

The making of South Africa's tenth province

Robert Crawford, *Bye the Beloved Country? South Africans in the UK, 1994-2009*

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Bye the Beloved Country not only shares a pun with Alan Paton's amazing work of love, hope and endurance in a country full of racial injustice, but Paton's work also embodies the complex history of South Africa in the twentieth century forming a backdrop to Robert Crawford's book. It was the historical events and structures touched upon in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, which gave rise to apartheid and eventually, after the fall of apartheid South Africa, a range of historical consequences which motivated the emigration of thousands of white South Africans to different parts of the globe.

Crawford's book is a contemporary historical study which analyses the discourses of South African emigration to the United Kingdom in the period from 1994 to 2009. Each of the six chapters examines a different aspect of emigration by mainly white South Africans.

Crawford begins his analysis with the so-called "chicken-runners", a section of the book which deals with the discourse on South Africa's current

and future security. Bearing this in mind, the significance of beginning the study in 1994 becomes evident, because this was a time of insecurity as far as many white South Africans were concerned. Crawford concludes that “the flight of the chicken-runners” was motivated by the fear of a spiralling crime rate; the perceived ineptitude of the new South African government; and the alienation caused by Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and affirmative action policies. The underlying factor behind all these reasons can be boiled down to a single issue, namely race. Crawford states that immediately after 1994:

chicken runners think that only their skin colour has made them victims of crime; chicken runners think that their skin colour has made them victims of the ANC government’s incompetence and discriminatory attitude; chicken runners have no place in South Africa (p 30).

However, only one of the discourses and was mainly propagated by South Africans in South Africa. Crawford deals with another strong motivation to emigrate, namely the opportunity to graze in greener pastures.

Throughout Crawford’s book his points are illustrated by statistics on studies done on South African emigration to the UK. In examining why white South Africans chose the UK, he used, among others, the 1999 British Council survey of young South Africans’ opinions, and comes up with the information that 74 percent of the respondents favoured the UK because of its stable economy; strong currency; education system; patriotism; and multicultural society. This shows that running from South Africa’s problems was not the only motivation behind emigration, but as the words of one South African in the UK illustrates, they were seeking greener pastures: “We choose to live in this country because it affords us security, wealth and opportunity” (p 32).

Citing labour as another of the primary reasons for immigration, Crawford then looked at the visas and passports used by South Africans to gain insight into the patterns of emigration and to establish a clear picture of who the “expats” are. In this way he shows that the specific type of South African expatriate arriving in the UK is quite different from those settling in Australia and Canada. Here he touches on the so-called “brain drain” and argues that it is mainly white professionals who leave for the UK, with London being the location they choose to start their new lives. The consequences for South Africa, and the perennial issue of losing crucial skills, make for interesting reading.

South Africans not only immigrated to the UK, but also had to establish a kind of community as a consequence. Here the case looks similar to that of pre-1994 South Africa. According to Crawford the South African expatriate community lacked an umbrella organisation and a social centre. Their interaction with one another were thus characterised by a series of loose networks, which included the SA *Gemeente* church, Afrikaans festivals, and friendship networks encompassing more than just the love of “braai and rugby”. This disparate nature of social relationships

between South Africans in the UK, characterised by loose links, informal networks and individual interest, is according to Crawford uniquely South African.

Expatriates also had to forge a new identity in a foreign country. Like the tangle of loose connections characterising South African's social networks in the UK, their identity also has a tangle of contradictions. According to Crawford this struggle for identity reflects the complex nature of South African identity which is extremely heterogeneous. For the expats themselves this sometimes meant that they were simultaneously alienated by and attracted to both countries and felt neither here nor there. This identity crisis raises questions about the future of the expats: will they remain in the UK or will they return home? The last part of Crawford's book deals with this issue and explores how South African expatriates revealed themselves as not being unpatriotic chicken runners.

Although Crawford uses a wide range of sources, his focus is mainly on the South African based and expatriate media. As such, the information in his book, and the conclusions he draws, do not come as a surprise to one who has followed the media these past twenty years.

Central to Crawford's argument is the relationship between the future and the past and how the complex historical consciousness of white South Africans motivated their emigration from, and in some cases their return to, South Africa. His book covers most of the phases of South African emigration to the UK and the discourses of identity politics of South Africans at home and abroad. Although at times a tedious read, the book makes us reflect on the idea of the South African diaspora in the UK and the possibilities of the future with South Africans abroad still maintaining ties with their country and contributing to a mutually beneficial relationship.

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