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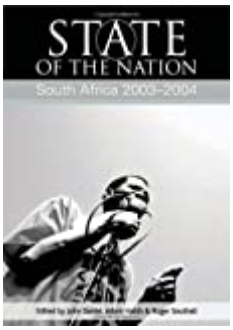

John Daniel, Adam Habib, Roger Southall, eds. *State of the Nation: South Africa 2003-2004.* Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 2003. xv + 400 pp. $34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7969-2024-9.

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This year will see the tenth anniversary of the first non-racial democratic elections in South Africa. The government has already begun celebrating, issuing various overviews of the last ten years which, invariably, accentuate the positive and downplay–or ignore–the negative. Thus, a balanced and nuanced evaluation of the real state of the nation is both timely and necessary. The book under review provides, in the main, this synopsis.

Written by some of the key social scientists in the country, the book provides a comprehensive and honest picture of contemporary South Africa and will be extremely useful in any courses on South Africa or the region. I have already used various chapters in my own course on South African politics.

Made up of seventeen chapters, the book covers virtually the whole gamut of major issues. After an introduction by the editors, Gerhard Mare provides an interesting overview of the nature of contemporary South Africa, whilst Roger Southall covers, with some dexterity, the decline of the opposition in the country and the tensions that have been developing within the Tripartite Alliance. The decline in capacity in some areas of government is covered by both. Overall, it is becoming more and more apparent that confirmation of maladministration, whether it is simply in an incapacity to execute policies or whether linked to corruption (see below) is becoming starker. That much of this is affecting social policy–welfare, poverty relief, heath, and housing–is tragic and undermines the ANC's election slogan of "A Better Life For All." Somehow, the government will have to tackle the growing shortage of skills within the civil service caused by both affirmative action and the lack of ability to enlist and keep qualified and experienced black bureaucrats when the private sector so aggressively (and successfully) competes for their talents.

The chapters on the economy, by Nicoli Nattrass and Miriam Altman, both on the appallingly high levels of unemployment, as well as Sakela Buhlungu on trade unionism, are interesting and well written. Percy Moleke's chapter on the racial character of employment in South Africa, with detailed figures on the domination of management positions by white males, is also enlightening and useful.

The chapter on HIV/AIDS, by Mandisa Mbali, is excellent and a cogent summary of the rather unfortunate course that the issue has taken under Mbeki. Certainly, Mbeki's denial and prevarications around the whole HIV/AIDS pandemic has not only undermined the strategies the government has put in place, having a negative impact on people with HIV and AIDS and their families, but has also demoralized those in government and in the NGO sector who are striving to lessen the impact

of the disease on society. It also, of course, undermines South Africa's "image" overseas and has made Mbeki look both ridiculous and heartless. His recent statement to an American journalist that he does not know anyone who either has died of AIDS or even has HIV (poor Parks Mankahlana and Peter Mokaba–forgotten so quickly!) suggests that though officially "retired" from the "debate," the South African president and leader of the country with the highest number of people with HIV/AIDS in the world still lives in denial.

Chapters by Adam Habib on state-civil society relations in the post-apartheid era, and chapters on various aspects of the state of education, make up a full section on society in contemporary South Africa. Within this section, a valuable chapter by Michael Aliber and Reuben Mokoena on land reform is admirably written. After all, the election of the ANC was supposed to represent an historic opportunity to place equitable land policies on the political agenda after centuries of racist alienation. But contrast the comparative pace that the National Department of Agriculture has taken in liberalizing agricultural markets since 1994 as the government pursues neoliberal programs with the considerable holdups experienced in the Department for Land Affairs approach to land reform. The 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme's promise that it would redistribute 30 percent of agricultural land within five years now seems a cruel illusion. Yet, Aliber and Mokoena point out that despite shrill warnings about land being a ticking bomb in South Africa, which the ANC at times has used with reference to Zimbabwe's own troubles, only 1.3 percent of South African respondents in surveys express the opinion that land is one of their top three concerns. Yet it remains, of course, problematic and, perhaps most importantly of all, a symbolic reminder of past injustices and appropriation by the minority.

Two chapters on South Africa's foreign relations round off the book. Maxi Schoeman's chapter on South Africa as a middle power is interesting, though I am curious as to why she has not referred to the work of the so-called "Stellenbosch School" which wrote extensively in the late 1990s on precisely this topic, using the very same Coxian framework. John Daniel, Varusha Naidoo, and Sanusha Naidu's chapter on South African corporate expansion into Africa is excellent, a really probing account which to my mind throws up a major paradox in Mbeki's foreign relations. Whilst the President stakes his colors to the Africanist mast and decries white racism (real and imagined), his promotion of neo-liberal solutions to Africa's developmental impasse means that liberalization almost inevitably opens the door to "white" capital from South Africa. A veritable, and at times ostentatious, "re-colonization" of whole swathes of the continent is occurring, for good or bad. Yet paradoxically, the agents of such impulses are those least likely to concur with Mbeki's racialized vision of the continent's future.

On the downside of the book, one of the omissions, a major one I feel, is a chapter on corruption and its seeming increase in the polity. After all, an overwhelming majority (around eight of ten) South Africans think that corruption is one of the key issues in today's South Africa. And it is sadly true that rarely a day passes without some report of corruption in one form or another being printed. Certainly, the number of top-ranking politicians who have been prosecuted for corruption, or who are strongly suspected (as in Vice-President Jacob Zuma's having *prima facie* evidence of corrupt practices hanging over him) of committing corruption is large and ever-growing. A chapter on how corruption is staking out the post-apartheid, post-Mandela government should be included in the next edition.

So too, there should be a stronger chapter on race relations in contemporary South Africa. This is particularly urgent now that Mbeki's racial take on politics, particularly in the country's foreign relations but also domestically, is becoming more and more discernible. Whilst Xolela Mangcu does a decent enough coverage of the continuance of white racism, going so far as to assiduously list the handful of particularly nasty actions by whites, he is somewhat skimpy on details when it is the other way around. It is not good enough to pass breezily over the fifteen hundred murdered farmers with the one-sentence comment that "to be sure there have also been racial incidents including black attacks on white farmers" (p. 112).

But, in all, this book is an excellent overview of contemporary South Africa and one that will be read and used with profit by all interested in the country and its future.

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