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South Africa's Young Democracy, Ten Years On: Guest Editor's Introduction

POSTAPARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA HELD ITS THIRD GENERAL ELECTION IN April 2004. This time the United Nations decided that it did not need to send any electoral observers to pass judgment on the quality of the process. Soon after the election the public debate about the qualities and characteristics of the next president took root as Thabo Mbeki—having defined the post-Mandela era in his own image as the "intellectual president"—began to navigate his second term as president. Eleven years of press freedom, the separation of the executive, parliament, and judiciary, and a growing vigor in civil society provide clearly defined positive signposts.

South Africa's transition into a nascent democracy has been celebrated in many ways but perhaps the most important and invigorating is the amount of writing about this first period. This wide variety of analysis spans the spectrum from euphoric to celebratory, through various kinds of sociopolitical critique to outright condemnation of the state for failing the poor and most vulnerable majority—for destroying the vision of the struggle against apartheid or what the Communist party of South Africa referred to as internal colonialism. Has the revolution been betrayed and according to what benchmarks?

Some of this critical writing featured the failure of the program of the government in meeting well-recognized tenets of the Freedom

Charter, adopted by the Congress of the People in Kliptown, outside Johannesburg, in June 1955. For four decades the Freedom Charter had come to symbolize the minimum revolutionary program of the nonracial Congress Alliance led by the African National Congress (ANC). Some of this writing also focuses attention on the failure of the transition to address the basic elements of the more contemporaneous Reconstruction and Development Program. This program came into being in the run-up to the first election in April 1994 as a minimum program of action that bound together the broad liberation movement led by the ANC. These charters hold an iconic status in the history of the nation and act as a kind of metric. In all of this post-ten-year analysis most focus has been on the state of the economy and the delivery of social services.

This special issue of *Social Research* is another attempt to explore the nature of the transition in the years since April 1994. To accomplish this scholars and activists have been invited to contribute to this issue. Each brings a special perspective. Their papers span a broad range of topics—from the state of the economy, with its deeply structural problems and an unemployment rate of 20 to 30 percent, to the nature and impact of important symbols of the South African transition, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to the state of South Africa's foreign policy forays. A theme that runs through several of these papers is the way in which the nature of the negotiations process reaches into the transition period, a point we will return to.

South Africans remind themselves from time to time that the first election happened at the cusp of a low-scale civil war—in fact two such wars. Just one year before the first election in 1994, Chris Hani, perhaps the most popular leader of the liberation movement after Nelson Mandela, was assassinated by members of the white right-wing. Just a week before the elections, amid rumors of cessation, the Inkatha Freedom Party, representing a substantial part of South Africa's isiZulu-speaking people, had not yet found its way into the election. And just two days before the election Johannesburg's streets suffered bombings carried out by the white right-wing. The negotiations of the previ-

ous four or five years, both the process and the content, had pushed the preelection transition process far enough to prevent substantial reversals. It is also the case that the precariousness, or the perception of precariousness of the preelection period, forced certain concessions on all sides and left several loops incomplete, to be dealt with when a properly constituted government had been elected. The basic elements of the new democracy were in the wings before the first elections were held. There were reports of the stockpiling of food by some whites and the British embassy indicated that it had received an unprecedented number of applications for immigration to that country. The 1994 elections were hugely successful and peace reigned.

What is commonly spoken of as the reconciliation, nation-building focus of the first five years, the years of the Mandela presidency, was built around highly symbolic events and processes. Amid much controversy and dispute the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) took center stage and began the process of allowing people who had never been heard before, to be heard—victims of apartheid crimes, perpetrators of apartheid crimes, and victims and perpetrators of crimes committed in the name of the struggle. The TRC proceedings, televised live, provided the framework for multiple truths to be spoken and heard—the commission affirmed the unheard and liberated those who could not be heard. In 1995 the Constitutional Court heard its first cases. The court affirmed the constitution of 1996, regarded by many as one of the most progressive, as the supreme law of the land and having the power to declare an act passed by Parliament as unconstitutional and therefore null and void. The court also acted as a countervailing force to the power of the executive.

This period also saw the initiation of a large number of formal policy processes—formal in the sense that the newly created government departments convened these and built on, modified, or trashed the policy frameworks that emerged in the policy development exercises of the mass democratic movement in the period between 1988 and 1994. Each of these policy processes was symbolic in structure and content and contained different kinds of interesting accommodations

and concessions. Perhaps the most pertinent symbol of all was the bastardized assemblage that became the anthem of the new nation—the beloved "Die Stem" of the apartheid regime and the beloved "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" of the oppressed. The first government was a government of national unity and it came into being directly as a result of the negotiations process, as a means to ensure that all South Africans had a chance to engage in the shaping of the postapartheid period. It also served as a way to break the ranks of the old ruling elites—an elite that had divided itself into various factions during the negotiations process. It also acted as a mechanism to assure whites and other minority groups that they had a place in the new order.

The Mbeki era began with a clear and unambiguous signal that this was to be a time of reconstructive delivery. This focused attention on the fact that reconciliation as a framework for nation building had to reach beyond the notion of grand symbols (as important as these are) and platitudes. The second government made clear that these were meaningful only if the new democracy improved the quality of life of the majority of South Africans. This was a nation that during the apartheid era produced 50 percent of the electricity of Africa and in which 60 percent of its own population was without it. It boasted a science system that gave rise to the first heart transplant operation while people were dying daily of tuberculosis and cholera. A back of the envelope calculation indicated that South Africans walked the equivalent of an estimated 11 times to the moon and back daily to fetch water for home use. At the southern tip of Africa, only 13 percent of the South Africa's 1.2 million square kilometers belonged to Africans; the rest was owned by white South Africans and the state. In the Mbeki era the mantra was that delivery would be accelerated—that reconciliation would constitute both the major symbols and actual reconstructive program; that one without the other would damage the nature of the young democracy and the ambitions of the struggle and the quiet revolution.

The formulation of this vision for the Mbeki era brought to the fore a variety of contentious and divisive strands. The first is the

obvious clash of agendas represented by the fact that for many white, Indian and “Colored” South Africans the reconciliation agenda was seriously eroded by the reconstructive one; that the power associated with the vast majority of the ANC in the nation’s governing structures at all levels would allow the party to erode and betray the emphases and achievements of the Mandela presidency. Of course, for most South Africans this was not the case. While there has been vast support for the reconciliation process, the ANC could not have simply ignored the fact that, for its major constituency, not much had changed in the first five years. While peace had reigned and numerous new policies were enacted and delivery had indeed occurred, there were also clear and unambiguous signs that the quality of life for the country's majority had not improved significantly. Perhaps more important, for some South Africans this shift presented an emphasis on “difference” rather than on “sameness” and, because of the racialization of wealth distribution and privilege, it was inevitable that this would focus on the development of a racialized development discourse.

The reconciliation and reconstructive agendas depended fundamentally on the deliberate development of strategies to grow the economy. As we discover in Vishnu Padayachee’s paper, this depended on the enactment of suitable legislation, the creation of suitable governance institutions such as an independent South African Reserve Bank, and vigorous attempts on the part of the government to align itself with the broad dictates of what is broadly called the Washington Consensus. A set of negotiations with the World Trade Organization, the European Union, and other major trading partners placed the South African economy fully within the framework of a globalized economy. But this step immediately resulted in the voluntary scrapping of trade tariffs and government subsidies, which in turn resulted in the collapse of several local industries. The textile and clothing industry was one such example; its collapse resulted in the eradication of 150,000 jobs. The leather and shoe industries were also hit. This immediately resulted in raised tensions within the so-called governing alliance that includes the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the Communist party

of South Africa and these have been sharpened by the emergence of a detailed and intricate debate about the nature of the economic growth strategy adopted by the government.

Yet another source of tension related to the emergence of this agenda is that related to issues of identity and citizenship. The deep divisiveness of the apartheid system created deeply divided identities based on race and ethnicity. The development and implementation of affirmative action and employment equity policies led to wide-ranging concerns and debates about what it means to be South African. Mbeki and others have constructed these debates around the notions of building an African nation and its future in an African country on the African continent; the nation-building project is couched in terms of an Africanism discourse. This too is a major shift from the reconciliation agenda of the first five years that was shaped in terms of and emphasized the ANC's *one nation, many cultures* approach. The concern related with the integration (or rather re-integration) of South Africa into Africa stems from the reality that during the Apartheid era the nation was not only a pariah on the continent, it saw itself as a bastion of the west on the African continent.

The great tragedy of South Africa's transition is that it is a society wracked by the devastation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic that is ravaging entire communities, moving through professions like teaching and nursing and through workforces more generally. Young adults are the most affected age group and there is increasing evidence that the impact of the pandemic is most substantial among young adult women. The long-term implications of this are only now beginning to be forecasted, recorded, and analyzed. The deeply divided response of the society to the pandemic has been highlighted by the very controversial public discourse laid out by Mbeki with regard to the use of anti-retroviral drugs. And the current minister of health, while presiding over a national department of health that is unfolding a drug delivery system for HIV/AIDS sufferers and a vaccine development program, constantly seems to undermine the achievements and effectiveness of the department. This has emerged as a deeply divisive issue but has also helped

to shape new understandings of how the government and civil society might relate to each other. The emergence of the Treatment Action Campaign as a powerful force in terms of its capacity to engage the state on the issues related to treatment has been very important. As important has been the extremely public spat between protagonists of the dominant scientific position and those (a small minority) who hold scientific positions that are contrary to the dominant one (the dominant position holds that there is a causal relationship between the development of full-blown AIDS and being infected with HIV).

The emergence of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and the Landless People's Movement (LPM) signaled the re-emergence of civil society in an organized form—the first signs of the development of proto-social movements in the emerging democracy. These organizations have mobilized large campaigns on the basis of specific issues. Importantly, the TAC has used the new democratic institutions such as the Constitutional Court to move forward its struggle. However, the emergence of these developing social movements has also brought to the fore various kinds of tensions between the state and civil society and it is very likely that the emerging shape of this relationship will have important consequences for the vibrancy of the democracy. The importance of the clashes between the TAC and the state is that it hinges on the contentious position adopted by the latter—and by Mbeki in particular—about the roll of antiretroviral drugs in the treatment of AIDS sufferers. The complexity of the position of the state, which has now committed itself to the rollout of a broad-reach antiretroviral treatment regime, even now has deep ramifications for the nature of the relationship between the state and the national science system. On the one hand there are clear and unambiguous indications of deep suspicion and distrust of the science system. Nowhere is this clearer than in a speech made by Mbeki at the University of Fort Hare, in which he referred to the perception among medical scientists that African people were simply carriers of germs. On the other hand the state has committed large amounts of money to develop experimental vaccinations against HIV/AIDS. The emergence of the Treatment Action

Campaign as a powerful social agent for contestation and change tells a story not just of the struggle for universal treatment for AIDS sufferers but also about the reemergence of social movements as a force to reckon with in the consolidation and growth of democracy in the new South Africa.

THESE EXAMPLES OF TENSIONS THAT HAVE EMERGED IN THE POST-1994 period are no more than what might be expected in a society in transition, a society that has emerged not from the ashes of apartheid but out of its living tendrils. The question that faces the leaders of its government structures, its institutions and its intellectuals, is how to wean it off those tendrils—to establish a genuine postcolonial project that links with the global frameworks on its own terms. The regular reference point that is posited by people who feel threatened by these tensions and the nature of the discourses is whether the trajectory takes us toward or away from international (meaning global North) norms. The emergence of a counter discourse led by Mbeki hinges on the unfolding of a prophetic African Renaissance that includes the vital and organic reintegration of the South Africa into Africa. This is a powerful framework for a postcolonial imagination and has attracted considerable interest and excitement from a broad range of intellectuals. The key challenge of this philosophical and political project is whether it carries sufficient weight in terms of the balance of forces on the South African scene. And the key issue within this is whether the symbolic framework provided by the notion of an African Renaissance will facilitate the generation of a new set of philosophical underpinnings that would allow these tensions to be played in a contested terrain rather within two separate and unequal paradigms.

The beauty of the negotiation process was its ability to encompass a range of confluent conditions, to construct a complex web of these, and then to produce a simple formula that captured the imagination of oppressed and oppressor. And the beauty of the transition process is that it has allowed multiple voices to be spoken and heard in multiple languages in such a way that the reality of the transition period is a

complex of multiple realities—each valid in some ways and not valid in other ways but each necessary for the construction of a nation-building project. It is arguable whether the emphasis on reconciliation in the first five years was the correct strategy and whether the change in direction in the next five years was wise. But what is important is that the first 10 years of this young democracy has produced peace, stability, slow and sluggish growth in the economy, and a host of nation-building and reconstructive challenges that remain to be solved.

The key challenge therefore for the next phase of the transition is the need for the emergence of a common platform on which these critical conversations may take place. What are these common platforms? First, they have to be constituted in terms of well-defined physical or virtual spaces that are conducive to the participation of different social forces. Second, they require the development of voices that can be spoken and heard by these different forces, voices that are at least held to be equal. Third, these common platforms require the convergence of philosophical/ideological frameworks within which discussions about the key issues can be discussed effectively.

Why has it been so difficult to produce these platforms? The South African liberation movement was deeply complex, with many ideological positions held together by the powerful imagination generated by a struggle for national liberation. The ANC was in exile, it was in prison, and it was firmly lodged in the mass movements inside the country. The centralist tendencies within the ANC were strong and effective and able to contend with the strong centrifugal forces that constantly threatened to fragment it. The situation became considerably more complex as one widened the definition of liberation movement to include the broad alliance between the ANC, the Communist party of South Africa, and the Congress of South African Trade Unions as they shaped a common program. National liberation only partially satisfied the agendas of the Communist party and the trade union movement, and these three partners had to find ways of talking to each other without fracturing into contesting entities. The Reconstruction and Development Program came into being as powerful signifier of common purpose and

common philosophy, but the RDP was no more than a metaphor for that unity, with the alliance driving a powerful campaign into the first democratic election. Very soon after its large majority in the first election, it became clear that the ANC was prepared to begin to reshape its political and economic agenda. As one might expect, the dissension within the alliance has been public at times.

But there was another kind of alliance. The ANC was anxious to take into the first election an alliance of the oppressed; an alliance with the Black Consciousness Movement, the Pan-Africanist Congress, the Inkatha Freedom Party and a host of others. Among these the ideological and political differences varied in depth. Just prior to the election there was a low-intensity war involving the ANC and its allies on the one hand and the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party on the other. It took the moral authority of Nelson Mandela and the astuteness of the ANC's strategists to bring these parties into the first election as an alliance of the oppressed. The construction of the alliance, once again, required the emergence of ways of talking to each other, ways to ensure that the process of alliance formation continued even in the absence of consensus on many key points. It required ways of talking that were aimed at preventing the irreparable fracturing of the "black" voice, ways of talking that kept potentially divisive (and destructive) tendencies in this construction within a framework that allowed for multiple visions of the future.

And so the negotiations process was shaped by the political imperative of maintaining the different political forces—from the ideological right to the left. In addition to keeping some kind of cohesion among the movements that represented the oppressed, there was a strong imperative to keep all the voices of the white political spectrum represented. This had an enormous impact on the shape of the negotiations and the early transition process. Several of the papers in this issue therefore probe the effect of the negotiations process on the shape and nature of the transition process. This is an important emerging approach in understanding the difficulties faced by South Africa in making rapid progress through the myriad challenges facing it. The nature of the interaction (or lack of it) between the multiple voices in

the preelection phase and the profuse use of a variety of metaphors provide one basis to understand this intricate relationship between the nature of the negotiation process and that of the transition. The papers in this issue use a variety of lenses through which to see and refract this, including this one. And later in this introduction, we add to the meaning of these.

This set of papers, drawn from writers who have significant experience in the intellectualization of South Africa's transition, covers a broad range of subjects. These have been chosen carefully so as to provide a cross-sectional view of the transition landscape. They have been chosen specifically as a means to understand the nature of the transition through an analysis of the performance of this newly democratized society in meeting the political, social, and economic needs of its people. They also provide the basis of understanding the difficult choices that face the government, civil society, the private sector, and others and they explore the tensions between those choices. There are no right answers—just difficult choices.

The papers in this special issue also provide detail about the kinds of progress that have been made in areas of fundamental importance to the most vulnerable people. They also look at how the implementation of macroeconomic policy has laid the foundation for steady growth in GDP, an increase in foreign direct investment, and good fiscal control while also presiding over an enormous wealth gap between rich and poor, unacceptably high levels of unemployment, and the utter devastation HIV/AIDS has imposed on the poorest people.

As one would expect with a set of papers like those in this volume, new questions and new intellectual challenges are presented. This special issue gives scholars of other recent transitions the opportunity to engage with South Africa's transition and in particular to interrogate the nature of the negotiations process and its impact on the transition. It allows the opportunity to view comparative approaches among these many recent political transitions across the globe and perhaps the emergence of a large international project of this nature.

The new South Africa was born in the image of Nelson Rohihlahla Mandela's enormous powers of compassion and reconciliation and this gave way to the reconstruction/reconceptualization agenda of the Mbeki government. The first five years carried a nation-building message with simple (and perhaps simplistic) choices. The second five years introduced layers of complexity, overlaying the hugely important nation-building project with the need for black economic empowerment in order to couple the agenda of political empowerment so powerfully achieved in the process of negotiations to the agenda of economic empowerment. Casting a shadow over all of this is the specter of HIV/AIDS as it scythes through the nation to devastate a society that holds the promise to be a beacon for peace and development for Africa and the world.