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Shopping during a Revolution: Entrepreneurs, Retailers and "White" Identity in the Democratic Transition

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South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s: As barricades burned in the townships, and armoured vehicles rolled through their streets, whites poured endlessly into the shops and malls in an apparent frenzy of consumption.[1] At first glance this picture provides a classic example for a Marcusian view of the modern consumer – emotionally deadened by the blandishments of mass culture, he or she becomes the apt subject of the authoritarian state.

But in this article it will be suggested that something more complex was happening. Ultimately, the shopping-obsessed hedonists of the 1980s proved unwilling to fight to the death for their racial privilege. This article is part of an attempt to explain why white South Africans, despite the continuing influence of various forms of racial ideology, and despite their demonstrable indifference to much of the suffering around them, did in fact opt for change.[2] It also seeks

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1. K.S.O. Beavon, "Northern Johannesburg: Part of the 'Rainbow' or Neo-apartheid City in the Making?", *Mots Pluriels*, 13, April 2000, http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotPluriels/MP1300kb.html traces the rise of the shopping mall phenomenon on the Rand. Up to the late 1960s, shops and department stores in the region were overwhelmingly concentrated in the Johannesburg central business district, with smaller concentrations in the centres of the Rand towns. During the 1970s, there was the beginning of movement towards the establishment of suburban shopping malls on the periphery of the metropolis. By 1978, a third of white consumers in the Johannesburg region were shopping at these malls only. In the mid-1980s, four of the major department stores in the Johannesburg central business district closed and three of them decentralised their operations to suburban malls. By 1995 there were 37 shopping malls of over 10 000 square meters in the Johannesburg periphery, the vast majority of them in areas predominantly populated by whites. By that time, the suburban malls had twice as much retailing space as the Johannesburg city centre.
2. A comment is needed on the use of apartheid "racial" categories in this paper. Use of these categories by the author reflects that under apartheid, legal definitions of race – "White", "Coloured", "Indian", "African", etcetera, had a reality derived from the

to do so in a way which links the behaviours of daily life with national politics, rejecting any simple distinction between micro- and macro-levels of social analysis.[3] Consumerism and acceptance of political change were linked in complex ways. The new patterns of consumption, rather than stabilising support for the racial order, were bound up with new and more self-reflexive forms of self-identity which were not easily compatible with the State's abstract and unitary political projects. The argument of the article therefore parallels that of recent sociologists of contemporary consumption who tend towards a less pessimistic view of shopping's social impact[4] than has often been the case in the work of their predecessors.

The article examines the world of consumption on the West Rand, an area just outside Johannesburg, during the South African democratic transition of 1985 to 1995. My route into this question is through a series of interviews with small business people conducted at the time of the transition.[5] After outlining the overall argument, an overview of the way in which political struggles interacted with the world of retail and entrepreneurship will be provided. I will then proceed to focus on the experiences of shopkeepers and business people, showing how these illustrate my broader arguments.

Virtually all accounts of the South African transition would agree that it was the product of revolt led by the African National Congress (ANC) and internal social movements, of external pressure in the form of sanctions, and of the policy shift to negotiation by the liberation movement under Nelson Mandela and the National Party (NP) under F.W. de Klerk (though analysts may disagree about the relative importance of each of these aspects).[6] Such macro-political

very different access to resources which people in each of these categories possessed, the different levels of coercion to which they were subjected, the forms of spatial segregation which were imposed on them, and the significantly differentiated forms of political organisation which consequently emerged amongst them. The categories however were of course thoroughly artificial. It took immense ideological and bureaucratic labours for instance, for one part of the population to be defined as "white". One of the paper's underlying assumptions is that racial categories are subject to constant disintegration and attempts at recomposition.

3. The approach adopted here is based in a sociology which asserts the capacity of the micro-study to speak to the macro-process, exemplified by the work of Norbert Elias. See N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process I* and *II* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1978 and 1982).
4. For example, R. Bocock, *Consumption* (Routledge, London, 1993).
5. The interviews quoted in this paper were carried out by Candice Harrison in Roodepoort and Krugersdorp, between 1993 and 1995. The comments by "Dave" were recorded by the author at a Roodepoort Chamber of Commerce public seminar in 1993.
6. The best narrative of the transition is P. Waldmeier, *Anatomy of a Miracle The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa* (Viking, London, 1997). The best account of the politics of the apartheid era as a whole is D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost*

factors by themselves fail to explain why the large majority of whites were prepared to acquiesce in change in the end. Throughout the 1990s there were substantial forces in white politics which did attempt to give leadership to white rejection of change.[7] P.W. Botha's "successful" repression in the 1980s demonstrated that the option of continued military control existed, albeit at the price of a wider war and economic decline. It was not inevitable that whites would do what the rest of the world thought of as sensible and capitulate. To say that it was in their interests to do so, begs the question of how they conceived of their interests. There is thus a real question as to why whites went along with political change.[8]

There was an important shift in the subjectivity of white South Africans between the beginning of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1990s which made it more difficult to mobilise them effectively for the defence of the racial order. This new subjectivity was related to the wider global changes in self-identity associated with the era of late modernity.[9] Forms of identity emerged which focused on "lifestyle". New patterns of consumption were a crucial driving force of this change. With an increasing tendency of whites to identify as globalised consumers, their ability to identify with the abstract cause of apartheid declined. Their self-identification became increasingly self-regarding and hedonistic.

This situation marked a change from the era of the 1960s when the State had some success in a modernist project of tightly regulating white society through surveillance of political, social and sexual conduct, cultural autarky through censorship, and military conscription. State initiatives helped to generate a subjectivity which was amenable to the defence of the modernist state project of a totalitarian racial order. In the next decades this subjectivity was eroded.

Years The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party 1948-1994 (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1996).

7. For my account of the right wing parties, see J. Hyslop, "Why was the White Right Unable to stop South Africa's Democratic Transition?, *in* P.F. Alexander, R. Hutchison and D. Schreuder (eds), *Africa Today A Multidisciplinary Snapshot of the Continent in 1995* (Australian National University, Canberra, 1996), pp 145-165.
8. A. Marx, "Apartheid's End: South Africa's Transition from Racial Domination", *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 20, 3, July 1997, pp 470-496, argues that in the period leading to the transition, whites attained unity amongst themselves, thus creating an essential precondition for change. I find this proposition implausible. By 1994, whites were probably more spread out along an ideological and organisational spectrum than at any time in the country's history.
9. The argument of the article has been stimulated by the thinking represented in U. Beck, A. Giddens and S. Lash, *Reflexive Modernization Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Polity, Cambridge, 1995); and M. Albrow, *The Global Age* (Polity, Cambridge, 1996).

However, these changes impacted on Afrikaans- and English-speaking whites along somewhat distinct historical routes. New social divisions occurred in Afrikaner Nationalism from around the end of the 1960s. In the 1950s and 1960s the NP had succeeded in imposing a monolithic and almost hermetically sealed unity on Afrikaners. In this era the National Party constructed a network which I refer to as the "pseudo-traditional organisational complex".[10] The complex was a set of institutions aimed at keeping Afrikaners mobilised and separate from English-speaking whites[11] and foreign cultural influences. Increasingly, this complex was cross-cut by tensions between the emerging middle class, professionals and business leadership on the one hand, and lower grade white-collar employees, workers and agrarian nationalists on the other. Generally, the former began to accept limited changes in the structure of apartheid while the latter resisted them. Even more importantly from our point of view here, is the fact that these initially relatively minor political differences fragmented the unity of the NP. The result was a clear decline in the cohesiveness of Afrikaner identity and in the mobilisational capacity of the pseudo-traditional organisational complex.[12] Especially the more affluent strata began looking outward, which enabled an interaction between the new global processes of subjectivity formation and local ones. A "strong" Afrikaner identity combining allegiance to "*volk*" and state, was increasingly replaced by a "residual" Afrikaner identity, comprising an emotional attachment to language and informal social and business networks.

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10. For the historical background, see T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975); D. O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1993); H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners Biography of a People* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2003).
11. The most innovative reflections on Anglo-Afrikaner relations are to be found in D.H. Akenson, *God's Peoples Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1992).
12. The importance of class factors in the internal divisions of Afrikanerdom is disputed by H. Giliomee, "The National Party's Campaign for a Liberation Election", *in* A. Reynolds (ed), *Election 94 South Africa The Campaigns, Results and Future Prospects* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1994), p 46; and by J. van Rooyen, *Hard Right The New White Power in South Africa* (Tauris, London, 1994). However, a powerful case for the significance of class divisions is made by D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*. Class divergences in Afrikaner politics are also emphasised by H. Adam and K. Moodley, *The Opening of the Apartheid Mind Options for the New South Africa* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993), p 150; T.D. Sisk, *Democratisation in South Africa The Elusive Social Contract* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995), pp 131-132; and by Waldmeier, *Anatomy,* p 199. An extensive survey of white voters undertaken in Bloemfontein in 1990 showed a remarkably tight correlation between social class and political position - see L.J.S. Botes, D.C. Groenewald, A. Pelser, "Aspekte van 'n Post-Apartheid Suid-Afrika uit die Oogpunt van Blanke Bloemfonteiners", *Joernaal vir Eietydse Geskiedenis*, Desember 1991, pp 54-75.

White English-speakers (and other white minorities) were generally antagonists of the Afrikaner nationalist mobilisation of the 1940s to the 1960s, but in terms of racial politics, differences between the English and Afrikaner were limited. Until the early 1970s, the vast majority of English-speakers supported the United Party, which was committed to a segregationist ideology, albeit one somewhat less rigid than that of the NP. At the time, there was no serious challenge to apartheid from English-speakers, beyond a fringe of liberal and leftist activists and intellectuals. However, the English-speakers were subject to new globalising influences to an even greater extent than Afrikaners. They were never politically mobilised by the regime, and many resented the obligation of military service, as well as the Afrikaner domination in the bureaucracy. Thus their loyalty to the State was not particularly strong. At the same time, they were enjoying unprecedented personal wealth and leisure. Their familial links with Britain and other European countries were conduits for international cultural and social trends into their communities, as were rising levels of international travel. English-speakers, separated from their old cultural ties to the Empire, became more and more influenced by American trends. Thus by the early seventies, English-speaking whites, still more than Afrikaners, were producing a new consumer-orientated subjectivity.

The rise of a consumerist identity of course did not mean that whites were automatically going to become more racially egalitarian,[13] but a strongly individualised sense of self-interest was likely to come into play in making political decisions. Therefore, when in the 1980s political pressures on white South Africa became severe, the priority for large swathes of that society was not the pursuit of racial ideology, but the possibility of continuing to pursue "lifestyle". This outlook was not conducive to military sacrifice, and encouraged calculations about accepting a new order in which property rights would be guaranteed.

The need to change propelled whites, both English and Afrikaner, into constructing new narratives of the self. This self was characteristically defined in terms of a certain style of consumption, which people of varying socio-economic positions would label as "middle-class". A notion of "middle-classness" was deployed by people brought up within the confines of racial ideology to negotiate the road to desegregation. Racial boundaries began to blur, and commitment to racial ideologies weakened.[14] The typical pattern

13. V. Crapanzano, *Waiting The Whites of South Africa* (Random House, New York, 1985), did a superb job of identifying the forces of stasis in white subjectivity, but failed to identify the factors making for their incipient erosion.

14. In contrast to my argument, G. Schutte, *What Racists Believe* (Thousand Oaks, Sage, 1995), contends that during the transition whites in fact unified around a common racist ideology, which apparent political differences only appeared to cover. Schutte

which emerged in my interviews, was one of claims to have never been personally racist in the past, combined with a declared willingness to accept integration with the black "middle class". The focus of social fear shifted from race as such to questions of social stratification. The more affluent or more change-minded strata of whites wanted desegregation to be managed in a way that would unify the "middle class" across racial boundaries while preventing the black poor from entering formerly "white" schools and housing areas in large numbers.

The globalised media played an enormous role in the process of white self-identification. In the renarrativication of self that whites embarked on, a strong sense can be found of talking outward, addressing a global audience whose criticisms of them could not even be suppressed by the state broadcaster. The notion of "middle-classness" drew on television images of American suburbia and consumer styles. Desegregation was imagined through television treatments thereof.

The importance of shopping and entertainment in white daily life became enormous. It was in this sphere that white society was increasingly invested. Defence of "lifestyle" came to be seen as separable from defence of the racial order, and more important than it.

Shopping in revolutionary Krugersdorp

To the east and west of Johannesburg, a continuous strip of industrial towns follows the Reef, the accessible strip of gold-bearing ore near the surface. This is "The Rand". The mines around which these towns were originally constructed at the end of the nineteenth century are in decline, and the industries which have grown around them, struggle to survive globalised competition. During the 1980s and 1990s, the West Rand was at the centre of the battle for the future of South Africa.[15] The divisions of the society were built into its physical structure in a remarkably clear way. Spinal roads linked a chain of town centres, designated as "white" areas under apartheid. Moving west, Roodepoort is the nearest to Johannesburg; then comes Krugersdorp, and

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would surely be hard put to explain why ideological divergences and conflicts amongst whites, up to and including the point of killing each other, were so intense. And indeed, can his argument explain why there was a transition at all? If whites were so unified around the question of racial domination, why were they not able to develop an effective strategy to retain political power?

15. For an overview of the political conflicts in Krugersdorp in the period see J. Hyslop, "Problems of Explanation in the Study of Afrikaner Nationalism: A Case Study of the West Rand", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22, 3, September 1996, pp 373-385.

then Randfontien. Roodepoort was by far the most modern and prosperous of these towns; it had extensive new cluster housing developments and prosperous suburbs. There were some important social disparities within the formerly "white" towns. Some parts of Roodepoort, and to a much greater extent Krugersdorp and Randfontein, were marked by the presence of visible "poor white" areas. Krugersdorp has a clear physical division between affluent Noordheuwel and working-class Krugersdorp West, the latter characterised by grim-faced brick housing and evident unemployment.

Far greater disparities were however to be found in contrasting the central towns with the string of African townships which apartheid planning generated as a separate chain of housing beyond the white suburbs. These were overcrowded and lacking in basic facilities. For the purposes of this article, the most important of them was Kagiso, south of Krugersdorp and the home of much of its workforce. By the late 1980s, the combination of township housing shortages and declining enforcement of apartheid had enabled homeless people to establish squatter camps in some of the empty peripheral spaces around the white suburbs.

Inside this configuration there was a specific shape to the world of retailing. The old urban centres in Krugersdorp, and several parts of Roodepoort, had the clusters of chain stores, small general stores, hardware shops, and greengrocers characteristic of small South African towns. Many of the successful businesses were operated by individuals from specific ethnic backgrounds – Indians (mainly Moslems descended from Gujerati-speaking immigrants), Greeks, Portuguese and some Italians. Historically, the Jewish community had played a large part in retail in the town, but this role had declined because of upward social mobility and movement out of the area. As we shall see, the contribution of Afrikaners and the generality of white-English speakers to entrepreneurship in the area was much more patchy than those of the smaller ethnic minorities.

The pattern of localised shopping had been disrupted, although not totally displaced in the 1980s, with the construction of Westgate, a vast, post-modern shopping mall on the Roodepoort boundary with Krugersdorp. The mall transformed consumption patterns in the area, drawing shoppers on a big scale from the white towns and increasingly, the black townships of the whole West Rand. It presented shoppers with a panoply of consumption opportunities, in contrast to the rather basic range of goods in the Krugersdorp shops. There were lavishly stocked prestige stores, speciality shops, cinemas, restaurants and fast-food outlets. The challenge of Westgate put the smaller businesses of the area under pressure and those which survived, tended to be the ones able to offer extra services, convenience, good pricing or exceptional quality. Often these survivors again were businesses run by minorities with considerable accumulated business experience.

Indian traders had been formally excluded from the central business area of Krugersdorp at the height of apartheid, but some had found legal expedients to get around this restriction. With the crumbling of much "petty" apartheid legislation in the 1980s, they were able to regularise their position. Few African entrepreneurs could however break into the trade of the town centre, because of both the lack of capital and connections, and the racist atmosphere of the town. Township business centred on small shops and street trading. The conservative Krugersdorp Council strove to keep a rising tide of street traders out of the town centre, but by the early 1990s, this was a lost battle. The most visible sign of African entrepreneurship in the centre was the minibus taxi industry, which by the 1990s, was burgeoning and generating considerable returns. The difference in the spatial situation of black and white business was to have important consequences.

In the latter half of 1985, township organisations launched boycotts of shops. This was part of the quasi-revolutionary uprising which swept through the Southern Transvaal, involving extensive street clashes between youths and security forces. The aim of the boycotts was to place economic pressure on the national and local state, in pursuance of a wide variety of political and economic demands. In Krugersdorp, youth organisations made agreements with African retailers and taxi owners that they would be exempt from the boycott in exchange for lowered prices.[16] These events commenced with a series of boycotts which over the next ten years flared up at moments of local or national crisis. Tensions were exacerbated when the NP lost the Krugersdorp Municipal Council to the extreme right in 1988. Although, within a year, the dominant faction on the Council backed down from its attempts to maintain a fully segregationist policy, its behaviour certainly exacerbated local aspects of the conflict.

This situation created a complex set of tensions. African retailers had an interest in maintaining boycotts of all other businesses, but not in accepting price reductions. White entrepreneurs for the most part suffered serious declines in takings during the boycotts. They saw the hard line reactionary Krugersdorp Council as a key problem. Almost unanimously, whites in small business fulminated against the role of the Council. Even before the extreme rightist take-over, the Council's ineptitude had lost the town the chance to have Westgate built within its boundaries. The Council also had, as its critics claimed, lost opportunities for the establishment of a car factory, a minor airport and a university campus in the town. By the early 1990s, white business people in Krugersdorp were desperate to cut a deal with black political organisations, in order to prevent the destruction of the local economy by boycott.

16. *Saspu National,* February 1986.

The Indian business community was in an important, though uncomfortable hinge situation in this conflict.[17] The ANC had a political project of creating African and Indian unity. Moreover, as the transition picked up speed in the 1990s, established Indian business people were often well-placed to manoeuvre white business into the kinds of alliances which the ANC wished to create. The record of Moslem participation in ANC politics gave some Indian business people credibility with African organisations, while their significant local economic status gave them credibility with white business. Still the interests of African and Indian entrepreneurs could be, and often were, defined as clashing with one another.

In 1986 a local African business body was formed, namely the Kagiso African Chamber of Commerce (KAFCOC). Many Indian businessmen joined it, on the basis of an agreement that there would be cooperation between African business organisations and the Indian community. When the transition opened in the early 1990s, a boycott broke out over charges for services in the townships. Despite the Indian businesses' support for KAFCOC, KAFCOC's leaders did not consult them and included Indian shops in the businesses to be boycotted. This outbreak of tension between African and Indian business interests was only overcome after the Indian community provided shelter for refugees fleeing a Zulu nationalist attack on ANC supporters at the Swannieville squatter camp. Following the positive response in the townships to this action, Indian businesses were exempted from the boycott. A subsequent boycott in response to the assassination of Communist Party leader Chris Hani in 1993, was much better managed. A high-level ANC delegation held talks with the various organisations, creating a front embracing both Indian and African businesses. The prospect of being exempted from the boycott on an individual basis was held out to white businesses on condition that they would align themselves with the democratic movement. Eventually most white business came into an agreement to pressure the Council for change. The ANC thus effectively managed to draw most of local business into an alliance by the time of the 1994 election.

The political pressures to which Krugersdorp whites were subjected were crucial in bringing about change, but as I argued above, these pressures do not in themselves fully account for why change rather than repression was accepted as the option. Krugersdorp was after all a town in which right wing organisations were very active in proposing repressive political "solutions". The willingness of the town's white businesses, and eventually, of most of its

17. The information on the relations between KAFCOC and Indian business interests derives from the interview with the informant "Ebrahim", discussed later in the paper.

white voters, to accept participation in the new system needs to be accounted for. The forces symbolised by Westgate – the spread of a new kind of consumerist identity – were crucial in eroding the very clear boundaries of racial and ethnic identity which had hitherto prevailed amongst whites on the West Rand, creating the subjective basis for a political shift. The individual case-studies which follow, aim to provide some insights into how this process played out in the world of the small business person and the white consumer.

Dave: the incompetence of whiteness

Extraordinary attitudinal problems amongst white small business owners were identified by Dave, an expert on small business development who was associated with the Roodepoort Chamber of Commerce. Dave argued that entrepreneurs were chronically unable to take a long-term view of their situation: "So many entrepreneurs say to me that the only thing they believe in is, that in a business you've got to make money. And in that process all they do is to chase turnover, and they spend so much bloody time chasing turnover that at the end of the line, behind them the walls are falling down."

Dave had found that many entrepreneurs were unable to present adequate business plans, monitor their cash flows or plan financially.

What emerges from Dave's characterisation of the entrepreneurs is how far they were driven by a self-identity as consumers, rather than by seeing themselves as producers or creators. Business was conceived of by many entrepreneurs as a means of subsidising their hedonistic lifestyles, rather than as being an activity of any intrinsic worth. Business owners failed to appreciate the necessity for hands-on management. Dave had found that owners were frequently absent from their businesses: "It's golf on Mondays, Tuesday golf, Wednesday lunch and golf, on Thursday it's only golf in the afternoon, Friday it's probably golf all day and who the hell does any business on Saturday anyway? People are simply not in their businesses."

Initial success was often spoiled by entrepreneurs who splashed out on things that they couldn't afford, notably luxury cars. In Dave's view a typical pattern would be that after a successful first eighteen months, the owner would let down his guard, and the business would then lose direction and collapse.

Dave's account evokes the consumption oriented ethos of the white middle class very well. This desire for instant gratification may have been further encouraged by the short-term personal horizons that the background of chronic political instability fostered. Amongst many whites, there was an expectation of high rewards for limited effort.

Karen: ambiguities of New South Africanism

Karen is representative of the more successful end of the spectrum of small Afrikaner entrepreneurs and of the more reformist trends within Afrikaner self-identity. She and her husband Jan, a Netherlander, had run a bakery in Krugersdorp for eighteen years (with one interval). The longevity and success of the business was based on its convenient suburban location and the good quality of its products. By buying there, suburbanites could save themselves a trip to Westgate. The chain stores could not compete with the quality of their products. Karen and Jan had been alarmed when a supermarket had opened a bakery section, selling at lower prices, but Karen and Jan's sales had not fallen off, because the marked superiority of their products gave them a niche in the market-place. The small African workforce was bound to the couple by close paternalist relations. Two of their employees had been on the staff since the first year of the bakery's operation. No employee had ever gone on strike or participated in a strike, Karen claimed. To get around work boycotts in the townships, they had independently made arrangements with Karen's domestic employee to share her accommodation, so as to be able to avoid having to pass pickets. An odd unintended consequence of the boycotts had actually been that Karen's business had benefited. Because of the position of the shop in the suburbs, it was not monitored by boycott supporters as shops in the town centre tended to be. As a result, many black shoppers would go to Karen for their bread at such times.

Karen's religious history exemplified the loosening of the grip of the pseudo-traditional organisations over daily life. She had been raised at the centre of the complex, in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). Jan was Roman Catholic. When their son was born, Karen's DRC minister had given Jan "hassles" over the child's religious future. This led Karen to decide to convert to Catholicism. She and her husband had to be married again under the Roman Catholic rite, their children had to be re-baptised and Karen had to be confirmed again. After eight years in the Roman Catholic Church, Karen and her children rejoined the DRC, but her daughter then moved to a Methodist congregation. While this suggests the continued pull on Karen's allegiances to the DRC, her attitude to the church was a disillusioned one: "I still don't mind going to the Dutch Reformed Church. I just feel that here where we are it is very stodgy." She preferred to attend a DRC congregation in another area which had a relaxed, "carefree" attitude and was influenced by charismatic ideas: "... to me they're not Dutch Reformed any more. They've totally changed." In this way Karen was a typical example of the loss of faith in the pseudo-traditional organisations. Similarly, her children had become disaffected from the

Voortrekkers, the Afrikaner youth organisation: "... they didn't enjoy it. It was too Afrikaans for them. Because I have very liberal children and they don't fit in with the AWB [i.e. neo-fascists]."

Karen defined herself as a "liberal". What she appeared to mean by this was that she was sceptical of the prevailing political and racial ideologies within the Afrikaans-speaking community, and in favour of deracialisation of institutions. She claimed never to have voted before the election of 1994 because of her political disaffection. However, she also had reservations about the pace of change. In fact, when the transition occurred, she had opted for the party which seemed most able to exercise white control over the speed of it, voting for F.W. de Klerk's NP: "I desperately wanted a change, but I also felt that it couldn't happen overnight ... deep inside you were scared, scared of what would happen when the change came ..."

Karen's attitudes to desegregation were fairly typical of those of the "liberal" end of the white middle class. She had no objection to integration, but wanted middle-class white schools to remain middle-class. Thus racial integration had to be introduced gradually from primary school, because, she claimed, only in this way could "standards" be maintained.

Karen was highly judgemental of the overt racism of poor whites, but herself also fearful of black people as a collectivity. Her son Stefan went to a predominantly white working-class technical school. She portrayed her son as the product of an uplifting middle-class background, distinguished from his racist proletarian schoolfellows by his liberal attitudes. Karen said that the kids at school would "... kill a black if a black was taken in there. But most of the kids are from Krugersdorp West ... Stefan has never mixed with those kids. He says you walk, you keep your eyes front, that's it." Stefan's "one or two" friends were from middle-class Noordheuwel.

Like many liberal Afrikaans-speakers, Karen, while having distanced herself from the pseudo-traditional complex of Afrikaner organisation, had in the post-election period experienced a revival of ethno-linguistic identification triggered by the state broadcaster's reduction of its Afrikaans transmissions. This was widely seen by people like Karen as an attack on their language, and a breach of the reciprocity inherent in the transitional arrangements: "... with television, they are wanting to take Afrikaans off, you know going for Afrikaans and that kind of thing. I never realised it would worry me and it does. It worries me in the way that I realise it's a heritage I have ... I haven't been a staunch Afrikaner but it has been there ... It's not politics, it's an identity, which to me is part of my family ..."

Karen's career demonstrates the emergence of a sector of small business targeted at the newly expanded white middle class. It was, because of its small size and suburban location, relatively insulated from surrounding political turmoil. An interesting paradox is that Jan and Karen are able to import a labour relations system arising from colonial paternalism into a somewhat late-modern business organisation. Karen's positions were almost paradigmatic of those of liberal or reformist Afrikaners interviewed for this study. Karen's self-identity is based on globalised discourses of consumption, codified in terms of middle-classness. This strong middle-class identity enabled Karen to embrace the idea of a desegregated South African middle class. She was happy to accept this notion as the price of keeping the masses at bay. Karen had no sense of obligation to poorer whites and was keen to distance herself from them in order to strengthen her middle-class status. Her rejection of established notions of Afrikaner identity and her disenchantment with the world of pseudo-traditional organisations was made very clear.

It is interesting that it was the question of Afrikaans on television which precipitated Karen's "residual" sense of Afrikaner identity. Her ideological world was rooted in globalised media representations, but she wanted some representation of her ethnicity within that framework.

George: diasporic businessman on the front line

George, a third generation South African of Greek descent, was the owner-manager of one of Krugersdorp's best-known restaurants. When interviewed in 1995, George was positive about political change, but at the same time felt squeezed between the resentment he had experienced in the past from Afrikaners and what he regarded as growing black antagonism to his community. Speaking of the response his immigrant grandparents had experienced from Afrikaners, he said: "And of course '*hulle was die donderse uitlanders*' [they were the damn foreigners]. And that filtered right through to the third generation ..." George continued to experience occasional incidents of this sort: "I've been told that the '*Grieke is net wit kaffers'* [Greeks are just white kaffirs] by ... a drunk white Afrikaans customer. Of course he just got kicked out ... you do get ... the owner of the restaurant being called '*Griekie*' [little Greek] and that kind of thing, which does irritate one, but for business' sake I think one just swallows it ... there is a certain amount of a condescending attitude."

Now it was violent robberies in shops which George saw in racial terms, which were making Greek shopowners anxious about their future. He felt that the Greek community was particularly exposed to criminal violence because of their high concentration in vulnerable small businesses: "We are shop kind of

people, we are in cash businesses ... people don't realise how worried we are about it. We've seen not one, not two, but in the thirties and forties of different incidents of young kids getting gunned down when they close their Steers [steak-houses]."

In addition he feared the anti-Greek sentiments expressed during a recent strike against the SPAR chain of stores. A number of SPAR franchise holders were of Greek origin, and the strike had taken a xenophobic turn which included the trashing of the Greek consulate by strikers: "For some obscure reason there are banners saying 'Go Back to Greece ...'".

George had both benefited from, and helped to create more complex patterns of consumption amongst the Afrikaner middle class of the area. Under its previous owner, the restaurant which he ran had been only one of a handful of major restaurants on the West Rand. When Westgate had opened up, featuring about fifteen restaurants and entertainment venues, the restaurant, then a steak-house, had been badly hit by the competition and George had bought it. George developed the business as a speciality Greek restaurant. Initially there had been a certain amount of consumer resistance: "I can't say it was a booming business from day one, purely because people were sceptical, there's '*'n Griekse soort kos*' [a Greek kind of food] and '*'n Griekse soort*' [a Greek kind of] attitude and I think that it phased people slightly."

But George had in fact hit the consumer market at exactly the point at which its tastes were changing: "I've had the most incredible response from the Afrikaans people in Krugersdorp. It's something new, it's something different, and they're quite open and receptive to a new way of looking at things, which I'm very, very impressed with."

It is interesting here that George's language starts to slide away from the culinary and toward the political. For in fact the "openness" and receptivity to "a new way of looking at things" which apparently characterised the political transition was precisely bound up with the movement of the Afrikaner middle class away from the world of pseudo-traditionalism and into a self-identification as part of a world of globalised consumers. The desire to participate in global patterns of consumption was conducive to a greater degree of political adaptability. In the restaurant the process of changing consumption and the rise of class-based desegregationism had run alongside one another. Explaining how customers had accepted the racial desegregation of his restaurant, George attributed this to class factors: "It also reflects on the kind of clientele that I have. I don't know how it would go down at your local franchised steak-house."

Nevertheless, the response from George to the difficulties of the outside world had been withdrawal into the Greek community: "We have one of the most successful Greek communities in South Africa, in terms of what we offer to our members, in terms of our growth. We have a full Greek school, primary and high school ... The community here is centred around the church, purely because we are the only Greek church on the West Rand. [And] ... because of the past hostility of other whites ..."

Yet the process of self-definition was complex, for the Greek community in South Africa had a specific historical experience. As George discussed this with his friend Nicos, the question became ever more tangled:

Nicos:	The South African Greek is extremely, extremely loyal to this country. And I don't know of many Greeks that have said they want to leave the country. They feel they must leave the country, sure, but they have got a really, really strong allegiance to this country, because it's given them what they have.
George:	Also, our generation of people, we're South Africans, we are not Greek. You know we go to Greece, and we love it, but we're ... [trails off] ... we're different.
Nicos:	But you're not accepted here as a South African, by any means.
George:	You're basically an immigrant everywhere.
Nicos:	You're not a Greek over there either, but I do believe they'll accept you because you are a Greek in essence. No here, you are not a South African ... you are not allowed to be one.

The long-term success of George's business indicates the increasingly complex consumer demands of the Afrikaans-speaking middle strata. As his story suggests, those strata became more flexible on the political front, not so much as a straightforward response to pressure, but as part of a strategy in which participation in the patterns of late-modern consumption came to override every other consideration.

As part of a diasporic minority within the dominant white "racial" group, George found himself in a complex situation. Long-standing commercial skills inside his community could be turned into very effective economic interventions. But his very success put him in the social crossfire. Afrikaner hostility had kept him socially marginalised in the past, although it was now

diminishing. Spiralling crime and unresolved racial antagonisms made George fear for his future. As a consequence, he located himself very firmly within the Greek community and was contemplating emigration, yet his social marginalisation was far from total, and thus he was posed with problems as to how far his identity was South African.

End of the rainbow?

To what extent had the commercial world of Krugersdorp changed? Ebrahim, a successful local Indian businessman who had been active in pro-ANC political organisations, was very optimistic about developments within white Krugersdorp: "The real Evil-Kinevils [sic] were a small percentage. I'm still convinced that the majority of Afrikaners have thrown in the towel and accepted that they must live with the people. Because you can see that there is a changing attitude in Krugersdorp ... Krugersdorp was very racialistic. Today it is not."

Ebrahim thought that white support for such a shift was strong, although it was stronger amongst the young than the old, and stronger amongst the middle class than the working-class. He even felt the local police had shown that they were willing to confront right wingers.

Karen was far more pessimistic. Although genuinely pleased about political change, she saw race relations in Krugersdorp as worse than before and deteriorating. She thought that the right wingers, whom she identified with the white working-class of Krugersdorp West, were more cautious than before the election of 1994, but more enraged beneath the surface: "I think they might think before they do anything where before they may just have acted ... But I actually think there's more hatred, which I never would have believed possible."

The picture clearly is a mixed one. There does seem to have been a reduction in street level racist incidents in Krugersdorp. At the same time Ebrahim's status as a respected businessman means that he experiences the town in a different way than the African poor would. Karen's conclusions are also a little problematic. There was a broad relation between white right wing support and lower incomes, but not a perfect one. There were wealthy right wingers, and there were white low income earners who were genuinely trying to come to terms with the new social order. And even if whites' retreat from overt confrontation was as unwilling as Karen suggests, it would still have made some practical difference to daily life.

Political resistance and pressure provided the motivational force for whites to reassess their future, but the decisions they took in response to those pressures were rooted in shifts in subjectivity. These shifts were not a purely local phenomenon, but need to be understood in terms of the relations between South Africa and the wider world of late modernity.

Abstract

A factor in the transition to democracy in South Africa during the period 1985-1995 was a shift in the subjectivity of white South Africans, which was important in their acceptance of the process of change. New patterns of consumption and their attendant globalising cultural influences created self-reflexive forms of self-identity amongst whites which were inimical to mobilisation in nationalist and statist projects. This argument is developed through a case-study of the West Rand area in the transition period, focusing on the social role of entrepreneurs and retailers. The article surveys the course of the political conflicts in the area, showing how these impacted on business people. It then examines in detail a number of case-studies derived from interviews with business owners of the area in this period, which are used to illustrate the broader argument. Particular attention is given to the consumerist ethos and its interaction with the factors such as religion, ethnicity and the work ethic.

Opsomming

Inkopies gedurende 'n Revolusie: Entrepreneurs, Kleinhandelaars en "Wit" Identiteit in die Demokratiese Oorgangstyd

'n Verskuiwing in die subjektiwiteit van wit Suid-Afrikaners was 'n belangrike faktor in hulle aanvaarding van die proses van verandering tydens die Suid-Afrikaanse oorgang na demokrasie in die periode 1985-1995. Nuwe verbruikerspatrone en hulle gepaardgaande globaliserende kulturele invloede het self-refleksiewe vorme van self-identiteit onder wit mense geskep wat mobilisering in nasionalistiese en staatsprojekte teengewerk het. Hierdie argument is ontwikkel deur 'n gevallestudie wat gedurende die oorgangsperiode aan die Wesrand gedoen is. Dit het gefokus op die sosiale rol van entrepreneurs en handelaars. Die artikel lewer 'n oorsig oor hoe die gang van politieke konflik in die area op besigheidsmense ingewerk het. Ten einde die breër argument te illustreer, volg 'n gedetailleerde ondersoek na 'n aantal gevallestudies, verkry uit onderhoude wat met besigheidseienaars in die area gevoer is gedurende die betrokke periode. Besondere aandag word gewy aan die verbruikersetos en die interaksie daarvan met faktore soos godsdiens, etnisiteit en werksetiek.

Key words

Whites, South Africa, West Rand, Krugersdorp, transition, consumption, consumerism, self-identity, retailers, nationalist, “whiteness”, boycotts.

Sleutelwoorde

Witmense, Suid-Afrika, Wesrand, Krugersdorp, oorgang, verbruik, verbruikerswese, self-identiteit, handelaars, nasionalisties, “blankheid”, boikotte.