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## SOCIAL ANOMIE AND RACIAL SEGREGATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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**ABSTRACT.** The concept of anomie is one of the classics of sociological theory. Developed by scholars such as Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton, the concept refers to the absence of clear social norms and values and to a lack of sense of social regulation. However, whereas Merton focused on features of relative deprivation that cause anomie, Durkheim was primarily interested in the link between rapid social change and social anomie. According to the latter, normative regulation is threatened with being undermined and people are likely to lack the social and psychological means for adjustment in times of rapid social change. Drawing on survey data from the South African General Household Survey polled in 2002, the article examines the ethnical differences in levels of social anomie in the South African society. In order to do so, we, first, place the South African levels of anomie into comparative context. In a second step, we look at the race specific levels of anomie. Third, we investigate whether the differences in anomie between the races are related to the still existing socio-economic inequalities or whether race can be regarded as an independent factor that impacts on anomie. Finally we scrutinize to what extent socio-economic factors account for different levels of anomie within the races.

**KEY WORDS:** anomie; South Africa, racial segregation; transformation, Quality of life

### INTRODUCTION

Social anomie is a concept developed for understanding the repercussions of rapid social change on social integration and social stability. When institutional and social structures undergo significant changes, as in times of social transformation or accelerated societal modernization, established patterns of social organization are likely to lose their integrating qualities. On the most general level, anomie is associated with “great difficulties of individual adaptation, resulting in a loss of general social orientation, the development of feelings of insecurity and marginalization, uncontrolled rising expectations,

feelings of relative deprivation and the questioning of the legitimacy of core social values” (Orrù, 1987: 215).

The article aims to investigate the extent and structure of social anomie in South Africa. Since South Africa is still an ethnically segregated country we are interested in racial differences in social anomie and whether the socio-economic inequalities between the races help to explain these differences. The first section of the article will provide a brief overview of different concepts of anomie, especially the frameworks of Durkheim and Merton. This section will also look at current anomie research, in particular its application to societal transformation. The main part of the article investigates the incidence and structure of social anomie in South Africa. Drawing on survey data from the South African General Household Survey polled in 2002, the paper examines whether South Africa is confronted with a high level of anomie. We will place the results into context by presenting data for eight other countries that have participated in the EUROMODULE project. Thereafter, we will determine the racial differences in anomie in South Africa and scrutinize the role of socio-economic and socio-demographic factors in explaining these differences. We will look closely at gender, age, education, employment status and the individual household’s financial situation. Finally, we investigate to what extent differences in the level of anomie within the races can be explained by socio-economic factors.

#### SOCIAL ANOMIE FROM A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The concept of social anomie is one of the classic frameworks of sociological research. Defined and popularized by the founding father of modern sociology, Emile Durkheim, the term is commonly used to describe a state of lack of norms and social regulation in a society. This means that rules on how people ought to behave are breaking down and thus people do not know what to expect from one another. Anomie, simply defined, is a state in which norms are confused, unclear or not present. Durkheim’s understanding of social anomie is closely associated with his ideas on the emergence and reproduction of social solidarity in highly differentiated societies

which have been spelled out in his book *The Division of Labor in Society* (1997 [1893]).<sup>1</sup> Anomic forms are situations in which integrative mode of organic solidarity is disrupted, for example if social inequalities grow too large, social injustices and a lack of opportunity are apparent or if a growing polarization of social groups makes moral integration difficult.

Robert K. Merton also made an outstanding and influential contribution to the concept of anomie. His first significant publication was the article "Social Structure and Anomie" (1938; for later revisions see Merton, 1949, 1957). He was deeply influenced by Durkheim's writings, but he intended to proceed further by spelling out what produces anomie in more detail (Hunt, 1961: 58). Therefore, he distinguishes two important elements of the social and cultural structure. The first are culturally assigned goals and aspirations, in other words things that individuals should want and expect from life. The second aspect defines certain modes as socially acceptable for achieving these goals, such as obeying the law and societal norms. In order for a society to be socially integrative there must be a balance between aspirations and means to fulfill such aspirations (Merton, 1938: 673–674). According to Merton, a balance occurs as long as the individual feels that he or she is achieving the culturally desired goal by conforming to the "institutionally accepted mode of doing so" (Merton, 1938: 674). Though Merton based his concept for the most part on Durkheim's idea of anomie as a normless state of society, he was primarily interested in the disjunction between culturally devised goals and accepted means of achieving these ends. Quite contrary to Durkheim's understanding of anomie, it is not a general absence of norms, but the inability of groups to attain socially valued goals that causes anomie in Merton's theory.<sup>2</sup> This, in fact, makes his concept applicable to a more thorough analysis of syndromes of anomie in relatively stable societies that lack opportunities for deprived and socially marginalized groups.<sup>3</sup>

By and large, empirical research on anomie has focused on individual dispositions and attitudes rather than on society at large. The basic presumption is that the percentage of anomic individuals gives an indication of the degree of anomie in society. In other words, the more individuals share traits of anomic dispositions, the higher the degree of anomie in a society is. The focus on individuals, however, explains why the concept has also gained promi-

nence in the research disciplines of criminology and psychology. These disciplines have been quite inventive in the measurement of anomie, and were the first to develop anomie scales. Commonly, the concept of anomie has been interpreted as a form of alienation or isolation as exemplified in Srole's (1956) study on social integration. Srole views anomie as being dependent on sociological and psychological factors interacting with each other. The major contributions of Seeman (1959) and Dean (1961) also emphasize social isolation, normlessness, self-estrangement and powerlessness as key features of the anomie concept. In some studies cultural estrangement, measured as the individual's acceptance of popular culture, has also become part of the anomie concept (e.g. Middleton, 1963; Seeman, 1959). Middleton (1963) found that social conditions of deprivation are related to anomie and alienation. In his study on the US, several socio-economic factors such as occupation, income and gender turn out to be significant, but most salient are the factors race and education. Other important, near-classic studies in the US context have focused on the relationship between anomie, race and spatial marginalization (Bullough, 1967; Kapsis, 1978; Wilson, 1971).

In a large part of the scholarly literature, social scientists have taken up the issue of how political, social, and economic modernization processes may jeopardize the social order and the integrative capacity of societies. In this context it has been pointed out that it is not social change per se that destabilizes societies, but rather the social inability of individuals to keep pace with social change. Social change is manageable for affected populations "as long as patterns of interpretation of the change are available which enable the altered reality to be understood again and again in meaningful ways" (Atteslander, 1999: 9). However, if there are no behavioral and cognitive means available to facilitate the ability of individuals to cope with social change, it is likely that social anomie will become widespread.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, the anomie framework has been applied to the transformation of post-totalitarian societies in Central and Eastern Europe, demonstrating that these countries are indeed confronted with anomic tendencies (e.g. Genov, 2000; Glatzer and Bös, 1997; for China see Li et al., 1999; Vladimirov et al., 1999). After the breakdown of the old political systems, these societies were faced

not just with political change, but also with fundamental transformations of the socio-economic system. These changes were not limited to the institutional level of society, but affected the very tangible life circumstances of the citizens (Srubar, 1994). One specific trait of the Eastern European transformation was the sudden and unexpected breakdown of the old system, in most cases initiated by relatively small groups of dissidents and opponents rather than the broad citizenry. The vast majority of people did not play an active part in dismantling the old system and, hence, were overwhelmed when the changes gained momentum. Having been socialized within the socialist system, they were indeed “trapped in changes, for which they were not prepared” (Vladimiriv et al., 1999: 47) and are therefore prone to develop anomic tendencies. However, it has been shown that the impact of rapid social change is neither uniform nor thoroughly mobilizing, but rather multi-faceted and multi-leveled. Anomic processes on the macro level may affect people’s economic fortunes, for example, but there are also “hidden” structures of stability (Vladimiriv et al., 1999). Far-reaching changes in society are often countervailed by a relative stability in individuals’ micro-environments, which provides significant means for adaptation.<sup>5</sup>

Oegerli and Suter (2001, unpublished) have made an intriguing contribution to the understanding of social anomie, examining the effects of relative deprivation on feelings of anomie. They argue that, from a comparative perspective, there are differences in anomie between Western and Eastern European countries. One of their findings is that, in line with Durkheim’s framework, the level of anomie is higher in those countries that underwent fundamental changes of the political and economic system. On the other hand, they also demonstrate that Merton’s concept – namely that societal disadvantages and deprivation that hinder people in reaching socially accepted goals cause anomie – is more applicable in wealthier countries. The explanatory power of relative deprivation is stronger in the Western societies than in the countries in transformation, where there is a higher overall level of anomie. They conclude that the Merton model is more suitable for the West while the Durkheim model fits the East. Arts et al. (1995) also work on the basis of the assumption that the social transformation in Eastern Europe can be characterized as an ideal-typical situation for Durkheim’s theory,

and they expect a huge gap between “what is” and “what ought to be justice” in particular. They show that respondents from the East have more doubts about what is just and what is unjust. In addition, people from the East are more dissatisfied with their income and living standard and have a stronger feeling of not getting what they need.

### ANOMIE AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

We shall start our investigation of the incidence and structure of social anomie in South Africa before this background of anomie research. Our point of departure is that since South Africa underwent far-reaching social changes in the last decade the country will be seriously affected by anomie. However, we also expect that, given the existing forms of inequality and racial segregation, the different groups within society will exhibit different levels of anomie. To promote a better understanding of South African society and its transformation in progress, it is worth taking a brief look at the main lines of social development. The transformation process in South Africa pursued two fundamental objectives: the implementation of modern and democratic institutions and the improvement of living conditions. Both aspects found their way into the new constitution of South Africa and ANC policies. Ten years after the first free elections, South Africa is generally seen as a young but stable democracy. The negotiated settlement gave political power to the formerly suppressed sections of society. Mandela, the great mediator, made a wonderful contribution when he became the first president of *all* South Africans. No further politically motivated violence has occurred since then.

As confirmed by research, the year 1994 stands for widespread happiness amongst the people of South Africa. Their joy about the newly gained freedom created an extraordinary feeling of hope. In these times, the great majority of all South Africans supported the transition. Race did not matter when the people were asked whether they were satisfied with their life or not, regardless of their personal material life circumstances. Hope was the main determinant. Valerie Møller named this phenomenon “post-election euphoria” (see

Møller, 1994). Aspects of national pride, happiness and also raised expectations are relevant in this regard (see Møller et al., 1999; Møller and Dickow, 2001). Furthermore, Møller et al. found that national pride might be one important source of national unity, while at the same time enhancing well-being during the difficult years of transition.

However, though ambitious plans have been made to provide all people with a “better life”, this has only partly been achieved and there are still significant racial divisions in the quality of life. For the black majority, a “better life” means clean water and electricity, but also jobs, health opportunities, and education. There has been some progress in implementing programs to meet these basic needs of those affected by poverty. Within five years, health clinics have been built, as well as water and electricity connections. Free health care for mothers and children, and school meals assist the ultra poor (see Devey and Møller, 2002). On the other hand, the macro-economic strategy has failed to create the promised jobs and therewith the overall economic growth and improvements people hoped for.<sup>6</sup> Despite political equality, there are great social inequalities within the country: South Africa’s Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, is one of the highest worldwide (May 1998: 23). In 2002 still about 65% of total personal income tax and 45% of total value added tax originated from ethnically as White classified households which only make up a share of about 13% of the country’s population (SADH, 2003). Blacks have the highest unemployment rate of the economically active population: In 1999 the official unemployment rate was around 29%, the expanded unemployment rate (those who had not worked in the seven days prior to the interview but wanted to work) amounted to 44 per cent. The respective figures for colored South Africans are 15.3 (23.6) and for those of Indian origin 15.6 (20.3). Whites have the lowest figures, at 4.7% official unemployment and 6.8% expanded unemployment. Low-paid and low-qualified informal sector work, mainly domestic work, is also very widespread amongst Blacks (Statistics South Africa, 2001). The differences between rich and poor in South Africa are huge and are unmistakably connected to race, since the black majority still lives under third-world conditions.

With the end of the apartheid system it was not only the political and civic goals that became the benchmark of individuals’

evaluation of the new system; people also adopted urgent expectations in terms of improved socio-economic standards of living. A case study has shown that, despite the high acceptance of the newly declared societal and social objectives, there was an increasing disillusionment due to the lack of expected improvements in the material conditions of life (Holley et al., 1999). The enthusiasm of people at the grassroots level – still confronted with severe problems of health, housing, nutrition, and economic security – has significantly declined. Moreover, the macro-economic strategy adopted has also conveyed new social risks. There are currently growing status differences within the black population, partly due to unequal material empowerment, but also in terms of unequal access to political and administrative power. While most of those previously disadvantaged have remained so and share many underclass traits, a new black bourgeoisie has emerged (Adam et al., 1997). On the other hand, it seems that the Whites, who make up about 12% of the country's population, are as economically well off as ever, on average. It has been found that, in regard to the overall degree of happiness in South Africa, Whites are the happiest, followed by Coloreds and Indians, whereas Blacks report the lowest levels of happiness (Harris, 1997). However, results from the Quality of Life Trend project conducted by Valerie Møller and Dickow Helga (2001) illustrate that the still materially privileged Whites currently have a relatively pessimistic view of the future, while the other three ethnic groups are more optimistic in relative terms. It might be the case that Whites are more anxious because they have something to lose. However, neither do nearly 50% of non-white people have a positive view of the future, and appear to be disillusioned by the declarations of a better life for all. An interesting feature when looking at satisfaction levels and aspirations among the ethnic groups is that the ranking has been reversed (1999 levels): The most satisfied (Whites) are the most pessimistic – the more optimistic (Blacks) show the lowest satisfaction with life.

From a Durkheimian point of view, it can be assumed that the South African transition produces high levels of anomie.<sup>7</sup> However, in this article we cannot prove this hypothesis since there is no time series data available to compare the anomie levels before and after the change. We are only able to give some empirical hints that may substantiate this assumption. Using Merton's point of departure



and against the background of a highly segregated society, one can also expect differences in the level of anomie between societal sub-groups. In other words, though the overall anomie level in South Africa might be comparatively high, not all the social groups may have similar difficulties in adapting and stabilizing socio-psychologically. Taking Merton's lead, one can hypothesize that a persistent deprivation of society's sub-groups in terms of socio-economic potential causes anomie. Since racial differences represent one of the most striking features of social inequality in South Africa, we hypothesize a strong link between anomie and race. However, given the history of South Africa it can also be assumed that socio-economic inequalities may not fully account for racial differences in anomie. For example, Hirschowitz and Orkin (1997) found that symptoms of anxiety and feelings of powerlessness and depression are related to the exposure to violent events and that Blacks experienced traumatic events and post-traumatic stress disorder to a much greater extent than the other societal groups. In our analyses we focus on the question whether different anomie levels between the races can be explained as results of the socio-economic inequality and whether race has an independent impact on the level of anomie.

Following the discussion, our empirical analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we will present a comparative view of anomie, placing South Africa into an international context. Second, we will examine the race-specific features of anomie within South Africa. For this we test whether race is truly the factor determining different levels of anomie, or whether socio-economic factors linked with race cause differences in anomie. A last step will be a test of how intra-racial differences in anomie levels are explainable on the basis of the socio-economic situation. Using these race-specific analyses, we will learn more about the importance of material well-being as a condition of societal integration for sub-groups of society.

## DATA AND MEASUREMENT

To test out our hypotheses, we used data from Statistics South Africa's General Household Survey (GHS), a representative survey

polled using the face-to-face interviewing method in 2002. The data represent the South African government's attempt to evaluate the state of transformation in the new millennium. The GHS data became available to the authors as together with Valerie Møller and Joachim Vogel, Denis Huschka was invited to participate in the development of the questionnaire. The GHS includes indicators which measure aspects of quality of life. These measures aim explicitly at analyzing the living conditions and the way they are perceived and evaluated by individuals. The choice of indicators was inspired by the Euromodule questionnaire, a standardized survey module for comparative welfare research (see Delhey et al., 2002). After the fieldwork was finished, the respective GHS indicators were integrated into the Euromodule data<sup>8</sup> which now comprises nine countries. Our study makes use of five items based on Middelton's early operationalization of the concept of anomie. These items measure the feelings of powerlessness ("I cannot do much to change most of the difficulties we face today"), estrangement from work ("I do not really enjoy my work")<sup>9</sup>, social isolation/estrangement ("I often feel lonely"), disorientation/normlessness ("Life has become so complicated that I almost cannot find my way") and normlessness ("In order to get ahead nowadays you are forced to do things that are not correct"). All item responses in the South African sample range on an ordinal scale from "strongly disagree" to "completely agree". There is one slight inconsistency: The original Euromodule's disagreement option used for the other participating countries reads "not agree at all with the statement", but we believe that these response options are equivalent.

In our analysis we take powerlessness, meaninglessness, disorientation, normlessness, and both estrangement from work and social estrangement as dimensions of anomie. To test whether an cumulative measure consisting of all five dimensions can be created, we ran a factor analysis. The results allow us to generate an easy-to-use additive anomie index (AAI) ranging from 0 (total disagreement in all five dimensions) to 15 (total agreement in all five dimensions). The AAI is calculated as the sum of the respective means of the anomie dimensions  $-5$  (to adjust the range to the starting point 0). The higher the score of the AAI is, the more agreement with statements that indicate anomic attitudes amongst the people exists. For descriptive analyses, the sample was weighted.

## DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT

In the first part we will present an overview of anomie in selected countries. Using the Euromodule, the selection of countries includes stable “old” democracies (such as Switzerland and Austria), as well as “newer” democratic systems (Spain) and several societies which have recently undergone processes of far-reaching social change (South Africa, Hungary, Turkey, South Korea and Slovenia). A special case is Germany. West Germany can be seen as an “older” and “stable” democracy, whereas East Germany has undergone a fundamental transition. With the political transformation of 1989, East German people overcame the lack of freedom, the lack of democratic rights and are now much better off compared to pre-unification times. But they are faced with serious problems of unemployment and insufficient economic development. West Germany’s positive economic performance has been slowed down by the heavy and burdensome economic transfers from West to East. Research has shown that East Germans report significantly higher levels of anomie than West Germans as a result of social change and unequal outcomes (see Bulmahn, 2002). For this reason, the two parts of the country are presented separately (see Table I).

The picture of anomie across the Euromodule countries is clear. Stable and older democracies such as Switzerland and Austria show low levels of anomie, whereas Turkey and South Africa exhibit the highest levels of anomie. South Korea, East Germany, Hungary, Slovenia but also Spain have relatively high anomie levels. In short, societies that have undergone fundamental social change score higher than old and settled societies. The ranking of the anomie dimensions is relatively stable across countries. In all countries, people mainly suffer from feelings of powerlessness, whereas “not enjoying work” is generally seen as a relatively minor problem. Agreement with tolerating incorrect actions is relatively high in South Africa compared to the other countries, but even higher in Hungary, Slovenia, East Germany and Turkey.

The box plot presentation (Figure 1) provides a closer view of the 25%, 50% and 75% percentiles and the range of the AAI. South Africa is marked as a country where some people report no anomie at all, while there are also people who clearly agree with all five state-

TABLE I

Anomie in cross-national comparison

Anomic Reactions: Mean (1 Do not Agree at all ... 4 Completely Agree)											
	Slovenia	Hungary	Spain	Switzerland	Austria	Turkey	South Korea	Germany	West Germany	East Germany	South Africa
Cannot influence	3.2	2.0	3.0	2.5	2.6	3.1	2.4	2.9	2.9	3.1	2.9
Feel lonely	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.4	1.5	2.5	2.5	1.6	1.6	1.6	2.6
Do not enjoy work	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.3	1.4	2.6	2.4	1.7	1.7	1.7	2.5
Life so complicated	2.0	2.1	1.8	1.5	1.5	2.7	2.4	1.7	1.7	1.8	2.8
Do things not correct	2.5	3.2	1.8	1.7	1.8	2.3	2.1	2.0	1.9	2.4	2.1
Additive Anomie Index (AAI) (range: 0-15)	6.4	5.8	5.2	3.4	3.8	8.2	6.8	4.9	4.8	5.6	7.9
N in the sample	1012	1510	2489	1570	502	4020	1134	2493	2006	487	25048
Year	1999	1999	2000	2000	2002	2001/2	2001/2	1999	1999	1999	2002

Data: Euromodule 2002.

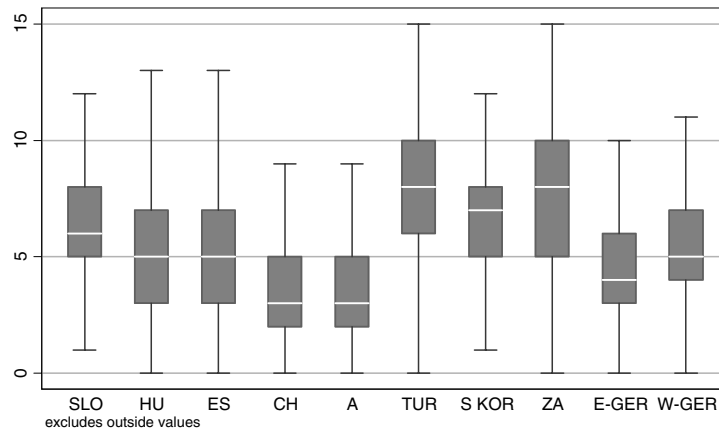


Figure 1. Distribution of anomie in cross-national perspective.

ments. The South African range of the combined second and third quartile (shown as box) is the largest in the Euromodule, followed by Turkey, Hungary, Spain and Germany.<sup>10</sup> Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia and South Korea have smaller middle quartiles.

The graph not only demonstrates that South Africa (together with Turkey) has the highest average anomie level, but also that these feelings are highly differentiated within South African society, as indicated by the large range. Only 25% of the South African population report anomie levels lower than 5 AAI points. In comparison, 75% of the population of Switzerland and Austria have an anomie level below 5 points. The median (the horizontal line in the box) and the upper boundary of the box indicate that 50% of South Africans have an AAI between 0 and 8 points and 75% between 0 and 10 AAI points. 25% of the population exhibit anomie levels higher than 10 points. The sharp variation within South African society prompts us to ask whether different racial groups express different levels of anomie. Table II shows that Blacks are clearly the societal sub-group that reports the highest levels of anomie. Whites exhibit a significantly lower level of anomie than the other groups of the South African society. Their additive level is not higher than the levels found in Spain and East Germany. Coloreds and Indians are in a middle position between black and white South Africans. This race-specific differentiation within the country can also be found with regard to other quality of life

TABLE II  
Anomie by race in South Africa

	Measures of Anomie: Mean (1 Do not Agree at all ... 4 Completely Agree)				
	African/Black	Colored	Indian/Asian	White	South Africa
Cannot influence	2.90	2.90	3.00	2.60	2.90
Feel lonely	2.70	2.40	2.30	1.90	2.60
Do not enjoy work	2.60	2.20	2.30	2.00	2.50
Life so complicated	3.00	2.80	2.80	2.20	2.80
Do things not correct	2.10	2.00	2.20	1.70	2.10
Additive Anomie Index AAI (range: 0–15)	8.30	7.30	7.60	5.40	7.90
N	18490	2595	604	2898	24587

Data: Euromodule 2002.

indicators such as happiness and the satisfaction with the economic situation of the household (Harris, 1997). Given the great racial inequalities, we can assume that the differences in anomie are associated with the unequal socio-economic conditions of the different races, and therefore indicate a type of social anomie specific to Merton.

Looking at the components of anomie, the levels for Whites are lowest in all five dimensions. With the exception of support for incorrect behavior, where Indian/Asians score higher, Blacks score highest in all individual indicators. Generally, it is remarkable that the acceptance of incorrect actions is relatively low in all ethnic groups compared to the other dimensions of anomie. Especially for the disadvantaged, approval of incorrect measures as a way to handle daily life with all its difficulties was expected to be higher. Amongst Blacks, complaints of life being too complicated have the highest score of all anomie questions. This might indicate that Blacks still have to learn to handle the new political, administrative, social, and judicial systems. Møller and Hanf (1995), who surveyed voters during the first democratic elections in 1994, found that there was a significant number of Blacks who articulated the wish to learn more about voting since they were “not familiar with basic democratic principles...” (p. 55). Whites might not have these problems of understanding democracy, also because of their higher educational level. It is a reasonable assumption that low educational levels, one of the worst heritages of apartheid, hinder a quick and successful integration of the black population into the new institutional framework as active citizens. There is another interesting detail when comparing the respective highest-scoring item of the ethnical groups. Whites as well as Coloreds and Asians/Indians show their greatest concerns about “powerlessness”, whereas Blacks mainly complain about a “complicated life” in most cases. The current political dominance of the ANC, which represents the interests of the Blacks above all, might be one of underlying reasons. Coloreds and Indians/Asians or Whites may not see themselves as fully represented by the presently ruling political coalition, even if there is no obvious discrimination or other objective reasons for this phenomenon. Norris and Mattes (2003), using the Afrobarometer, supplied empirical evidence for the fact that ethnicity is a strong determinant of support for the governing party in South Africa.

## THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF ANOMIE

The analysis of race-specific anomie has shed light on the fact that feelings of social disintegration do indeed have an ethnic bias. Anomie is a phenomenon of all races, but the levels differ significantly. It is reasonable to assume that this is one of the persistent legacies of apartheid. However, taking a sociological vantage point, we are also interested in the question as to whether the differences in anomie between the races can be explained in socio-economic or structural terms, or whether cultural factors also impact on the level of anomie. Figure 2 provides a stylized model of the possible relations between race, social inequality and anomie. According to the upper part of the graph, race-specific anomie is largely determined by socio-economic factors, e.g. employment status, income, and education. Since a literature review has suggested that these factors matter, we would also expect to find racial differences in anomie closely related to societal inequalities. However, not all anomie might be caused by socio-economic disadvantages. Given the divisions of the past and the very different experiences the different ethnic groups have had, socio-cultural factors might also affect the

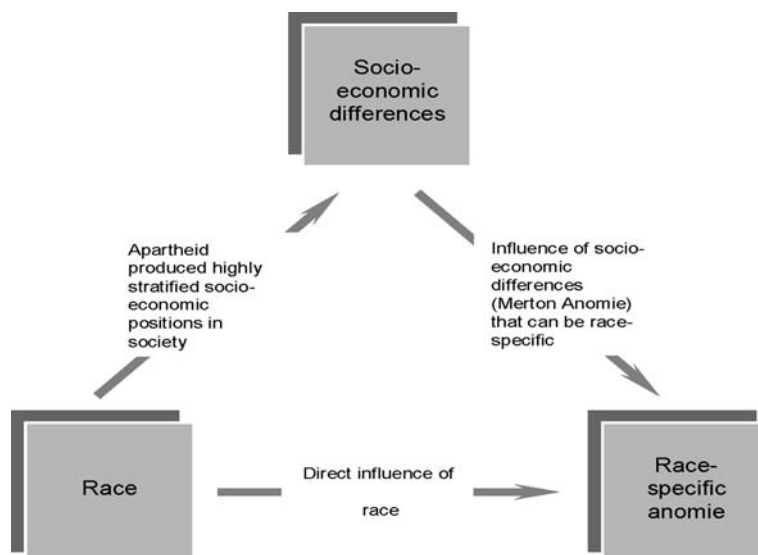


Figure 2. Model of race and socio-economic position as determinants of anomie.



levels of anomie. They may be independent of the social position of the groups when measured today. Thus, the model also indicates possible direct links between race and anomie levels that refer to more general socio-cultural syndromes closely related to the legacy of the past and the very specific group experiences during the process of transformation.

In our analyses we measure socio-economic inequalities as differences in education, employment status and the household's financial situation.<sup>11</sup> Lack of education amongst the Non-Whites is taken as an important factor for the barriers they face on the job market. The currently practiced affirmative action can only be successful if abilities and skills of different societal sub-groups are adequate. Since education is one of the fundamental means to reach socially accepted goals, one can hypothesize that the very unequal educational levels of the racial group impact on social anomie. The employment status<sup>12</sup> can also be taken as one possible determinant of anomie. Employment status is of importance because of the positive effects of social integration at the work place, but also because having a job provides income. The social security system in South Africa is not designed to meet people's needs and provide them with benefits that allow a comfortable life. We also included the household's financial situation in the analysis, as it is a good representative of the socio-economic status of the respondent. Our hypothesis is that the more money people spend on consumer goods, the lower the level of anomie, because richer people have better means and resources to cope with the demands of social change. From our short review of the process of transformation in South Africa, we know that these socio-economic factors are very much race-related. To find out whether anomie is determined by the socio-economic factors mentioned, we used multivariate regression analyses. Since we are also interested in the role of these factors compared to other more cultural or socio-political race-related factors, we ran a number of regressions that allowed us to test the relative weight of these aspects. We also controlled for age and gender as important socio-demographic factors.

In our first model (Table III) we test whether differences of the AAI are determined by race additionally controlled for age and gender, with Blacks as the reference group. The coefficients suggests that in relation to black South Africans the AAI for Coloreds is 0.85

TABLE III  
Determinants of anomie in South Africa

Dependent variable: AAI	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coef.	t-value	Coef.	t-value	Coef.	t-value
Sex (Ref: Men)						
Woman	0.1599***	(3.5)	0.0845*	(1.82)	0.0736	(1.59)
Age	0.0032*	(2.16)	-0.0050**	(-2.94)	-0.0003	(-0.19)
Race (Ref.: Blacks)						
Coloreds	-0.8456***	(-11.47)			-0.6318***	(-8.63)
Indian/Asian	-0.6515***	(-4.46)			0.2110	(1.42)
White	-2.7642***	(-37.97)			-1.3720***	(-15.33)
Education						
(Ref: Secondary)						
Primary			0.5092***	(9.81)	0.3452***	(6.51)
Post secondary/ non tertiary.			-0.6563***	(-6.78)	-0.6287***	(-6.53)
Tertiary			-1.2593***	(-9.92)	-1.1353***	(-8.96)

TABLE III  
Continued

Dependent variable: AAI	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coef.	t-value	Coef.	t-value	Coef.	t-value
Employment status (Ref: Employed)						
Unemployed			0.5581***	(9.45)	0.5065***	(8.61)
Not econ. active			0.0058	(0.1)	0.0428	(0.76)
Expenditure						
ZAR (household)			-0.0003***	(-26.3)	-0.0002***	(-16.69)
Constant	8.0563					8.1870
R-squared:	0.0604					0.0907
Adj. R-squared:	0.0602					0.0903
Number of cases:	23774					23774

Significance levels: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .  
Data: Euromodule 2002.

points lower, for Indians/Asians 0.65 points lower and for white South Africans even 2.76 points lower than the Black level. Women show higher anomic tendencies than men, whereas the level falls as individuals get older. Looking at the R-squared value, race explains about 6% of the AAI's variance. Our second model tests for the effect of socio-structural determinants without including race. We also test for gender and age. Not being economically active has no influence on anomie levels, but being unemployed raises the AAI by 0.56 points. Education, however, has a clear influence. The higher the level of education, the less likely one is to report strong anomic feelings. The financial situation also makes a difference. The anomie level falls 0.3 points per extra 1000 Rand spent. However, one should also be aware that, given the fact that average incomes are low, a 1000 Rand difference is a great improvement. The model explains about 8% of the AAI variance, compared to 6% in Model 1. Additionally integrating race into the model increases the explanatory power, but only slightly. This suggests the effect of race on social anomie as displayed in Model 1 reflects the race-based socio-economic inequalities in South Africa to a large extent.

Most of the indicators in Model 3 produce highly significant coefficients which confirm the findings in Model 2: The higher the level of education, the less anomie a person reports. The less money a household spends, the more anomic feelings there are. Having a job decreases the anomie level as well. On the other hand, age and gender no longer matter, neither does being not economically active. However, with the exception of Indians and Asians, the coefficients of race are significant even after having controlled for socio-economic effects. Hence, not all the differences in anomie between the races can be explained by the socio-economic variables in our model. Overall, the results suggest a two-fold explanation: There are differences in anomie levels between the races. These differences are largely determined by the socio-economic factors which race represents. However, there is a remnant of other determinants of anomie that goes along with race, but which is not related to the socio-structural factors taken into account. Furthermore, there is evidence that the race variable does not capture all the explanatory power of the tested socio-economic variables, because their influence exceeds that of race. This might be an indication that race is not the only structuring criteria, and that

“classical” factors of inequality also have a race-independent status for structuring the mental state of the population. However, there is also a share of anomie that cannot be explained by the indicators used. Looking at the R-squares, our analysis suggests that about 90% of the variance of anomie is not determined by the independent variables. This result recalls Durkheim's explanation of anomie as “general” absence of norms in a society. In conclusion, it can be suggested that anomie in South Africa is a phenomenon which is both influenced by race and socio-economic stratification, but also a syndrome of common disorientation. Only the share of anomie which is related to socio-economic characteristics fits into Merton's explanation of anomie.

#### INTRA-RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN ANOMIE

The analysis above has given us an idea of how important socio-economic factors such as material wealth, education, and employment are for the different levels of social anomie in South African society. We know that the higher the household's spending level and education, the lower the level of anomie is. We also know that integration into the labor market produces lower levels of anomie in comparison to the group of unemployed. The above paragraph examined the role of these factors in relation to the racial division in the country. Though we found out that there are straightforward relationships between the socio-structural and racial factors on the one hand, and the level of anomie on the other hand, we do not yet know whether the socio-economic determinants operate similarly for all races. Therefore, we ask in this paragraph whether there are significant intra-racial differences in anomie and whether these differences can be explained by socio-economic inequalities within the racial groups.

Our first question is whether the racial groups tend to cluster around a certain anomie score or whether there are marked inner-group differences. The box plot presentation (Figure 3) demonstrates that there is a good deal of inner-race variation in anomie. There are people of all races who report no anomic feelings at all (AAI=0), whereas some declare that they fully agree with each of the anomic items (AAI=15). The combined second and third quartiles of the

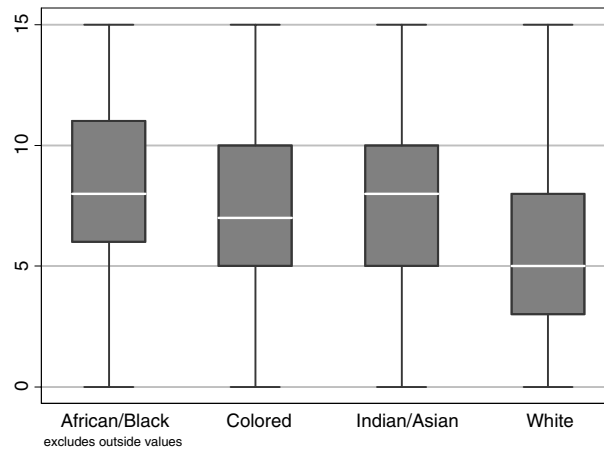


Figure 3. Distribution of anomie within racial groups in South Africa.

ances range around 5 points. However, the medians (the horizontal lines in the boxes, which divide each sample into half) and the placement of the boxes on the vertical line vary between the races. The second and third quartile for the black population is placed highest, followed by the Coloreds and Indians/Asians (albeit with a higher median for the latter), and they are placed lowest for the Whites. The middle 50% of the Whites have an AAI between 3 and 8 points, whereas the middle quartiles of the Blacks range between 6 and 11 points on our scale.

Since it is a political goal to provide the people with a better life and thereby to promote social integration, unity and well-being, one would like to know whether social and economic conditions account for the level of anomie within racial groups. For this reason, we carried out race-specific regression analyses with socio-economic characteristics of the respondents as independent and the AAI as dependent variable (Table IV). We first look at the R-squared values which indicate the explained variance of the models. The tested socio-structural variables explain the intra-racial differences in anomie only by 2% for Blacks, about 7% for Coloreds and Whites and 12% for the Indian/Asians.

The results for Blacks are not easy to interpret. Even though the coefficients and *t*-values for education, unemployment and the financial situation of the households indicate a highly significant influence on anomie levels, the explained variance is smaller than for

TABLE IV  
Determinants of Anomie in South Africa by Race

Dependent Variable: AAI	Black		Colored		Indian/Asian		White	
	Coefficient	t-value	Coeff.	t-value	Coef.	t-value	Coef.	t-value
Sex (Ref: Men)								
Woman	0.0875	(1.64)	0.0792	(0.53)	0.0667	(0.24)	-0.0234	(-0.17)
Age	-0.0009	(-0.46)	0.0042	(0.75)	0.0138	(1.27)	0.0020	(0.44)
Education (Ref: Secondary)								
Primary	0.2959***	(4.95)	0.6139***	(3.96)	-0.6968	(-1.73)	0.9702	(1.54)
Post	-0.6266***	(-5.01)	-0.4839	(-1.44)	-0.5728	(-1.16)	-0.6265***	(-3.48)
second./non tertiary								
Tertiary	-0.9446***	(-4.72)	-2.5298***	(-4.71)	-0.7870	(-1.61)	-1.1966***	(-6.6)
Employment status (Ref: Empl.)								
Unemployed	0.4606***	(7.13)	0.5083*	(2.54)	0.5863	(1.37)	1.1557***	(3.76)
Not econ. active	0.0014	(0.02)	0.1650	(0.96)	0.3324	(1.05)	0.0953	(0.58)

TABLE IV  
Continued

Dependent Variable: AAI	Black		Colored		Indian/Asian		White	
	Coefficient	t-value	Coef.	t-value	Coef.	t-value	Coef.	t-value
Expenditure ZAR (house hold)	-0.0002***	(-10.4)	-0.0003***	(-7.7)	-0.0003***	(-6.86)	-0.0002***	(-8.40)
Constant	8.2588		7.3625		8.0896		6.4308	
R-squared:	0.0217		0.0763		0.1189		0.0722	
Adj. R-squared:	0.0213		0.0733		0.1164		0.0693	
Number of cases:	18126		2474		572		2602	

Significance levels: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .  
Data: Euromodule 2002.



the other groups. As we have argued above, there are intra-racial differences in the socio-economic position, but evidently they do not have a great influence on the variance of anomie within the black population. The joint analysis for all races also indicates that the socio-economic variables were of good use to explain the overall variance in anomie, which was, for the most part, related to racial division. However, looking at the group of Blacks in more detail, the socio-economic position tends to play a lesser role in determining individual anomie. In other words, socio-economic variables explain *inter-racial* anomie, but not that much the variance of *intra-racial* anomie for the Blacks. It could be that the general differences between the formerly disadvantaged and poor (Blacks) and the formerly advantaged and still better off (Whites) are of a different quality and are not easily wiped out by socio-economic gains on the individual level. One can argue that a feeling of disorientation and estrangement is still a common trait of the black population, despite the emergence of greater inequality within that group. This might be due to specific experiences in the past, such as the effects of an oppressive political system that still leave an imprint on the present state of mind. Social-psychological studies on mental health in South Africa show that a high proportion of black South Africans report syndromes of post-traumatic stress disorder, far more than the other races. By and large, these syndromes are caused by large-scale political violence and subjective experiences of stress people were exposed to, especially during the time of apartheid (see Hirschowitz and Orkin, 1997). This research has also corroborated that there is a high correlation between symptoms of trauma and feelings of anxiety and powerlessness, which would support our assumption that social-psychological factors matter.<sup>13</sup>

Amongst the white South Africans, money, unemployment, and educational levels influence the intra-racial differences. With affirmative action and the loss of their "given" dominance in all areas of life, it has become more difficult to find or to keep their (still socio-economically privileged) place in society. Some Whites have experienced social and economic losses, some are now unemployed and have difficulties finding a new and adequate job. The changes may have raised the level of suspicion and disorientation within their group, especially for those at the lower end of the social inequality structure. For the Indian/Asian population of South Africa, the

intra-racial differences in anomie are clearly related to personal financial prosperity. Their explained variance of anomie levels is the highest of all. The more money the household spends, the less likely an Indian/Asian South African is to report anomic feelings. For the group of Coloreds we know from the GHS data that they are on average slightly better off than Blacks and that they less hit by unemployment. On the other hand, their average education level is lower. The tested socio-structural variables explain their intra-racial anomie differentiation only insufficiently. However, an increase in terms of income and better educational opportunities would possibly lower their levels of anomie.

### CONCLUSIONS

Our article has shown that feelings of disorientation, powerlessness, and estrangement, in short anomic tendencies, are very widespread in South African society. Compared to other countries participating in the Euromodule, the South African levels of anomie are very high. This result points into Durkheim's well established and documented assumption that rapid societal change is accompanied by anomic tendencies even if there is no time series data to prove it for South Africa. When rapid social change occurs, social regulations can break down, the controlling influence of society on individual propensities is no longer effective and individuals are left to their own devices. Given the enormous degree of changes South African society has been facing, we expected anomic tendencies and have empirically confirmed them. Even if the changes are generally seen as positive because the discriminating apartheid system had to be overcome, the democratization progress caused individual experienced disjunctions between the newly established aims and individuals' social means to cope with their new situations. For the Black majority of the South Africans as well as for the Coloreds and the Indian/Asians, the new situation is characterized by more freedom, social rights, integration, possibilities to participate in the political processes and – on a basic level – more opportunities to live a life they want to live. In contrast, there have been only modest improvements in terms of better education, well paid jobs and financial security, which help to reach the desired goals of a

better life. Since these means are more than political freedom and participatory opportunities, it will take time until they are “delivered” to everybody. Up to the present day, the success of the social reforms has been primarily institutional and related to granting civic and political rights, but less achieved by an improvement of the material conditions of life. The overall economic uplift which also raises the quality of life for the poor is yet to come. New risks like the HIV pandemic are even setting back some of the progress already made. However, there are good reasons to believe that the anomie levels will drop if the transformation stabilizes, and material and social improvements filter through to the poor to a substantial extent.

As seen from the data, social anomie in South Africa is determined by social-economic inequalities. This also empirically confirms Merton's thesis that it is relative deprivation and the related inability of some groups to live up to common societal goals that explain social anomie. We have established that a number of status-related characteristics have an impact on the level of individual anomie. In South African society, many of these inequalities still go along with race. Despite political reforms, race is still the major dividing line. Most of the socially disadvantaged are black or colored, whereas many Whites still enjoy a privileged life in material terms, but also in terms of access to education. Thus we found a significant influence of the variable “race” on anomie. There is also a share of anomie which is explained by race but independent from socio-economic aspects controlled for in this study. We thus assume an ongoing importance of race-specific socio-psychological factors related to the historical legacy. Further research is needed to throw more light on this. However, we also found a huge amount of anomie that is neither determined by race, nor by socio-economic factors. This observation recalls Durkheim's description of anomie as a condition of relative normlessness in a whole society or in some of its component groups. This concept is less focused on the role of socio-economic factors (though they can play a part) but more on the overall absence or weakness of normative regulation.

The intriguing question of whether an overall better life for South Africans would lead to lower levels of anomie is not easy to answer. Especially among the black population, socio-economic factors do not have a strong power to explain within-race differences in anomie

levels. For the Whites, in contrast, it seems to be of importance to maintain their quality of life at the current level, whereas for the Indian/Asian South Africans, personal financial prosperity matters primarily. Our cautious answer to the question is as follows: A profound improvement in life quality for all South Africans would lower the anomie levels. However, the material condition of life is not all that matters. There are aspects of social equality, reconciliation between the former oppressors and the formerly oppressed, integration of the excluded into all areas of life, mutual respect, and understanding, that are necessary to form a truly unified society. Common and widely accepted goals and the adequate means accomplishing them can only be established as a joint venture of all sub-groups of society.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Durkheim applied the term anomie again in his study of suicide (1952 [1897]). There he claims that when social restraints are weakened, humans no longer have limits upon their desires and aspirations and they become infinite in scope. If people pursue goals that are basically unattainable, they are likely to end up in a state of unhappiness. This state may unleash deviant and unregulated behavior and, hence, can be seen as a form of anomie.

<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the two perspectives, on the one hand Durkheim's societal interpretation, and on the other hand Merton's more individual or group-specific perspective, are not mutually exclusive but can also be seen as complementary. This is particularly obvious in Durkheim's interpretations of the forced forms of the division of labor. According to him, it is not sufficient that societal rules exist; sometimes these rules are the cause of injustice, for example if people feel that their talents and achievements are not rewarded, or if some groups have implemented rules that protect their privileged positions.

<sup>3</sup> In the context of wealthy societies, and in conflict with Merton's presupposition of a strong link between lower classes and anomie, it has been pointed out that lower classes in particular may develop coping strategies that allow for an effective cognitive adjustment to their life circumstances. Moreover, higher social strata are also not exempted from anomie, because the gap between aspiration and goal-fulfilment may also become salient for them (Bohle et al., 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Social welfare research has also made extensive use of the concept of anomie. Driven by the concern for the individual quality of life, welfare research has distinguished between objective living conditions and subjective well-being (Campbell, 1972; Zapf, 2000). Within the context of this kind of research, anomie is considered as one central dimension of a wider concept of subjective well-being (Glatzer and Bös, 1997). As one of the outcomes, scholars have corroborated that life satisfaction is deeply affected by feelings of anomie and that anomic people tend to have a lower life satisfaction (Western and Lanyon, 1999: 95).

<sup>5</sup> Glatzer's and Bös' (1997) comparison of East and West Germany finds a significantly higher level of anomie in the eastern part of Germany, whereas the western part shows a relatively stable, but lower anomie level. However, the authors also point out that the level of anomie is not extraordinary given the nature of the societal rupture experienced by East Germans. This indicates compensatory mechanisms at lower levels of society such as families, neighborhoods, and other social networks.

<sup>6</sup> From 1995 to 2000 South Africa's Human Development Index (see HDI, various years) fell from 0.735 to 0.690. In 2002 it was lower again, even lower than in the 1980s. Despite all efforts, the percentage of the population with access to improved (not basic) sanitation and to sustainable water sources was not substantially higher in 2000 than 10 years earlier. Life expectancy at birth is currently six years lower than in the 1970s (all data from HDI, various years), mainly related to the HIV pandemic.

<sup>7</sup> In contrasting old and new forms of anomie, Holley et al. (1999) point out that during the apartheid period, anomie was characterized by negative as well as positive functions. Political oppression and economic deprivation of the black population also contributed to unsettling the old system, which was inhumane with a racist character. On the other hand, the silent and apathetic suffering and the exclusion from many civic, political, and economic rights created generations of black people who had little or no experience of positive authority.

<sup>8</sup> The South African team and the authors would like to thank Ricarda Nauenburg of the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB) and Richard Devey of Durban's University of Natal for adjusting and recoding the data and implementing it into the Euromodule data set. We are also grateful to Wolfgang Zapf, initiator of the Euromodule project, for making the whole data set available to us.

<sup>9</sup> Even if the dimension "estrangement from work" seems to refer to a paid job, unemployed or retired persons have in several surveys using the same operationalization of anomie answered the question without any problems (e.g. Glatzer and Bös, 1997). The logic behind is that unemployed respondents relate their answers to "everyday activities". Berger (1980) reflects on the problem and specifies "work" as activities that are not rewarding in itself. Thus not only paid but also unpaid everyday activities can be seen as such.

<sup>10</sup> The middle quartile ranges for East and West Germany when presented separately appear to be rather small, but when put together the box plot range for Germany is as big as the Spanish or Hungarian.

<sup>11</sup> The GHS uses expenditure to evaluate the financial situation of households. This is said to be a good representation of the financial situation of a household, because it looks at real consumption, but also because informal and illegal work incomes are difficult to measure. However, the indicator also has certain drawbacks, especially for the high-income groups which might spend a smaller proportion of their household income.

<sup>12</sup> "Employment status" as we use it consists of three dimensions: first the "employed", second the "unemployed" defined as "people who do not currently work but want to" and third the people who are outside the labour market (e.g. elderly, disabled and sick).

<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, there are other factors which could play a role. Poor emotional well-being is more likely to be found in urban than in rural areas (see Hirschowitz and Orkin, 1997: 180). Thus the place one lives in (Townships or small rural settlements) can be assumed to determine different levels of anomie as well.

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