

## A tapestry of insights and analyses

**Alan Jeeves and Greg Cuthbertson (eds), *Fragile Freedom: South African Democracy 1994–2004***

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Emerging from a series of conferences during 2004, this collection of articles provides a diverse, incisive and insightful series of papers on issues relating to South Africa's

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14 *The Sunday Independent*, 25 October 2009

15 See Kristina A Bentley and Roger Southall, *An African Peace Process: Mandela, South Africa and Burundi* (HSRC Press, Pretoria 2005), chapters 13 and 14

16 T R H Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (Macmillan, London, 1977), p xv

efforts to realise the dreams and aspirations of 1994. It is a complex and dense volume of diverse and inspiring scholarship.

Each of the fifteen chapters stands independently, but collectively they form a rich collage of historiography, social analysis and critical debate. Given the diversity of issues dealt with, a review of this nature cannot do justice to the work as a whole, but rather demands a reflection on the parts that make up the significant sum.

Roger Southall's article "Political Change and the Black Middle Class in Democratic South Africa" provides an illuminating analysis of the black middle class. The chapter ends with an invitation for greater neo-Marxism and neo-Weberian debate in making sense of the significant class shifts taking place in South Africa and their likely trajectories. It is to be hoped that other scholars will respond to this call.

In "Why the ANC's Social Contract is still an Empty Promise" (with an unfortunate misprint in the chapter headings), Carolyn Bassett outlines the role of NEDLAC as an illustration of shifting public policy-making since 1994. Key to the focus of the chapter is the processes of policy centralisation which took place during the Mbeki era – shifting power away from parliament (even cabinet) and NEDLAC into the Office of the President. Bassett highlights the tensions this created within civil society, especially unions, and argues that the political fragmentation developing in the second decade of democracy is a result of the Mbeki government's inability to turn the South African economy around and establish a public policy process that incorporates political allies.

Marlea Clarke's article, "Incorporating or Marginalizing Casual Workers? Ten Years of Labour Market Reforms under the ANC", provides a review of labour related legislation and its failure to address the disparities in employment conditions, wages and working environments of casual, informal and marginalised workers.

An analysis of the way in which women's narratives were dealt with during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is provided in Rosemary Jolly's article "Spectral Presences: Narrating Women in the Context of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission". Jolly highlights the necessity of a greater understanding of women's need for "subject status" through the creation of spaces of understanding in which the unspeakable can be spoken – a need that has continued unabated since the formal work of the TRC came to a close.

Another article dealing with the TRC is Rosemary Nagy's article entitled "After the TRC: Citizenship, Memory and Reconciliation". It comprises a conceptual mapping of the relationships between citizenship and the linking of memory and reconciliation encapsulated in understandings of transitional justice. In connecting unresolved issues from the past with emerging issues of xenophobia, Nagy argues for an integration of the rights-based and identity related aspects of citizenship with memory and reconciliation as the "linchpin". Unlike most other articles in this volume, Nagy moves beyond a retrospective or current analysis into articulating a possible framework for the future in this regard.

Cynthia Kros begins her chapter "Ethnic Narcissism and Big Brother: Culture, Identity and the State of the New Curriculum", with a reference to Heribert Adam's

concept of “ethnic narcissism” as a means of explaining understandings of group identities during the apartheid era, and the ways in which they became entrenched in South Africans’ understandings of self. By combining a historical overview of the relevance of the concept of ethnic narcissism with an analysis of school curricula post-1994, she highlights some shifts into more constructed understandings of identity as well as deep-seated tensions and legacies. There are many interesting ideas in the article, although it is a challenge to engage with the breadth of material in a paper of this length.

Thomas Blaser’s article “A New South African Imaginary: Nation-Building and Afrikaners in Post-Apartheid South Africa” explores issues relating to nationalism, ethnicity and nation-building, with particular reference to Afrikaners. Blaser explores the challenges faced by the state and Afrikaner people themselves in negotiating the relationship between apartheid-era policy redress and the place of ethnicity within the complex arena of current identities in South Africa. While the theoretical frameworks informing nation-building, nationalism and ethnicity are rigorously explored, the suggested prominence of Afrikaner identity in the title is insufficiently realised in the text. The tensions and debates in this sector of South African society have certainly sharpened since this chapter was written; it is regrettable that the article does not provide clearer formulations of these dynamics in the current context.

In “Land Restitution in South Africa: Rights, Development and the Restrained State”, Ruth Hall explores the paradoxical nature of the parallel legal frameworks within which the issue of land restitution is being addressed. Hall highlights the possible implications of government’s haste in completing land restitution processes without paying sufficient attention to the issue of redress and its possible contribution to rural transformation, including support for rural people’s land-based livelihoods.

Comparative case studies of two land restitution processes form the basis of Anna Bohlin’s article “A Price on the Past: Cash as Compensation in South African Land Restitution”. Her account and analysis of the reasons for two geographically separate communities choosing cash payouts rather than land restitution illuminate the complex intersectionalities of identity, belonging, poverty and displacement. They also provide helpful insights into the symbolic nature of land restitution processes and their problematic relationship with possibilities for reconciliation.

Thembele Kepe’s article “Land Restitution and Biodiversity Conservation in South Africa: The Case of Mkambati, Eastern Cape Province” provides the third land restitution case study in this volume. The Mkambati Nature Reserve is the context for an analysis of the issues emerging from land restitution processes in designated conservation areas. Kepe provides a useful framework of findings which could guide policy makers and practitioners in the future.

In the final chapter on land restitution, “‘We Are Consoled’: Reconstructing Cremin”, Cheryl Walker gives a heartening account of the remarkable story of resilience and redress of the Cremin community’s celebrated return to their land in Kwazulu-Natal.

There are two chapters on issues relating to HIV&AIDS, the first of which is Deborah Posel's "The AIDS Controversy in South Africa". The article contextualises the controversial AIDS denialism of the Mbeki era by tracing the influence on Mbeki of global readings of AIDS in Africa combined with the history of sexuality and disease in South Africa. Posel argues that the effect of Mbeki's views was inadvertently to reinforce essentialised understandings of the pandemic as well as obfuscate and delay meaningful public debate and action.

The development and influence of the Treatment Action Campaign in creating new political spaces, understandings of citizenship and possibilities for mobilisation in South Africa, is outlined in Steven Robins and Bettina Von Lieres's article "Remaking Citizenship, Unmaking Marginalization: The Treatment Action Campaign in Post-Apartheid South Africa".

The final article is Jonathan Hyslop's "Political Corruption: Before and after Apartheid". Hyslop argues that discussion about corruption tends to focus primarily on dealing with the perceived "problem" that it constitutes, rather than investigating how it actually operates and sustains itself. Hyslop concludes that the existing forms of corruption in South Africa comprise a combination of various forms of corruption used since the establishment of the Transvaal Republic in 1883, with new innovations that explain the ways in which corruption has "plagued" the post-1994 government.

Alan Jeeves and Greg Cuthbertson are to be congratulated on their efforts to compile and edit a volume of such range, depth and significance. This publication is a worthwhile addition to any personal bookshelf or public library.

*Theresa Edlmann  
Grahamstown*