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'Fear of numbers': reflections on the South African case

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Abstract

Arjun Appadurai's *The Fear of Small Numbers: an essay on the geography of anger* (2006) draws largely on the case of India for empirical data. The 'fear of small numbers' that he discusses relates to the insecurity of contemporary societies, where 'pollution' of the national body by minority groups leads not only to irritation and discomfort but at times to the need for the obliteration of the pollutant. Neville Alexander (2008), similarly, said that 'to define yourself into a minority corner in a situation such as the transition in South Africa is to play with fire in an almost literal sense'.

Appadurai's argument, when applied to and tested within the South African context, does not find an unproblematic fit. What it does do, however, is to 'defamiliarise the familiar', as Zygmunt Bauman put it (1997), that often neglected aspect of the sociological project, and allows me to bring together the past and the present in a different way. South Africa presents us with the fear of numbers, both large and small, determined by the needs of establishing, contesting and of maintaining power, and the ideological formulations required by each. Such an approach also demands multi- or even trans-disciplinarity and international comparative studies.

Introduction

Processes of classifying human beings, the reasons for such practices, and the consequences thereof, provide important points of entry into making sense of the social world and of some of the conflicts within it. For this reason I was stimulated recently when reading Arjun Appadurai's *Fear of Small Numbers: an essay on the geography of anger* (2006) to apply this perspective to the South African context. Appadurai's argument is that 'small numbers', or social and political 'minorities' in a nation-state, are often perceived as blights upon the landscape by those who wish to claim, who believe in, the purity/ homogeneity of the 'majority', numerical and/or hegemonic – 'there is a fundamental, and dangerous, idea behind the very idea of the modern nation-state, the idea of a "national ethnos"' (2006:3). Kemp (2004:75) writes, for example, of the specificity of the 'ethnonational project [in Israel] "judaization" of the state territory through its concomitant "de-Palestinianisation"', but this process can be illustrated much more widely.[1]

In addition to the central idea of perceptions and creations of minorities, Appadurai adds the prevalence of 'social uncertainty', linked to population movements and cultural dilution, processes that occur under conditions of globalisation. Such social processes leave many with 'profound doubts about who exactly are among the "we" and who are among the "they"' (2006:5). While the 'forms of uncertainty are certainly various', Appadurai mentions an illustrative few, one with specific relevance to SA: 'One kind … is a direct reflection of census concerns: how many persons of this or that sort really exist in a given territory?' (Appadurai 2006:5). With population flows, the question can take the form of 'how many illegal aliens' are hidden within the body of the nation state, 'how many are there who threaten what is "ours"', to refer to events in South Africa and any refugee-receiving state. The invasions of a preferred state of being, and not only of a nation state, can also be given historical context, as captured by Mahmood Mamdani's question (1998): 'when does a settler become a native?' The uncertainties can

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[1] Also see Goldberg 2009:109 for this approach to the complex question of the formation of the state of Israel; also on Israel see Woods 2004:227, who uses the term 'homogenize'; and, related, Butler 2004: chapter 4. For a very different case – Abkhazia and Georgia – see Ascherson 1995 and 2008, and Iskander 1993. Also see Brown 2006, for discussion of the ambiguous notion of 'tolerance' of those falling outside the dominant 'culture'.

create intolerable anxiety about the relationship of many individuals to state-provided goods – ranging from housing and health to safety and sanitation – since the entitlements are frequently directly tied to who 'you' are and thus to who 'they' are. (Appadurai 2006:6)

Consequences flow from this fear, actions are taken to address what are perceived to be the root causes – a fear aggravated, I would add, in societies marked by extreme inequality and by societies measuring its populations in racial, and not just religious or ethnic or gendered, terms. 'Race', when applied to human beings, can never be a neutral descriptive term but carries the historical baggage of exploitation, domination and dehumanisation.

What I do in this essay is to explore, in outline, the issue of 'numbers', great and small, and the imposed or willingly accepted social identities that provide the content to the labels for such groups in South Africa. It may be more accurate to say that the names, operating within a seemingly rejected 'prior vocabulary' that owes, if not its origin, then at least the firming of its banal obviousness to the language and practices of apartheid, continue to determine the numbers in South Africa.[2] On some crucial levels it is simply impossible to escape the labels. Illustrations reflect my own interests and immediately available secondary sources – I offer them for debate. The reason for the approach I follow here is to enter into concerns and debates around conflicts (actual and potential) from a different, but shared, angle – those are the concerns of race and racism, of class exploitation and political domination, of nation and nation-building, of xenophobia, of sexism and homophobia. Linked to or implied by these issues are also various debates about alternatives to conflict – cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, tolerance, reconciliation, non-racialism, nation-building, community, democracy.

These labelled/ numbered/ counted social groups serve (possibly) as a guiding principle through the intricacies of fear of pollution. They illuminate the processes of othering that accompany such fears, and historical demands that relate to (capitalist) exploitation and

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[2] Brian Fay (1999:73, emphasis added) writes that '[f]acts are linguistically meaningful entities which select out from the stream of events what happened or what exists. But this means that in order for there to be facts at all there must be a vocabulary in terms of which they can be described. Without a *prior vocabulary* which a describer brings to a situation there would be no facts whatsoever'.

(political and social) discrimination that often give rise to insecurity and threat; also, as historical conditions change, to the need for redress (corrective action) based necessarily (it is argued) on the same previously rejected categories.

The strand that runs through the essay presented here is census-taking, the most encompassing form of classification in any nation-state. However, beyond the census lies a vast array of complex and interlocking practices, within the field of naming and numbering, whether these be official and bureaucratic,[3] or in the common sense of everyday life, or within public discourses in the mass media. Analysis of census results is not a novel approach to making sense of the claimed reflection and the creation of social reality (see, for example, Nobles 2000, Kertzer and Arel (eds) 2002, Prewitt 2005). It is, however, less common as a method in its application to South Africa. It should not be so, for in this country, too – and maybe even especially – uncertainties are addressed through means presented as obvious truths, the social common sense (for example, as reflected in census categories), claimed by both those in a position to define numbers from a position of power, and by those whose counter-claims are essential to partial or full contestation of that power; contestation which, however, remains within the same organising and mobilising discourse of names and naming.

Counting specimens, creating peoples

Appadurai refers specifically to census-taking and the naming and measurement that is central to those processes within the modern nation-state in his discussion of small numbers. On the face of it this national accounting of 'who' and 'what', is a necessary and innocuous process – after all, to inform policy we need to know how many of whom there are, what attributes distinguishes them in ways that are deemed relevant to efficient and just governance, and the provision of which services and goods in what quantities are required. We have to determine what they have or what they lack: those who are left behind, those who need what kind of special attention. It allows us to measure change, positive or negative, in the 'size and shape' of our societies; to evaluate success and

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[3] Immigration classifications, regulations and practices provide another example of such formal bureaucratic processes. See, for example, Peberdy 2009.

failure in the goals set for the state. It is a classic case, it seems, of empirical *description* of demographic *facts* in the modern world.[4]

It is not uncommon, either, within this approach to defining the world within which we live, critically to examine the changing categories of 'social reality' offered through the apparent scientific approaches that are employed in statistical demographics; to question the claimed 'neutrality', even the necessity of the specific categories deemed necessary and employed. Such critical enquiry operates with the presumption that we construct the social world within which we live, and do not just find it always already there: a world that is perceived to be a continuation of the past, static in its present and by implication in its future. The processes reveal much: the power to classify, the power to shape and create, the power to alter, and the reasons behind the apparent neutral descriptions. Such measurements will structure how I present the argument below. The issue of changing notions of numbers, of whom and what, and the motivations for and consequences of such changes is what interests me, especially in its present unfolding in a democratic South Africa, committed to a vision of non-racialism, rather than the racism – and the racialism on which it was founded – of the apartheid order. Here my initial interest owes much to the study by Melissa Nobles of such changing categories in censuses in Brazil and the USA (2000), and is given immediate content by the recent articles by AJ Christopher (for example, 2002 and 2009) on 'south and South Africa'.[5]

Nobles' comparative research explored, specifically, the utilisation of race and ethnic categories in census series from the first such national count to the last in the twentieth century in Brazil and the USA. In her study she notes:

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[4] For discussion of statistical data and their usefulness see, for example, Hacking 2005.

[5] For purposes of periodisation I had originally thought of deliberately using the term 'Colonialism of a Special Type' – CST – with pre- and post- prefixes to create a common approach, relevant to the overall exercise. Here I was no doubt influenced by a recent newspaper article by Tshilidzi Ratshitanga ('This is democracy of a special type', *Sunday Times* April 26, 2009), indicating the presence, 15 years after the establishment of a shared citizenship, of not only race categories, but also of the continuation of the notion of 'settler' which forms the basis of the analytical and mobilising approach that employs the term CST (for a discussion see Mamdani 1998). It serves to draw attention to one important distinction, held aggressively as a social identity by some 'incomers' (and not only the colonised) at certain moments in time, but also served (and still serves) to distinguish existing segments of the population otherwise included in a common Constitutional citizenship. Fully to integrate it here would have distracted. For the development of the term see, for example, Slovo 1976.

> Race is a complex and often internally contradictory set of ideas about human similarity and difference. Racial membership and racial boundaries are actively created and recreated through language, thought, social interactions, and institutional processes.
> … The myriad uses of census data, especially racial data, in public life expose the political stakes that accompany census methods and census-taking. … I also claim that racial enumeration itself creates and advances concepts of race, bringing into being the racial reality that census officials presume is already there, waiting to be counted. (2000:xi)

Christopher draws attention to a similar creationist role in the local context: '… it must be remembered that it was the state that undertook the process [of census-taking] for its own purposes, which changed with time, thereby altering the categories employed' (2002:402). Those 'own purposes' are of the essence, whether in the USA, Brazil, Rwanda, Israel, India, the Netherlands, or in South Africa. And, in addition, while the formal and most effectively acted upon process of numbering is the census, accepted social categories also depend on common sense, on micro bureaucratic practices, on rumour, on stereotypes, on historical memory (fact and fiction), and on political mobilisation; and which all also have consequences, great and small, in giving shape to 'groupness'. It is to draw attention to the particular notion of groups that applied in south and South Africa that I used the awkward plural of '*peoples*' in the sub-heading above – the plural signified that there were not just *people* found or to be found, shared *humanity* is in fact inadequate to the political project.

Other 'institutional processes', as Nobles refers to them, those that lie beyond census-taking, are often not as mild as head counting – people may not accept the categories and their implications, necessitating policing and control of the borders between 'us' and 'them' (South African 'pass laws' are a case in point, as are a plethora of other apartheid legislation and their enforcement at all levels of government, and in a multitude of spaces, governing most social interactions (see, for example, Horrell 1982)). The historical contexts within which census-taking takes place need be established. It is, however, possible to find 'small numbers' also at smaller scales: a mine hostel; a university campus; the Msinga region in the rural reaches of the KwaZulu-Natal province; a suburb such as Alexandra attached to the metropolis of Johannesburg; a

province such as the Western Cape. In a way elections, at whatever level, can also serve, not only to bind as citizens sharing a process, but to confirm 'small numbers' and to provide platforms from which the ostensible dangers they pose can be expressed.

Here I am employing the dates provided by census years to indicate the flow of history, and locating those within a wider periodisation that relies on changes in political control, in order to give shape to this exploratory essay. At the same time reference will be made to some of the illustrative parallel processes of creating groups in social consciousness, in addition to the apparently neutral practice of gathering statistical data. The approach followed here, obviously, shapes the scale of investigation – largely the formal and the national.

Pre-colonial, colonial and Boer Republic south Africa

Against the grain of this essay, my first references here will not be to formal processes of state-initiated counting, but to two instances nearly two centuries apart where numbers counted. In 1659 (seven years after the Dutch East India Company's way-station was established at the Cape), the issue of numbers arose, forced by a large raid by the Khoi-Khoi under Doman, people indigenous to the southern part of Africa, destroying farms and taking cattle. The numbers of relevance were those of cattle in relation to land, and the numbers that enabled control over both. There were probably in the region of 4,000 to 8,000 natives, affected by the new forcible settlement and the notion of private property (see Giliomee 2003:8). The settlement of non-natives numbered few people – some 90 landed in 1652, while 'free burghers' (released from the DEIC) numbered only 142 in 1670.

And then in 1838, on a day that features still in recognition as a public holiday in South Africa (now as the Day of Reconciliation rather than of the Covenant), December 16, the Voortrekkers (descendants, in part, of the settlers at the Cape in the seventeenth century) defeated Zulu warriors at a battle on the banks of the Ncome/ Blood river. The event was described as a God-given miracle because of the numbers involved, numbers which are repeated in most of the subsequent recounting of that event and in the paintings that hung

in many Afrikaner homes, as are the labels attached to sub-divisions. There were '468 trekkers, three Englishmen, and sixty blacks' against 'between ten and twelve thousand Zulu'. None of those in the lager was killed, a reversal from two previous massive losses by the trekkers in the year before (Giliomee 2003:165).[6]

Obvious divisions into categories pre-dated the first census. These were fluid and varied (not that subsequent census categories were in effect much more fixed in content or type), but they were shaped by different demands, leaving cross-cutting notions of what should count in establishing modern order in Africa. The categories employed, in addition, related to various forms of record keeping other than those of extensive and coordinated censuses – allocation of land, registration of births, membership of congregations – and were not consistent. The 'first modern scientific census in South Africa was only conducted by the colony of the Cape of Good Hope in 1865', utilising four population segments: 'European, Hottentot, Kafir and Other' (the last referring to 'people of mixed race parentage'; 'Kafir' here referring, through its Arabic root, to 'unbeliever') (Christopher 2002:403). Christopher draws attention to the absence of consistency in using the census terms in other 'official documents' (as noted above), and that the language distinction between English and Dutch played a role in allocating settlement space for the language groups. In 1875, a decade later, 'six major categories and many sub-categories' were used, utilising a mix of bodily features and social factors – such as religion, 'yellow skinned', and 'Fingos' (the last-mentioned African [as distinct from 'European'] group singled out for their 'progress in civilization') (Christopher 2009:103). Further censuses were held in 1885, 1891 and 1904, using the same system. Christopher (2009:103) notes that the changes in 'race' classification and the absence of cross-tabulations with race in many other tables of information indicated 'the colour-blind nature of the colonial franchise, access to which was based on property qualifications', itself a measure of involvement and inclusion in a capitalist economy.

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[6] For a much-needed attempt to integrate the various perspectives on events in Zululand and Natal at this time, see Etherington 2001.

In the Boer Republics and in the Colony of Natal censuses took place, obviously starting at a later date than in the Cape: in the Oranje Vrij Staat (Orange Free State) in 1880 and 1890, with a simple distinction between 'Europeans and Coloured' (reflecting the legal separation – citizens and non-citizens); Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR – South African Republic) in 1890, restricted the census to 'Europeans' (Christopher 2002:403, 2009:102). Here the existence, largely in Johannesburg due to gold-seeking immigrants, of large numbers of males born outside South Africa meant that 'only a third of adult White males [the sole enfranchised group] in the South African Republic had the right to vote in 1890' (Christopher 1890). This situation, of a threatening and threatened 'foreign' element within the Boer Republic – a fear of growing numbers of *Uitlanders* (foreigners) within the ZAR – was used to justify the Imperialist war at the turn of the century (for a discussion see Giliomee 2003:chapter 8). Thomas Pakenham concludes his monumental book with words from British soldier survivors, recorded in 1970: '"... It was all for the gold mines."' (1993:571).

In Natal a census was taken in 1891,[7] 'but it merely estimated the indigenous population and gave no geographical breakdown of the Indian population', while 'people of mixed race' were included with Europeans (Christopher 2002:404, 2009:103-4; also see Brookes and Webb 1979:158 fn7, for rough figures in 1887). In 1860 indentured labour from India was introduced to service the labour needs of the successful sugar plantations in the Colony, but for a century such people and their descendants were kept in a state of impermanence in the Colony and in South Africa. Rehana Ebr.-Vally – in a chapter entitled 'Representations of a South African minority' – discusses this issue, well illustrating the arguments advanced in the article. Dr DF Malan, then Minister of Home Affairs in the Union of South Africa parliament, said in 1925 while debating an Act on the matter (quoted Ebr.-Vally 2001:83):

> 'If you [the Indians] don't go back to your home gracefully, I will shoulder you out without your bag and baggage, but if you go like an obedient boy, sell up your goods and chattel on top of it, I will give you ten pounds and quietly go. Otherwise, I will make your life intolerable here but if you choose to remain here, do so as a pauper.'

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[7] It does not seem that any count was or could have been done in the short-lived (1884-1887) 'New [Trekker] Republic' in the North of Zululand (see Brookes and Webb 1979:154).

Ebr.-Vally notes that 'Between 1947 [when India achieved independence] and 1961 "Indians" were considered as Indian Citizens with the status of foreign residents in South Africa' (2001:84). In 1961 this changed with the creation of a Department of Indian Affairs (SAIRR 1961:141) for a recognised separate 'population'; and in 1962 the Minister of Indian Affairs said that 'the repatriation scheme had failed. The Government had, accordingly, decided that it had no choice but to regard the Indians as permanent inhabitants of the country' (SAIRR 1962:120). It is not possible here to indicate how the consequences of the deliberate maintenance, from within and from without, of a 'community'– '*the* Indians' – as recognisable and impermanent can flare up at any moment, but there are several such instances through the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries already.

A census in 1904, conducted by the British Imperial authority after the South African War, recorded categories of 'Europeans, Natives, Asiatics and Mixed'. The scope of 'Asiatic' provide a picture of the migrations that had taken place in south Africa: the list included Indians, Chinese, Syrians, and Malays. Here the first signs of the centralisation of control throughout what was soon (from 1910) to be *South Africa* became clear, with shared categories being employed across the country. It was extended into the first post-1910 census when an Empire-wide simplified categorisation was utilised, but adapted to local demands and ways of perceiving the social world: 'European or White, Bantu, and Mixed and Other Coloured' (Christopher 2002:404).

Without going into detail during this early period of national census recording some aspects should be noted: the transfer of older European conflicts into the African continent with language serving as a dividing line between English and Dutch in the Cape Colony; the overall distinction, but with uneven consequences, between Europeans and others of various types – the most significant divide being exclusion from citizenship in the Boer Republics; introduction in some instances in the 1890s in the Cape of 'racial exclusion clauses' to occupation of property (raising the issue of who 'was not a regarded as a European') (Christopher 2002:404). Categorisation, also in formal, bureaucratic practices it must be kept in mind, is not limited to the census, but required in

anachronistic ways or those demanding other distinctions than those specified in census taking – an important point in leaving fluidity and/or confusion in social classification, and in drawing attention to deliberate formal intervention in shaping social groupings at a *national* level, once that became feasible and essential to processes of social regulation and planning.

Union of South Africa 1910-60

The formative moment in the creation of a country called 'South Africa' in 1910 involved two drives: the first economic, the second political. They cannot be separated. The development of imperialist capitalism, resting in south (and southern) Africa on the mineral wealth of the region, demanded a regulated large supply of cheap, largely unskilled, labour – this is a story often told, so will not be repeated here. The political settlement after the South African War, informed also by ideas of civilisation and of race, shaped the inclusion of the inhabitants of the Boer Republics (frequently labelled an inferior 'race' themselves within British perception) with policies initially vigorously aimed at cultural integration. This policy created language as a major split and potent factor, because of the threat against it, in Afrikaner ethnic mobilisation (see, for example, Giliomee 2003).[8] Giliomee notes that because language was so potent in the mobilisation of identity it created, during the twentieth century, the conflicting views of 'Afrikaner' as a language- or alternatively as a race-community. If the former position was accepted in the debate then many of those who were not classified as 'White' should be included (largely from the 'Coloured' category); if the latter, it devalued the language criterion for belonging (2003:389), and one of the distinguishing pillars of mobilising Afrikaners into a 'volk', would then not apply as excluding factor from the group of English-speakers and other Europeans accepted as 'white'.

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[8] The language issue remains contested in post-1994 South Africa, especially around Afrikaans because of its centrality to identity-fears, and, on the other hand, from the 'struggle' perspective because of its place within white rule ('the language of the oppressor'). It plays itself out in the contemporary period, as illustrated in the conflicts at some tertiary education institutions, such as the Universities of Stellenbosch and Pretoria (see, for example, Jansen 2009, and extensive debate in the Afrikaans-language press on the Stellenbosch case). The possibility exists that ethnicity could also be re-introduced more strongly in the country as non-English or non-Afrikaans first language speakers demand proper recognition in tertiary education institutions of (or at least some of) the other nine 'official languages' recognised in the Constitution.

Christopher (2009:104) notes that the notion of 'white' (racialised – rather than ethnic) nation-building brought about a question in post-1910 censuses on the ability to speak both official languages (initially, until 1925, Dutch and English, and from thereafter Afrikaans) – bilingualism measured in this specific form increased from an initial 34 per cent to 64 per cent in 1936.

What the settlement (imposed in 1910) did, in addition, was to deliver a centralised authority to the new 'South Africa', an authority that could facilitate and coordinate utilisation of labour towards the exploitation of the mineral wealth of the sub-continent. The state was built, initially, on amalgamation of the discrete political practices pertaining in the colonies and republics, which made it nearly completely racially exclusive. Over the next decades post-Union the position that held in the 'northern provinces' (dominated by the practices of the Boer Republics) was extended through legislation to all of the Union of South Africa.[9] So-called 'Cape liberalism' waned in the already overwhelmingly racially-excluding 1910 Constitution.

The first South African census, in 1911 (the new state stamping its authority, as it were), as mentioned above, paid heed to comments on the 1904 Cape census and to Empire-wide attempts at simplifying census-taking.

It is not necessary to go into the problems of implementing classification here. Just to note that , in the Cape, 'the censuses of 1918, 1926, 1931 and 1941 only enumerated Europeans' for purposes of allocating parliamentary seats to the enfranchised on a constituency basis – this despite the initial 'colour-blind franchise' in that province. The practice of drawing such a fundamental colour/race line raised difficulties, similar to those in the USA, of who belonged to this privileged category (the 'we' of the enfranchised) (Christopher 2002:404). While 'popular usage' differed from the official categories (Christopher 2002:404), the former increasingly fell in line with the officially-defined social reality – not surprising if we follow Nobles' line of argument that formal categories create rather than simply reflect categories. Policy making, and advantages

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[9] Read the moving testimony of Professor DDT Jabavu and others in 1927 on the Representation of Natives in parliament Bill, in Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter (series editors) 1987:202-12.

(material and socio-political) followed from, or were confirmed by, the census categories making it advantageous for at least some inhabitants or citizens to accept and defend the classification during this period.

By 1921 the four spokes of the South African race wheel were the basis of census categories: European, Native, Asiatic, and 'Mixed and Other Coloured'. Numbers were having effect – the pollutant created through indenture in the second half of the nineteenth century in the Colony of Natal had to be eliminated, so the repatriation programme for 'Indians' had to be measured through a census category, a category also requested by the Indian government 'for information on its diaspora' (see below). Christopher mentions that 'each race group [was] asked different questions on separate questionnaires' (2009:104).

There were Union of SA censuses on six occasions from 1911, and whites-only censuses in four more in one of the provinces (the latter, as mentioned, for demarcating seats in the constituency-based racially-exclusive electoral system). The 1951 census, one of two before the *Republic* of South Africa came into being under National Party (NP) rule after its electoral victory in 1948, was the most important for the discussion here: it served as the basis for the 'legal' classification of the population into 'races'. This population count followed immediately after the Population Registration Act (PRA) of 1950, which it served.[10] This census added (on a once-off basis) a fifth category (Cape Malay) because the PRA required such a group. The year 1951 was also when the Bantu Authorities Act was passed, setting in motion what was to become the Bantustan (later 'Separate Development') policy through 'the gradual delegation to [tribal, regional and territorial – all limited to the 'Bantu' category] authorities of certain executive and administrative powers' (Horrell 1969:2). With these bland words the introduction of a new era of fragmentation is described, one that altered in dramatic fashion the politics of numbers – which in the context that concerns me is the politics of power, exploitation and control.

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[10] For a recent in-depth discussion on race classification under apartheid, see Erasmus (2008).

O'Meara notes that the 1960 census determined that 'whites made up just 19,3% of the South Africa's 16 002 797 inhabitants ...' (1996:136) Fifty eight per cent of this minority were from the Afrikaner ethnic group, and 38 per cent English speakers. The advantages of ethnic favouring were visible, also at the level of the working class and not just in the growth of 'volkskapitalisme' (people's capitalism), the main subject of O'Meara's book:

> ... rapid movement into the higher income sectors of the economy. ... Afrikaans-speaking white males were still not as well of as their English-speaking counterparts ... [but] there had been a notable closing of the gap in all the better occupational categories during the first twelve years of NP rule. (1996:136)

The categories of language were important in the formal counting (one section of the South African population having been racialised as a privileged category of 'white') so as to monitor the effect of affirmative action policies for the Afrikaner ethnic sub-group.

Republic of SA 1960[11]

Neal Ascherson writes in 2008 of Abkhazians and their relationship to Georgia in the Black Sea region:

> Passions came to a head as the Soviet Union fell apart and Georgia prepared to declare independence. This was a classic post-imperial crisis. As in India and much of Africa, smaller peoples lumped together with bigger peoples by an imperial administration rebelled when the bigger partner declared independence and proposed to rule them directly. (2008:3)

Ascherson continues, with a line that links with South Africa, and one of the fears of numbers that had not been considered directly by Appadurai:

> The Abkhazians had survived their association with Georgia by relying on the Soviet Union's divide-and-rule policies to protect their autonomy. Now, it seemed, they were to become a mere minority in a Georgia *intent on imposing cultural and political uniformity* (emphasis added).

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[11] The rough periodisation employed here could, probably properly, be dated back a decade, to 1951 with the census that provided the data for the PRA and with the passing of the to the Bantu Authorities Act in the same year, or else 1959 and the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act, rather than the creation of the Republic – an issue between Afrikaners and British Imperialism in the first instance. Both these Acts (Bantu Authorities and Promotion of Bantu Self-Government) set SA on a path where the 'colonists', in the Colonialism *of a Special Type* approach, made it clear that gradual integration into a common political system, under any system, was no longer to be envisioned.

Whereas before, within the Soviet Union of Stalin, being a recognised minority, a nationality (Connor 1984, also Christopher 2009:102), with strategic status within a 'Union' that claimed to recognise and accommodate all expressions of cultural diversity, Abkhazians were now the potential pollutants within a new state of Georgia. *Georgia* claimed *its* independent existence on the basis of the legitimate claim of recognition of 'nation' status for *Georgians* – and the Abkhazians, or rather Abkhazia, was part of that state. The Abkhazians provided proof of *Georgian* nationhood through their rebellion against Georgia. For the success of Georgia the viral status of the Abkhazians had to be addressed.[12]

Unlike post-Soviet Georgia, apartheid South Africa was fearful of 'cultural and political uniformity' for that would maintain the threat of large numbers, especially as political culture had been defined largely in terms of notions of race rather than ethnicity. Race was also the basis of opposition to white domination. Yes, there were 'minorities' in South Africa, but that was because there were no majorities, became the NP argument. In the process it meant fiercely guarding such a minority, the Afrikaners (or, increasingly, albeit reluctantly, 'whites') which had imposed an extremely privileged position for itself and controlled the means to ensure domination, and facilitate exploitation. 'We are a country of minorities' claimed the apartheid ideologues,[13] confident that such words would convince the world that 'small numbers' cannot harm each other; that 'small numbers' reflected the ethnic (national) diversity where others would see only white and black; that 'small numbers' allowed *separate* development, and ultimately the apartheid version of decolonisation.

As can be imagined, census-taking became a messy business in its practice and in the results it produced. Revisiting the many criticisms of the statistics and the failure of such

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[12] For an engaging recounting of this bit of a complex history, so much part of the wider complexity of the Black Sea and its surrounds, see Ascherson (1995:chapter 10; for counting numbers in Yugoslavia during a similar post-Soviet Union period, see Nobles (2000:183).

[13] Hendrik Verwoerd stated in a January 1962 speech, before announcing the decision of envisaged Transkei (one of the 'homelands') 'independence' (Pelzer 1966:363-4): 'Because in the long run numbers must tell. … Ultimately separate states must be created for the groups which originally settled here and the greatest possible degree of governmental separation must be given to the groups which have grown up in our midst'. The 'groups' are ethnic units rather than the all-encompassing 'the Bantu', which would be an overwhelming majority in a 'multi-racial' state, as the 1960 census, above, showed vividly.

data adequately to address the political and socio-economic problems of the country would be a salutary exercise. However, in 1959 the die was cast in the absurd vision of ten 'homelands' or ethnic-nation states, for the 'groups' which characterised the 'Bantu people', in the servitude of a racialised 'white' Republic of South Africa (RSA). Three years later the vision of Transkeian 'independence', the first Bantustan to be placed on this road, was announced in parliament.

The first census in the RSA was undertaken in 1970 and, unsurprisingly, 'introduced a number of innovations reflecting the pursuit of the policies of state partition'. Home language was the basis on which 'African Bantu-speaking people' were divided into 11 (because there was an 'other' category) 'Bantu national units', the 'groups' to which Verwoerd had referred in 1962 (see fn 13). And then there was something designated the 'White Areas'. The arrogance of this approach meant that these various census reports were not even integrated into a single document (Christopher 2009:106).

In the 1980 census the nightmare continued, with the removal of data for the, by then, three 'independent' Bantustans, but with a 'common questionnaire' for the rest of the population. However, '"In the case of South African blacks an attempt was made to distinguish between [those allocated to the self-governing Bantustans]"', and those where this was impossible to determine from the results. These figures then gave 'South Africa' a population in which whites were the majority! As AJ Christopher comments, '(t)his might be regarded as the high point of census manipulation during the apartheid era' (2009:106). The SAIRR notes (1980:67):

> Mr Leonard Mosala, a member of the Soweto Committee of Ten, said that the census had obviously been designed to make a demographic analysis of the African population in terms of tribal culture and geographic origin, because there was no way 'in which an African who fills in the form can avoid identifying himself with one or another of the so-called homelands'. Preliminary results excluded the three 'independent' bantustans.

Two more apartheid censuses took place – in 1985, when the Ciskei joined the 'independent' Bantustans;[14] and 1991, when the census had been postponed because of

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[14] This gave rise to the term 'the TBVC states', referring to the Transkei, BophuthaTswana, Venda and Ciskei.

political unrest in the country. But, as Christopher notes, despite the 'elaborate and ruthlessly implemented social engineering programmes', 'White' people were declining in relative numbers (2009:106). Apartheid had failed also in census terms – the fear of large numbers remained a reality.

It is worth noting that there were black participants in this absurd process – censuses were carried out with Bantustan civil services in Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei in 1980, 1985 and 1991. In 1994 these 'states' were all re-integrated into the RSA, bringing to a conclusion the formal distinctions created by apartheid. However, the level of violent conflict that had been created by and through the bantustan policy of ethnic separation is impossible to count. In KwaZulu-Natal, for example, more than 15,000 Zulu-speakers were killed in violence between two resistance political affiliations – the ANC and Inkatha – with increasing participation of South African 'security forces' in the conflict (see, for example, Kentridge 1990). The antagonisms created, or stereotypes strengthened, through apartheid's deliberate policy of divide-and-rule flare up now and then, sometimes in totally unexpected ways, a decade into the twenty-first century, and two decades after apartheid was formally declared to have failed.

Democratic South Africa: post-Colonialism of a Special Type?

Post-CST South Africa has, regrettably, uncritically accepted and often enthusiastically embraced much of the systems of numbers of the previous periods, while somewhat unsuccessfully and intermittently attempting a common identification – such as through the idea of the 'rainbow nation', commitments to 'nation-building', or a rhetorical commitment to Constitutionally enshrined 'non-racialism' and unity in diversity. What *has* characterised this period are factors that, for the first time, allow alternative ways of 'living together' to be imagined and acted on. These are monumental achievements when measured against the past, so based on the opposite, on essentialist divisions of many forms. There *is* now an inclusive citizenship, constitutionally giving equal rights to all; confirmation of a single territory where all are entitled to live and earn a living in ways that they choose – if they can afford it; Constitutional prohibition on discrimination, in whatever form; and there is majority rule through regular elections. However, such

inclusion has brought its own problems of unforeseen exclusions bringing their own problems of 'othering'. There are growing numbers of non-South Africans within the state's borders; old divisions flare up in new guises – such as through ethnic stereotyping and suspicions; the often ineffectively attended violence based on homophobia, sexism, and against HIV positive people display and reinforce stereotypes every day; and the massive socio-economic inequalities of apartheid South Africa are intensified in new ways as capitalist class formation is redirected in the name of redress and de-racialisation, and with fresh popular expressions of rejection of continuing exploitation and the failure of capitalism to meet claims for a better life for most (even if not for all).

But let me again look at the *creation* of numbers, now, in this 'new' South Africa, processes that demand participation from very large numbers of citizens in the bureaucratic practices of allocation and counting, and not just the census takers and race classification review boards of the past as decision-making agents. Such an approach is different in many ways from the brutal crudeness of apartheid until the Population Registration Act was done away with in 1991 (for example SAIRR 1992:1, 457). The previous system operated on the basis of fears of *large* numbers (at the extremes those created through notions of 'black' and 'white'). It formally disaggregated those large numbers ('we all belong to *small* numbers' and these are mostly allocated to 'own' areas in the 'homelands'), and then made the political, social and physical landscape approximate those minorities into which the population was officially reconceived. The system was complex in its execution, through the bantustans, group areas, 'separate amenities', 'immorality' legislation, and the additional myriads of ways in which the social landscape of discriminatory practices was controlled. For that purpose it would be necessary to go back to the dispassionately described facts and figures in the publications from the research of Muriel Horrell and of the SA Institute of Race Relations generally (eg Horrell 1978, 1982), rather than the delusions of apartheid social engineers.

In 1996 the first post-apartheid, but not post-CST, census took place. The central categories of 'describing' this new country were those of the familiar four (race) spokes of the inclusive wheel used a metaphor by the ANC for the race-based organisations that

initially formed the Congress Alliance,[15] confirmed as appropriate, legitimate, acceptable and identifiable (and, crucially, justified as 'necessary' to make the new social order function). The census, through this route, also denied the extreme diversity – claimed in so many tourism campaigns – that characterises not only the natural, but also the social landscape of this tip of Africa. The census is actively engaged in shaping, through the inherited template that it confirms, the future. These continuing census categories are not open to capture the ways in which South African citizens are starting to live their lives post-'post-apartheid'. It was astonishing, in 2003, when the Cricket World Cup was held in SA, one of the early international celebratory sports events, to hear the commentator at the opening ceremony, obviously reading from a prepared speech, tell the world of the numbers of 'blacks', 'Indians', 'coloureds' and 'whites' in the country!

The necessity for maintaining the categories of race was expressed as follows (Christopher 2009:107, quoting South Africa 1998:17):

> The Government considered it important: 'to continue to use this classification wherever possible, since it clearly indicates the effects of discrimination of the past, and permits the monitoring of policies to alleviate discrimination'.

(also see South African statistician-general, Pali Lehohla).[16]

The foundational categories of apartheid South Africa were now claimed as neutral statistical measures.

There was a fifth category in 1996, the reason for and way of subsequently dealing with it worth noting:

> … a concession was made to the Griqua National Council, which led to the inclusion of an 'other' category …, for those groups, notably the Khoisan, who wished to establish a separate identity. However, only 0.9 per cent of the population returned themselves as 'other' or did not identify with one of the

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[15] 'In 1954, June 26 and 27 were marked throughout South Africa by mass meetings and by an antiapartheid conference in Johannesburg. The call went out for organisers for the forthcoming Congress of the People. The year before the Congress of the People was one of extensive nation-wide activity: preparatory meetings were held all over the country and the people gave concrete expression to their aspirations, which became embodied in the Freedom Charter. The emblem of the campaign was a four-spoked wheel, representing the four organizations in the Congress Alliance, namely the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People's Organisation and the Congress of Democrats.' (http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/campaigns/cop/freedomday.html)

[16] 'Debate over race and censuses not peculiar to SA' (*Business Report* May 5, 2005) and '"Race" is just one variable in monitoring change' (*Business Report* May 12, 2005).

inherited four apartheid era groups. The 2001 census retained the 'others' category in the questionnaire, but in the processing of the returns: '*logical and dynamic imputation was used to reclassify the people who did not indicate their population group or who described themselves as something other than the* (sic) *one of the four options given*'. (Christopher 2009:107, also quoting South Africa 2003:4, my emphasis)

However, the complexity and the moral questions of race classification increases by the day, with ever-greater consequences as the social engineering that it under-girds continues and embeds race with no sign of a break with the apartheid vision as far as the (apparently) globally rejected race categories and classification goes. This essay is written 16 years after the transition to democracy and to an inclusive citizenship in South Africa, a decade and a half of commitment to a society that would strive, in the first place, towards greater economic equality, 14 years after the confirmation of a Constitution that commits the population to non-racialism. And yet we have been able to do little better in this crucial field than deliberately continuing with and defending race classification (Stone and Erasmus 2008), and reluctantly allowing somehow excluded racialised sub-categories access into the same groups (see Erasmus and Park 2008). The court case involving Chinese South Africans will someday seem laughable, but at present it still represents confirmation of the banality, the everyday common sense, and insensitivity around degradation and hurt of race classification in this country.[17] That politicians should have been such vocal and insensitive participants in the resistance to inclusion of this grouping (of Chinese South Africans) into the category of those previously discriminated against provides an even more regretful dimension to the incident.

It remains that claims to many goods is premised on accepting that the individual belongs to a 'race'; that acceptance into the commonly imagined community of South Africans, for many citizens, is still qualified on the basis of 'race'; that motives can be imputed and actions interpreted because an individual belongs to a 'race'. The one thing that has changed from apartheid South Africa days is that such confidence exists that 'race' *is*

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[17] The tiny minority of Chinese South Africans had appealed for inclusion into the category of 'designated' groups, signifying previous disadvantage and opening opportunities for preferred treatment in the areas of employment and economic opportunities.

common sense in South Africa in the twenty-first century that there *is no need* to define it again. It is believed and accepted that the common sense of race thinking is so embedded that the state can rely on its subjects, on a daily basis, to complete forms that demand racial classification – from school children, accident victims, members of societies, and many more. Sometimes the sensitivity of the matter is acknowledged in that euphemisms are employed in the still familiar boxes.[18] Erasmus (2008) makes the telling comment that there was 'no *common* in commonsense', in reference to one of the ways in which 'race' was formally interpreted under apartheid. The same can no doubt be said in the post-apartheid South Africa when there is no other way of identifying 'race', except to find refuge in apartheid itself.

In the case of the science of statistics it is equally bizarre, and not only the 'logical and dynamic imputation' that is involved in race reclassification (as mentioned above), but also the process through which such allocation into numbered categories takes place, after the hated Population Registration Act was withdrawn, leaving no definition of 'race' in law. Again to refer to Christopher and Statistics SA:

> Thus [because of the repeal of the PRA] the census enumerators were advised that a population group was: 'A group with common characteristics (in terms of descent and history), particularly in relation to how they were (*or would have been*) classified before the 1994 elections' (South Africa 2004:12). In this manner those born since 1994 were brought within the ambit of apartheid race classification! (2009:107)

The deliberate maintenance of apartheid race categories, and the consequent prevention or restriction of other identifications in a 'new and inclusive' South Africa, made fluidity and change impossible at this level of identify creation – race indicates *difference* and not even *diversity* (see Beall, 1997, for the implications of this distinction). Even to be 'African', as a shared identity as Thabo Mbeki had so inclusively defined it in Parliament, was excluded by Statistics SA. In the 2001 census, Christopher notes: 'Significantly the term "African" reverted to "Black" in recognition that other groups, notably Afrikaners and Coloured, regarded themselves as African' (2009:107).[19] It seems

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[18] For an important discussion of 'race' in legislation, see Stone and Erasmus (2008), for reliance on common sense, see 2008:31.

[19] The process of decision-making in rElation to census-taking demands further investigation, similar to what Nobles had done in the USA and Brazil, and building on Christopher's work in South Africa. The article by Khalfani and Zuberi (2001) does not show enough complexity and is, therefore, contradictory in

that neither we nor our children are to be allowed, at least by Statistics SA and others able to determine the place of race, to shape the country in which all live towards the non-racial ideal embedded in the Constitution.[20] What this founding Constitutional value means, and what it might mean, is not debated, except on the margins (see, for example, Alexander 2008:9).

Conclusion

This essay reflects a limited aim: simply to draw attention to one aspect of the racialised numbering that Christopher has examined – namely to manipulate the notion of majority and minority, over time. There are further possible entry points into this practice. The first is well captured in the title of the book edited by Martha Lampland and Susan Leigh Star, namely *Standards and their Stories: how quantifying, classifying, and formalizing practices shape everyday life* (2009) – how is it possible to establish standards when the figures generated rely on *race* categories, especially when those same categories served the abhorrent and globally rejected apartheid system of control? The second is the background to and effects of using numbers, *because* 'the resolution numbers offer is nothing more than a human decision' (Stone 2002:165). As 'metaphors' it is important to reflect on the fact that to

> categorize in counting ... is to select one feature of something, assert a likeness on the basis of that feature, and ignore all the other features. To count is to form a category by emphasizing some features instead of others and excluding things what might be similar in important ways but do not share that feature.

In this case that feature is the embedded memory of 'race' categorisation – hence the defence that 'classification' is not required in post-apartheid census-taking, because the census relies on 'self-classification'!

Why are these numbers so important especially, it would seem, in the census categories. The categories, even if they are accepted with a large degree of common sense agreement

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places. It also does not enter the process, beyond description.

[20] Ironically, when the apartheid parliament repealed the Population Registration Act in 1991, the Repeal Act 'made provision for people born after 27 June 1991, the date on which the legislation was enacted, to no longer be classified in terms of race … [For those previously classified] [r]ace classification would disappear only once the Republic of South Africa Constitution Act of 1983, …, was repealed', this creating a 'non-racial' society (SAIRR 1992:1).

that they present what we all know (Fay's 'prior vocabulary'), operate in society and in social interaction in a much more fluid way. In some cases people have priorities that are far removed from the hierarchy of social identities implied by formalisation into legislation, into census statistics, into availability and selection of categories for sense making in conversation or in the media. In most cases class, social and material inequality, illiteracy, sexuality, age, unemployment, a profession, state of health, and many more, weigh more heavily in self-description and self-experience than does 'race' – those aspects continue to provide the always-present context of survival. In some cases the use of 'race' categories may, even deliberately, serve to hide those other aspects of social divisions in discourses. For some, difficult as it may be in this country with its legacy of the construction of 'races' with real effect, 'race' is the figment, the social construct, that science and social justice teaches us is how we should approach it, difficult as that should be.[21] For some class, the recently oft-neglected category in analysis in South Africa, may over-ride the relevance of 'race' – after all, the other aspect of apartheid South Africa we inherited, with even less of a note of caution but often with arrogantly ostentatious acceptance from its few new beneficiaries, is capitalism.

Above I had said that that the census process, in its effect (deliberate or not) of creating a template of a false consistency and obviousness of the social landscape, 'is actively engaged in shaping, …, the future'. May it fail before it leads to (further) violence of the kind identified by Appadurai (2006), Bauman (2000: Afterword), and Alexander (2008), to take just three examples of the arguments presented against the making, the 'discovery', and the maintenance of 'small numbers'. The task confronting the social analyst and activist is of exploring redress and ways of addressing the immediate present of inequality in its many forms, without refuge in the apparent obviousness of racialised common sense, of dealing with diversity rather than difference.

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[21] The recent Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions , wrote, despite dealing with issues of racism, discrimination and firmly held perceptions of the reality of race, that '... there is now irrefutable evidence that race, as a biological phenomenon has no scientific basis. It does not exist'. It reads as an academically-required qualification and is not followed through in analysis or recommendations (Ministerial Committee 2008:26).

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