

## A rainbow, prophets and the vortex: The state of South Africa, circa 2012–2013

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The second phase – tragedy  
or farce?

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South Africa is now in the early months of important times.

In 2014 South Africans will celebrate four anniversaries. All are founding moments in this new democracy. The first two were in February. There was the 25th anniversary of State President F.W. de Klerk's 2 February 1990 State of the Nation address to the Joint Sitting of Parliament, announcing the unbanning of outlawed liberation movements and persons and the release of 'political' prisoners. Then 11 February marked the 25th anniversary of Nelson Mandela leaving prison and delivering his landmark address from the balcony of the Cape Town City Hall. On 27 April 20 years ago, the 10th Parliament of the Republic was duly elected in South Africa's first universal general election. Finally, 10 May will mark the 20th anniversary of Mandela taking the oath of office as President of the Republic.

And yet, as these historic milestones draw closer, the lustrous sheen has faded on public narratives of heroic liberation struggle and the miraculous birth of the 'Rainbow Nation'. Important new public discourses are developing. Influential voices seek a re-examination of South Africa's liberation past, its transition to democracy, and its post-apartheid condition. There are major scholarly and political critiques of the existing relationships among the ruling political party, the state, and South African citizens. All political parties, including the ANC in its 2012 centenary year of celebration, have acknowledged the need for new, innovative political thinking. And yet the ANC-led Congress Alliance is beset with inter- and intra-organisational politicking and feuding. From its liberal anti-apartheid and pro-democracy pasts, South Africa's leading party of opposition has now also established firm bases as a party of provincial and municipal government standing poised to make further electoral gains. A new oppositional political party has now formed from within the heart of black consciousness liberation traditions. There is considerable public discussion on the need for a new standard of morality in public life. South Africa's standards of leadership are decried, most particularly by revered figures with impeccable anti-apartheid and 'Struggle' backgrounds. Within these very public critiques, current ruling elites across the spectrum, are described as self-interested, lacking in moral principle, ethical scruple and the required political vision.

This year South Africa will also hold its fifth general election. Much politicking will evoke nostalgic memories of that first optimistic moment, and evocative memory of the now recently deceased Mandela. The ANC will use these feel-good anniversary moments to maximum self-congratulating celebratory purposes. Whilst the ANC will be returned as the ruling party of national government, election results promise to reflect a substantial re-alignment of political forces – the first such major change since 1994.

So, in this year there will be many articles, books, conferences – national and international – documentaries, exposés, films, histories, memoirs, memorials, polemics, and much more. Central to all these anniversary-time offerings should be two appropriately posed questions: 'When did apartheid end?' and 'After 20 years, what's freedom's dividend?'

These two books are about South Africa's post-apartheid contemporary condition, ca. 2012–2013. The first has its roots in left-wing anti-apartheid discourses of the 1980s. The *New South African Review* – now in its third iteration – is the descendant of that influential earlier series, then published by Ravan Press – also a powerful anti-apartheid force in the 1980s. As then, the series' intellectual energies come largely from within the Sociology Department at the University of the Witwatersrand. The New series is published by Wits University Press. The second book – dramatically larger in both scale and intent – is from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The HSRC is a statutory body, established in 1968 as the national social science public policy research institute. This book is the sixth volume of their post-apartheid State of the Nation series.

The key to both these scholarly works lies in their respective sub-titles. The *New South African Review's* is 'The second phase – tragedy or farce'. Here is explicit reference to the 'The Second Phase' – a key recent ANC political analysis promising more 'radical policies and decisive action' in implementing the national democratic revolution, as adopted at their conference in Mangaung in 2013.<sup>1</sup> This notion is now a central element in the ANC's 2014 Election Manifesto.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, the HSRC's theme is also unambiguously expressed in its telling sub-title: 'Addressing inequality and poverty'. This phrase also comes from current ANC thinking – its 'addressing poverty, unemployment and inequality' policy statement and slogan.<sup>3</sup> This mantra is now also a key aspect of the ANC's 2014 Election Manifesto.<sup>2</sup> So, both books nail their relevancies firmly to their respective masts.

Significantly, these books also have some similar lines of both enquiry and analytical perspective. They also share similar overall general outlooks. Both show a deep sense of concern that South Africa has now passed into another phase of its post-apartheid trajectory. But here the sense conveyed is very, very different to the confident 'second phase' public exuberance of the ANC. It is these two book's overall senses of the current South African condition that lies at the centre of this review.

Both books are scholarly reviews, of a special type. Both are thematic and clearly the result of strategic thought. Their respective sub-titles are most revealing. Neither book is chronologically rigid. There is much of contemporary

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history and politics in both. This history concerns both apartheid and the pre-1990 history of liberation movements, pro-democracy struggles and post-1990 contexts: global, regional and national. All of this detail is vital. Yet both works are essentially studies in contemporary and applied social science. Significantly, despite these two works being, respectively, the third *New South African Review* and the sixth volume of the *State of the Nation*, both eschew narratives of progress. The books resonate with sombre concern, offering ominously forbidding perspectives.

In both works the key moment is the Marikana massacre. Indeed, although strangely it is not clearly identified, the *Review's* cover image is of 'The Man in the Green Blanket' – the 32-year-old Eastern Cape migrant and mineworker leader, Mgcineni Noki, who was one of the 34 shot dead on that fateful 16 August 2012.<sup>4</sup> And to be clear, in neither of these works is 'Marikana' simply a metaphor. That killing ground is used as a high-definition prism through which to see vast swathes of historical and contemporary South African life – now a central moment in post-apartheid South Africa's very changed contemporary condition. Here, 'distilled to its essence' – to borrow Devan Pillay's phrase in the *Review* – is the crux of these books' findings.<sup>5</sup> Preferring the phraseology of liquid dynamics, Olive Shisana – the influential CEO of the HSRC – puts it clearly in her Foreword: South Africans 'have entered a 'watershed'<sup>6</sup>. In this scenario the central actor is the poor – those without a freedom dividend – who 'refuse to accept the persistence of inequality and poverty'<sup>6</sup>.

The 'Rainbow Nation' was a term defining a time of enormous optimism. Key to that South African optimism was trust in future governance, and faith in the human capacities and eager potentials of free people – South Africa's hugely and tragically diverse new citizenry in the making; its nascent civil society. To all these, Mandela's inaugural speech as President offered South Africans a social contract with their incoming government. His concluding remarks were<sup>7</sup>:

*We understand it still that there is no easy road to freedom.*

*We know it well that none of us acting alone can achieve success.*

*We must therefore act together as a united people, for national reconciliation, for national building, for the birth of a new world.*

*Let there be justice for all.*

*Let there be peace for all.*

*Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all.*

*Let each know that for each the body, the mind and the soul have been freed to fulfil themselves.*

*Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world.*

That optimistic sense of faith in human goodness and progress was quickly reflected in government policy. There was the Reconstruction and Development Programme. That same sense of optimism was also central to the new school education policy: outcomes-based education. And there was also Mandela's own pet project: the schoolchildren's feeding scheme. By the 2001 local government elections the entire country had been divided into metropolitan areas – the key home of the citizen. Indeed one can argue that the politico-legal death of apartheid came thus with these local government elections, with citizens now having to vote in these newly demarcated areas.

Broadly, the first was stymied by international financiers, with Mandela not using his undoubted moral authority to stand his ground; the second

by its own ambition and a near complete lack of unionised teacher and civil service capacity, competence, and comprehension; and the third by greed – mainly of parents and schoolteachers. And the final one is now threatened by the popularly referred to 'Traditional Courts' bill, pushed by none other than the current President. 'Let us solve African problems the African way, not the white man's way', Zuma recently told a meeting of traditional leaders.<sup>8</sup> The issue has been widely reported internationally.<sup>9</sup> To very many, here are apartheid's Bantustans being slipped in through the back door. Currently shelved – largely through opposition from ANC-led provinces – the ANC will re-introduce a revised form of this bill into Parliamentary processes after the forthcoming general election. Optimistic humane principles: non-racialism, non-sexism, and *ubuntu* – have become sterile mantras, devoid of real meaning. It is significant how little public emphasis ANC leaders give to the term 'citizen'. Mandela mostly spoke, and most powerfully too, to 'My fellow South Africans'. Mbeki, in his sonorous addresses, preferred to stress white and black, and communities – advantaged and underdeveloped, rich and poor. Zuma's formal public face is opaque.

Forgetting downright antagonism and resentful meanness, within these optimistic times there were many words of wise counsel and considered caution. Considering the key ANC origins of the two sub-titles to these books, two cautions are vitally important. Significantly, one was never reported – never leaked – to the media. After the elections in 1994, at the ANC's first Parliamentary caucus, a member of that caucus remembers President Mandela (by then not a member of that caucus) cautioning as follows: 'It is only the ANC that can kill the ANC.'<sup>10</sup> Over time warnings continued to be expressed, even from the highest reaches within the ANC. One key public moment came in 2004. Addressing the Pan-African Parliament, President Mbeki made the following comments, the significance of which is impossible to miss. Mbeki<sup>11</sup> quoted Chinua Achebe:

*They need nobody to remind them that they and their continent became an object of pity and despair among the peoples of the world, with their human dignity denied, because what happened and what we did suggest that we were incapable of doing the things we must do to restore and assert our own dignity, to do the things we must do to achieve the objective of a better life for all our people.*

*Because they know what has happened to them, these masses understand very well why Chinua Achebe said the things he said in his classic work 'Things Fall Apart', when he wrote:*

*'Warriors will fight scribes for the control of your institutions; wild bush will conquer your roads and pathways; your land will yield less and less while your offspring multiply; your houses will leak from the floods and your soil will crack from the drought; your sons will refuse to pick up the hoe and prefer to wander in the wilds; you shall learn ways of cheating and you will poison the kola nuts you serve your own friends. Yes, things will fall apart.'*

Mbeki's comments are an appropriate backdrop to Susan Booysen's excellent chapter on the ANC in the *Review*.<sup>12</sup> Her main interpretive lines are also used to good effect in Temba Masilela's important chapter in the HSRC volume.<sup>13</sup> Let's try and develop some of these points by asking suggestive comments and questions. We have to be brave.

It is clear that the ANC is now just a mature African nationalist party. It proclaims its permanence, and its prophetic messianic message, and godly derived authority. It draws heavily on an, albeit often invented or over-imagined, rich historical seam of legitimacy. It has very dynamic internal energies. Its membership swells. It dispenses patronage – within both itself and also into private and public sectors. It initiates, filters and

limits policy discussions, and wider public discourses. Its street-fighting capacities remain. And by nature it is now a party of reform.

In the early 1990s, as the ANC went into complicated political and constitutional negotiations, it and its alliance partners were hugely divided over key approaches and beliefs. These divisions have not yet been resolved. Indeed, these differences were taken into government. The ANC has long debated the centres of power issue: mostly over whether there are one or two centres. Aren't there now many more centres of power? There is all too much of Tammany Hall in the ANC's senses of how entrepreneurial private enterprise joins political patronage, state tender and the civil service. Much patronage is actively planned and arranged on substantial scales. Much corruption operates in the public domain. Do these aspects of ANC organisational energy not count as organised criminal activity? Finally, regicide has been committed once – at Polokwane in 2007. Does one not acquire a taste for such excitement, plotting and deadly bloodletting?

These two books comprise 40 chapters, covering an enormous range of topics. There are clearly discernible themes common to both works. The first common theme concerns politics, power and governance. Here, importantly, the *Review* focuses heavily on the country's power elites. But there is an important difference. The HSRC volume avers such theoretical and political perspectives. Secondly, and again in both books, comes issues of the economy, labour, black economic empowerment (BEE), spatial developments and environmental issues. The third common theme covers public policy and social practice. It is here that the HSRC's long-standing depth and expertise in these areas comes into its own. In their work are extensive sociological perspectives, often highly detailed, of what it means to be living in South Africa at present. The final theme concerns South Africa and the wider world.

It is impossible to review all. There is a range of approaches and outlooks. For a variety of reasons there are stand-outs, needing mention. John Daniel's and Roger Southall's respective views on power elites are critically important.<sup>14,15</sup> William Atwell's work – a case study on BEE – is hugely stimulating, and encouraging too.<sup>16</sup> David Fig's perspectives on hydraulic fracking are refreshingly important.<sup>17</sup> So too is Mcebisi Ndletyana's view on politicking and policy incoherence.<sup>18</sup> Francis Nyamnjoh's article on seeing South African society through the prism of a Freedom Day broadcast from SAfm is a quite superb example of the sociological imagination at work.<sup>19</sup> There are more in similar vein.

But there are niggles, and more too.

These two works are both scholarly studies of very contemporary issues. Through all the chapters mention is made of a range of people: from elites to media commentators; political activists; trade unionists; foreigners; the sick; workers; the poor, homeless and destitute; victims of homophobic attack (gays and lesbians); xenophobes; abused women and children; shackland militants; organised criminals; and so forth. These are not just sociological categories. These are all living people. Both books have indexes. These are replete with individual names. Most of these named and indexed people live. Many are public figures. Many own, legislate or govern. Others do not. They all live and act. Yet in the *Review* only 1 chapter out of 16 – Fig's on fracking – really illustrates an understanding of the importance of oral interview source material and analysis. This too is the case in the HSRC's volume. Aside from a chapter with a single telephonic interview, and Nyamnjoh's important tuning in to SAfm, only 1 chapter out of 24 makes use of oral interview material: the chapter by Laetitia Rispel and Jeanette Hunter on health-care reforms.<sup>20</sup> Surely this is inexplicable and a substantial methodological gap? What has happened to oral interviewing – of elites, and ordinary people too, in South African social science research methodology? What has happened to that dynamically rich and politically powerful tradition of oral interviewing – the insistence on the importance of the people's voice – that was so much a part of left-wing social scientist's politics and method during the 1980s? In both books, most of the cited works are secondary sources. We are not reading self-referential, disengaged but cleverly self-serving articles positioned for a proclaimed wider greater good, are we? Let's return to this issue in concluding remarks.

Review books like these two do present a range of chapters, mixing micro-studies and larger more comprehensive perspectives and themes. Readers tend towards the permissive, allowing for certain diversities and idiosyncrasies. But these are nevertheless reviews. They are not editions of a scholarly journal; nor are they published collections of conference papers.

Over the last few years there has been much discussion, in political, media and scholarly contexts, of political re-alignments. Much interest has focused on the growth of social movements and their potential importance within both local and national politics and governance. The *Review* has one chapter on social movements. This chapter concerns the Anti-Privatisation Forum in Johannesburg. Here are interesting personal reflections on weaknesses and failures; and an attempt in May 2012 to rejuvenate the movement. 'About fifteen men and women met on the stairs of Museum Africa one Sunday morning.'<sup>21</sup> Although strikingly reminiscent of earlier South African Trotskyite political traditions, we are not told of the Forum's political persuasions. This is an important pity. A major question concerns potential linkages between social movements and wider political forces.

In Gauteng during 2012–2013 the most important anti-privatisation issue was not a small fractious group agitating for free utility services and encouraging illegal electricity connections in Soweto. It was the sustained and widespread public opposition to the privatisation of Gauteng's public freeway system. These oppositional energies came from a political party – the Democratic Alliance (DA), the ANC-aligned trade union federation – the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and largely social media-based social movements – such as the Opposition to Urban Tolling Alliance (OUTA) and Tolhek. Campaigns involved many tens of thousands of people, legal challenges, petitions and freeway go-slows. The latter organised by both COSATU and, separately, motorbike clubs. The issue has by no means disappeared. But it is noticeable how wider political differences came between parties having common cause in this single-issue campaign. And yet this single issue campaign was of huge potential benefit to a wider public. So, the behaviour of its citizen opponents is also revealing. The privatising of freeways can be quite properly viewed as an unjust law. When will South Africa's citizens – both its working- and middle-class commuter components – see South Africa's history of successful non-violent civil disobedience as inspiration for new senses of citizen power? Gandhi developed his ideas of *satyagraha* here. The Defiance Campaign – a campaign against unjust laws – would not have sustained itself without such principles. Here are vital issues that need coverage which are not covered.

To return now to Shisana's analytical overview in the HSRC volume: a 'watershed' moment. As the two works point out, much of the contemporary crises have been foreseen, and 'a turnaround approach has become inevitable'.<sup>6</sup> This issue is critically important and needs close scrutiny and development. Continuing her theme Shisana sets out 'multidimensional challenges...governance, politics, international relations, migration, poverty, unemployment, human settlements, the economy, and lastly, understanding the country's security environment'.<sup>6</sup> Similarly in their general introduction, Nyamnjoh and Gerald Hagg, together with Jansen, provide a number of even lengthier interrelated factors which are involved in any of the given key themes.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in the *Review*'s Introduction by Pillay, there is a section on Marikana. Herein is one absolutely key paragraph. It is one sentence, nine printed lines long. Here listed are the dynamics involved in creating the Marikana massacre. Each listed point is a highly respected sociological field of enquiry. There are 29 in number.<sup>5</sup>

This general sense is common to both works. Yet it needs further definition – certainly so to make the seriousness of the challenges that much more starkly clear. Shisana speaks of watersheds. But South Africa's current condition is far, far more serious. Keeping with the language of fluid dynamics, here now is the vortex: an irresistibly engulfing, spiralling and whirling mass. A watershed moment has long passed. How this present moment changes for the better is unclear.

Government goes into 2014 with the National Development Plan 2030, a massively researched and detailed plan of intent and purpose, derived from substantially consultative processes, for the next 15 years.<sup>23</sup> Although formally approved by the ANC, it remains hugely contested within both the ANC and its alliance partners. With this year being an election year, with an incoming administration and promised changes to the structure of executive government, delays in implementation are assured. And, the very idea of a 15-year plan excites the aspirations of the politically ambitious and the newly noticed too in any majority party. They have issues to prove and interests to serve. There is little unusual in this.

It was these issues which prompted the HSRC scholars to reflect on wider issues. South Africa has emerged from its 'age of innocence'. Mistakes have been made. There are important lessons to be learnt. The legacies of the apartheid period are deeply entrenched. Leaders, across the spectrum, idealised all and also often poor and inappropriate visions, and their own celebrity and perceived omnipotence to advise, design, plan and introduce (or compel or impose) and then monitor change. Very basic errors have been made.<sup>22</sup> So, obviously, South Africans should be seeking and demanding – needing – a very thorough and honest understanding of how this came to be? In this regard Shisana comments as follows<sup>10</sup>:

*More than ever there is a need for informed and robust debate that will enable public intellectuals, policymakers, academics, business, labour and civil society, to engage with our current challenges in a manner conducive to finding solutions.*

And that's it? This revealing reflection is heavily biased towards leaders and wider elites – including planners, policy wonks, applied social scientists and scholars in general.<sup>6</sup> But more of the same really will not do. Isn't there any sense within social scientists of a need to evaluate their own role in this state of affairs? Surely perspectives must be broadened. To repeat social scientist's own admissions: basic errors have been made. So, before such – continuing – meetings and debate why not also make a start to listen and learn from South African citizens? Isn't this basic ethically rooted and methodologically rigorous disciplined social science enquiry, very smart politics, and good humane common sense too? Don't just meet with fellow elites. Conduct probing recorded social science interviews with elites; and so too with ordinary citizens. Surely the very vibrancy of bravely engaged independent social science enquiry can give so much to responsible public policy discussion and decision?

Despite its professed centrality, neither book has a chapter on Marikana. This is a glaring omission. The very soon before he was shot dead Noki features largely, although unnamed, on the *Review's* front cover. He doesn't even get entry mention in the HSRC's index. So, there is an obvious and good place to start – just have the basic common decency and respect to acknowledge the name of the now dead 'Man in the Green Blanket'.

One is reminded of Mbeki's reciting from Achebe; and then of Yeats's 'The Second Coming':

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.<sup>24</sup>*

Throughout these two books scholars are expressing sentiments so very similar to ones offered, almost daily, in wider public discourses.

This is despite these scholar's own findings raising warning bells. And, although some writers within these books prefer otherwise, it is wise to not easily dismiss such public sentiments. We are all, after all, only human. To paraphrase a prevalent public view, South Africans require an inspirational leader of moral legitimacy forging a rejuvenated political discourse around a core common vision. There is a huge degree of observational and emotional sense in such an outlook. But, sadly, isn't the dystopia of the vortex a lot more vigorously stronger and persistently dynamic and powerful than such utopian wishes? Do South Africans just need a 'Lula moment'?<sup>25</sup> Or do South Africans really seek to create another man-god? Are South Africans not caught in a post-Mandela prophetic quest – seeking the new Messiah with a magic wand? And until then, just how do they intend awaiting the Second Coming?

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