

Erudite and accessible primary source of the 1950s

M.J. Daymond and C. Sandwith (eds), *Africa South: Viewpoints, 1956–1961*

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This admirable book is part of a growing trend to better capture, edit and (re)publish primary sources on the South African past. It is not that the historiography is bereft of such sources, for we have had the Van Riebeeck Society series since 1918 and the James Stuart Archive has been chugging along since 1976, to name two of those most widely used. Rather this recovery was, like South African society in general, lop-sided so it poorly served black history. This has been changing with, for example, the fine volumes of translations by literary scholars like Jeff Opland and Liz Gunner, collections of SADET interviews, and the forthcoming second edition of the notable Carter/ Karis/ Gerhart volumes.¹² But the gaps remain wide, and one can think of many a newspaper, magazine, or long-out-of-print book much in need of resuscitation in anthology.¹³

Africa South was the brainchild of young intellectual Ronald Segal, who moved from the National Union of South African Students to pursue the life of a literary critic overseas but, shocked by apartheid's ferocity, returned to South Africa in the mid-fifties and founded the journal-cum-magazine in 1956. His own ideological predilections blended left-liberalism with a twinge of socialism, but the journal embraced a much wider span of ideologies and vocations to bring on board popular and academic historians, literary and art critics, political scientists, journalists, poets, and especially political activists from African nationalists and liberals to communists, women organisers and trade unionists. In a 2007 interview with the editors before he died, Segal explained the need then for a strong, oppositional voice: "You should try and

12. Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of South African Historical Documents (VRS), Cape Town, from 1918; C. de B. Webb and J.B. Wright (eds), *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1976); J. Opland (ed.), *S.E.K. Mqhayi, Abantu Besizwe: Historical and Biographical Writings, 1902–44* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2009); L. Gunner (ed.), *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God: Isaiah Shembe and the Nazareth Church* (UKZN Press, Scottsville, 2004); SADET, *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling their Stories* (Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008); T. Karis and G.M. Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, 6 vols. (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1972).

13. The former category has recently been addressed in one case by the anthology section of P. Limb (ed.), *The People's Paper: A Centenary History and Anthology of Abantu-Batho* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2012), but one would hope, for instance, for a new edited version of T.D. Mveli Skota's classic, *African Yearly Register* (1930, 1931, 1966), and the complete works of say, Mandela, Biko, and an anthology of *Drum*.

propagate your views that things should change ... How can you best do it? Do it through the one thing you know, which is writing. How do you do it? ... through some sort of magazine" (p 16). The interview, which reveals Segal's motives and aims, as well as some of his editorial decisions (such as the forced move when banned after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre to Britain where it became *Africa South in Exile*), adds greatly to the value of the book as an historical source to better explain the intellectual history of this influential period of deep crisis.

Editors Margaret Daymond and Corinne Sandwith, experienced literary scholars, have chronologically arranged 57 of the 460 original articles spanning the entire life of the journal from 1956 to 1961. It is a fine, representative sample focusing on prose rather than the fiction and poetry that Segal also included. In their Introduction, they point to some omissions typical of the period, such as neglect of gender as an analytical tool, even if a good number of women writers are incorporated. They make clear that page limits obliged them to omit some important authors but those wanting to consult the whole kit and caboodle can turn to the online complete works at DISA.¹⁴

Selection, editing and production are all superb and a credit to editors and publishers. A few facsimiles of original illustrations (such as cartoons) may have further enhanced the volume. In the same vein, the historian in me hungers for more contextual footnotes, though we receive good compensation with the succinct and informative introductions to the essays. Whilst all the essays and their authors are very well introduced, this is often more in terms of the latter and some readers unfamiliar, say, with wider African history might desire greater context. In this regard, some South African presses seem to have caught the American allergy to such erudite apparatus in a misplaced assumption that footnotes scare readers away. Perhaps it is up to historians to step forward and make sure we endow published primary sources in this respect. Nevertheless, the articles, originally written for the general reader, still read well.

The journal encompassed all regions of the continent. It drew on not just political activists and academics but also popular writers such as Basil Davidson, who wrote on the broad sweep of African civilisation. On West Africa, inclusion of reports from Thomas Hodgkin, a leading contemporary scholar, and Sabura Biobaku, of the first generation of Nigerian professional historians, epitomises the Pan-African scope of Segal's editorialising. There were incursions into the fine arts and archaeology in analyses of Swahili Coast cultures and West African woodcarving. Breaking stories on political crises, as in the Congo, or reflective pieces on nationalism in Cameroon and Ghana on the eve of independence, or on Libya, Kenya, and Nigeria (by rising writer Cyprian Ekwensi) added to the breadth. Here Rosalynde Ainslie, who penned reports from South, East, and Central Africa and became the magazine's British correspondent, played a major role. All this was in marked distinction from other contemporary periodicals such as

14. Available at www.disa.ukzn.ac.za

Anthony Sampson's *Drum*, which often mirrored the willy-nilly adoption of Western tropes, as did the captive, white-owned, black-edited press such as *Bantu World*.

The eminence and political centrality of many of the South African writers included in the collection show just how significant this journal was, and how useful it can be to historians, who are lately revisiting this period. These include Ruth First, Brian Bunting, and Michael Harmel from the communist left, Helen Joseph, Alan Paton, Leo Kuper, and Julius Lewin from the liberal opposition to apartheid, and Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Z.K. Matthews from the ANC. There is both breadth and depth in the South African coverage. Apartheid and its draconian laws and repression is of course centre-stage, with its impact on, for example, human rights, the press, labour control, religion, universities, and families, and with reports on the Treason Trial, women's resistance to passes, and the National Party. Coverage ranges across the country from the Transvaal and Durban to Pondoland, the Transkei and Sekhukhuleni. Neither was the Southern African region neglected, with stories filed from Windhoek by Brian Bunting, from Salisbury by Enoch Dumbutshena, and from Mozambique by Chikomuami Mahala.

Despite this regional breadth, the sharpest insights we can glimpse from the volume are into South African political debates and actions. Essays by Mandela and Sisulu on anti-apartheid tactics are complemented by more theoretical works such as those by Lionel Forman in his classic analysis of the roots of African nationalism, or reports on the formation of the Pan Africanist Congress. There were penetrating exchanges on burning issues of the day, one of the most interesting and longest-running being on the immediacy of revolution. Fabian socialist Julius Lewin kicked off the debate in late 1958 with a pessimistic prediction of continued repression. Communist Michael Harmel was certain of eventual victory over apartheid, whereas ex-communist Eddie Roux mused that intensified repression would ultimately breed compromise. Joe Matthews and Segal both felt revolution in the air, whereas the venerable scholar of British social democracy, G.D.H. Cole, tended to agree with Lewin on the need for reform. Rather appropriately, as things turned out, the debate closes with Mandela, underground in 1961, pointing to the proliferation of global revolutions.

This very useful collection that deftly recaptures the spirit of the times now sits proudly beside my equally treasured original copies of a journal that was a lodestone for progressive South Africans of a wide range of political viewpoints, and which historians (and the general reading public) can now plumb with greater ease and accessibility.

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