



# Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005

*Grace Davie*

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Poverty is South Africa's greatest challenge. But what is "poverty"? And how can it be measured and addressed? In South Africa, human-science knowledge about the cost of living grew out of colonialism, industrialization, apartheid, and civil resistance campaigns, which makes this knowledge far from neutral or apolitical. South Africans have used the Poverty Datum Line (PDL), and other poverty indicators, to petition the state, to chip away at the pillars of white supremacy, and, more recently, to criticize the postapartheid government's failures to deliver on its promises. Rather than advocating one particular policy solution, this book argues that poverty knowledge - including knowledge of the tension between quantitative and qualitative observations - teaches us about the dynamics of historical change, the power of racial thinking in white settler societies, and the role of ordinary people in shaping state policy. Readers will gain new perspectives on today's debates about social welfare, redistribution, and human rights and will ultimately find reasons to rethink conventional approaches to advocacy.

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