property owners to evict occupiers, prioritising scarce medical resources for patients that have a higher chance of survival, and restricting hate speech against minorities.) And yet, the evidence here turns out to be inconclusive, for there are very few cases where the invocation of *Ubuntu* has been decisive. In the majority of cases, Furman argues, judges have used *Ubuntu* mostly to illustrate or justify decisions that they have already made using more conventional legal reasoning.

This relationship between *Ubuntu* and constitutional law is also the focus of Ramose's essay, which is perhaps the most interesting piece in the collection. Unlike the majority of the other contributors (and the jurists quoted by Furman), he shares Keevy's view that a fundamental incompatibility exists between the South African constitution and the ethic of *Ubuntu*. But where Keevy argues for the replacement of traditional values with constitutional universalism, Ramose takes a diametrically opposed stance, arguing for the importance of *Ubuntu* and mounting an attack on the idea of constitutional supremacy itself. For Ramose, the constitution is too inflexible, and too protective of property rights. South Africa, he suggests, might be better served by a parliamentary system that was unrestrained by judicial checks and balances.

This argument is ultimately not persuasive; the dangers of unchecked political power having been illustrated too many times throughout history. But it serves to illustrate the bracing range of views that exists within this volume. In terms of its positive agenda, the collection of essays is limited; those who approach it looking for *Ubuntu*-flavoured proposals for economic and constitutional reform are likely to be disappointed. The volume succeeds in a different way, however: as an intriguing set of reflections on what it means to be South African.

Laurence Caromba
School of Social Science
Monash South Africa

****

Saul, John S/Bond, Patrick *South Africa — The Present as History*. *From Mrs Ples to Mandela and Marikana*. Suffolk: James Curry and Johannesburg: Jacana Media. 2014, ix + 302 pp.

Two decades after the transition to the new democratic South Africa, John Saul and Patrick Bond have produced a book that reflects on this

apparently momentous occasion. Notwithstanding the sub-title's implicit suggestion, however, this is not your usual book recounting the history of South Africa from its prehistoric days (*Mrs Ples*) to the current time (*Marikana*). It is in essence a study that augments an already productive trail of academic analysis by both authors on post-democratic South Africa, focusing explicitly on the socio-economic dimension and utilising a critically socialist perspective.

Both Professor John S Saul and Professor Patrick Bond are renowned political economists and acclaimed 'academic activists' in the domain of African studies. The issues the book under review is concerned with have in essence been told elsewhere and in various other forms by the said authors. That being said, in this instance Marikana appears as the relatively new lens through which the 'story' is told. It is an event that further illustrates and substantiates their 'stance' and that also extends the periodisation of their former work — yet essentially both the 'stance' and 'story' are much the same.

In line with this focus on Marikana, the book is not only dedicated to the late Neville Alexander, but also to "the memory of the 34 mine-workers massacred at Marikana by the post-apartheid state" (p v). This tragic episode is pivotal throughout the work. In the Introduction the "massacre at Marikana" is referred to as "merely the most graphic example of what South Africa's troubled history has produced" (p 3). Further on in the Introduction, it is "merely one more of the ways in which South Africa's multi-faceted contradictions unfold before your eyes at Marikana" (p 7). In keeping with this catastrophic theme, the authors from the outset paint a dismal picture not only of South Africa's past but also its current post-*apartheid* situation.

The issue of a complex past with "multi-faceted contradictions" referred to above is also a recurring dictum throughout the analysis. According to the authors the book seeks to:

> offer a consistent, cumulative argument about the direction of developments in South Africa as the country has moved from its apartheid past into its post-apartheid future (p 9).

The complexities and contradictions which are indeed critical and integral to any examination of the South African past are persistently underscored throughout the book.

In the Introduction (pp 1-12) the authors also point out that in order to keep the book as "succinct and focused as publication require-

ments demand" it is based on a synthesis of "the literature of professional scholarship and a range of public documents" as well as their "own experiences over a number of years" (p 10). While they very usefully and appropriately include assessments of some of the key debates held by a range of other scholars (reflected in a 15-page bibliography) it is Saul and Bond's personal participation in various capacities that adds to a particular disposition in the book. They have both dedicated, and continue to dedicate, themselves to the freedom struggle but are disillusioned with the outcome, and it is this view that colours the text.

The authors' huge disappointment in the post-*apartheid* dispensation is apparent from the very first pages and continues throughout the analysis to the last page of pessimism regarding the "future?" (p 270). The long-awaited transition to a new South Africa is acutely juxtaposed to a transformation that did not transpire. The book therefore sets out to consider the "'pre-history' of a liberated South Africa" (p 2) and the story of the "undeniable drama of the transition from the formal structures of white minority rule" to the South Africa of today which is a "much more unequal society than during apartheid" (p 3).

Implicit in the subtitle is a tripartite division of the book: Part I (pp 13-142), which comprises just over half of the book, sets out to traverse the entire history of South Africa from its early beginnings to the 1994 election. It is this past or "pre-history" of the new democratic South African dispensation that the authors argue left "fingerprints" (p 2) all over present-day South Africa. This is the "present as history" and the legacy that Saul sets out to assess, a legacy that deeply "scarred" the succeeding two decades after democracy. In the first chapter, "The making of South Africa … and apartheid to 1970", the first section moves surprisingly swiftly through the early pre-colonial African history. It focuses briefly on the Bantu-speakers and their commonalities of culture and economic production with a brief acknowledgement of Omer-Cooper's "'recognizable linguistic and cultural sub-groupings'" giving no attention to the interrelationships (both cooperative and confrontational) between the various indigenes — the Bantu-speakers themselves and the Khoisan. This is at one level rather ironic given that the history presented by the *apartheid* government did likewise — focusing more on the "land-fall" of "van Riebeck" [sic] (p 21). The remaining sections move rapidly through the subsequent three centuries of conquest, mineral discoveries and exploitation, the emergence of segregation and the heyday of *apartheid* in the 1960s. This adept overview is based on

key scholarship and also takes cognisance of the significant debates, but at the same time interprets and highlights aspects of this past in view of the arguments that follow. The chapter therefore does "set the stage for … the succeeding one" (p15).

The second chapter, "The transition: The players assemble, 1970-1990", begins by reemphasising the point about the complex nature of the South African story. It heralds the dramatic victory over the "grim system of apartheid" but decries the "grim fact of capitalist domination" (p 63). Continuing the chronology, the chapter considers resistance such as the Durban strikes (1972-73) and Soweto riots (1976) along with union activities, such as those of COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), UDF (United Democratic Front) and MDM (Mass Democratic Movement) against the *apartheid* state and "racial capitalism" (p 64). The idea of a "precariat" is also floated here as part of an urban-ised resistance force. (pp 66-67, 78) It is here too that we see evidence of the author's own involvement in anti-*apartheid* activism (p 73 fn 23) as well as the persistent disillusionment of others involved. For example, "'many cadres [were] angered by the apparent abandonment of long held principles and policies'" (p 97).

In a shorter third chapter "The apartheid endgame, 1990-1994", Saul outlines the negotiated process which was dealt with "cautiously" and "somewhat nervously" (p 121) before the "relatively thin layer of ANC linked black elites … slipped into power" (p 63) and sold out to what is depicted as an unfair compromise highlighting the ultimate limitations of the ANC's victory (p 64) — in essence the "politics of power and profit" with concomitant "reform and repression" (pp 105, 115). Concluding Part I, Saul points out that "most academic analysts" have accepted "both as inevitable and as benign the fact that, on balance, the negotiations' process tended to sideline many of the bearers of popular resistance" (p 141). He adds that some observers have been "unenthusiastic" about what "was actively being accomplished in South Africa in democratic terms" (p 142) and concludes pensively that "…a page has been turned. Time alone would tell what was written on the next one" (p 142).

Part II (pp 145-210) takes on the title of the book, "The present as history" and focuses, as the sub-title indicates, on the "post-apartheid and post-1994" periods. In chapters 4 and 5 it is Bond who considers two decades of the new democratic South Africa in two distinct phases. The first deals with the accumulation of wealth and the rise of class conflict

(1994-2000), while the second involves the period after the Mandela presidency up to the Marikana incident (2000-2012). The chapters also show that the visible contradictions and inequalities in terms of class and gender as well as the unaddressed environmental concerns and lack of genuine popular democratic empowerment persist, if not deepen, beyond the transition of 1994 (p 65).

In some 65 pages Bond considers the "unfortunate compromises" made by the ANC government which subscribed to a neo-liberal economic path that, he argues, was prefigured in the transitional years. The "pessimistic predictions" made are perpetuated and portrayed throughout chapters 4 and 5 with "systematic corruption", "extreme inequality, unemployment and low pay" — trends Bond claims were reflected in the Marikana massacre of 16 August 2012 (p 176). In his chapter conclusion Bond again emphasises the complexities and contradictions by stating that by late 2012 "South Africa [was] amongst the most difficult countries to read, politically" (p 208).

In Part III of the book, "Conclusions [plural]: The future as history", each author has a final word on the current and pending socio-economic and political propositions. With deepening gloom Bond considers the Marikana massacre as an explosion of desperation. Saul concludes "from the vantage point of the troubled present" referring to both the "anti-climactic" ANC victory as well as the "complex cross-currents of the present moment" (p 243).

In conclusion, the *Present as History* is a well written and informed retrospective discussion of South Africa's past. This scholarly reflection on the history of the country is, however, sombre and ideologically-loaded.

Karen Harris
Department of Historical and Heritage Studies
University of Pretoria