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Racial Classification and Colonial Population Enumeration in South Africa

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Abstract

The European population that settled in southern Africa developed traditions of enumeration. These traditions began by differentiating the population on the basis of race and ethnicity. Focusing on the Cape of Good Hope, our paper documents the process employed by the state in racially classifying populations within South Africa's colonial enumerations, from 1657 to 1904. We find that researchers using pre-twentieth century enumerations must consider the impact the history of racial classification has had on our perceptions of population composition.

Introduction

In 1488, African herdsmen and farmers encountered the Portuguese explorer Bartholomew Dias when his ship reached the southern tip of Africa. The contact with Dias was followed by the arrival of the Dutch traders of the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie¹ (VOC) and the colonization of the southern coast of Africa by Europeans. Over the period from 1657 to 1819 the European-origin population at the Cape of Good Hope, the principal European outpost in southern Africa, increased from 134 to 45,000 (Patterson 1975; Gouws 1987).

Racial classifications have been made in South African enumerations since 1657. These classifications have had an important role in how the State has defined political and economic rights. In this paper, we examine the history of racial classification in population enumeration. Our focus is on the Cape but we suggest that the Cape experience has general implications for other settlements in South Africa and helps in understanding the emerging national context of racial classification in the census.

Colonial Enumerations in South Africa

Successive colonial administrations conducted annual enumerations of various settler populations from 1657 to 1785 and from 1805 to the early 1900s. The Dutch East Indian Company took the first wave of enumerations of the colonial populations at the Cape of Good Hope from the 1650s to the late 1700s. They took the second wave when the British took control of the colony in 1795. The Dutch regained control of the Cape Colony in 1803; however, the British recaptured control in 1805. Between 1795 and 1865, yearly enumerations were taken with a few exceptions (see Appendices 1 and 2). These enumerations took place at the request of the colonial administrator in Britain, and the timing was set so the entire British Empire was enumerated simultaneously. The colonial authorities made a series of proclamations concerning

population in the eighteenth century. For example, in June and July of 1797, the Earl of Macartney issued two proclamations mandating the enumeration of the population, property, livestock and produce--for consumption and selling (CC 1898). The June proclamation stated that all “Inhabitants” of the Cape Colony over sixteen years of age—the taxable population--were to be entered into the Colonial Registers. Africans were often enumerated by proxy; the expressed intent was a complete estimate of the population.

The colonial authorities were adamant about enumerating the “inhabitants” of the colonies and surrounding territories regardless of “race” (Macartney 1797 in CC 1898:103, 123). South African census data offer us the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the relationship between colonialism, census taking, and the African continent. More specifically, for our purposes, these census data allow us the opportunity to examine the historical development of official schemes of racial classification in the southern African region.

The areas of the present Republic of South Africa contained various colonies that operated as independent administrative units and conducted various population enumerations. The most extensive and systematic enumerations took place in the Cape of Good Hope Colony.² The Cape of Good Hope Colony had one of the earliest and longest running enumerations of the population in southern Africa beginning in the late 1650s.

Some of the earliest enumerations of populations in South Africa were the registrations of the V.O.C.’s staff and slaves, Free Blacks, the Vryliede (which included Free Burghers and Free Coloureds). These enumerations were taken shortly after the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652.³ From 1682 to the 1800s, enumerations were taken every three to five years in the *Opgaafrol*, or Citizens Tax Rolls (CGH 1682; also see Potgieter & Visagie 1974).⁴ The *Opgaafrols* contain information on individual households, including the names of the head of the

house, numbers of men, women, children, servants, slaves (according to sex and adult/child), livestock, and produce.

There was no definition of race in any of these early documents, however the term Free Blacks referred to people of African and Asian descent, primarily the latter, and people of mixed parentage (Patterson 1975). Additionally the enslaved population consisted of captives from East Africa (Mozambique and Zanzibar), Dahomey, Delagoa Bay, Indonesia (including Malaysia), India and Madagascar (see Eldredge and Morton 1994; Armstrong and Worden 1987). The majority, sixty-five percent, of the enslaved population came from Madagascar. None of the enslaved population had their origins in Europe. The act of exclusively enslaving non-European origin populations was critical in the establishment of a racially stratified society in South Africa.

The enslavement of non-European-origin populations was by the seventeenth century a common practice among European Diaspora populations (Drake 1987: Chapter 7). The act of identifying settlers as a distinct population worthy of enumeration symbolized European dominance over the native African population. The settlers were viewed as being different and better than the “native” population. The use of racial classification as a marginalizing process preceded the “legalization” of racial stratification. Likewise, the usage of racial classifications in South Africa preceded the reference to “racial categories” in official census questionnaires and documentation.

The classifications of the various populations in the annual enumerations of the Cape Colony were not stable (see Appendix 1). They changed considerably over time and even tended to vacillate between types of classifications. In 1806 there was a category for “Free Blacks” in which no one was enumerated; however, in 1807 1,134 people were enumerated as “Free

Blacks.” This classification was dropped from the published returns in 1808 and did not return until 1817 when 1,876 people were counted. This vacillation also occurred with other categories. For instance, the “Coloured” classification was introduced in 1705; however, after 1744 it was not used again until 1840. It was again abandoned in the 1865 Cape Colony census and was not seen in the tables of the census until the first Union census of 1911. Discussions about the “Coloured” population did occur in the census reports of 1875, 1891, and 1904; however the “Coloured” classification was not included in the official tables.

From 1806 to 1824 Europeans were classified as “Christian” in the annual enumerations. This religious classification was deleted and changed to “Whites” in 1827. As more non-Europeans were baptized, the “Christian” category became inadequate for differentiating between the dominant group and the subordinate groups. By 1827, the census returns consisted of three racial classifications “Whites,” “Free Blacks,” and “Slaves.” The change from Christian to European was an important acknowledgment of racial identification in the Cape Colony. Although the word race was still not used, by adopting this new nomenclature, the state institutionalized the process of racial classification.

The change from Christian to European/White occurred in the midst of much discussion about the maintenance of slavery, taxation on the earnings from slaves being hired-out and the rights of slaves. The Boer/Afrikaner farmers argued for the maintenance of the slave system or at least a very gradual process of manumission so that there would be little impact to the slave owners and “as little inconvenience or danger to the public as possible” (CC 1905:358). It is likely that these societal changes influenced the decisions regarding racial classifications of those who compiled the census data. The slave category was used to refer to the enslaved non-European others. There were no European slaves. By classifying the enslaved by their social

status, the European settlers identified them relative to their subordinate social status in the colonial state. As Sheila Patterson notes:

There were a number of similarities between the Cape and the colonies set up in the Caribbean area by the Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, French and English. This applied particularly to the colonizers' objectives—gain, gospel-spreading, or glory—and to their firm conviction of their superiority as Christians and Europeans over the peoples they dispossessed, conquered or enslaved. (1975:164)

The British abolished legal slavery in 1833 and eliminated the slave classification in colonial enumerations. Beginning in 1840 the formerly enslaved were reclassified as the Coloured population in the Cape.

The “Great Trek” of the 1830s, around which Afrikaner identity is associated, resulted from the British arrival in the Cape (Magubane 1979:43-47; Thompson 1995:87-96.). The encroaching British forced the Afrikaners, or Boers, to migrate to the interior in the 1820s. The Afrikaners wanted to escape the imposition of the English language, British rule, and in particular the abolition of slavery. The Afrikaners had built a patriarchal peasant economy on the back of enslaved labor, and the British had recently abolished slavery throughout the British Empire, which now included the Cape Colony. By 1840, several thousand Afrikaners moved their families, servants, and possessions across the Orange River south of the Tugela and settled on the fringe of the Zulu Kingdom.

Enumerations of the African population have never been complete. Often colonial officers supervised the chiefs and headmen working with educated “natives” who served as the

enumerators. The numbers were rough estimates without reference to exact age, gender, or other individual identifiers. From the 1840 to the 1853 enumeration, the official *Blue Book* indicated that accuracy in counting the Coloured population within the entire Colony was not possible because of their “wandering and unsettled mode of life” (CGH 1843:225).

The meaning of race is derived from social context. Miscegenation not only undermines the biological basis of race, but also challenges the social meaning of racial categories. This was the case in the Cape Colony in the mid-nineteenth century. From 1841 to 1854, there were two racial classifications in all the enumerated districts of the Cape Colony, except for Cape Town where there was only a total of the population by gender. It became harder to distinguish between the various populations because of miscegenation (van den Berghe 1967; Patterson 1975). There was considerable miscegenation between European males and slaves or “Khoikhoi” (indentured servants). In fact, according to George Fredrickson “by 1850 ['Indos'] accounted for more than half of those legally classified as European” (Fredrickson 1981:97). The Indos were the offspring of Dutch-born men and Indonesian women living in South Africa. For Cape Town the enumerators distinguished between the races again in the published reports of the 1854 enumeration. It is interesting to note that this problem of identification occurred in a city that was only about 9.5 square miles--by far the smallest in all the colonial districts. The other thirteen districts averaged 8,480 square miles and had a population density of about 1.3 persons per square mile, whereas in Cape Town it was about 2,363 persons per square mile (CGH 1847:248-7). The population density may have contributed to the difficulty of making racial distinctions during the annual enumerations.

The 1855 census included three classifications of the population--White, Coloured, and Aliens. There was concern about the accuracy of the enumeration of the Coloured population in

the census, particularly in the districts of Beaufort and Somerset. The Civil Commissioner's Office audited the census returns. This audit revealed that there were several subregions, in addition to the ones mentioned above, that had unreliable data based on the quality of the work done by the Field-cornets (enumerators). The Cape Town enumeration was conducted by an independent body under the direction of J. Suasso De Lima (CGH 1854). The Cape Town district had three population classifications--Various, Malays, and Heathen. However, De Lima (CGH 1854), who compiled these data for Cape Town, used the phrase "Prize Negroes [etc.]" instead of "Heathen." The term "Prize Negro" referred to Africans who were emancipated from captured slave-ships (Peires 1988). Interestingly enough, "white," "European," and "Christian" were not included as classifications. The inclusion of "Various" as a category is further indicative of the confusion surrounding the process of racial classification and the impact of miscegenation on the racial classification. In the 1856 census, we see similar results; however, there was no new enumeration taken for Cape Town.

The word "race" was used in the 1865 census as a category to describe the various population groups in South Africa.⁵ The classifications under the race category--European, Hottentot, Kafir, and Other--confounded the distinction between race and ethnicity, particularly because the three latter groups all contain Africans. The derogatory term "Kafir" encompasses all the various Bantu populations, including the Zulus, Sothos, and Xhosas. The "Hottentots" consisted of a mixed population of Khoikhoi, San, and individuals who were the products of miscegenation between Khoikhois and Europeans. Europeans were products of Afrikaners, British, French (Huguenots), Germans, Portuguese, and Dutch.

The Colony/Territory of the British Kaffraria, an area Northeast of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, was annexed into the Cape Colony on May 27, 1865.⁶ Therefore, the

enumeration for the Kaffraria's population was not included in the Cape Colony's first census on March 5, 1865. In anticipation of the territory's annexation, the Cape's Governor requested, on May 12, a "Copy of the Latest Returns of the Population of British Kaffraria, distinguishing, so far as possible, the different Races of which it is composed" for the year ending December 31, 1864 (CGH 1865:A.38). Although the Cape Colony's census was not perfect, the enumeration of the British Kaffraria was probably even less reliable because it was based on information five months prior to the date requested. There were two sets of returns published, one for "Natives" and the other for "Europeans." The latter included Africans who worked on European farms. It also made a distinction between Europeans who were farm residents, Germans and Other Europeans. It is not known if the latter distinctions were considered to be racial distinctions or not. On other such occasions nationality was used as a distinction for race.⁷

In 1875 the number of racial classifications was increased to six. The two additional classifications were Malay and Fingoes. Five of the six racial classifications were referred to as "Coloured" classes. The "Hottentot" classification included returns from the "Hottentots, Namaquas, Hill Damaras and Korannas, and the scanty remnant of Bushmen still surviving within the Colony. Here also many persons of mixed race have been enumerated as Hottentots....The enumerators evidently in the somewhat perplexing task of deciding on race were in this and other cases guided by the predominance of European or Hottentot characteristics in the person of those who were to be classified." (CGH 1877:3)

The process of defining the "Hottentot" for the purpose of census enumeration was confused with defining the Europeans because the enumerators could not make decisive distinctions between the "mixed" population. Otherness--in this case Hottentot identity--and the self, or the

Europeans, became intertwined because of the attempt by European settlers to biologize race. We are not told what a “European or Hottentot characteristic” is, but we can surmise that it was based on some physical characteristics. These characteristics were taken as a definitive indication of racial identity. This effort, by the census Director’s own admission, was a failure; however, the enumerating bureaucracy presented the data from the enumeration in the census tables as though the categories were real and clearly distinct. The effort and need to demarcate the population on the basis of race is evident in these early returns.

The Fingo provide another example of how the census was used to define the African population in the context of European colonial desires. The Fingo population assumed a particular role in Cape Colonial society in contrast to other African groups.

The Fingoes form part of the Bantu Family, but their peculiar relations with the Colony as involuntary immigrants within its boundaries, and their exceptional intelligence and progress in civilization lead to their being here separately considered. (CGH 1877:3)

The Fingoes were greatly assimilated into European culture based on their association with the Wesleyan missionaries (McGregor 1930). The Fingoes were also extensively used by the Colonial government as a buffer between the Colony and the Xhosas. Collectively, these events led to Fingoes being granted particular considerations and privileges within the Cape Colony. There was even a special Citizenship Act passed in 1864 “for preventing Colonial Fingoes and certain Subjects of Her Majesty from being mistaken for Kafirs and thereby aggrieved” (GG 1864). The Citizenship Certificate itself said that a Fingo “is an inhabitant of this colony, and a subject of Her Majesty the Queen, and is not to be obstructed or impeded by any person upon the ground or supposition that he is a Kafir without a pass” (GG 1864). According to McGregor

(1930), Fingo was the European name given to the Ama-Mfengu (meaning hungry people in search of work), who had fled the Zulu expansion and sought refuge with the Gelekas and then in the Cape Colony.

The fourth Coloured classification was the “Kafirs Proper, among whom are representatives of all the tribes south of Delagoa Bay, are classed the kindred race of the Betshuana, of whom the mass in the Colony belongs to the Basuto branch. The last class includes the great and increasing population which has sprung from the intercourse of the colonists with the indigenous races, and which fills the interval between the dominant people and the natives. Among them is an inconsiderable number of foreigners” (CGH 1877:3). Here we see that there was considerable confusion in regards to the racial classification of the Colonial population. However, the colonial administrators were clear in the need to distinguish between themselves as the colonizing population and the colonized Africans. Three of the Coloured groups were composed of “mixed” people. This confusion suggests that the enumerations of the Coloured and the European population were not accurate. There was considerable “passing” occurring in South Africa, particularly after 1910 when institutionalized racial segregation increased. Also, most of the populations had some reluctance to being enumerated because of the government’s objective if basing tax collection on the results (CGH 1877:1).

Classifying the Fingoes as a racial group in the colonial censuses caused two problems in the census enumeration. First, the colonial authorities confounded the distinction between race and ethnicity. In fact, race was used mainly as a distinguishing factor between Europeans and non-Europeans. Second, the enumerators would have had a difficult time determining who was a “Kafir Proper” or Xhosa and a Fingo because both were from Bantu tribes and would have looked similar. Fingoes actually consisted of several populations from various tribes and some

Fingoes joined other tribes (McGregor 1930). The only way for the enumerators to distinguish between the various Bantu people was by their residential locations and with the assistance of government appointed Headsmen and Chiefs. It is noted in both the Census Reports and in the Blue Books that it was difficult for enumerators to determine who belonged to what racial group. For example, the Final Report for the 1904 Cape of Good Hope Census said: “As a result of ... intermarriage—which is every year becoming less exceptional—the biological line between these three Race Groups is growing more and more confused and less easy to determine, but notwithstanding this fact it can hardly be gainsaid that for all intents and purposes the three will for many years to come remain distinct classes, each with its own peculiar social and religious and political problems” (CGH 1905:xxi). The most distinguishing features among the various African populations may have been cultural (Schapera 1930; Wilson 1975:46).

The published census reports were believed to be evidence of the degree of civilization of the colonizing European population. The censuses enumerated the number of people, their social classifications and the country’s relative wealth by showing the amount of land, livestock and agricultural produce owned by the inhabitants. The Census Commissioner for the Natal Colony advised the citizens of the Colony in 1904 that “The figures showing the results will be read with interest all over the world, and it should be [our] endeavour to give the truest and fullest possible returns” (CN 1904:6). In a similar letter, the Cape of Good Hope Census Director stated, “It must be remembered that the published results of the enumeration will go forth to the world and be accepted in conclusive proof of the condition of the Colony” (de Smidt 1890:1). The census not only had a practical local benefit for the colonies, but it was also seen as part of making a statement to the world that the country existed and had been civilized by European colonization.

The Cape Colony Census Director's reports confirm the colonial perspective that the process of enumeration was being embraced by the "native" population (CGH 1877:2; CGH 1892:ix; CGH 1905:xxi). For example in the preliminary report for the 1904 Cape Colony census, it was stated that

It is specially gratifying to be able to state that throughout the Native Territories, as well as within the Colony itself, the Natives responded most readily to the appeal made to them. The various Supervisors speak in glowing terms of the assistance rendered by the Chiefs and Headsmen, more particularly the Pondos, and of the intelligent replies given to the Enumerators. Those who were absent at the time of the enumeration actually traveled long distances to ascertain if a proper record of themselves and their families had been made. (CGH 1905:xxi)

The colonial state used census enumeration for the collection of taxes. The Chiefs received revenues from the taxes contributed by their people. This may have helped motivate Chiefs and Headsmen to participate in the colonial enumeration. However, African participation in the enumerations exemplifies the colonial administration's ability to exert its hegemony over the indigenous population. In the practice of racial classification, the colonial state became the "definers" and the Africans and others the "defined."

Expansion of Colonial Population Enumerations

The Great Trek took the Boers to the land of Shaka, the great Zulu king. The Boers settled on the edge of a Kingdom still living in the glory of Shaka. Shaka unified the various Zulu principalities into a formidable state (Thompson 1995: 84-87). Shaka's Zulu kingdom was a militarized state with a conscript army of about forty thousand warriors. In the 1820s, Shaka's

army became increasingly dominating, disrupting local chiefdoms and extending the territory of the Zulu kingdom. Shaka fought wars to increase the area under Zulu control, causing thousands of people to relocate. Around 1828, two of his brothers and a personal servant assassinated Shaka. Shaka's brother, Dingane, succeeded to the kingship and maintained Shaka's policies. The Zulu expansion included the conquest of the high lands of the inner Rand leading many of the African people to emigrate, thus leaving these lands open to the colonial advance of the Boer settlers.

In 1838, in response to Boer settlement, the Zulu king and his councilors ordered a preemptive strike to end European encroachment into their territory. The Afrikaners, along with reinforcements from the Cape Colony, responded by attacking the heart of the Zulu kingdom. Following a decisive defeat of the great Zulu kingdom the emigrants settled in Natal and laid claim to most of the fertile land in the area. They drew up a constitution and declared all Dutch-speaking European-origin members of the community citizens. Both race and ethnicity became factors in identity and the state policy. To further compound the racial conflict in southern Africa, the Natal government imported laborers from India to such an extent that they outnumbered the European-origin population by the end of the century.

The fall of the Zulu kingdom in Natal resulted in a large return of persons to their home areas from which Shaka had ejected them. And as one historian observed:

Greatly outnumbered, the emigrants were not able to establish their version of law and order. Not for the last time in South African history, a white minority was faced with the problem of reconciling its need for security with its dependence on the labor of conquered peoples (Thompson 1995: 92).

Again, demographic changes had a direct bearing on political processes, and British

efforts frustrated Boer efforts at state formation. Moreover, in 1843, Great Britain made Natal a British colony. Following the British annexation, the Boers emigrated, founding the Transvaal and Orange River republics in 1852 and 1854, respectively. As early as 1847, the Boers had nearly all emigrated from Natal and were replaced by British immigrants.

South Africa was composed of a series of enclaves engaged in continuous battles: Africans against Africans, Africans against Boers, Africans against British, Boers against British, and Boers and British against Africans. The Boers were as dependent as the Africans on the British trade in guns and ammunition. As Magubane observed, “the British were the masters of the situation, for the Boers did not have the material means to conquer, let alone unite, the country”(Magubane 1979: 45). As in the United States, the settlers in South Africa were in conflict with the British Empire. Furthermore, not only were Boers not of British origin but they saw their interests at odds with those of the British settlers.

Beginning in 1867 with the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and the 1886 discovery of gold at Witwatersrand (White Waters Ridge) in the Transvaal, South Africa became a major contributor to the European-centered world economy (Thompson 1995:110-15; Magubane 1979: 45-47). Most of the capital invested in the new mining industries came from Europe and the United States, and most of the profits were absorbed there as well.

The British Empire reached its international peak during this time, and within South Africa, Boers and British settlers conquered the remaining independent African communities. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the British Empire instigated a wave of wars to consolidate the entire subcontinent under its rule. During this period, Europeans drew the political lines within South Africa. Indirect rule and European colonial policy became the dominant form of governance. These changes accentuated the differences along the color line

among the inhabitants of southern Africa.

The legal formalization of the color line occurred with the annexation of the Transkei in 1877, Griqualand East in 1879, the Gcalekaland and Thembuland in 1884, and the Pondoland in 1894. The colonial authorities extended the racial distinctions developed in the settlement process to the mining industries. The labor force was split between the European-origin workers and the African-origin workers. Supervisory roles, opportunities for advancement and relatively high wages were reserved for the European-origin workers. African-origin workers were denied opportunities for skilled or supervisory jobs, paid poorly, and forced to live in all-male compounds. Freedom in the new colonial state would be racialized.

The Transvaal colonial administration took censuses between 1890 and 1904. These censuses probably contained the most documented system of racial classification out of all of the colonial censuses. In the census publication, there were numerous pages explaining the different racial groups. Much of the explanation was devoted to discussing the various ethnic groups within the racial categories. The actual number of classifications used by the Transvaal colonial government changed drastically throughout the published census volumes. At times the Asian population merged into the “Mixed and other Coloured” population category, and at other times there were only three broad racial classifications. For the 1890 Transvaal census only the European population was enumerated, and in 1904 a complex web of racial classifications was used.⁸ The instructions given to the enumerators for this census illustrate the complexity and confusion surrounding the classifications of the races:

It will also be observed that the “Race Distinctions” column of the Enumerator’s Book a distinction is drawn between “Aboriginal Natives” and “Other Coloured Races,” the former of which includes Basutos, Bechuanas and

Kafirs, and all coloured persons excepting Malays, Asiatics, Hottentots, and the descendants of white and coloured parents. (Transvaal 1904a:4)

Here we see another example of the State's involvement in the social construction of race. Other than the social distinctions made by the colonial officials there probably would not have been any differences between the two "coloured" populations mentioned above. Lastly, in the "Census of uncivilized Natives" the enumerators used colored beads to indicate a particular household size and composition.⁹ This was another indication that the early enumerations were not reliable estimates of the population size or composition of the African-origin population.

As a central part of the Transvaal, Johannesburg was a developing metropolitan area. Its municipal administrators were dissatisfied with the "unreliable" data from the 1890 colonial census and thus decided to conduct a census of the municipality in 1896 (Transvaal 1906b; Johannesburg Sanitary Department 1896). This effort was repeated in 1908 and 1910; the latter was administered by the Municipal Council of Johannesburg (MCJ 1911). The 1896 census had racial categories that were confounded with nationality and ethnicity. For example, Eurafrican was included as a racial classification. In the 1910 census report, the Council attempted to justify and clarify its rationale for making certain racial classifications. In doing so, their discussion of the Eurafrican racial classification demonstrates how the Council used race to facilitate the administration of racially marginalized populations.

The term Eurafrican has been introduced, as most other terms used to describe persons of mixed European and African Native birth are ambiguous and have been employed in various senses. The term "mixed" is clearly ambiguous. Thus South African Coloured is sometimes used to denote people of mixed descent, and again as a group-term including these people and also Natives. In

Johannesburg Statistics this term, viz., South African Coloured has been used to denote all coloured people from the pure-blooded native to the half- or quarter-caste: in fact to anyone either or all of whose parents or grandparents have been aboriginal natives.

There are many reasons that make it advisable to classify the half-caste separately from the Native. While admitting that *no hard and fast line can be drawn between European and the Eurafrican on the one hand, nor between the Eurafrican and the Native on the other*, yet practically there is a large class of people in South Africa who politically and socially can be, and who actually are, recognized as “Coloured People”; they are here designated Eurafricans. *Apart from any political interest such a classification may have, there is and undoubtedly importance from a social eugenic and public health point of view, in keeping this group distinct from the group Native.* Their mode of life, liability to disease, etc., differs considerably from both Europeans and Natives. (MCJ 1911:5-6; emphasis added)

This quote from the Census Supervisor illustrates the municipality’s partisan reasons for developing racial classifications. This lucid and candid articulation is exemplary of the state’s establishment of a racially stratifying system of enumeration. It used this system to marginalize certain populations based on the established racial classifications.

The Swaziland census was taken in conjunction with the Transvaal census of 1904, both of which were conducted at the request of the Colonial Office in London (Milner 1904). The

results for both censuses were published in one report by the Transvaal colonial government. In the final report, twelve racial categories were identified for Swaziland and Transvaal in Table 25 of the report. However, in subsequent tables (26-29) only eleven categories are tabulated. The data for the “Asiatics” racial group was included in the “Mixed and other Coloured” category in these subsequent tables. Additionally, the *Supplementary Tables* for the 1904 Transvaal Census Report contain sixteen different racial classifications. Here Asians are divided into four groups and the African populations are further subdivided into “racial” categories (Transvaal 1906a and 1906b).

In the Natal Colonial census of 1891, there were three racial classifications—“All Nationalities,” “Natives,” and “Indians.”¹⁰ The census proclamation on December 22, 1890, stated that the census would be taken “exclusive of the Native population.” The Secretary for Native Affairs instructed the Administrator of Native Law to produce an estimate of the African population by taking a sample of the various tribes in the colony. A census was also taken in this colony in 1904. In fact, on October 21, 1903, a conference took place in Pretoria, with representatives from most of British South Africa.¹¹ This conference was intended to facilitate the coordination and standardization of the 1904 census throughout British South Africa.

An enumeration of the Basutoland population appears in the Cape of Good Hope Census Report for 1875. The racial categories were “European or White,” “Hottentot,” “Fingo,” “Kafir and Betshuana,” and “Mixed and Other.” The table is presented without any discussion about the census or these classifications. In the census reports for 1891 and 1904, there were three racial classifications--Natives, Whites, and Coloureds; again only tables were presented. In 1904, the census for the Cape of Good Hope included an enumeration of Bechuanaland (now Botswana), which was established as a British Protectorate in 1885 and annexed as a district of

the Cape Colony in 1895. This was done at the request of the Barolong and Bamangwato tribes in protest of South African Boer confrontations. Kama, chief of the Bamangwato, argued that the Boers' "actions are very cruel among us black people....We are like money, they sell us and our children." (*Encyclopediæ Britannica* 1929, vol. 3:288).

There were three censuses in the Orange River Colony prior to unification in 1910.¹² Its first two censuses contained two racial classifications—"European or White" and "Coloured." For the 1904 census, the Coloured classification was divided into two categories—"Aboriginal Natives" and "Mixed and Other Coloured Persons." There was no discussion about the process of racial classification.

The enumerations of South Africa's indigenous populations were important to the colonists for estimating the size of the cheap labor pool, and colonial and municipal revenue via Hut, Poll, Squatter, and Horse taxes. They were also important in the assessment of the size of any potential military threat from the "non-Europeans," as well as possible African military enlistees for the colony. During the colonial period, these enumerations involved all of British South Africa--including Basutoland, Southern Rhodesia, and Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Colonial regulation required three interrelated processes: the procedures of acquiring, distributing, and exploiting the lands and resources of the colony; the procedures of transforming indigenous institutions and modes of organization to support the colonial process; and the policies of redefining and "domesticating" the African population.¹³ Population enumerations were part of the process by which Africans have been redefined into European subjects. Population enumeration in South Africa was part of the effort to provide a context for discussing the redistribution of African land and wealth to the European settler population. By racially classifying each individual, the colonial government could regulate the process of colonization

that included the control and distribution of resources.

The European colonial government differentiated between the African population and the European settler population. The concern of the administrators was principally that of documenting, and thereby legitimating, the presence of the settler colonial population. This documentation also facilitated the transformation of South Africa into a European construct. The European references to Africans as natives, slaves, Free Blacks, Hottentots, Bushmen and Negro Apprentices help reduce all differences into a sameness that was however different from the white norm.

CONCLUSION

Researchers who employ pre-twentieth century enumerations of the population must give considerable attention to the impact of the history of racial classification on our understanding of population composition. The South African census contains the longest running consecutive compilations of data on racial classification in Africa. The official classifications of different racial groups have been dynamic. Not only has the terminology changed, but also the groups represented by the terms have changed. Racial classification in the South African census is related to the social and political context by its definition and measurement.

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Notes

¹ This is the Dutch name for the Dutch East Indian Company.

² From 1874-76 a series of censuses was taken in small Cape Colonial territories and reserves-- Fingoland 1874; Idutywa Reserve 1874; St. John's Territory 1874, 1875, and 1876; Tembookieland 1875; and Griqualand East 1874. There was no race data collected, only sex and age group (adult/child) (CGH 1878:V.23).

³ The Vryliede consisted mainly of Europeans, however there were a few Coloureds included (De Wet 1978). There were probably enumerations of slaves in all of the locations where Vryliede are enumerated (see Eldredge and Morton 1994). Gouws (1987) suggests that slaves and their children were also registered in some of these earlier enumerations. The VOC also maintained a registry of those enslaved by the company. Jeffreys (1944:120) stated that the earliest enumerations available of South Africans were published in the *Journal* on October 12, 1672. However, outside of Jan van Riebeeck's diary, which contains counts of the individuals disembarking from the three ships that arrived with him in 1652, the Cape Town Archives maintains the *Monsterollen van Vrije Lieden* (Muster Rolls of Vryliede), which contains the names of Free Burghers, their wives and children; some contain lists of soldiers from 1657 to 1791 (there are some years missing from the manuscripts). Prior to 1657 most Europeans in the Cape were affiliated with the VOC.

⁴ The actual name of the census returns changed over time from “*Rol*” to “*Opneemrolle*” to “*Opgaafrol*.”

⁵ The mandate for the 1865 census was called for by the Census Act of 1864. Although the census was originally enacted in 1862 and scheduled to occur earlier, for financial reasons it did not take place (GG 1864:1; CGH 1892:iii).

⁶ The residents of the area called the British Kaffraria referred to it as a colony, and the Government of the Cape of Good Hope referred to it as a territory.

⁷ See the *Government of South Africa*, Vol. 1, 108, (CNA 1908).

⁸ “Racial” classifications for 1904: European or White, Basuto, Bechuana, Cape Colony Kafirs, Portuguese and East Coast Tribes, Rhodesian Tribes, Swazi, Transvaal Tribes, Zulu, Unspecified Aboriginals, Cape and Bastard, Mixed and Other Coloured, Asiatics Other than British, Indian, Malay, and Other Asiatic British Subjects.

⁹ “A big black bead represented an adult married Native, a big yellow bead a grown up single man. As regards the females, a big blue bead signified a married woman, and a white bead a single woman over fifteen years of age. A small yellow bead stood for a boy and a small white bead for girl” (Transvaal 1904b). The Headman would pass by each hut and place a bead on a string for each person residing at that location.

¹⁰ Although indentured and unindentured Indians were presented in separate tables, they are presented as one racial group.

¹¹ The following areas were represented: Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Natal, Cape Colony, Basutoland, and Bechuanaland. Although Swaziland and Southern Rhodesia were not represented at the conference, they also took censuses in 1904. And as we have seen above, Swaziland's census was conducted in conjunction with the Transvaal's.

¹² From 1848-54 this territory was known as the Orange River Sovereignty, and as the Orange Free State Republic from 1854-99. From 1900-09 it was called the Orange River Colony and the Orange Free State Province after 1910. These changes indicate the geopolitical evolution of this territory. In 1995 it became the Free State Province.

¹³ For a philosophical discussion on this process of colonization of the African self see: V.Y. Mudimbe. 1988. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, chapter 1.

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