

Sharad Chari, *Apartheid Remains*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-4780-3041-6 (paper); ISBN: 978-1-4780-2617-4 (cloth); ISBN: 978-1-4780-5945-5 (ebook)¹

Sharad Chari's *Apartheid Remains* takes its time. Appropriate that it should do because Chari's is a careful project, one that is as deliberate in its execution as it is sympathetic in its treatment of its subjects. Painstakingly, Chari charts the differences between South Africa's Indian and coloured communities, delineating their distinctions with something on the order of feeling. These historically disenfranchised South African communities are neighbors, after a fashion. Neighbors of the "frenemy" variety as they are sometimes joined in their commitments while in other moments they are decidedly wary of each other. In the end, though, they are both, in one way or another, locked into the brutal inequality that is their lived reality: the abject failure that is the post-apartheid state.

Sharad Chari, however, is not one who submits to abjection. So disposed, Chari calls upon a figure critical to his earlier work, the pamphlet *Gramsci at Sea* (University of Minnesota Press, 2023). Specifically, that Gramscian aphorism that is so often, and seldom with good cause, bandied about: pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will. *Apartheid Remains* is a tribute to this Gramscian formulation in its capacity to imagine something, anything, that might buoy two communities so devastated by the violence, corruption, nepotism, and state capture that is the post-apartheid state. Chari's propensity to summon his inner-Gramsci, strikes me, someone born and raised under the strictures of apartheid who spent a lifetime resisting it only to have the historical misfortune to bear witness to this post-apartheid travesty, is a capacity at which I marvel. Much as I must say I have no wish to emulate it. And find no historical reason to do so.

No matter. Sharad Chari has given us a tome, for it is a seriously extended piece of work, with which we might, were we so inclined, to see, in the crevices of everyday life in Durban, the smallest glimmer of a prospect for a life under even these, the most unjust and unwarranted, strictures. *Apartheid Remains* does sterling work in historicizing these communities, in not only

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sketching them for us in just the right amount of detail but also of excavating what, following Michel Foucault, we might name a genealogy of the present.

Speaking of Foucault, *Apartheid Remains* demonstrates a theoretical thoroughness as Chari works carefully with the various theorists he draws on, invoking only the parts of the theorist's work applicable to his project, only that which best explicates the conditions of life as they obtain in ecologically and politically contaminated Durban.

Apartheid Remains provides a detailed history of the communities under scrutiny and does so both through broad-strokes history and through the moving personal profiles of the subjects he encounters. Chari's insights, his character sketches, his eye for the foibles, propensities, and, yes, the occasional eye for the opportunistic, is the work of a scholar who is not only patient but also clearly cares about his subjects, about their lives, about how it is they have come to live the lives they do, about their future prospects, most of which, it must be admitted, are slim, but always with a recognition of the courage that it takes to live everyday life in a society that has so criminally failed the historically disenfranchised.

Furthermore, Chari has a gift for shifting the critical lens from the expected trajectory to that less considered. To the non-South African reader, Chari's dual study—two communities, differently located in their relation to the apartheid and the post-apartheid state; differentiated in access to regional power and distinct in terms of their “nativity”—might suggest a straight comparison.

Such an impression would be sorely wrong. Durban, and what used to be the province of Natal, now Kwazulu-Natal, has historically been home to two disenfranchised constituencies. One, the majority, Zulu, the other, in apartheid nomenclature, “Indian”—of South Asian descent. And this is where Chari's choice of subjects is salient. The coloured community, as labeled by apartheid (mixed-race), constitutes but a small minority in the province. What is more, when coloured South Africans are the subject of scholarly research, it is generally the Western Cape (Cape Town and its environs) that enjoys the focus.

Apartheid Remains refuses the hegemonic by focusing fully on Durban. This is no small intervention into the logic of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. This work disrupts, rudely, the conventions around race, region, and scholarship as they have for too long been

understood and practiced among South African academics. In this way, *Apartheid Remains* lays down a marker, showing how to study South Africa's various subjugated communities in a way that does not conform to expectation.

On those grounds alone, *Apartheid Remains* is a salient work of scholarship.

Apartheid Remains is also a groundbreaking work of scholarship not only in its ethnographic sympathy, not only in its theoretical range, not only in its thoroughness, not only in its refusal to submit to the pessimism and gloom that is everyday life for the majority of South Africans who struggle, in every way they can, to make a life under conditions that reveal, every day, the failed promise of the anti-apartheid struggle, but in its determination to provide social scientific evidence of how it might be done.

It is, as *Apartheid Remains* is at pains to point out, the women in these communities, the women with their ingenuity, their resilience, their absolute refusal to bow down to the harshness of life, economic, political and otherwise, the women who make-do with their political activism, their capacity to make life in and through their gardens, their hands always busy, their minds racing as they wrestle with this question of how to make, sustain and possibly even, in rare moments, enjoy and take pleasure in that life, who draw Chari to them. It is the women who take him into their confidence and, in their turn, give him reason to articulate their/his peculiar brand of Gramscian optimism.

It is to Chari's credit that he is open to receiving these political and affective gifts, that he is sensitive to offerings that are, not to put too fine a sentimental point on it, rich in spirit. If, as seems every day more impossible, but let us allow ourselves a moment of prospect, that day arrives when apartheid no longer remains, much of the credit in one part of the country will go to women who people *Apartheid Remains*.

Because it is a soaring testimony to these women.

In the 1956 march by black women against the implementation of the pass law on women, thousands of women marched on the seat of white power, the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Their rallying cry was, "You have struck the women, you have struck a rock." They were open and militant in their defiance, those women. *Apartheid Remains'* women seem to prefer to operate in a lower, less confrontational, but more life-sustaining register. Appropriate, it

must be said, because theirs—these Durban women—is the work of how to keep life going, the very question of biopolitics—the theoretical thread/threat that runs through Chari’s work, insistently, it is the question with which he seems intent on engaging at every opportunity—that is seldom studied in so mundane, close and resilient a form.

The work of the biopolitical, as understood by Foucault, is not only to think alongside (never outside of, nor independent of) sovereignty, but to give voice to what it is that distinguishes biopolitics. The logic of biopolitics is to make live and let die; as opposed to sovereignty, where the regime prefers to let live and make die, that is, the sovereign’s power is indisputable and ubiquitous.

Apartheid Remains documents the struggle of how to make live. How to make live when everything militates, almost unapologetically, against such a prospect.

In post-apartheid South Africa the historically disenfranchised women have harnessed their militancy. In order to make of their anger, frustration and circumscribed life chances a rallying cry fit for the biopolitical: “You have struck the women. They will, as best they can, endure.”

It is no small thing to make life under such treacherous, threatening and historically treasonous conditions. When the revolution, such as it was because, in truth, there was no such philosophical animal in the anti-apartheid movement, certainly not one that could withstand Marxist scrutiny, fails the women, they learn the importance of not submitting. And, having learned the lesson, in continuing to learn that lesson, they take it upon themselves to instruct all around them into this modality.

It may be, after all, that, when all is said and done, it is these women who are not only post-apartheid’s best chance at a biopolitically sustainable future. They are its only chance.

This is the spirit that animates *Apartheid Remains*.

It is an intellectual feat of no small proportion.

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