990s resulted in agreement as to the broad outline of these rules. Consensus around the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate political action and discourse, the institutional rules through which interests are advocated, has not yet been secured. This chapter examines the ways in which this struggle to secure consensus around the political boundaries of legitimacy and illegitimacy plays out in the AA debate.

At the level of public rhetoric, most parties accept the idea of AA. As will be demonstrated, what is meant by AA remains murky, and the extent to which it is being implemented is questionable.[3] Multiple definitions of AA abound. According to Albie Sachs, 'all anti-discrimination measures, as well as all anti-poverty ones, may be regarded as constituting a

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[1] **Adam Przeworski**, *Democracy and the market: Political and economic reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, 14.

[2] **Adam Przeworski**, 'Some Problems in the Study of the Transition to Democracy,' in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives*, edited by **Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead**, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, 59.

[3] To illustrate: a joint study conducted by the BMF and Ernst & Young found a rapidly increasing perception amongst companies that their AA programmes are succeeding. 70 percent of respondents reported an 80 percent success rate in their AA efforts, with a majority (86 percent) claiming that such programmes would soon come to an end (see **Sello Motlhabakwe**, 'Benchmarking affirmative action,' *Enterprise*, February 1996, 58-59; and **Salgado**, 'Support for Affirmative Action'). Given that the experience of implementing AA in corporate SA is strewn with failures, frustrations and at best partial successes, this finding highlights the disjunctures which emerge between public rhetoric and institutional practice (see **Innes and Davies**, 'Affirmative Action in the Workplace,' 5).

form of affirmative action.'[4] This definition portrays AA as a panacea for a multitude of socio-economic ills. What is envisaged is AA in the mould of US President L.B. Johnson's War on Poverty and the Great Society social programmes.[5] Initially, the ANC promoted such an all-encompassing definition. As stated in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP): 'Affirmative action measures must be used to end discrimination on the grounds of race and gender, and to address the disparity of power between workers and management, and between urban and rural areas.'[6] These goals were to be achieved through the redistribution of resources and opportunities. Measures stipulated include, *inter alia*, a programme of (adult basic) education and (re)training; promoting the collective rights of workers and their representatives; and providing job security for pregnant women.[7] As recognized in the Green Paper (1996), many of these programmes should not properly be categorized as AA. They are rather the response of a democratically elected government to the problems of its electorate. They can therefore be catered for within the ambit of other pieces of legislation.[8]

Other definitions present AA as an aggressive recruitment and promotion strategy;[9] as a major restructuring of organizational and societal structures and power relations;[10] as 'apartheid in

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[4] **Albie Sachs**, 'Affirmative Action and Good Government,' Alistair Berkeley Memorial Lecture, Cape Town, November 1991.

[5] For more detail, see **John David Skrentny**, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action: Politics, Culture, and Justice in America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 85-89 passim.

[6] **ANC**, 'The Reconstruction and Development Programme: A Policy Framework,' Johannesburg: Umanyano Publications, 1994, 115. This view seems to have gained currency. As Grace Mokoena from SA Banking asserted, 'the RDP is nothing else but affirmative action.'(**Grace Mokoena**, SA Banking equality ombudsman and head of the Organizational Transformation Unit, interview by author, Johannesburg, 28 August 1995). Similarly, Nkuhlu's definition of AA ranges from numerical quotas through to state-sponsored development programmes focused on the provision of education, health, housing, water and electricity (**Wiseman Nkuhlu**, 'Affirmative Action For South Africa in Transition: From Theory to Practice,' in *Affirmative Action in a Democratic South Africa*, edited by Charl Adam, Johannesburg: Juta, 1993, 16-17).

[7] **ANC**, 'The Reconstruction and Development Programme,' 116.

[8] To cite two examples: workers and unions rights are dealt with in the new LRA; and Section 9 of the Bill of Rights outlaws discrimination on the basis of gender and race. See also **Linda Human**, 'Discrimination and Equality in the Workplace: Defining Affirmative Action and its Role and Limitations,' *Management Dynamics* 4, no. 3 (1995): 55.

[9] See, for example, **Vincent T. Maphai**, 'Affirmative Action in South Africa A Genuine Option?' *Social Dynamics* 15, no. 2 (1989): 1; quoted in **Khehla Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure: Affirmative action and South Africa's search for racial equality,' *Policy: Issues and Actors* 8, no. 4 (1995): 8-9.

[10] See **Lovemore Mbigi**, 'Ubuntu: Spirit of African solidarity,' *Enterprise*, February 1996, 62; and Grace Mokoena, interview, 28 August 1995.

reverse';[11] as development and training focusing on multi-skilling and career pathing;[12] or as a temporary intervention which would achieve equal employment opportunities without lowering standards or unduly trammelling the career aspirations of current employees.[13]

5.2 Defining the Terms of the Transition

These contests over AA can be read as a proxy for the key conflicts defining the democratic transition. These are over the pace, direction, content and control of the democratization process itself.[14] Of relevance to the South African debate are Deval Patrick's observations of the AA controversy in the US:

> Reduced to pungent but pointless sound bites, fortified by myths but little useful data, fuelled by the politics of division, this nation is grappling with a profound question: whether its sad legacy of exclusion, based on race, on ethnicity, or on gender, is really behind us - and if not, whether we have the collective will to do anything about it. For such a critical issue, one so closely linked to the question of what kind of society we will be, the debate lacks virtually any sense of perspective. That is why, in my view, affirmative action has a symbolic significance out of all proportion to its practical impact.[15]

The AA debate can be reduced to a contest over two competing visions of transformation. The first ideal type views the current transition as a liberal, pluralist democratic revolution, a

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[11] **SA Paper employee**, focus group interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996. Representative of many white respondents' views was the following statement:'affirmative action is doing a lot of harm to the country...Whites are not getting jobs and skilled people are leaving and they're putting unskilled blacks in their place.'(**Henk Langeveldt**, SA Tin engineering superintendent, interview by author, Johannesburg, 24 April 1996). Equating AA with reverse discrimination, a book-keeper at SA Engineering claimed that 'blacks and whites are treated differently in the company...They've got affirmative action completely wrong. They believe they've got to do what the new South Africa is doing; if there's a white and a black they've got to take the black - even in management. They say there's no discrimination but there is against whites...'(**Marie Verbaan**, SA Engineering book-keeper, interview by author, Wadeville, 19 April 1996).

[12] **Thabo Molefe**, SA Packing (regional) and SA Tin World Class consultant, interview by author, Johannesburg, 25 April 1996.

[13] **Linda Human**, *Affirmative Action and the Development of People: A Practical Guide*, Johannesburg: Juta, 1995, 3.

[14] The terms within which the debate is framed has changed much since the early 1990s. Then, the AA debate was characterized as one between the 'black advancement' school which held that black development was a black problem; and the 'people management' school which argued that black manager development was as much of a white as a black problem (**Linda Human**, 'Why Affirmative Action Programmes Fail: The South African Experience,' in *Educating and Developing Managers For a Changing South Africa: Selected Essays*, edited by Linda Human, Cape Town: Juta, 1991, 221).

[15] **Deval L. Patrick**, 'Standing in the Right Place,' in *The Affirmative Action Debate*, edited by George E. Curry, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1996, 139.

central ideal of which is the continual balancing of equality and liberty: eclipsing either logic will imperil the democratic project. The AA policy prescriptions that emerge from this view are predicated on the idea that equal treatment will not necessarily result in equal results. Policies that dictate equal outcomes foster a conception of equality as identity. The assumption that equality can guarantee equal results is seen as specious and unworkable. Hence the focus on equality of opportunity.[16] According to Thompson, '(a)ny affirmative action policy must operate as the handmaiden of equality, and not as an end in itself.'[17] There is recognition of the need to redress the inequities of the past, but the assumption is that historical group oppression and disadvantage should not translate into wholesale (present and future) group privileging. If group identity is to be given weight in the (re)distribution of resources, it should not be the sole criterion.[18] It should be but one factor in the equation which determines such (re)allocations. As Thompson avers: '(e)qualization of opportunity and not the grant of favours to the disadvantaged should be the leitmotif.'[19]

The second vision takes as its starting point past policies and legislation that were enacted in a deliberate attempt to hinder the development of blacks. It holds that 'the most significant AA programme carried out has not been by the US or by Malaysia, but by apartheid, which was a bastardized form of AA'.[20] This vision submits that SA's flirtation with AA is not a new development. The claim is that from Pact Government[21] through National Party rule, the Broederbond, the civil service, parastatals, and organizations such as Sanlam were all engaged

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[16] Thompson asserts the need to navigate between two conflicting strands or understandings of equality: 'The 'precarious *via media* between equal treatment and equal outcome is perhaps the promotion of equality of opportunity.'(**Clive Thompson**, 'Legislating Affirmative Action: Employment Equity and Lessons From Developed and Developing Countries,' in *Affirmative Action in a Democratic South Africa*, edited by Charl Adam, Johannesburg: Juta, 1993, 22).

[17] **Thompson**, 'Legislating Affirmative Action,' 21. Asbjorn Eide makes a similar point in his claim that 'the purpose of affirmative action is to advance equality in the enjoyment of human rights.'(**Asbjorn Eide**, 'Equality and Affirmative Action,' in *Affirmative Action in a New South Africa*. Papers and reports of a Conference on Affirmative Action convened by the ANC Constitutional Committee, Port Elizabeth, October 1991, 4).

[18] Policies which privilege the group rarely see the need to problematize this contested category.

[19] **Thompson**, 'Legislating Affirmative Action,' 29.

[20] **Lovemore Mbigi**, writer and consultant, interview by author, Johannesburg, 5 April 1995. Along these lines, Mamphela Ramphele suggests that '(i)t can be argued that apartheid was a massive affirmative action programme for white people...It is thus important not to be simplistic in the advocacy of affirmative action as if it is an inherently good public policy instrument.'(**Mamphela Ramphele**, *The Affirmative Action Book: Towards an Equity Environment*, Cape Town: IDASA Public Information Centre, 1995, 18).

[21] In 1924, a coalition of the National Party and the Labour Party won the election, heralding the Pact government under Albert Hertzog.

in an AA project to advance the interests of white Afrikaners (mainly men).[22] In the 1920s, discriminatory legislation centred on the 'civilized labour policy' that was designed to uplift newly urbanized impoverished whites at the expense of black workers.[23] Thompson notes that in the employment domain, the pivotal legislative measures designed to afford racial privilege were those laying the basis for the policy of job reservation: s 77 of the Industrial Conciliation Act 11 of 1924[24] and s 12 of the Mines and Works Act 27 of 1956.[25] Discrimination on the basis of sex was also legally entrenched. For instance, the Wage Act 44 of 1937 (subsequently 45 of 1957)[26] allowed differentiation between employees on the grounds of sex and laid the basis for discriminatory wage determinations.[27]

Advocates of this second vision make clear and direct links between past projects to uplift the socio-economic standing of poor whites and current attempts to implement AA.[28] According to Mureinik:

> [This vision] yearns for a nationalist revolution - the displacement of Afrikaner predominance with African predominance. This vision sees the Nineties as Africans' answer to the Fifties...[during which] Afrikaner nationalists sought ethnic pre-eminence in almost every public institution...Contemporary nationalists...see the project of social transformation in the same way. So much so that they sometimes lapse into calling the ethnic domination programme of the Fifties "affirmative action", tacitly

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[22] See **IDASA**, *Making Affirmative Action Work: A South African Guide*, Cape Town: IDASA, 1995, 3. Collins argues that '(t)he public service is an excellent example of just how effective affirmative action can be. The National Party used the civil service to create jobs for its (largely) white male Afrikaner supporters.'(**Collins**, 'Affirmative action,' 41).

[23] Sonn argues that 'legislation like the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 was passed as Affirmative Action for whites against cheaper black labour.'(**Franklin Sonn**, 'Afrikaner Nationalism and Black Advancement as Two Sides of the Same Coin,' in *Affirmative Action in a Democratic South Africa*, edited by Charl Adam, Johannesburg: Juta, 1993, 6).

[24] Repealed by Act 94 of 1979.

[25] Repealed by Act 38 of 1987 (**Clive Thompson**, 'Employment equity in a changing South Africa: options during the transition,' *Labour Law Unit Occasional Paper* 1/92, Cape Town: University of Cape Town, February 1992, 1).

[26] These discriminatory provisions were removed by the Wage Amendment Act 48 of 1981.

[27] **Thompson**, 'Employment equity,' 1.

[28] For example, Sonn asserts: 'And as historians today write of the rise of Afrikaner business, they will in the future be in a position to refer to the renaissance of black entrepreneurs...'(**Sonn**, 'Afrikaner Nationalism and Black Advancement,' 8). Criticizing this parallel, Bheki Sibiya, then Managing Director of the BMF, remarks that 'some people argue that when the NP came to power in 1948 it implemented affirmative action and therefore there's nothing different now that the ANC's in power they should also implement affirmative action. We distance ourselves from this because the NP implemented hurtful preferential treatment and we're talking about preferential treatment that is *corrective* preferential treatment...not hurtful.'(**Bheki Sibiya**, Black Management Forum managing director, interview by author, Johannesburg, 1 September 1995).

invoking it as a model for their own programmes.[29]

Given that these two visions are ideal types, the arguments that fall within their respective parameters are not necessarily internally consistent. Nor do they form cohesive groupings. A rough parallel can, however, be drawn between these two visions and the distinction Shubane draws between a backward and forward-looking view of AA. The backward-looking view focuses on the removal of discriminatory measures to ensure the flow of benefits to all.[30] This camp is not without its AA proponents who recognize that the repeal of discriminatory laws will not, in and of itself, end the disadvantages and inequalities they generated.[31] The Labour Market Commission notes that a non-discriminatory labour market would still be 'socially inequitable' if certain demographic groups continue to be systematically under-represented in the better-paying occupations and sectors.[32] Business South Africa (BSA)[33] falls within this camp, arguing that AA is simply one strategy to achieve equality of opportunity and it is 'at best a corrective process of limited duration.'[34] The claim is that the debate on AA cannot take place in isolation from considering supply side measures that affect the extent to which the racial and gender composition of an enterprise can change.[35] Other measures required include the triad of worker empowerment, black advancement and black business development.[36]

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[29] **Ettiene Mureinik**, 'Africanists are Wits's real enemy,' *Mail and Guardian*, February 2-8 1996.

[30] Types of anti-discrimination measures outlined in the Green Paper will require employers to ensure all potential candidates know about employment opportunities as they arise, and provide equal pay and benefits for equal work (*Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 3, secs. 3.5.2 - 3.5.2.5).

[31] For example, glass ceilings fostered by informal organizational barriers to advancement will not simply shatter (**BSA**, 'Position Paper,' 2).

[32] *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 431.

[33] BSA is a confederation comprising 16 employer federations including the South African Chamber of Commerce (Sacob), Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut (AHI), and the Chamber of Mines. It describes its role as representing business in national macro-economic and social issues. See 'Business South Africa: Organising for the future,' *The Innes Labour Brief* 5, no. 4 (1994): 23.

[34] **BSA**, 'Position Paper,' 1. The BSA continues to discuss the various drafts of the Green Paper on employment equity with the Department of Labour and therefore what follows should not be read as the definitive (and ongoing) position of the BSA on AA.

[35] Therefore, a key objective is to enlarge the pool of employable candidates through building capacity amongst disadvantaged groups (**BSA**, 'Position Paper,' 1-2, 6).

[36] According to Tshabalala: 'To be meaningful in the new South Africa, our operations need to look at doing business with black subcontractors, franchisers, suppliers and so on. We looked at this and saw that there wasn't sufficient capacity for blacks to link up with a world class manufacturing company such as SA Packaging...Therefore, we decided to build the capacity of black entrepreneurs...'(**Joseph Tshabalala**, SA Packaging management services director, interview by author, Johannesburg, 18 March 1996). See also **BSA**, 'Position Paper,' 3, 8.

Aspects of Cosatu's programme for transformation converge with this view. Many unionists believe that the opening up of the South African economy has generated more pressing issues than AA, such as job security, wages and retrenchment.[37] As Cosatu vice-president George Nkadimeng put it: 'affirmative action is not about blacks getting jobs but about training and getting them skilled - it's about empowering the disadvantaged with skills.'[38] In 1996, Cosatu was in the process of synthesising the views of its affiliates into a national AA policy.[39] Their AA proposals are integrated into a broader human resources policy that includes an integrated, certified education and training scheme, retraining for retrenched workers, training linked to pay and grading, career pathing, recognition of acquired skills and a strong emphasis on Adult Basic Education Training (ABET).[40] For Cosatu, quotas are not the main mechanisms for achieving AA. Sam Shilowa, Cosatu general secretary submits that '(g)enuine affirmative action programmes should also aim to go beyond the company gates into the communities.'[41] Hence, programmes aimed at fostering workplace democratization, worker ownership, black ownership and land reform are placed at the heart of any AA drive.[42] According to Isaac Nkomo, a SA Packaging manager and ex-unionist: 'from the union side, affirmative action is about addressing questions of opportunity and ... access to training, promotion and so on ... At that level, it doesn't threaten senior managers.'[43] Competing perspectives of AA do not neatly parallel 'class' interests. One cannot assume, a priori, that the more 'redistributive' programmes carry any necessary class content. According to Chris Wiese, SA Can general manager:

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[37] **Myra Alperson**, 'Redefining affirmative action: How trade unions see it,' *The Innes Labour Brief* 4, no. 3 (1993): 39.

[38] **George Nkadimeng**, interview, 7 March 1996.

[39] **George Nkadimeng**, interview, 7 March 1996.

[40] See **Collins**, 'Affirmative action,' 44; **Duncan Innes**, 'Cosatu's human resources policy: An overview,' *The Innes Labour Brief* 4, no. 3 (1993): 22-35; **Gerry Reilly**, 'Labour wants speedier affirmative action,' *New Nation*, 1 March 1996; **IDASA**, *Making Affirmative Action Work*, 11; and **Alperson**, 'Redefining affirmative action,' 37.

[41] **Sam Shilowa**, 'Black economic empowerment and the RDP,' *The Innes Labour Brief* 5, no. 4 (1994): 10.

[42] **Shilowa**, 'Black economic empowerment,' 9-17.

[43] **Isaac Nkomo**, interview, 5 March 1996. As Piet Roos put it: 'We don't see affirmative action only as giving someone a management position...We see affirmative action as getting people into better positions: multiskilling; promotion from within...'(**Piet Roos**, interview, 26 March 1996).

> The local Numsa won't jump over the moon if we appoint a black engineer here. They'd rather see us putting more energy into developing them and give them extra opportunities they were deprived of in the past rather than bringing in external blacks into management - which is what I think SA Packaging Head Office wants from us ...[44]

5.3 Beyond Race? Class-based Affirmative Action

Proponents of a class-based AA question the validity or wisdom of racially derived standards and appointments.[45] As Nattrass notes, whilst race overlays labour market disadvantage, the overlap is not exact. Given that multiple divisions and axes of inequality (such as gender, class and regional divides) crosscut racial cleavages, 'race can serve [only] as an imperfect initial marker in the analysis of discrimination and disadvantage'.[46] Race is problematized, as is the assumption of a trickle-down effect.[47] The claim, which has much currency in the US, is that race-based AA programmes are unable to take account of different degrees of disadvantage.[48] These programmes are seen to primarily (if not wholly) benefit the position of a relatively privileged stratum of blacks, thereby ignoring the marginalized, the unemployed and the unskilled.[49] According to Numsa shop stewards at SA Can:

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[44] **Chris Wiese**, interview, 26 March 1996. Numsa shop stewards seem to corroborate this perspective. Commenting on the need for worker unity, they asserted that 'for the future of the company we want to do away with racial connotations - black and white; us and them. We're all workers...'(**Sipho Shabangu and Musi Lange**, interview, 26 March 1996).

[45] Typical within this perspective is Shubane's assertion that AA is 'fundamentally discriminatory in that it judges people on the basis of race and not on the basis of the 'content of their character'.'(**Kehla Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure: Affirmative action and South Africa's search for racial equality,' *Policy: Issues and Actors* 8, no. 4 (1995): 23). Moreover, Shubane contends that barring whites from some positions 'differs little from apartheid, which derived from an assumption that whites should be entitled to exclusive benefits simply because they were white.'(Ibid., 1).

[46] **Nicoli Nattrass**, 'Dissenting Opinion on Affirmative Action by Commissioner Nattrass,' in *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, 162-163.

[47] Advocates of race-based measures often assert, yet fail to demonstrate the trickle-down effect. For instance, the BMF maintains that the development of 'a strong and responsive cadre of Black managers and executives will ensure the upliftment of both the disadvantaged worker and the Black community.'(**BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 8).

[48] Glenn Loury posits that AA is a symbolic policy, and its ability to assist poor blacks is severely limited. Moreover, 'it has become divorced from the social and economic context of racial inequality as it actually exists in our society.'(**Glenn C. Loury**, 'Performing Without a Net,' In *The Affirmative Action Debate*, edited by George E. Curry, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1996, 51). AA advocates are beginning to question whether it is justifiable 'to include an African-American who's making $100 000 per anum in the same affirmative action category as someone who's trying to get out of the ghetto...? There'd probably be more support for the latter...' (Interview with **Martine Rodriguez**, former director of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFFCP), interview by author, Washington, D.C., 31 July 1996).

[49] **Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure,'17. Pointing to the Malaysian experience sometimes bolsters this claim. Whilst AA has benefited some Malays, income disparities within the Malay group are greater than within any other ethnic group. Defining AA along ethnic lines has meant that many of the 'truly disadvantaged' have remained so

> Management affirms colour rather than practicing real affirmative action. Management is practicing affirmative action by hiring one or two blacks ... instead of affirming they're co-opting ...When the union asks about affirmative action they say that they have [one or two blacks] there, but that's not what we want. We want it for the underprivileged. Affirmative action should be where management develops the people, the underprivileged.[50]

Hence the call for developing socio-economic criteria as the chief markers of eligibility for AA. Critics such as Ramphele argue that such a departure from 'colour-coded' AA initiatives is necessary, as the latter breed a divisive 'blacker-than-thou' mentality.[51] Whilst recognizing that de facto race-based decision-making has not been eradicated, continuing to institutionalize racial differences de jure may ultimately endanger the health of a democratic government. By giving AA an socio-economic focus, past discrimination and current inequalities can be redressed without specific reference to ascribed characteristics or irreducible identities. The latter cannot be reversed, whilst the former (socio-economic position) can.[52] As Mr. Justice Goldstone maintains:

> I believe that one can find objective criteria from race both in the education field and in the employment field. One can find criteria such as bad school education ...[which] do not just assume that people deserve the benefit of Affirmative Action simply because of their skin colour. These and other criteria will enable people to be deserved Affirmative Action to get it. At the same time, they also carry with them ... an automatic end to any Affirmative Action programmes ...[A]s more and more South Africans receive a decent education and as more and more South Africans live in decent circumstances, the need for people to receive the benefits of Affirmative Action will slowly disappear.[53]

Notwithstanding the validity of this exposition, the forms of exclusion based on race and class - whilst often coincidental - are not identical. In Goldstone's rendition, a black middle class woman who attended a private (as opposed to Department of Education) school would probably be 'undeserving' of class-based AA. But she may still face discrimination. Race-neutral redistributive measures may be required to address basic needs (such as eradicating

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(**Thompson**, 'Legislating Affirmative Action,' 39).

[50] **Sipho Shabangu and Musi Langa**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[51] **Ramphele**, *The Affirmative Action Book*, 16.

[52] See **Thompson**, 'Legislating Affirmative Action,' 41; and **Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure,' 23.

[53] **Richard Goldstone**, 'Affirmative Action,' *Trends in South African Labour Law*, Taylormade Administrative Services, 1992; quoted in Thompson, 'Legislating Affirmative Action,' 41-42.

disparities in primary education). When an extra or targeted effort is needed to bring designated categories of persons into the mainstream, AA may come into play (for example, emphasizing recruitment of black undergraduates for technical courses). As Janice Franklin, a former director of the US Federal Government's Office of Personnel Management, put it: 'affirmative action is in response to problems identified over the core or basic needs. Where the line is drawn is somewhat subtle and is dependent on who is defining it and for what purpose.'[54]

Need-based programmes seem to be of a different order to AA. The two sets of programmes are geared at redressing different axis of disadvantage and discrimination, and are thus not reducible to one policy plank.[55] Comprehensive and flexible anti-discrimination measures that do not automatically privilege one variable or axis of past inequality are thus required.[56]

Contra this 'class-based' perspective, the second, forward-looking view privileges race and proposes that certain benefits be made available to all blacks who were oppressed.[57] Shubane claims that embedded within this view 'is an assumption that because all blacks suffered discrimination in the past, they should receive future, compensatory, priority in the distribution of benefits.'[58] Hence the BMF calls for a programme of AA and argues that the 'Black majority...needs to be provided with the same boots and straps as have been provided to Whites before they can be expected to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps".'[59]

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[54] **Janice Franklin**, former director of the Office of Personnel Management, interview by author, Washington,D.C., 5 August 1996.

[55] **Marquita Sykes**, National Organization for Women (NOW) racial diversity program director, interview by author, Washington,D.C., 2 August 1996.

[56] The beginnings of such an approach may be found in the Anglo-Alpha AA Agreement (December 1995).'Disadvantaged employees' are defined as 'those employees of Anglo-Alpha (including job applicants who are potential employees) who have been disadvantaged in respect of education and employment opportunities as a consequence of past legislation and/or social conditions. Women and disabled people will also be included in this definition.'('The Anglo-Alpha Affirmative Action Agreeement,' cited in **Carol Butcher**, 'The Anglo-Alpha Affirmative Action Agreement,' *Industrial Democracy Review* 4, no. 6 (December 1995-January 1996): 58).

[57] As Albie Sachs puts it: 'To the extent that the African people have been the main victims of exclusion in the past, so they will be the main beneficiaries of inclusion in the future.'(**Albie Sachs**, 'Affirmative Action and Black Advancement in Business,' in *Affirmative Action in a Democratic South Africa*, edited by Charl Adam, Johannesburg: Juta, 1993, 110).

[58] **Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure,' 10.

[59] **BMF**, 'Affirmative Action Blueprint,' 3. Johnson criticizes this vision and what he sees as current AA policies for being nothing more than 'systematic privilege conferred on one race in the labour market'(**R.W. Johnson**, 'Mandela's last dance,' *Prospect;* no. 20 (1997): 30).

Proponents of this view often harbour a desire to foster a narrow Africanist project of pre-eminence. An essentialist understanding of race is not, however, immanent in this perspective.

Many advocates of race-based AA believe that defending a non-racial agenda whilst emphasizing race leads to a paradox of AA.[60] This incompatibility thesis is articulated by, amongst others, Albie Sachs:

> The most difficult problem has been to reconcile the principle of non-racism, which seeks to avoid any reference to race, with the principle of repairing the damage done by past racism, which requires paying attention to actual and continuing patterns of racial advantage...The situation is intrinsically difficult and contradictory.[61]

But is what we face really a paradox? Or is it merely a straw man? Most champions of the incompatibility thesis collapse the ideology of non-racialism into the pretensions of colour-blindness.[62] What is thereby elided is the distinction between behaviours that do not rely on stereotyping individuals on the basis of race, and those that profess to be a-gendered or a-racial. Non-racialism as a theoretical framework (and code of conduct) does not ignore race. Instead, it refuses to use race as a proxy for other types of information (such as individual interests, abilities and moral values).

Rather ironically, the ideology of non-racialism has been plagued by intellectual laziness and, given SA's history, has been grossly undertheorised. The Congress movement defined itself as that which apartheid was not. The discourse of non-racialism was used to counter the doctrine of racism. It sought to usurp division as the central organizing principle of society. In its place, equivalences between different groups and identities were to be established, equality becoming the defining feature of the political terrain.

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[60] As Adam claims: '(t)he dominant ideology of non-racialism is said to be incompatible with racial preferential treatment...a paradox exists in the sense that, to eliminate race and gender as significant categories in public life, it is necessary to take account of the way race and gender affect everyday existence.'(**Kanya Adam**, 'South Africa has unique case of affirmative action,' *Cape Times*, 13 February 1995). Similarly, Human submits that '(t)he paradox in relation to affirmative action...is that, although race and gender have to be made an issue in terms of recruitment and development opportunities, in the day-to-day management of people, issues relating to 'culture' and gender should be down-played.'(**Linda Human**, 'Competencies for Managing Diversity: What South African Managers Need,' in *Cultural Synergy in South Africa: Weaving Strands of Africa and Europe*, edited by Melissa E. Steyn and Khanya B. Motshabi, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1996, 178).

[61] **Sachs**, 'Affirmative Action and Black Advancement,' 121.

[62] For instance, Human asserts that 'to ignore race and gender in the short term is to deny the reality of racism and sexism which exist in our society.'(**Human**, *Affirmative Action*, vi).

The rhetoric was that of the artificiality and irrelevance of race (and by extension, ethnicity). This was given concrete expression in the category 'black', a political signifier taken to refer to Africans, coloureds and Indians. Whilst the much lauded unicity of the oppressed played a key role in challenging apartheid discourse, it did not translate into organizational practice and mobilization which, by and large, occurred along racially defined lines. For instance, National Union of South African Students (Nusas) activists were white, whilst those belonging to the South African National Students Congress (Sansco) were black. It is thus no surprise that '(a) vast no-man's land has opened up between the celestial rhetoric and the racialism of our practice.'[63]

This points to yet another blindspot within the incompatibility thesis: its failure to distinguish between measures which recognize race as a salient feature of social, cultural and economic identity, and those which utilize race as a criterion upon which privileges are bestowed or withheld, which treat race as an independent variable in recruitment, selection and promotion decisions. The former measures are consistent with a non-racial vision, whilst the latter are probably not.

What both the backward- and forward-looking views share is a common underlying assumption that it is the group that must benefit from AA. As Shubane puts it: 'thinking on affirmative action has not gone beyond a group definition of the problem it seeks to address.'[64] Insisting on group solutions to inequality assumes that all blacks were identically disadvantaged by apartheid - which is different to arguing that all blacks were victims of unfair discrimination. It implies that all whites are good enough and do not require any interventions on their behalf. This obscures various other possibilities: some whites may have acquired their positions deservedly; some blacks may have advanced beyond the limits of apartheid; and it is only certain individuals within the group that will benefit from AA - these

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[63] **Hein Marais**, 'Falling down: The non-birth of non-racialism,' *Work in Progress* 93 (1993): 12). Marais questions whether non-racialism will simply become a 'social spin-off of material comfort' for a non-racial elite, or if the humanism underpinning the concept can be retained and a 'progressive', non-racial project be revitalized (Ibid., 12-13). Frank Meintjies struggles with just such an idea, claiming that '(b)ringing blacks and whites together to fight apartheid is not the same as confronting ingrained feelings of racial superiority or inferiority. As such, working for a non-racial society did not generally include developing approaches, material or models for tackling deep-seated assumptions rooted in racial ideas.'(**Frank Meintjies**, 'Confronting discrimination in organizations,' *The Innes Labour Brief* 4, no. 3 (1993): 48).

[64] **Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure,' 2.

benefits will not be distributed to, for example, the unemployed or rural black women.[65] AA advocates are silent on the selection process that will be used on a day to day basis to determine which blacks are to receive AA benefits. As Roosevelt Thomas puts it: 'what affirmative action means in practice is an unnatural focus on one group, and what it means too often to too many employees is that someone is playing fast and loose with standards in order to favor that group.'[66]

It is also unclear as to whether different types of remedies should be adopted to redress the different degrees of discrimination to which individuals were subject.[67] For all these reasons, Shubane argues that AA 'as a group-centred strategy to redress inequality, is ill-equipped for the task.'[68] Unless these concerns are addressed, there is a danger that AA will become a catch-all concept used to describe any action to redress inequality. This would render the term too vague to be of much theoretical or operational utility.

5.4 Equal Opportunities: Undermining Equality?

The Bill of Rights states that AA is a means of achieving equality: 'To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.'[69] Proscribed is (direct or indirect) unfair discrimination against anyone on one or more of the following grounds: race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.[70] For many, the ideal of equality is given expression through programmes aimed at fostering equal

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[65] **Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure,' 21-24.

[66] **R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr.**, 'From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity,' 109.

[67] **Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure,' 12.

[68] **Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure,' 12.

[69] Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, ch. 2, sec. 9. The constitution was signed into law on 10 December 1996.

[70] Subsection (5) states that discrimination on one or more of these grounds is unfair unless it is established that the discrimination is fair. The onus thus shifts from the plaintiff to the defendant. The individual no longer has to prove that the perceived discrimination is unfair. Rather, the person or organization accused of unfair discrimination needs to prove that the discrimination is fair: a more difficult task. Similarly, the Employment Equity Act states that '(w)henever unfair discrimination is alleged in terms of this Act, the employer against whom the allegation is made must establish that it is fair.'(Employment Equity Act, sec. 11(30)).

opportunities. Yet for some, the two concepts (equality and equal opportunities) are divorced. The belief is that support for equal opportunities 'could be viewed as a subtle and more insidious form of apartheid.'[71]

This proposition is bolstered by the mass volte-face of previous apartheid supporters. When faced with the prospect of AA or race-based quotas, previous (white) racists begin to espouse non-racial tenets and erstwhile sexists begin to subscribe to a non-sexist agenda.[72] The Volkstaatraad submissions on AA and equality to the Constitutional Assembly starkly illustrate this trend. To wit:

> Affirmative action is regarded as permissible only if a specific individual can show that another individual has been advantaged at his/her expense on the ground that he/she is of a different racial group...The test relates to the circumstances of an individual...and not to whether discrimination has in the past been practiced against a specific race group as a whole. The replacement of one racial group with a different racial group on a purely quota basis, is nothing less than blatant racial preference and discrimination and conflicts with the essence of the principle of non-discrimination as a fundamental right...A programme of affirmative action...cannot be reconciled with fundamental rights.[73]

Non-racialism, a central organizing ideology of the anti-apartheid struggle, is invoked to protect racial exclusion, just as the principle of non-sexism is championed to maintain male domination.[74] As Sachs puts it:

> The consequent anomaly is that the instrument being advanced to maintain the practice of inequality is the very principle of equality itself. Put another way, the concept of equal rights is becoming the main barrier to the actual enjoyment of equal rights. Whereas before inequality was justified on the grounds of the need to discriminate, now it is being legitimized on the basis of the need not to discriminate.[75]

For a society in which equality and liberty are still newly-fought-for acquisitions, it is difficult to accept that these ideals have no universal or necessary content: different groups compete to

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[71] **Sonn**, 'Afrikaner Nationalism and Black Advancement,' 2.

[72] See **Sachs**, 'Affirmative Action,' 119.

[73] **Volkstaatraad**, 'Submission to the Constitutional Assembly, Theme Committee 4 (Equality),' Cape Town: Constitutional Assembly, ca. 1995.

[74] **Sachs**, 'Affirmative Action,' 119.

[75] **Sachs**, 'Affirmative Action,' 120.

give their particular understanding the gloss of universal representation (albeit temporarily). The task of gaining such approbation is complicated by workplace strategies that employ the rhetoric of equal opportunities to mask a lack of commitment to change. As a manager at SA Insurance commented: 'there are some senior players who use the loophole of equal opportunities to not motivate affirmative action effectively because equal opps is still the softer option'.[76] This attempt to shore up the status quo comes through clearly in the following statement by a white SA Engineering supervisor: 'I don't agree with affirmative action. They're enforcing race with affirmative action and race should have nothing to do with affirmative action ...[AA] should be to get the best guy in the right place regardless of whether it's a white, *coolie*, coloured or black.'[77] In the face of these attitudes, it is unsurprising that there is widespread scepticism about the 'democratic credentials' of equal opportunities. It also helps explain the reticence to accept that the democratic terrain is up for grabs, that it allows for a diversity of political logics ranging from right-wing populism to radical democracy.[78]

5.5 The Business of Affirmative Action

Despite attempts to thwart change (such as those mentioned above) many in corporate SA have accepted the need for AA. Rather obviously, the central driving force for change has been the political transition to democracy. The business/ANC detente began in the mid-1980s. Dialogue with the ANC began as business leaders, intellectuals and influential whites realised the need to start exploring alternatives to apartheid. In September 1985, under the leadership of Gavin Relly, Harry Oppenheimer's successor as chairman of Anglo American, a group of businessmen met with Oliver Thambo and other ANC leaders in Lusaka. In 1986, Pieter de Lange, chairman of the Broederbond, met with Thabo Mbeki (then ANC director of information and advisor to Thambo) at a Ford Foundation conference in Long Island, New York. In 1987, Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, a former leader of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), took a delegation of sixty one intellectuals (mainly Afrikaners) to Dakar, Senegal, for

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[76] **Derek Schnell**, SA Insurance general manager (health care services), interview with author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995; and **Amanda Spira**, SA Insurance department manager (human resources), interview with author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995.

[77] **Carl van Staden**, SA Engineering supervisor, interview by author, Wadeville, 18 April 1996. Similarly, a white SA Insurance employee asserted that 'it would be better if affirmative action and equal opportunities were the same. We shouldn't be forced to take a non-white.'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995).

[78] See **Laclau and Mouffe**, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 168.

three days of talks with ANC leaders. This meeting resulted in a joint communique expressing unanimous support for a negotiated settlement.[79]

As these processes unfolded, vocal opposition to government policies from within the ranks of its previous supporters increased. A belief in the need to test the will(s) of the populace prior to articulating and representing them (a task the Tricameral parliament assumed upon itself) began to take hold. The face-to-face meetings with the ANC led to a de-demonization of the liberation movement. In the imagination of certain sectors of the business community, the former enemy to be destroyed was being transformed into an adversary to be challenged (and beaten - probably at the polls). For much of corporate South Africa, the writing on the wall came in 1990 with the release of Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC.

Business policies began to be articulated (although not necessarily formulated) within the rhetoric of broader political discourses. Prior to the April 1994 democratic elections, corporate leaders such as Chris Liebenberg (a future Minister of Finance, then CEO of Nedcor), spoke of 'look[ing] back on it in years to come as a watershed in our history when control by the *haves* changed to participation by the *havenots*.'[80] Safeguarding an economic structure premised on neo-classical economic tenets seems to have spurred many business leaders to refashion their rhetoric. Given that large sectors of the populace continued to experience corporate SA as apartheid in Armani, many business leaders recognized the need to be seen to be willingly participating in the country's momentous transition.

AA has thus been driven primarily by bottom-line considerations. Clifford Barrett, SA Packaging human resources director, notes that mobilizing support for AA is often contingent on winning the business case for change initiatives. This is because 'our managers are not bleeding liberals, they aren't driven by a social conscience....'[81] A 1995 study of 56 companies found that the majority of CEOs (73 percent) and human resources directors (76 percent) surveyed believe that AA 'makes good business sense.'[82] Yet, when expanding on these

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[79] See **Sparks**. *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 72-73, 86; **Thompson**. *A History of South Africa*, 243; and **Aletta J. Norval**, *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*, London: Verso, 1996, 257-259.

[80] **Chris Liebenberg**, 'A message from the Chief Executive to all the staff of the Nedcor Group,' *Nedcor Gateway Voter Education: Democracy's Building Blocks*, internal Nedcor booklet, Nedcor Strategic Alignment Division in association with Groundswell: Johannesburg, 1993, 1.

[81] **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[82] Adèle Thomas conducted the survey. See **Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 37; **Thomas**, 'Political freedom in

business reasons, only 13 percent of CEOs and a mere 3 percent of HRDs identified AA as being linked to issues of competitive advantage and business survival.[83] Slightly more promising are the findings of a joint study by the BMF and Ernst & Young. Eighty two percent of companies surveyed claimed that AA was strategically necessary, whilst 47 percent believed it improved competitive advantage.[84] Neil Cumming sums up the overall picture in his assertion that above all, AA 'must have a commercial focus - it must link to the money-making process.'[85]

As early as 1993, Sacob (the 'voice of business') declared that AA in the business sector was 'necessary and desirable'.[86] Business reasons for embarking on AA strategies can be grouped into two broad categories: internal and external factors. Internal factors include, *inter alia*, trade union pressures for worker advancement;[87] the need to counter-act the under-representation of blacks and of women in business; and the need to broaden the skills base to ensure that the current technical and managerial skills shortage does not further constrain growth.[88] Expounding on the 'common sense' reasons for implementing AA, James Smith, SA Packaging group MD, avers:

South Africa'; and **Neil Cumming**, 'A Case Study: The Myths and Realities of Affirmative Action: The SA Packaging Experience of Developing a Collection Vision,' in *Beyond Affirmative Action: Managing Diversity for Competitive Advantage in South Africa*, edited by Adèle Thomas, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1996, 70.

[83] Similarly, a survey of 1500 medium and large businesses released by the Department of Business Economics at the University of the Witwatersrand found that 68 percent of businesses believe that AA will result in no direct benefit to their organizations (survey results cited in **Francoise Botha**, 'Tokenism in business,' *Cape Times*, 28 April 1995).

[84] According to Motshabi, those companies that hire more blacks will 'have an early opportunity to develop ways of coping with cultural diversity. These organizations will have a strategic edge over slower competitors.'(**Khanya B. Motshabi**, 'Managing Cultural Diversity in a Multi-racial Workplace,' in *Educating and Developing Managers For a Changing South Africa: Selected Essays*, edited by Linda Human, Cape Town: Juta, 1991, 124). See also **Salgado**, 'Support for Affirmative Action'; **Motlhabakwe**, 'Benchmarking affirmative action,' 58-59; and **Thabo Leshilo**, 'Business lagging in affirmative action,' *Star Business Report*, 27 November 1995.

[85] **Cumming**, 'A Case Study,' 66.

[86] **Sacob**, 'A SACOB Policy on Affirmative Action,' Johannesburg: South African Chamber of Business, 13 July 1993, i. See also 'Affirmative Action Guidelines: A Summary of the Sacob Proposals on Affirmative Action,' a supplement to the King Report on Corporate Governance, Johannesburg, 29 November 1994.

[87] At SA Packaging, the 1990 PAWU strike and the company's portrayal as a union-basher forced management to reconsider their labour relations strategy. In internal company documents, this bitter nine week strike by 4 000 employees is referred to as the 'Great Strike'. It is listed as a 'milestone in the history of WCM&S in SA Packaging.' After the strike, SA Packaging embarked on a change process, initiating World Class Manufacturing and AA (**Heather King**, interview, 1 September 1995; and **Andre Pienaar**, interview, 19 March 1996).

[88] **Sacob**, 'Affirmative Action,' i - 5; **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996; **Linda Human**, 'Concluding Comments,' in *Educating and Developing Managers For a Changing South Africa: Selected Essays*, edited by Linda Human, Cape Town: Juta, 1991, 332; and **Ncaba Hlophe**, 'Managerial shortage persists,' *Star Business Report*, July 16, 1997.

> the bulk of labour we need to draw on is black and we need to recruit and train them and we won't have industrial peace if you're seen to be racist. If you take a ten year view, if you don't do this you're not going to survive...[We need to be] getting talent from blacks because it won't be whites coming in.[89]

The 1993 Sacob AA policy document presents AA as part of a non-racial elite pact or Centre-Right coalition. It states that AA should 'not be seen as a way of addressing society-wide inequality...[but] should be seen for what it is: a strategy to close ethnic and gender gaps in the middle-class and in management and ownership in the private sector.'[90] This view dovetails with much of the literature on regime change (now rather inelegantly termed 'transitology') which stresses the importance of pacts for the sustainability and consolidation of democratic transitions.[91] More to the point, however, Sacob's desire to present business as representative of the South African population at large has its roots in the race-class debate between liberals and neo-marxists (revisionists) which dominated previous eras.[92] Sacob would have located itself within the camp of those who argue(d) that racial domination was in contradiction to, and dysfunctional for capitalist accumulation. Apartheid, it is claimed, acted as an 'irrational' fetter on economic advancement.[93] This non-racial capitalism/stable democracy couplet is made explicit in the following reasoning:

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[89] **James Smith**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[90] **Sacob**, 'Background Document: Comparative Evidence Relating to Affirmative Action,' Johannesburg: South African Chamber of Business, 13 July 1993, 29-30.

[91] To give a rather crude synopsis of this approach: centre-right coalitions, organized by centrist and 'probusiness' elements of the political class and relying on middle-sector organizations and voters for support, serve to legitimate transitions which fail to fundamentally alter asymmetrical (economic) power relations. See for example **Guillermo O'Donnell**, 'Introduction to the Latin American Cases,' in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Latin America*, edited by Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, with a foreward by Abraham F. Lowenthal, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, 3-18; **Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter**, 'Defining Some Concepts (and Exposing Some Assumptions), in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, edited by Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, with a foreward by Abraham F. Lowenthal, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, 12-13; and **Robert R. Kaufman**, 'Liberalization and Democratization in South America: Perspectives from the 1970's,' in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

[92] For an overview of this 'liberal-revisionist' debate, see **Deborah Posel**, 'Influx Control and the Construction of Apartheid, 1948-1961,' D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1987, 18-29.

[93] **William H. Hutt**, *The Economics of the Colour Bar*, Andre Deutsch, 1964, 173-179 passim. For a more sophisticated rendition of this 'liberal' position, see **Merle Lipton**, *Capitalism and Apartheid: South Africa 1910-1986*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1986. For a variant of the inverse argument which stresses the functionality of apartheid for the capitalist system, see **Jack Simons and Ray Simons**, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, London: IDAF, 1983, 610-615. Nattrass reviews the controversy from an economic perspective, and examines the emergence of a potential middle ground based on social-democratic ideas (**Nicoli J. Nattrass**, 'Controversies About Capitalism and Apartheid in South Africa: an Economic Perspective,' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, no. 4 (1991): 654-677).

> Senior positions in business...are highly visible rewards in any society to which many people aspire. As long as one particular section of a population is seen to dominate these rewarding positions, those categories in the population which are under-represented will regard both the private sector and the economic system in general as illegitimate...Through appropriate forms of affirmative action, therefore, the private sector can contribute to the necessary socio-economic integration of society and to the stability of democracy.[94]

In this rendition, the threat is that those who view the economic system (capitalism) as illegitimate will similarly read the political system (albeit not yet born) as illegitimate. This claim is given credence by presenting a political form of modern society (democracy) as indistinguishable from an economic system (capitalism). The distinctions between a capitalist project and a democratic one are elided. This obfuscates analyses of the ways in which the apartheid project provided opportunities for, and set limits to the development of capitalist practices.

Critics contend that locating black advancement (or AA) programmes within the language of elite pacts serves to lay bare this strategy of co-option by other means. According to Collins:

> The nett effect of these programmes has been to create divisions and conflict on the shopfloor. Unionists and other members of the democratic movement see the advancement schemes as "tokenism" and "window dressing" and view black managers as aspirant capitalists, individualists, "fat cats" and collaborators. This is particularly so when ex-shopstewards or activists are targeted for these promotions.[95]

Whilst exposing the raw underbelly of Sacob's policy, Collins remains wedged within the National Liberation Struggle rhetoric of 'the peoples camp' (unionists and other democrats) versus 'the enemy camp' (capitalists and facists). To advance into management ranks is to become one of *them*. The unicity of the 'us' is constructed through denying multiple subject positions. Collins' analysis is fatally wedded to the marxist conceit that political and moral interests can be read off economic location. In a similar (albeit inverted) logic to that of Sacob's,

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[94] **Sacob**, 'Affirmative Action,' 4. Similarly, Bheki Sibiya, then Managing Director of the BMF, claimed: 'For the economy to grow a lot of people have to have a stake in it. If they do, they'll be committed to see it grow...This commercial rationale is the most important reason why we engage in affirmative action.'(**Bheki Sibiya**, interview, 1 September 1995). And according to Lazarus Maseko, MD of SA Tin, 'Affirmative action...(is) an incentive to get people to believe in free enterprise, and to create role models for people who've been left behind.'(**Lazarus Maseko**, interview, 12 April 1996).

[95] **Collins**, 'Affirmative action,' 43.

capitalism is imputed, a priori, with a political (undemocratic) essence. This overemphasizes historical continuity and reproduces the fallacies of the colonialism of a special type (CST) thesis. This holds that capitalism, in its very constitution, requires racial domination.[96] Amongst other conceptual and empirical deficiencies, this thesis reproduces a functionalist fallacy (viz. it assumes that because capitalism benefitted from apartheid, it created apartheid in order to accrue its benefits).

5.6 Conclusions

This chapter has examined the emergence of conflicting AA models within the context and discourses of the political transition to democracy. It has drawn attention to the ways in which this debate has become a proxy for a more fundamental contest over the political boundaries of legitimate action and discourse. This was illuminated through an overview of the race versus class-based AA debate, and the arguments against twinning the principle of equality with an equal opportunities project.

It has been argued that whilst these debates inform the institutional and moral framework within which AA will be implemented, many corporate leaders claim that the primary catalyst for initiating AA is business-related. Companies have begun to recognize the need to take advantage of the demographic changes wrought by the transition. Key amongst these is the changing racial composition of the consumer and supplier markets. Increasingly diverse markets are beginning to spur organizations to make their work force more representative of their customer and client base.[97] Ensuring the future supply of black managers has been given

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[96] **SACP**, *The Road to South African Freedom*, programme of the South African Communist Party adopted at the fifth national conference, 1962. See also **Harold Wolpe**, 'The theory of internal colonialism: the South African case,' in *Beyond the Sociology of Development: Economy and Society in Latin America and Africa*, edited by **I. Oxaal** *et al.*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975; and **Harold Wolpe**, 'Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid,' *Economy and Society* 1, no. 4 (1972). In later works, Wolpe questions the functionalist fallacy. See **Harold Wolpe**, *Race, Class and the Apartheid State*, Unesco, 1988.

[97] This is, however, contingent on industry composition, product type, and (current and future) customer profile. A Financial Mail article comments that 'it makes sense to employ more blacks in human resources and marketing and sales when the complexion of both the work force and the market is getting blacker. And indeed, FSA-Contact's responding companies report those are the most successful areas for affirmative action' ('Affirmative Action,' *Financial Mail*). This is borne out by Clifford Barrett from SA Packaging who claims that 'we can only deal with NSB [National Sorghum Breweries] because we have some senior black people to work with them.' NSB is one of the country's largest black-owned and run organizations, and in the mid-1990s was an icon of black business achievement (**Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996). SA Insurance operates within a different market. Many of its white employees believe that 'you need whites to serve whites - their market prefer to see white men.'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 22 September 1995). Another employee expressed similar sentiments: 'SA Insurance needs to decide what to do...we've been an 'A' market white man's insurance company and we're now in the new South Africa but the business end of the market is not in a position to

added impetus.

The threat of legislative sanction has also served to spur on AA initiatives. The EEA makes provision for a variety of incentives and sanctions. Key amongst these is the attempt to make access to state resources (such as tender business, the award of new licenses; direct or indirect subsidies; tax incentives; loans and grants) dependent on a good employment equity record.[98] The EEA states that any employer who applies for a contract with any organ of state must comply with the applicable chapters of the Act. Any state tender must either contain a declaration to the effect that the employer is complying with the relevant chapters of the Act or a certificate of compliance issued by the Minister. Failure to comply with the Employment Equity Act is sufficient grounds for rejection of a tender or cancellation of an existing contract.[99] The EEA also makes provision for the imposition of fines for contravening certain provisions of the Act. Fines range from R500 000 (if the employer has no record of previous contraventions) to R900 000 (for employers with four previous contraventions in respect of the same provision within three years).[100] The extent to which these (rather paltry) amounts will serve as a sufficient deterrent to contravening the Act is still a matter of conjecture.

A survey of 1500 medium to large businesses released by the Department of Business Economics at the University of the Witwatersrand found that 80 percent of businesses thought that implementing AA would help them gain favour with the government.[101] This idea is made explicit in Sacob's AA policy document that states that 'businesses require a range of functional interconnections with officialdom. Such connections and interactions are likely to

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carry out an affirmative approach - unless you're in the upper end of the market SA Insurance doesn't want to speak to you. We don't know who we are...'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 22 September 1995).

[98] For example, providing evidence of a commitment to AA and an endorsement of 'RDP philosophy' was a feature of many provincial government tenders. A Free State Government Banking Tender questions: 'Do the statements in your tender documents imply that you endorse the following principles? [Including] the equalising of opportunities of the historically disadvantaged and women...Do your personnel policies actively prevent any form of discrimination in the workplace, including in the recruitment, promotion, training on the basis of race, gender or disability?' (**SA Banking**, 'Free State Government Banking Tender'). See also **Aitken Ramudzuli**, 'Affirmative action: time to show progress,' *Star*, 27 March 1996.

[99] The State Tender Board Act (no 86 of 1986) and Tender Board regulations will be amended in the light of these provisions. See Employment Equity Act, sec. 53.

[100] Employment Equity Act, schedule 1.

[101] Cited in **Botha**, 'Tokenism in business.'

be facilitated if personnel other than whites are prominent at the interface with public service institutions.'[102] Many respondents interviewed echoed these sentiments. According to a SA Engineering employee: 'we were told in a green area meeting that affirmative action is a necessity in the company otherwise they won't get contracts or tenders because the government wants all companies to implement it.'[103]

Inconsistent findings emerge from various studies conducted to gauge whether the threat of legislative sanction has induced South African companies to adopt AA programmes.[104] Given that AA is 'read' through the optics of particular political circumstances, as these circumstances change, so may the readings of AA. This is highlighted in a survey conducted by Perry & Associates. It found that in February 1994, AA ranked number one out of twenty nine key issues facing management. By May 1995 it had slipped to eighteenth spot. In 1996, because of threatened legislation it resurfaced as the second most important strategic issue facing blue chip executives.[105] It seemed that in 1997 the pendulum had swung the other way. FSA-Contact's 1997 AA study states that in that year, there was substantial growth in the adoption of formal AA policies and, over the last five years, there had been a 157 percent increase in these programmes. Moreover, only 4 percent of their sample introduced AA

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[102] **Sacob**, 'Affirmative Action,' 5.

[103] **Mitchell Govender**, SA Engineering Material Expediter, interview by author, Wadeville, 19 April 1996. Bester commented that during a departmental AA seminar, employees were told that 'if you tender for a contract you need to attach a list of all the [AA] things you've done - therefore affirmative action...is also for the company and not just for employees.'(**Ann Bester**, SA Engineering planning assistant, interview by author, Wadeville, 19 April 1996). Similarly, a supervisor asserted that 'to get work the company has been forced by clients to put blacks in positions otherwise they won't get work...'(**Paul Laubscher**, SA Engineering supervisor, Wadeville, 18 April 1996).

[104] In 1996, a joint study by the BMF and management consultants Ernst & Young found that only 26 percent of companies surveyed had implemented AA out of fear of legislative action. More than a hundred medium and large private and parastatal organizations across various industries were surveyed. Given that participants tend to be organizations which voluntarily practice AA, the sample is skewed [Ernst & Young management services director Julian Nagy, cited in **Salgado**, 'Support for Affirmative Action'; and Black Management Forum/Ernst and Young report cited in **Motlhabakwe**, 'Benchmarking affirmative action,' 58-59).This contrasts with a survey of 1500 medium to large businesses released by the Department of Business Economics at the University of the Witwatersrand which found that 85 percent of businesses adopted AA out of a fear of legislative action (survey cited in **Botha**, 'Tokenism in business'). There does seem to be some validity to these concerns. An example is the AA policy in the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. This allows the Employment Equity Committee to ensure that current and future contracts with suppliers be amended to contain contractual obligations binding suppliers to implement AA programmes equivalent to those in the Department itself (see **Abdul Milazi**, 'Affirmative action document on the way,' *Sowetan*, 13 November 1995; and 'Affirmative action law soon: Asmal,' *Citizen*, 15 November 1995).

[105] The November 1997 Perry & Associates survey found that AA rated as the fifth most important management consideration (Perry & Associates cited in **Don Robertson**, 'Affirmative Action loses its ranking,' *Sunday Times Business Times*, 7 December 1997).

policies in response to the threat of sanctions of government imposed quotas.[106] It is therefore difficult to accurately gauge the impact of legislative efforts on levels of support for, or opposition to AA.

The nature of the afore-mentioned evidence as well as that which I collected does not lend itself to any one, definitive interpretation. Multiple reasons are advanced to explain and rationalize the implementation of AA programmes. Similarly, there is no conclusive evidence as to whether or not AA is, or is thought to be, economically advantageous. What seems to be clearer is that the transition to democracy has been accompanied by a shift in the boundaries of legitimacy. This means that a blanket rejection of AA is no longer politically feasible. The need for companies to present a socially responsible public image has become key. As Cumming asserts: AA is 'a political process...It has implications, not only for the company's productivity profile, but for its image profile.'[107] Politically unpalatable organizational demographics result in companies attempting to attract and retain the best black talent available. Chapter Six examines how these political and public relations imperatives influence the decision as to which groupings should benefit from AA. Here it will be seen that despite the legal definition of 'designated groups', designating certain categories of disadvantaged persons as AA beneficiaries is largely dependent on political considerations: Who is the perceived audience of AA policies? What is this audience's assumed expectations? What will be the organizational consequences if these expectations are not met (or at the very least, if attempts are not seen to be made to meet them)? In brief, it will be shown that these choices are in part a reflection of the struggle to define and give shape to the political boundaries of legitimacy and illegitimacy.

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[106] **FSA-Contact**, 'Affirmative Action Policies and Practices Monitor,' July 1997, 6.

[107] **Cumming**, 'A Case Study,' 68. Similarly, a SA Insurance employee asserted that 'if it's seen that SA Insurance is not buying into affirmative action then it could face loss of business. Therefore, it's imperative from social and business responsibility...'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 22 September 1995).

CHAPTER 6
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION: WHO BENEFITS?

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is primarily concerned with who benefits, and who is intended to benefit from AA. Corporate understandings of AA rest on a group definition of the problem. Who constitutes the group is not self-evident. In the main, when designating AA beneficiaries, corporate AA policy documents took their lead from the Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity, and subsequently from the Act. Following from the Green Paper, the EEA states that AA measures are to be directed at 'designated groups': Black people, women and people with disabilities.'[1] 'Black people' is a generic term which includes Africans, coloureds and Indians.[2] The disadvantage experienced by blacks, women and disabled people is not uniform, either in concept or practice.[3] This chapter suggests that the debates about AA beneficiaries roughly parallel those outlined in the previous chapter: were there vast disparities in levels of disadvantage under apartheid? If so, how should this be accounted for in AA policies? Should it translate into different levels of group privilege or should individual disadvantage take precedence? How much to differentiate within these groups to meet specific needs is still being debated.

Central to these debates is the question of how to ensure accelerated measures for designated groups without re-installing an oppressive classification system.[4] If inter- and intra-group inequalities are to be adequately targeted and addressed, AA policies cannot apply sweeping measures to all blacks or all women. This implies an emphasis on policies that disaggregate the group. This chapter suggests that these types of policy prescriptions are constrained by the political boundaries of legitimacy. These are increasingly being informed by an African nationalist desire to privilege the group as a racially defined entity. For many managers interviewed, there is a high degree of risk associated with advocating policies which countervail this tendency - AA policies which put gender on an equal par with race, for

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[1] Employment Equity Act, sec. 1(23)(e).

[2] Employment Equity Act, sec. 1(35).

[3] **BSA**, 'Affirmative action,' 1.

[4] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 4, secs. 4.2.3 - 4.2.3.2.

instance. Within the AA debate (and the parallel struggle to delineate the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate political action) downplaying gender has become a safe and legitimate course of action. As will be demonstrated below, attempts to de-emphasize coloured and Asian employees has had a more varied effect, depending on the regional and organizational context.

6.2 Not Black Enough? The "Coloured Question"

The debate as to who should be incorporated within the category of AA beneficiaries has laid bare a central faultline which began to emerge during the denouement of the national liberation struggle: who can legitimately appropriate the appellation, and self-identify as black? In practice, coloureds and Asians are often excluded from AA programmes. The findings of an AA survey of 1500 medium to large businesses released by the Department of Business Economics at the University of the Witwatersrand corroborate this. The survey found that only 13 percent of organizations identified coloureds and Indians as beneficiaries of AA.[5] This issue has caused much tension within coloured communities. Regional dynamics play a big role in this debate. It resonates most strongly in the Western Cape - home to the majority of coloureds. At SA Can, which is situated in Gauteng, black males are the prime beneficiaries of AA. This has not generated much controversy. As Piet Roos avers: 'From the manufacturing environment, what should be favoured is the black male. That's who I look at, we have no women in production...So, we have a choice between a white or black male.'[6]

Many AA programmes rely on two different (and potentially conflicting) criteria in determining beneficiaries. The first seeks to disaggregate those communities historically disadvantaged by apartheid. It relies on *levels* of past disadvantage as the primary benchmark against which future benefits are to be determined. On this criterion, blacks - who were subject to the greatest degree of oppression under apartheid - become the primary AA beneficiaries. This would be the BMF's position. Whilst including Indians and coloureds within the political category of black, the BMF asserts that 'women and men classified as African have been

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[5] Cited in **Botha**, 'Tokenism in business.' Indeed, despite objections from managers in Durban and Cape Town, SA Packaging Head Office initially only recognized black Africans as AA beneficiaries. In the last year, this position has shifted somewhat and coloureds, Indians and women now all fall within the ambit of AA (**Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996).

[6] **Piet Roos**, interview, 26 March 1996.

especially disadvantaged', and should thus be the primary beneficiaries of AA policies.[7] To the contrary, Sam Shilowa, then Cosatu general secretary, is of the opinion that disadvantage per se is sufficient as a criterion. He suggests that AA should be 'aimed at uplifting all those communities which have been historically disadvantaged by apartheid. Coloured and Indian communities would therefore be major beneficiaries of affirmative action programmes.'[8]

The second criterion is that the workforce needs to reflect regional demographics. In the EEA, two of the factor relevant to defining 'equitable representivity' (of designated groups in the workforce) are the demographic profile of the national and regional economically active population, and the pool of suitably qualified people from designated groups from which the employer may reasonably be expected to promote or appoint employees.[9] In the Western Cape, this may result in policies that privilege coloureds. However, the conventional view holds that in the Western Cape, coloureds are over-represented in corporate structures. The charge is that they benefited from the coloured labour preference policy (implemented after the NP came to power in 1948). This position has been criticised as obfuscatory: whilst coloureds were given preference over black African labour, they were still subject to discrimination.[10] Despite this objection, on the whole primacy is afforded to the first criterion (levels of past discrimination). Many respondents complain that in practice this translates into a blacks-only hiring policy.[11] As a coloured employee at SA Paper argued:

> We as coloureds go nowhere in SA Packaging - maybe we need to be black...We're qualified and we go nowhere, we won't get top jobs...When it comes to promotion, coloureds aren't being taken into account. They're taking blacks off the streets...and putting them in jobs. It's true that blacks deserve better but you don't just take him out of university and put him in a top job.[12]

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[7] **BMF**, 'Affirmative Action Blueprint,' 7.

[8] **Sam Shilowa**, 'Black economic empowerment,' 10.

[9] Employment Equity Act, sec. 42(a).

[10] See **South African Institute of Race Relations**, 'Still out in the cold,' *Frontiers of Freedom*, Third Quarter (1995): 13-14.

[11] **Henry Barclay**, SA Paper general manager, interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996; and **SA Paper employee**, focus group interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996.

[12] **SA Paper employee**, focus group interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996. Offering a dissenting view, a coloured supervisor commented that '[AA] is being dealt with very well. Management hasn't gone out window-shopping left right and centre.'(**Joe Landsberg and Ernest Schoeman**, SA Paper dayshift supervisors, interview by author, Cape Town, 1 April 1996).

Resentment arises from the charge that coloureds are simply 'not black enough'. Whilst apartheid policies were clearly applied in a differential manner, many coloureds feel that their past experiences of discrimination are being overlooked.[13] This fosters a perception of double jeopardy: under apartheid, they were not white enough, and now they are not black enough.[14] Simultaneously shunning and appropriating this conception of a schizophrenic and hybrid self, an Indian employee at SA Engineering protested that

> we were classed as blacks before but now with affirmative action we aren't black. Affirmative Action is only for blacks not for Indians - we don't stand a chance. We stand in the middle. You see vacancies in the [news]paper and before it was 'whites only' and now it's 'affirmative action'...Blacks are smiling now because they're getting some attention and whites are complaining because they're not getting attention anymore...and we are dangling in the air...[15]

6.3 Overlooking the Truly Disadvantaged?

A secondary dimension of the debate over AA beneficiaries is the charge that AA simply leads to the emergence of a small black elite.[16] The physical number of individuals who stand to benefit from these types of labour market interventions is small. Drawing on the 1994 October Household Survey statistics, the BSA claims that in Gauteng, out of an economically active population of 2.48 million, only 100 000 black people (4 percent) are in management ranks.[17] The argument is that emphasizing AA at the expense of job-creation and economic empowerment strategies merely serves to shift privilege amongst a small minority in formal sector employment.[18] The basic idea is sound, but is vulnerable to the charge that the recent economic growth has been a jobless recovery or jobless growth.[19] To imply, as does the BSA,

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[13] According to Pierre van Rensburg, human resources manager at SA Paper:'in the Western Cape there have been big debates the ANC lost the vote here [in the 1994 parliamentary elections] because of their focus on developing Africans and not coloureds...'(**Pierre van Rensburg**, interview, 1 April 1996).

[14] See **Lance Dirksen**, 'Not black enough?' *People Dynamics*, July 1995: 18-19.

[15] **Mitchell Govender**, interview, 19 April 1996. Similarly, a coloured supervisor claimed that 'here in SA Engineering, blacks are given preference over coloureds and Indians and some people feel bad about it.'(**Abdul Kala**, SA Engineering supervisor, interview by author, Wadeville, 18 April 1996).

[16] See, for example, **Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure,' 17.

[17] 'October Household Survey,' *Central Statistical Service* (1994), cited in **BSA**, 'Affirmative Action,' 4.

[18] **BSA**, 'Affirmative Action,' 4.

[19] For a critical evaluation of this and other interpretations of the labour absorptive capacity of the economy, see **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 57, 97-98.

that growth is synonymous with increased employment opportunities (particularly for the unskilled and semi-skilled) and increased numbers of blacks and women in management positions, is empirically untested.

Conversely, the BMF chooses to go on the offensive in its attempts to defend AA against this charge of elitism. To wit:

> Elitism in its negative form assumes reactionary political attitudes and aloofness from the masses. This is not necessarily the case with Black managers. One can be part of an elite without being elitist. Society in every country has an elite of one kind or another, so the emergence of an elite in South Africa is not in itself a problem.[20]

This fails to address the criticism that AA only benefits a small percentage of the population - it merely offers a defence of elites. Moreover, this defence assumes that simply because an individual is black, she will hold certain political and moral values and exhibit anti-elitist behaviour. Race is invoked as a proxy for political and moral attitudes.

6.4 Is Gender on the Agenda?

Discrimination and disadvantage along gender lines is stark. Women earn substantially lower wages than men;[21] are more likely to be unemployed;[22] and are disproportionately represented in segments of the labour market in which incomes, opportunities and working conditions are comparatively unfavourable.[23] CSS's *Manpower Survey* suggests that in 1991, women accounted for only 1.5 percent of senior engineers, 6.7 percent of architects, 19.4 percent of lawyers, and 14 percent of doctors (GPs).[24] Caution is required in interpreting these statistics. The mere

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[20] **BMF**, '*Affirmative Action Blueprint*,' 13.

[21] **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 402, 409-413. The Labour Market Commission states that despite the legislation of equal pay for work of equal value, 'the impact of these acts have been anything but effective in dealing with gender discrimination in pay.'(*Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 477).

[22] For black women, the unemployment rate in 1994 stood at an alarming 50 percent (*Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 437).

[23] **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 403-407. Occupational and sectoral segregation continue to reinforce the idea of 'women's work' and 'men's work'. As Adrian Stucke, a SA Engineering manager, put it: 'Traditionally, women were treated differently, In our environment we hardly ever find a woman in a man's role.'(**Adrian Stucke**, interview, 19 April 1996).

[24] **D. Budlender**, 'Available information on women and the labour market,' CASE Law, Race and Gender Project, Cape Town, mimeo, 1995, 13; cited in Standing, Sender, and Weeks, *Restructuring the labour market*, 407. The ILO

existence of disparaties does not, in and of itself, prove that gender discrimination has occurred. The reasons for these disparities may lie in other factors. For instance, women have on average lower levels of schooling than men,[25] and a much lower unionization rate (and hence, a weaker organized voice).[26] The Labour Market Commission notes that the gender profile of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and unions indicates that, despite their rhetoric,[27] 'they have effectively paid as little concrete attention to the question of gender equity as their corporate counterparts.'[28]

There is evidence of gender discrimination in the workplace. Many respondents report that 'women are seen as non-citizens or as second-class citizens'.[29] Apropos of this secondary status, a SA Insurance employee maintains that 'as women, you have to prove so much more than men. At lower levels, it's predominantly female; at higher levels its predominantly male.'[30] Breakwater Monitor statistics for 1995-1996 bear this out. They reveal that women account for only 12.29 percent of management, and 24.61 percent of Paterson Grade C.[31] Commenting on these statistics, Bowmaker-Falconer submits that 'neither the *Top 15* [companies] nor national

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Review notes that the CSS figures should be treated with particular reservation.

[25] **David Everatt and Mark Orkin**, *"Growing up Tough": A National Survey of South African Youth*, a report presented to the National Youth Development Conference, Broederstroom, March 1993, 11; cited in Standing, Sender, and Weeks, *Restructuring the labour market*, 402.

[26] **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 413-414.

[27] For example, George Nkadimeng, Cosatu vice-president, asserts that both black and white women should be designated as AA beneficiaries (**George Nkadimeng**, interview, 7 March 1996).

[28] *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 474. What efforts there have been have tend to be rather ad hoc. Gestures aimed at fostering gender equity include the Chemical Workers Industrial Union's (CWIU) 1991 resolution calling for an end to gender discrimination in the workplace and within unions themselves; a May 1992 Saccawu (first-ever) National Gender Seminar; and Cosatu's Sexual Harassment Code of Conduct and Procedure adopted by a Cosatu Executive Committee meeting held on 26-27 May 1995 (see **Alperson**, 'Redefining affirmative action,' 38-40; **Miriam Altman and Patricia Kumalo**, 'Confronting sexual harrasment,' *SA Labour Bulletin* 19, no. 3 (1995): 58-60; and *Cosatu Sexual Harassment Code of Conduct and Procedure*, internal memo circulated to all affiliates and Cosatu regions, Johannesburg: Cosatu, 31 May 1995).

[29] **Grace Mokoena**, interview, 6 September 1995. As a SA Insurance employee submitted: 'the problem of gender is across all races'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 22 September 1995).

[30] **SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995. Echoing these sentiments, a bookkeeper at SA Engineering commented that 'with the management we've got here, women will get nowhere. There are no women managers...Management is just not interested in women. All the men have high positions in the offices and company cars.'(**Marie Verbaan**, interview, 19 April 1996).

[31] *Breakwater Monitor*, September 1996, 21-22.

samples have made major strides in the area of developing and promoting women.'[32] In 1996, black women held a negligible 0.38 percent of directorships, and white women a mere 1.09 percent. White men provided the bulk of directors (94.27 percent).[33] These statistics need to be qualified, however. Soggot and Wadula point out that the number of directorships held by white women increased 229 percent from 1995, but just 29 percent for black male directors. Hence their assertion that '(b)oardroom affirmative action has favoured sex above race this year'.[34]

What many respondents perceive as a widespread reticence to promote women may be a contributing factor to these gender disparities. According to Clifford Barrett, SA Packaging human resources director:

> there has been more resistance to women then there has been to blacks...Apart from most white males being racist, they're sexist as well and hold the same prejudices against women that they do against blacks...There's as much as or more fear of managing women then blacks.[35]

Most AA policy statements cast a sideward glance towards women as beneficiaries, paying lip service to gender equality whilst implementing AA along racial lines. As Innes notes, 'business tends to emphasize the race issue and gender, if mentioned at all, is relegated to a secondary role.'[36] One exception is South African Breweries (SAB), whose Three Year Business Plan for 1996-1998 includes women as AA beneficiaries and sets specific targets for female employees by grade.[37] On the whole, however, gender is not a *de facto* consideration in AA appointments. As Dan Sebake, SA Tin human resources manager, claims: 'there's been a complete switch from white male domination to black male domination. I haven't seen

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[32] *Breakwater Monitor*, September 1996, 43.

[33] Figures taken from Robin McGregor's *Directory of Directors*; cited in **Mungo Soggot and Patrick Wadula**, 'Women sprint their way up the corporate ladder,' *Business Day*, 1 February 1996.

[34] **Mungo Soggot and Patrick Wadula**, 'Boardrooms favour gender over race,' *Business Day*, 1 February 1996.

[35] **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[36] **Duncan Innes**, 'Green Paper on employment equity looks beyond race,' *Sunday Independent*; 15 December 1996. Commenting on recent black appointments, Numsa shop stewards at SA Tin noted 'that's where it ends with affirmative action - nothing has been done with gender or on the ladies side. Changes are only from the male side.'(**Lucas Molwane and Joe Ngema**, SA Tin Numsa shop stewards, interview by author, Johannesburg, 24 April 1996).

[37] Cited in **Innes and Davies**, 'Affirmative Action in the Workplace,' 18.

anything about gender in action.'[38] Attitudes have changed little since a 1989 study in which only 12.6 percent of respondents (white English-speaking male managers) considered it necessary to have AA for women.[39] According to Henry Barclay, SA Paper general manager, 'the management team is male and [when it comes to] affirmative action they think black, not women'.[40] In the AA debate broadly, gender issues are marginalized and overlooked. By valorizing race, there is a danger that AA will be conceptualized simply as a programme for black advancement.[41]

The status of white women in AA programmes generates much controversy. Some respondents believe that despite white women's underrepresentation at management and director levels, they were privileged by apartheid. They are thus not in need of any AA.[42] The suggestion is that black African women, the most underrepresented group of all, should be the sole targets of any gender-directed AA.[43] Compounding the antipathy towards white woman co-opting the AA agenda is the notion that white women are given preferential treatment over blacks in selection and promotion decisions. According to Grace Mokoena: 'they'd rather have white women than Africans and they'd rather have coloureds and Indians than Africans. Whatever's closer to them they prefer...'[44] Survey results do not bear this out. Breakwater Monitor statistics based on the rate of change in a longitudinal sample of 64 organizations from April 1994-March 1996 found that black, coloured and Asian (BCA) women account for 39 percent of all women employees in the sample. However, they show the greatest positive

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[38] **Dan Sebake**, interview, 25 April 1996. Similarly, speaking at a Tribute magazine forum, Delisiwe Dludlu, a management consultant, claimed that '(a)ffirmative action tends to be there for the black male, not the black female. White corporate South Africa tends to assume that if they are looking for an affirmative action candidate, they are looking for a man.' (**Delisiwe Dludlu** quoted in Ross Herbert, 'Affirmative action "has yet to benefit women",' *Star Business Report*, 22 August 1995).

[39] **H. Human and F. Allie**, 'Attitudes of White English-speaking Managers to the Advancement of Women in Business,' *IPM Journal*, March 1989: 22-24; quoted in Sarah Fischer, 'Placing women on the affirmative action agenda,' *People Dynamics*, May 1995: 23-24.

[40] **Henry Barclay**, interview, 2 April 1996.

[41] See **Fischer**, 'Placing women on the agenda,' 23. According to Bheki Sibiya, then MD of the BMF, AA has three dimensions:race, gender and disability. As race 'constitutes 80 percent of the problem', this is the BMF's sole focus (**Bheki Sibiya**, interview, 1 September 1995).

[42] According to Piet Roos, SA Can operations manager: 'White women aren't discriminated against - they've got all the opportunities...we don't have affirmative action for white women.'(**Piet Roos**, interview, 26 March 1996).

[43] **IDASA**, *Making Affirmative Action Work*, 9.

[44] **Grace Mokoena**, interview, 6 September 1995.

growth: 15 percent as opposed to 1 percent for BCA employees overall. During this period, white representation declined by 4 percent.[45] Isaac Nkomo, an ex-unionist and manager at SA Packaging head office, offered his interpretation of gender and racial politics in the boardroom:

> There are lots of white women who've been performing for years and they aren't promoted...Affirmative action became a buzzword when blacks became accepted into the mainstream and we left aside white women...They're seen as sex symbols and nothing else...White women are qualified to be up there...but the white men don't want white women up there because they'll challenge the status quo and power relations...These companies put some black person up there on the Board and that person is not qualified...and when the Board talks they just agree because they don't know what they're talking about. So they're just a rubber stamp and they don't challenge the status quo in any way. That's why these Boards will rather have blacks than white women.[46]

Clearly the distinctions between, and vast differences in the level of discrimination experienced by white and black women need to be reflected in different types of AA programmes. A primary obstacle white women face is the absence of corporate sponsors. As Henry Barclay, SA Paper managing director put it: 'she hasn't got anyone pushing for her - male managers will push for male candidates and male appointments.'[47] Conversely, black woman will have been subject to many forms of extra-labour market disadvantage and discrimination. White women could benefit from anti-discrimination initiatives, for instance, whereas black women could be the targets of more aggressive forms of AA. In light of the general lack of focus on gender equity, however, these debates seem to be of secondary importance.

The increasingly popular African nationalist project does not accord primacy to gender equality. Therefore, in meeting the expectations of this vocal audience, AA policies do not need to foreground gender. Female employees have, on the whole, greeted this neglect of gender with a rather surprising silence.[48] An analysis of the state of the women's movement in

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[45] *Breakwater Monitor*, September 1996, 41. Similarly, *Women in Business*, a survey by Quest personnel group found that whilst black men and women benefit from AA, white women are overlooked (survey results cited in **Zilla Efrat**, 'White women come third in equality's race,' *Sunday Times Business Report*; 29 October 1995).

[46] **Isaac Nkomo**, interview, 5 March 1996.

[47] **Henry Barclay**, interview, 2 April 1996.

[48] According to James Smith, female employees are 'not making any noise at the moment...Gender is not a big issue, I don't hear white women being disgruntled.'(**James Smith**, interview, 17 April 1996).

SA and the future direction of a feminist agenda is outside the ambit of this thesis.[49] Suffice it to note that whilst many female respondents related experiences of work-place discrimination, few seemed willing to voice these openly. Fear of increased harassment and victimization may prevent some women from taking action to rectify the problem. Others seem uncomfortable with pursuing gender questions. Given that it does not confer political kudos, gender is not a popular cause to advocate. This is not to suggest that articulating gender-based projects has become an illegitimate course of action. The political boundaries of legitimacy are fluid enough to encompass demands for women's rights. The idea of privileging the racial group a priori has not, as yet, gained universal acceptance. A coherent focus to a national women's campaign could potentially change the boundaries of the debate about who benefits from AA. However, as Roseline Nyman, Naledi gender researcher commented: 'Women's struggles are dispersed - this period offers a lot of potential and we're missing the boat.'[50]

6.5 Conclusions

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the debates about who should benefit from AA. It has shown that this is dependent on both pragmatic and political considerations. As was demonstrated in Chapter Five, there is growing consensus in the corporate world that hiring and promoting black candidates is a sensible and appropriate course of action. This chapter has shown that the category 'black' is increasingly defined along strictly racial grounds. The 'coloured question' highlights the increasing significance of race and the declining salience of ethnic differences. The African nationalist rhetoric that is increasingly permeating political discourse has made it safe to pursue and advocate this race-based AA.

The section on gender has drawn attention to the fear that unless the (initial) focus is on race, AA will be watered-down through a proliferation of target groups. The worry is that by broadening the definition of AA beneficiaries, difference and disadvantage will be equalized, and the critical need for black advancement will be neglected.[51] This would, in turn, obscure

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[49] See for instance **Fayeeza Kathree**, 'Where have all the women gone?' *Agenda*, no. 24 (1995): 21-26; and **Thuli Madonsela**, 'Beyond putting women on the agenda,' *Agenda*, no. 24 (1995): 27-38.

[50] **Roseline Nyman**, interview, 28 March 1996.

[51] See for example **Linda Human**,'"Black Advancement", Affirmative Action and Managing Diversity: What South Africa can learn from the USA,' 323; *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 474; and **Keith Rosmarin**, 'Affirmative action in the USA: Learning points for South Africa,' *The Innes Labour Brief* 5, no.1 (1993): 47.

the extent to which some axes of inequality are more onerous than others, and that bearers of different identities are subject to varying degrees of discrimination in particular societal, historical or situational contexts. These fears are not borne out in practice. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, an outcome of the move to define AA beneficiaries along strictly defined racial lines is an undue emphasis on targets and quotas as a central plank of AA initiatives.

CHAPTER 7
THE WORKINGS OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

7.1 Introduction

There is growing consensus in the corporate world that hiring and promoting black candidates (narrowly defined) is a sensible and appropriate course of action. As was demonstrated in Chapter Six, the debates about who should benefit from AA are dependent on both pragmatic and political considerations. In the main, AA beneficiaries are defined along strictly racial lines. An outcome of this move to privilege race a priori is an emphasis on targets and quotas. This chapter surveys the arguments in support of, and those against implementing targets. In particular, it questions whether AA has been burdened with the expectation that its achievements will extend beyond the fostering of equality of opportunity to guaranteeing the equality of results.

Targets and quotas are one of the most controversial aspects of AA. According to a joint study by the BMF and management consultants Ernst & Young (released in 1995), 82 percent of respondent companies rejected quotas.[1] The Sacob AA policy document considers quotas as 'harmful and counter-productive', claiming that they 'are likely to involve either discrimination in reverse and/or the lowering or erosion of performance standards in a company or organization.'[2] Introducing legislated quotas immediately is a uniformly unpopular idea. Many believe such an approach would foster a climate of 'number-crunching'.[3] This is partially consistent with the EEA which does not impose quotas, but mandates AA in order to ensure the 'equitable representation' of designated

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[1] The study, conducted amongst approximately 2100 enterprises, was initiated in 1994. Its findings were released in 1995 (Black Management Forum/Ernst and Young Report, cited in **Salgado**, 'Support for Affirmative Action').

[2] **Sacob**, 'Affirmative Action,' 7.

[3] As Mpho Makwana, then Equal Opportunities Director at the Department of Labour, argued: 'It is not just a question of numbers, but rather a question of changing the environment in which people have to operate' (**Mpho Makwana**, quoted in Hélène de Villiers, 'Optimizing equity,' *People Dynamics* 14, no. 2 (1996): 15). Critics of quotas point to Malaysia. Whilst AA has improved the economic positions of Malays (for example, ownership of corporate assets is one such indicator that has improved), quotas have engendered much bitterness and racial tension amongst non-Malays. Tokenism is also evident:many purportedly Bumiputra companies in fact continue to be controlled by Chinese or Indians (**Ian Emsley**, *The Malaysian Experience of Affirmative Action: Lessons for South Africa*, with a foreword by Karim Raslan, Cape Town: Human & Rousseau Tafelberg, 1996: 40-41, 54; and **Thompson**, 'Legislating Affirmative Action,' 39).

groups in all categories and levels in the workforce. The Act states that measures to achieve such representivity include 'preferential treatment and numerical goals, but exclude quotas.'[4]

The precise meaning of the term 'equitable representation' remains vague. Whilst the term is not defined in the Act, the factors relevant to equitable representation can be gleaned from the Director'-General's compliance review. These include the demographic profile of the national and regional economically active population, and the available skills pool. In place of legislated quotas, the Act seeks to create a basis for extensive consultation between employers, employees and trade unions in order that they will set numerical goals to achieve 'equitable representation' based on the means and constraints of their specific workplace.[5] Caution is required, however. If a lack of representivity is taken as proof of discriminatory intent or as indicative of unintentional discriminatory acts that have a differential (or adverse) impact against blacks, the hallmarks of AA may become a focus on group differences and numbers of blacks employed.[6] Another rather worrying lacuna in the EEA is the absence of any mention of a defined termination point for the suggested measures.[7]

Lack of government capacity to effectively monitor the implementation of employment equity laws may circumscribe its enforcement authority. Many have sought to limit the proliferation of agencies to advise, monitor and sanction the private sector in the area of AA.[8] Institutions and persons which the Act mandates to fulfil these functions include the

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[4] Employment Equity Act, sec. 15(3).

[5] Employment Equity Act, sec. 42(a).

[6] The US experience suggests this outcome. See **Skrentny**, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action*, 93, 115.

[7] The experiences of Malaysia and India are cautionary. In both countries AA provisions which were initially seen as temporary have assumed a political life, and hence permanence, of their own. In Malaysia, it is now an offence to discuss reform of the positive discrimination provisions of the constitution (**Thompson**, 'Legislating Affirmative Action,' 39).

[8] The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is instructive in this regard. Since its inception, the EEOC has lacked enforcement authority and insufficient resources have circumscribed its effectivity. Categories of protected individuals have increased (for example, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 gives civil rights protection to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, sex, colour, national origin, age, and religion). As a result, charges laid have spiralled, but there has been no commensurate increase in resources. According to an EEOC official: 'we're all victims of the trend to downsize government. I don't think that anyone intends to...emasculate us, we're just seen as part of the government...Therefore, we're hurt by the general American attitude towards government right now.'(**Sheldon Gardner**, attorney advisor with the Office of Program Operations, Equal Employment Opportunity

Director-General; the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA); a Labour Inspectorate; the Labour Court; and a Commission for Employment Equity.[9] Criticizing what are perceived as *dirigiste* policies, the BSA questions the practicality of monitoring the approximately 193 000 companies, 280 000 closed corporations and numerous unregistered concerns. Critics of increased state regulation also point to limited state resources and the need to avoid duplicating private sector monitoring mechanisms already in place.[10]

7.2 Understanding Support for Targets

Proponents of targets advocate their use as a remedy for the chronic under-representation of blacks in managerial positions.[11] Organizations such as the BMF encourage the implementation of quotas ('goals or numbers that must be met at all cost'). The call is for these to be enforceable in law: 'International and local experience has proven that voluntary targets and quotas do not work and that one cannot rely on good faith alone when it comes to asking employers to implement affirmative action.'[12] They point to the apartheid division of labour which is starkly reflected in all sectors. According to the South African Labour Flexibility Survey (SALFS), in 1995 blacks accounted for 77.1 percent of unskilled workers in the manufacturing sector, but a mere 3.4 percent of managerial employees. By contrast, whites accounted for 1.8 percent of unskilled workers, and 86.5 percent of managerial employees.[13] This can only be countered with closely specified and keenly monitored targets. Hence the BMF's claim that 'unless targets are set, the

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Commission, interview by author, Washington,D.C., 24 July 1996). See also **Skrentny**, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action*, 123-125, 190, 206-207; and Titles I and V of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Pub. L. 101-336) (ADA), as amended (U.S.Code. vol. 42, secs.12101, 12112).

[9] Employment Equity Act, sec. 35, sec. 43, sec. 46, and sec. 49.

[10] Private sector mechanisms include the Breakwater Monitor, jointly managed by UCT Graduate School of Business and 130 leading SA organizations; and the new JSE listing requirements. These stipulate that companies will have to set out in their published financial statements the extent to which they comply with the King Committee's Code of Corporate Practices and Conduct, clause 12 of which states that an AA programme should be part of each company's business plan (see **BSA**, 'Affirmative Action,' 2, 7; and *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*; chap. 8, secs. 486-489).

[11] See for example **BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 22.

[12] **BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 12, 22; and *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, secs. 460-462.

[13] SALFS (1995) cited in **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 392-393.

affirmative action process is doomed to failure.'[14]

The argument is that targets drive business and if AA is to be dealt with as a business strategy, the same logic should apply.[15] This is borne out by Francois Theron, SA Insurance's training and development divisional manager, who claims that at Liberty, 'affirmative action is not driven like business objectives...'[16] Given senior managers' reluctance to treat AA with the seriousness required, the strategy is limited. For this reason, Clifford Barrett, SA Packaging group human resources director, asserts that setting targets is crucial:

> [It] gives you a check of the affirmative action health of the organization...How can you ask a whole bunch of white managers to bring in a whole lot of dark people who'll take over their jobs?[17]

The BMF ultimately wishes to see a situation in which employees at all levels reflect the demographic profile of the South Africa population at any given time.[18] Attainment of this target will be 'the final exit point' for AA programmes and monitoring.[19] To this end, the BMF has devised the 'Basotho Hat Formula' for AA targets. The aim is for 50 percent of junior managers and 30 percent of senior managers to be black by the year 2000.[20] These targets have been adopted by a number of organizations.[21] In 1990, the National African

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[14] **BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 24.

[15] As Sibiya, then MD of the BMF, put it: 'if you use anything else it may just be [seen as] fuzzy' (**Bheki Sibiya**, interview, 1 September 1995; and **BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 23-24).

[16] **Francois Theron**, SA Insurance training and development divisional manager, interview by author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995. According to an employee, 'amongst the top execs, there's no black representation so no-one is there at the executive level to push the process...'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995).

[17] **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[18] **BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 24.

[19] **BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 24.

[20] By the year 2000, the following percentages of employees should be black: 80 percent of trainees; 70 percent of supervisors; 50 percent of junior managers; 40 percent of middle managers; 30 percent of senior managers; 20 percent of executive directors; and 30 percent of non-executive directors (**BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 25-26).

[21] According to Bheki Sibiya, 'a number of companies have openly adopted the BMFs Basothu Hat Targets: for example, Nampak, Eskom and the IDT all have the BMFs targets as their official policy.'(**Bheki Sibiya**, interview, 1 September 1995). By January 1997, approximately 25 percent of Eskom's managers were black. The aim is to ensure that by the year 2000, 50 percent of management staff (in C-upper and F band Patterson levels)

Federated Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NAFCOC) adopted their own formulation of fixed targets for black advancement.[22]

Given the current backlog in education, the dearth of suitably qualified black candidates, and limited employment opportunities, these targets may need to be revised to remain achievable. The BMF grudgingly accepts this.[23] Yet this complicates their position and renders it internally inconsistent. On the one hand, full demographic representivity will signal the 'final exit point' for AA. On the other, the BMF accepts the need for a definite time frame and termination point for AA programmes. As Bheki Sibiya, then MD of the BMF, put it: 'Our focus on affirmative action is of limited duration - till 2005 (for 10 years, 1995-2005). By 2005 let us have achieved a critical mass and then let affirmative action not be on the national agenda because in some instances it's divisive.'[24] Through setting this end point a priori, the objective of demographic representivity is called into question.

This inconsistency may be, in part, a function of the BMF's attempts to appeal to what they perceive as different audiences and address the assumed expectations of those audiences. In order to retain its legitimacy within the eyes of the business community, the BMF needs to take cognisance of the moral considerations undergirding the AA debate.[25] Key amongst these is that group differences will be given preference and individual rights suspended as long as this is a *temporary* state of affairs designed to achieve a morally good end (viz. greater equality). The BMF needs to assure this audience of its good faith, and to give a commitment that this end point will not be constantly deferred. These moral

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are black (**Eskom**, 'Affirmative Action Programme,' *Newsbrief: the international newsletter from ESKOM, South Africa's electricity utility*, no. 20 (1997): 3).

[22] These targets were adopted in the form of a resolution at Nafcoc's Sixth Summit Conference in October 1990: 30 percent board members of companies listed on the JSE to be black; 40 percent of shares on the JSE to be black-owned; 50 percent of the value of their outside purchases must come from black owned suppliers and contractors and at least 60 percent of top management in JSE-listed companies should be black (See **Sacob**, 'Background Document,' 12; and **Nkuhlu**, 'Affirmative Action,' 16).

[23] **BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 26.

[24] **Bheki Sibiya**, interview, 1 September 1995. Similarly, the BMF document states: 'it is crucial to define the point at which organizations exit from affirmative action programmes. Unless this is done, the process runs the real risk of turning into reverse discrimination rather than reversing discrimination.'(**BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 23).

[25] For an analysis of the ways in which morality, cultural meanings and audience expectations influence the boundaries of legitimacy within which political policies are formulated, see **Skrentny**, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action*, 231-242.

considerations need to be balanced with the interests of another perceived audience - those who demand fidelity to a vision of morality which presents race as a legitimate basis of decision-making. Once again, as revealed in Chapter Five, debates about AA become a proxy for contests over rival visions of a new social order.

7.3 Targets in Practice: A Brief Appraisal

As noted above, the EEA makes provision for targets or 'numerical goals' and indeed, most large companies have some form of targets in place.[26] In the case studies, the pattern is for the corporate head office (or, in some cases, the divisions) to formulate guidelines for AA targets. These are distributed to the various operations which motivate for numbers, review them annually, and implement the targets at plant level.[27] According to Dan Sebake, SA Tin human resources manager:

> Because we're not independent at all, we're part of a larger Group the Group will lay down guidelines and we'll be expected to follow them...Targets are in place (from the Group) and we follow them. There are financial incentives.[28]

The SA Packaging case illustrates that it is often unjustified to present targets as the 'softer' option. Sanctions and rewards can attach to targets, just as they do to quotas. Whilst accountability for AA can be built into the process via financial incentives, these may, in turn, generate their own problems.[29] Dan Sebake purports that there are two difficulties with AA:

> The first is the incentive scheme: if you've met your quota or target the people who benefit tend to be management and not necessarily the organization. Therefore, one can turn the whole thing into a personal agenda of individuals...And two, there are no disincentives. Therefore the whole thing becomes a farce and people

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[26] *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*; chap. 8, sec. 461.

[27] Pierre van Rensburg, human resources manager at SA Paper, commented: 'There's no plant based affirmative action policy but the Group has one and we use that as a guideline and apply those targets in this region. We have an annual review and motivate for black numbers for the next year - we set targets for the next financial year and then review them annually...We try very hard to appoint a black person' (**Pierre van Rensburg**, interview, 1 April 1996).

[28] **Dan Sebake**, interview, 25 April 1996.

[29] Issues pertaining to systems of monitoring and accountability, including financial (dis)incentives, are discussed in Chapter Eight of this thesis.

> say operation x is doing very well therefore don't upset the apple-cart and they continue giving blacks meaningless jobs.[30]

These views were echoed by respondents at SA Paper, many of whom believe that getting the numbers right is all that matters because 'the GM [General Manager] here is judged on the amount of non-whites he employs...'[31]

At SA Engineering, the Groups AA prescription is more broad, allowing AA plans and the exact composition of 'realistic targets for future achievements' to be determined at company level.[32] According to Clive Evans, SA Engineering's general manager: 'it's a Group requirement to have an affirmative action policy, committee, and targets and goals - and we can't ignore Head Office...'[33]

In line with what is becoming common practice, the case study companies monitor staff strength by skills, sex and race. These workforce profiles often fail to provide disaggregated job group profiles. AA figures may be inflated by broadbanding occupational levels (particularly management) and including coloureds and Asians within the category of 'black'.[34] SA Insurance stands accused of this practice. The charge is that 'Hay 6 [occupational grade] has been included into the management level - which it wasn't previously - because there are lots of blacks and coloureds at that level.'[35] According to an employee, it is done 'to make their statistics look good...it's a dirty trick on SA Insurance's behalf.'[36]

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[30] **Dan Sebake**, interview, 25 April 1996.

[31] **Cedric Meiring**, SA Paper process engineer, interview by author, Cape Town, 1 April 1996; and **Piet Farber**, SA Paper engineering superintendent, interview by author, Cape Town, 1 April 1996. Dismissing this belief, Henry Barclay claimed that 'there's not much validity to this fear.'(**Henry Barclay**, interview, 2 April 1996). However, as James Smith, group MD, admitted: 'There were some penalties for some of the guys down there in the Western Cape [for not recruiting sufficient numbers of blacks]... we've got to be very sensitive. We must be seen to be recruiting whites, blacks and coloureds of talent...and if that's a coloured then we must promote him and you can't put a lightweight black over him - that's wrong.'(**James Smith**, interview, 17 April 1996).

[32] **SA Contractors**, 'Affirmative Action Policy: Executive Brief,' internal company memo, Johannesburg: 28 March 1995.

[33] **Clive Evans**, interview, 18 April 1996.

[34] **Motlhabakwe**, 'Benchmarking affirmative action,' 58-59.

[35] **SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 20 September 1995.

[36] **SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 20 September 1995.

To complete an assessment of workforce composition, an availability profile and a job transaction profile are required. According to Human, the former facilitates comparison between the job group profile and the representation of qualified blacks and women in the external labour pool; whilst the latter traces the progress of blacks and women within the organization.[37] The EEA stipulates that in conducting an analysis of the workforce (which in turn will inform the development of employment equity plans), such information needs to be collected.[38] In the absence of such data, the targets that are formulated and introduced tend to be very general and fail to differentiate by job grade or level.[39] General percentage increases may conceal the over- or -under-representation of AA groupings in particular job grades. Indicators of systemic discrimination in specific occupations or operational areas may be similarly obscured.

In many companies there is confusion as to whether targets exist in the organization and as to what these targets are. Recruitment systems vary, with most companies giving preference to black applicants. This latter requirement is implemented with different degrees of flexibility. The corporate rhetoric is that the skills necessary for the job, the size of the qualified external and internal applicant pool, and future staffing opportunities are all taken into account.[40] Yet as will be shown, rhetoric does not translate easily into organizational practice.

7.4 Understanding Resistance to Targets

Many respondents are critical of targets, arguing that they lead to tokenism, inefficiency and declining standards. They are charged with promoting a culture of entitlement. The majority of SA Can respondents (black and white, workers and managers) and many at

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[37] **Human**, *Affirmative Action: A Practical Guide*, 25.

[38] Employment Equity Act, sec. 15(4).

[39] For example, SA Packing's (divisional) targets for the period 1996 2000 specify three categories: management, skilled and apprentices. This is not to suggest that the individual SA Packaging operations rely on similarly broad categories. Moreover, SA Packaging's black management caucus devises targets which specify job grades ('AA Targets - BMC Proposals,' internal SA Packaging memo, Johannesburg, SA Packaging's Black Management Caucus, 25 April 1996).

[40] **Piet Roos**, interview, 26 March 1996.

SA Paper do not believe in setting targets or quotas.[41] Appointing individuals without the necessary skills is seen to be meaningless, resulting in window-dressing. Under pressure to include blacks in the higher echelons of management, companies have put in 'show blacks' and have left skewed power relations untouched. The claim is that in order to reach their targets

> companies will appoint additional jobs and the present incumbents will still keep their old jobs...The person will be seen as a token with no-one working for, or with him...This is happening in one or two other SA Packaging divisions...These divisional managers want to impress James Smith [SA Packaging MD] and fill their targets.[42]

There is widespread opposition to tokenism, and the practice does not seem to be widespread. At SA Paper, many respondents believe that AA candidates are incompetent, inexperienced, and have been hired solely on the basis of their skin colour.[43] According to managers interviewed:

> [AA] was virtually legislated. You couldn't hire unless someone was black - African black. And it ended up with us taking on incompetent people. If I want to appoint a coloured I have to ask Head Office...There has been a tapering of radicalism: in Stage One we had to employ a black otherwise employ no-one; in Stage Two we had to employ a black and if not then you can employ a coloured. Things have quietened down...you can now hire anyone that's competent. But jobs have been freezed. Therefore we aren't employing anyone.[44]

Wholesale group preferences fail to account for two possible difficulties: firstly, blacks who benefit from these posts may not be the same individuals who were denied opportunities in the past; and secondly, whites who are barred from these posts might not

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[41] Many respondents resent AA because they believe it sacrifices competency and experience. According to a coloured middle manager at SA Paper, 'the black person gets promoted to a level of incompetence. We've seen this in SA Packaging. They [blacks] don't have expertise or experience.'(**Cedric Meiring**, interview, 1 April 1996).

[42] **Piet Roos**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[43] According to a white employee: 'A white man is old and a black person is in the blacks and coloureds will come in and retrench me.'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 2 April 1996). And according to a (white) SA Insurance employee: 'There's a rumour I heard that SA Insurance employed a Negro [viz. African-American] just to have a black face' (**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 22 September 1995).

[44] **SA Paper employee**, focus group interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996. Shrinking employment opportunities further complicate attempts to implement AA. This is examined in Chapter Eight.

be the same individuals who benefitted from past discriminatory employment practices.[45] Even those who endorse the use of quotas caution against using them as the main means of redressing the legacy of apartheid injustices and inequalities.[46] Whilst race and gender should be seen as relevant factors in appointments, Albie Sachs avers that '(b)lackness should never become a property right in itself as whiteness became'.[47]

Many respondents are concerned that AA policies are simply about meeting targets, and bypass development and training needs.[48] This worry was echoed throughout the case studies. According to Numsa shop stewards at SA Can:

> Numsa says 'yes' to affirmative action and 'no' to co-option. People should be developed and only those people who deserve to be in those positions should be there. There shouldn't be tokenism.[49]

This position seems to be in line with broader Cosatu policy which envisages AA as part of an economic reconstruction programme designed to have positive spin-offs for all workers. Sam Shilowa, then Cosatu general secretary, rejects 'any attempt to abuse affirmative action to create racial divisions between workers.' He submits that merely replacing whites with blacks 'is tokenism which distorts the whole purpose of affirmative action.'[50]

An additional problem in implementing rigid, output-based quotas is that it erodes motivation and performance levels among those who do not fall within the target group(s) and who feel that the value of their qualifications and experience is devalued.[51] As a SA

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[45] **Shubane**, 'The Wrong Cure,' 18.

[46] **Albie Sachs**, 'Reflections on Quotas,' in *Affirmative Action in a Democratic South Africa*, edited by Charl Adam, Johannesburg: Juta, 1993, 142.

[47] **Sachs**, 'Reflections on Quotas,'143.

[48] According to Thabo Molefe, the SA Tin World Class consultant, AA is a two-pronged process: bringing in external black appointments ('which is symbolic'), and 'developing guys on the shopfloor to get better...multi-skilling, prior learning...and career pathing. Without this, you can forget about any real affirmative action. This'll take a longer time than this symbolic stuff...The company is going about it in a bad way by focusing only on the top, senior levels.'(**Thabo Molefe**, interview, 25 April 1996).

[49] **Elias Mashilo**, interview, 27 March 1996.

[50] **Shilowa**, 'Black economic empowerment,' 11.

[51] **Sacob**, 'Affirmative Action,' 8-9.

Paper respondent put it:

> Quotas leads to inefficiency because people who're in jobs now are under the constant threat of lack of job security. If you're white or coloured, you feel the company would love to replace you with a black. Therefore it's very difficult to keep highly motivated staff or to get them to put in that extra bit.[52]

The way in which AA is dealt with has severe implications for morale, loyalty and performance levels of existing employees. Indeed, the EEA seeks to balance or weigh the job prospects and rights of non-designated groups (often the existing incumbents) against the job prospects and rights of designated groups. The Act attempts to ensure this balancing process by requiring consultation with non-designated groups as well as designated groups.[53] The perception that AA will trammel their job opportunities is still widespread amongst non-designated groups.[54] It is necessary to address these perceptions because, whether justified or not, they have organizational implications. Perceptions of increasing irrelevance and vulnerability vis-a-vis other groups of employees may underpin attempts to subvert AA initiatives, particularly if AA is perceived to be in direct conflict with the aggrieved employees material interests.[55] The potentially negative implications of AA for non-designated groups are seen by some as an (perhaps unfortunate but) unavoidable consequence of equalising opportunities. As Kgaphola puts it, the generalized decline in job opportunities in SA

> tends to create the perception in white people that "(the) blacks are taking *our* jobs": a perception which, incidentally, derives from the entitlement culture (of white people) created and entrenched during the apartheid era.[56]

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[52] **SA Paper employee**, focus group interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996.

[53] Employment Equity Act, sec. 16(c).

[54] As Gerhard Oosthuizen, a local Mine Workers Union official, put it: 'Whites are just being wiped out of their places by black empowerment...Now they take people who have less qualifications than a white person simply because they're black.'(**Gerhard Oosthuizen**, secretary of the MWU at SA Can, interview by author, Vanderbijlpark, 27 March 1996).

[55] Resistance to AA is discussed in Chapter Eight of this thesis.

[56] **Mashupye Ratale Kgaphola**, 'Obstacles to affirmative action,' *Sowetan*, 9 May 1995.

7.5 Two Sides of the Coin: Skills Shortages and Quick Fixes

Implementing quotas in a situation of a skills shortage amongst designated groups creates artificial shortages which may over-reward the relatively few candidates who have the required qualifications.[57] The stark racial inequalities in education, as documented in previous sections, have led to a limited skills pool. According to Peter Zimmerman, in 1996, a mere 0.25 percent of blacks (75 000 people) had university degrees. Of these, 53 percent (40 000) were in general arts or education. This left 35 000 blacks to compete with ten times the number of whites for professional, managerial and technical jobs.[58] Qualified blacks are seen as a valuable commodity in short supply, and therefore are often paid high premiums. The desire to present a more demographically representative corporate face has led companies to poach employees from other organizations. Commenting on premiums, James Smith, SA Packaging group MD, submitted: 'there's pressure to rectify things quickly - the situation's being distorted...Hopefully normalcy will prevail in a few years...and you won't have the crazy situation you have now where people are scared of political pressures.'[59]

In the private sector, only a small proportion of employees is drawn from the non-technical and non-numerate disciplines. The paucity of sound numeric and analytical skills further constricts the available pool of AA candidates.[60] According to the *Race Relations Survey*, in 1994 only 0.6 percent of chartered accountants were black (67 of the 12 232); a mere 0.5 percent of professional engineers were black (64 out of 12 990); and a similarly negligible 0.5 percent of civil and mechanical engineers were black (42 out of 9 202).[61] A common refrain from respondents is that a shortage of skilled applicants hampers

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[57] **Sacob**, 'Affirmative Action,' 7-8.

[58] **Peter Zimmerman** quoted in Pamela Dube, 'SA gets ready to affirm its people,' *Sowetan*, 3 April 1996.

[59] **James Smith**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[60] In 1993, there were approximately 2000 black matriculants with higher-grade maths and science passes at university entrance level. This requirement is necessary for the following degree courses: medicine (including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and dentistry), accountancy, actuarial and computer science, and all the pure and applied science degrees, including engineering (figures complied by Edusource, cited in **BSA**, 'Affirmative Action,' 6). In 1992, only 9 percent of black university entrants were registered for technical and scientific courses. The majority (55 percent) were registered in the humanities and social sciences (*Race Relations Survey* 1994/95, cited in **BSA**, 'Affirmative Action,' 5).

[61] *Race Relations Survey* 1994/95, cited in **BSA**, 'Affirmative Action,' 4-5.

AA initiatives.[62] Hence the BSA's assertion that companies 'cannot affirm people into skilled jobs without at the same time significantly increasing the number of skilled applicants.'[63] Many companies are attempting to redress the educational backlog. Corporate social responsibility initiatives include the provision of bursaries and scholarships for prospective and current employees, and funding community-based educational projects.[64] According to Piet Roos:

> The community is where the labour force comes from and therefore we want to create a culture of education in this community so that in ten to fifteen years down the line you don't have the problem of unskilled and uneducated labour force that we have now.[65]

The practice of paying premiums on black skills seems to be widespread; the premium being between 20 to 50 percent more than what white employees in equivalent positions are paid. According to a general manager at SA Insurance: 'our premium is about 10 to 20 percent for blacks. You don't want to pay them that but it's a market force...whites don't really know about it.'[66] Similarly, an engineer at SA Paper commented that 'there's a premium on black skills. A black engineer goes for one and a half times a white engineer'.[67] The legality of this has been queried. Amanda Spira, a SA Insurance human resources department manager commented:

> We pay premiums for blacks...I don't know about the constitutionality of that, there's a case in court now where a white manager is taking the company to court over this...[But] it's a supply and demand thing, if there are three good blacks and fifteen companies who need them then they can name their price.[68]

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[62] **Richard Stone**, SA Insurance deputy general manager, interview with author, Johannesburg, 22 September 1995.

[63] **BSA**, 'Affirmative Action.' 6.

[64] For example, SA Can runs a programme to teach English language skills to children from Boipatong, a black township situated close to the SA Can site (**Chris Wiese**, interview, 26 March 1996).

[65] **Piet Roos**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[66] **Ross Segal**, SA Insurance general manager, interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995.

[67] **Cedric Meiring**, interview, 1 April 1996; and **Piet Farber**, interview, 1 April 1996. Similarly, SA Paper middle managers asserted that 'the black guys are the most expensive out there they change jobs every three to six months.'(**SA Paper middle managers**, focus group interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996).

[68] **Amanda Spira**, interview, 18 September 1995. This case seems to have become part of company folklore. According to a SA Insurance employee: 'there's a labour law case against SA Insurance by an employee who was up for promotion and he wasn't promoted because he was white he was actually told this...'(**SA**

This type of quick-fix leads to many problems: frustration, resentment and disillusionment build amongst existing staff; and external recruits may be deprived of peer support.[69] This may result in what has been termed the 'pinball syndrome' which refers to the high premium on black skills leading many qualified blacks to jump from job to job.[70] As Dan Sebake, SA Tin human resources manager, put it:

> In employing affirmative action candidates, the organization is placing too much emphasis on highly qualified black people who tend to job-hop because they are few and there's a premium being paid - therefore they exploit it. Therefore, rather than focusing on paper qualifications organizations should focus on experience.[71]

Indeed, the upshot of job-hopping is that these re-cycled appointments fail to acquire additional skills or sound experience, which has worrying implications for future career development.[72] It also results in high labour turnover with a resulting decline in performance and motivation.[73]

Alternative explanations have been offered for job-hopping. The BMF lays the blame on the under-utilization of black recruits who are given 'soft' jobs without any responsibility.[74] Opposition from direct reports and other employees coupled with a lack of institutional support makes success more difficult.[75] A dearth of orientation and mentoring

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Insurance employee, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995).

[69] According to Chris Wiese, SA Can general manager: 'My experience with these black external appointments is that there are so few good ones available and there's such a big price tag on them - we see them coming in and going out and it's not because they haven't had real jobs here. There's resistance to them from their subordinates...maybe if I'd counseled them on a more regular basis they might not have left...'(**Chris Wiese**, interview, 26 March 1996).

[70] See **Jenny McGrath**, 'Taking a tilt at pinball wizards,' *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, March 31 to April 6 1995.

[71] **Dan Sebake**, interview, 25 April 1996.

[72] As Jenny McGrath, a personnel consultant, claims: 'These affirmative placements shoot themselves in the foot. It has a negative impact on them if they job-hop the whole time. For example, Premier Milling decided that they're not going to be so stringent with getting affirmative action placements anymore because they've had a couple of bad experiences...[with] the pinball syndrome.'(**Jenny McGrath**, Peak Personnel consultant, interview by author, Johannesburg, 4 April 1995).

[73] **Sacob**, 'Affirmative Action,' 8-9.

[74] As the BMF puts it: 'Companies are the main culprits in job hopping. They fail to provide meaningful, responsible and powerful positions to Black people. Black managers are often not taken seriously into account by their organizations and they suffer from under-utilization.'(**BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 13-14).

programmes for a new recruit often means those new appointments flounder.[76]

Another pervasive problem is the stereotyping of AA candidates, which manifests in new discourses of racism.[77] In SA, as in the US, many respondents automatically deem AA candidates inferior and unqualified for their positions. As Renee Redwood, former executive director of the Glass Ceiling Commission (US Department of Labour) questions: 'why is there an assumption that white men are qualified, but you have to put the caveat "qualified" in front of women and minorities?'[78] Respondents at SA Insurance use the term *affirmative* interchangeably with that of *black*.[79] The implication is that all blacks are products of AA, and therefore incompetent.[80] According to an assistant general manager: 'Our customers are very critical...There might not be a black in sight and it's blamed on affirmative action...you lose clients because of affirmatives ...'[81] A similar logic informs the concept of *affirmative languages* - a term used by some respondents to denote black African

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[75] Examples abound. To cite two: (1) the black human resources manager at SA Engineering is perceived by many black employees as a management stooge, 'like a bantustan leader in the old days' (**Thomas Maluleke**, interview, 19 April 1996). Conversely, most white employees 'don't approach him because they see him as black and therefore he won't be able to solve your needs...We should have two personnel managers: one white and one black.' (**Ann Bester**, interview, 19 April 1996). (2) Leon Kleinhans, a coloured coach (foreman) at SA Can, claims that he has less *de facto* power than white foremen in charge of fewer machines do than he does. The white mechanics that inspect his machines bypass him when reporting problems, thereby undermining his authority and perceived capabilities. Attempting to explain this, Kleinhans remarked:'Maybe the whites are jealous or think that they can't take an order from a black man...I can see why people strike here, it's about all the frustration that builds up.'(**Leon Kleinhans**, interview, 27 March 1996).

[76] In US companies such as NYNEX, AT&T, and Exxon Chemicals (NJ), mentors perform a variety of roles. These include orienting proteges to the corporations unwritten rules, norms and expectations for behaviour; serving as role models; and encouraging proteges to act toward achievement of their goals (see **NYNEX**, *Diversity Brochure*, NYNEX Corporation, White Plains, N.Y., 1992, 22; **AT&T**, *AT&T Diversity Strategy*, internal company policy document, Morristown, NJ, January 1994, 2; and **Exxon Chemical Company**, *Mentor Program: A Helping Hand*, internal company booklet, New Jersey, ca. 1994).

[77] 'There's now a modern type of discrimination that's indirect, not direct.'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995).

[78] **Rene A. Redwood**, special assistant to the Secretary of Labor, US Department of Labor; former executive director of the Glass Ceiling Commission, interview by author, Washington, D.C., 31 July 1996.

[79] For example: 'When you recruit externally it has to be an *affirmative* but they may not have the skills.'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995).

[80] **SA Insurance employees**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995; and **SA Insurance employees**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995.

[81] **David Cahn**, SA Insurance assistant general manager, interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995. Similarly, a (white) employee asserted that 'there's a perception that blacks are untrainable, that you can't affirmatize them because their education has been so bad and so we need to take on Nigerians [and other Africans]....this is worrying...'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995).

languages.[82]

These prejudices and stereotypes of black AA employees result in multiple negative experiences including, *inter alia*: role overload; heightened scrutiny; barriers to informal networks which facilitate promotion; and exclusion from difficult or challenging assignments based on negative expectations.[83] Lack of accurate performance feedback makes it extremely difficult to correct or defend alleged shortcomings.[84] Many AA appointees therefore find their careers prematurely stymied.[85] Given its advocate role, the BMF is surprisingly cavalier in its dismissal of the stigma and resulting psychological burdens that often attach to AA beneficiaries.[86] That the frustration such prejudice engenders may lead black employees to boycott company-sponsored social events (SA Insurance, or in some instances, to resign (SA Engineering), is not addressed.[87]

In *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, Ellis Cose gathers personal anecdotes that catalogue the panalopy of frustrations and humiliations that afflict so many members of the black middle class in the US. These narratives speak of a sense of 'permanent vulnerability of one's status', of the 'resentment at being judged at every turn, if only in part, for one's

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[82] **SA Insurance employees**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995.

[83] **Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 44; and **Fiona Plani**, 'Managing Diverse Employees Breaking the Corporate Mould,' in *Beyond Affirmative Action: Managing Diversity for Competitive Advantage in South Africa*, edited by Adèle Thomas, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1996, 78.

[84] Murray puts it rather bluntly, arguing that 'many whites are embarrassed to treat black employees as badly as they are willing to treat whites. Hence another reason that whites get on-the-job training that blacks do not: much of the early training of an employee is intertwined with menial assignments and mild hazing.' If this is construed as racial abuse, the new black employee will be deprived of a formative 'apprenticeship' that is key to career progress (**Charles Murray**, 'Affirmative Racism,' in *Debating Affirmative Action: Race, Gender, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Inclusion*, edited and with an introduction by Nicolaus Mills, New York: Delta, 1994, 202-203). See also **Thomas**,'From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity,'116.

[85] For a personal account of the resistance and barriers a black professional confronted in his career path see **Edward W. Jones, Jr.**, 'What It's Like to Be a Black Manager,' in *Differences That Work: Organizational Excellence through Diversity*, edited and with an introduction by Mary C. Gentile, with a foreword by R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., A Harvard Business Review Book, Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1994, 49-64; and **Edward W. Jones, Jr.** 'Black Managers: The Dream Deferred,' in **Gentile**, *Differences That Work*, 65-84.

[86] The BMF simply asserts that 'the Black person should not have a negative attitude as an affirmative action beneficiary...If there is an opportunity, take it!'(**BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 13).

[87] According to a SA Insurance employee, 'people are boycotting social events to show their frustration at work and then they're blacklisted because of it.'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995); and **Thomas Maluleke**, interview, 19 April 1996.

complexion instead of oneself.'[88] Shedding light on why it is that despite their affluence and many successes so many middle class blacks are angry, Cose draws up a list of 'the dozen demons' many black Americans encounter.[89] These run the gamut from an inability to fit in and exclusion from the club, to faint praise, presumption of failure and guilt by association. Coping fatigue, self-censorship and silence all take their mental toll.[90] Cose notes that ultimately '(w)hat is constant is not anger but awareness, awareness that even the most pleasant interracial encounter can suddenly become awkward, ugly, or worse.'[91]

The corporate culture of many companies continues to be predominantly autocratic, hierarchical, and intolerant. This was evident at both SA Insurance and SA Engineering. Pressures to conform are high, resulting in perceived sanction against voicing dissent.[92] According to a SA Insurance employee:

> there's no mentality of taking risks - if something doesn't work out the consequences are so dire it's not worth it...There's no space to make mistakes...you can't speak to management...there's a fear of victimization.[93]

Employee consultation is negligible, as decision-making remains the exclusive prerogative of senior management.[94] What is important is not what you know but who you know - or rather, who listens.[95] Employee morale is understandably low. This manifests in high levels of absenteeism, low productivity, and in extreme cases, sabotage.[96]

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[88] **Ellis Cose**, *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, New York: HarperPerennial, HarperCollins, 1995, 40-41.

[89] Cose recognizes that these demons do not affect blacks only. He also does not assume that all black Americans will encounter all (or even some) of these demons.

[90] **Cose**, *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, 56-72.

[91] **Cose**, *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, 44.

[92] **SA Insurance employees**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 22 September 1995.

[93] **SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995.

[94] The vast majority of Genrec respondents expressed this sentiment. Attitudes seem to have changed little since 1992, when a culture audit found that most employees perceive management as directive, task-oriented and autocratic. A full 95 percent of black employees believe that you have to be 'one of the guys' to get ahead in the company. 75 percent of black employees and 62 percent of white employees believe that what is important is who, as opposed to what you know (**Diversity Consultants**, *SA Engineering Culture Audit*, 28, 102-106).

[95] **Geoff Diamond**, SA Insurance deputy general manager, interview with author, Johannesburg, 22 September 1995; and **SA Insurance employees**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 22 September 1995.

[96] **Thomas Maluleke**, interview, 19 April 1996.

Some commentators, such as Phinda Madi, present this continuing *baasskap* mentality as another 'push' factor affecting AA appointees.[97] Madi claims that 'companies expect blacks to become clones of the average manager and if they don't, they're seen to be unsuitable and then the organization ostracizes them and they leave. And therefore there's the perception of job-hopping'.[98] The solution lies in developing a 'critical mass' of black employees, presented as the anodyne to enhance the comfort zone level. The claim is that this will challenge organizational cultural arrogance and ensure that 'racially inclusive' modes of operating are negotiated.[99]

Two separate (albeit mutually-reinforcing) phenomena need to be addressed. The first, as described throughout this thesis, is that racist practices persist in many organizations. This bolsters Madi's argument. The second is that autocratic corporate cultures, which place a high premium on assimilation, are not necessarily racist. Indeed, many white, coloured and Indian employees also report experiencing feelings of alienation, frustration and disempowerment. Granted, these are in all likelihood less acute than the problems experienced by their black counterparts, but this is a question of degree, as opposed to kind. A central problem is that many commentators fail to distinguish between policies and practices that have a (racially) differential impact, and racially discriminatory policies. Evidence of both can be found in many South African organizations. But differential impact is not the same as racial discrimination, and should not be tainted with the same brush.[100] To do so would be to produce policy prescriptions that misrecognize the problem and misidentify the solution. As alluded to above, one such policy relies on the idea that more black faces will automatically result in a less hierarchical, more flexible and accommodating corporate culture. This reifies racial differences, and is both conceptually

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[97] *Baasskap* is the notion that decisions are solely the boss's prerogative (see **Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 67-68).

[98] **Phinda Madi**, Simeka Consultancy director, interview by author, Johannesburg, 7 April 1995.

[99] Similarly, Wendy Shilowa argues that Eskom's AA programme has been successful because it 'has the advantage that there's a critical mass of black people - they have the numbers, therefore, they can do a number of things to ensure black advancement' (**Wendy Shilowa**, Bridging the Gap Consultancy president, telephonic interview by author, Johannesburg, 12 April 1995). See also **Motshabi**, 'Managing Cultural Diversity,' 123-124).

[100] Here I draw on Stephen Carter's exegesis of differential-impact-as-racial-discrimination. Carter submits that '(e)very policy has a differential impact on some group...But to conclude too quickly that what-ever has a differential impact on black people ought to be forbidden that, always, it is the world, not we, that must change it to make a terrible mistake, not only in policy analysis but also in morality.'(**Stephen L. Carter**, *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby*, New York: BasicBooks, 1991, 218).

flawed and empirically unproven. Chapters Nine and Ten revisit this recurring theme of racial perspectivism.

7.6 Redefining Human Resources Policies and Practices

The EEA recognizes that AA is not simply about quotas and preference. The Act obliges every designated employer to implement the following AA measures: measures to identify and eliminate barriers which adversely affect designated groups; measures designed to further diversity in the workplace based on the equal dignity and respect of all people; reasonable accommodation for designated groups to ensure that they enjoy equal opportunities and are equitably represented in the workforce; and measures to retain, develop and train employees from designated groups. The latter measure includes appropriate training measures as stipulated in skills development legislation (to be enacted in 1999).[101]

The EEA recognises that AA is most successful when planned and implemented as an integral part of human resources development. Many companies have begun to modify previous recruitment, selection and promotion criteria and practices that were overtly, subtly or inadvertently discriminatory. This review extends to grievance and disciplinary procedures,[102] and staff development and training.[103] SA Packaging has redefined what constitutes 'relevant experience'. According to Keith Khumalo, a non-executive director:

> Most of our black managers come in as change agents...You can't recruit black talent on the basis of [business] experience: the normal career path of a talented

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[101] Given the disparities in access to training and the dearth of skills amongst designated groups, accelerated training programmes are an important constituent of employment equity plans. Consultations will identify the nature of training required in each workplace. Whilst employers do not have to employ new employees in order to fulfil the requirements of the Act, they have a duty to train and develop existing employees as part of the process of advancement. Training and development accordingly constitute one of the most important positive measures advocated by the EEA (Employment Equity Act, sec. 15(2).

[102] For example, SA Banking, in consultation with the representative unions, has developed formal grievance and disciplinary procedures to deal with unfair discrimination and abuse. Jack Hall, SA Banking CEO, states: 'in serious cases of unfair discrimination, harassment or abuse, dismissal will be regarded as the appropriate penalty, and, in such cases, SA Banking will consider providing financial, moral and legal support to the aggrieved employee if s/he wishes to take civil action against the individual concerned.'(**Jack Hall** quoted in SA Banking, 'SA Banking Gateway booklet: Our programme for the social and economic empowerment of all our people,' internal company document, Johannesburg, June 1993).

[103] **Thomas**, 'Political freedom in South Africa.'

> black was to be an activist. Therefore, blacks having had an activist role is very important for Nampak: the bulk of our managers were recruited from positions in MK, the MDM, Cosatu, [and the] civics...[104]

The EEA stipulates that as part of AA, numerical goals to achieve the 'equitable representation of suitably qualified people from designated groups within each occupational category and level in the workforce' need to be stated, and the strategies intended to achieve these goals outlined.[105] The definition of a `suitably qualified' person was one of the most contested issues in the parliamentary debates on employment equity. Union representatives supported a loose definition which would place the obligation on employers to train employees, whilst business representatives supported a narrower definition which emphasised ability to perform the job as being of overriding importance. According to the Act, a person is 'suitably qualified' if they have any one of or a combination of the following: formal qualifications; prior learning; relevant experience; or capacity to acquire, within a reasonable time, the ability to do the job.[106] In recruitment and selection the employer must review all the factors set out above, and assess whether the person has the ability to do the job. The employer may not unfairly discriminate against a person solely on the basis of their lack of relevant experience.[107]

This will become a forcing mechanism for employers to make explicit the often informal and unwritten criteria required for effective and career-enhancing performance. Traditionally, the ability to socialize with (predominantly white male) staff teams was a key determinant of employee selection and career success. These types of unspoken, long-established criteria need to be critically examined for hidden discriminatory implications, and their discriminatory effects countered.[108]

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[104] **Keith Khumalo**, SA Packaging executive director, interview by author, Johannesburg, 5 April 1995. Part of SA Packaging's AA drive is to recruit talented black managers, train them in World Class Manufacturing (WCM) initiatives, and then 'warehouse' them at Head Office. The hope is that they will then 'cascade' down into jobs within the various operations (**Heather King**, interview, 1 September 1995; **James Smith**, interview, 17 April 1996; and **Joseph Tshabalala**, interview, 18 March 1996).

[105] Employment Equity Act, sec. 20(2)(c).

[106] Employment Equity Act, sec. 20(3).

[107] Employment Equity Act, sec. 20(4) and (5).

[108] **Sacob**, 'Affirmative Action,' 12, 14. As a SA Insurance employee put it: 'racism is subtle...We don't socialize together over weekends and information may be disseminated in social gatherings in suburb pubs but I live in a township.'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995).

The criteria for a job need to be shown to be relevant to the outputs of the job. As the following comments illustrate, this method is not necessarily bias-free. According to a SA Insurance employee: 'I have difficulty knowing how to tell if someone has the ability to do the job...so we measure whether someone can articulate themselves. We judge competence by eloquence'.[109] Other criteria used in the past and now construed as potentially discriminatory include using seniority (where a company has historically employed few blacks, women or disabled people), psychometric tests, medical tests, language requirements, and standard Last-In, First-Out (LIFO) practices.[110]

Sonn holds that 'blacks with minimum required qualifications must be given preference over whites with maximum qualifications.'[111] He claims that this constitutes tokenism *only* if the intention is to keep the organization predominantly white, or if the organizational environment is rigid and stifles black advancement.[112] If we take tokenism to mean that a candidate's appointment is merely symbolic, the practice of hiring a candidate who is qualified to do the job (but is not the best qualified for the job) can indeed avoid charges of tokenism.[113] Human maintains that lowering entrance qualifications for blacks and women will only lead to tokenism if it is proven that the current entry qualifications have predictive validity with respect to job performance. This is not solely dependent on the candidate's abilities, but depends on a range of factors including the expectations of her competence, tacit obstacles to progress, and the availability of institutional support. This complicates attempts to measure the job-relatedness of entry criteria.[114]

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[109] **SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995.

[110] Employment Equity Act, sec. 7, and sec. 8; and *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 4, secs. 4.5.3.4 - 4.5.3.10.

[111] **Sonn**, 'Afrikaner Nationalism and Black Advancement,' 3.

[112] **Sonn**, 'Afrikaner Nationalism and Black Advancement,' 4.

[113] Jim Chalmers, an NAACP official, defends this position in his claim that 'at a bare minimum, the workplace should reflect the number of blacks in the society. Affirmative action has never suggested you should have people who weren't qualified. If to get a job you have to score 75 on a test, and a black scores 76 and a white scores 80, what is required is to score 75. So, both white and black passed the test and therefore they met the requirement for the job... If there are twenty whites and only one black in the workforce, then hire the black.'(**Jim Chalmers**, NAACP official, telephonic interview by author, Baltimore, 25 July 1996).

[114] See **Human**, 'Discrimination and Equality in the Workplace,' 62-64. The Anglo-Alpha AA Agreement (1995) goes some way in addressing this dilemma. It states that systems and programmes, such as formal evaluation by recognized bodies, need to be developed to ensure recognition for employees 'who have been disadvantaged in terms of educational opportunities...who, as a consequence, do not have the formal qualifications necessary to be appointed to a particular position...and who are nonetheless fulfilling or are able

Commentators such as Human assert that AA should only take place at the selection and recruitment stages. Thereafter, common criteria of performance should be used in evaluating all employees, and promotions should take place on the basis of these criteria.[115] As Wiseman Nkulu avers: '(t)o ensure there is no lowering of standards, promotion must be based on performance. Under no circumstances must individuals be promoted because of their skin colour.'[116] Performance evaluations, in turn, need to be divested of past traces of bias. The flip side of the racially exclusionary criteria of past human resources practices was to facilitate the rapid career progression of whites. As the ILO Review notes, 'whites have been artificially eased into management without the requisite qualifications.'[117]

Some advocates of AA invoke these past practices to bolster demands for an increased emphasis on internal skills formation and fast-track career pathing of skilled employees.[118] Others present past racism as justification for lowering the qualifications required by AA candidates. According to Numsa shop stewards at SA Can:

> There are positions that need a certain standard of education or training. But, taking into account what happened in apartheid - you'd have a HR person who'd have no degrees and get on-the-job training but today with AA they're suddenly talking about qualifications.[119]

SA Engineering employees voiced similar grievances. The allegation is that black employees are required to have certain educational qualifications prior to embarking on training courses, or in order to qualify for promotion; a restriction that does not apply to

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to fulfil the requirements of the position in practice but have not been appointed to it when it has been vacant.'(cited in **Butcher**, 'The Anglo-Alpha Affirmative Action Agreement,' 61-62).

[115] **Human**, 'Why Affirmative Action Programmes Fail,' 324; and **Sacob**, 'Affirmative Action,' 15.

[116] **Nkuhlu**, 'Affirmative Action,' 19.

[117] **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 391. Commenting on white male competence (or lack thereof), Christie claims that 'One might go so far as to suggest that a white male with a reasonable education would have to be very incompetent indeed not to become a manager.'(**Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*; 77).

[118] **Elias Mashilo**, interview, 27 March 1996. As a SA Engineering employee put it: 'they should give people more opportunities that they're capable of. They shouldn't look at their colour or creed just at their ability...There are white supervisors with a Std. 6 but we aren't given the opportunity - this is racism.'(**Mitchell Govender**, interview, 19 April 1996).

[119] **Sipho Shabangu and Musi Langa**, interview, 26 March 1996.

white employees.[120] In particular, the low educational qualifications of many white supervisors, as compared to the relatively high qualifications currently demanded for entry into these positions, is seen as discriminatory.[121] According to Numsa shop stewards at SA Engineering:

> Some blacks here have got a Std. 10 and they've got welding training but they tell them they need a N4/5 [technical qualification] as well as a matric for the position of a trainee welding supervisor. But half the supervisors here have a Std 2 and they can't even write their own name...[122]

The Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity stipulates that the criteria used in recruitment, training, and promotion decisions need to reflect genuine job requirements.[123] Historically, duplicate grades for black and white workers resulted in different and unequal levels of pay for equivalent work.[124] Similarly, many of the prerequisites for training serve(d) a *de facto* racially exclusionary purpose. To counter past discrimination, the Green Paper recommends 'as far as possible, lower formal qualifications for jobs and training',[125] a suggestion already taken up by some companies.[126]

In this form, AA is about promoting greater equality of opportunities and career

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[120] According to Jacob Sibiya, 'training was implemented but in reality it doesn't exist because you need a Std. 7 or 8 to actually do the training and most workers here don't even have a Std. 1...' (**Jacob Sibiya**, ex-Numsa shop steward at SA Engineering, interview by author, Wadeville, 18 April 1996).

[121] According to Numsa shop stewards: 'Management's always saying that if you want a good job, you need a Std. 7...But we have whites who don't have a Std. 7 who're supervisors. Management says we are making ourselves a favour so we can make ourselves educated...'(**Numsa shop stewards** (SA Engineering), interview, 18 April 1996).

[122] Whilst 'Std. 2' may be an exaggeration, the general point holds. Elaborating on this issue, these shop stewards asserted that 'that's why we as blacks in this new South Africa say if we need a Std. 10 the supervisor should have a degree because otherwise what's he going to tell me if he's not more educated? Jordaan [the MD] said that supervisors must add to his Std. 6 and get a Std. 10, but we don't see any of them at our CEP School.'(**Numsa shop stewards** (SA Engineering), interview, 18 April 1996).

[123] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 3, sec. 3.5.11.

[124] White grades would generally call for formal qualifications which most blacks were legally prevented from obtaining. Moreover, the officially stipulated level of formal education required for the job is often not necessary for the effective performance of the work (*Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 3, sec. 3.5.10).

[125] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 4, sec. 4.7.4.4.

[126] For example, Piet Roos, SA Can operations manager, claims that 'we have a long-term plan to upgrade guys to become artisans, engineers etceteras without worrying about whether they have formal qualifications or not.'(**Piet Roos**, interview, 26 March 1996).

trajectories. It cannot, however, guarantee greater equality of success. No set of admissions criteria can guarantee that every candidate who manifests potential for success will in fact succeed.[127] Failure to distinguish between potential to succeed and the guarantee of success constitutes a central dilemma in the AA debate. It is all very well to assert that AA must 'involve minimal qualifications on the part of the Black candidate; and the technical qualifications of such a black person must either be equal, or less than those of a white person'.[128] But the process through which this skills disparity is reversed and the mechanisms through which performance will be enhanced, remain obscure. Different selection criteria (based on *de facto* differential performance) are sometimes translated into different (racially determined) standards of evaluation and expectation. To simply assert the need to hire less qualified blacks does not, *ipso facto*, obviate the differential performance of these candidates and employees. Rather than hiding from this differential performance by setting different thresholds of expectation for the performance of AA appointees, employees need to reverse it.[129] As Isaac Nkomo, a SA Packaging manager, asserts:

> until such time as this company cannot...move without phoning me then I don't have power - and power is earned, not given. Therefore, performance is what gets left out when you talk of AA for black managers. I don't believe in this quota system - I don't want to be a number...I moved out of detention a long time ago...The question of blackness should not be part of the reason for promoting me, it can be an added advantage, but it's not my colour that you've promoted me on but my performance.[130]

Whilst the idea of merit is superficially unassailable, there is no universal agreement as to its constituent parts. The decision to include technical proficiency, computer-literacy, verbal agility, analytical ability and leadership potential under the rubric of meritorious abilities is contingent on the specifics of the occupation and position. Even if agreement on the latter was to be reached, homosocial reproduction - the tendency of selectors to see the greatest potential in those that are similar to themselves - tends to be pervasive.[131] AA

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[127] **Lattimer**, 'The case for corporate diversity,' 31.

[128] **Maphai**, 'Affirmative Action in South Africa,' 2; quoted in **Sonn**, 'Afrikaner Nationalism and Black Advancement,' 3.

[129] See **Loury**, 'Performing Without a Net,' 56-57.

[130] **Isaac Nkomo**, interview, 5 March 1996.

[131] **IDASA**, *Making Affirmative Action Work*, 155. In criticizing what it sees as a knee-jerk celebration of diversity,

policies which override conventional criteria may thus be needed 'to break autopilot decisions...if you're a white man, and you're recruiting on auto-pilot, you'll automatically hire a white man'.[132] The argument is that there is no such thing as a generic 'best person for the job' because 'best' is always defined, at least in part, by race, gender, cultural and religious criteria.[133] Hence the call for re-examining the merit principle.

Caution is required to ensure that merit, as the overriding frame of reference, is not jettisoned in the rush to adopt 'culturally-sensitive' human resources practices. For instance, Mbigi suggests that recruiting friends and relatives should be encouraged on the grounds that 'clannish controls are more effective and easier to administer' than conventional systems of selection and recruitment.[134] This comes dangerously close to condoning nepotism. As Albie Sachs warns, AA 'must not be an excuse for dishing out rewards to friends, acolytes, family members...or even comrades who shared jail or exile'.[135]

7.7 Conclusions

Drawing on the case study material, this chapter has provided an overview of the arguments in support of, and those against implementing targets and quotas. It has also examined specific aspects of human resources policies and practices which are being redefined.

Any consideration of the workings of AA needs to be grounded in an understanding of both the legislative framework (as discussed in previous chapters) and the uncertain

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the Financial Mail condones homosocial reproduction in its endorsement of the view that organizations 'have developed a profile of their typical employee and recruit and promote in line with it.'('Affirmative Action,' *Financial Mail*, 18 October 1996).

[132] **Harry Bristow**, interview, 10 April 1995.

[133] **BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 10. Similarly, Sachs contends that blacks and women continue to be (subtly) discriminated against. For instance, 'you may speak five languages, but if they do not include English and Afrikaans, you are not bilingual.'(**Sachs**, 'Affirmative Action,' 121).

[134] **Lovemore Mbigi**, interview by Barbara Nussbaum, 18 July 1995, *South African Management Project Working Papers*, vol. 3, 'Knowledge Creation, Learning, Innovation and Application,' Johannesburg: Graduate School of Business Administration, University of the Witwatersrand, 1995, 3.

[135] **Sachs**, 'Affirmative Action,' 131.

nature of organizational policies and programmes. The latter assume lives of their own that overtake intentional practices and head office injunctions. They do not produce a fixed set of outcomes. No matter how well planned, no strategy can anticipate or control all the conditions necessary for its realization or success. Given that AA initiatives operate through a complex set of social and cultural structures and relations, they may produce unintended outcomes. The race as remedy or race as merit analytical schema (described in Chapter Five) may be employed in an effort to impart to these outcomes some sort of political intelligibility, but this will of necessity occur *ex post facto*.

Organizations are merely provisionally constituted. They have no essential substantive unity or institutional fixity. The unity, if any, of organizational structures, far from being pregiven, must be constituted politically.[136] Organizations are the sites, generators and products of strategies. As systems of strategic selectivity, they favour certain types of political strategy over others. The relational character of this selectivity is manifest in the differential impact of organizations on the capacity of different groupings to pursue their interests. Different forms of organization privilege some strategies over others, and within a given time horizon, the types of strategies favoured may change.[137] The concept of strategic selectivity may assist in explaining company-specific instances of job-hopping, prejudice or tokenism.

This chapter has argued that efforts to change 'how things get done around here' require the realignment of human resources practices with AA objectives. As a stand-alone policy initiative, however, this is insufficient to effect the desired changes. To reduce AA to redefining recruitment, selection, promotion, and merit criteria is to overlook the realm of organizational narratives and memories that constitute the institutional boundaries of legitimate action. This is the cultural underside of organizations. It is within these marginal spaces, with their conflicts, ambiguities and 'non-rational' behaviours, that on-going small-scale organizational socialization strategies are enacted. It is here that the intimate knowledge about getting along in an organization, the unspoken rules and norms, are transmitted.[138] It is in this realm that mini-empires are built, cliques coalesce,

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[136] See **Jessop**, *State Theory*, 267.

[137] **Jessop**, *State Theory*, 260; and **Robert Cooper and Gibson Burrell**, 'Modernism, Postmodernism and Organizational Analysis: An Introduction,' *Organizational Studies* 9, no. 1 (1988): 107.

[138] See **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 165.

and interpersonal rivalries and rumours thrive. And it is here, in this morass of organizational politics, that the fate of AA programmes and appointees is often decided.

CHAPTER 8
NEGOTIATING THE OBSTACLES TO AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

8.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the obstacles and resistance likely to be encountered in implementing AA programmes. It draws attention to issues of responsibility and accountability for AA. In many companies there are as of yet no formalized AA policies. In 1996, FSA Contact's annual study of AA found that only 56 percent of respondent companies had formal AA policies. The equivalent figure for 1995 was 67 percent.[1] This chapter explores the ways in which this relative absence of official corporate AA policies plays out within organizations. In some instances it encourages the devolution of responsibility for AA to the line function. In others, it allows organizational members to avoid assuming accountability for AA and provides the space for resistance and subversion to flourish.

Attempts to communicate corporate AA strategies (through internal television broadcasts, corporate policy documents and staff memos) are, on the whole, ad hoc.[2] The majority of respondents throughout the case study companies display low levels of awareness of corporate AA policies. This lack of awareness permeates all organizational levels, from shop stewards to, in some instances, senior managers.[3] AA policies are seen as ambiguous, and there is a lack of clarity about AA's strategic objectives, target population(s), and time frame. Channels to facilitate top-down as well as bottom-up communication within companies are, on the whole, inadequate. In some companies, middle management constitutes a barrier to more open communication and consultation between lower level employees and the executive echelons.

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[1] FSA Contact Consulting Report, cited in 'Affirmative Action,' *Financial Mail*, 18 October 1996.

[2] Stucke's assertion is typical of many responses: 'everybody hadn't been sat down and told what affirmative action's about.They heard about it through word of mouth.'(**Adrian Stucke**, interview, 19 April 1996).

[3] For example, Adrian Stucke, a SA Engineering manager, asserted: 'We have an affirmative action policy but it's not widespread most people don't understand it...I don't. Only the people who're involved in the affirmative action committee know what's going on it hasn't been spread enough...'(**Adrian Stucke**, interview, 19 April 1996).

The uncertainty surrounding AA feeds into both black and white fears. This chapter suggests that the former are linked to the ways in which AA is constrained by sluggish economic growth; the latter to truncated career horizons. Lastly, this chapter examines the conundrum of conflicting organizational objectives: can management reconcile re-engineering corporate structures and the accompanying retrenchments with AA objectives?

8.2 Who Drives Affirmative Action Strategies?

The active support of the CEO and executive for AA is central to its success.[4] This top-down commitment is key in obtaining buy-in to AA initiatives. Whilst most CEOs are vocal in their support of AA policies, the driving of these initiatives is often left to the human resources division. SA Banking's case is instructive in this regard. Jack Hall, the CEO, has declared his intention to eradicate unfair discrimination and ensure racial representivity. Addressing employees on SA Banking's Rainbow video, he asserted that 'statistically we're just not good enough. There need to be, in our human resources, a reflection of the demographics of the community.'[5] However, responsibility for AA has been relegated to the Reconstruction and Corporate Affairs (RCA) unit. According to Karen Chambers, a manager, this unit 'was formed to push affirmative action. That is the purpose of this unit, we don't bring in any profits...it shows SA Banking's commitment to AA.'[6] To the contrary, divorcing AA from bottom-line considerations (and from the HR function) appears to have served primarily to ghettoize AA within the organization.

The Benchmarking Affirmative Action project, a joint study by the BMF and management consultants Ernst & Young, found that in only 43 percent of cases did the impetus for AA come from the top: of the more than 100 CEOs and senior managers canvassed, only 43

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[4] At companies identified as exhibiting corporate best practices, such as Xerox Corporation, senior management's active role in planning, communicating, monitoring and managing AA and diversity practices and expectations is key.(**Deborah Evans Cox**, Xerox Corporation Balanced Work Force & Affirmative Action former manager, telephonic interview by author, 23 August 1996; **Xerox**, *Diversity at Work*, Xerox Corporation publication, Stamford, Connecticut, ca. 1995; **Innes and Davies**, 'Affirmative Action,' 7, 10; and **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 176-179.

[5] **John Hall**, *SA Banking Rainbow Video*, produced by SA Banking, 1993.

[6] **Karen Chambers**, SA Banking internal corporate communications manager, interview by author, Johannesburg, 28 August 1995.

percent has initiated AA. HR departments accounted for 32 percent of AA initiatives; and 'stakeholders' (including unions, interest groups, and shareholders) for the remaining 25 percent.[7] This seems to be a key stumbling block at SA Insurance. According to Frank Bailey, acting general HR manager, 'champions of the cause are few and far between'.[8] AA initiatives run the risk of being seen as 'soft' HR issues, something which can be relegated to the back burner should more pressing business survival and competitive advantage issues emerge. As Bailey puts it: 'corporate HR is still seen to be driving affirmative action but we're not [even] cracking it in our own department, our statistics are the worst.'[9] Moreover, many HR departments do not have the power to sanction or reward those who inhibit or promote the AA strategy. As a SA Insurance employee confirmed: 'people see it [AA] as nice to have, but there's no pressure to see results'.[10]

In contrast, at both SA Engineering and SA Packaging the AA strategy has been initiated and driven by head office. At SA Engineering, a change strategy was initiated because 'management recognized that there were a lot of changes happening in the country and if they didn't change we'd cease to exist and be left behind.'[11] At SA Packaging, the managing director, James Smith, has forcefully driven the AA strategy.

A centrally driven strategy can, however, lead to a generalized lack of commitment to AA. Resistance to top-down directives constitutes a central barrier to the effective implementation of many AA initiatives. For example, whilst there is extensive awareness of SA Packaging's AA programme, Clifford Barrett claims that only about half the workforce 'buys-in' to the project. He believes that as 'an internalized way of managing, it's not really there. They don't really walk the talk.'[12] The difficulty lies in effectively

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[7] Black Management Forum/Ernst and Young report cited in **Motlhabakwe**, 'Benchmarking affirmative action,' 58-59. Adèle Thomas reports a similar finding (**Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 37).

[8] **Frank Bailey**, SA Insurance human resources acting general manager, interview by author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995. According to an employee, 'they should start with changing management's mindset affirmative action needs to start from the top.'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995).

[9] **Frank Bailey**, interview, 18 September 1995.

[10] **SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995.

[11] **Adrian Stucke**, interview, 19 April 1996.

[12] **Clifford Barret**, interview, 17 April 1996.

cascading responsibility and accountability for change initiatives throughout the top layers of the organization. At SA Paper, for instance, ownership of the AA initiative has not been fully established. Many respondents are unclear as to where or with whom accountability for AA lies. Responsibility shifts endlessly throughout the company.[13] As a middle manager at SA Paper put it: 'the heads of departments don't see affirmative action as important - they don't train guys or bring them up through the system.'[14] Attempts to overcome this problem and achieve buy-in include applying pressure via performance appraisals and developing career plans for black recruits. According to Henry Barclay, the general manager:

> We have targets and we need to achieve them. We're measured on it annually as an Operation and as a Division. This is one of the six to eight things we're measured on. Because of resistance from white current employees you have to force it to a certain extent. No white manager is going to willingly look for a black who's not as competent and who needs time to be coached...Unless you measure them on this, they won't do it. The management team have an incentive scheme, and yes, there are financial incentives and disincentives.[15]

Given that organizational change depends on the backing of top management, Clifford Barrett believes that 'we didn't make changes we should have at the leadership level - we should've got rid of people'.[16] He suggests that head office will only begin to see real results when black GMs are appointed. The case of SA Tin is instructive in this regard. Prior to Lazarus Maseko's appointment as GM in May 1995, the entire management team consisted of white males. As of April 1996, three of the seven members were black men. The demographic profile of SA Tin employees and managers exceeded the Divisional AA targets for 1996.[17] At both SA Tin and SA Can, the resignations (or retrenchments) of apartheid-era management teams seems to have provided an opportunity to 're-engineer management'.

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[13] **Wilmot Gabriels** *et al.*, interview, 1 April 1996; and **Henry Barclay**, interview, 2 April 1996.

[14] **Cedric Meiring**, interview, 1 April 1996; and **Piet Farber**, interview, 1 April 1996.

[15] **Henry Barclay**, interview, 2 April 1996.

[16] **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[17] As Maseko puts it: 'We're affirmed here at Main Tin...[although] it's not complete yet... I'm making a concerted effort to appoint blacks.'(**Lazarus Maseko**, interview, 12 April 1996).

At SA Tin, an internal audit in the early 1990s revealed that the (previous) GM was seen by most employees as the central obstacle to change. This led to his resignation (or dismissal, depending on which version of events is given credence).[18] The new management team initiated democratization processes which could not have been implemented (nor had much success) under the previous regime. As James Smith, group MD, asserted: whilst 'there's not 100 percent buy-in, we've made progress relative to the average South African company.'[19]

8.3 Accountability and Performance Evaluations

In some companies, performance management and evaluation systems have been modified to ensure line managers are accountable for AA. Performance appraisals and compensation are tied to AA goals. This accountability is generally measured in relation to numbers (targets met, people promoted, staff turnover and so on) and not according to employee development. This has led commentators such as Linda Human and Adele Thomas to suggest that the ability to manage diversity effectively should be incorporated as a component of managerial and supervisory evaluation and performance management.[20] Operationalizing this may prove to be difficult. At the level of rhetoric, managers espouse the importance of cultivating good people management skills. The Sacob AA policy document, for instance, suggests that '(l)ine managers should be evaluated in terms of their performance in achieving the goals of employee development in the same way as they are evaluated in terms of the achievement of operating results.'[21] However, this is rarely put into practice. Greater value is placed on achieving operating results and demonstrating strong technical and functional skills.[22]

Devolving responsibility for AA to the line function allows for the integration of AA

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[18] **Thabo Molefe**, interview, 25 April 1996; **Eric Jones**, SA Tin Production Manager, interview by author, Johannesburg, 24 April 1996; and **Henk Langeveldt**, interview, 24 April 1996.

[19] **James Smith**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[20] **Human**, *Affirmative Action*,. 55-62 passim; and **Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 104.

[21] **Sacob**, 'Affirmative Action,' 11.

[22] Amongst respondents, a widely-held sentiment is that 'amongst managers, there are no people management skills...they're task-oriented...they put technical people in a managerial role for which they're not suited.'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995).

objectives with business strategy issues. The flip side is that it creates the space for line managers to subtly sabotage the process. Similar patterns can be identified when a company relies on a decentralized AA strategy. This gives divisions or operations the freedom to interpret AA in ways that they deem congruent with their business strategies. James Smith, SA Packaging group MD, explicates the rationale for decentralization:

> The message that we have to change has been rammed down their throats but initiatives are left to divisions, so that there's more ownership. The need to change is the gospel we preach at every moment, but the way you change and the programmes are left up to the guys down there...a centralized strategy is impractical, it'll never work and you'd have a huge backlash.[23]

This flexibility is not in and of itself problematic. What is troublesome is the ways in which this allows resistance (both overt and covert) against AA to flourish. At SA Insurance, for instance, operationalizing corporate AA policy is left to each division. In consequence, the organization lacks a coherent AA strategy. Moreover, levels of accountability and responsibility for the initiative vary considerably. In some divisions, the corporate AA policy has been rearticulated into a divisional equal employment opportunity strategy. This then becomes the vehicle through which line managers can continue to ignore racial and gender inequalities in the name of maintaining 'standards', 'quality' and world competitiveness. AA objectives are set begrudgingly, in the absence of consultation, and are not communicated to middle managers.[24] This contrasts starkly with the practice in other departments. In one department, responsibility and accountability for AA is less diffuse. Every manager has recruitment and promotion targets which are appraised annually. Trained mentors, whose role it is to transfer informal company knowledge ('how things are done around here') are appointed for new black recruits. Mentoring forms part of their overall management performance appraisals.[25]

It appears that a key way to circumvent inconsistencies in implementing AA is to establish line management accountability for AA through a system of incentives and disincentives for their performance (or lack thereof). This parallels what is considered best practice in

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[23] **James Smith**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[24] **Amanda Spira**, interview, 18 September 1995; and **Koos Jooste**, SA Insurance general manager, interview with author, Johannesburg, 20 September 1995.

[25] **Derek Schnell**, interview, 18 September 1995.

US companies. At Allstate Corporation, Avon Products, First Chicago, Xerox Corporation and Sara Lee (to list but a few examples), diversity and AA measures are included in managers' performance reviews. Accountability is linked to compensation through the performance measurement process. The objectives a senior manager has that impact her compensation will impact on all her direct reports, and will become the objectives and goals of the employees reporting to her.[26] The need to (financially) reward desirable behaviours and disconfirm undesirable behaviours is advocated by, *inter alios*, Clifford Barrett, Bheki Sibiya, and Peter Christie.[27] According to Barrett:

> Managers take their cues. Telling them that we need affirmative action has a limited effect. Appealing to their good sense is all good and well but they're driven by cues, formal and informal. It comes back to the Pavlovian thing of reward, recognition and punishment. If you have an incentive for affirmative action they'll do it. You can even see it statistically. A few years ago we "incentivized" the process. Money catches peoples attention.[28]

South African Breweries (SAB) is another organization which seems to have used targets rather successfully. All employees with line responsibility draw up staffing plans, earmarking posts for AA appointments. This facilitates buy-in through ensuring line managers are involved in setting and meeting targets.[29] Individual managers promotions and bonuses depend on performance in Equity (SAB's AA policy), as well as on performance in the traditional areas of sales and costs.[30] This is in line with SA Packaging's thinking. As James Smith, SA Packaging group MD, put it:

> [Managers] wouldn't have made the change without the pressure. It was also about me on the campaign trail: public forums, world class days, speaking to managers about black advancement...We debated and communicated en masse about the process. The message was reinforced on every occasion. It became even more formalized with deductions on people's bonuses if they didn't fulfil their

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[26] **Janice Fenn**, Sara Lee Corporation, former director of human resources development, telephonic interview by author, 21 August 1996; **Douglas C. Volz**, Sara Lee Corporation, vice-president of employee relations, interview by author, Chicago, 8 August 1996; **Deborah Evans Cox**, interview, 23 August 1996; **Xerox**, *Diversity at Work*; and **Chicago Area Partnerships**, *Pathways & Progress*, 57-58.

[27] **Bheki Sibiya**, interview, 1 September 1995; and **Christie**, *Stories of an Afman(ager)!*, 139.

[28] **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[29] **Innes and Davies**, 'Affirmative Action,' 11.

[30] **Innes and Davies**, 'Affirmative Action,' 8.

> [AA] obligations...We'd knock 15 percent off their bonuses if they weren't being serious...[31]

8.4 Black Management Caucuses

A common problem amongst the case study companies is the dearth of representative structures to advise on, co-ordinate, mobilize support for, and monitor the corporate AA initiative.[32] Whilst some companies are establishing AA task teams, these are often only superficially inclusive of all constituencies and hence lack legitimacy. This is the case in both SA Engineering and SA Insurance. Many of these AA committees are plagued by perceptions that they are ineffective and unable to deliver anything concrete. For instance, the AA task team at SA Engineering is seen as 'toothless.'[33] Similarly, at SA Can, the GM admits that 'there is no real affirmative action task team - it's not operational and is not very successful.'[34] Unsurprisingly, the level of apathy amongst employees is high.

What have started to emerge, however, are black management caucuses (BMCs). Isaac Nkomo, a SA Packaging manager, claims that these caucuses 'are born out of frustration' with the slow pace of change and the perception that AA is merely about window dressing.[35] The representivity and formality of these groupings differ from those which are restricted to ad hoc and informal discussions amongst black managers to more structured and formal groupings which have company support. The BMC at SA Banking is an example of the former.[36] The BMC at SA Packaging exemplifies the latter. It uses company facilities and receives financial support from SA Packaging for its activities.[37]

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[31] **James Smith**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[32] See for example **SA Insurance**, 'Affirmative Action Follow-up Audit: September 1995,' confidential report presented to SA Insurance by Linda Human: Johannesburg, 25 September 1995.

[33] **Ann Bester**, interview, 19 April 1996.

[34] **Chris Wiese**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[35] **Isaac Nkomo**, interview, 5 March 1996.

[36] **Grace Mokoena**, interview, 6 September 1995.

[37] **Joseph Tshabalala**, interview, 18 March 1996; and **Bongani Khunyeli**, SA Packaging management services manufacturing & people development unit manager, interview by author, Johannesburg, 26 March 1996.

Although their advent is endorsed by most black managers, belief in the beneficial aspects and credibility of BMCs is not universal. Their supporters credit BMCs with providing a 'comfort zone' within predominantly white male companies; and for breaking what Sibiya terms the 'politeness barrier' in the corporate world.[38] The idea is for BMCs to play an advocacy role for black managers (to provide black professionals with a voice), and assist in attracting, retaining and mentoring new AA recruits.[39]

Critics question the opportunistic and careerist aspect of these caucuses, claiming that black managers are 'looking at the black management caucus to deliver however many jobs tomorrow. That's the negative part - if there's a target of 20 percent blacks, they'll say, "I want to be in the 20 percent"...'[40] Amongst white managers and employees, resistance to BMCs is widespread. Critics point to the potential for such groupings to rely on an essentialist understanding of racial identity.[41] According to Phinda Madi:

> Many companies frown on black caucuses...The fear is that they will polarize the workforce...that each group will want their own representative group...and this will fragment the workforce. I support black caucuses, [but] they need to be transparent and accessible...they shouldn't be a black *broederbond*.[42]

Critics overlook the potential for caucuses to become effective communication tools, giving corporate minorities first-hand, direct access to senior management. Moreover, if they focus on performance, their activities could be extended to include mentorship, skills workshops (featuring presentation skills, computer literacy, career development, self improvement), and developing community liaison networks. The black caucus group at Xerox Corporation has been effective in these areas. Its success acted as a catalyst for the emergence of women and Hispanic caucus groups in Xerox, and externally, it provides

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[38] **Bheki Sibiya**, interview, 1 September 1995.

[39] **Wendy Shilowa**, interview, 12 April 1995; **Bongani Khunyeli**, interview, 26 March 1996; and **Keith Khumalo**, interview, 5 April 1995. As Khumalo put it: 'We need a strong caucus - whites respect power. We need strong advocates.'(Ibid.)

[40] **Lazarus Maseko**, interview, 12 April 1996. Similarly, Isaac Nkomo submits that 'the problem with black managers is that we're all individualistic...This is personal you want to see yourself personally moving up (the career ladder).'(**Isaac Nkomo**, interview, 5 March 1996).

[41] For instance, Chris Wiese, SA Can GM, is opposed to BMCs because 'it's only going back to the past and it's racist...'(**Chris Wiese**, interview, 26 March 1996).

[42] **Phinda Madi**, interview, 7 April 1995.

advice to other companies and employee groups looking to establish similar caucuses.[43]

The BMC at SA Packaging played a key role in initiating a Group-level AA task team (established in 1994). The desire for AA to be narrowed into a policy instrument arose out of a worry that it was being 'driven by personalities' and hence its success was too dependent on certain individuals.[44] The AA task team is comprised of representatives from the BMC, CEO and divisional managers. It has an advisory role, and is tasked with discussing the BMC's AA proposals and developing a Group AA policy document. The draft document includes the following recommendations: beneficiaries are to include blacks, coloureds, Indians, and women, with the focus on blacks; annual targets and benchmarks that relate structural representation to regional demographics are to be introduced; an AA officer is to be appointed; and bonuses should continue to be tied to achieving AA targets.[45]

The task team excludes union representatives. Union consultation is dealt with in a parallel process. As stipulated in the National Agreement between Ppwawu and SA Packaging, the National Forum (representative of both management and unions) will develop AA guidelines for the shop floor.[46] Isaac Nkomo maintains that the unions are seeking to address questions of opportunity, access and training. These differ from the issues energizing the BMC (increased black representation within management ranks, quotas and personal promotion).[47] The potential tensions between the BMC's understanding of AA and that of the union's expose the fallacy of using race as a proxy for interests.[48] At the level of black managers, AA is predominantly about (personal) power, and thus threatens the status quo. At the level of the shop floor, AA is understood within a broader framework of workplace democracy and refers primarily to human capital

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[43] **Xerox**, *Diversity at Work.*

[44] **Joseph Tshabalala**, interview, 18 March 1996.

[45] **Joseph Tshabalala**, interview, 18 March 1996; and **Heather King**, interview, 1 September 1995.

[46] *Agreement between Ppwawu and SA Packaging Operations*, 7 August 1995.

[47] **Isaac Nkomo**, interview, 5 March 1996.

[48] The practice of using race as a proxy for viewpoint or interests is widespread. See for example **Theo Rawana**, 'Affirmative action in govt is outlined,' *Business Day*, 27 November 1995; and **Mzimkulu Malunga**, 'The Metropolitan Life mystery,' *Sowetan*, 6 February 1995.

development.[49] These differences unmask the fallacy of privileging racial identity a priori over other axes of identity and commonality (such as status or class position). We cannot assume that simply because these managers are black they will seek (and find) common ground with black workers. Indeed, it appears as though the union's position has many points of overlap with that of senior white managers.[50] Nascent schisms between BMCs and unionists are perceptible. According to Numsa shop stewards at SA Can:

> Black managers' caucuses are good but only if it benefits workers on the shopfloor...If they go up there for the benefit of the workforce, then that's good. There are guys with a tendency that after being developed he forgets those blokes down there or their brothers - they forget the Afrocentric approach and they start becoming selfish. If it's a caucus for their own that's not Afrocentric stuff, they'll be operating on an island.[51]

The case of SA Tin explodes the myth of racially dependent epistemological niches within which group perspectives are formed and given voice. As noted above, over the last few years the racial profile of the management team at SA Tin has changed. Of import has been the replacement of the white male MD with a black male MD (Lazarus Maseko), and the appointment of a black human resources manager (Dan Sebake). This new team has met with mixed reaction. According to Dan Sebake, 'when Lazarus and myself moved in, there was an expectation on behalf of workers that things would improve for the better because they have their own people here. To a certain extent we didn't meet those expectations.'[52]

The new managers charge that they inherited an unprofitable operation plagued with difficulties. These included alcohol abuse in the workplace, low levels of literacy, and ill-defined lines of authority which gave shop stewards undue power. Unsurprisingly, their attempts to address these problems have met with resistance and disputes. As Numsa shop stewards put it:

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[49] **Shilowa**, 'Black economic empowerment,' 9-10.

[50] **Isaac Nkomo**, interview, 5 March 1996.

[51] **Sipho Shabangu and Musi Langa**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[52] **Dan Sebake**, interview, 25 April 1996.

> The problem is...that when a black foreman is appointed we as workers expect more to come from them but we get only little from them... And with discipline they're becoming very harsh, even more than before. We don't expect a black manager to fire or dismiss someone when they know where we're coming from...When we saw affirmative action taking place... our expectations were raised high and we were expecting more than before but we weren't given it.... They're the same as the old management - they still operate in the old style, they should manage differently but they don't...They're even harsher then the old managers...[53]

For his part, Lazarus Maseko argues that 'my success at SA Tin depends on how good business results are, not on how good my workers feel about me.'[54]

Commonality is shown to be an act of political will and strategic insight, rather than an assertion or passive discovery. Along similar lines, Munro Reid, an African-American executive at the US Federal Government's Office of Personnel Management, takes umbrage with attempts to naturalize race. He suggests that

> One of the reasons why the clout of the NAACP has declined is because...they wanted to cookie-cut black people and when you've got 25 million black people, you can't say they all think the same...We're both black executives. We don't have the same economic problems as a black person from the ghetto and we don't think like them. And not all blacks grew up poor! ... If you say - what do black people need in our society? You'd have a million answers![55]

8.5 White Fears: The Tokolosh Revisited?

The FSA-Contact's 1996 AA study found that the proportion of respondent companies reporting white employee resistance to AA rose from 56 percent in 1995 to 71 percent in 1996. Companies citing a lack of commitment from management to AA rose from 36 percent in 1995, to 49 percent in 1996.[56] Clifford Barrett confirms that despite the lack of overt resistance to AA at senior management level, covert resistance is increasing:

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[53] **Lucas Molwane and Joe Ngema**, interview, 24 April 1996.

[54] **Lazarus Maseko**, interview, 12 April 1996.

[55] **Munro Reid**, Office of Personnel Management official, interview by author, Washington, D.C., 1 August 1996.

[56] FSA Contact Consulting Report, cited in 'Affirmative Action,' *Financial Mail*, 18 October 1996. Thomas reports a similar lack of commitment to AA amongst all levels of managerial staff (**Thomas**, 'Political freedom in South Africa').

> There's resentment amongst the white male species; we're the last of the last. The threat has come...white managers are seeing that they aren't getting the jobs. There's a white backlash...[57]

Managing diversity and AA are about change, and in the absence of new markers of certainty (which could perhaps be provided by effective change management strategies), insecurity breeds unchecked. In the case study companies, antagonism to change continues to undermine the successful implementation of these programmes. The case study companies have invoked the full gamut of strategies to deal with resistance. These range from ignoring animosity (as is the case at SA Tin),[58] to replacing entire management teams with younger, more progressive individuals - as was the case at SA Can.[59] SA Engineering relied on the threat of sanctions to enforce compliance. Employees who refused to attend company-wide diversity workshops were told that any lack of co-operation would result in disciplinary hearings. According to John Barron, SA Contractors human resources director:

> We told people, either you change, or you're out (this came from the MD). For example, there was this Afrikaans AWB girl who refused to participate in the process - she told us she refuses "to sit with kaffirs". We called her in and told her, "my girl, you have a choice, either you participate or you leave. There's the door, the choice is yours." She stayed. But there were only a few of these types of cases.[60]

White fears of AA have become the linchpin around which many workplace discussions of AA revolve. According to Numsa shop stewards at SA Can, 'when you ask about affirmative action you're told about white fears, whites are afraid blacks will take away

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[57] **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[58] For example, Eric Jones, SA Tin production manager, disregards those who oppose change, suggesting that 'there must be resistance to the changes because the MWU [Mineworkers Union] has asked to be recognized...but we've never really bothered to find out who they are...'(**Eric Jones**, interview, 24 April 1996).

[59] With reference to the old management team, Piet Roos commented that 'they had to leave or were asked to leave, they didn't want to leave.'(**Piet Roos**, interview, 26 March 1996).

[60] **John Barron**, interview, 5 September 1995. Articulating her animosity to the democratization process, Marie Verbaan commented: 'I wasn't mad about Labour Link but I had to do it. We had a seminar for two days and I wasn't impressed. I didn't want to go from the start. We've got the right to mix with who we want to mix with - they mustn't force us to mix...I don't care about learning about their culture. It was shoved down our throats. All the ladies felt like I did but they were too scared to say anything. The MD told me that if I didn't go I'd be fired.'(**Marie Verbaan**, interview, 19 April 1996).

their jobs. That's not the case.'[61] Even in those companies in which AA has made only minimal inroads into the apartheid-inspired demographic profile of the workforce, white employees remain fearful of change.[62] The perception is that AA will trammel their career opportunities. This may lead existing employees to subvert the initiative. Anecdotal evidence supports this hypothesis. At SA Engineering, some respondents allege that white supervisors, fearful of their long-term job security, attempt to impede the training prospects of black employees.[63] This trepidation resonates with past fears of the *swart gevaar*. According to Yster en Staal shop stewards at SA Engineering:

> They haven't taken on one white as permanent and they've taken on about forty blacks as permanent...So, that makes you start to hate each other again - it's like the old days...We start to hate the blacks. It's management's fault... all our white apprentices must leave the firm but they keep the blacks...It looks to me like management are scared for the blacks and the blacks have advantage over whites.[64]

A critical examination of the bogey of white fears - not all of which stem from unexorcised apartheid demons - is required. The reasons underpinning legitimate fears need to be understood and attempts made to address employee anxieties. This should not, however, be confused with the assumption that AA takes no prisoners.

In SA Insurance, middle managers often see themselves as being on the front line. Amanda Spira believes 'that fear is real. The company is not being honest, they should say: "of course your opportunities are being diminished but we'll try and minimize the damage".'[65] Angus Bowmaker warns that unless South Africa improves its economic growth rate, thousands of white managers will lose their jobs in the next couple of years for AA to make any significant progress. Between 1980 and 1995, there was an annual average decline of almost 1 percent per capita in the gross domestic product. During this

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[61] **Sipho Shabangu and Musi Langa**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[62] For example, SA Engineering's offices (which house the administrative, financial and other services) are still 98 percent white (**Ann Bester**, interview, 19 April 1996).

[63] **Thomas Maluleke**, interview, 19 April 1996.

[64] **Jan Harmse** *et al.*, interview, 18 April 1996.

[65] **Amanda Spira**, interview, 18 September 1995. As Carol Bates, Spira's assistant, commented: 'we really need to deal with middle management white fears...we're very thin on headcount and they're feeling the pressure...'(**Carol Bates**, assistant to Amanda Spira, interview with author, Johannesburg, 20 September 1995).

period the economic growth rate averaged 1.6 percent, with negative growth in 1990, 1991, and 1992.[66] Moreover, the lack of almost any growth in total management numbers in 1992-1994 implies that black gains have been made at the expense of white managers.[67] The BMF avers:

> When Whites cannot get jobs because the company prefers to employ Blacks, this policy must be seen in the context of the previous situation in which Whites were always preferred over Blacks. This situation is being directly reversed by affirmative action, which is in effect the reversal of discrimination rather than reverse discrimination...Where companies place moratoria on the appointment of Whites, this has to be seen as a temporary measure to address specific imbalances within a particular time frame, not as a permanent strategy. Only if it were a permanent strategy would it become reverse discrimination.[68]

The disingenuity of this play on semantics is a moot point. What is troublesome, however, is the idea that a practice can only be termed discriminatory if it attains permanence. Bheki Sibiya, then MD of the BMF, takes a different tack. Candidly pointing to the ways in which AA can have racially divisive consequences (such as excluding coloureds and Indians from AA programmes, which 'divides black people'), he concedes that 'so long as we have affirmative action we'll have to live with divisiveness and paradoxes.'[69]

8.6 Reconciling Conflicting Organizational Objectives

A key challenge to the success of AA programmes involves reconciling conflicting organizational objectives. On the one hand, organizations need to respond to increasingly competitive pressures through re-engineering corporate structures (which often entails retrenchments). On the other, they are under pressure to provide additional job opportunities for previously disadvantaged individuals. In an era of downsizing and increasing world competitiveness - and the emphasis this places on a robust bottom line, technical competencies and increased productivity - AA strategies are increasingly

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[66] Figures from the Reserve Bank (June 1995), and the IMF (1995); cited in **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 24-25.

[67] Statistics from the Breakwater Monitor reports; cited in 'Growth vital to progress in affirmative action,' *Star Business Report*, 26 June 1995.

[68] **BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 14.

[69] **Bheki Sibiya**, interview, 1 September 1995.

difficult to maintain. According to Henry Barclay, SA Paper general manager:

> There are conflicts that come from the Group or Division - their objectives often conflict with each other: For example, we need to ensure affirmative action but at the same time hack the headcount and re-engineer. [This leads to] conflicting headcounts.[70]

This tension is exacerbated by the need to become internationally competitive. These contradictions make it difficult to get people to buy in to change initiatives.[71] AA is, at least initially, highly resource-intensive and the levels of human resources investment demanded involve a long-term commitment.[72] A key feature of AA success stories is that the AA initiative has been implemented during a period of solid financial growth. In this type of environment, a company has the requisite resources to devote to human capital development. This was the case with SAB. According to Innes and Davies, a key reason for the success of SAB's Equity programme was that it occurred while SAB's markets were expanding. This led to an increasing demand for staff. Moreover, resources were available to fund AA initiatives such as training and mentoring. Lastly, because existing employees did not feel that their jobs were threatened, they accepted the AA policy relatively easily.[73]

This demonstrates the importance of the order in which organizations embark upon change management initiatives. If a company initiates a trust-building exercise prior to an 'efficiency exercise' (which invariably involves retrenchments), the trust which has been built will shatter.[74] This, in turn, may result in low employee morale and productivity (possibly prompting yet another 'efficiency exercise'). Such initiatives are more likely to be effective if they are introduced after a staff-reduction exercise.

Efforts to promote employment equity are often constrained by declining or stagnant economic growth. As Amanda Spira, a human resources department manager at SA Insurance puts it: 'With affirmative action, we want to change demographics without

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[70] **Henry Barclay**, interview, 2 April 1996.

[71] **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[72] *Restructuring the South African Labour Market*, chap. 8, sec. 468.

[73] **Innes and Davies**, 'Affirmative Action,' 9, and 6.

[74] **John Barron**, interview, 5 September 1995.

negatively affecting productivity, profitability and existing staffs careers. But this can't work, something has to go'.[75] The recent downsizings, and flattening and delayering of managerial hierarchies at SA Insurance has made middle management 'hostile - they know they're not going anywhere and affirmative action is another threat. They don't buy this notion that "we're not going to trammel your career"...'[76] In SA, the consequence of this downsizing is that opportunities to bring promising blacks into management are rapidly diminishing 'because there are *no* management positions left - we've taken out whole layers'.[77]

Moreover, recent profitability gains at SA Insurance have come from very lean manpower, a substantially improved product line, and weekly productivity measurements that are made public. In this highly competitive climate with bottom lines that have to be met within tight deadlines, many feel that they cannot afford to bring in candidates with large needs for training and experience.[78] Even in those divisions in which there is demonstrable good faith in implementing AA, 'in times of crisis they revert to production issues...and then [AA] programmes need to be deferred.'[79]

At the level of rhetoric, the idea that AA is integral to business survival and the bottom line is gaining currency. Given these aforementioned problems, however, even when AA is seen as a strategic objective, companies rarely treat it in the same way as other strategic issues.[80] Adele Thomas's survey of 213 companies found that when expanding on the business reasons for AA, only 13 percent of CEOs and a mere 3 percent of HR directors identified competitive advantage and business survival as key.[81]

A possible explanation for this is that data to support the business case for AA is not

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[75] **Amanda Spira**, interview, 18 September 1995.

[76] **Amanda Spira**, interview, 18 September 1995.

[77] **Koos Jooste**, interview, 20 September 1995.

[78] **Amanda Spira**, interview, 18 September 1995. As Frank Bailey put it: 'there's less and less luxury for a big nursery.'(**Frank Bailey**, interview, 18 September 1995).

[79] **Derek Schnell**, interview, 18 September 1995.

[80] **IDASA**, *Making Affirmative Action Work*, 134.

[81] **Thomas**, 'Political freedom in South Africa.'

readily available. Given the complex nature of the task, and the newness of many AA programmes, there is a dearth of longitudinal studies assessing the impact of AA policies on profit and loss statements.[82] Even if the requisite evidence were available, some hold that it may not prove the business case for AA. According to Henry Barclay, SA Paper's general manager:

> We have to compete globally, whether we like it or not. If we don't, we'll go under...No affirmative action or RDP policy will help the company survive. It's a question of whether we have more skills, and less people...to close the gap with the USA...We're going to be employers of less people - corporate business is not going to be the provider of more jobs...[83]

AA is being implemented at a time when the nature of work is changing, skill requirements are adjusting, and the pace of economic change and flatter organizational structures is eroding the traditional expectation of a career. According to James Smith, SA Packaging group MD, a key problem facing the country is how to reconcile the legions of unskilled, predominantly illiterate manual workers with the increasing demands of global competitiveness, which often calls for fewer employees who are more qualified. The outlook is bleak: in the World Competitiveness Report of 1995, SA ranked 42nd overall (out of 48 countries) and last in the area of human resources development.[84] Smith notes that 'there will be casualties and it'll be brutal. Since I've been MD we've taken 6000 people out of SA Packaging - I'm not proud of it.' He submits that the problem is becoming less an issue of recruiting well-qualified black university students, and more a question of 'what to do with the legacy of the piles of labour from the past.'[85]

Employees varyingly blame one or other of the two organizational objectives (World Class Manufacturing or AA) for the fall-out. Some, however, recognize the difficulties and question how (or rather, if) these objectives can be reconciled. As a SA Insurance employee put it: 're-engineering assumes very high skills, high self-motivation, flat

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[82] This is recognized in the joint study by the BMF and management consultants Ernst & Young (Black Management Forum/Ernst and Young Report; cited in **Motlhabakwe**, 'Benchmarking affirmative action,' 58-59).

[83] **Henry Barclay**, interview, 2 April 1996.

[84] Cited in **Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 1.

[85] **James Smith**, interview, 17 April 1996.

hierarchies...but affirmative action assumes development and training...these two are inconsistent'.[86]

These problems provide reticent managers with a built-in escape route out of their AA responsibilities. In a company like SA Insurance, the need to maintain high levels of productivity, profitability and standards is widely accepted. In this light, it is difficult to judge whether or not a manager's decision to deprivilege AA objectives in favour of one of the latter goals (such as maintaining standards) has been taken in good faith.[87] Other tensions arise. As Koos Jooste, a SA Insurance general manager, explained: 'we have an internal transfer policy but what if you have a white internal candidate who's just as qualified as a black external candidate - who do you appoint? Which policy is more important? How are staff going to perceive it?'[88]

These debates are manifestations of the extent to which defining the content, pace and scope of World Class Manufacturing (WCM) has become a key area of contention between workers and management. A review of the problems plaguing the SA economy and the strategies (such as WCM) adopted to arrest areas of economic decline are not within the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to note that multiple reasons have necessitated moves towards greater competitiveness, trade liberalization, industrial restructuring, labour market and wage flexibility, and market reform. These include: uncompetitive industries; stagnant economic growth; declining investment; low levels of productivity, skills and literacy; inadequate education and technical training; and declining levels of private sector employment.[89]

The absence of a common understanding of WCM is reflected in the oft-heard conviction

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[86] **SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995.

[87] **Koos Jooste**, interview, 20 September 1995.

[88] **Koos Jooste**, interview, 20 September 1995.

[89] See for example **Avril Joffe, David Kaplan, Raphael Kaplinsky, and David Lewis**, 'Manufacturing Change,' *Indicator SA* 11, no. 2 (1994): 53-60; **Francis Wilson**, 'Problems of Economic Restructuring in South Africa,' paper presented to the Centre for African Economies: Institute of Economics and Statistics, University of Oxford, Oxford, 3 June 1996; **Robert H. Hayes and Gary P. Pisano**, 'Beyond World-Class: The New Manufacturing Strategy,' *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1994: 77-86, **Shilowa**, 'Black economic empowerment,' 7-17; and **Reneé Grawitzky**, 'Labour tables its blueprint for the future,' *Business Day*, 2 April 1996.

that WCM is a European concept, ill suited to African socio-economic conditions. As Numsa shop stewards at SA Can put it, 'if we don't have world class wages, benefits, and working conditions...we don't have world class. But management doesn't see it like this...'[90] The claim is that by relying on English and German companies as benchmarks, management disregards the wages, literacy, training and skills discrepancies between South African and European companies.[91] Dismissing WCM, many respondents rhetorically question the value of 'trying to bring in European ideas. We're working in Africa, a Third World country - and Europe is First World. So, how can you bring those ideas here?'[92]

Amongst workers, a common refrain is that unless their perilous socio-economic circumstances are improved, management cannot expect them to become world-class performers.[93] The ever-present threat of retrenchments, coupled with high levels of unemployment and crime, adds to the scepticism of WCM.[94] As Ppwawu shop stewards at SA Paper put it:

> South African businesses are at war and we are the casualties. They're trying to be more competitive and world class and we're the casulaties. We have no jobs, our kids don't have education...Middle management and top management should first look at themselves: they're all in their comfort zones. We make the cake, we decorate it, and they eat it all...[95]

WCM calls for increased levels of technical skills and educational qualifications. Given the current deficit of skills and qualifications amongst the workforce, their antipathy to WCM

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[90] **Sipho Shabangu and Musi Langa**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[91] **Sipho Shabangu and Musi Langa**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[92] **Wilmot Gabriels** *et al.*, interview, 1 April 1996. According to Lazarus Maseko, MD of SA Tin, 'it's naive to think that all our businesses can compete with Germany...It's a vision...[but] unless we do compete we'll become another Third World consuming country. Saying we can't be world class is saying we have an incurable disease - I think we have a curable disease...'(**Lazarus Maseko**, interview, 12 April 1996).

[93] **Wilmot Gabriels** *et al.*, interview, 1 April 1996.

[94] Rejecting the current move towards WCM, a Ppwawu shop steward argued that 'I'll go world class for one reason, if it creates jobs, not if it puts people on the streets...The more you put on the streets the more the crime rate increases, therefore the people who're left may earn stuff but you'll get robbed in one minute. You may be a world class performer but you won't have a cent - you'll be robbed...'(**Wilmot Gabriels** *et al.*, interview, 1 April 1996).

[95] **Wilmot Gabriels** *et al.*, interview, 1 April 1996.

is unsurprising. A key constraint to skill formation is the lack of literacy and numeracy amongst workers but, according to the ILO Review, few firms have been providing training to overcome this obstacle.[96] Indeed, a large percentage of the SA Packaging and SA Engineering workforces have had little formal schooling. This bolsters the perception that WCM is synonymous with retrenchment (particularly of unskilled employees). For example, at SA Paper, the GM told a meeting that Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) means a reduction in headcount. The message fed back to the workforce was that BPR equals retrenchment.[97] In March 1996, Ppwawu declared a dispute over BPR and the possibility of future retrenchments, claiming that 'we see BPR as a nice word for retrenching people.'[98] These shop stewards believe that by defining skills as synonymous with formal qualifications, their experience (accumulated over many years of work) is devalued.[99]

At the various SA Packaging operations, these suspicions have made it difficult to get the unions to believe in WCM. For example, Numsa shop stewards at SA Tin (which has not as yet implemented WCM) claim that 'we still have our suspicions that if they go ahead with this reworking of the organization some of our comrades will be retrenched. Until we get this guarantee that they won't be we can't really go for it [WCM].'[100] This antagonism is particularly pronounced at SA Paper, where BPR is blamed for the high levels of mistrust, insecurity and demotivation amongst all stakeholders. As a supervisor put it: 'at the shop floor level we know there's going to be retrenchments... now it's like having a person in a condemned cell who's about to be hanged but not knowing when it's going to happen.'[101] Little has been done to allay respondents' fears, in part because these fears seem to have validity. Henry Barclay, SA Paper general manager, summed it up as follows:

> Even though we'll try our level best to keep people if we do retrench at the end of

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[96] **E. Wood**, 'Skill constraints in a sample of South African engineering firms,' *Essay 3*, University of Cambridge Ph.D., 1994, mimeo; cited in **Standing, Sender, and Weeks**, *Restructuring the labour market*, 345.

[97] **Pierre van Rensburg**, interview, 1 April 1996.

[98] **Wilmot Gabriels** *et al.*, interview, 1 April 1996.

[99] **Wilmot Gabriels** *et al.*, interview, 1 April 1996.

[100] **Lucas Molwane and Joe Ngema**, interview, 24 April 1996.

[101] **Joe Landsberg and Ernest Schoeman**, interview, 1 April 1996.

> the day we hope it'll be voluntary...We're in the business to make money and maximise profit and we're not here to fix up the problems of the past or drive the RDP. What we need first and foremost is to maximize profits...BPR is focusing from the GM down. We'll probably have five management people becoming redundant and a lot of middle management becoming redundant but this may cascade down and affect the lower levels.[102]

8.7 Conclusions

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the types of obstacles and forms of resistance encountered in the implementation of AA programmes. It has shown that the backing of top management is necessary but not sufficient for the success of AA initiatives. It has suggested that elected and representative structures can be useful in advising on and mobilizing support for AA initiatives. These fora can provide a conduit for the views of the organization's rank and file to be heard at senior management level. If used effectively, such structures can assist in quelling the rumours and managing the fears that tend to accompany AA.

This chapter examined the practice of tying performance appraisals and compensation to AA goals. It was shown that whilst this promotes accountability for AA ('money talks'), the right numbers are often achieved at the cost of a more wholistic approach to people development. Indeed, the dearth of people and change management skills may hamper AA initiatives.

The jury is still out when it comes to the question of white fears. This chapter suggested that in the face of economic uncertainty, white employees might find an index of security in scapegoating blacks. Fears of retrenchments and truncated career trajectories contribute to the backlash against AA. In an environment of downsizing, AA is easily politicized and comes to mean quotas and preferential treatment: something companies have for blacks, and not whites; (and in some cases) women, and not men. What complicates attempts to address these fears is that they may have some validity.

Of crucial importance to any discussion of white fears is the often-overlooked issue of

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[102] **Henry Barclay**, interview, 2 April 1996.

black fears. As was demonstrated in this chapter, many unskilled and uneducated workers (the vast majority of whom are black) are distrustful of the move towards World Class Manufacturing. They suspect, probably correctly, that the envisaged changes to the labour process will result in retrenchments.

Developing a comprehensive understanding of AA entails taking account of the economic realities that enable, shape and constrain these programmes. The cultural and political discourses within which these economic factors are understood and interpreted by the different social actors need to be factored into the equation. As was suggested above, there are multiple ways in which employees make sense of this constraining environment. This, in turn, shapes the ways in which they react to AA and WCM initiatives. It also influences who or what will become the target of their fears. The organizational landscape is uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Conflicting organizational objectives and permanent white water will continue to be the defining features of corporate SA for the foreseeable future. The task for all parties will remain that of negotiating and managing this complexity. With reference to these challenges, George Nkadimeng, Cosatu vice-president, put it nicely: 'People can no longer eat slogans...We need to look at the world as it is today, and not the world as Karl Marx said.'[103]

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[103] **George Nkadimeng**, interview, 7 March 1996.

CHAPTER 9
MANAGING DIVERSITY

9.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the theory of diversity management, and provides a brief overview of managing diversity as a set of (often vague and incoherent) policies and practices. It draws attention to the ways in which American ideas and practices in this field have been imported by South African commentators and practitioners. It is suggested that a central pitfall is the tendency of diversity facilitators to rely on a variant of multiculturalism that reifies cultural groups. In consequence, managing diversity strategies tend to either essentialize one axis of identity, or valorize difference to the point of indifference. The latter assumes that all differences are equivalent, that they have equal value and significance. This analytic position thus proscribes the development of a set of criteria to adjudicate between differences. What we are left with is a debilitating indifference. We no longer have the space to think about how some differences weigh more heavily on their bearers than others, or about how some differences may impinge upon, and indeed, eclipse others.

As detailed in previous chapters, many executives face a pressing need to increase the racial diversity of their workforce. This may lead to what Roosevelt Thomas terms a six-step, crisis-ridden AA cycle. Problem recognition (the dearth of blacks and women) leads to an AA intervention and the recruitment of corporate minorities. AA appointees enter the organization with high expectations but become frustrated by failing to progress and plateauing prematurely. Some become disillusioned and leave. This confirms the prejudices of many white employees and managers that blacks or women cannot cope with the pressures or make the grade. A period of dormancy ensues, and is broken by a new crisis. The cycle is then repeated.[1] In common with other diversity theorists, Thomas touts managing diversity as the central mechanism to break this inevitable deadlock.

The US is considered as the country of origin of diversity management programmes. During the past decade, many American companies have, with varying success, embarked upon diversity initiatives. Various phenomena have stimulated the move towards diversity

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[1] **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 21-23; and **Thomas**, 'From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity,' 110-112.

management, of which two intertwined phenomena are key. The first is the increasing awareness in corporate corridors of the demographic changes in the workforce and consumer market. In 1988, the Hudson Institute published a study entitled *Workforce 2000* (commissioned by the US Department of Labour). Its central conclusion was that changes in the demographics of the labour force and national consumer markets were going to change the face of corporate America. By the year 2000, white males would account for only 15 percent of new entrants to the labour force, with minorities, women and immigrants constituting the bulk of the increase.[2]

Following its publication, conventional wisdom held that managing diversity was no longer a social ideal, but a practical business mandate.[3] The idea of diversity became corporate gospel. Advocates claim that managing diversity has become a critical competency for managers in the 1990s.[4] According to Doug Volz, vice president of employee relations at Sara Lee Corporation: 'diversity is a business imperative in a company as global as we are and who markets to different cultures...it's good business sense and good market sense to value this thing we call diversity.'[5]

This idea is beginning to take hold in corporate South Africa. An enhanced ability to respond timeously to diverse markets is being anticipated by many organizations. For instance, an internal SA Banking document states: 'Diversity (of our staff) is a strength. This is enhanced by having a staff mix that reflects our target markets more accurately.'[6]

As noted in Chapter Seven, the realignment of human resources policies and practices with AA objectives is necessary to effect change. It is, however, insufficient to ensure the level of change required for retaining and developing the capacities of all black and women

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[2] **William B. Johnston and Arnold H. Packer**, *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century*, Indianapolis: Hudson Institute, 1987; quoted in **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 5; **Bernstein**, *Dictatorship of Virtue*, 155-157; and **Thomas**, 'From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity,' 107.

[3] See **Lattimer**, 'The Case for Corporate Diversity,' 17. The *Workforce 2000* figures and conclusions took hold of the popular imagination, and are cited *ad nauseam* in both the corporate and academic valuing diversity literature.

[4] **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity*, 10.

[5] **Douglas C. Volz**, interview, 8 August 1996.

[6] *My own experience of the Rainbow programme*, SA Banking Rainbow Personal Workbook, Johannesburg: SA Banking, ca. 1993, 13-14.

employees. This leads to the second major stimulus towards diversity management in the US: this is what many American commentators perceive as the failure of AA to create a corporate environment within which the nation's human capital is fully utilized. AA programmes have not managed to eliminate the barriers to the advancement of women and corporate minorities to management and decision-making positions. In many organizations, the glass ceiling is still in place.[7]

Taking heed of these experiences, many South African practitioners in the field of change management extol the virtues of implementing diversity management concurrently with AA. This chapter examines what exactly is meant by 'diversity management', what it is meant to accomplish, and whether it can in fact achieve that which it sets out to do.

9.2 The Move from Segregation to Assimilation

Under apartheid, the workplace was characterized by a racially bipolar culture with strictly defined lines of authority. Managers were mostly white and workers were mostly black. The organizing framework was one of segregation, of us versus them.[8] Verbal and physical violence was employed to reinforce this polarization. As a SA Engineering supervisor put it: 'about seven years ago there was a racial problem...artisans would throw hammers at the workers.'[9] Similarly, a colleague of his noted that 'in the past, if a guy didn't listen to you, you'd...*klap* [hit] him on the back of his head - but not anymore.'[10] Disavowals to the contrary, many respondents believe that this bipolar sensibility lives on.

The notion that there are two separate cultures that parallel racial contours is prevalent amongst respondents. The 'White/Western/Eurocentric/Task-Oriented' culture is

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[7] See *Good For Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital,* a Fact-Finding Report of the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, March 1995, 7-8 passim; and *A Solid Investment: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital,* recommendations of the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, Washington,D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, November 1995, 4-6.

[8] Providing insight into how managers understood labour relations in the past, Piet Roos comments that 'we had a culture of employees clock in and leave their brains at the gate...As managers we believed we knew everything and didn't want to know anything from workers.'(**Piet Roos**, interview, 26 March 1996).

[9] **Paul Laubscher**, interview, 18 April 1996.

[10] **Piet Pretorius**, interview, 18 April 1996. According to a coloured supervisor, 'in the past they [supervisors] didn't care about workers on the floor and they used to say "jy werk vir jou geld en as jy nie werk nie I'll fok you up." Now they say please and thank you...'(**Abdul Kala**, interview, 18 April 1996).

portrayed as a key obstacle to the transformation of power and racial relations. Amongst others, Grace Mokoena, SA Banking ombudsman, charges this culture with responsibility for the underrepresentation of women and blacks.[11] Typical of this perspective is Motshabi's contention that the core of the problem is that South African business remains 'Westcentric', thereby alienating and marginalizing black employees.[12] These commentators allege that the 'mind set of white South Africa' is the key stumbling block to AA's success. Mokoena alleges that the 'culture of playing golf' allows for the creation of 'pavement people' - blacks and women who occupy the sidewalks of power whilst the central thoroughfares are patrolled by white men.[13] In contrast, the 'Black/South African/People-Oriented' culture is presented as the panacea. The equation of culture with race leads to myths as to what constitutes these seemingly mutually exclusive and coherent entities called 'black culture' and 'white culture'.

In recent years, the concept of organizational culture has undergone a major revival in management studies. Various definitions are proposed. To outline but a couple: Cox and Harquail rely on the idea of culture as integration. Culture is the underlying values, beliefs and principles that serve as a foundation for the organization's management system; it is a tool to forge a common corporate identity.[14] Linstead conceives of culture as a text (written and read by all members of the organization).[15] And Mills views culture as the configuration of rules, enactments and resistance which manifest in and through corporate artefacts, processes and behaviours.[16]

Given this cultural renaissance, it is rather surprising that much of the diversity management literature continues to rely on a rather superficial understanding of (organizational) culture. Typical of this literature is Cox and Harquail's assertion that

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[11] **Grace Mokoena**, interview, 28 August 1995.

[12] **Motshabi**, 'Managing Cultural Diversity,'120.

[13] Grace Mokoena puts it nicely: 'At SA Banking, they make decisions on the golf course, and then they discuss golf at work.'(**Grace Mokoena**, interview, 28 August 1995).

[14] **Taylor Cox, Jr. and Celia V. Harquail**, 'Organizational Culture and Acculturation,' in *Cultural Diversity in Organizations: Theory, Research & Practice*, edited by Taylor Cox, Jr., San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1993, 161.

[15] **Linstead**, 'Deconstruction,' 60-61; and **Elizabeth Harlow and Jeff Hearn**, 'Cultural Constructions: Contrasting Theories of Organizational Culture and Gender Construction,' *Gender, Work and Organization* 2, no. 4 (1995): 185.

[16] **Albert J. Mills**, 'Man/aging Subjectivity, Silencing Diversity: Organizational Imagery in the Airline Industry. The Case of British Airways,' *Organization* 2, no. 2 (1995): 244.

'(t)raditionally, the objective of the socialization process has been complete alignment of the individual with the norms of the organization. Thus socialization...is closely linked to acculturation processes.'[17] The assumption is of a unidirectional, imposed culture, which establishes hegemony by moulding the values, attitudes and behaviours of organizational members. Within this framework, Motshabi criticizes assimilationist strategies for 'trying to make Blacks more like Whites', for 'imposing on Blacks a set of values devised only by Whites.'[18] In presenting corporate culture as monolithic, this analysis fails to examine organizational sub-cultures that may inhibit or support AA and diversity programmes.

Given that social segregation is still an abiding feature of the South African corporate landscape, this bipolar understanding of culture (as advanced by Mokoena *etal*) resonates strongly amongst respondents. According to engineers at SA Paper, 'people are still segregated socially, we're still conditioned by the past. We're still individual cultures - there's a cross over but there still is "I'll stay in my area and you stay in yours."'[19]

The extent to which racism and racial tensions endure, conditioning corporate cultures, differs from case study to case study. SA Engineering represents the one extreme. According to Numsa shop stewards, 'racists dominate here. These people are still living in the past, in the apartheid era.'[20] Apartheid hangovers are found in the continued racial segregation of the change rooms on the Heavy Bay;[21] racially defined wages; and the multiple ways in which black and white employees are treated differently.[22] Management is aware of this racism, but seem to lack the political will or inclination to do much about it. As Adrian Stucke, a manager, admits: 'there's a long way to go...to the acceptance of the disadvantaged

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[17] **Cox and Harquail**, 'Organizational Culture and Acculturation,' 165.

[18] **Motshabi**, 'Managing Cultural Diversity,' 122.

[19] **Cedric Meiring**, interview, 1 April 1996.

[20] **Numsa shop stewards** (SA Engineering), interview, 18 April 1996.

[21] 'One side it's for whites and the other for blacks - they've got hot water and we don't...There's a fence dividing the two change rooms. In 1995 we heard rumours that the fence is going to be removed due to affirmative action.'(**Numsa shop stewards** (SA Engineering), interview, 18 April 1996).

[22] A typical comment came from a Netu shop steward who maintains that 'the foremen don't listen to us at all. When we talk to him he refuses but when it's a white person he does everything very quickly for him.'(**Oupa Ngobeni and Thami Mabalane**, interview, 18 April 1996).

workers that they are human beings.'[23]

The various SA Packaging operations seem to have been more successful in eradicating this crudely racist and adversarial culture. At SA Can, a corollary of this erosion of racism has been the decline in support for the whites-only Mineworkers Union (MWU). Membership has dropped from about 68 percent of white workers in the 1980s to current levels of approximately 9-10 percent. A central reason for the decline in MWU membership has been its right wing and conservative bias. Andre Pienaar, SA Can's human resources manager, claims that most white workers 'see the MWU as out of touch with what's happening in the company and they don't want to resist change.' [24] Despite real changes, pockets of racism continue to exist. As Leon Kleinhans, a coloured foreman, put it: 'Here the whites see other people as *kaffirs* or *boeties*. As a black or coloured man you can hear them in their offices talking to each other about the *hotnots* and *kaffirs*.'[25]

Overall, racial segregation in the workplace is on the decline. Assimilationist pressures, however, still prevail in most companies. The conventional approach to diversity is one of assimilation. The emphasis is on 'fitting in', of diluting individual difference. Diversity advocates criticize the trope of the melting pot for making 'norm'alization the price of corporate acceptance. Organizational strategies that rely on alignment, congruence and adaptation are seen as ill suited to deal with the challenges of an increasingly diverse workforce. Within assimilationist discourses claims to equality are upheld only by establishing equivalences which deny difference: to insist on your difference is to nullify your claim to equality.[26] A SA Insurance manager revealed this view: 'there's a guy here who's got a lovely accent - only after he talks [a bit longer] do you realise he's black.'[27]

A degree of assimilation is required around core values that are linked to job output.[28] What

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[23] **Adrian Stucke**, interview, 19 April 1996.

[24] **Andre Pienaar**, interview, 19 March 1996.

[25] **Leon Kleinhans**, interview, 27 March 1996.

[26] **Cynthia Cockburn**, *In the Way of Women: Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations*, London: Macmillan, 1991, 219.

[27] **David Cahn**, interview, 19 September 1995.

[28] **Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 50.

is up for debate is how to determine which values fall within this rather amorphous category. SA Insurance's English communication skills training programme will serve to illustrate this dilemma. Many SA Insurance employees maintain that it is harmful to relations with clients if employees with whom they deal cannot speak or write English effectively.[29] Hence the business communication skills training programme (BECS) was introduced.[30] Fluency in the lingua franca of the corporate world is one area in which assimilation is linked to job output, and is necessary for individual and organizational success. Conversely, the expectation that employees will cultivate a standardized accent is insisting on a level of assimilation not linked to job output. A deputy general manager at SA Insurance expressed this expectation in the following way: 'you need to get the African roughness out of their accent so therefore there's a spoken English component'.[31] Managing and valuing diversity programmes are touted as a means to extirpate this form of stereotyping and foster a respect for cultural and racial pluralism.

Many companies are still at the stage of expecting new recruits to adapt and fit in to the dominant culture. Proposals for what Plani terms 'symbolic egalitarianism' (re-examining status symbols such as parking bay allocation, dress codes, and dining arrangements) have met with resistance.[32] As Harry Bristow articulates it:

> [Debates about] wearing sari's and caftans trivializes cultural questions or issues...whether you're in Japan or New York, you wear a suit to a business meeting - if you wear a sari or caftan, no-one will take you seriously...There are more important questions to be addressed...for example, the fact that 99 percent of the Board [of Directors] is white...Our culture is an assimilationist one - of course! You must conform [and] wear a suit.[33]

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[29] According to an employee, 'one factor that leads to the impression of blacks being incompetent is language. A letter written by a black in English is more clumsy than one written by a white.'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, 20 September 1995).

[30] With reference to the process through which BECS trainees were identified, a white employee submitted that 'there was a culturally and racially biased skills assessment recently...to identify English skills...it was designed to make black people fail...It was aimed at English first language speakers..the test was of spoken English, so if you had an accent you'd fail...'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, 18 September 1995).

[31] **William Spence**, SA Insurance deputy general manager, interview with author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995.

[32] See **Plani**, 'Managing Diverse Employees,' 81-82; and **Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 141.

[33] **Harry Bristow**, interview, 10 April 1995.

Taking umbrage with assimilationist strategies, Cox submits that the stronger an individuals identification with the majority group culture, the better her career outcomes.[34] Employees with 'monocultural minority-group identity structures' (individuals who only minimally assimilate to majority group norms) will experience more negative career outcomes than those with other identity structures will.[35] Similarly, the level of value congruence or the degree of 'fit' between the organization's and the individuals culture affects career outcomes.[36] To the extent that (corporate) majority group members define an organization's culture, everything else being equal, their value congruence (and job satisfaction) will be greater than that of members of (corporate) minority groups.[37] This is seen to create barriers to the full participation of corporate minority group members.[38] Value-dissonance is also touted as one of the reasons why (white) women have benefited more from AA than minority men (itself a debatable proposition).[39] As Martine Rodriguez, a former head of the OFCCP, posits:

> Because the culture set is one of Caucasian values, it was hard for minority men to understand the culture. They weren't comfortable with corporate environments. They had to learn the unwritten rules - they had no role models or mentors and they were at a clear disadvantage.[40]

In both these expositions, no account is taken of identities as being in a constant process of negotiation. It is assumed that all corporate minorities will react in the same way to normalizing strategies. By presenting the individual as a passive entity to be targeted by organizational expectations and inculcated with dominant cultural norms, a robust conception of agency and subjectivity is eschewed. These theories are unable to explain

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[34] **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 62.

[35] **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 62-63.

[36] **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 21-22.

[37] **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 22.

[38] **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 129.

[39] According to Heidi Hartmann, the strongest effect of AA has been on minority males (and secondarily on minority females). She claims that AA has had the least effect for white women, and attributes the latter's gains in the labour market primarily to Title VI and access to education. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, extends equal protection standards to all colleges and universities receiving federal grants.(**Heidi I. Hartmann**, Institute for Women's Policy Research director and president, interview by author, Washington,D.C., 14 August 1996).

[40] **Martine Rodriguez**, interview, 31 July 1996.

how, despite the normalizing forces at work, individuals are never subsumed entirely by assimilationist pressures.[41] These strategies are contested, they are always temporary, unstable and never totalizing. By overlooking this, a concept of resistance is absent from the analysis. What Mary Gentile terms 'invisible diversity' is similarly ignored. This refers to identities such as religion or sexual orientation that *tend* not to be immediately evident. Bearers of these identities have a choice of becoming identified (or not) with a particular identity group in a particular setting, a choice that has costs and benefits.[42]

Identities are context-dependent. Each organization has its own institutional matrix interwoven with multiple sets of power relations. Race, class, gender, ethnic, economic, political, and regional cleavages all affect the form cultural identities assume in particular organizational contexts. The form the relationship between black and coloured employees assumes in a SA Packaging subsidiary in Gauteng differs from that it might take in a subsidiary in the Western Cape. In the former, the central cultural fault-line still appears to run between whites on the one hand, and blacks and coloureds on the other.[43] Conversely, at SA Paper most coloured respondents believe that social and cultural schisms divide them from their black colleagues. As a coloured supervisor put it: 'I've been working with blacks for years and they don't trust you - however well you know them. They call you a *'witvoet* bastard'...that you'll always run to the whites if you have problems...'[44] According to another coloured employee, differences in culture and beliefs are key:

> In day to day communication, coloured and white communication is much easier than white and black [communication]. Coloured and white cultures are very similar; our humour is the same. There's a social gap between whites and coloureds, on one side; and blacks [on the other].[45]

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[41] This parallels McNay's critique of Foucault's theory of normalization (**Lois McNay**, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, 165).

[42] **Mary C. Gentile**, 'Introduction,' in *Differences That Work: Organizational Excellence through Diversity*, edited and with an introduction by Mary C. Gentile, with a foreword by R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., A Harvard Business Review Book, Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1994, xvi.

[43] According to a coloured foreman,'There's trust between the blacks and the brown people...but there's no trust between the blacks and browns, and the whites.'(**Leon Kleinhans**, interview, 27 March 1996).

[44] **Joe Landsberg and Ernest Schoeman**, interview, 1 April 1996.

[45] **SA Paper employees**, focus group interview by author, Cape Town, 2 April 1996. Dismissing the idea that these differences may lead to different comfort levels within the organization, a coloured employee asserted that 'you'll never make an African feel uncomfortable. Don't you believe that! It's like water off a ducks back to him. They can feel where they're wanted or not wanted.'(**Connie Heymann**, SA Paper long distance transport clerk, interview by author, Cape Town, 1 April 1996).

Clearly, these patterns should not be taken as representative of the cultural and racial dynamics in each region. For instance, at SA Engineering in Gauteng the racial divides are closer to those at SA Paper than they are to those at SA Can (in Gauteng). Explaining why the vast majority of their members are black, Numsa shop stewards at SA Engineering asserted that 'the other whites are scared of dancing...The others [coloureds] are on our side because we're in the majority but they're afraid to come out. Some of the coloureds here are puppets - they say different things to whites and blacks.'[46]

9.3 Defining Diversity

Advocates of diversity management argue that assimilation is bad for business.[47] Its negative consequences hinder organizational effectiveness because of withdrawal behaviour by (corporate) minority group members, lost productivity, a potential loss of leadership talent, and time wasted establishing legitimacy that could be more effectively used to solve organizational problems.[48]

These advocates contend that in order to eradicate the eurocentric bias of the corporate world, AA policies need to be coupled with diversity management programmes. The belief is that corporate exclusivism can be countered by affirming the diversity and background of all employees.[49] Hence the call for an end to the traditional dominance of white male culture. In its place is to emerge a 'dominant heterogeneous culture',[50] one that gives pride of place to previously excluded and marginalized identities and cultural practices.[51]

Difference is to be affirmed and individuality respected. To abet this process, the Green

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[46] **Numsa shop stewards** (SA Engineering), interview, 18 April 1996.

[47] **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 8.

[48] **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 193.

[49] For example, an internal SA Banking publication states: 'Valuing diversity places a neutral or positive value on differences be they racial, gender, cultural or other differences. Where it is used in organizations it means allowing people more opportunity to be themselves within the framework of organizational effectiveness.'(*My own experience of the Rainbow programme*, 25).

[50] **Thomas**, 'From affirmative action to affirming diversity,' 142.

[51] The BMF proposes that managing diversity programmes challenge assimilationist attitudes and eurocentric business practices whilst encouraging a more 'Afrocentric business philosophy.'(**BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 33).

Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity proposes cultural and gender diversity training for employers and employees.[52] It states that employment equity plans should include explicit support for cultural diversity in the workplace, expressed through clothing, food, and language.[53] To this end, the following types of strategies and practices are invoked: appointing Equality Ombudsmen and Councils, conducting cultural audits, and initiating diversity management workshops. The latter varyingly include multicultural awareness, cross-cultural communication skills, valuing differences and trust-building exercises. Efforts to eradicate sexual harassment from the workplace are slowly being adopted.[54] All companies surveyed had implemented or are in the process of implementing these types of programmes and policies. These initiatives all fall within the ambit of 'diversity management'.

As will be discussed below, there are different understandings of what is meant by 'managing diversity'. There is, however, widespread agreement that diversity management is about creating an environment that taps the capabilities of the entire work force. This will allow all individuals (regardless of their differences) to achieve their potential in pursuit of corporate objectives and goals. It will not demand assimilation into the prevailing corporate culture.[55] Roosevelt Thomas, a leading theorist and practitioner in the diversity field in the US, submits that managing diversity is not about ending oppression and discrimination.[56] Rather, it hinges on the question of how best to manage blacks and women so as to increase the effectiveness of the organization.[57] The goal of managing diversity programmes is not the creation and celebration of a diverse work force (this is the goal of AA and valuing diversity efforts). It is the management and full utilization of the organizations human

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[52] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 4, sec. 4.7.3.

[53] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 4, sec. 4.7.4.3.

[54] Anti-harassment codes are more prevalent in American companies. These codes provide guidelines for recognizing (and confronting) harassing behaviour, which may include verbal, visual, or physical harassment (see, for example, **Exxon Chemical Company**, *Preventing Harassment in the Workplace*, internal company anti-harassment policy document, New Jersey, ca. 1994; **Xerox**, *Diversity at Work*; and **NYNEX**, *Equal Employment Opportunity Supplement*, NYNEX Corporation, White Plains, N.Y., 1995).

[55] **Thomas**, 'From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity,' 112-117; **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 167-173; and **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 11.

[56] **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 167.

[57] **Roosevelt Thomas, Jr.**, The American Institute for Managing Diversity president, interview by author, Atlanta, 27 August 1996.

resources (this includes white males) to enhance overall management capability.[58]

Managing diversity differs from valuing diversity initiatives. The latter have an interpersonal focus and seek to reduce what are presented as 'cultural misunderstandings' through sharing, understanding and valuing differences.[59] By focusing on individuals, these initiatives often overlook the organizational level, or what Cox terms the 'diversity climate' of an organization. This consists of four individual-level factors (personal identity structures, prejudice, stereotyping, and personality type), three intergroup factors (cultural differences, ethnocentrism, and intergroup conflict) and four organizational context factors (organizational culture and acculturation processes, structural integration, informal integration, and institutional bias).[60] The diversity climate influences individual career experiences and outcomes (such as job satisfaction and organizational identification). This, in turn, may affect employees' work quality, productivity, and level of absenteeism.[61] By failing to change the diversity climate - the organizational systems and culture - valuing diversity programmes do not address systemic discrimination.[62]

The end point of valuing diversity programmes becomes the starting point for managing diversity initiatives. By emphasizing systemic change, managing diversity programmes aim to make corporate culture more receptive to AA and other change initiatives.

Like any organizational transformation, diversity management incurs financial costs.[63] These costs are often disregarded in the rush to proclaim the benefits of diversity. Thomas presents managing diversity as a source of strategic opportunity and competitive advantage.[64] The Green Paper on Employment Equity claims that promoting diversity will bring many benefits, including 'greater flexibility, access to a broader pool of skills, and

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[58] **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 28.

[59] **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 28; and *My own experience of the Rainbow programme*, 26.

[60] **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 9.

[61] **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 10.

[62] **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 169.

[63] The Green Paper recognizes that institutional and cultural change 'imposes costs in both time and money.'(*Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 3, sec. 3.8.4.1).

[64] **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 181.

reduced hierarchy, which should ultimately boost productivity.'[65] Other purported benefits of diversity include, *inter alia*, enhanced creativity and problem solving; increased employee morale and commitment; lower staff turnover and the natural upward mobility of employees; improved community, industrial and public relations; improved team performance; increased flexibility and adaptability; a recruiting edge; enhanced job satisfaction and increased productivity.[66]

There are multiple problems involved in measuring these benefits. These are discussed in Section 9.4 below. What concerns us here is what we are supposed to be measuring. What do advocates of managing diversity mean when they speak of 'diversity'? In much of the literature, diversity is defined as broader than race, gender, ethnicity and culture.[67] This definition has taken hold in corporate diversity publications. For example, IBM states that

> Over time, we have expanded our definition of diversity to include those human characteristics that make each person unique: race, color, gender, national origin, culture, lifestyle, age, disability, sexual orientation, Vietnam-era veteran status, economic or marital status and religion.[68]

This problem of amorphous definitional boundaries is endemic to the diversity literature, which often defines 'diversity' so widely that it starts to lose specificity, and hence utility. Robert Lattimer and Roosevelt Thomas exemplify this trend of applying 'diversity' to ever-widely ranging phenomena and processes. In the early 1990s, Roosevelt Thomas suggested we expand our understanding of diversity 'beyond race and gender', to include (amongst other axes) age, personality, occupational status, sexual orientation, geographic origin and lifestyle choice.[69] In his latest book, *Redefining Diversity*, Thomas argues for expanding diversity to encompass the entire spectrum of strategic issues facing modern corporations.[70]

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[65] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 3, sec. 3.6.5.

[66] See, amongst others, **Thomas**, 'From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity,' 107-117; **Cox**, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations*, 26, 40; **Towers Perrin**, 'Managing Diversity: A Critical Challenge for Employers,' *Monitor*, no. 169 (August 1995); **Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 11-12; and **Lattimer**, 'The Case for Corporate Diversity,' 18.

[67] As Roosevelt Thomas put it: 'diversity is not synonymous with race and gender.'(**Roosevelt Thomas, Jr.**, interview, 27 August 1996).

[68] **IBM**, *Diversity @ IBM*, New York: IBM, 1996.

[69] **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 10. See also **Mary Gentile**, 'Introduction,' xiv-xxv.

[70] **R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr.**, *Redefining Diversity*, New York: AMACOM, 1996, 3-14.

These include teaming, cross-functional co-ordination and acquisitions and mergers.[71]

Uncertainty and ambiguity are defining features of the late twentieth century organizational landscape. Thomas's diversity paradigm seems to be an attempt to address what has been described as permanent white water.[72] Managers need to be 'comfortable with complexity' as they steer their organizations through chaos.[73] For Thomas, diversity becomes a conceptual framework and heuristic device for diagnosing, understanding and addressing diversity mixtures and tensions.[74] As Janice Fenn, former human resources director of Sara Lee Corporation puts it:

> Diversity encompasses affirmative action but that's only one component... [it's about] try[ing to] address the needs of all employees. We're also looking at white males and other issues than race and gender. For example, job enrichment and balancing work and families to ensure that our employees can work and grow.[75]

The issue is not whether the insights provided by this broader definition of diversity enhance our understanding of organizational processes. What is at issue is how wide the boundaries of diversity management can be stretched before they lose any sort of conceptual shape. According to Thomas, the principle thesis of his book is that diversity 'applies not merely to a collection of people who are alike in some ways and different in others, but also to intangibles - ideas, procedures, ways of looking at things.'[76]

By a feat of legerdemain, diversity management has been reconceptualised and reclassified as an analytical strategy. Undergirding this project are the concepts which have become every critical theorists stock-in-trade: fluidity, diversity, adaptability and contingency.[77] This

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[71] See also **Lattimer**, 'The Case for Corporate Diversity,' 21.

[72] This notion is now widely part of the 1990s management-lexicon. Peter Vaill is credited with coining the term (see **Peter Vaill**, *Managing as a Performing Art*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989).

[73] **Thomas**, *Redefining Diversity*, 57.

[74] **Thomas**, *Redefining Diversity*, 4-10. The diversity paradigm outlines eight action options available to managers (and employees) as they address diversity: include/exclude; deny; assimilate; suppress; isolate; tolerate; build relationships; foster mutual adaptation (Ibid., 19-32).

[75] **Janice Fenn**, interview, 21 August 1996.

[76] **Thomas**, *Redefining Diversity*, 46.

[77] For example, see **Thomas**, *Redefining Diversity*, 46, 65.

approach is beneficial in that it asserts that diversity and complexity are intertwined: a limited ability to deal with complexity may lead to bias, and enhancing the capability to deal with complexity may reduce biased behaviours. The ability to think outside of simple bipolar grids fosters mutual adaptation.[78]

The problem lies in the conceptual silences that mark the move from Thomas's explanatory framework to his more prescriptive insights. He fails to answer how, in this era of downsizing and uncertainty, large numbers of managers can be encouraged (and in turn, encourage others) to face up to ambiguity and complexity rather than run from it. Thomas's initial framework is promising. But it is in danger of encountering a new risk that lies in recasting diversity as yet another totalizing explanatory discourse with universalistic pretensions. By shedding its particularistic (read: AA) baggage, diversity may also lose its specificity and theoretical potency.

9.4 A Review of Culture Audits and Diversity Workshops

A culture audit is usually the first step in a managing diversity programme. By interviewing a cross-section of the organization and examining the organizational climate, the audit seeks to isolate the factors that drive and/or inhibit diversity.[79] The aim of a culture audit is to assess the extent to which discriminatory practices affect the demographic composition of the workforce; organizational policies and practices; and staff attitudes and perceptions. On the basis of its findings, a diversity typology may be formulated. This would detail levels of racial tolerance and diversity attitudes.[80]

In 1994 two consultants conducted an AA audit at SA Insurance. In the course of determining workforce composition, employees' thoughts on AA, and organizational policies related to employment equity, they interviewed a cross-section of approximately 400 employees and managers. According to Harry Bristow, 'the audit led to a revamp of policies; [defining] goals and direction; and "Partnership" workshops.'[81] A follow-up AA

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[78] **Thomas**, *Redefining Diversity*, 85-109.

[79] **Thomas**, *Beyond Race and Gender*, 14-15, 38, 60-71.

[80] **Diversity Consultants**, *SA Engineering Culture Audit*, 3-4.

[81] **Harry Bristow**, interview, 10 April 1995.

audit was conducted in September 1995. Similarly, the first phase of the Democratization process at SA Engineering was a culture audit conducted in June 1992. The aim of the audit was to identify problems and barriers to the democratization process. A follow-up 'dipstick' audit was conducted in May 1993.[82]

The findings of the SA Engineering audit are typical of those found in the various case study companies: Management style is autocratic, communication is poor, and consultation non-existent. There are high levels of alienation amongst employees, with correspondingly low levels of morale, trust and loyalty. The views of black and white employees diverge markedly, as do those between black employees and management. There is scepticism as to management's commitment and ability to change. Racial tolerance is low, with corresponding high numbers of racist incidents.[83] Prompted by these types of findings, many organizations embark on diversity or democratization initiatives.

In 1994, SA Insurance began its 'Partnership' programme of three-day cross-cultural understanding and interaction workshops. The stated objectives of 'Partnership' are to enable participants to express their attitudes and values on matters of culture; develop skills to manage preconceptions; and improve trust and communication skills across the board.[84] A cross-section of approximately 24 employees at a time participates in the SA Insurance cross-cultural *bosberaads*.[85] The rough format of the course is as follows: Day 1 is introductory, focusing on individual and group icebreakers. Days 2-3 are held at a game lodge, and consist of group exercises;[86] encouraging cross-cultural socializing; and discussing appropriate and inappropriate corporate behaviour. Examples of appropriate behaviour would be '(a)cknowledging people as they enter your office' and 'waiting to be invited to sit'. Inappropriate behaviours are seen to include '(u)sing labelling terms such as "coolies", "darkies", "whities", "boesmans", "dutchmen"' and '(s)elective chivalrous behaviour

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[82] **John Barron**, interview, 5 September 1995.

[83] **Diversity Consultants**, *SA Engineering Culture Audit*.

[84] *Partnership*, delegates package for Partnership workshops, Johannesburg: SA Insurance, ca.1994.

[85] 'People share rooms, so you have, for example, a top manager sharing a room with a black driver.'(**Harry Bristow**, interview, 10 April 1995).

[86] The 'Know Me Board Game' features prominently. In 1995, it was awarded the Product of the Year Award from the Federation of Human Resource Development Association of Canada. I found the questions outdated and repetitive ('Partnership game wins international award,' *SA Insurance News*, internal company publication, Johannesburg, June 1995).

e.g. allowing only white women into the lift [elevator] first.'[87]

'Partnership' aims to foster cross-cultural understanding and relationship building through emphasizing learning and participation in small, racially and gender diverse groups. The goal is to enable individuals to get to know one another in a non-threatening environment, thereby promoting tolerance of diversity.[88] With reference to similar cross-cultural workshops held for SA Packaging employees, Bongani Khunyeli affirmed their value in cultivating a broader understanding of different cultural practices. For instance, she remarked that many blacks are offended if other employees fail to greet them, which 'is like they don't exist, you don't see them. Once you know this, you can act better.'[89]

Perceptions of the various companies value-sharing workshops are overwhelmingly positive. The lack of follow-up mechanisms is, however, a generic problem. According to Numsa shop stewards at SA Can:

> What's surprising is that you attend [value-sharing] courses and it doesn't make much of a difference: it has no impact on the shopfloor and with management... When we get back from these courses management is lazy to implement these changes - it's a problem of laziness, they become reluctant. The problem on the shopfloor is of racism, that blockades progress.[90]

This fosters the widespread perception amongst respondents (including many managers) that diversity programmes fail to make any quantifiable difference on the shopfloor. The criticism is that such programmes are simply 'quick-fixes' or fads with short term sustainability, whose benefits 'dribble out as a good feeling within four to seven days of returning to work.'[91] In practice, the dominant corporate culture continues to privilege certain cultural forms and practices over others. Culture sharing is qualitatively different to power sharing. Capturing the mood of frustrated expectations, a SA Insurance employee commented that 'Partnership' is 'all about cross-cultural understanding and nothing about

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[87] *Partnership*.

[88] See *SA Insurance News*, June 1995.

[89] **Bongani Khunyeli**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[90] **Sipho Shabangu and Musi Langa**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[91] **Ketan Lakhani**, 'Changing "them" vs changing "us",' *People Dynamics* 14, no. 2 (1996): 11; and **Lazarus Maseko**, interview, 12 April 1996.

real life - it's a tax relief for SA Insurance.'[92]

Following the culture audit and on the recommendation of Diversity Consultants (the consultants who conducted the audit), SA Engineering introduced a range of initiatives. These included management trust building workshops designed to promote team building, communication, problem solving, and sensitivity to racial questions; supervisor empowerment programmes; and self-esteem workshops geared at boosting morale and motivation amongst blacks, coloureds and Asians.[93] Central amongst these initiatives were diversity workshops, held during 1993. These were designed to encourage participants, drawn from diverse backgrounds, cultures, education levels, and job grades to discuss their cultural values, political ideologies and feelings.[94] As John Barron explains:

> [These workshops are about] trust building...bottom line - not this airy fairy stuff...Now, building trust is a long and hard process...it takes a lot of time and faith...It's like the truth commission - you've got to put it all on the table before we can move forward.[95]

The aim was not simply to understand differences, but to address apartheid-baggage. This entails managing fear, anger and polarization. As Barron exclaims: 'it's a cathartic process.'[96] According to Mandla Gumede, SA Engineering's human resources manager, black employees were excited about the workshops, but many whites were reluctant to participate. Disciplinary action was taken against those who refused to attend the workshops.[97]

In many of the SA Packaging plants, diversity management programmes are given an African management spin. These initiatives draw heavily on the ideas of Lovemore Mbigi, a

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[92] **SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995.

[93] **Mandla Gumede**, interview, 11 April 1996.

[94] John Barron remarks: 'they got together the tea lady, the girl from the accounts department...the director, the shop steward, the sweeper [and so on]. They have a two day workshop in which all issues are dealt with.'(**John Barron**, interview, 5 September 1995).

[95] **John Barron**, interview, 5 September 1995.

[96] **John Barron**, interview, 5 September 1995.

[97] Gumede noted that 'they were given first or final warnings and they had to go to workshops. Everyone in the company attended them.'(**Mandla Gumede**, interview, 11 April 1996).

leading African management theorist. He bases his ideas on the 'shadow corpse' thesis. In Afrocentric religions, a dead body is not buried if it shows a shadow. The shadow signifies negative feelings such as fear or anger which prevent the dead person from moving on and being transformed into a useful ancestral spirit.[98] Cleansing ceremonies - during which mourners go into an open burning platform to discuss these issues - are held.[99] Mbigi asserts that for AA to succeed, organizations need to hold burning platforms or *Dambe* ceremonies.[100] These are about burning the past ('confronting our racism')[101] so that renewal can take place.[102]

The starting point is to identify the various fears or shadows of different racial groups. 'White Shadows' include fear of AA, declining standards and black anarchy; whilst black fears are of co-option, white manipulation and of being termed a 'sell-out'.[103] Open burning platforms enable the different groups to come to terms with their shadows and their 'social memories', and to let them go.[104] Neil Cumming adds a word of caution, noting that '(w)e cannot pretend that 'one *braaivleis* makes us all new South Africans'.'[105]

In SA Packaging, 'a collective survival mentality' was developed using bosberaads, value-sharing workshops, and competitor benchmarking. Burning platforms (or, in Barrett's terminology, 'truth commissions') were held to build legitimacy and relevancy for the workplace reorganization initiatives.[106] In 1993, at the initiative of SA Packaging head office, SA Can underwent a process of transforming its organizational culture and values. Mbigi's

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[98] **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 54.

[99] **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 54.

[100] **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 56.

[101] **Cumming**, 'A Case Study,' 69.

[102] **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 3; and **Lovemore Mbigi**, interview, 5 April 1995.

[103] **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 56-60; and **Lovemore Mbigi**, interview, 5 April 1995.

[104] **Lovemore Mbigi**, interview, 5 April 1995; and **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 56.

[105] **Cumming**, 'A Case Study,' 65.

[106] **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996.

ideas were put into practice. Employees attended value-sharing workshops, the aim of which was to create an awareness of change.[107] Andre Pienaar, the human resources manager, is a big fan:

> The workshops were the biggest single initiative that caused us to change culture. They were 'burning platforms' where whities and blackies got at each other and raised burning issues in the company. They raised the 'let go's' - let go of driving BMW's, let go of disciplinary action...In some instances, people walked out of sessions...normally white extremists who couldn't cope with what was happening. These people are now on board, through sensitization to change and getting them involved.[108]

In common with the case studies outlined above, in 1993 SA Banking initiated 'Rainbow'. This was a programme encompassing AA, managing cultural diversity, anti-discrimination measures, and reconstruction and development.[109] 'Rainbow' went through a number of stages: Rainbow 1 comprised an organizational audit; Rainbow 2 consisted of a three hour video-based workshop dealing with cultural diversity and equity. Approximately 12 000 people (over 80 percent of employees) participated in these internally facilitated workshops.[110] Rainbow 3 incorporated industrial theatre and videos addressing AA. By 1995 it had reached over 4 000 employees countrywide. The 'Rainbow' programme has now been concluded. A climate audit was conducted in 1995-1996 to assess the extent to which employees had assimilated the 'Rainbow' message.[111]

Other types of managing diversity initiatives SA Banking has undertaken include the appointment of an equality ombudsman; launching an employee charter which was developed through a twelve month process of consultation; and monthly live televised business broadcasts to all their branches (termed 'Interact').[112] Included within the 'diversity' ambit is SA Banking's primary vehicle of social responsibility - the SA Banking Community

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[107] **Andre Pienaar**, interview, 19 March 1996.

[108] **Andre Pienaar**, interview, 19 March 1996.

[109] **SA Banking**, 'SA Bank's Free State Government Banking Tender,' 6.

[110] **Karen Chambers**, interview, 28 August 1995; and **Grace Mokoena**, interview, 28 August 1995.

[111] **Karen Chambers**, interview, 28 August 1995; and **Grace Mokoena**, interview, 28 August 1995.

[112] See **SA Banking**, *Social Report*, Johannesburg: Public Affairs Department of SA Banking: 1994, 19; and **SA Banking**, 'SA Bank's Free State Government Banking Tender,' 1-11; **Karen Chambers**, interview, 28 August 1995; and **Grace Mokoena**, interview, 28 August 1995.

Development Fund. This supports non-profit organizations and initiatives that focus on skills training, education, job creation, rural development, health care and capacity building.[113]

9.5 Can We Measure Diversity?

A central question that needs to be addressed is whether the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of managing diversity programmes can be measured. The first step would be to clearly define what is it we wish to explain. Organizations engage in a variety of change initiatives and other business strategies concurrently. This bedevils attempts to observe and measure 'diversity' variables independently of other organizational and market forces.

The aim of much of the managing diversity literature is to demonstrate that the effective management of workforce diversity has 'quantifiable results', such as 'organizational stability' and 'an improvement in the bottom line.'[114] Following Roosevelt Thomas, Adele Thomas submits that a managing diversity programme 'will never be sustainable or have any impact upon organizational performance if it is done for anything other than sound business reasons.'[115] The evidence to support these assertions is primarily anecdotal. There is a lack of robust longitudinal studies measuring the impact of diversity. The connection between the reasons given for implementing these initiatives and their (putative) results remains unclear.

It is also not obvious what should legitimately be included within the ambit of what Thomas terms 'sound business reasons'. These can consist, *inter alia*, of improving productivity and profitability; reducing industrial conflict; and promoting a socially responsible public image for political reasons. This lack of clarity about the aspects that are being investigated and the terminology employed is evident in the following comments. Chris Wiese, SA Can's general manager, claims that the benefits of participative and diversity management are tangible: 'we've been making good profits and efficiency has

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[113] Other trusts include the Sports Trust and the Arts and Culture Trust (**SA Banking**, *Social Report*, 1, 18).

[114] **Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 2.

[115] **Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 11. The original point is that of Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., who claims that 'only business reasons will supply the necessary long-term motivation' to sustain managing diversity programmes (**Thomas**, 'From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity,' 113).

improved.'[116] Expanding on the reasons for this, he suggests that

> the workforce concentrate now more on work-related issues than on how to fight management and the old racial problems. A lot of energy in the past went on the wrong things. Productivity has increased. We've implemented the best manufacturing strategies necessary...This would not be possible if we still had police dogs chasing around here. The whole culture change has enabled us to implement those strategies...[117]

This raises the question of the extent to which benefits ascribed to diversity management initiatives are, in fact, positive spin-offs from other change management processes (such as Total Quality Management) or the consequence of an end to repressive governance (politically and within the workplace). The former and latter are given the diversity appellation *ex post facto*. Improvements in efficiency, productivity and profitability at SA Can seem to have resulted from the successful implementation of World Class Manufacturing and participative management ideas. This is not to dispute that a diversity management effort may have been necessary to the adoption of WCM. Indeed, these initiatives may incorporate aspects of 'diversity management'. But they are not identical with it. To pretend otherwise seems to be more a case of wishful thinking than it is of empirically verifiable findings.

In much of the diversity literature, the purported benefits of diversity double as benchmarks.[118] The Green Paper on Employment Equity tasks the Directorate of Equal Opportunities with establishing 'performance indicators and timetables to assess...[the] creation of a work environment and culture that is open to persons of diverse backgrounds and attitudes.'[119] Unlike in the US, in SA there are no authoritative references in the area of managing diversity.[120] Proxies for the types of criteria to be used in benchmarking exercises

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[116] **Chris Wiese**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[117] **Chris Wiese**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[118] See **Barbara E. Kemmerer and V. Aline Arnold**, 'The Growing Use of Benchmarking in Managing Cultural Diversity,' *Business Forum* 18, no. 1,2 (Winter/Spring 1993): 38-40; and **Atlanta Diversity Managers Affinity Group**, Atlanta: Towers Perrin, November 14 1995; cited in **Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 107-109.

[119] *Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity*, chap. 5, sec. 5.3.2.4 (d).

[120] **Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 108-109. According to Thomas, on the basis of a year-long study, she could only identify nine companies which appeared to be making progress over and above the 'numbers game.'(**Thomas**, 'Political freedom in South Africa.')

can be found in the measures of success of a managing diversity programme suggested by the Atlanta Diversity Managers Affinity Group. These include: measuring sales volume and market share before and after diverse marketing teams have implemented programmes targeting diverse consumer groups; quality of information exchange in the organization; recognition as an employer of choice amongst corporate minority candidates; more creative problem solving and innovative products and services; increased loyalty and commitment; lower absenteeism; higher quality of output; access to global markets; and sourcing new markets.[121]

A pivotal problem with this approach is that it fails to demonstrate empirically how these criteria can be ascribed to managing diversity (or to an increasingly diverse workforce). A methodological flaw undergirds these proposals for diversity benchmarks in that this form of argument presumes as given the very phenomenon it sets out to explain. The existence of any of the diversity benchmarks (such as a reduction in cycle time) is taken as proof of the benefits (or success) of diversity initiatives. The premise is that if a positive correlation can be demonstrated between diversity (itself a rather amorphous category) and reduction in cycle time, the diversity initiative is a success. The stronger claim is that, if there is a reduction in cycle time, it is *because* of the diversity programme. This results in a fallacy of affirming the consequent. Take p to mean diversity has been successful, and q to imply a reduction in cycle time. What is being proposed is the following supposition: if q then p. This form of argument begs the question.

What also remains unanswered is in what ways (if any) these measures of 'best practice' in the area of diversity differ from sensible ways of managing people. Many of the areas identified could have a 'diversity angle' (for want of a better phrase). This can be illustrated using one of the benchmarks of diversity, such as sourcing new markets. Take the following example: in 1993, a sales manager for Avon Products in Atlanta noticed an influx of Korean and Vietnamese immigrants. She recruited a phalanx of Asian women to sell cosmetics, and Avon cleaned up.[122] There are at least two possible readings of this vignette. One would be within the mould of the US Federal Glass Ceiling Commission. The Commission's 1995 report offers these types of accounts to shore up the argument that diversity is a business

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[121] **Atlanta Diversity Managers Affinity Group**, in **Thomas**, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, 107.

[122] This example is taken from **John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge**, *The Witch Doctors: What the management gurus are saying, why it matters and how to make sense of it*, London: Heinemann, 1996, 263.

imperative. The claim is that corporations which leverage diversity through the explicit recognition of cultural differences within the consumer market and workforce 'can experience better financial performance in the long run than those which are not effective in managing diversity.'[123] A simpler reading of this story would present it as a simple case of recognizing a market niche and taking advantage of the existing market gap. New customers lead to an expanding market share and increased profitability.

Both interpretations may be valid.[124] The case illustrates the argument advanced in Section 9.2 above. A consequence of stretching the definitional boundaries of diversity management is that they begin to lose conceptual shape and explanatory value. The wider the scope and the greater the potency vested within the concept of diversity, the less the explanatory powers it ultimately has.

9.6 The Limits of Diversity

The allure of essentialism holds many managing diversity programmes in thrall. Essentialism has some purchase on the ways in which individuals make sense of their experiences. By defining what it is to be African or European in racial and cultural terms, many diversity facilitators ignore the complexities of cultural hybridity. The dilemma of managing diverse individuals becomes one of managing cultural blocs. In seemingly innocent ways, these programmes promise unmediated access to an essential black (or female) subject.

Identity is a production that is never complete and is constituted within representation. Stuart Hall submits that the politics of representation is a politics of power. Categories of individuals are positioned, subject-ed and constructed as 'other' within dominant regimes of representation.[125] This does not imply that power is unilateral. Indeed, resistance to these othering and normalizing strategies is one process which allows for the emergence of hybrid cultural identities. If identities are constituted within representations, the challenge is to develop new forms of representational practices. In an attempt to displace past

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[123] *Good For Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital*, 14.

[124] The second, however, has the virtue of simplicity over the first.

[125] **Stuart Hall**, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited and introduced by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, 395.

(mis)representations of blacks (for example, the idea that 'black culture' is inappropriate to the business world), many diversity management programmes rely on erecting new monolithic cultural tropes. The undue focus on the group *qua* homogeneous collectivity serves to reinscribe presumably natural and essential racial and cultural attributes. The following comments from a white SA Engineering employee demonstrate that valuing diversity workshops have the potential to reify the very cultural differences they seek to demystify:

> We had Diversity Consultants workshops about culture. For example, in black people's culture a black man will walk first into a room (to protect the woman) whereas a white thinks that if a man walks in front of you it's rude. They do things differently to us. The workshops were there to help us understand this...The main thing is that people know they (blacks) have a culture and it's not the same. Also, English and Afrikaans people have different cultures - we must just try and respect them.[126]

The reinforcement of cultural differences implicitly abets an 'us' versus 'them' mentality. In place of negative stereotypes, positive racial differences are touted. To wrap cultural differences in cheery and positive imagery is to remain trapped within an essentialist register.[127] Intergroup differences are emphasized whilst intragroup differences are elided. Particularity is thereby subordinated within a black rubric or prototype. In consequence, we have a white foreman praising SA Engineering's Diversity Consultants (diversity awareness) workshop in apartheid-inspired rhetoric:

> It was good...[now] we understand their culture - why they're working like that or talking like that. For example, they shout, that's their culture. There is a difference in black and white culture - for example, the way they talk and eat...they're different.[128]

This tendency to valorize group differences stems, in part, from diversity management's intellectual debt to a variant of multiculturalism that has gained currency in academic, cultural and media circles in the US in the past decade. Bernstein maintains that this particular multiculturalist impulse goes beyond simply respecting American pluralism and

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[126] **Ann Bester**, interview, 19 April 1996.

[127] Gates claims that when we speak of 'the black race' or 'the Jewish race', race pretends to be an objective term of classification 'when in fact it is a dangerous trope.'(**Henry Louis Gates, Jr.**, 'Writing "Race" and the Difference it Makes,' in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 5).

[128] **Piet Pretorius**, SA Engineering general foreman, interview by author, Wadeville, 18 April 1996.

makes a religion of 'difference'. It is obsessed not with the suffering, but with the 'identity' of the groups that have been subject to discriminatory behaviour.[129] In the US, as in SA, different racial groupings continue to have differential access to societal resources, status and security. This is not the result of a failure to recognize cultural diversity - as some multiculturalists might have us believe. Diversity management programmes have a tendency to reproduce this logic. To assume that the celebration of workforce diversity will change asymmetrical power relations is fallacious.

Part of the multiculturalist quest is to replace past master narratives of authority with the authority of experience. The ways in which black identity has been constituted in the experience of struggle is presented as justification for this appeal to a new form of authority.[130] From this appeal it is but a short step to invoking the authority of the oppressed subject; and the 'authentic Third World Woman' or 'historically disadvantaged employee' emerges. The standpoints of the subjugated are deemed 'innocent' positions. The analytical strategy at work assumes that blacks (or women) are a homogeneous group, identifiable prior to any analysis. The proposition is that blacks are the same because of the sameness of their oppression. An elision takes place between 'blacks' or 'women' as discursively constructed groups (in itself always a precarious and temporary exercise) and blacks or women as subjects of their own histories and experiences.[131]

Diversity facilitators point to individual instances of black powerlessness to prove that in the corporate world, blacks and women, as groups, are powerless. This leaves no space for a viable theory of agency and individuals are thus denied their subjectivity. Rorty attacks cultural sensitivity trainers for relying on this type of logic:

> Several cuts beneath the people who teach such courses in colleges and universities, there are *Lumpenintellektuellen* who work as 'diversity facilitators', employed by firms which offer 'applied behavioural science'. Such firms will send teams of facilitators to your factory...There they give seminars which purport to explain to your staff the

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[129] See **Bernstein**, *Dictatorship of Virtue*, 3-11; and **Richard Rorty**, 'A leg-up for Oliver North: Review of Bernstein,R. 1994. (Knopf),' *London Review of Books* 20, October 1994: 13-15.

[130] Amongst others, bell hooks makes this claim. See **bell hooks**, 'Postmodern Blackness,' in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited and introduced by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, 426.

[131] Chandra Mohanty makes this point with reference to 'third world' women. See **Mohanty**, 'Under Western Eyes,' 300.

> differences between nice cultures - the cultures of the oppressed, scorned and misunderstood - and the nasty culture of the people being sensitised. These facilitators...rarely know anything much about these so-called 'cultures', and have to fall back on a few trite formulae. Their main job is to exploit their audience's vague sense of guilt.[132]

Human embraces this critique, suggesting that this variant of multiculturalism is on a par with 'traditional maximalist stereotyping.' Her central objection rests on the claim that both approaches neglect to examine other social variables (such as economic, religious and political factors) which impact upon social relations. Beck and Linscott advance a similar argument. They claim that by relying on the idea of a universal black type with certain inevitable traits, managing diversity programmes reintroduce a system of 'racist classification'.[133] Human concludes that both approaches 'do more harm than good, the traditional approach by reinforcing negative stereotypes and the 'multicultural' approach by alienating those members of what Rorty (1994) refers to as the 'nasty' culture.'[134]

Taking umbrage at cultural reductionism in its various forms is different from assuming that there is equivalence between the outcomes of the different variants. In their cruder versions, both the 'traditional maximalist approach' and multiculturalism present culture as primordial. The key premise of the former is that discontinuities and cleavages between cultural segments result from an absence of common values and motivations. Various cultural groupings are seen to engage in incompatible practices and traditions, such as kinship, religion and education.[135] Other social relations are presented as secondary to culture. Similarly, multiculturalists are often guilty of imputing culture with theoretical and empirical primacy. For example, an Exxon Chemicals (NJ) 'Primer on Diversity in the Workforce' advocates replacing ethnocentric judgements with 'the attitude that training in managing diversity seeks to promote -- [which] is *cultural relativism*, the attempt to

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[132] **Rorty**, 'A leg-up for Oliver North,' 13.

[133] **Don Beck and Graham Linscott**, 'The African Crucible: Unity in Diversity,' in *African Management: Philosophies, Concepts and Applications*, edited by Peter Christie, Ronnie Lessem, and Lovemore Mbigi, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1994, 104. The fallacies involved in equating diversity programmes with racism are examined below.

[134] **Linda Human**, 'Managing diversity: a critique of some assumptions underlying certain practical approaches,' *South African Journal of Labour Relations* 19, no. 3 (1995): 37-38.

[135] For a fuller rendition of the cultural pluralist debate see **Leo Kuper**, ed., *Race, Class and Power*, London: Duckworth, 1974; **Leo Kuper**, ed., *Pluralism in Africa*, Los Angeles: African Studies Center, University of California, 1971; and **Martin Legassick**, 'The concept of pluralism: a critique,' *Economic development and cultural change* 19, no 4 (1971).

understand another's beliefs and behaviors in terms of that person's culture.'[136] Culture is given, rather erroneously, a priori causal significance.

Despite these similarities, multiculturalism is not analogous to the cultural pluralist project. A key point of divergence is that for the latter, cultural differences justify the differential incorporation of groups within society. This, in turn, legitimates their differential access to rewards and resources. Hierarchical racial differences are seen to derive social significance from cultural pluralism, and to reflect conditions of cultural diversity.[137]

Of use is the distinction Appiah draws between racialism and extrinsic racism. Variants of the multiculturalist project would probably coincide with what he terms *racialism:* the view that there are heritable characteristics which allow us to divide our species into sets of races, in such a way that all the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race. These traits and tendencies are seen as constituting a sort of racial essence.[138] Relying on this logic, multiculturalists may exaggerate out of proportion even the smallest symbol of racial or ethnic differentiation. This then begins to represent a major cultural difference that is believed to defy comparison or scrutiny.[139]

To the contrary, *extrinsic racism* is based on the belief that 'the racial essence entails certain morally relevant qualities.'[140] Moral distinctions between different races are seen to justify (or warrant) differential treatment. This form of racism generally undergirds projects that have used race as the basis of oppression. Arguing for the right to retain the MWU's whites-only policy, Gerhard Oosthuizen illustrates this form of racism:

> If you're talking about your religion...and how you grow up, that's where you must keep cultures in the right places. In your religion, you need to keep everyone on his

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[136] **Exxon Chemical Company**, *Valuing Diversity in NJO,* internal company valuing diversity workshop materials, New Jersey, ca. 1994.

[137] **Kuper**, *Pluralism in Africa,* 13.

[138] **Appiah**, *In My Father's House,* 13.

[139] **Werner Sollors**, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, 7.

[140] **Appiah**, *In My Father's House,* 13.

> own territory, and if you mix everyone then your child doesn't know who he is. You must keep whites with whites and blacks with blacks at school...The MWU must also stay white - there are still different cultures between whites and blacks. Even within the blacks there are two main groups of blacks: one in the location [township] and one from their cultural states [bantustans]. They have totally different cultures. Those that come from their cultural states want to keep their own culture - we don't mind working with them and giving them a fair deal. But when they leave work they'll want to be amongst their own people in church, school...[and so on]. But the new one in the location they have no culture whatsoever. They want to take over but they have no culture.[141]

Race acquires an explicitly cultural inflection, and, culture, in turn, becomes naturalized. The transition from culture to race to religion is seamless. Cultural (or, in this instance, minority) rights are wielded as justification for defying the law and upholding a racist status quo. In the workplace, prejudice is often rendered acceptable by coding it in the rhetoric of a multiculturalism which exalts cultural groups. It is in this sense that there are dangerous parallels between the traditional maximalist approach and the variant of multiculturalism under discussion.

Managing diversity programmes are often implemented in the quest to expunge the types of negative expectations and perceptions of black employees expressed by Gerhard Oosthuizen. Perhaps a secondary concern would be to foster an understanding of the multi-dimensionality and complexity of black identities and practices. At a theoretical level, 'liminal subjects' would discover places from which to speak. Diversity management initiatives would facilitate the construction of different points of identification or positionalities within the corporate world.[142] Instead, as examined above, most of these programmes inadvertently lead to a reinscription of rigid racial frontiers. According to Human:

> We can tell managers that all cultures are equal and that they should respect diversity until the cows come home; but if we do not address their negative expectations (their belief that Blacks are less capable) and highlight for them the effect of these expectations on performance, managing diversity programmes will have no more impact than 'black advancement' programmes.[143]

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[141] **Gerhard Oosthuizen**, interview, 27 March 1996. A coloured foreman at SA Can criticized this policy: 'I...tried to join the MWU but their representative told me that it's only for whites no other people can join. Their constitution says only whites can join. This is illegal for a union to represent whites only.'(**Leon Kleinhans**, interview, 27 March 1996).

[142] See **Hall**, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' 402.

[143] **Human**, 'Black Advancement,' 321-322; and **Human**, 'Competencies for Managing Diversity,' 175.

Human suggests that managing diversity programmes in South Africa have tended to follow the US model, in which these programmes are often used as a substitute for a more direct engagement with the problems of racism and sexism.[144] Anecdotal evidence from, amongst others, SA Insurance's diversity programme ('Partnership'), supports her broad premise. Despite 'Partnership's' ethos of multiculturalism, many employees believe that 'once you get back from 'Partnership', nothing's happening...there are no follow-ups. Some find 'Partnership' to be an ego boost - you hear good things others think of you but back at the office it's a totally different scenario, the mindset hasn't changed'[145]

Given that the effects of these programmes may be limited, we need to question the extent to which we can, and indeed, should attempt to change values. Human suggests that the focus of diversity programmes shift to teaching skills that enable individuals to change their behaviour. The premise is that consistent behaviour change can ultimately influence attitudes.[146] This is the tack taken by the Bureau of Business Practice in the US. At the end of a pretty standard booklet discussing valuing diversity, it states that '(t)his booklet isn't really about changing attitudes. It's about changing behavior. What you think and feel is your business. But remember...you are always responsible for your behavior...'[147]

In this variant, managing diversity training would be geared to fostering competencies that involve 'situational adaptability', 'transcultural competence' and effective communication skills.[148] Indeed, the lack of this type of skills component seems to hinder the effectivity of current diversity programmes. With reference to SA Insurance's 'Partnership' programme, Amanda Spira claims that 'the majority of people think its interesting and fun but it doesn't change behaviour...there's no skills component...it's designed to increase awareness...I can't say it's effective because I can't see people changed.'[149] Respondents who believe that

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[144] **Human**, 'Competencies for Managing Diversity,' 173.

[145] **SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 22 September 1995. Madi submits that 'it becomes difficult to make people value diversity when a year ago they were being told they were part of an inferior or superior culture.'(**Phinda Madi**, interview, 7 April 1995).

[146] **Human**, *Affirmative Action and the Development of People*, 79.

[147] **Bureau of Business Practice**, 'The Value of Cultural Diversity,' Waterford, CT: Paramount Publishing, 1994, 13-14.

[148] **Human**, 'Managing diversity,' 40; and **Human,** 'Competencies for Managing Diversity,' 181.

[149] **Amanda Spira**, interview, 18 September 1995.

'Partnership' effects changes in attitude are few.

Where they do exist, practical skills-based programmes aim to provide managers with the competencies to behave differently in the workplace. The training focuses on factors that influence the development of employees (including managers' personal prejudices); trainees' individual managerial style (particularly their characteristic use of power); and the enhancement of effective (cross-cultural) communication skills.[150] The eventual aim is to integrate managing diversity into organizational competencies.[151] Critics question whether the inclusion of this type of skills component in diversity management efforts is viable and likely to produce results. According to Clifford Barrett, 'the solution is probably changing or getting rid of those people who can't manage diversity. Ultimately the solution may be replacing those managers.'[152]

The concern that diversity programmes should not become alternatives to tackling prejudice and discriminatory behaviour resonates amongst respondents in the case study companies. For example, criticizing SA Insurance's 'Partnership' programme, an employee noted that 'being sensitive to other people's cultures is not the same as giving people confidence in other races ability to do things.'[153] Similarly, the BMF express strong reservations about the use of diversity management programmes as a substitute for AA. Bheki Sibiya, then MD of the BMF, argues that 'we need to engage with affirmative action for a long time before we can say let's manage diversity. We're not ready for diversity management thinking or programmes. The component of diversity management which is relevant now in South Africa is a small one.'[154] The primary concern is that managing diversity comes to be seen as a safer, less contentious, and harmless version of AA.[155] Human criticizes what many perceive as the 'touchy-feely' aspect of diversity management programmes:

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[150] This is based on observations of a managing diversity skills training workshop for SA Insurance managers.

[151] **Harry Bristow**, interview, 10 April 1995.

[152] **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[153] **SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 18 September 1995. Similarly, another SA Insurance employee commented: 'I'm not sure if it's leading anywhere...it's good to know about other cultures...but a major concern among non-white and women staff is that just under managerial level there are skilled people but they're not going anywhere...'(**SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995).

[154] **Bheki Sibiya**, interview, 1 September 1995.

[155] **BMF**, *Affirmative Action Blueprint*, 31-32.

> To move too quickly to the less threatening process of 'managing diversity' leaves some fundamental issues untapped and unaddressed. Organizations cannot afford to put a gloss over racism and sexism; they are issues which must be addressed, however uncomfortable this process may be.[156]

Managing diversity initiatives may allow companies to avoid the quantitative aspect of recruiting, training and promoting corporate minorities, which is addressed by AA.[157] Given that there is, as yet, little diversity to be managed, most commentators insist on the need for AA. As previous chapters have shown, the dearth of blacks is particularly pronounced in the upper managerial echelons. Sibiya terms this skewed racial distribution 'the Irish Coffee Syndrome.'[158] This syndrome refers to a thin top layer which consists of whites (the cream) whilst the bulk of the organization remains black (the coffee). Whilst some organizations still exhibit this level of workforce segregation (such as SA Engineering), many do not.

Despite halting and often uneven progress, many corporate cultures seem to have changed quite profoundly in the past few years. That diversity related issues are being debated in and of itself speaks to the changed organizational and political climate. The debates about how best to manage the diversity of the workforce do not necessarily reflect a fundamental shift in the boundaries of legitimacy. This chapter has revealed that there are continuities in the discourse of cultural pluralism and that of managing diversity. What has changed is that articulating negative stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes has become illegitimate. This is taken for granted - to the extent that those who hold such views are beginning to tailor them to fit in with the legitimacy or moral imperative of 'diversity'. The discourse of managing diversity has become available as a potential resource from which to draw the moral justifications they seek. Hence, far from constituting a coherent project, the discourse of diversity management can be appropriated and articulated by diverse (and often conflicting) political projects.

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[156] **Human**, 'Competencies for Managing Diversity,' 175. Similarly, Madi argues that diversity management initiatives have made little impact on the 'cultural arrogance' characterizing South African organizations (**Phinda Madi**, interview, 7 April 1995).

[157] Madi avers that contra AA, this type of programme is about 'how to use employee diversity to achieve corporate strategy and it doesn't concern itself with numbers.'(**Phinda Madi**, interview, 7 April 1995).

[158] **Bheki Sibiya**, interview, 1 September 1995.

9.7 Conclusions

This chapter has shown that the demand for increasing workforce diversity has gained much currency in the corporate world. Typical of this approach is Peter Christie's injunction to '(e)nsure that blacks, women, gays and disabled people are given preference for vacant positions until a diverse staff profile is achieved. Homogeneous people breed homogeneous thinking.'[159] Christie assumes that increasing the number of employees from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds will *ipso facto* result in an increasing number of viewpoints. This rests on the idea that diversity and heterogenous thinking come as one, part and parcel of the same package. To sustain this premise, one would need to assume a priori that race or culture or ethnicity could be proxies for viewpoint. This parallels what is rather inelegantly termed viewpoint diversity which results in the specious idea that there is a black (or white) way to be.[160]

Criticizing attempts to use racial (or ethnic) differences as surrogates for other differences, Stephen Carter contends that 'unless one supposes that biology implies ideology, this movement to make race a proxy for views surely involves a category mistake.'[161] What is not at issue is the rather obvious point that in developing equivalence of meanings and cross-cultural understanding, it is helpful to understand where individuals 'are coming from'. Our location within a particular (sub)culture colours our every-day experiences which range from the type of education we receive to our encounters with the criminal justice system. This, in turn, influences viewpoints; our perspectives are (in part) socially constructed. What is objectionable, however, is the assumption that this allows us to predict, a priori, whether individual x of race y will adopt a particular viewpoint, simply because x is a member of y. This involves a fallacy of composition: the properties of the whole are presented as identical to the properties of the various components of the whole. In biologizing race and culture, the role played by factors other than commonality of experiences or a shared phenotype is ignored, thereby disabling our powers of analysis.[162]

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[159] **Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 144.

[160] See for example Derrick Bell's assertion that 'the ends of diversity are not served by people who look black and think white.'(**Derrick Bell**, quoted in **Carter**, *Reflections*, 33). For a critique of critical race theory, see **Jeffrey Rosen**, 'The Bloods and the Crits,' *New Republic*, December 9 1996: 27-42.

[161] **Carter**, *Reflections*, 40.

[162] See **Rosen**, 'The Bloods and the Crits,' 27-42; and **Kwame Anthony Appiah**, 'The Uncompleted Argument: DuBois and the Illusion of Race,' in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Chicago:

To justify calls for diversity and racial proportionality by invoking viewpoint diversity is to be guilty of erroneously identifying pluralism (or diversity) per se with a democratic or equal opportunities project. It is also to assume, as Haraway puts it, that subjugation is grounds for an ontology.[163] The move from a deracialized and de-gendered register to a self-referential, racialized and gendered register is not an unproblematic process.

Vestiges of essentialism creep into much diversity theorizing. Fiona Plani makes these conceptual errors in her claim that the systems of hierarchical control in most SA companies 'will be found to be incompatible with the more consensus values and beliefs in participative democracy held by the majority of workers.'[164] The empirical validity of this sweeping statement is questionable (and not proven). This problem is compounded by the assumption that workers, blacks, women, and gays (all those on the previously disadvantaged end of the bipolar axis which privileges managers, whites, men, and heterosexuals) necessarily hold 'progressive' views. It is presumed, a priori, that entire categories of individuals favour consensus over conflict and participation over exclusion. Ascriptive criteria become the evidence for the rather dubious claim that these groupings (writ homogeneous) are, a fortiori, harbingers of a radical democratic project. The assumption is of an oppressed subject occupying an inherently progressive point of departure, from whence a left-wing politics or radical project will emerge.[165] McIntosh commits this fallacy, privileging the viewpoint of the 'oppressed' and imputing it with moral superiority. To wit:

> though "privilege" may confer power, it does not confer moral strength. Those who do not depend on conferred dominance have traits and qualities that may never develop in those who do..."underprivileged" people of color who are the world's majority have survived their oppression and lived survivors' lives from which the white global minority can and must learn.[166]

University of Chicago Press, 1986, 21-22 passim.

[163] **Donna J. Haraway**, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London: Free Association, 1991, 193.

[164] **Plani**, 'Managing Diverse Employees,' 80.

[165] See **Laclau and Mouffe**, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 167-169.

[166] **Peggy McIntosh**, 'White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies,' in *Power, Privilege and Law: A Civil Rights Reader*, edited by Leslie Bender and Daan Braveman, American Casebook Series, St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing, 1995, 29.

George Nkadimeng, Cosatu vice-president, objects to this fetishizing of a perfect black/oppressed/oppositional subject. Criticizing the essentialism undergirding the African management project, he asserts that 'the question of race and colour doesn't matter, it's personality.' In response to Africanists, 'I ask them who they'd rather have: Joe Slovo or Gatsha [Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi]: they say "Slovo, but he's an exception." And I tell them he's not an exception...'[167] We need to caution against privileging, romanticizing or appropriating the vision of the less powerful. As Haraway submits, the standpoints of the subjugated are not 'innocent' positions.[168] Non-traditional epistemologies and identity politics do not render 'being' into an unproblematic state. According to Haraway: '(o)ne cannot 'be'...a woman, colonized person...and so on - if one intends to see and see from these positions critically. 'Being' is much more problematic and contingent.'[169]

Diversity advocates present as fact the proposition that diversity is a good in and of itself. This fails to demonstrate or explain why diversity has an inherent value (and many would deny it does).[170] This chapter has criticized this tendency to privilege the idea of diversity without elaborating its content. Whilst increasing the numbers of blacks and women employees constitutes a move towards a more diverse and plural workforce, this diversity and pluralism will not necessarily advance a democratic or equal opportunities project.

Lastly, it has been argued that by valorizing difference many diversity advocates recapitulate cultural pluralist assumptions. To insist on a conception of the subject as given, unitary and fixed, is to envisage an absolute system of differences in which each identity occupies a unique and privileged position. By relying on a logic of pure difference, these programmes are often unable to suggest a common ground around which new collective identities can coalesce. In this way, diversity management programmes are, on the whole, powerless to challenge existing asymmetrical power relations.

Chapter Ten picks up these themes. It examines the ways in which the African management project recapitulates past discourses of cultural separatism, and in so doing, fosters the

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[167] **George Nkadimeng**, interview, 7 March 1996.

[168] **Haraway**, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 191.

[169] **Haraway**, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 192.

[170] See for instance 'Affirmative Action,' *Financial Mail* (online).

appeal of phenotypical symmetry and a manufactured sense of sameness. Chapter Ten will question whether the twinning of African management and diversity management projects inadvertently cements the links between a 'traditional maximalist approach' and a multiculturalism that glorifies difference.

CHAPTER 10
AFRICAN MANAGEMENT

10.1 Introduction

It has been argued in previous chapters that, since 1990, the boundaries of what constitutes legitimate political and moral discourse and action have shifted. The outright rejection of 'African' values is no longer politically acceptable. What many have sought to do is recast assumptions of ingrained cultural difference within an Africanist rhetoric. Hence the appeal of African management tenets. By valorizing culture and insisting on the sanctity of cultural-cum-racial groups, what has come to be known as African management offers continuities with past segregationist discourses. This chapter interrogates the extent to which African management ideas parallel the fictions expounded by the National Party (pre-1994). It concludes that, like a considerable proportion of the diversity literature, much of what falls within the African management rubric fails to challenge fundamentally outmoded ways of thinking about and managing cultural differences.

Within the apartheid discursive regime, race acquired an explicitly cultural inflection. By conceiving of culture along ethnically and racially exclusive lines, culture was transformed into a pseudo-primordial (or quasi-biological) property of communal life.[1] The National Party's 'cultural groups', fissured along 'fixed' racial boundaries, erroneously implied that identity cleavages coincide with cultural conflicts. Afrikaner nationalism fused the floating signifiers of race and nation and, within this framework, to speak of nationalism was to speak in racially exclusive terms. The NP's appeal to pure particularisms, which were to stand in differential relation to other particularisms (making no reference to a universal dimension of equality and rights), has been discredited.[2] An unfortunate outcome of this has been what Nhlapo calls 'cultural facelessness' which 'presages an unwelcome vacuum in the area of social identity.'[3]

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[1] See **Gilroy**, *Small Acts*, 23-24.

[2] See **Laclau**, 'Political Frontiers.'

[3] **T. Nhlapo**, 'Culture and Women Abuse: Some South African starting points,' *Agenda* 13: 5-14; quoted in Cheryl Potgieter, 'Women's Lives Across Cultures,' in *Cultural Synergy in South Africa*, edited by Melissa E. Steyn and Khanya B. Motshabi, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1996, 90.

It is into this vacuum that African management theorists have stepped. These theorists present the idea of African culture as something to be used against Western rationality - as though culture in and of itself is natural and, in its 'African' form, anti-rational and exotic. In this way, African management theorists participate in naturalizing and universalizing the value-laden category of 'culture'. They have failed to notice that '(t)he Western emperor has ordered the natives to exchange their robes for trousers; their act of defiance is to insist on tailoring them from homespun material.'[4]

In the 1980s, attitudinal surveys found that the majority of white businessmen believed that African cultural attributes were inimical to business success. As Chris Wiese, SA Can general manager, recalled: 'the [previous] MD told me that a black can never be an endmaker, there's just too much technology involved.'[5] Black employees were viewed as overly emotional, incapable of properly evaluating business scenarios, and lacking the ability to effectively learn mathematical, technical and mechanical skills.[6] Such attitudes live on in the 1990s. As a white manager at SA Insurance argued: 'they [blacks] have different values that fly in the face of business.'[7] Similarly, another SA Insurance employee asserted that

> in Western cultures, there are things we understand that are natural to us, like getting share options or getting a bond...Those kinds of questions are often presented because black people often don't understand [these concepts].[8]

In the last few years, latter-day cultural reductionists have simply inverted the old opposition. For them, it is no longer the case that (to cite a coloured semi-skilled worker) 'the African is not a working person'.[9] Old-fashioned cultural separatist assumptions are now given an Africanist spin. The continuities lie in the automatic privileging of culture and the idea that modern African cultural forms are simply historical outgrowths or continuations of traditional culture. This chapter demonstrates the ways in which advocates of African management present African values (such as 'ubuntu') as critical to the long-term robustness of South African

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[4] **Appiah**, *In My Father's House*, 60.

[5] **Chris Wiese**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[6] Cited in **Human**, 'Managing diversity,' 36-37; and **Human**, *Educating and Developing Managers*, 222.

[7] **David Cahn**, interview, 19 September 1995.

[8] **SA Insurance employee**, focus group interview with author, Johannesburg, 19 September 1995.

[9] **Connie Heymann**, interview, 1 April 1996.

capitalism. This reworking of traditional maximalist ideas parallels the efforts of many diversity advocates (discussed in the previous chapter). The continuities between this new form of cultural separatism and old-fashioned apartheid assumptions begin to provide the skeleton of an explanation for African management's increasing influence.

10.2 Making Sense of African Management

According to Lovemore Mbigi, a leading theorist and practitioner of African management:

> Black managers should overcome their dependency on white management thinking by developing their own Afrocentric management ideas and management practices. The most damaging aspect of apartheid is in the mind. As African managers, we will not be fully confident and assertive unless we liberate ourselves from the heavy yoke of three centuries of mental oppression. There is a dire need for an Afrocentric cultural renaissance in management thinking.[10]

With this in mind, in the early 1990s the South African Management Project at the Wits Business School was established. Much of the African management research has been conducted under its auspices. This work is predicated on the assumption that particular management techniques carry a necessary (and a priori) national or ethnic essence. Hence the desire to deprivilege Japanese and American management concepts, and develop an 'indigenous' approach to management.[11] The project aims to increase awareness 'of the importance of developing and furthering a genre of local management that is *authentic*.'[12]

A central claim is that by developing theories of management indigenous to (South) Africa, African management circumvents the uncritical application of the Western canon. If the argument for African or afrocentric management is to avoid reproducing the stereotypical presuppositions of the white or eurocentric management whose antithesis it would be, then (at the risk of tautology) it needs to demonstrate its argument that theories developed elsewhere

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[10] **Mbigi**, *The African Dream in Management*, 38. The intellectual debt to the black consciousness movement is apparent, as the striking parallels with Biko's writings illuminate. In Biko's words: 'as long as blacks are suffering from inferiority complex a result of 300 years of deliberate oppression, denigration and derision they will be useless as co-architects of a normal society...Hence what is necessary...is a very strong grass-roots build-up of black consciousness such that blacks can learn to assert themselves and stake their rightful claim.'(**Steven Biko**, 'Black Souls in White Skins?' in *I Write What I Like*, Steven Biko, edited by Aelred Stubbs, London: Penguin, 1978, 35).

[11] **Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 8.

[12] **Lessem and Nussbaum**, *Sawubona Africa*, 13 (emphasis is my own).

are incapable of providing an adequate explanatory and prescriptive framework for management practices in Africa. Despite its populist appeal, any claim to African specificity cannot simply be based on a common *racial* problematic. It would need to invoke some other significant commonality in the African environment, socio-economic structure, or history.

This has proved difficult. Many of the practices presented as specifically African differ little from what is generally regarded as best practice in Western (particularly American) firms. Such practices include appointing 'community managers'; involving workers at shop floor level (which 'honours the African communal spirit'); and terming joint management/union committees 'transformation indabas'.[13] These suggestions uncritically rely upon, and attempt to establish equivalence with, Western concepts. It is only through a feat of legerdemain that the claim to African management's uniqueness has any credence. As Lazarus Maseko, MD of SA Tin, puts it:

> African management? There's no such thing...African management assumes there are differences...but there aren't any values that are African or exclusive to anybody...Maybe I'm light on the Africanizing issue. If you Africanize you must link it to my bottom line and show me what I must do with this African thing and how it'll benefit us...For example, I greet everyone, that's got nothing to do with being African, it's got to do with being polite...[14]

This dovetails with many of the ideas espoused by diversity management theorists (as discussed in the previous chapter). These theorists contend that the increasingly multiracial face of the South African workforce necessitates a move away from an exclusive, 'white' corporate culture, to one that celebrates cultural pluralism.[15] Within much of the African management literature, this supposition is recast as a 'clash of cultures'. For example, Plani (following Molebatsi) claims that 'dictates on social norms both within and outside work life are extremely Eurocentric and insensitive to what is African...We have to accept that there will be a clash of cultural norms'.[16] Koopman also relies on this trope. He submits that 'managing our way, the Westerner's way, seems to have clashed with the innate spirit and nature of

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[13] See **Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 84-87; and **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu*, 63-64.

[14] **Lazarus Maseko**, interview, 12 April 1996.

[15] See for example **Motshabi**, 'Managing Cultural Diversity,' 117.

[16] **Plani**, 'Managing Diverse Employees,' 82.

Africa.'[17]

Lessem's intellectual model - the 'four-world' paradigm - informs many of the writings within the African management genre. The model states that each quadrant of the globe (North, South, East and West) is characterized by certain qualities which are, in turn, reflected in business management culture. Rationalism permeates Northern corporate culture; the East is characterized by developmental management and holism; the West by primal management, entrepreneurship and pragmatism; and the South by metaphysical, convivial management and humanism.[18]

A dichotomous logic undergirds Lessem's model. What JanMohamed terms a 'manichean allegory' is erected: a diverse field of interchangeable oppositions between the European and African, white and black, civilized and primitive, good and evil, and so on.[19] To illustrate: Koopman argues that '(t)he ideologies of our two worlds of white and black are...totally mismatched.'[20] The mismatch comes about in attempts to force a right-brain thinker (a 'lesser educated person') into more 'well educated first world' left-brain workplaces.[21] Koopman continues in this vein: 'Blacks therefore have difficulty in coping with this, not because they are black, but because in the main they are right brain oriented...'[22] Despite his protestations to the contrary (as in identifying himself as a 'White African'), the assumption is that all whites are not Africans and that all Africans are black, and hence, something different (and less competent in managing the 'first world').[23] The manichean allegory and circuitous logic is

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[17] **Koopman**, *Transcultural Management*, 70.

[18] For a fuller exposition of Lessem's global businessphere see **Ronnie Lessem**,'The Southern African Businessphere,' in *Cultural Synergy in South Africa*, edited by Melissa E. Steyn and Khanya B. Motshabi, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1996, 186-204; **Lessem and Nussbaum**, *Sawubona Africa*, 13; and **Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 17-24.

[19] **Abdul R. JanMohamed**, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature,' in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 82.

[20] **Albert Koopman**, 'Transcultural Management: In Search of Pragmatic Humanism,' in *African Management: Philosophies, Concepts and Applications*, edited by Peter Christie, Ronnie Lessem, and Lovemore Mbigi, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1994, 43. Elsewhere, Koopman claims that '(t)he hard aggressive handshake of the Western world and the limp handshake of Africa perhaps serves as a manifestation of these two different views of life.'(**Koopman**, *Transcultural Management*, 107).

[21] **Koopman**, 'Transcultural Management,' 43.

[22] **Koopman**, 'Transcultural Management,' 43.

[23] **Koopman**, *Transcultural Management*, 60.

complete. As Lazarus Maseko, MD of SA Tin, put it:

> My biggest problem with Africanization is the stuff about African time...that's crap. If you're late for a meeting I'm not going to invest in your business...Colonialism has brought inefficiency, and they introduced us to this crap notion of time...I don't know what they mean by *African*? This issue of Africanization is a cheap shot at African people...if they're mediocre...then you say fine...it's their culture...If by African management you mean you're recognising people's different upbringing and heritage, then that's fine. But not all this other crap.[24]

lndeed, the line of thought which endorses or denounces all (European or African) cultural practices leads to the incapacity (or an unwillingness) to delineate evaluative criteria to assess different practices.[25] Not all cultural forms and discourses (and the values and behaviours they engender) prepare individuals equally for success in the corporate world.[26] Simply because a child self-identifies as European, it does not logically follow that she should be schooled within an 'European' framework. Simply relying on one approach (whether it is 'European', 'African' or 'Asian') does not adequately prepare individuals for a multi-centric world.

ln this sense, African management ideas are a variant of diversity management: supplying the content to the rather nebulous injunction to celebrate different cultures. Bernstein contends, however, that diversity advocates are not interested in pluralism. He claims that they take what are actually one or two varieties of the Western or African tradition and present them as the world of diversity.[27] It is ironic that diversity practitioners and theorists are 'sadly misinformed about what real diversity in the world is like...'[28] In its uncritical celebration of all aspects of African cultural traditions and practices, much of African management reproduces what has been described as a key flaw of the diversity management paradigm: the presentation of cultural systems of meanings, representations and symbols as unitary.

By appealing to the artifice of authoritative traditions, many African management theorists

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[24] **Lazarus Maseko**, interview, 12 April 1996.

[25] For example, an Exxon Chemical's (NJ) valuing diversity document states that whilst cultural categorizing is an unavoidable exercise, 'it is possible not to judge the categories as "good" or "bad" and instead to see them as simply different from one another.'(**Exxon Chemical Company**, *Valuing Diversity in NJO*).

[26] See **Bernstein**, *Dictatorship of Virtue*, 10-11, 37 passim.

[27] **Bernstein**, *Dictatorship of Virtue*, 31.

[28] **Bernstein**, *Dictatorship of Virtue*, 30-31.

attempt to pass off their reading of traditional practices as *the* authentic reading. The cultural practice of *lobola* will serve to illustrate this argument. Cultural statements that refer to the treatment of adult women as legal minors can be constructed in multiple ways: some women may be articulated with the traditional narratives and practices in such a way that their defence of *lobola* becomes an act of both cultural and self-enunciation. According to Potgieter, many African and Muslim women affected by these practices 'felt that the *lobola* and the dowry system were part of their heritage or culture and that it provided them with a sense of identity.'[29] Other women may present *lobola* as a human rights violation that masquerades as a cultural practice. The African management paradigm fails to cater for this ambiguity.

Naturalizing gender relations is central to the project of configuring and expressing contemporary notions of racial and African authenticity. This, in turn, becomes re-defined through an emphasis on fixed gender roles.[30] Many African and diversity management theorists re-present essentialized gender differences as inseparable from this authenticity. Gender becomes the modality through which culture is symbolized.[31] Reinscribing traditional malestream hierarchies, Sipho Shabangu, a Numsa shop steward at SA Can, submits that

> women should not forget where they belong - it's God's way...No-one should stop someone from developing as an individual, but I'm personally against this thing of women's rights. Women tend to forget where they belong. You shouldn't forget where you belong - naturally. Women naturally belong in a kitchen, naturally as a women you should know your responsibilities: look after your children and their children. There are some women who want to be a man and drive big lorries. And they forget that as a woman they should look after children and cook... They turn nature the other way round... This is regardless of culture: if you're a woman you're a woman, you can't be against what God intended you to do... It shouldn't be said that just because you're a woman, you can't manage - no, that's discriminatory, But when you arrive home you're still a mother...[32]

The category of 'woman' is represented as a coherent and available image. This elides differences among women and obscures the disparate expectations to which they are subject.[33]

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[29] **Potgieter**, 'Women's Lives Across Cultures,' 100.

[30] **Gilroy**, *Small Acts*, 7 and 197.

[31] Cox puts it bluntly in his claim that 'gender does indeed represent a cultural category...women, as a group, hold a distinctly different worldview from men.'(**Cox**, *Cultural Diversity*, 106).

[32] **Sipho Shabangu**, interview, 26 March 1996.

[33] See **Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson**, 'Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism,' in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, edited and with an introduction by Linda J.

By relying on a rhetoric of commonality, Shabangu presumes the universal significance of the categories of gender, sexuality, and women. This ignores the extent to which expressions of gender relations (such as conformity with traditional cultural behaviours) are situational and context-dependent. On a visit to elderly parents in a rural area, a black manager may display traditional behaviours expected of her in that context but would behave rather differently in an urban social gathering.[34]

For their bearers, cultural identities are significant. From this starting point, many African management and diversity advocates make a logical leap and argue that any communication - between employees or between employees and employers - is a multicultural event. These theorists tend to present individuals primarily as products of their racial and cultural selves. This notion has its roots in an uncritical acceptance of what Mason terms the 'Miscommunication Thesis': the idea that individuals (or groups) lack shared concepts and therefore simply talk past one another. This incommensurability between cultures assumes an insurmountable discontinuity between categories of persons said to belong to different cultural groups. What is one person's celebration of cultural tradition is another's human rights violation.

The 'Miscommunication' thesis fails to recognize that the existence of persistent disputes is compatible with (and indeed, may be predicated on) the reality of communication between rival political, cultural and ethical positions. This communication may, in turn, be dependent on there being some congruence of meaning. The assumption that difference reflects pre-given ethnic or cultural traits serves to conceal the fluidity of cultural boundaries.[35] This forecloses an analysis of the ways in which boundaries are transversed, and individuals participate in (and appropriate) each other's cultural repertoires. As cultures are construed as monolithic, intra-cultural (as opposed to inter-cultural) fissures and clashes remain unthought.

Given the complex web of beliefs and actions constitutive of cultures, Human suggests that in day-to-day management, cultural issues should be downplayed. Culture should be dealt with in the daily interaction between an individual and her manager rather than by a broad-brush

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Nicholson, New York: Routledge, 1990, 33.

[34] See **Human**, 'Competencies for Managing Diversity,' 177.

[35] For a critique of this perspective see **Homi K. Bhabha**, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, 1-4.

strategy that relies on essentialist assumptions.[36] This, she believes, will allow us to 'see individuals as individuals with their own strengths and weaknesses and their own particular relationships with the 'cultures' and 'classes' from whence they come.'[37] Just as cross-cultural communication is complicated, so too is intra-cultural communication. It may not be possible to develop equivalence of meaning within one 'cultural group' (one cannot assume that there is a singular, homogeneous 'native voice').[38] As Homi Bhabha puts it: 'the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.'[39] Recognizing the dangers of cultural reductionism thus needs to be coupled with an understanding of the extent to which culture is imbricated in individual and collective identities.

10.3 Rhythm is the Architecture of Being: Rituals Operationalized

African management ideas are gaining currency within corporate circles. The promise is that by applying an 'African management' approach, the work place will become a more familiar and comfortable terrain for black employees. Given that eurocentric practices have been discredited, this promise is appealing. As Piet Roos, SA Can's operations manager, put it:

> We're sitting with diversified cultures here and what you want to do is Africanize your culture - link your company culture to your population in the factory. Seventy to eighty percent of our employees are black and therefore there are differences in, for example, time - there's African time...You need to link your change process to your ethnic culture in your factory, and link your ethnic culture to corporate culture. We're trying to Africanize our World Class Manufacturing...when we put out the vision we put the mother taal [language] to the poster...[and use] Ndebele patterns...[40]

Much of African management aims to increase productivity through minimizing cultural dislocation. This is to be done by invoking 'African values' in the service of increased profitability and productivity. With their codifying of Africa and Africans, many African management theorists, in the tradition of past purveyors of manners-and-customs discourses,

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[36] **Human**, *Affirmative Action and the Development of People*, 73.

[37] **Human**, *Affirmative Action and the Development of People*, 76.

[38] See **Andrew Mason**, *Explaining Political Disagreement*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 93.

[39] **Bhabha**, *The Location of Culture*, 37.

[40] **Piet Roos**, interview, 26 March 1996.

serve to mediate and ease the shock of contact on the frontier.[41] Here, the frontier is not that of the 'dark interior' of nineteenth century Southern Africa, but the heralding of a post-apartheid era. Illustrative of this are cultural reductionists such as Slabbert and Opperman who smuggle the 1980s baggage of the human resources profession through the *ubuntu* back door. In line with other such practitioners, Slabbert and Opperman claim that a prerequisite for effective change management is co-operation and support within the labour force, which hinges on the successful integration of an organization's core values (viz. profitability) with the 'traditional values of its black employees'.[42] The claim is that 'big discrepancies' exist between the two sets of values:

> In shrill contrast with the organizational core values, traditional values such as...access to traditional healers, the worship and appeasement of ancestral spirits and the supernatural...were found to be of great importance to the Batswana employees.[43]

What emerges is an a-contextual landscape in which traditional (read: cultural) values are presented as primordial, and the 'naturalness' of ethnic (writ cultural) groups is not questioned. As with diversity management, group differences are reified. The cultural self is presented as a pre-given, unitary entity.

This presentation of Africa and the African subject resonates with Mbigi's suggestion to adapt the Shona production festival ceremony (*Mukwerera*) to the workplace. The aim is to assist managers in communicating corporate objectives more effectively. This is to be done through punctuating the general manager's report on his strategic plans with singing, 'tribal dancing' and slaughtering cattle.[44] According to James Smith, group MD of SA Packaging, there is nothing specifically 'African' about this rendition of African management:

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[41] **Mary Louise Pratt**, 'Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen,' in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 140.

[42] **J.A. Slabbert and W. Opperman**, 'A framework for the integration of cultural values of core values,' *South African Journal of Labour Relations* 19, no. 3 (1995): 44-45.

[43] **Slabbert and Opperman**, 'A framework for the integration of values,' 50.

[44] **Lovemore Mbigi**, 'The Spirit of African Management,' in *African Management: Philosophies, Concepts and Applications*, edited by Peter Christie, Ronnie Lessem, and Lovemore Mbigi, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1994, 85-86.

> But Lovemore [Mbigi] feels you need to tap into the African psyche and have more rituals...He's struggling to get universal buy-in to that. What can we prescribe at the centre to get Afrocentric management? Nothing...We should have more rituals...to celebrate what's gone right. But we're not prescribing rituals...we're just teaching them about the importance of ritual and its role.[45]

Organizationally, this has been operationalized by incorporating rituals into World Class Manufacturing (WCM) initiatives such as Total Productive Maintenance (TPM).[46] Many SA Packaging operations have embarked on these processes. Teams are identified; a team name (such as 'Simply the Best') selected; and team members are then sent on team building exercises. The hope is that they will re-enter the workplace with a sense of group identity and a collective mission. Their first business agenda is often autonomous maintenance (the team strips, cleans, repairs, reassembles and maintains their own machine). The TPM machine is launched into commission and unveiled amid much (African) ceremony - singing, toyi-toying, slaughtering of cows, speeches, prayers, and food and drink. The objective is to instil team pride and a sense of achievement (certificates may be awarded). At SA Paper, the unveiling of a well-oiled tissue-box machine had all the trappings of a new South African public relations stunt, complete with white men in suits grimacing with the effort of appearing comfortable toyi-toying.[47]

Despite the hype, there are many problems with WCM initiatives at SA Paper. These include apathy, a gap in understanding and communication between the shopfloor and management, uneven commitment to the initiative, and lack of central co-ordination. As Len Munro lamented: 'Since I've been here we've tried loads of management techniques and initiatives but they fizzle out after about three months and then a new fad comes along and it's the same story. We land up sounding like a broken record.'[48]

The idea that songs and dance are symbols of collective beingness and solidarity is the

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[45] **James Smith**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[46] According to a SA Packaging promotional video, people work best in teams that are empowered to make decisions. Hence, TPM is about empowering people to take responsibility for their contribution to productivity and the ongoing maintenance of high standards through continuous improvement (*SA Packaging Centre's Induction*, video produced by SA Packaging, ca. 1995; and **SA Packaging**, 'Viewpoint: A Newspaper for all Employees of SA Packaging,' internal Group newsletter, Johannesburg, February 1996).

[47] These observations are based on a TPM launch I attended on April 2, 1996, whilst doing research at SA Paper.

[48] **Len Munro**, interview, 2 April 1996.

linchpin around which much of this ritual revolves. As Léopold Senghor posits: '(r)hythm is the architecture of being'.[49] Impey and Nussbaum argue that songs have the potential to enhance productivity, increase morale, and can be used as effective vehicles for team building.[50] Europak (part of the Nampak group) is used as a case study to demonstrate the ways in which religious and praise songs, as well as slogans and songs drawn from the national liberation struggle have been adapted for the workplace.[51] Slogans include 'Viva Europak, viva! Forward with Europak, forward!' Refrains that were in the past used to praise the tripartite alliance of the ANC, the Communist Party and the union movement ('Viva the ANC, viva! Viva the SACP, viva! Viva Cosatu, viva!') are now employed in the service of Capitalism Inc. This is illustrated in the following song, entitled 'We Breaking Through', written by a black engineer to celebrate the launch of a production line:

> The BREAK THROUGH don't only make bottles
> We also manufacture History
> While making Manufacturing History...
> You see, it is no mystery
> We making Victory
> We scattering all mythical notions of non-conformance
> Yes, smashing all those barriers to World-Class performance...[52]

Here, the idea of manufacturing history (and fictionalizing identities) is invoked as a means of lauding the benefits of WCM, the aim being to manufacture a sense of identity with both the team and the manufacturing process itself.

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[49] **Léopold Senghor**, *L'ésprit de la Civilisation ou les Lois de la Culoture Négro-Africaine*, Vol VIII-X, Paris, 1956: 74; quoted in Angela Impey and Barbara Nussbaum, 'Music and dance in southern Africa: Positive forces in the workplace,' in *Sawubona Africa: Embracing four worlds in South African management*, edited by Ronnie Lessem and Barbara Nussbaum, Johannesburg: Zebra, 1996, 227.

[50] **Impey and Nussbaum**, 'Music and dance,' 227-244.

[51] For example, as a struggle song, one of the meanings of the slogan '[...] *iya xcaxcazela, zela, zela*' would have been: 'The Nationalist Party is shivering when the ANC comes'. In the workplace, it refers to Europak's competitors who are shivering (with fear).(See **Impey and Nussbaum**, 'Music and dance,' 249-251).

[52] Cited in **Cumming**, 'A Case Study,' 70-71.

10.4 Ubuntu Reconsidered

According to the Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

> Africans have a thing called ubuntu; it is about the essence of being human, it is part of the gift that Africa is going to give the world.[53] It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being willing to go that extra mile for the sake of another. We believe that a person is a person through other persons; that my humanity is caught up, bound up and inextricably in yours. When I dehumanise you, I inexorably dehumanise myself. The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms. Therefore you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own in community, in belonging.[54]

'Ubuntu' is central to the African management approach. It is the linchpin around which most of its policy suggestions hinge. 'Ubuntu' has become a catch-all buzzword, and is regularly invoked by commentators, practitioners, and corporate high-flyers. Despite (or possibly because of) the terms popularity within public and corporate discourse, it remains ill-defined. That a term may come to mean different things to different people is not in and of itself problematic. In the case of ubuntu, however, this ambiguity is troubling because the concept is widely used to inform and justify many corporate AA and diversity management initiatives. An internal SA Banking document illuminates the ways in which 'ubuntu' surfaces within corporate corridors. The document describes the types of behaviours that demonstrate a lack of ubuntu (not greeting individuals 'appropriately') and those that demonstrate ubuntu (tolerating differences of culture, religion and opinion, for instance).[55] If ubuntu is to become more than a mere platitude, a level of common understanding as to its meaning(s) is required. It is to this task that we now turn.

Ubuntu roughly translates as 'a man is a man' through other men.[56] The fundamentals of

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[53] Similarly, Biko expounded: 'The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa giving the world a more human face.'(**Steven Biko**, 'Some African Cultural Concepts,' in *I Write What I Like*, Steven Biko, 61).

[54] Cited in **Mbigi**, *Ubuntu: The African Dream in Management*, 147.

[55] **SA Banking Corporate Communications**, 'Individual, corporate and community transformation: SA Banking initiatives,' Johannesburg: SA Banking, 1995, 10.

[56] Groenewald notes that *ubuntu* is a Nguni, and more specifically, a Zulu word that is synonymous with the following words: *botho* in Sesotho, *vumunhu* in Shangaan, *vhuthu* in Venda, and *menslikheid* in Afrikaans (**Hennie Groenewald**, 'Intercultural Communication: "Risking" a Change of Heart,' in *Cultural Synergy in South Africa*, edited by Mellisa E. Steyn and Khanya B. Motshabi, 21). See also **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 88.

ubuntu include the notion that community and family are the cornerstones of African thought; storytelling is key to early socialization processes; and age, experience and manhood need to be valorized.[57] For many African management theorists, the idea of ubuntu is implicated in our very (collective) identity as Africans. Mbigi claims that for Africans to undertake the challenge of development, 'they need to discover their own collective self-identity. This has to be an inward journey which should lead to a celebration of collective "personhood" which we have called Ubuntu.'[58] The injunction is to excavate our true collective self, to reclaim and (re)construct an identity dislodged by external (read: Western) forces.[59] As Mbigi puts it: '(w)e need to rediscover our collective soul - our Africanhood - we have to dig down into our cultural roots'[60].

The proposal is for employing a seemingly intact and coherent past in the service of a more turbulent present. The archaeological *leitmotif* steers clear of introspection and averts its eyes as the excavators and tomb robbers swap tools. Common history is presented as necessary for racial identity. This hampers efforts to assess the processes through which groups 'choose' or invent their history and traditions. In a similar vein, many African management theorists overlook the ways in which the idea of ubuntu is a 'modern' construct, which is employed in the service of a modernizing project. As Koopman puts it: 'managers in Africa owe it to their own survival to renew the indigenous way of Africa...Ubuntu awaits modernization.'[61]

The self-conscious aspect of this project becomes more apparent when assessing the ways in which the African management school is caught up in the broader struggle for the rearticulation of the nation. For instance, Mthembu asserts that the exclusion of 'African values' from the workplace has prevented the development of 'a more authentic corporate culture.' The call is for a 'paradigm shift' to be enacted through the 'retrieval, strengthening

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[57] **H. Mvume Dandala**, 'Cows never die: Embracing African cosmology in the process of economic growth,' in *Sawubona Africa: Embracing four worlds in South African management*, edited by Ronnie Lessem and Barbara Nussbaum, Johannesburg: Zebra, 1996, 71-85.

[58] **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 6.

[59] According to Grace Mokoena: 'with Western cultures, the more alone they are the better they feel. Within my own culture I owe an explanation of my behaviour to my family...you find this in Afrikaners and Africans. The English Western culture has used their thinking to separate us [Afrikaners and Africans].'(**Grace Mokoena**, interview, 6 September 1995).

[60] **Mbigi**, *Ubuntu: The African Dream in Management*, 46.

[61] **Koopman**, *Transcultural Management*, 62.

and revaluing of an African identity'.[62] Permeating the African management literature is the idea that this identity is a collective one. It is only by insertion within the commun(i)ty that the 'I' comes into being and gains prominence.[63] I am only through We, the latter thereby becoming a unitary Subject and sole author of its actions. Self-knowledge and self-reference become possible only through group knowledge. As Mbigi asserts:

> In the Afrocentric religion, in order to know what you can become you must start by knowing who you are. This cannot be done through a memo or privately, it must be done in a ritual or ceremonial manner. It must also be done collectively.[64]

The rhetorical figure is of the excavator, draped in his faux kente cloth, simultaneously marching backwards (in his attempt to discover and extract the authentic heart of the nation) and forwards (in the vainglorious hope of convincing his fellow travellers that the doppelganger is in fact the ancestral spirit of old).

This may lead to what the Beninois philosopher Paulin Hountondji has dubbed *unanimism*: the belief that there is both a peculiar African form of thinking and a unique African contents of thought.[65] The comments of Sipho Shabangu, a Numsa shop steward, typify this belief in a common conceptual vocabulary. He claims that 'to do things as oneness is unity and strength - you think for me, I think for Jacob, we have a common ground...that's ubuntu. I respect you as a human being, not because you have degrees...'[66]

The question becomes one of whether or not the group or community is malleable enough to accommodate all of its member's selves. If *unanimism* is the guiding philosophy, then it will be difficult for the community to become simply an additional referent for individual identities.

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[62] **Delani Mthembu**, 'African values: Discovering the indigenous roots of management,' in *Sawubona Africa: Embracing four worlds in South African management*, edited by Ronnie Lessem and Barbara Nussbaum, Johannesburg: Zebra, 1996, 216.

[63] Levine and Taitz note that in order to write the 'I' into prominence, a splitting off or fracturing of a communal identity is required. This 'then allows for the possibility of a reinsertion of the "I" back into the commun(i)ty with which it both identifies and dis-identifies simultaneously.'(**Melissa Levine and Laurice Taitz**, 'Fictional Autobiographies/Autobiographical Fictions: (Re)evaluating the Work of Dambudzo Marechera,' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 32, no. 1 (1997): 111).

[64] **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 54-55.

[65] **Paulin Hountondji**, cited in Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 24.

[66] **Sipho Shabangu**, interview, 26 March 1996.

This is because the (purportedly) traditional African mode of communal association can be construed as referring to 'persons associated in a manner such as to constitute them as a natural person, a partnership of persons which is itself a Person.'[67] This approach introduces points of closure into the symbolic repertoire of the group. Ubuntu becomes the veneer of respectability for the attempt to fix the identity of the community. It bolsters this illusion of consensus and the claim that '(g)roup harmony or *ɯa* is inherent in African culture'.[68] As Mbigi puts it, in 'Mother Africa'

> (t)he question of freedom of choice for the individual is out; what is crucial is freedom from want. It is also theoretical nonsense to expect individual self-reliance and independence. One survives by joining hands with others. South African organizations like the Zionist Christian churches survive on the basis of the solidarity principle and absolute group conformity on survival issues. This is their competitive advantage. Maybe this is what gave birth to and sustained the South African primitive political ideology of Apartheid...[69]

Following from this is the emphasis placed on the conception of community which becomes more than the aggregation of its parts. As Menkiti claims, African thought 'asserts an ontological independence to human society, and moves from society to individuals [rather than] from individuals to society.'[70] This conception rests on a stable and fixed idea of societal or communal boundaries, and thus prevents an analysis of the types of (often conflicting) strategies employed over time to improvise multiple, shifting identities within plural and differently bounded spaces. The transferral of the individual into a communal body implies that the individual is imprinted on the social; with the ground of the social constituting one giant palimpsest. In Léopold Senghor's words: 'I feel the other, I dance the other, therefore I exist.'[71] Within this framework, Dandala submits that

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[67] **Michael Oakeshott**, *On Human Conduct*, Oxford, 1975, 203; cited in Chantal Mouffe, 'Democratic Citizenship and the Political Community,' in *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*, edited by Chantal Mouffe, London: Verso, 1992: 232.

[68] **Koopman**, *Transcultural Management*, 58.

[69] **Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 105.

[70] Cited in **Augustine Shutte**, 'Philosophy for Africa: Community and Individual Freedom, and Conceptions of Humanity,' in *Cultural Synergy in South Africa*, edited by Melissa E. Steyn and Khanya B. Motshabi, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1996, 29.

[71] **Senghor**, *L'ésprit* de la Civilisation; quoted in Impey and Nussbaum, 'Music and dance in southern Africa,' 227.

> Africans consider 'beingness' not merely as a given because one was born, is alive and will die. Being human is achieved as a person shows characteristics that qualify him or her to be so regarded. Hence, it is quite possible to refer to a person as a 'non-person' or '*asingomutu lowo*'...*Ubuntu* thus becomes a fountain from which actions and attitudes flow.[72]

Ubuntu is about 'how to be',[73] it is 'a cornerstone of culture',[74] and humanness is thus delimited and defined a-priori. A naturalist fiction emerges in which essentialist distinctions are drawn between what is human and what is not. The idea of what it is to be a person becomes both the representation (of personhood) and the rules: an opposition is thereby erected between the subject who establishes and articulates herself in accordance with the rule(s), and the Other, who does not have access to or who fails to conform to the rule(s) and is therefore deprived of the status of subject. As Mthembu asserts: 'Any person who does not conform to certain standards would be referred [to] as *akumuntu wamuntu*, 'this is not a human being'...Communitarian society means neither a society of equals nor a free society'.[75] Coercion coexists with manufactured consent: conformity and loyalty to the group is demanded and expected. As a black manager noted: 'What one sees as very African is that process of consultation - we consult and consult but once the decision is made, you're not allowed to deviate from it - dissension's not allowed.'[76]

This failure to embrace pluralism per se is troubling. Within the African management rubric, efforts to figure sameness and to reinforce the epistemological niche from which the universal speaks often become racialized: As Dandala submits:

> *ubuntu*...is not an exclusive possession of Africans...The law of averages, however, suggests that, from an African perspective, it is people of African origin who are likely to have ubuntu and when a person of non-African extraction, particularly a white person, shows signs of *ubuntu*, people may say '*unobuntu ngathi ayingomlungu*' ('he/she

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[72] **Dandala**, 'Cows never die,' 70 (emphasis in the original).

[73] **Dandala**, 'Cows never die,' 70.

[74] **Dandala**, 'Cows never die,' 84.

[75] **Delani Mthembu**, 'African values: Discovering the indigenous roots of management,' in *Sawubona Africa: Embracing four worlds in South African management*, edited by Ronnie Lessem and Barbara Nussbaum, Johannesburg: Zebra Press, 1996, 220. On this point, also see **Groenewald**, 'Intercultural Communication,' 21.

[76] **Dan Sebake**, interview, 25 April 1996. Similarly, Mbigi avers that '(t)he dark side of Ubuntu means failure to [conform] will meet harsh punitive measures such as evening "Dunlop treatment" or "necklacing", burning of houses and assassination.'(**Mbigi with Maree**, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, 58).

> has *ubuntu* as if he/she is not a white person').[77]

The trope of race is shot through this rather dubious appeal to ubuntu as the connective tissue of the African person. Involved in this symbolic projection of race as kinship is an 'almost aesthetic cultivation of a stable, pure, racial self',[78] which allows for a new register of Africanness to emerge. This register is dissociated from the politics of contemporary Africa.

A tension emerges between this racialized humanism, which is a short-cut to solidarity, and the idea that ubuntu and humanness can be achieved. The question arises as to whether it is possible to divorce the concept of ubuntu from its exclusivist racialized moorings. Can we simultaneously recognize what many perceive as our great untapped advantage - the 'we-ness' spirit of collectivity - whilst jettisoning its latent authoritarianism?[79] Can the representation of the community be sustained in the face of equivocation and difference that may threaten the image of its universality? Some within corporate South Africa seems to think so. If we are to believe the rhetoric, ubuntu fosters the acceptance of shared values and encourages greater commitment to teamwork.[80] Indeed, Neil Cumming makes even more extravagant claims for the concepts potency:

> Cynics would argue that the application of *Ubuntu* and related processes in a manufacturing environment would have very little impact on 'hard' measures such as efficiency and productivity - Wrong, we have seen many examples where the machine efficiency and the productivity of the people around the machine have literally doubled![81]

The empirical validation of these claims is elusive. The question of what is meant by 'ubuntu', and of whether it is measurable and if so, how, are similarly unanswered. This parallels the criticisms directed against the ways in which the term 'diversity' is employed in the diversity management literature. Both 'ubuntu' and 'diversity' have become catch-all phrases,

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[77] **Dandala**, 'Cows never die,' 71 (emphasis in the original).

[78] **Gilroy**, *Small Acts*, 195.

[79] **Clifford Barrett**, interview, 17 April 1996.

[80] For instance, an internal SA Banking document states that 'ubuntu is critical to the success of any South African organization as its presence, or absence, in the behaviour of its staff, can have a significant impact on productivity.'(**SA Banking Corporate Communications**, 'Individual, corporate and community transformation,' 10).

[81] **Cumming**, 'A Case Study,' 68.

pronounced on any and every pretext.[82] This broadbrush approach has an oversimplifying effect. It inhibits a more nuanced and subtle analysis of the ways in which cultural relations impact self- and group-identification within the workplace. Invoking the concept of ubuntu to fit business expediencies rankles in some quarters. As Madi asserts, ubuntu is 'not just a fad of the new South Africa. I am amazed at how many chief executive officers there are who seem to believe that by adding the word '*ubuntu*' to their five-year plans they have crossed the Rubicon...'[83]

Ubuntu holds out the promise of becoming the glue with which to cement a new, national, rainbow identity. This seems to be part of its appeal. The offer of an easy, indigenous panacea is tempting to business leaders grappling with reconciling fractured organizational cultures. Christie contends that 'it is in the social realm particularly that we have the most to learn from our black comrades, who have seemingly long since known what it means to be human.'[84] It is as though there is a longing to impute an a priori African essence to any positive quality (such as warmth or dignity). He claims that 'if we can treat our customers and suppliers with warmth; if we can imbue our products and services with warmth - then this can be Africa's unique contribution...Then, from the ashes of apartheid, like a Phoenix, Africa's lion will rise.'[85] It is as if centuries of negative images can be reversed simply by *diktat*, by holding up positive qualities in the hope that their refractions will banish the darkness. The longing is to make Africa synonymous with what it is to be human, to define humanity, to (re)claim our rightful place as the originators of humankind.

In Gilroy's words: 'The newly invented criteria for judging racial authenticity are supplied...by restored access to an imagined, though not always imaginary, idea of original African forms and codes.'[86] This truncated vision of and identification with Africa dovetails with the wish to ensure that the mantle of the cradle of civilization is returned, not to (re)drape or (re)cloak the

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[82] Proclamations do not necessarily equate with in-depth comprehension. A 1996 study conducted by the research company Product Development Laboratories (PDL) found that 62.5 percent of companies surveyed knew little about ubuntu (**Thabo Leshilo**, 'Affirmative action still shunned as tokenist,' *Independent* (online), available from http://www2.inc.co.za/Archives/9607/05/affrim.html, Internet, accessed 17 July 1997).

[83] **Phinda Madi**, 'Moving the Centre,' *People Dynamics* 13, no. 3 (1995): 16.

[84] **Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 9.

[85] **Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 13. And elsewhere he asserts that '(d)ignity is a cornerstone of African culture'(Ibid., 145).

[86] **Gilroy**, *Small Acts*, 197.

continent in darkness, but as a symbolic artefact or representation of the continent's innate warmth. The concept of ubuntu has been deemed equal to this task. As Fanon puts it, the postcolonial rediscovery of a true cultural identity is the object of 'passionate research...directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today...some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others.'[87]

10.5 Questioning African Management and its Antinomies

In common with much of the diversity literature, many advocates of African management rely on cultural reductionism, presenting culture as static and non-fissured. A key assumption is that cultural practices emerge in a vacuum, almost *sui generis*:[88] As Mbigi puts it: 'In my culture, hunting is the major expression of entrepreneurship...The spirit of entrepreneurship then, is symbolised in our culture as the Spirit of the Hunter...In a way there is no difference between the feudal African hunter and the modern entrepreneur.'[89] Here, the construction of cultural, ethnic and racialized identities (to provide a topology where none exists) is manifest in a sequence of identifications: the identification of his culture (that of the Vahera people?) with Africans, and of Africans with a unified cultural identity and tradition. In an apparently seamless transition, the I becomes the We, and localized or geographically specific cultural forms and practices serve as a proxy for African attributes.

In treating cultural (or racial, we are never quite sure which) groupings as autonomous, many African management theorists recapitulate the error of excluding from the analysis those structures, institutional matrices and relations (such as gender, class and power relations) which are necessary to an explanation of the nature and relationships of 'cultural groups'. The attempt to advance cultural (and implicitly, racial) cleavages as the causal explanation of putatively different racialized cosmologies is to beg the question. These phenomena cannot be taken as given. If anything, they constitute the *explananda* and cannot thus be presented as the

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[87] **Franz Fanon**, 'On national culture,' in *The Wretched of the Earth*, London, 1963, 170; quoted in Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' 393.

[88] For example, Koopman identifies 'essential traits of African culture'. He urges his 'black brothers' to 'go back to their own beliefs, to start searching for the real way of Africa'(**Koopman**, *Transcultural Management*, 60).

[89] **Mbigi**, 'The Spirit of African Management,' 78. Mbigi avers that early signs of possession of this hunter spirit include, *inter alia*, 'affinity to dogs...affinity to hunting and shooting activities...constant hunting dreams...constant business dreams...'(**Mbigi**, *Ubuntu: The African Dream in Management*, 33).

explanans.

Much of African management is concerned with defining and interpreting African cultural practices for what is perceived of as a non-African audience (the South African corporate world). By so doing, these theorists often comes dangerously close to fashioning and celebrating themselves as Other. These theorists begin to occupy the unenviable position of what Suleri terms 'Otherness-machines', mediating a particular reading of (black) Africa(ns) for their white compatriots in the corporate world.[90] This world is, however, no longer lily-white. Whilst 90 percent of the JSE is still controlled by traditional white businesses, the remaining 10 percent consists of black companies - a figure which continues to increase.[91]

In tandem with such attempts to valorize otherness, many African management theorists trumpet a caricatured vision of Mother Africa. In this way, they parallel those advocates of diversity management who celebrate a politics of difference which mirrors ideas of human difference as espoused by nineteenth (and twentieth) century racial theory.[92] A conservative and romantic reading of Africa serves to bolster the principal dynamic of otherness. The politics of difference is privileged at the expense (and in the guise) of the politics of equality. Lessem is a prime example. Drawing on Van der Post, Lessem postulates:

> The bushman makes gods of all the animals that surround him; the Hottentots kneel to an insect, the praying mantis; the Bantu listens to the spirits of his ancestors in the roar of the lion and in the noise of his cattle stirring. Then suddenly European man burst upon the scene. A long period of pure reason which began with the Reformation and had been stimulated by the French Revolution was deeply at work in the European spirit, setting him at variance with his intuitions and instincts...[93]

Lessem presents the past as an uncomplicated, factual package, simply there and available for rediscovery. He is blind to the ways in which it is constructed through myth, fantasy, memory and narrative; through that very heuristic device eulogized by African management theorists - storytelling. Mbigi similarly fetishizes precolonial history in his claim that '(t)raditional

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[90] **Sara Suleri**, *Meatless Days*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989, 105; cited in **Appiah**, *In My Father's House*, 157.

[91] See **Charlene Smith**, 'Darkening the corporate pigment,' *Mail & Guardian*, November 28 to December 4 1997.

[92] Malik makes this argument with reference to postmodernism. See **Kenan Malik**, 'Universalism and difference: race and the postmodernists,' *Race & Class* 37, no. 3 (1996): 2-4.

[93] **Lessem**, *From Hunter to Rainmaker*, 150.

African political systems and values treasured democracy, freedom of expression, consensus, grass-roots participation [and] consultation...'[94] What is presented is an incomplete and romanticized picture of Africa. The way in which Africa has traditionally been viewed by Western eyes is echoed in this attempt to 'stereotype antiquity' and codify the Other.[95] The image of original African forms and codes as harmonious and natural obscures the politics and asymmetrical power relations of past and contemporary African social formations.[96] Ironically, this type of discursive regime also finds parallels in Biko's writings on 'the authentic cultural aspects of the African people'. Here, he exemplifies a form of othering in which Africans are homogenized into an almost static, collective 'we'. To wit: 'Attitudes of Africans to property again show just how unindividualistic the African is.'[97]

Interestingly, the concepts of 'whiteness' and 'Europe' are not subject to parallel processes. Europe is not 'figured' as the mother of different 'white' civilizations. If anything, there is an unconscious attempt by African management theorists to replace this foster mother (Europe) with the original motherland: Africa. Hence Christie's injunction to whites to '(b)ring your foot back where it belongs - here in Africa with your other foot.'[98] Within the apartheid system of marking differences, the boundaries of the identity 'European' stretched to include all so-called whites - regardless of their place of birth or country of origin. In the absence of the (black) African, whiteness became a transparent quality. It attained opacity and became racialized only in relation to, or in contrast with, the 'colour' of non-whites; the dark mirror of Africa.[99] After iterating the gifts black Africans have to offer the world, Christie avers that this is

> not...to suggest that the things we do as whites are terrible, and that blacks, in contrast, are all wonderful people...many whites are blacker than black, and many blacks whiter

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[94] **Mbigi**, *Ubuntu: The African Dream in Management*, 28.

[95] See **Luli Callinicos**, 'The multiple worlds of South Africa's historiography,' in *Sawubona Africa: Embracing four worlds in South African management*, edited by Ronnie Lessem and Barbara Nussbaum, Johannesburg: Zebra, 1996, 93. Callinicos claims that '(w)ith our inadequate knowledge of ancient Africa, precolonial history is in danger of being romanticized in a haze of golden mythology or, alternatively, congealed into an image of static social systems.'(Ibid.)

[96] On this point see **Gilroy**, *Small Acts*, 197 passim.

[97] **Biko**, 'Some African Cultural Concepts,' 55, 57.

[98] **Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 148.

[99] See **Barbara Flagg**, '"Was Blind, But Now I See": White Race Consciousness and the Requirement of Discriminatory Intent,' in *Power, Privilege and Law: A Civil Rights Reader*, edited by Leslie Bender and Daan Braveman, American Casebook Series, St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing, 1995, 34.

> than white. But the two groups do, generally speaking, have complimentary [sic] gifts to offer the world...[100]

Despite the disclaimer, Christie (like many African management theorists) relies on a reductionist logic of what it is to be 'white' or 'black'. In his topology, blacks display interests and have traits a, b, and c, whereas whites display interests and have traits x, y, and z. If a white exhibits traits a, b and c, that white is *ipso facto* 'blacker than black'. Moreover, to assert that blacks and whites have complementary gifts is to assume that what they have to offer is different, and in the absence of any explanation of the source of that difference, we must presume it is their (fawn? ebony? ochre? caramel? beige?) skin colour. There is once again the spectre of a discourse of authentic organicity that would seeks to reinscribe a biologized form of social division.[101]

10.6 Conclusions

This chapter has suggested that undergirding much of the African management rhetoric is a catalogue of refashioned cultural separatist ideas. It has argued that this accounts, in part, for the increasing appeal of the African management project within corporate circles. In valorizing group differences and culture, it parallels much of the diversity management literature. This highlights the continuities with both the diversity management and the traditional maximalist approach.

In much of the African management writings, two separate ideas are conflated. The first is that management practices are not universal, but context-dependent and business needs to appreciate local and regional cultural specificity. Indeed, as will be discussed in the following chapter, multiculturalism and capitalism seem to make good bedfellows.[102] The second is that there is a set cultural reality out there that corresponds with a fixed African reality and it is to this that business needs to be attuned. A confused leap is made between the former, defensible claim and the latter, probably indefensible claim. As Bheki Sibiya, then MD of the

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[100] **Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 12. Similarly, we have Lessem's claim that, 'I'm white on the outside and black on the inside'(**Ronnie Lessem**; quoted in **Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 128).

[101] See **Norval**, *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*, 299-305.

[102] As Micklethwait and Wooldridge note: 'virtually every global brand has had to make concessions to local taste in order to achieve its ubiquity...McDonald's hamburgers come with optional Teriyaki sauce in Japan (just as they come with chilli peppers in Mexico).'(**Micklethwait and Wooldridge**, *The Witch Doctors*, 248-249).

Black Management Forum, asserts:

> African management is a cliché - good management is good management wherever one manages...Integral to good management is understanding the environment in which one operates.[103]

This chapter has shown that purportedly traditional African ritual and songs are employed in the workplace in an attempt to enhance productivity and morale, and are touted as effective vehicles for team building. The appropriation and repackaging of an authentic 'African' culture often serves to foster the primary goal of corporate South Africa - the maximization of profits. This is evident in Mbigi's claim:

> Another example of harnessing our African cultural heritage into competitive world-class products is the Lost City in this country.[104] It is the harnessing of ancient African mythology of animal spirits such as the lion spirit (*dindingwe*) and the baboon spirit (*soko - mukanya - ncube*) as well as oracular place spirits...into modern competitive products and services. Sol Kerzner stretched his imagination. The resort could improve its attraction, enhance customer delight and customer wonder by offering African cultural entertainment in the form of music, dance, art, African spiritual experiences [and so on]...[105]

Of significance is the artificiality of Mbigi's nativism. Where are the voices of the 'we' he so hastily embraces? The synthetic particularisms he moulds into palatable cultural morsels will not feed those who, in the names of separate development and profit maximization, were dispossessed of their land and forced to live in rural slums. The text is similarly silent on the symbiotic relationship between the erstwhile Sol Kerzner and Lucas Mangope - under whose authority as President of Bophuthatswana the leisure resorts of Sun City and the Lost City were constructed. It will do well to remember Fanon's counselling to beware the neocolonial wolf dressed in the sheep's clothing of (synthetic) populism. To wit: the intellectual

> sets a high value on the customs, traditions, and the appearances of his people, but his inevitable, painful experience only seems to be a banal search for exoticism. The sari becomes sacred, and shoes that come from Paris or Italy are left off in favor of pampooties, while suddenly the language of the ruling power is felt to burn your

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[103] **Bheki Sibiya**, interview, 1 September 1995.

[104] The Palace of the Lost City is a Sun International Leisure Resort, situated in what was then known as the bantustan of Bophuthatswana.

[105] **Mbigi**, *Ubuntu: The African Dream in Management*, 44-45. As he puts it elsewhere: 'Ubuntu should become a cultural business emblem to express our collective soul in the business marketplace'(Ibid., 43).

> lips...[However, the] culture that the intellectual leans toward is often no more than a stock of particularisms. He wishes to attach himself to the people, but instead he only catches hold of their outer garments.[106]

This is not to suggest that unscrupulous profit maximization is always and everywhere the intent or consequence of the application of African management ideas. Indeed, many advocates of African management would argue to the contrary. The emergence of a corpus of African management ideas and practices is a relatively recent development. Whilst the contours of a discrete paradigm or school of thought are evident, it is still too soon to assess its influence and impact within management circles in South Africa. Webster sounds an early cautionary word. He warns against too hasty an embrace of African management as a means to transcend the boundaries of the tensions between management and workers on the shop floor. Webster submits:

> Unless this important step towards 'African management' finds a central place for the shop steward and the union, it will be rejected as yet another attempt to pre-empt unions for black workers...To ignore the very real conflicts of interest between capital and labour is not to go beyond the boundaries, it is to abandon the game altogether.[107]

This chapter has suggested that captured by the rhetoric of exoticism, many African management theorists are all too eager to fashion themselves as the Other, to embrace what Appiah terms *alteritism*: 'the construction and celebration of oneself as Other'.[108] The dangers of being treated as an 'Otherness-machine'[109] are apparent in the following narrative (taken from The Palace of the Lost City's publicity material):

> Centuries ago, they fled the Barbarians of the Northern deserts, wandering South until they found it ... a splendid valley. This gentle tribe...built a fabulous city crowned by a magnificent Palace in tribute to their Royal family. The legend of this Palace and its Lost City has echoed in the souls of adventurers for centuries. Finally re-discovered, its splendour has been restored. The Palace of The Lost City at Sun City - situated on the world famous Sun City Complex and voted one of the top hotels...in the world.[110]

Evoking the iterative rhythm of a traditional past, the material relies on the narrative form of

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[106] **Franz Fanon**, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 221, 223-24, quoted in **Appiah**, *In My Father's House*, 61.

[107] **Webster**, 'Changing industrial relations in South Africa,' 175-176.

[108] **Appiah**, *In My Father's House*, 156.

[109] **Sara Suleri**, *Meatless Days*, 105, cited in **Appiah**, *In My Father's House*, 157.

[110] Citation from the American Express Southern Africa Classic Selection Web Site, available from http://www.mg.co.za/mg/classic/, Internet, accessed 23 April 1997.

story-telling to market what Mbigi elsewhere terms 'heritage tourism': that which is aimed at repackaging a 338 room hotel (rooms from US$374 per night) complete with casino and two championship golf courses as emblematic of an indigenous African cultural heritage.[111]

This highlights a conceptual weakness common in much of the African management literature: the failure to distinguish between symbols and meanings. This is particularly evident in the emphasis on ubuntu. Many African management advocates presume that words and ideas represent in a simple and direct way the 'world out there'. This overlooks the extent to which symbols are flexible vehicles for a variety of different and potentially contradictory meanings. As Gilroy notes: '(t)he strength of symbols is their multi-accentuality and malleability.'[112] Sharing a common body of symbols created around notions of race or ethnicity or history does not necessarily entail sharing the plural meanings that may attach to these symbols. To assume that individuals need to share the meanings as well as the symbols obscures the ways in which particular meanings become hegemonic or collectively held. It forecloses an examination of the institutional and power arrangements within which cultural symbols and identities are formed, circulate, and change. As Gilroy avers: '(c)ommunity is as much about difference as it is about similarity and identity.'[113] This chapter has sought to demonstrate that attempts - such as the African management project - to fix the reading of such symbols deny this difference and come dangerously close to racializing sameness.

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[111] **Mbigi**, *Ubuntu: The African Dream in Management*, 143.

[112] **Paul Gilroy**, 'Urban Social Movements, "Race" and Community,' in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited and introduced by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, 392-403. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, 415.

[113] **Gilroy**, 'Urban Social Movements,' 415.

CHAPTER 11
CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has argued that the AA debate has become a proxy for a more fundamental contest over the political boundaries of legitimate action and discourse. Notwithstanding pockets of resistance, there is consensus (amongst business leaders) on the need for AA policies. This widespread public acceptance of AA is explained, in part, by post-1994 shifts in the boundaries of legitimacy. Rejection of AA is no longer a legitimate course of action. This becomes evident when analyzing corporate AA policy statements. Equally important to what is said is what is not said, what is taken for granted as illegitimate.[1] It has become politically unacceptable to deny, or to be seen to deny the aspirations of the historically disadvantaged sectors of society. Opposition to AA falls into this category of politically illegitimate actions.

Corporate discourses on AA are tailored to the expectations of an increasingly vocal, and primarily black, audience. The legitimacy imperative - the need to be seen to be acting within the boundaries of a new political morality - is key to understanding the justificatory framework informing management's AA practices. In order to act, one requires a framework to think through and give direction to one's actions. This framework is shaped by ideological considerations that enable one to act in ways that make sense to oneself (morally, politically and economically). It is in this sense that ideology and the political boundaries of legitimacy become a justificatory framework for action.

Despite the moral lexicon that has sprung up around AA, the majority of managers hold that the primary catalyst for initiating AA has been business-related. Demographic changes in the labour force, and in the client and consumer markets have spurred many organizations to implement AA. Whatever the explanatory framework for these moves, it makes good business sense to ensure that one's work force is representative of one's customer and supplier bases.

Many companies are arguing that AA serves a bottom-line purpose and is needed, *inter alia*, for market profile, to meet future staffing needs, and to realign past policies and practices

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[1] **Skrentny**, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action*, 233.

with the new legislative framework and labour relations paradigm. This raises the question of whether or not companies have formulated an economic rationale for AA in order to make a virtue out of necessity. Whilst AA has political and moral virtues (and on these levels is desirable), many managers question whether it is in fact economically advantageous. As discussed throughout this thesis, there are real costs involved in implementing AA. Its medium to long-term benefits is clear. From the interviews conducted, however, it appears that the jury is still out in determining AA's short-term business benefits. The political imperative to implement AA means that companies need to make sense of it economically. This is not to suggest that managers simply have to make a leap of faith with regards to AA. The issue is more complex: whilst many are making a virtue out of necessity, this necessity may prove to have its virtues.

The nature and status of the evidence from the case study companies lends itself to alternative explanations as to the reasons why AA is being implemented, and its putative (or actual) benefits. This thesis has suggested that the evidence is complex, and it is difficult to arbitrate between the conflicting accounts collected. In and of itself, this is revealing of the world in which the various organizational actors are operating. We are ultimately left with open questions as to the future consequences (intended and unintended) of AA and diversity management programmes. Given this complexity, attempts to arbitrate between the different versions are probably futile. Deciding on and selecting one account above all others would merely serve to over-ride the complexity and ambiguity inherent in what the respondents have said (and the meanings they attach to these statements).

It is in this sense that there is a link between the nature of the evidence collected (it is subject to multiple interpretations) and the substance and theoretical framework of the thesis (which recognizes complexity and ambiguity). In failing to provide any definitive answers, the research findings illuminate the complexity of the AA debate. This uncertainty is suggestive of the fluidity and insecurity that underpins political and economic transitions and institutional transformations.

Chapter Six has shown that political considerations come to the fore in determining which categories of disadvantaged persons are to be designated *de facto* AA beneficiaries. Many business people have attempted to placate the primary audience of AA policies (black Africans) through ad-hoc measures designed to darken the corporate pigment. The category

'black' is increasingly defined along strictly racial grounds. The 'coloured question' highlights the increasing significance of race and the declining salience of ethnic differences. As discussed detail below, Africanist rhetoric, which increasingly permeates political discourse, has made it safe to pursue and advocate this race-based AA.

An outcome of this approach to AA is an undue emphasis on targets and quotas as a central plank of these initiatives. Whilst this may begin to address the expectations of a section of this policy's audience (black managers), it does not necessarily address the needs of other organizational categories. In particular, the dearth of individually targeted training and development programmes, career-pathing, and mentoring programmes, is worrying. This is compounded by the absence of opportunities within which to exercise newfound skills. To reduce AA to redefining recruitment, selection, promotion and merit criteria, is to overlook the realm of organizational narratives and memories that constitute the institutional boundaries of (il)legitimate action. It is to this problem of transforming organizational culture that efforts to value and manage diversity are addressed.

Diversity management programmes are often subsumed within the broader rubric of AA efforts. Chapter Nine discussed the reasons why the demand for increasing workforce diversity has gained much currency in the corporate world - both in SA and in the US. Just as AA programmes are borne out of political and business considerations, so too are diversity initiatives. The latter are implemented in the laudable attempt to ease the transition from hierarchical and eurocentric corporate cultures to more pluralist and inclusionary practices. Advocates of African management contend that this approach provides both the conceptual framework and the managerial tools and techniques required to effect this transition. Whilst these ideas are becoming more popular in business circles, it is still too early to assess the extent of their influence and impact.

As discussed in Chapters Nine and Ten, a range of problematic assumptions often underpin diversity management initiatives. Key amongst these is the notion that increasing the number of employees from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds will *ipso facto* result in an increasing number of viewpoints. Racial (or ethnic) differences are invoked as surrogates for other differences, and race becomes a proxy for viewpoint. Whilst increasing the numbers of black and female employees constitutes a move towards a more diverse and plural workforce, this diversity and pluralism will not necessarily advance an equal

opportunities project. Moreover, by valorizing difference (and with it, the oppressed subject) many diversity advocates recapitulate cultural separatist notions. Similarly refashioned assumptions subtend the African management project. As suggested in Chapter Ten, this begins to account for its appeal within corporate circles.

This is not to imply that Africanism is simply an updated version of a segregationist project. To the contrary, many Africanists seek to offer reunificatory images as a way of imposing a fictitious coherence on the experience of (forced) dispersal and fragmentation of the 'African race'. This is done by representing or 'figuring' Africa as the mother of many different peoples. As Hall puts it: 'Africa is the name of the missing term, the great aporia, which lies at the centre of our cultural identity and gives it a meaning which, until recently, it lacked...'[2] As the politics of representation is about the politics of power, forms of representation in and of themselves seek to constitute new kinds of subjectivities and identities. This is the task to which much of the Africanist project is addressed.

Hall avers that '(w)ithout relations of difference, no representation could occur. But, what is then constituted within representation is always open to being deferred, staggered, serialised.'[3] In other words, whilst social relations, meanings and practices are discursively established, no discourse can totally fix meanings. There is a 'surplus' of meanings and a potential for their articulation with diverse discourses.[4] Meaning and the positioning of identity are not permanent, but merely temporary closures. What are significant are the hegemonic discourses within which meanings become (temporarily) fixed. Africanism is beginning to emerge as one of these privileged points of reference.

This conceptual framework helps to explain the multiple, and often conflicting interpretations of the Africanist project. Albie Sachs suggests that 'people hijack the concept of Africanism to deny fundamental human rights and deny the democratic system.' For example, the idea that the African spirit is consensus seeking and African society is grounded on oneness has been invoked to suppress trade unionism in many African

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[2] **Hall**,'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' 394.

[3] **Hall**,'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' 397.

[4] **Laclau and Mouffe**, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 1-5, 147-193.

countries. This is, according to Sachs, 'an abuse of the concept of Africanism'.[5] The implication is that Africanism has a necessary content and an a priori fixity. Sachs implies that by invoking it to achieve nefarious ends is to rob it of this content, to disabuse it of its inherent goodness. Africanist discourses and symbols are burdened with the task of conjuring up a utopia of racial authenticity at a very time when what it is to be African is inescapably multiple and hybrid in character.[6]

As discussed in Chapter Ten, the African management project disregards this cultural and political hybridity. This reticence is understandable in that multiplicity and nuance complicates attempts to forge and maintain generalist spaces for critique. Given that corporate corridors of power remain predominantly white and male, the ability to develop an institutional critique on the basis of race and gender remains important. Hence, for political reasons, a concept of racial difference needs to be retained (problematized, but available). The African management project converts this insight into *the* authoritative insight, thereby fetishizing race and African-ness. In so doing, it fails to attend to intragroup complexity and difference. It is therefore unable to address a central dilemma of our time: how to preserve gender and racial identity as a source of political or organizational unity, whilst deconstructing gender and racial prescriptives which homogenize difference and limit choice and possibility?

In what superficially appears to be a break with the African management narrative of valorization, Lessem questions how Africa's humanistic pretensions can be reconciled with a continent that regularly produces dictators such as Idi Amin, and acts as the backdrop for numerous acts of genocide.[7] This, however, represents not a discontinuity with, but rather the underbelly of the exoticization of otherness. Keith Richburg, a black American and the Washington Post's Africa bureau chief from 1992-1994 starkly exposes this underbelly.[8] He

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[5] **Albie Sachs**, 'Changing the law, changing the mind,' in *Sawubona Africa: Embracing four worlds in South African management*, edited by Ronnie Lessem and Barbara Nussbaum, Johannesburg: Zebra, 1996, 153.

[6] See **Gilroy**, *Small Acts*, 6.

[7] **Lessem**, *From Hunter to Rainmaker*, 143.

[8] Richburg claims that having gone to Africa in search of his roots, he left thinking: 'Thank God my ancestor got out, because, now, I am not one of them.' **Keith B. Richburg**, *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa*, New York: A New Republic Book/BasicBooks, 1997: xiv. See also **William Finnegan**, 'Black Like Me?', *New York Times Book Review*, March 30 1997, 9; and **Andrew Malone**, 'Black American denounces "horror" of mother Africa,' *Sunday Times* (London), 1 June 1997.

polarizes to polemicize and, speaking of Rwanda, avers:

> The country has reverted to prehistoric times...could these be fully evolved humans carrying clubs and machetes and panga knives and smashing in their neighbors' skulls and chopping off their limbs...? No, I realized, fully evolved human beings in the twentieth century don't do things like that...These must be cavemen.[9]

This is an outcome of rendering the concept of African-ness within a vertical hierarchical axis. The project to invert this axis, to revalue the black pole of the opposition against the white by glorifying what it is to be black (or African), remains within the bipolar logic. Good and evil, civilized and primitive, guilty and innocent have simply switched places. And it is but a short step to switch them back again, to talk of the 'insanity of Africa',[10] and to reinscribe Africa as the 'heart of darkness'. Where, in his schema, would Richburg place the Nazis or the Bosnian Serbs? Are they subhuman too? A (perhaps-inescapable) consequence of relying on bipolar oppositions is their tendency to reproduce stereotypes.[11] As Todorov notes:

> racial Others are either noble savages or filthy curs, rarely anything in between; and in any case, whether they are judged to be inferior (as by those authors who worship civilization) or superior (as by those who embrace primitivism), they are radically opposed to European whites.[12]

This is not, however, to dispute the significance of collective identities. As suggested throughout this thesis, group identity seems to work best when its members see it as real or as natural. And it is to this naturalized racial identity that African management theorists speak. This is ultimately a political problem. Crude anti-essentialist theories might challenge naturalistic explanations of difference, but they are not equal to the task of constructing a racially inclusive political project. Anti-essentialism has the tendency to move from the

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[9] **Richburg**, *Out of America*, 91.

[10] **Richburg**, *Out of America*, xi.

[11] This logic underpins Christie's exhortation to '(f)ire the next manager who pooh-poohs the African work ethic.Or racism, however, subtle, will continue to bedevil our organizations.'(**Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 151). No such objection is raised against positive stereotyping. To wit:'Natural African qualities, if correctly channelled, are highly conductive to servicing customers.'(**Christie**, *Stories from an Afman(ager)!*, 147).

[12] **Tzvetan Todorov**, "'Race,'' Writing and Culture,' in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 377.

apprehension of difference to positing the existence of different ontological categories.[13] There is a danger in too wholesale a commitment to either dual or multiple grids of analysis. In searching for who comprises the (racially inclusive) 'we', we need to abandon projects concerned with excavating and tracing lines of descent. The focus needs to become one of creating lines of consent. In Werner Sollors' words:

> How can consent (and consensus) be achieved in a country whose citizens are of such heterogeneous descent? And how can dissent be articulated without falling back on myths of descent?[14]

This points to a direction for future research: what type of political project(s) can be forged out of the anti-essentialist turn within political theory? Many of the ideas which fall within the postmodernist and multiculturalist rubrics (loosely defined) form part of the onslaught against totality which has characterized much of the theoretical output within the social sciences over the past couple of decades. Clearly, multiculturalism and postmodernism are not synonymous. I have grouped them together in order to make a more general point about the possible contours of an anti-essentialist politics.

Postmodernists seek to undermine the idea that the new is subservient to the rare, the well preserved, and the timeworn. The old, grand narratives are discredited, as is the idea of a singular belief system or universal outlook. The demise of foundationalism and metanarratives signals the emergence of plural centres of legitimation. Totalizing discourses are presented as dangerous fantasies, wreaking havoc as they marginalize and destroy oppositional voices. Enlightenment hierarchies are discarded and replaced with plural, inclusionary and often relativist ideals. The authenticity and legitimacy of other voices is celebrated.[15]

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[13] See **Malik**, 'Universalism and difference,' 15-16.

[14] **Sollors**, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 6. The point is made with reference to American society.

[15] See, amongst others, **Cornel West**, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 3-32, 195-205; **David Harvey**, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989, 8-9, 48; **Donna J. Haraway**, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,' in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, edited and with an introduction by Linda J. Nicholson, New York: Routledge, 1990, 190-233; **Fraser and Nicholson**, 'Social Criticism without Philosophy,' 21-28, 33-35; **Malik**, 'Universalism and difference,' 1-3; **Michel Foucault**, *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, 32-50 passim; **Michel Foucault**, 'Two Lectures,' in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper; Sussex: Harvester, 1980, 78-108 passim; and **Seyla Benhabib**, 'Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-Francois Lyotard,' in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, edited and with an introduction by Linda J. Nicholson, New York: Routledge, 1990, 107-130.

Postmodernism and other anti-essentialist theories have been taken up by blacks, women and gay people as a means of establishing the legitimacy of diversity, of challenging white authorial voices (in academia, private organizations and other loci of power). For some, however, the knee-jerk celebration of difference may promote moral and political indifference, or a politics of quietism. Proponents of an identity-based politics, such as Bell Hooks, critique the concept of a decentred and multiple subject arguing that 'it's easy to give up identity, when you got one.'[16] The fear is that the denial of the validity of homogeneous identities is surfacing 'at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time.'[17] Similarly, Baker criticizes the idea that simply because science has apologized and said there is no such thing as race, all talk of race must cease:

> Hence, "race," as an emergent, unifying, and forceful sign of difference in the service of the "Other," is held up to scientific ridicule as, ironically, "unscientific." A proudly emergent sense of ethnic diversity in the service of new world arrangements is disparaged by whitemale science as the most foolish sort of anachronism.[18]

Baker takes umbrage with discourses, such as postmodernism, which eschew the idea of the self as a pre-given unitary entity, which dismiss as fantasy the idea of any a priori privileged points of view or foundational guarantees. Such discourses are seen as a license to trivialize the political stakes. For Baker, race is something that has been appropriated by the Other and which now serves as an index of group (positive) identification and unity. In common with many other advocates of a narrow identity-based politics, Baker conflates two issues: the interrogation of race as a coherent concept (if identities are provisional, can race ever become a proxy for other pieces of information about an individual?) with the need for a progressive politics to preserve race as a social category of analysis. By ignoring this distinction, Baker's account remains problematically shot through with essentialist assumptions. It is the privileged positioning and explanatory potential of biological or descriptive racial difference, and its presentation as the *origin* of oppression, which needs to be questioned.

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[16] **hooks**, 'Postmodern Blackness,' 425.

[17] **hooks**, 'Postmodern Blackness,' 425.

[18] **Houston A. Baker, Jr.**, 'Caliban's Triple Play,' in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 385.

Throughout, this thesis has implicitly raised the possible interconnections between multiculturalism (in all its variants) and the capitalist project. Stating that racism, sexism, homophobia and ageism all have no place in the workplace, Ted Childs, director of workforce diversity at IBM corporation, submits that '(t)here's only one "ism" on which we need to focus - consumerism. Every citizen in every country is a potential customer.'[19] In a multiculturalist discourse, all cultural artefacts are deemed as good as each other. Determining cultural value becomes a relative exercise that may descend into an 'anything goes' market eclecticism.[20] Signs of blackness (given the cool imprimatur) are packaged to appeal to white consumers.[21] Rieff argues that in this way, postmodernism and multiculturalism help to 'legitimize whole new areas of consumerism'.[22] Given the appeal of boundary-less markets, products and companies, celebrating multiculturalism and marketing ersatz exoticism makes good business sense for capitalists (including the new *wa-benzi* class).[23]

Jones opines that in such a climate, words and symbols like black pride and kente become just another marketing pitch or *Good Housekeeping* seal. She claims that '(e)thnicity, as the postmod watchers warned us long ago, is emerging as nothing more than a market niche, a field of products ripe for anyone to sell or consume'.[24] Jones further laments that symbols such as 'Africa' have become detached from their 'cultural beginnings'.[25] In so doing she assumes that there is some original point of genesis which has been discarded in the commercial rush to appropriate the trappings of an Afrocentric cultural renaissance. Central

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[19] **Ted J. Childs**, 'Workplace Diversity in the United States,' in IBM; *Diversity @ IBM*, 43.

[20] See **Harvey**, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 42. Harvey questions whether postmodernism is 'simply the commercialization and domestication of modernism, and a reduction of the latter's already tarnished aspirations to a *laisse-faire*, 'anything goes' market eclecticism?'(Ibid.)

[21] Gilroy notes there is no contradiction 'between making use of black culture and loathing real live black people.'(**Gilroy**, *Small Acts*, 35).

[22] **David Rieff**, 'Multiculturalism's Silent Partner,' *Harper's* 287, no. 1719 (1993): 64.

[23] A reference to those new black entrepreneurs, capitalists and professionals whose status symbols include driving a Mercedes Benz (hence, *wa-benzi*).

[24] **Lisa Jones**, *Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex, and Hair*, New York: Doubleday, 1994, 302.

[25] According to Khoza, 'Afrocentricity is about Africans putting Africa at the centre of their existence. It is about Africans anchoring themselves in their own continent; its history, traditions, cultures, mythology, creative motif, ethos and value systems exemplifying the African collective will'(**Reuel Khoza**, 'The Need for an Afrocentric Approach to Management,' in *African Management: Philosophies, Concepts and Applications*, edited by Peter Christie, Ronnie Lessem, and Lovemore Mbigi, Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources, 1994, 118).

to this renaissance is the idea that salvation lies within African [code: black] businesses. In this way, a narrowly defined nativism is coupled with an economic programme for a racial or ethnic group's incorporation, on its own terms, into a heterogenous society. The multiculturalist rhetoric in the United States resonates with the African management approach. As Mbigi avers:

> Our shared goal should be to create black businesses, black products, black skills, black institutions, black organizations, black agendas, black management ideas and practices...black directors, black power, black solidarity, black networks, black economic muscle, black economic vote, black entrepreneurs...[26]

Of import here is Rieff's admonition of multiculturalists for advancing a programme that stripped of its rhetoric, 'is little more than a demand for inclusion, for a piece of the capitalist pie. And capitalism is not only increasingly willing but increasingly eager to let in women, blacks, gays, and any other marginalized group. Eureka, more customers!'[27] But the rhetoric is selective: nativist intellectuals and multiculturalists too often omit from their analysis an inquiry into the asymmetrical power relations and other forms of systemic and structural inequality which will not be ameliorated by a multicultural project. It is precisely because discourses of race and tribalism, discourses of difference, often cut across our economic interests that they serve to blind us to them.

Contrary to the idea of stability being predicated on homogeneity, it may be that the stability of today's society requires instead a ubiquitous fragmentation of the social order and a proliferation of divisions among citizens. For it might just be that this very *fragmentation* (along lines of gender, race, ethnicity and so on) prevents oppositional attitudes generating a coherent platform from which to launch an alternative political programme. Postmodernism lauds the fragmentary and the ephemerality of a social order in which the only consensus is that there is no consensus. Speech circulates without obstruction, nothing is taboo. The illusion that everything is sayable, visible and uncontested occludes adversity, distance and division.[28] By mainstreaming difference, the

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[26] **Mbigi**, *Ubuntu: The African Dream in Management*, 32.

[27] **Rieff**, 'Multiculturalism's Silent Partner,' 71.

[28] **Claude Lefort**, *The Political Forms of Modern Society:Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, edited and introduced by John B. Thompson, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986, 227-229; and **John B. Thompson**, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984, 30.

postmodernist (and the multiculturalist) turn thus has the potential to be articulated with a right wing or neo-conservative programme. As Thompson notes:

> The reproduction of the social order may depend less upon a consensus with regard to dominant values or norms than upon a lack of consensus at the very point where oppositional attitudes could be translated into political action.[29]

Stuart Hall presents a concept of hegemony which takes account of, and indeed requires the provisional and contradictory nature of political identifications. It is an idea of hegemony as *'operating through* difference' rather than *'overcoming* difference'[30] He uses the example of patriarchal hegemony. This does not operate through reconstructing women in the image of men. Instead, it provides a subaltern position (or positions) for the Other. As Hall puts it:

> So hegemony need not imply a collective will that is uniform, that is imposed, that obliterates difference. Hegemony is the process, never complete, of trying to create some formation out of persistent, contradictory differences which continue therefore to need the work of 'unifying' - again in quotation marks, since no self-sufficient unity or totality can ever be produced.[31]

Hall notes that whilst identities are not fixed unified essences, they are points or positionalities of *'temporary* attachment' which need to be taken up in order for the subject to act at all.[32] These 'positional identities' are 'stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.'[33] We find subadjacent to every identity, invented histories, invented cultural affinities, and invented communities. The problem of identification is intimately bound up with the problem of identity construction (identities are not finished products); it is not about the affirmation of a pre-given identity.[34] Simply because these identities are constructed, invented or imposed, does not mean that we should not take them as seriously as those who

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[29] **Thompson**, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, 62-63.

[30] **Stuart Hall**, 'Fantasy, Identity, Politics,' in *Cultural Remix: Theories of Politics and the Popular*, edited by Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995, 69 (emphasis in the original).

[31] **Hall**, 'Fantasy, Identity, Politics,' 69.

[32] **Hall**, 'Fantasy, Identity, Politics,' 65.

[33] **Hall**, 'Fantasy, Identity, Politics,' 66.

[34] See **Homi K. Bhabha**, 'Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition,' in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited and introduced by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, 117-118.

invent, bear or appropriate them.[35]

The type of political project that could emerge from this conception of (imaginary) identification cannot be constructed around fixed or 'real' identities. This is not to imagine a politics devoid of 'frontier effects' - which involve symbolically staging a line between 'us' and 'them'. Again, to cite Hall:

> That is quite different from assuming that 'us' and 'them' are eternal essences, but it does recognise the necessity of saying that just now, conjunctionally, this line matters. The drawing of the line is never final, never absolute.[36]

What we are trying to imagine is a politics which recognizes the arbitrariness of where the line is drawn; which understands the fiction of identifications, but is nonetheless capable of action.[37] It is in this sense that an oppositional politics may not even be thinkable outside the framework of a politics of identification. Given that identities are relational and constituted on the basis of difference, one's identity is (partially) other-defined: how I appear to others impacts who I am or appear to be. For post-apartheid subjects a central question is who are these 'others' against whom the 'authenticity' of the self is gauged? The problem is not simply one of 'who am I?' but 'who are we?'[38] This task of framing collective identities within the vectors of similarity and continuity is contested. The burden is shared by those intellectuals or critics who would mediate a new image of the nation to itself. South Africans are engaged in a collective search for a vocabulary with which to name the new forms of identities which are coming into being. As discussed in Chapter Ten, an 'Africanist' discourse has become a key nodal point around which these struggles are beginning to coalesce.

Precisely what is meant by 'Africanism' is hotly contested. Suffice it to note that protestations to the contrary, most self-defined Africanists impute the term with a racial (and often, political) essence.[39] What is at stake is the ways in which the boundaries of an

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[35] See **Appiah**, *In My Father's House*, 175.

[36] **Hall**, 'Fantasy, Identity, Politics,' 66.

[37] **Hall**, 'Fantasy, Identity, Politics,' 66-67.

[38] Appiah interrogates these questions with reference to African writers (**Appiah**, *In My Father's House*, 75).

[39] See, for example, **Charlene Smith**, '"All-embracing Africanism" not a contradiction in terms,' *Mail & Guardian*, July 4-10 1997; **Gilbert Lethwaite**, 'Rainbow SA, but are we black enough?' *Independent* (online), available from

African identity are being constructed; the theoretical coherence (if any) which defines these boundaries; and the limits of the sayable within this discourse. The public debate and criticism over who chooses to don or shun the 'Africanist' appellation speaks to a deeper contest over the problem of national identification. Given that race has become the primary base through which this African identity is being theorized, new forms of racial or ethnicist frontiers are beginning to replace past representations. A consequence of attempts to racialize the new image of the nation is that the litmus test of identity is becoming one's professed pride, or lack thereof, in Africa (as if Africa were a singular entity readily defined).

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the political transition has been accompanied by attempts to reconstitute racial, political and gendered identities. It has been suggested that the language of Africanism is providing the conceptual grammar with which to understand these processes. It has been argued that in the face of economic uncertainty - and the persistence of poverty, inadequate access to economic resources and social services, and high levels of unemployment - the temptation is to naturalize identities. This begins to explain the appeal (and justification for) narrowly race-based AA programmes. As discussed above, the legitimacy imperative has created the space for an Africanist discourse to piggyback on AA initiatives. Attempts to couple an Africanist agenda with AA may, however, have unintended (and undesirable) consequences. Key amongst these is the potential for AA's failures to be read through the optics of a race-baiting politics.

As outlined in Chapter Eight, AA programmes have encountered many obstacles and forms of resistance. Implementing AA in a climate of economic uncertainty breeds fear amongst existing employees of retrenchments and of stifled career trajectories. Many whites express this by scapegoating blacks. Chapter Eight suggested that it is difficult to unravel genuine fears from racist vitriol. The debate about 'white fears' generally obscures black fears - an issue to which more attention needs to be devoted. Many unskilled and uneducated workers are distrustful of the move towards World Class Manufacturing, suspecting (probably correctly) that the changes will result in job losses. In essence, AA programmes

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http://www.inc.co.za/online/News1/general/africa/africanist.html, Internet, accessed 8 July 1997; 'Concerns grow over "Africanist cabal",' *Weekly Mail & Guardian* (online), available from http://wn.apc.org/wmail/issues/970523/NEWS11.html, Internet, accessed 23 May 1997; and 'Privileged should become militant Africanists says Mbeki,' *Independent* (online), available from http://www.inc.co.za/online/News3/politics/headlines/satmbeki.html, Internet, accessed 12 July 1997.

cannot be understood in isolation from the economic 'realities' that enable, shape and constrain them. Given these adverse economic conditions, AA will, in all likelihood, have limited individual impact. At most, its gains will be modest. It will not eliminate the apartheid legacy of racial and gender inequalities, nor can it alone overcome the effects of other economic forces. AA needs to be located within a broader policy agenda aimed at promoting economic equity. It is in this respect that it has the potential to be an effective policy tool.

The transition to democracy in South Africa has opened the way for a diversity of political projects and visions to be articulated. This fluidity has meant that identities are, in many senses, still up for grabs. The act of looking back at one's history from a position which that history never had the capacity to think exposes the contingency of one's identity and political universe.[40] This ambiguity can breed insecurity - hence the attraction of representations, such as 'African culture', which supply an index of social unity and identity. As discussed above, the very process of identity formation is premised on a moment of exclusion: the construction of a 'me' or an 'us' entails a delimitation of a 'you' or a 'them'. We must be wary of political projects which seek to freeze this moment of exclusion. Our history teaches us that a crystallization of a friend/enemy divide does not bode well for a robust democracy.

In the face of too much or too little visible change, populists of all political persuasions are wont to draw on the race card. As part of a much-needed economic transformation, AA should not be allowed to fall prey to this destructive and petty form of politicking. Our democracy may not yet be strong enough to survive such squabbles intact.

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[40] **Lisa M. Klein**, 'Local Peace Committees: Laying the Foundations for Democracy? The Case of Ratanda/Heidelberg: 1991-1993,' dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1994, 1.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Sample 1
Interview Schedule for South African Interviewees

A CULTURE AND CONFLICT

1 Do you think there has been a change in Company X's culture in the last few years? (examples)
- 1.1 If yes, why do you think this is so?
  - 1.1.1 Do you think that this has largely been as a result of management changes (management seeking to instill a new culture?) or has it been a joint union-management process?
- 1.2 What aspects of Company X's culture still need to change, if any?
- 1.3 How have the changes at Company X affected Union Y?
- 1.4 Has the way in which Union Y deals with conflict changed over the past couple of years?
- 1.5 Have the changes improved levels of trust between managers/supervisors and workers?

2 Is racism/sexism still a problem at Company X?
- 2.1 If yes, can you give me examples of racist/sexist practices that still exist?
- 2.2 Where are conflicts/complaints around racial issues dealt with? (in teams? other structures?)
  - 2.2.1 Do you think that these channels or structures are effective in dealing with racial conflicts/complaints? (are disputes around race/gender generally resolved?)
  - 2.2.2 Have levels of racial tolerance increased in the past couple of years?
    - 2.2.2.1 If yes/no, why do you think this is the case?

3 Do you think there is a difference in the way in which white and black employees view the culture at Company X?
- 3.1 Do you think there is a difference in the way in which male and female employees view the culture at Company X?
- 3.2 Do you think that any of the conflicts or disputes at Company X are about clashes in culture?

4 To what extent, if any, have 'African' values been incorporated into the workplace?
- 4.1 There's been a lot of talk about companies adopting an 'Afrocentric' approach or African management principles. What does this mean to you, if anything? (is it a good/bad idea?)

5 Have you attended any value-sharing/cross-cultural workshops?
- 5.1 Were these useful? (did they have any impact back in the workplace?)
- 5.2 If such workshops haven't been run, do you think they would be useful?

B MANAGEMENT/UNION RELATIONS

6 What is the history of unionization at the plant?
- 6.1 What are your membership figures? (have they decreased? why?)
  - 6.1.1 What are relations like between the different unions at Company X?
- 6.2 What were management/union relations like in the past?

6.2.1 Has this changed? - if yes, in what ways and why do you think this is the case?

6.3 What role have the unions played in the past?

6.3.1 Has this role changed?

6.3.1.1 If yes, in what ways and why do you think this is the case?

6.4 What are the major challenges facing Union Y in the next year or so?

6.5 What are the main disputes between Union Y and management right now?

6.5.1 What are the major obstacles to improved union/management relations?

C. WORKER PARTICIPATION/STRUCTURES

7 What types of worker participation structures or processes are in place at Company X?

7.1 What is the background to these processes?

7.1.1 Were the unions consulted about them? (did you feel this consultation was sufficient?)

7.1.2 Who initiated most of these processes?

7.1.2.1 It seems that most processes (for eg. TQM) were management initiated and top-down. Is this a correct perception? And if yes, how was union buy-in achieved?

7.1.2.2 Do you think that the level of information disclosure is sufficient?

7.2 What has been the reaction of shop stewards and union members to these processes?

7.2.1 Was there any resistance or antagonism? (to teams/co-determination structures etc?)

7.3 Have these forums/structures (changes) made any difference to management/union relations?

7.4 Do you think that this (agreement around) plant forum(s) is an opting out of the new LRA legislation around workplace forums?

7.4.1 Has there been any discussion amongst shop stewards, workers (etc) about the new LRA and its implications?

7.5 Do you think these structures have empowered Union Y/the unions?

7.5.1 If not, would you have done things differently if you could do them again? (in terms of change process/TQM etc)

7.6 Do you think these structures have empowered workers? (why/why not?)

7.7 Do you think your members/union officials (shop stewards) have the capacity to participate effectively in all the codetermination structures? (if no, what training is needed?)

7.8 Are there any other forums or structures that you think should be implemented?

7.8.1 Is there a Black Managers Caucus at Company X?

7.8.1.1 If no, do you think one should be introduced? (and do you think that black managers should be unionized?)

D. BACKGROUND TO AND UNDERSTANDING OF AA

8 How is the question of AA being dealt with at Company X?

8.1 When/Why did Company X decide to start implementing AA policies?

8.2 Who was consulted in the design and implementation of the AA process?

8.3 Do you think there is a general awareness about what's happening with AA amongst workers? (how do you think they understand the AA process?)
8.4 Who drives the process? (HR/MD?)
8.4.1 Who is accountable for the AA initiative?
8.4.2 Are there incentives for managers to implement AA policies (for eg. financial incentives for hiring blacks etc)?
8.5 Where do you think issues around AA should be discussed?
8.6 How successful has the AA process been to date?
8.6.1 How is the AA policy measured/monitored? (if at all)

9 How does Union Y understand AA?
9.1 Do you have a formal AA policy?
9.2 Does this differ from the way management understands AA?
9.3 Who are/do you think should be the beneficiaries of AA?
9.3.1 White women? black Africans/coloureds?
9.4 Do you think targets or quotas should be introduced?

10 What are the major problems you have experienced with the AA process?
10.1 Has there been any resistance to the AA process/your demands around AA? (if yes, from whom? how can this be dealt with?)

E. HR PRACTICES

11 What types of things does it take to be recruited and promoted at Company X?
11.1 Are AA criteria taken into account in recruitment, selection and promotion procedures? (what's been the reaction to this?)
11.2 Is there a shortage of good black/women candidates in Company X for promotion to managerial level positions? (why?)
11.2.1 Is there a premium paid on black skills?
11.2.2 Is job-hopping a problem you've encountered? (if yes, why do you think this happens?)

12 What types of training and development processes are in place/offered? (for different job grades etc)
12.1 Are these sufficient/effective?

F. OVERVIEW OF CHANGE PROCESSES

13 Has the pace of change been too slow, too quick, or just right?
13.1 What are your general impressions of the change process?
13.1.1 Key successes?
13.1.2 Key challenges/obstacles?

Sample 2
Interview Schedule for American Interviewees

A. THE BACKLASH AGAINST AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

1 There seems to be a political advantage to attacking Affirmative Action (AA) programs aimed at minorities, as opposed to those aimed at benefitting women. Would you say that the backlash against AA is not about preferences per se, but about race?

- 1.1 In the AA controversy, has there been an attempt to split off women (and women's groups) from minorities?
  - 1.1.1 If yes, how successful have civil rights groups been in countering this attempt?
- 1.2 Do you see race preferences in the same light as other preferences (such as 'legacies'; athletic preferences and so on)?
- 1.3 Why is it that advocates of AA have not linked AA to other traditions of preference (eg. Vets) but link it to the question of civil rights?

2 How much of the backlash against AA derives from adverse reactions to the effects of anti-discrimination laws (such as the opening of previously restricted jobs to persons of color and women), rather than about AA *per se*?

- 2.1 Do you think that the ultimate agenda of many opponents of AA is the repeal of anti-discrimination laws?

3 Do you think that AA should equate with proportional racial representation?

4 It seems that there is growing (if not majority) support in the (Supreme) Court for a view of the constitution as mandating no more than individual equality. Does this imply that there has been a swing back to favoring 'color-blind' participation; or is there another conception of justice informing the Court majority's lack of support for race-based remedial measures?

5 If there is such a backlash against, and opposition to AA, why do you think that only 2 percent of the approximately 91 000 employment discrimination cases pending before the EEOC are reverse discrimination cases?

B. HAS AFFIRMATIVE ACTION WORKED?

6 Despite the various AA and equal opportunity programs of the last few decades, the Federal AA Review (1995) concludes that on the whole, successes have been gradual and rather modest. Why do you think this is the case?

- 6.1 Is there any evidence that AA has expanded minority employment in skilled positions (has there been a net gain or has it been merely a question of national musical chairs)?

7 Is it possible to measure the contribution of AA programs *per se* - separate from the contribution of, for example., antidiscrimination legislation; rising incomes; decreasing prejudice and so on?

8 Does the emphasis on group-defined numerical relief (and the assumption that underrepresentation implies discrimination) detract from the scrutiny of what

actually occurs within institutions once representivity or full utilization is achieved?

8.1 Does it allow employers to hide continuing discrimination behind good numbers?

9 Why do you think that the big corporations have been relatively silent in the public AA debate?

9.1 Is the legislative framework covering private employers (they aren't required to adopt AA unless under court order to remedy 'egregious' violations of the law) adequate? (particularly in light of the statistic that in the nations largest corporations, only 0.6 percent of senior managers are African-American and only 3-5 percent are women...)

9.2 What is the key rationale governing private companies AA efforts?

10 Recognizing that there are multiple barriers to equal employment opportunity, what do you think are the key obstacles to the advancement of women and minorities in the private sector?

11 In the era of downsizing, AA has become more controversial and has met with heightened resistance. How do you think that diversity of the workforce can be achieved whilst reducing its size?

12 What do you think is the appropriate use of goals and timetables for hiring and promotion? (What about numerical quotas?)

C. COALITION-BUILDING AND IDENTITY POLITICS

13 What do you make of the argument that narrowly defined identity politics (or Black nationalist separatism) is the best strategic response to, as President Clinton put it: '[The] simple truth [that] White and Black Americans often see the world in dramatically different ways'?

13.1 What do you think of the current debates about integration versus segregation?

14 Do you think that in the face of the right-wing backlash, narrowly defined identity politics is on the retreat and we're going to see more formalized coalition-building initiatives (such as the 'Fight the Right' March organized by NOW)?

14.1 How do you think that these coalitions can be sustained?

15 What do you make of the argument (advanced by amongst others, William Julius Wilson) that policies that call for preferential group treatment (like AA) won't do much for less advantaged minorities; and what is needed are race-neutral redistributive programs (such as full employment policies; job skills training; comprehensive health-care legislation etc)?

16 What should be the core strategies of the civil rights effort in the 1990s?

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