

South Africa: The Long Transition of a Terminal Patient

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Thirty years ago, a popular book entitled *Africa in Transition* (edited by Prudence Smith, London: Reinhart, 1958) was published containing a series of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) talks on "how the lives of the African peoples in the Union and the Rhodesias are being transformed by the impact of European civilisation." Since then, countless books have appeared with similar titles. The Rhodesias having become part of independent Black Africa, the focus has shifted to South Africa itself. The theme now is approached from a somewhat different angle: how the last bastion of white hegemony is being transformed by the impact of Black resistance.

The 1984-1986 unprecedented period of resistance, reform, restructuring, and repression has produced a generous crop of new titles dealing with the old theme. Most books in the category *South Africa in Transition* or *Apartheid in Crisis* follow a similar pattern: beginning with a brief survey of what happened before, then a more or less critical assessment of whether the changes in South Africa amount to a dismantling or a modernisation of apartheid, followed by an evaluation of the relative strength of the opposing forces and their internal cohesion; and towards the end the authors indulge in some crystal ball gazing. The ball usually reveals the apocalypse of a prolonged civil war at one extreme and a rather unspectacular transition to a multiracial oligarchy at the other end, with various forms of violent evolution in between. Various options for the future are reviewed, ranging from majority rule to sometimes extremely complicated structures of power sharing or outright partition.

The three books under review do not break much new ground, which is not to say that they do not contain useful information. Of these three publi-

Anthony Lemon, *Apartheid in Transition*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987. 414 pp.

Helen Kitchen, ed. *South Africa: In Transition to What?* New York, Westport, Conn., London: Praeger, 1988. 201 pp.

Jesmond Blumenfeld, ed. *South Africa in Crisis*. London, New York, Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987. 207 pp.

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cations, all aiming at a general readership, Anthony Lemon's *Apartheid in Transition* is likely to be the most durable. This textbook-like volume is essentially an updated version of his *Apartheid* (Westmead: Saxon House, 1976), although this is nowhere mentioned. It delivers largely what it promises on the back cover: an interdisciplinary, detailed explanation of the historical context in which apartheid has developed and the ways it has been implemented, together with the nature, extent, and direction of recent changes. Particularly useful and detailed chapters are devoted to population and urbanisation and to the South African space economy, dealing with commercial and subsistence agriculture and with mining and industrialisation, both in the core areas and in the homeland periphery. An almost encyclopedic but very readable survey, it brings together much useful information which is generally only found in many scattered and more specialised studies; but it has one major flaw. There are informative chapters on White politics, detailing every White election since 1948, and on Indians and Coloureds. But what about Black politics? Indeed, Black South Africans appear on almost every page, but mostly as objects of policy, not as subjects of history. Only in the concluding chapter covering forces of change a brief discussion is given of the black trade union movement – generally acclaimed as a major agent of change – the UDF, the Black Consciousness groupings, and Inkatha. The ANC is lumped together with economic sanctions under the heading "external factors," although Lemon acknowledges that the "ANC has clearly succeeded in significantly internalising its operations since 1984." This approach is in keeping with the author's stated belief: "if there is to be peaceful change in South Africa it will have to be brought about by whites and their elected representatives." But this "top-down" analysis does little justice to the inner dynamics of Black society, which thus tends to become part of the landscape rather than part of the cast of actors.

Somewhat more light on Black political activity is shed in the other two volumes. Most of the twelve contributors to *South Africa: In Transition to What?* share Lemon's belief that the outcome of the present strife will be determined primarily by internal factors, while the contributors to *South Africa in Crisis* show more interest in the interplay between internal reactions to the crisis and "the diverse and unprecedented set of political, military and economic pressures which have been interjected from abroad."

The chapters in the volume edited by Helen Kitchen were previously published as issues of the *Africa Notes* of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. The first contribution was originally written in 1982, the last one first appeared in June 1987; none of these have been updated. The essays thus cover a time span ranging from the most liberal period under Nationalist rule to that of unparalleled resistance and repression. Remarkably, the first two essays, written in 1982 and 1983, are certainly

not the most outdated. William Foltz, in spite of his hesitation to predict the future, spells out several trends which still seem relevant: the newly developed reluctant partnership between government and private industry as partners in a joint task of technocratic modernisation; the rise of the military; the governments' objective to create a stable, basically urban African work force led by a collaborating middle class; the increasing factionalism in the Afrikaner community, now riven with class, institutional, and intellectual divisions; but the assertion that the government is going out of its way to undermine Buthelezi's position has not been borne out by events since.

Of particular interest is Robert Rotberg's chapter on "The Process of Decision Making in Contemporary South Africa," which offers valuable insights in the policies of survival through modernisation. P. W. Botha's policies are characterised as a rationalised pragmatism, accompanied by an important shift in the locus of decision-making power from old-line bureaucrats to a cadre largely composed of military trained technocrats.

Steven McDonald's "Guide to Black Politics" (1984) is inevitably very outdated, as is Heribert Adam's and Stanley Uys' essay on regional politics. The 1984 Nkomati Accord did not herald the end of destabilisation and a new era with Pretoria in the role of regional peacemaker, as has become painfully evident to the people in the neighbouring states. Other contributions deal with Black education, shifts in White and Black politics, scenarios for the future, and sanctions.

But for some of the ground covered in this book, the reader would do much better to consult Jesmond Blumenfeld's collection of essays in *South Africa in Crisis*, compiled from eleven seminar papers presented at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London during 1986. A major advantage is that these papers have subsequently been updated.

Blumenfeld opens the book with a critical analysis of government economic policy, an assessment of the effect of sanctions and the prospects for a siege economy. Merle Lipton addresses the question of whether reform amounts to destruction or modernisation of apartheid, a chapter based on her voluminous book *Capitalism and Apartheid*. Stanley Uys' hope for a political realignment involving the PFP and the New Nats (the reform-minded wing of the National Party) holds little promise in the wake of the 1987 election. Simon Baynham's chapter on "Political Violence and the Security Response" is among the most interesting in this book, pointing out that in the view of Pretoria's power elite reform must parallel or follow repression; it cannot be permitted to precede it. Murray Forsyth's paper on constitutional proposals again covers the familiar problem of how to share power without losing control. It comes as a surprise to find the National Party among the supporters of a constitutional settlement and the ANC and the UDF among the opponents, being interested only in the "seizure of power." The findings

of the Commonwealth's Eminent Persons' mission would seem to point in another direction.

Martin Meredith, in his essay on "The Black Opposition," differs markedly from MacDonald in his assessment of the UDF. For Meredith, the UDF has succeeded in projecting itself as the standard-bearer of the resistance tradition, but "its loose structure meant that the UDF lacked both cohesion and discipline." MacDonald, on the other hand, characterises the UDF as having an "efficient, democratic national structure that allows its members to vet policy issues thoroughly and recommend action." This last description seems more fitting for the black trade union movement than for the UDF. Meredith points out that mass arrests of UDF officials and activists under the state of emergency did not result in quelling the violence in the townships. It is, at best, doubtful whether quelling the violence was indeed the objective of government and police action. Detentions hit the local UDF leadership, the very people who were in a position to channel the outbursts of rage into some kind of organised, mostly non-violent resistance. With the responsible leadership behind bars, the surge of anarchist violence went ahead without organisational restraints. Thus, the government's Bureau of Information could produce grim daily bulletins of "black-on-black violence." South African television, which usually does not disturb its public with pictures of white policemen shooting or *sjambokking* black schoolchildren, showed no such restraint when gruesome images of "black-on-black violence" could be portrayed.

Other chapters deal with Black trade unions (Robin Smith), constitutional compromises in divided societies (Adrian Guelke), foreign policy (J. E. Spence), while Peter Vale's concluding chapter on regional policy offers perceptive insights into Pretoria's motives.

All three books show traces of being hastily assembled, perhaps to meet the upsurge in public interest for South Africa during the 1984-1986 crisis. A number of factual errors can be noted. Lemon's discussion of black trade unions after the Wiehahn reforms of 1979 leaves the mistaken impression that racially mixed unions are still prohibited, unless a ministerial exemption is obtained. But all reference to "race" was deleted in the Labour Relations Amendment Act (1981). In fact, all unions affiliated to COSATU are non-racial. The Cape Action League is not affiliated with the UDF, but associated with the National Forum. Nor was the UDF supported by APDUSA (African People's Democratic Union of South Africa), whose orientation is towards the Unity Movement. One of APDUSA's leading figures has dismissed the UDF as an attempt to "create spurious unity of antagonistic classes and groupings." One error has survived the eleven years between the publication of the first and the revised edition of Lemon's book: "When the French revolutionary armies invaded Holland in 1795, Britain occupied the

Cape by arrangement with the Dutch king." The Dutch Republic had no king. Much confusion reigns in several essays about the composition of UDF, National Forum, and the major trade union groupings.

These three books by and large share a reformist liberal perspective and a detached tone. The lack of a more radical perspective makes these volumes at times seem somewhat remote from the intense emotions and passionate debates so characteristic of present-day South Africa. Only one of the many contributors is a Black South African: Zwelakhe Sisulu, whose 1986 speech on "People's Power: A Beginning, Not an End" is included in *South Africa: In Transition to What?* Here, the talk is of a transfer of power, not of complicated schemes for power sharing, although this goal is presented with sobering warnings that the moment is not yet there and that ungovernability should not be confused with people's power. Planning for the future, he points out, involves building new alliances to undermine the divisions created by the state, breaking the stranglehold that apartheid holds over the minds of white South Africans, building democratic organisations which can withstand the harassment of the apartheid government. But then, Zwelakhe Sisulu, after having been held in detention without trial for over two years, has been effectively silenced by a banning order.

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM), ed. *Public Enterprises Performance and the Privatization Debate: A Review of the Options for Africa*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1988. 509 pp.

The dismal performance of public enterprises, which have been established to promote socio-economic development throughout the African continent, is a matter of grave concern to politicians, policy makers, scholars of public administration, and indeed the general public. This disappointing performance has led most African governments to resort to the privatization of the enterprises. The concept of privatization is currently a hot topic, much in discussion and highly controversial. It has been one of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) structural adjustment policies aimed at limiting massive state intervention in the economy, and thereby curbing public spending. The African Association for Public Administration and Management's (AAPAM) *Public Enterprises Performance and the Privatization Debate: A Review of the Options for Africa* is a contribution to the current debate over the privatization of state enterprises.

The articles collected in this book were originally discussed at the AAPAM 1984 Annual Roundtable Conference under the theme, "Public Enterprises Versus Privatization: Which Way for Africa?" held in Blantyre, Malawi. The book is divided into two parts. The first part, which has twenty-three chapters and contributors, is divided into five sections: "An Overview of Public and Private Enterprises in Africa"; "Measures for Improving the Performance of Public and Private Enterprises"; "Government Policy Options"; "Financial Management"; and "Working Conditions and Motivations." This part comprises all the papers presented at the Roundtable. The second part incorporates a summary of the discussions held both at the plenary and syndicate sessions.

The book examines in detail the current status of public enterprises in Africa, including the rationale, objectives, and problems. It also examines the possibility of an expanded role for the sector in African economies and the "optional" division of labour between the public and private sectors.

The coverage of the book is wide and exhaustive. It includes an overview of the public and private enterprises – their roles, scope, performance, and challenges for the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action; comparative analysis of government policies on public and private enterprises in the Gambia, Nigeria, and Zambia; measures for enhancing the performance of public and private enterprises; and case studies of privatization in Ghana, Kenya, Canada, and Turkey.

Section 3 "Government Policy Options" is very interesting and stimulating. For