Abstract


This study rests on the basic assumption that racism is a global phenomenon, generally present, but with different manifestations under different historical circumstances and in different societal contexts. One of the most evident expressions of racism in the 20th century world is the case of South Africa, where massive legislation was introduced to regulate people's lives along defined 'racial' lines. With a perspective arising from the uniqueness of South Africa as a country where 'racial' policy was codified constitutionally, the debates in the South African parliament become crucial for analysis. Thus the main objective of the study is to identify the different perceptions of 'race' that were present in the debates on segregationist legislation in the South African Parliament between 1910 and 1961.

The thesis is fundamentally designed to compare conceptions of 'race', thematically as well as chronologically. The comparative perspective is applied in order to investigate and grasp the nature of 'race' as a changeable perceived categorisation. Chronologically, the thesis uses the traditional historiographical view on South African political history viz. that the Segregationist period of 1910-47 was followed by the Apartheid era of 1948-94. The thematic selection is based on three fundamental aspects of the attempts to separate individuals from one another made in South Africa during the segregationist/apartheid periods respectively. In order to organise the material, the thesis introduces 'sphere of life' as a necessary aspect to consider in the study of perceptions of human relationships. Methodologically, this is to apply source-criticism one step further than usually when acknowledging the importance of the content in a specific debate.

Three different 'spheres of life' are defined: the sphere of 'formal political separation'; the sphere of 'territorial separation' and the sphere of 'private separation'. The sample is taken with the objective to utilise the comparison over time as much as possible, and to include the defined spheres of people's lives in the comparison. Accordingly, debates concerning the three different 'spheres of life' is present, during both the segregationist period and the apartheid era.

To structure the analytical work, the study operates with different schools of thought around 'race'. The schools are identified through a theoretical discussion followed by an introductory investigation of a vital part of the source material – the debate on the Population Registration Bill of 1950. The study identifies three schools of thought around 'race' in the material - the Biological, the Evolutionistic and the Cultural.

In the analysed South African parliamentary debates on separation, the Biological school of thought is the most dominant and continuous perception of 'race' in the three defined 'spheres of life': formal political, territorial and private. The structuring of the material according to different 'spheres of life' also deepens the historiographical discussion on continuity/discontinuity around apartheid. The general picture provided in the study is a continuous pattern in the debates on segregationary measures introduced in the South African Parliament between 1910-61.

Key words: race, racism, apartheid, segregation, South Africa, South African parliament, parliamentary debates, spheres of life, school of thought, source-criticism.

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