

Book Reviews

Khadiagala, Gilbert / Naidoo, Prishani / Pillay, Devan/ Southall, Roger. *New South African Review 4: A Fragile Democracy – Twenty Years On*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press 2014, 378 pp.

This, the fourth in the series of *The New South African Review*, presents a cross-cutting selection of chapters assessing various challenges facing South Africa. The release of this volume, coinciding with the 20 years following South Africa's transition to democracy, provides an opportunity for reflection on the successes and shortcomings in meeting the African National Congress' 1994 promise of "a better life for all" (p 10). Consisting of 19 chapters, the contributions provide insights into recent events shaping South Africa's political, economic and social landscape, a review of which is necessary if the government is serious in addressing the three priorities of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

As in the case of the previous volume *The second phase – tragedy or farce? (2013)*, the fourth review is divided into four sections: Ecology, Economy and Labour; Power, Politics and Participation; Public Policy and Social Practice; and finally South Africa at Large. The broad theme identified in the sub-title of volume four, *A Fragile Democracy: Twenty Years On*, provides an indication of the context of the book with authors providing a particularly sobering analysis of the future of South Africa's developmental and democratic trajectory. Indeed Southall goes as far as pointing out that "the warning lights for our constitutional democracy are flashing" (p 203). Questions of fragility are not, however, a particular focus that all the authors explicitly engage with.

As is the nature of edited volumes there is considerable diversity in contributions, which affords readers opportunity to contemplate issues they may otherwise not have been inclined to do, but at the same time always raises a challenge to cohesion. This is mediated somewhat by the use of editorial introductions at the beginning of each section to identify the context and linkages between the different contributions.

As the editors point out in the introduction, any attempt to assess the state of South Africa's democracy after 20 years is a "perilous enterprise" (p 2). It is, however, a necessary one where looking back is essential to moving forward. The first section focuses on Economy, Ecology and Labour, although despite the title, the focus is on energy rather than

ecology. The initial contributions adopt a social justice position around the discussion on labour, with Nicolas Pons-Vignon and Miriam Di Paola raising the challenges linked to the casualisation of labour and the impact of ineffective state bargaining on labour (Chapter 1), while Ian Macun provides a discussion on the historical development of the Unions and their relative power and influence (Chapter 2). Labour concerns are also raised in Chapter 3, where Bridget Kenny assesses the impact of large corporates like Walmart and the politicisation of global supply chains. This is an area that will become increasingly significant across Africa as large retailers continue to arrive, raising further concerns over local food security, quality, local production and labour. The final two chapters (4 and 5) of section one by Jeremy Wakeford and Keith Gottschalk respectively, give attention to energy and in particular the role of oil and nuclear in South Africa's energy mix. With South Africa's own development plans hinging on energy access and affordability, these two chapters are particularly pertinent in raising questions concerning energy security, the cost (including externalities), and the politics behind the choice of energy sources.

The chapters that comprise the second section on Power, Politics and Participation paint a worryingly bleak picture of political development in South Africa. Bar perhaps Chapter 7 by John Clarke which demonstrates what can be achieved by communities through "civil courage", the chapters in this section highlight crises in governance, where laws (including customary law) are selectively interpreted, "hijacked by elite interests" (p 131), depriving communities of the benefits from the rich reserves of platinum in the North West region of South Africa. Just as Aninka Claasens and Boitumelo Matlala (Chapter 6) highlight the vast sums of money that remain unaccounted for, so too does Dale McKinley (Chapter 8) on secrecy and power in the case of the Mbombela stadium and the Ndwanda Trust. Chapter 8 also highlights the growing role of securocrats in the Zuma Administration, and the prospects of the Secrecy Bill on accountability and transparency within South Africa.

The latter part of section two places the focus on identity and politics. Xolela Mangcu (Chapter 9) gives particular attention to the different interpretations of black consciousness, pointing out that "democracy does not mean the disappearance of blackness and identity" (p 180), while Zethu Matebeni (Chapter 10) reminds the reader that while there may be numerous generalisations in the discourse when it comes to identity, there is considerable heterogeneity even within minority groups. The narrative goes on to depict the evolution of gay rights to gay politics, highlighting clear differences in approach within the gay/lesbian communities.

Section three grapples with some of South Africa's more immediate social problems, highlighting the disjuncture between policy and implementation. Martin Prew (Chapter 11) takes up the difficult task of comparing the Zimbabwean and South African school systems, and while the chapter points to the distinct differences in context between the two countries, it also points to the considerable distance South Africa has to go in addressing challenges including poor work practices, teacher demoralisation, and issues that go beyond the classroom, including levels of trauma, psychological support, and language policy. These challenges continue in higher education where Ahmed Bawa (Chapter 12) argues that universities continue to reflect an elitist approach and remain linked to the global neo-liberal paradigm. The problem of reconciling the fierce academic independence with being supported by the public purse is also highlighted. Some indication of the author's thoughts on the way forward would have been useful here in taking the debate forward.

Sarah Mosoetsa's (Chapter 13) contribution on household relations in South Africa is interesting for her empirical approach, which provides insights and engagement from affected communities through direct interviews with members of selected communities exploring the impact of unemployment on gender roles within the household. In the final chapter of the section Clare Ballard (Chapter 14) addresses the division between what the numbers say and the actuality on the ground when it comes to the problems of overcrowding in South Africa's prisons and the impact this has, not only on the prisoners' immediate quality of life (constitutional rights), but on the long term prospects of prisoner re-integration into society.

With the first three sections given primarily to domestic challenges for South Africa's fragile democracy, the final section considers the country's performance internationally through selected analysis of South Africa's relations with Africa, Israel, and north-east Asia. Reviewing South Africa's performance Gilbert Khadiagala (Chapter 15) points to the central position of Africa within South Africa's foreign policy agenda, but goes on to highlight a number of failings in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and the Central African Republic (CAR). International circumstances and the current conflict between Israel and Palestine have made Ran Greenstein's (Chapter 16) analysis more relevant than the author anticipated. This chapter provides historical context to the relations between Israel and South Africa as well as pointing to the impact that the crisis between Israel and Palestine has on the intra-community relations for Jews and Muslims in South Africa.

With economic diplomacy central to South Africa's international relations Scarlett Cornelissen (Chapter 17) presents a detailed analysis of South

Africa's changing economic relations with China, Japan and South Korea. Both Chapter 16 and 17 point to historical relations between *apartheid* South Africa and Japan and Israel, although relations waned with Israel yet economic diplomacy has seen relations between South Africa and Japan continue, despite losing some ground to China. The figures, however, confirm the ongoing inequality of trade between Africa and north-east Asia with a continued focus in extracting Africa's natural resources. Following on from these analyses Justine van der Merwe's contribution (Chapter 18) seems a little vague on foreign policy and South Africa's international engagement linked to the proposed Government-Business-Media complex. The value of the complex as a framework for analysis is also not clear, particularly as each sector includes a diversity of players.

In the final chapter by Mopeli Mosheshoe (Chapter 19) the focus is placed on understanding South Africa's leadership role within the region, or the idea of South African as a hegemon, "reluctant" or not. Given the challenges already presented in the previous chapters of this volume it is little wonder that the chapter's analysis concludes that it is South Africa's "internal constraints that limit its leadership ability in Southern Africa" (p 361).

With a number of publications being released in 2014 considering the progress of South Africa over the course of the first two decades of democracy this edited volume should be included on the reading list of academics, researchers, students and government officials looking to engage in the debate on South Africa's achievements and disappointments in shaping the future of the country.

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Praeg, Leonhard, *A Report on Ubuntu*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press 2014, 305 pp.

The term 'community' has gained in prominence in contemporary public political discourse. It has become a favourite in the speeches of politicians who use it to invoke a deeper moral commitment from their followers and the public at large. 'Community' thus often makes its way into the discourse for purely instrumental purposes only very loosely associated with its substantive contributions to political understanding and social engagement. Its inclusion through phrases such as 'community focused', and 'to work for the community' is intended by the politician as a veiled critique or question-