

Colonial Genealogies of Pluralism: Consociation as Disavowal in Contemporary Democratic Theory

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This article reframes understandings of pluralism in democratic theory by showing that the management of late and post-colonial identitarian conflict was integral to its incorporation into twentieth-century political science. It does so by reconstructing the central but underexamined place of theories of consociational democracy in efforts to reform South Africa's apartheid constitution in the 1970s and 80s. Consociational democratic theory offered such promising resources for apartheid reform, it contends, because it entwined (a) a conception of social pluralism that redescribed apartheid's racial hierarchy as identitarian difference with (b) a conception of institutional pluralism that curtailed the most transformative possibilities of decolonization through universal suffrage. Recovering pluralism's colonial genealogies clarifies the conditions under which the recognition of identitarian diversity can function as a disavowal of racial domination, positioning democratic theory as an adjunct to projects of neo-colonial order.

DECOLONIZATION AND THE REVIVAL OF CONSOCIATION


Recent years have seen a revival of interest in consociational and confederal approaches to democratic institutional design. Across a range of post-imperial contexts, proponents of consociational democracy have argued that under circumstances in which identitarian conflict renders consent to unitary majoritarian democracy impossible, countermajoritarian institutional designs offer the most plausible prospects for securing popular legitimation while preserving social peace. Most notably, liberal analysts of contemporary Israel-Palestine have argued that in the face of the political improbability of a two-state solution, projects of regional confederation offer the most plausible strategy for accommodating Palestinian and Jewish Zionist claims to national self-determination (Avishai and Bahour 2021; Elazar 1991; Rahman 2020; Scheindlin 2018). The normative appeal of consociational proposals derives from their feasibility and liberalism: feasible because they take political identities and aspirations as givens of institutional design; liberal, because they place identitarian compromise at the center of their institutional principles.

This article questions the normative status of consociational theory by analyzing its historical role in projects of neo-colonial institutional design. Extending prior political theories of disavowal (Mackinnon 2019; Shulman 2011), this article argues that consociational theory's formulation of pluralism as both a problem of

and solution to identitarian difference exemplifies a distinctively neo-colonial strategy for the disavowal of racial hierarchy. Although consociationalism bears a passing resemblance to projects of anticolonial federation, which turned to post-national political formations as a supplement to anticolonial popular sovereignty (Fejzula 2021; Getachew 2019, 107–41; Wilder 2015, 241–60), the distributed sovereignty of consociational power-sharing instead functions to contain the effects of racial hierarchy and curtail projects of decolonization through/as universal suffrage (Duong 2021). That consociational democratic theory performs such a function should not be surprising in light of its translation of colonial social theories of identity and conflict management into the idiom of contemporary political science.

Consociational democratic theory's central premise holds that *institutional* pluralism offers an apt and normatively desirable response to political conflicts that arise from *social* pluralism (Lijphart 1977a, 1–20). Advocates of consociation argue that its institutionalization of identitarian power-sharing renders it an attractive formula for engineering peaceful political settlements in “deeply divided” societies (Dryzek 2005, 218–20; Horowitz 1971). This self-presentation has shaped the criticism to which it has been subject: critics of consociational approaches have often faulted such proposals for formalizing rather than transcending identitarian difference, blocking social and political evolution toward a non-racial society (Dryzek 2005, 222–3; Mamdani 2020, 327–8; McCulloch 2014). Other critics have questioned the aptness of the analogy of western European confessional conflict, taken to be foundational to Arend Lijphart's original formulation of consociational democratic theory, for modeling racial and ethnic politics beyond the modern West (Barry 1975a; 1975b).

Such criticisms are right to draw our attention to the role of representation in not only mirroring but

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constructing political attachments (Disch 2011; 2012, 603–5), but fail to strike at the heart of the dilemmas posed by consociational democracy, which emerge from the wider conceptual frame for the analysis of social pluralism in which it is anchored. While political theorists ought to be skeptical of the model of identity underlying consociational democratic theory, the dilemmas such models of social pluralism pose flow not from the flawed analogy of all difference to religious difference, but rather the normative and analytic assumptions elided in the category of pluralism (Stoler 2016). Unsettling such assumptions requires recovery of the debts of contemporary political scientific analysis to understandings of the nature and management of social difference developed in service of projects of (neo)colonial order (Cammack 1997; Gendzier 2017; Vitalis 2015).

This article elaborates on this criticism by examining the role of democratic theory in efforts to reform the Republic of South Africa's apartheid constitution in the 1970s and 80s. To an extent that has left few traces on subsequent assessments of pluralism's status in democratic theory (Taylor 2008), few of the proposals for stabilizing South Africa's political and social order escaped a consociational frame. By charting consociation's circulation between academic political science and South African political reform, this article demonstrates how apartheid South Africa functioned as a crucial site for the formalization of consociationalism as a *democratic* theory. Recovering the simpatico between consociation and apartheid reform is not merely of historical interest; rather, understanding why the tools of democratic theory were particularly amenable to the task of apartheid reform at once illuminates consociational democratic theory's distinctive synthesis of strands of pluralist thought and exemplifies the more general politics of disavowal this synthesis enables.

This article unfolds in three sections. The first poses the historical and normative puzzle of pluralism by documenting the role of consociational democratic theory in efforts to reform the Republic of South Africa's apartheid constitution. I argue that the proliferation of consociational proposals for South African political reform is best understood not as an intervention of US political scientists in South African politics, but as the adoption of pluralism as an attractive paradigm for understanding apartheid's crises of stability and legitimacy across the legal South African public sphere. In turn, understanding why pluralist democratic theory offered such an attractive paradigm requires adopting a genealogical approach to its social theoretic assumptions.

Consociational democratic theory owed its South African reception to the way its overlapping conceptions of social and institutional pluralism enabled the elision and disavowal of apartheid's racial hierarchy. The second section argues that South African political reformers were drawn to consociational theory's characterization of South Africa as a "plural society." This formulation, indebted to efforts by colonial social theorists like J. S. Furnivall and R. F. A. Hoernlé to

theorize identitarian difference as a problem for post-colonial popular sovereignty, gained particular traction in Anglophone social scientific and South African reform discourse during the decolonizations that followed the Second World War. In contrast to thinkers in the South African anti-apartheid movement, who developed theories of internal colonialism and racial capitalism to pose the relation between material dispossession and racial formation, those who attributed the crisis of apartheid to South Africa's status as a "plural society" understood the aim of political reform to be the balancing of equivalent identitarian claims to self-determination.

The third section argues that South African political reformers found similarly attractive pluralist theory's elaboration of political decentralization as a strategy of democratic stability. The category of democratic stability not only posed the task of democratic theory as the adjudication of explicit tradeoffs between majoritarianism and political stability, but also furnished an affirmative normative justification of the desirability of popular legitimacy without majoritarian efficacy. While pluralist theorists themselves struggled with the aporias generated by their endorsement of polyarchy, South African skeptics of universal suffrage found in pluralism an institutional vocabulary for addressing longstanding white anxieties about Black majority rule as a problem of white group non-domination. Consociational theory's redescription of racial domination as intergroup conflict and reconfiguration of the horizon of democratic politics from majoritarian efficacy to popular legitimation made democratic theory functional for, where it was not actively complicit with, the reproduction of racial hierarchy.

This article concludes by considering the implications of this genealogy for contemporary efforts to mobilize the category of pluralism in empirical analysis and institutional design. As a critique of dominant approaches to the understanding of "communal" conflict, this genealogy foregrounds the hazards of merely recognizing difference in the absence of social theoretically robust accounts of its origins and salience. Democratic theories that regard social pluralism as an explanation rather than a phenomenon to be explained are vulnerable to enlistment in projects that mobilize identity to resist rather than enable more just social transformation.

PLURALIST DEMOCRATIC THEORY AND THE CRISIS OF APARTHEID

This section frames the puzzle of pluralism by documenting the surprising centrality of pluralist theories of democracy to efforts to resolve social and political crises in apartheid South Africa. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, a wide range of actors across South Africa's legal civil society (Buthelezi 1974; 1986; Paton 1985; Price 1991, 174; Progressive Federal Party 1979; Rhoo-die 1978; van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh 1979), often in explicit consultation with and reference to

contemporary scholarship in democratic theory and comparative politics, drew on democratic theories of consociationalism and confederalism to characterize their visions of stabilizing constitutional reform (Huntington 1982; Lijphart 1978; 1980; Worral 1981). At the same time, their participation in active projects of political reform furnished theorists of consociation, chief among them the democratic theorist Arend Lijphart, an indispensable site for elaborating (and demonstrating the practical utility of) consociation as a principle of institutional design.

Three principles lie at the heart of consociational theories of democracy: first, groups and group identities, not individuals, are the foundational unit of political representation; second, *inter*-group consensus must be a prerequisite for central state action; and finally, groups should exercise political autonomy on all matters of *intra*-group concern. The supposed practical and normative appeal of this approach to institutional design lies in its capacity to enable elite inter-group cooperation on key issues of collective concern while de-escalating “identitarian” conflict by removing wide swathes of public life from the domain of legitimate national political contestation (Lijphart 1977a). Coined by the US comparative political scientist David Apter (1961), consociational democracy is most closely associated with Lijphart, who elaborated it as a generalizable model of democratic institutional design across a series of studies in the 1970s. Lijphart translated consociation’s combination of group autonomy and identitarian power-sharing into practice, sketching constitutional proposals for representation through identitarian legislatures and executives; checks on non-consensual state action through devices like the mutual veto; and strategies for the depoliticization of national politics, including the automatic allocation of budgets and civil service positions and the devolution of social services like education and housing (Lijphart 1977a, 38–41).

To a degree that democratic theorists have not often registered, consociational theory shaped the form and content of efforts at political reform across the spectrum of legal South African politics during the 1970s and 80s. John Vorster (1966–78) and P. W. Botha (1978–84), successive prime ministers of the ruling National Party (NP), argued that consociational principles offered the best path for stabilizing political reform, signaling the NP’s willingness to accept racial “power-sharing” arrangements that did not require the ceding of white control over areas of “particular” racial concern. The vocabulary of consociation proved attractive not only to the NP’s Afrikaner intellectuals, but also to figures across the legal opposition (McKinnon Irvine 1984, 502–3; Price 1991, 135). Both Gatsha Buthelezi, Chief Minister of the KwaZulu homeland and founder of the Inkatha Freedom Party, and the liberal capitalist Progressive Federal Party developed consociational alternatives to the NP’s proposed reforms, criticizing the latter not for their deviations from unitary majority rule, but for their insufficient implementation of consociational principles (van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh 1979, 105–6).

Overlapping domestic and international crises in South Africa over the course of the 1970s provided the proximate impetus for political reform. In the decade and a half following the outlawing of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1961, the political-economic program of *grand* apartheid—the wholesale reengineering of South African society and economy to confine Africans to established homelands in the name of preparation for “independence”—confronted a series of challenges to its stability (Posel 2011). Despite systems of labor control aimed at restricting African migration to urban areas, South Africa’s industrial economy continued, and often deepened, its reliance upon increasingly skilled African labor. At the same time, the continued economic dependence and international non-recognition of “independent” Bantustans gave the lie to NP claims of sovereign self-sufficiency for regions like the Transkei and Bophuthatswana (Ferguson 2006). Economic recession in the early years of the 1970s, in conjunction with the virtual nonexistence of channels for legal representation of African labor, gave the initial impetus to a wave of wildcat strikes in Durban at the beginning of 1973, which quickly expanded to include some 70,000 workers in Durban and the Eastern Cape (Horrell and Horner 1974, 281–6).

Concurrent international and domestic political developments only increased the pressures on the apartheid political regime. As independence negotiations marked the end of Portuguese empire in neighboring Angola and Mozambique and white minority rule in Rhodesia, Black majority governments proved increasingly hostile neighbors for the South African regime, not least through their diplomatic recognition of and material support for the ANC-in-exile and its armed wing uMkhonto we Sizwe (Hackland 1980, 9–10; Price 1991, 38–43). Domestically, in spite of increased state surveillance and political repression, the 1970s had seen the explosive growth of domestic political unrest—first in the emergence of Stephen Biko and the Black Consciousness movement amongst African university students, and later in the decade, in the 1976 uprisings in Soweto township (Omar 2021). The renewed international scrutiny triggered by the violent repression of the Soweto uprisings posed a particular threat to the South African industrial economy, as risk assessors, dissident shareholders, governments, and international lenders significantly curtailed (where they did not end altogether) new investment in the country (Legassick and Hemson 1976; Price 1991, 62–8). Taken in aggregate, the combination of social revolt and domestic and international political developments suggested a system of white minority rule under unsustainable duress, if not on the verge of outright anticolonial war (Huntington 1982, 5n9; Southall 1983, 81; van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh 1979, 1).

In the face of such crises, South Africa’s ruling National Party turned to racial power sharing as the animating principle of political reform. As envisioned in proposals for constitutional reform that circulated throughout the 1970s (and were ultimately

implemented in the 1983 Constitution), power-sharing entailed the partial enfranchisement of South Africa's non-white majority through explicitly racial forms of representation (Department of Constitutional Development and Planning [South Africa] 1982; The Star and Argo Publications 1985).¹ Under the Botha government's reform proposals, while Black South Africans would remain represented only through political leaders in the homelands in a continuation of "native self-determination," Asian and mixed-race citizens of South Africa would gain representation in the central government through the establishment of separate racial parliaments able to legislate autonomously on issues of purely intra-racial (or "own") concern (Department of Constitutional Development and Planning [South Africa] 1982, 28–33). The principle of racial co-determination required joint parliamentary sessions for the approval of state action on matters of "interracial" concern, not least policies of redistributive taxation or the nationalization of industries (Department of Constitutional Development and Planning [South Africa] 1982, 21–3; Price 1991, 136). Continued white control over state policy was guaranteed, first, through a strengthened presidency that retained the authority to decide which issues were of consociational concern, and second, through fixed ratios of racial representation that circumvented the veto power of minority parliaments (Price 1991, 137–8).

The explicitly racial structure of political representation not only enshrined racial consensus as a prerequisite for social transformation, but also sought to foreclose nascent forms of multiracial coalition, including between Black, Asian, and mixed-race South Africans in the Black Consciousness movement as well as parliamentary alliances between white opposition parties and Indian and mixed-race representatives (van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh 1979, 24). At the same time, consociation's model of social peace through elite consensus licensed the continued disenfranchisement of the nation's African majority in the guise of preserving the representation of diverse ethnic homelands (Price 1991, 141–5). In a renewal of the policy of indirect rule, the multiplication of tribal representation at once invoked the prospect of the tyranny of an African majority even as it denied its existence by insisting that any African majority was, in fact, a collection of ethnic minorities (Buthelezi 1986, xxx–xxx; Mamdani 2018, 52–61). On both fronts, the NP pursued constitutional reform only insofar as it was able to concede the necessity of an end to apartheid for the sake of the preservation of white supremacy (Price 1991, 82–3).

While its simultaneous veneer of popular legitimization and limitation of radical transformation lent consociation its appeal to the ruling NP, more surprising is its adoption as a lexicon of reform by critics of the

apartheid regime, particularly in the models of decentralized federalism proposed by the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) in parliamentary opposition and a unitary consociational KwaZulu-Natal proposed by a 1981 commission convened by Gatscha Buthelezi. Indeed, Buthelezi's initial ascendancy as a major figure in South African politics was accelerated by the consociational promise of his status as the political leader of KwaZulu (Horrell and Horner 1974, 285–6). Amidst a decade of urban labor mobilization originating in Durban in neighboring Natal, the Buthelezi Commission's proposals for a consociational KwaZulu-Natal offered a nationally scalable model for racial peace (Lijphart 1980, 67–72; Southall 1983, 78).

To be sure, the constitutional proposals of the political opposition sought to chart a reform program meaningfully distinct from the NP's proposals, which were widely recognized as thin reworkings of the apartheid constitution (Buthelezi 1986, xxix–xxx; van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh 1979, 3–4). Where the NP's model denied an effective mutual veto to the Asian and Coloured parliaments and political representation altogether to Black South Africans, the PFP and Buthelezi Commission's proposals took a universal, geographically determined franchise as their foundational principle (Buthelezi Commission 1982, v.1, 104–17; Progressive Federal Party 1979; Southall 1983, 107). Likewise both the Buthelezi and PFP proposals sought to replace apartheid's explicitly racial organization of political rule with territorial jurisdiction on a basis of state equality: the PFP through its federal vision of a South Africa of semi-autonomous, territorially contiguous states, Buthelezi in his early proposals for a similarly territorially federated system of majority Black and white provinces (with racially mixed urban areas) with constitutional guarantees of minority rights (Buthelezi 1974; Progressive Federal Party 1979).

Nevertheless, consociational theories defined the terms of legal opposition during apartheid's 1970s crisis. The Buthelezi Commission's proposal for a consociational KwaZulu-Natal envisioned a legislative assembly elected through regional "voluntary associations," incentivizing racial consensus through a power-sharing executive comprised of equal numbers of white and Black representatives with legislative agenda-setting power (Buthelezi Commission 1982, v.1, 113–4). Similarly, albeit on a national scale, the PFP's proposal for decentralized federalism preserved central jurisdiction over matters of finance and defense while enshrining similar forms of parliamentary representation and a legislative veto for elected senators from "self-defined" (rather than state-constituted) cultural groups (Gordon et al. 1979, 6–8; van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh 1979, 113). In both cases, liberal supporters of consociation argued—in direct analogy with the federalism of the United States—that a devolved political constitution was necessary for making racial power-sharing tractable by diffusing the stakes of national political contestation (Buthelezi 1974, 15–6; Progressive Federal Party 1979, 21).

Pluralist democratic theory's widespread reception as diagnosis and resolution to apartheid's crisis of

¹ This article draws on archival research conducted at the Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives Collection. For information about archival access, please see the online appendix.

political order stands in need of further explanation. To be sure, its adoption can be explained in part as an effect of the entrepreneurial activity of political scientists themselves: US political scientists like Lijphart and Huntington, for example, took South Africa as a site for both social scientific inquiry and policy intervention—Huntington notoriously as a consultant to the National Party government, Lijphart as an interlocutor of South African social science organizations like the Institute for the Study of Plural Societies and South African Political Science Association (Lijphart 1978; 1982; Seidman 1987). White South African political scientists of a variety of ideological persuasions likewise moved between social scientific analysis and service on state and party commissions developing recommendations for a new constitutional dispensation (Bovenkerk et al. 1979; Webster 2020). But while such interventions can explain the adoption of consociation as a technical language, they do not adequately explain why consociational theories were so widely regarded as a promising strategy for political reform. Nor can meeting the short-term demands of re-legitimizing an embattled regime explain the full-throated endorsements of consociational proposals by actors, like the Progressive Federal Party and Buthelezi, relegated to near-permanent political opposition (Hackland 1980, 12–4).

Making sense of consociational theory's wide appeal instead requires recovering the shared assumptions about the nature of apartheid's crisis that consociational democratic theory cohered into an approach to constitutional design. Divergent as these actors' hopes were for the restabilization or gradual transformation of apartheid, their shared attraction to consociational theory marked an understanding of apartheid's crisis as a consequence of the presence of social diversity *as such*, and a shared commitment to political decentralization as a strategy for ensuring political stability over and before structural transformation.

RACIAL CAPITALISM OR THE PLURAL SOCIETY?

Consociational theory owed its reception within projects of South African constitutional reform in part to its claim to outline the form of democratic self-government particularly appropriate for a multiracial or “plural” society (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972). Huntington's endorsement of consociational political reforms, for example, rested on his assessment that South Africa was less a “society of individuals” than a “society of racial communities” (Huntington 1981, 13; 1982). Lijphart put the case similarly, arguing that “[i]n plural societies [...] *it is the nature of the society that constitutes the 'crisis'*”; it is more than a temporary emergency and calls for a longer-term grand coalition” (emphasis mine, Lijphart 1977a, 29).

In characterizing South Africa as a “plural society,” Lijphart and his South African interlocutors were drawing upon a paradigm for conceptualizing social pluralism with deep roots in both South African

liberalism and the social theory of late empire (Lijphart 1977a, 16–21). The sense of social pluralism crystallized in consociational democratic theory fused the countermajoritarian politics of late colonial social theory with the fatalistic vision of identitarian conflict espoused by South African liberals like R.F.A. Hoernlé. In so doing, it posed racialized conflict not as an effect of relations of domination that could be overcome through egalitarian social transformation, but as a symptom of irreducible social cleavages that could at most be managed through institutional design.

Contrasting the theory of the plural society with contemporaneous theories of internal colonialism and racial capitalism developed by the anti-apartheid movement illuminates the political stakes of these social theories. In contrast to anti-apartheid radicals who looked to universal suffrage and majority rule as a means of undoing apartheid's internal colonial or racial capitalist regime, apartheid reformers argued that South Africa's constitution as a plural society made consociational democracy's racially organized counter-majoritarianism the limit of feasible political reform. In this sense, disagreements over the social theoretic characterization of South Africa's social order tracked judgments about the shape of a feasible and normatively desirable South African political settlement (Southall 1983, 93). The program of a national democratic revolution outlined by the South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1962 and endorsed by the ANC in 1969 was premised on an understanding of the apartheid regime as a case of “internal colonialism” or “colonialism of a special type” (Levenson and Paret 2022). In the domain of political economy, the SACP's internal colonialism thesis, which claimed that “Non-White South Africa is the colony of White South Africa,” emphasized the mutual constitution of the advanced industrial development of white South Africa with the underdevelopment and exploitation of colonized Africans. Politically, this framed the ongoing struggle for a non-racial polity and universal franchise as an anticolonial struggle for the liberation of oppressed nationalities and located the national democratic revolution as the first stage in a longer struggle for the transition to a socialist republic (Filatova 2012).

The articulation and development of the category of racial capitalism within the anti-apartheid movement beginning in the 1970s contested the separation and sequencing of anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggle implied by the internal colonialism thesis (Levenson and Paret 2022; Wolpe 1975). In theorizing South Africa as a racial capitalist regime, the political economist Harold Wolpe argued that race was not just a mark of difference between exploiter and exploited, but also that racial differentiation played a central role in the profitability of the apartheid political economy (Wolpe 1975). On this account, apartheid's race laws functioned to preserve the system of cheap industrial labor, even as the forms of integration into industrial capitalism this system produced undermined its long-term viability (Wolpe 1975). Thinkers like Martin Legassick and David Hemson, aligned with Trotskyist tendencies in the ANC, and Neville Alexander, aligned with the

Black Consciousness Movement, mobilized this social theoretic account to argue for novel political strategies that conjoined anti-racist and anti-capitalist modes of political struggle (Alexander 1979; Legassick and Hemson 1976). Registering a strategic critique of the ANC's two-stage theory of national liberation, proponents of the racial capitalism thesis argued that the elimination of racial domination was impossible without establishing a popular and specifically working-class anti-apartheid struggle (Friedman 2012). While the disagreements between proponents of internal colonialism and racial capitalism marked substantive disagreements over anti-apartheid strategy, in posing the question of the relation between material dispossession and racial formation, they shared an understanding of majority rule as necessary but insufficient for the reconstruction of a racially hierarchical political economy.

By contrast, theories of the plural society were attractive precisely for their redescription of problems of racial hierarchy as those of identitarian difference. The availability of the category of the plural society for such an appropriation, however, depended on the distinctive meanings the term had accrued throughout its mid-twentieth century circulation across the territories of the former British Empire. In characterizing South Africa as a “plural society,” Lijphart and his South African political interlocutors invoked an analytic category that drew together a dense network of assumptions about the nature of racial and ethnic difference. Coined by the Fabian socialist and colonial administrator in British Burma, J.S. Furnivall, in service of a post-Second World War program for renewed colonial trusteeship in Southeast Asia (Furnivall 1944; 1956), by the time of its 1970s reinscription in consociational democratic theory, the concept of the “plural society” had also gained currency as an explanation for what social scientists regarded as the inherent identitarian instability of post-independence national states (Geertz 1963).

It is unsurprising that efforts to theorize social pluralism should have a distinctively colonial genealogy, insofar as the demands of governing the racially and ethnically diverse societies produced by imperial processes of accumulation, colonization, and migration spurred efforts to make sense of social pluralism as a problem for colonial rule (Valdez 2021). While the preservation of identitarian peace had long offered a justification for imperial rule (Kaviraj 2021), the theory of the plural society emerged at a historical juncture, during the inter- and postwar decades of the twentieth century, in which colonial projects faced particular challenges to their legitimacy. In the face of movements for self-determination throughout Britain's empire, late colonial theories of the plural society sought to address the twin imperatives of order and reform. Furnivall's own account of the plural society reflected his dual roles as a colonial administrator and member of the British Fabian Society, diagnosing the fragility of postcolonial popular sovereignty even as it suggested a reformist agenda for colonial trusteeship in British dependencies in Southeast Asia and beyond.

Furnivall's theorization of the “plural society” established a framework for assessing the feasibility of post-colonial popular sovereignty while elaborating prudential grounds for its continued deferral (Pham 2005). Developed across a series of monographs and pamphlets published by the Fabian Colonial Bureau in the 1940s (Furnivall 1944; 1945; 1956), Furnivall's theory advanced an account of identitarian conflict grounded in the socially disintegrative effects of “contact” with colonial capitalism on colonized societies. Drawing on studies in anthropology and colonial economics pioneered by social anthropologists like Bronisław Malinowski, Furnivall analyzed identitarian conflict as a special case of the social dislocations produced through the often forcible integration of pre-capitalist “traditional societies” into colonial logics of accumulation and rule. But whereas anthropologists principally conceived of the stakes of the disintegration of traditional societies in terms of the “labor question,” attributing colonial labor unrest to the social dislocation experienced by indigenous workers “temporarily urbanized” by their employment in capitalist plantations and mines (Cooper 1996; Wilson 1941), Furnivall argued that integration into imperial circuits of capital accumulation had also produced societies riven by racialized divisions of labor (Furnivall 1945; Pham 2005). In Burma, for example, five decades of imperial integration had introduced racialized distinctions between white capitalists, Chinese and Indian petty traders and lenders, and an array of classes of ethnically differentiated indigenous cultivators (Furnivall 1945, 164–7; Scott 1976, 56–90). While pre-colonial societies were themselves sites of significant identitarian plurality, Furnivall argued that the process of capitalist modernization had hardened underlying identitarian difference into novel, caste-like forms of social differentiation (Furnivall 1956, 306; Kaviraj 2021). In this sense, the colonial capitalist reorganization of land and labor was both raced and racializing: raced by the divide between indigenous laborers and agents of colonial capital, and racializing in its capacity to distinguish and sort peoples according to hierarchies of productive capacity and value (Ince 2022, 148–50).

The distinctive political claim of Furnivall's analysis was that the resulting social pluralism of colonial political communities like Burma precluded their feasibility as self-governing polities. Formalizing and generalizing long-standing tropes of pluralism as an impediment to colonial self-determination (Sultan 2020), Furnivall argued that the identitarian fragmentation of plural societies called into question the existence of a coherent people capable of acting as the subject of self-determination (Furnivall 1945). On the one hand, the “distribution of production among racial castes” produced racial and ethnic communities that found it “difficult to apprehend the social needs of the country as a whole” (Furnivall 1944, 450–1); on the other, the racialized distribution of economic power meant that universal suffrage posed a particular threat to social stability. “Democratic forms,” Furnivall argued, “will only make the society more unstable and less capable of independence by giving voting power to one group

while leaving economic power with others” (Furnivall 1945, 182).

The countermajoritarian implications of the concept of the plural society were central to its importance for legitimating postwar projects of colonial trusteeship. In contrast to the ability of a democratically insulated colonial state to mediate between competing identitarian interests, self-determination threatened political stability by linking contests for popular control to the power to produce or entrench forms of domination demarcated along identitarian lines (Furnivall 1956, 487–8). Furnivall gave J.S. Mill’s arguments for colonial despotism a specifically identitarian formulation: whereas the “organic autonomous societies” of western Europe could “maintain order with more or less success in virtue of [their] inherent vitality, [...] a dependency [needed to be] kept alive, as it were, by artificial respiration, by pressure exercised mechanically from outside and above” (Furnivall 1956, 8; Mill 2008, 257–68). Under circumstances of colonial social pluralism, Furnivall argued, the explicitly antidemocratic power of the colonial state could function as an asset: by holding sovereignty in trust in the short-term, a reformist colonial bureaucracy could cultivate forms of material and social equality that would ground a national political community capable of self-determination.

From its inception, the category of the plural society circulated first throughout Britain’s empire, then the wider decolonizing world, as a term of comparative political analysis (Kuper and Smith 1969; Nicholson 1948; Smith 1965). Deployed by imperial reformers and postwar social scientists alike, the “plural society” came to function as a shorthand for the challenges of governance in the “multi-racial” or “multi-ethnic” societies produced by empire (Buettner 2016, 38–49; Labour Party [UK] 1956). In the 1950s, Fabian Colonial Bureau-aligned colonial reformers like Colin Legum and Michael Scott mobilized the category of the plural society against the devolution of political authority from London to the proposed settler federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland (Lewis et al. 1951, 16–57). Legum and Scott argued that while the conflicting interests of white settlers in native lands and African nationalists in agrarian reform were containable when posed as entreaties to democratically insulated colonial administrations, they threatened to become explosive when linked to a more robust program of settler popular sovereignty (Lewis et al. 1951, 43). Preventing the expansion of the increasingly segregationist politics of white domination in South Africa, reformers argued, required that colonial administrations in Britain’s East and Southern African colonies cultivate the social conditions for true “racial partnership.” Yet as the term traveled from its original articulation in interwar southeast Asia, those who employed it elided even Furnivall’s limited attentiveness to the relationship between capitalist modernization and identitarian formation: characterizing the settler states of southern Africa as sites of generic “social pluralism” obscured the material asymmetries of competing settler and African nationalist claims to self-determination by redescribing them as “intergroup” conflict.

This hollowing out of plural society theory’s materialist account of racial formation paralleled the trajectory of liberal efforts to theorize race in South Africa (Fortes 1970; Hoernlé 1939, 145; Rex 1971). Social anthropologists like Godfrey and Monica Hunter Wilson working in interwar southern Africa had employed the Malinowskian analytic of “cultural contact” to diagnose the entwined race and labor problem posed by African workers “temporarily urbanized” by their employment in mines and other industrial occupations (Hansen 2015, 207–8; Shilliam 2019, 7–11). In the hands of liberal thinkers of race relations like Hoernlé, co-founder of the South African Institute on Race Relations and author of the influential *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* (Hoernlé 1939), however, the trope of cultural contact grounded a more pessimistic assessment of the long-run prospects of African “acculturation” into modern white society (Hoernlé 1938, 400; 1939, 31–7; Webster 2020).

Hoernlé’s account of racialized conflict as the consequence of contact between “modern” white settler and “traditional” African cultures transformed questions of hierarchy and settler colonial dispossession into those of cultural difference (Hoernlé 1939, viii–ix). Even as Hoernlé recognized that South African political development had produced what he described as a “color-caste society,” he asserted that “fundamentally, race feeling is distinct from, and remains untouched by, identity or difference of economic status and interests” (Hoernlé 1939, 147). In turn, Hoernlé’s account of race as an expression of affinity untethered from other forms of social inequality shaped his pessimistic assessment of the prospects for a racially integrated South African political community. Taking as ineradicable both the “dependence of White economy and comfort on [African] labor” and white desires for racial supremacy in an integrated society, Hoernlé argued that efforts to produce a racially integrated South African society could only reproduce an African proletariat excluded by the “double barrier” of racial caste and class (Hoernlé 1938, 407; 1939, 152–3). Under such circumstances, Hoernlé infamously argued, true and total racial separation—not only the territorial segregation of Africans into expanded reservations but also the decoupling of the white economy from its dependence on African workers—offered the best prospects for a future in which, no longer perceived as a threat to white dominance, the “native” might be cultivated as an object of white charity and the subject of self-determination (Bernasconi 2016; Hoernlé 1938, 397–400; Hoernlé 1939, 168–83; Soske 2015, 6–8).

Hoernlé himself eschewed the term “plural society,” arguing that it insufficiently captured the hierarchical quality of South Africa’s racial order (Soske 2015). But many who followed, from conservatives to liberal reformers, re-joined Hoernlé’s assumptions to the language of the plural society, producing a wealth of studies on the dilemmas of “intergroup accommodation” in plural societies (Fortes 1970; Rhodie 1960, 179–94; van den Berghe 1975). Their embrace of the category of the plural society signified

less any underlying agreement on the normatively desirable forms of South Africa's polity and economy than a shared sense of the problem of governance as the successful accommodation of equivalent and symmetric claims to racial self-determination.

When the NP's 1982 constitutional committee framed its recommendation of tricameral racial parliaments and a power-sharing executive as an effort to secure democratic government in a plural society, it was therefore locating its constitutional reforms within a longer genealogy of efforts to respond to South Africa's racialized hierarchies through the lens of intergroup accommodation. Grounded in the assumption that racial identification was and would permanently remain the irreducible determinant of political affiliation, the NP framed its proposals for legislative power-sharing through distinct racial parliaments as an elevation of the social theory of the plural society to a principle of institutional design (Constitutional Committee, South Africa President's Council 1982, 27–36).

Although opposition figures criticized NP reforms as a bad faith effort to entrench white racial power, they too deployed the analytic of the plural society to foreground group identity as a principle of representation. Even as PFP intellectuals acknowledged that racial conflict originated in apartheid's "institutionalized inequalities of power, wealth, opportunity and status," they also pointed to the failed emergence of multiracial working-class solidarity as evidence of the "independent significance" of racial and ethnic solidarities (van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh 1979, 14–8). The PFP and Buthelezi Commission's proposals for consociational representation through voluntary associations reflected their commitment to accommodating identitarian solidarities that would emerge from voluntary rather than legally coerced forms of racial and ethnic identification (Adam 1982; Lijphart 1985, 68).

Liberal reformers' adoption of the framework of the plural society reflected their commitment to stabilizing rather than upending South Africa's racially hierarchical political economy (Hackland 1980). In identifying the state imposition of racial and ethnic categories as apartheid's central harm, liberal advocates of consociation signaled their willingness to ameliorate the most dysfunctional elements of the apartheid regime while preserving the foundations of capitalist prosperity (Buthelezi 1986, 80). As contemporary observers noted, the abolition of racial restrictions on labor and property markets abandoned the "most costly and irrational features" of apartheid "separate development" without contesting the reproduction of racial and ethnic hierarchy in South Africa's political economy (Omar 2021; Southall 1983, 96–100). While liberal theorists of consociation anticipated that identitarian cleavages would re-emerge through the voluntary associations, they embraced associational representation in the hope that bargaining amongst racial elites would curtail the most radically transformative demands associated with majority rule (Buthelezi Commission 1982, v.1, 121–3; Southall 1983, 89).

In this sense, the broad appeal of the framework of the plural society emerged from its analytic ambiguity. Colonial discourses of social pluralism enabled analysts of race relations to acknowledge the racialization of political conflict while disavowing its material dimensions. While this allowed for the articulation of race as a "problem" for South African politics, it also enabled critical slippage between understandings of racial hierarchy as an effect of South African political economy and race as an irreducible expression of identitarian affinity.

DEMOCRATIC STABILITY AND THE POLITICS OF LEADERSHIP

Where consociational theory's formalization of pluralism as a problem of social difference explains its reception as a diagnosis for apartheid crisis, its endorsement of institutional pluralism as a strategy of democratic consent accounts for why it appeared to offer a constructive solution. In registering their proposed constitutional reforms in the language of democratic theory, South African thinkers were identifying important conceptual features of the task of democratic theory itself. Democratic theorists' elaboration of institutional pluralism as a central feature of democratic stability not only aligned the enterprise of political theory with Cold War efforts to specify the conditions of democratic feasibility, but also elaborated realist grounds for the desirability of popular legitimacy without majority efficacy. While some pluralist theorists themselves struggled with the tension between the status quo bias of institutional pluralism and the transformative demands of social justice, as Robert Dahl did in his analysis of the United States' own history of racial domination, South African skeptics of universal suffrage found in pluralism's realist emphasis on political stability a normative language and institutional formation apt for containing the most far-reaching implications of decolonization as universal suffrage (Duong 2021).

Democratic theory's emphasis on the institutional requisites of political stability reflected a changing understanding of the tasks of democratic theory and comparative politics in the middle decades of the twentieth century (Almond 1966; Gendzier 2017; Son 2020). The preoccupations of democratic theory, especially in the tradition inaugurated by thinkers like Robert Dahl, were shaped by two perceived necessities: first, offering a rejoinder to a postwar atmosphere of "democratic pessimism," and second, offering a constructive solution to the "problems" of nation-state formation emergent in the decolonizations of the mid-century. In the face of Cold War liberal anxieties about mass democracy as a slippery slope to democratic totalitarianism, theorists of democracy were at pains to offer an account of the sociological and institutional conditions under which mass democracy was broadly compatible with stable, liberal politics (Almond 1956; Dahl 1961, 5–7; Talmon 1952).

The theory of democratic pluralism offered an inductive response to the dilemmas of both democratic

pessimism and post-colonial state formation. By describing existing political systems as stable and broadly democratic, studies like Dahl's *Who Governs?* (1961) and *Pluralist Democracy in the United States* (1967) demonstrated the possibility of democratic stability even as their functional analysis of "established" furnished generalizable insights about the institutional conditions of democratic possibility. In this way, studies of the United States' putative attainment of democratic stability as the first "new nation" (Lipset 1963) bridged the past of American political development and the present and future of nation-building projects abroad (Engerman 2010).

Beginning in the 1950s, elite theorists of democracy like Robert Dahl proposed institutional pluralism as an explanation of the peace and stability of ascendant post-war democracies like the United States. Against those who assumed that political stability required social homogeneity or limitations on the scale of political communities, Dahl argued that democratic stability demanded not the elimination of conflict, but rather its successful diffusion through institutional design (Dahl 1967, 18–20). Identifying nonconsensual restraint on individual freedom of action as a principal source of political instability, Dahl argued that the key to managing the intensity of political conflict was the limitation of what he called "absolute sovereignty"—majority domination through state action—through federated and mutually antagonistic representative institutions (Dahl 1967). By constraining the scope and expression of majority will, Dahl suggested, pluralist democracies secured wide consent to democratic rule by limiting the intensity of contestation over state power and the likelihood of state action as a cause for popular resistance and revolt (Dahl 1967, 24).

The distinctiveness of pluralist democratic theory's emphasis on political stability is evident in contrast to the prior political theories of pluralism from which it is often supposed to be derived (Burtenshaw 1968, 586; Gunnell 1996, 254–7; Solomon 1983, 8–19). While pluralist democratic theorists shared with prior theorists of pluralism an interest in the decentralization of political authority, they diverged dramatically in the hopes they invested in such institutional pluralism. Alexis de Tocqueville's famous enthusiasm for the liberties of township government was grounded in their capacity to serve as a countervailing influence on the conformity and enervation produced by democratic equality and administrative centralization (Connolly 1969). Late nineteenth and early twentieth century British pluralists like Ernest Barker, G.D.H. Cole, and Harold Laski were similarly interested in the value of participation in constituent associations—from churches and municipalities to commercial corporations and trades unions—for politics in modern states (Runciman 1997). In this sense, both Tocqueville and the British pluralists defended institutional pluralism for its capacity to rejuvenate democratic politics through widened participation (Runciman 1997, 166–76).

While Dahl's democratic pluralism bore a structural resemblance to earlier European pluralists' vision of

decentralized political authority, Dahl's endorsement of pluralism rested on the stability, rather than the legitimacy, of pluralist states. Dahl's revival of Tocquevillian local government, for example, emphasized not the virtues of participation but rather the role of state and municipal autonomy in diffusing the effects of majoritarianism (Dahl 1967, 171–90). In permitting significant local autonomy, Dahl argued, institutional pluralism secured democratic stability by attenuating national-level disagreement on contentious political questions. On the democratic pluralists' account, political decentralization facilitated stability by securing the structural conditions for group non-domination: under conditions in which no group was able to wholly effect its will, pluralist institutions' decentralization of power enabled the cultivation of sufficient consent to preserve systemic stability.

In proposing institutional pluralism as a response to social pluralism, consociational theorists gave a specifically identitarian formulation to democratic theories with far wider currency (Apter 1961; Lijphart 1977a). Despite the absence of cross-cutting cleavages that democratic theorists had identified as a favorable sociological condition for democratic pluralism (Lipset 1981, 32), Lijphart argued that political stability could be secured in contexts of social pluralism through explicit strategies of institutional design. Instead of relying on alternation in rule to secure non-domination, Lijphart argued that consociation secured non-domination by devolving state power and enshrining a permanent politics of identitarian consensus.

Lijphart's account of consociational power-sharing deepened the importance democratic pluralists had accorded to elite consensus (Lijphart 1977a, 165–70). The stability of pluralist democracy rested on the sociological assumptions that most citizens were (and ought to remain) relatively insulated from political life, and that political stability was readily attainable through elite bargaining and consensus formation (Dahl 1961, 89–103). In a reworking of colonial strategies of indirect rule, Lijphart argued that political leadership by and bargaining among identitarian elites was essential for democratic stability in "plural societies"; in this sense, consociation was peculiarly appropriate for the plural societies of the "Third World" in light of the persistence of traditional forms of authority in postcolonial societies (Lijphart 1977a, 164–76).

While some have argued that an analysis of racial hierarchy was a key *omission* of pluralist democratic theory (Hochschild 2015), thinkers like Dahl struggled with the aporias of institutional pluralism as a strategy for democratic stability. In his analysis of the role of chattel slavery in American political development, Dahl grappled with the tensions between his "stabilizing" account of institutional pluralism and the possibility that pluralism's consensualist bias functioned as a structural intensifier of political violence and racial hierarchy. Although *Pluralist Democracy in the United States* framed the Black Civil Rights Movement as a paradigmatic success of pluralist democracy, Dahl analyzed the US Civil War as a period of

political violence in part intensified by the institutional pluralism of antebellum politics. The U.S. Congress' repeated use of gag orders to defer the emergence of slavery as a subject of political contestation—to say nothing of the same mechanisms built into the Constitution itself—may have bought the apparent stability of antebellum consensus at the price of eventual civil war (Dahl 1967, 66–7). Institutional pluralism likewise played a central explanatory role in the collapse of radical Reconstruction: in the face of white resistance to land reform and political enfranchisement for formerly enslaved people and less than unanimous support for radical Reconstruction within the Republican Party itself, the consensualist bias of pluralist institutions facilitated the collapse of Reconstruction governments throughout the 1860s and 70s, ensuring the restoration of white supremacy (Dahl 1967, 318–24).

If Dahl remained ambivalent about democratic pluralism's relation to social transformation, pluralism's promise to attenuate majoritarianism's most transformative implications made it appear as the only "peaceful, democratic option for the South African plural society" (Lijphart 1979, 514–5). Cold War democratic theory's account of the impossibility of majoritarianism in "plural societies" at once rendered "unrealistic" the demands of the ANC for decolonization as universal suffrage, even as it enabled NP elites to deflect growing calls for majority rule by insisting on the necessity of stability in any democratizing transition (Duong 2021; Lijphart 1985, 14–5; Worral 1981).

For reform-minded conservatives, pluralist democratic theory's redefinition of democracy as participation without majority efficacy enabled their attempts to claim the mantle of democratic legitimacy (Constitutional Committee, South Africa President's Council 1982; Lijphart 1977b; Price 1991, 79–98). Although Lijphart himself decried as "unsociational and undemocratic" the NP's use of consociational theory in constitutional proposals that neither enfranchised Black South Africans nor provided effective vetoes for the "Asian" and "Coloured" parliaments (Lijphart 1985, 56–64), the National Party's Constitutional Commission explicitly framed their adoption of tricameral racial parliaments and continuation of the homelands policy as a mixed strategy of white-Black partition and democratic racial power-sharing amongst South Africa's racial minorities (Constitutional Committee, South Africa President's Council 1982, 35–46). In defending the importance of racial consensus as a prerequisite for state action, theories of democratic pluralism were indispensable for redescribing efforts to preserve white supremacy as liberal projects of racial non-domination.

While the cynicism of NP invocations of racial non-domination was widely recognized, liberal reformers nevertheless converged with conservatives in the hopes they invested in institutional pluralism (Price 1991, 133). Where NP reforms devolved administrative responsibility to racially organized local authorities, the constitutional proposals advanced by the PFP and Buthelezi Commission experimented with

interlocking forms of institutional pluralism: first, the devolution of power from national to regional governments; second, the sharing of power between racially apportioned legislatures and executives. In substituting regional autonomy for the authority of the central government, liberal reformers saw in pluralism's multiplication of sites of political participation both the opportunity to assuage white fears about the pace of transformation risked by Black majority rule and to produce a more diverse set of political elites with investments in existing forms of political representation (Buthelezi and Africa Report 1973, 30; van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh 1979, 4–6).

As even contemporary observers noted, liberal consociational proposals reprised the shortcomings of the NP's proposals. To be sure, in insisting on political representation for Black South Africans, liberal reformers did more than their conservative counterparts to align political representation with the indisputable economic integration of the homelands into the South African economy (Buthelezi Commission 1982). But while liberal advocates of consociation sought to undo apartheid's racialized "inequalities of wealth, opportunity, and status," their endorsement of pluralism as a strategy for diffusing white resistance to majority rule disempowered the central state as a remediator of racial hierarchy through programs of economic development, land reform, and redistribution (van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh 1979, 133–65). While thinkers aligned with the PFP argued that there were "no inherent reasons why federalism should be incompatible with redistributive policies," the fact that political decentralization guaranteed a "slower and more complex" political process suggested that it was more likely to secure the acquiescence of whites resistant to majority rule (van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh 1979, 143–4). Taking as given the durability of white resistance to majority rule, liberal advocates of consociation argued that neutralizing universal suffrage's most transformative potentials was a "cost worth bearing" to secure the benefits of constitutional order.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued for a reassessment of consociational democratic theory's core normative and analytic claim: that institutional pluralism offers an apt remedy to political conflicts arising from social pluralism. Drawing on a historical analysis of the role of consociation in attempts to reform South Africa's apartheid constitution, this article has shown how the characterization of apartheid crisis as a problem of social pluralism enabled political reformers across the legal South African public sphere to disavow it as a problem of racial hierarchy. At the same time, it has argued that consociational theory's endorsement of institutional pluralism as a strategy for racial accommodation undermined its capacity to enable egalitarian social transformation. Against interpretations of consociation that regard it as an extension of democratic theory to

contexts of entrenched social difference, this article has clarified how the recognition and management of social pluralism can instead reproduce a colonial politics of indirect rule.

Conceptually, this article has shown how theorists of consociational democracy in the 1970s reinvigorated a colonial account of social pluralism for the demands of contemporary politics and political science. Amidst the social and political crisis of South African apartheid, this reinvention of colonial discourses of pluralism enabled would-be political reformers to disavow the material foundations of apartheid's racial hierarchy and legitimated their efforts to employ countermajoritarian political reforms to manage what consociational theory characterized as a principally identitarian conflict. Democratic theorists' revaluation of democracy as a right to participation rather than majoritarian efficacy gave a democratizing cast to the efforts of the NP to expand racial representation while preserving white domination. Likewise, liberal reformers' commitment to the pursuit only of feasible political reforms led them to sacrifice the institutional conditions for egalitarian social transformation in order to make universal suffrage acceptable to white South Africans invested in the continuation of racial domination.

In returning to pluralism's colonial circulations, this article has argued for the value of a genealogical approach to the categories of democratic theory and political science, and more specifically, the utility of a method of what might be called "genealogy without inheritance" (Allen 2010; Koopman 2009). Rather than demanding that a concept like pluralism exhibit essential coherence across time and historical context, this article has produced a case and assemblage of thinkers who repeatedly invoked the language of pluralism to address similar problems across diverse conjunctures. While some thinkers central to this account are connected by clear lines of influence and citation, many more drew upon the language of pluralism with partial knowledge of its multiple contexts and meanings. Such a genealogy does not claim to—and cannot—exhaust pluralism's political significance, which necessarily remains open to creative reappropriation (Mantena 2012; Parasher 2022). Rather, it produces a diagnosis of the recurrent dilemmas of political order that political thinkers have hoped recourse to pluralism might solve.

This article has recovered moreover the centrality of projects of political reform in apartheid South Africa for the consolidation of consociation and its attendant understandings of pluralism as a paradigm in contemporary political science. While the specific terminology of consociation and the plural society has been replaced in contemporary political analysis by more sophisticated and standardized measures such as ethnolinguistic fractionalization (Alesina et al. 2003; Rabushka and Shepsle 1972; van den Berghe 1987), this article suggests that such measures at best reinscribe the assumptions of previous models of social pluralism in a new generation of political science scholarship. In abstracting away from particular histories of racial and ethnic

formation, social scientists do not evade the difficulties inherent in the value-laden task of social description, but rather risk advancing analyses that occlude the sources of identitarian hierarchy.

To the extent that recovering political science's historical entanglements can play a role in the larger enterprise of decolonizing the discipline, this article shows that such an enterprise requires not only recognizing the postcolonial contexts of its formation, but more importantly developing analytic alternatives to the residual paradigms of colonial social theory. One promising avenue for doing so involves reintegrating theories of democratic institutional design with the very accounts of capitalist racial formation first developed in contestation of the social theory of the plural society (Lorenzini 2020). Returning to and generalizing the efforts of theorists of racial capitalism like Harold Wolpe and Neville Alexander to understand the contextually specific dialectic between material dispossession and identitarian formation offers a more promising conceptual avenue for thinking pluralism than accounts that seek to bracket social theoretically demanding accounts of racial, ethnic, or linguistic difference (Burden-Stelly 2020; Ince 2022; Jenkins and Leroy 2021).

Finally, situating recent efforts to revive consociational politics in Israel-Palestine within pluralism's colonial genealogies enables a more critical assessment of their contemporary appeal (Salloukh 2020). Analyzing the function of pluralist discourse during the crisis of South African apartheid—as a means of redescribing problems of racial hierarchy as those of identitarian difference—should prompt scholars and political actors alike to question the extent to which contemporary revivals of consociation produce similar disavowals of racial hierarchy and constraints on social transformation (Chacar 2019; Efron and Gottesman 2021). Returning to the analyses of racial and ethnic formation that theories of the plural society sought to displace can lay the groundwork for projects of institutional design that address rather than disavow the sources of racial hierarchy (Greenstein 2015; Kohlbray 2016). In this way, engagement with pluralism's colonial genealogies can point the way toward a practice of democratic theorizing in service of egalitarian transformation rather than neo-colonial order.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <http://doi.org/10.1017/S000305542400090X>.

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The author declares no ethical issues of conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human participants.

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