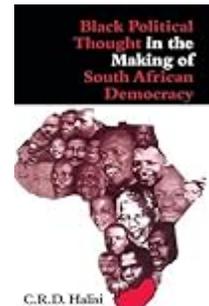


C.R.D. Halisi. *Black Political Thought in the Making of South African Democracy.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999. 192 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-33589-0.



Reviewed by Sean Jacobs (Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA))

Published on H-SAfrica (January, 2001)

A central question of the struggle for South African democracy and for forging a post-apartheid 'polity' is 'who are the people?' This book contributes to that discussion by examining the impact of rival conceptions of citizenship among African intellectuals in the making of South African democracy. Halisi broadly asserts that in colonial Africa, racial nationalism was transformed into a multitude of territorial nationalisms by the boundaries of colonial governments. In South Africa, however, racial nationalism persisted as a potent political force throughout the colonial, postcolonial and apartheid eras of racial domination. Although racial nationalism has been eclipsed in post-apartheid South Africa by liberalism, which is favoured by the ruling African National Congress (ANC), realists continue to reckon with its continuing popular appeal.

Recent analyses of citizenship have distinguished between liberal and republican traditions of thought. The liberal tradition is individualistic and libertarian; the republican prototype is communitarian and popular. In this study the two traditions are labelled 'multiracial unionism' and 'black republicanism' respectively. The former signifies the quest for a single national identity in a multiracial state: the latter recognises multiple communities and people's allegiances to multiple communities and defines the community along racial lines. Thinkers

associated with each of these perspectives have made seminal contributions to the emergence of a broadly based democratic movement in South Africa, one that encompasses the working poor as well as the politically active intelligentsia.

Halisi applies the familiar distinction between liberal and republican citizenship to black South African political thought in two ways. He examines the use of Western political concepts - specifically, democracy, liberalism, socialism and populism - by black political thinkers who have grappled with the problem of prospective citizenship in a multiracial state. Second, he attempts to elucidate the interdependence of racially conscious and non-racial discourse in the political thought of black South Africans. The book, which is the culmination of Halisi's doctoral research in the late 1970s clearly reflects the ideological debates inside South Africa up until the murder in detention by the South African security forces of Steve Bantu Biko, leader of the Black Consciousness Movement. In that regard it appears dated, although Halisi added a final chapter with a focus on the post-apartheid challenges for citizenship. This final chapter, however, gives the impression of an add-on so as to update the research to make it relevant for current debates.

Despite its limited historical reach, the book fits in well with the recent rise in academic scholarship on citi-

zenship (the relationship between rights and obligation) in Africa; most notably the works of Richard Sklar (Halisi's mentor) and by African scholars Peter Ekeh in Nigeria, Stephen Ndegwa in Kenya and Mahmood Mamdani with a continent-wide study (1). One of the refreshing things about Halisi's book is that he moves away from the rigid, often static ideological distinctions of South African politics or defining the apartheid struggle as nationalist, socialist or liberal, so common in the academic writings of the 1980s in South Africa or how the world viewed the South African struggle. (2)

The book also fills in huge gaps in the thus far limited work on the rich black intellectual history of South Africa. More importantly it breaks with the ideologically tainted critiques of 'black republicanism' in South Africa. Too many non-racial, pro-ANC critiques of black republicanism have dismissed the latter because of tactical differences in the fight against apartheid.

The book also contributes to the growth in transatlantic scholarship on US influences on black South African ideological politics. Here particularly the influence of Pan-African thought; that of Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. du Bois and Booker T Washington. In a useful section, part of the chapter on new left politics and the black consciousness movement in the 1970s, Halisi draws on the impact of the US-based Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC) on Biko's Black Consciousness Movement. Finally, despite the rushed appearance of the final chapter, the book locates some of the challenges for citizenship in the 'new' South Africa - racial populism and traditional authority, among others.

The best parts of the book are the sections on black resistance politics of the 1970s. Halisi's closeness to the black consciousness movement in South Africa throughout the 1970s is used to good effect in this regard. He arrived in South Africa in 1976 at the height of a resurgence of student politics after state repression had all but killed off all internal ANC and Pan-Africanist Congress-opposition to apartheid. He met with many influential resisters, among the PAC's Robert Sobukwe, then dying of cancer and under house arrest, and Steve Biko, whose legacy will be enhanced by the publication of the book.

The book is therefore a gem for scholars interested in the hitherto under-researched history of the black consciousness movement in South Africa or in developing a critical history of leftwing thought in South Africa. Halisi is clearly writing for an academic audience and does not provide a mainstream history of South African political thought.

For the well-informed African (and specifically South African) audience, parts of Halisi's work might seem obvious. On the other hand, he writes with a certain insider's perspective and sophistication that even South Africans familiar with the general outline of the development of black political thought on citizenship would find informative and useful.

Note to teachers: the book should not be assigned to an undergraduate class, but comes recommended for graduate students.

NOTES

(1) In this regard see, Stephen N. Ndegwa, 'Citizenship and Ethnicity: An Examination of Two Transitional Movements in Kenyan Politics,' *American Political Science Review* 91, 3 (September 1997): 599-616; Peter Ekeh, 'Colonialism and the Development of Citizenship in Africa: A Study in Ideologies of Legitimization', in *Themes in African Social and Political Thought*, edited by Onigu Otite. Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978; and Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University of Press, 1996.

(2) Recent examples of these approaches are the works of Tom Lodge (*All Here and Now: Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*. London: Longman, 1983) or Anthony Marx (*The Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Copyright (c) 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-safrica>

Citation: Sean Jacobs. Review of Halisi, C.R.D., *Black Political Thought in the Making of South African Democracy*. H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews. January, 2001.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4803>

Copyright © 2001 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.