

# AFRICA

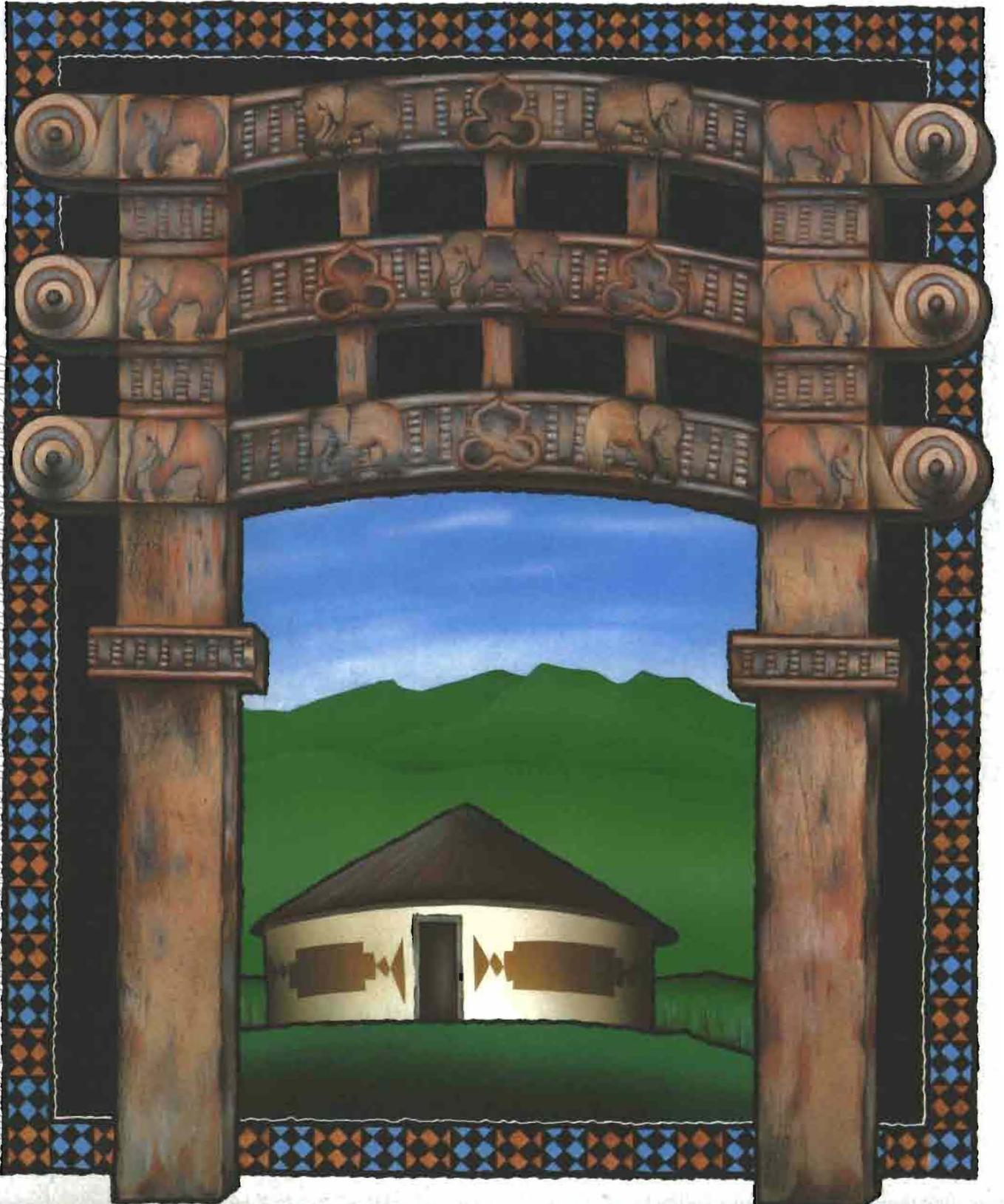
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# INSIGHT

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# Comment: Some thoughts on South Africa and Southern Africa

*Dr Denis Venter,  
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South Africa became the eleventh member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on 29 August 1994 when First Deputy President Thabo Mbeki signed the Treaty of Accession in Gaborone, Botswana. And immediately Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo went to great lengths to reassure the 10 other members that South Africa does not intend to dominate its SADC partners: South Africa “enters this new partnership as one player among many” and with “no desire to be the dominant partner”; also, South Africa has “no illusion of becoming the regional benefactor” – “such capacity... [South Africa does] not possess”. Nevertheless, Southern Africa might indeed have reached a “unipolar moment”. However little South Africa wants to play the role of regional “Big Brother”, its accession to the SADC will mean significant changes for the organization; not only because of the sheer weight of the country's economy (South Africa's gross domestic product is four times that of all the other SADC countries combined), but because the presence of South Africa means that the SADC concept may no longer be a “mission impossible”.

But South Africa can only play a progressive and constructive role in the Southern African region if it does not fudge its domestic transformation. The inherent strength within the South

African economy (a core skills base, important international trading links, spare productive and infrastructural capacity, considerable mineral and other reserves, and a vibrant capital market) must be consolidated and re-directed in order to meet the demands of a new, post-apartheid society in South Africa – also to broaden the regional community, not in the context of domination and subjugation but of equity and interdependence. Thus, South Africa should resist the temptation to create a network of weak states dominated by South African economic and political hegemony.

A post-apartheid South Africa which is able to exhibit even minimal calm and continuity will be the major economic, financial, technical and military power in the region. Consequently, by whatever indicator of power, South Africa will remain the natural leader of the region and, probably, pursue a broadly “active independent” orientation in foreign policy. However, in its regional relations, expectations are that South Africa will be a more benevolent *hegemon* than in the 1980s. And, if it cannot play the role of “regional developer”, then at least it may act as an intermediate agent for broader regional development.

Against the backdrop of the restructuring of the global economy, and a reduction in development assistance to Africa, the continent might become

even more marginalized – and this is bound to compel the states of the Southern African region, at least, to co-operate more closely in political and economic matters. But expectations by some African states that South Africa can simply fill the void seem to be highly unrealistic; even under the most ideal conditions imaginable, South Africa will be unable to match the West in development capacity – it may have the know-how and appropriate technology, but it has neither the skilled manpower nor the capital resources to do so. And in the remainder of this decade and beyond, South Africa will continue to face socio-economic problems of truly gigantic proportions: this amid conditions of serious economic decline, unacceptable levels of crime and violence, unrealistically high expectations, and a widespread legitimacy crisis in civil institutions and values. It is a bleak prognosis, but not irredeemable. South Africa – once regarded as a basket case of irreconcilable racial, political and ideological division – is making slow but sure and irreversible progress towards democracy and reconciliation. But apartheid has, indeed, sapped the existing socio-economic margins; and as a result, South Africa does not have the capacity to deal with its own hardship, let alone alleviate the region's tribulations.

Although South Africa is clearly *the* regional power, the South African government now readily recognizes limits to that power; and it relies more centrally on non-coercive instruments of policy, such as diplomacy, and economic co-operation and trade. It is well worth remembering that the tenets of South African policy on Africa and the Southern African region are: South Africa as part of the African community of nations (now a member of both the OAU and the SADC); African problems should be solved by Africans; the use or support of violence for the promotion of political objectives is unacceptable; joint interest in, and responsibility for, the socio-economic and ecological welfare of Southern Africa must be the basis for cooperation and good neigh-

bourliness; and Southern African states are interdependent and their future peace, security and stability are indivisible.

South Africa joins the SADC at a time of major changes in Southern Africa. Political reform in Mozambique and Malawi, progress towards democracy in Tanzania and Swaziland, and South Africa's own "negotiated revolution" have and are continuing to change the face of a subcontinent still troubled by civil war in Angola and political instability in Lesotho. On the economic front, the formation of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (Comesa) reflects a global tendency towards the creation of trade blocs. At the same time, the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) – bringing together South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia – is being renegotiated. The SADC will have to redefine itself with respect to these and other regional bodies; and it will have to draw up firm criteria for membership in answer to (rather unrealistic) membership expectations of countries further to the north.

Executive Secretary Kaire Mbuende is adamant that, with the exception of Mauritius, other countries should not be brought into the SADC; one of the weaknesses of the 22-member Comesa is that it is too big – therefore, the SADC should be kept "as small as possible"

For South Africa, membership of the SADC will also provide a strong platform for negotiations on trade with the European Union (EU). The question of South African access to European markets was not directly addressed at the Berlin conference (5 and 6 September 1994) between the EU and the SADC.

But it was a meeting which, in a wider context, marked South Africa's full integration into the Southern African region and the enthusiasm of the EU countries to play a greater role in a restructured SADC. And as a member of the SADC, South Africa has a much better chance of joining the African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) group of countries which, in terms of the

various Lomé conventions, have preferential access to European markets.

The Berlin conference was not a pledging conference of wealthy, benevolent countries committing themselves to large financial contributions to help Southern Africa, or dispensing aid to a stricken subcontinent. But it may develop a framework for a long-term institutional arrangement between the EU and Southern African countries. It will be the start, the EU hopes, of a long and on-going process of working together – of a robust working relationship that will create prosperous new markets for both themselves and their Southern African counterparts. And whether others like it or not, South Africa is being seen as the country that should lead efforts to regain Africa's self-esteem and break its "loser's image".

The challenge for the countries of Southern Africa is to jointly formulate an approach to drive the process towards a useful regional arrangement with the EU. But without the SADC countries shaping and pushing the process, it may not materialize for two reasons: first, other than for Germany and the United Kingdom, and maybe France and Italy, the member states of the EU are not particularly keen to "privilege" the Southern African region; and second, unless the region shapes the process, it will be left with an arrangement imposed by EU countries. Seen from another angle: some ACP countries would seem to wish the generous trade and aid provisions of Lomé IV to continue as Lomé V after 1999, whereas indications are that the EU would like to break up the Lomé process into a series of tailor-made regional arrangements with former Lomé members. The establishment of a special relationship between Southern Africa and the EU, therefore, could act as a model for a post-Lomé arrangement.

It is hoped that, flowing from the framework of a comprehensive inter-regional political dialogue between the EU and the SADC, discussing central issues such as conflict prevention, crisis management, and the stabilization of democracy, and taking into

account bilateral and multilateral arrangements (without prejudice to the Lomé Convention, the Berlin conference will result in a wide-ranging mutual cooperation agreement. This is meant to give moral and practical support to a relatively young regional grouping and to offer a partnership in know-how and development over a wide range of issues, including trade and economic cooperation, private investment, development initiatives, transport and communications links, energy supplies, education and training, health-care services, scientific and technological exchanges, cultural cooperation, the prevention of crime and drug-trafficking, environmental protection, and tourism. A general programme of action that should form part of a Berlin declaration will be the mere skeleton of an understanding on to which the muscle, flesh and skin of substance has to be grafted.

Clearly the EU can assist the region with its experience, an exchange of know-how, staff training, and organizational matters – including assistance with the building up of the SADC's community institutions. The aim would be to create peace and long-term security and stability in Southern Africa. The EU recognizes the importance of gaining a new, realistic understanding with Southern Africa, while at the recent SADC summit in Gaborone it was said that the SADC would be seeking a healthy trade rather than aid relationship with the EU. Economic cooperation and development form the basis for political stability, and it is hoped that the pro-

posed agreement could stimulate harmony and cooperation within the SADC grouping and with the EU countries, eliminate the fragmentation of markets, and counter the “Afro-pessimism” of the outside world. Cooperation and an economic success story of even relative proportions is likely to ensure political stability in the region, as an example for the rest of the continent.

### **Conclusion**

Within the region, membership of the SADC opens up new possibilities for trade and investment in a market with huge potential. However, South Africa will be at pains not to aggravate already skewed trade flows: South African exports to SADC countries are five times as high as imports from them. The creation of a regional power pool opens the way to purchases of electricity from neighbouring countries once South Africa runs into shortages as more and more homes are provided with electricity. The Lesotho Highlands Water Project will enable the impoverished mountain kingdom to sell water for use in the PWV industrial heartland of South Africa. This will enable South Africa's partners to finance imports from South Africa with exports (water, hydro-power, and oil) and not with foreign aid.

Southern Africa is arguably the only part of the African continent which can look forward to a genuinely regional dynamic. But this dynamic will be forthcoming only if there is

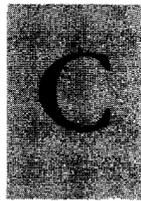
genuine and constructive cooperation among the countries of the region. SACU is, significantly, regarded as the most viable and most effective instrument of trade facilitation and customs management that exists, certainly in the Southern African region if not in Africa as a whole. South Africa should, therefore, bend its energies to draw its neighbours into a functioning system of security and prosperity, that need not be a formalized organization but which will extend real benefits. Moreover, regional cooperation and development integration rather than economic integration should initially guide the future of Southern Africa, with policy concentrating on the development and extension of regional technical-functional networks – in the areas of transport, telecommunications, water management, and power generation.

In the final analysis: the capability to cope with the aftermath of civil war and violent devastation, economic decline, colonialism and apartheid in the Southern African region has now to be developed. Steps to consolidate security in an holistic sense (much broader than a narrow military interpretation), to restore law and order, and prevent a recurrence of conflict are, however, likely to demand greater application and persistence than the economic recovery that they will help to make possible. Be that as it may: the processes of political change in Southern Africa has made a regional security regime, subsumed in the SADC, not only desirable but also possible.

# In the mix: Remaking coloured identities

*The concept of “coloured identity” has always been controversial. Dr AbdouMaliq Simone of the Foundation for Contemporary Research contributes to this debate.*

## A disquieting, untidy presence



Coloureds, Capies, Browns, So-calleds, Malays. However mixed race people in the Western Cape region of South Africa are designated, a certain reticence is inevitably demanded. While other nations and societies certainly have produced their fair share of racial mixing – note particularly Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Trinidad, the Swahili coasts of Kenya and Tanzania, Panama, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic – the situation of coloureds in the Western Cape is unique in several respects and invites singular modes of reflection.

Such reflection is a highly charged process in South Africa – something most coloureds themselves wish to avoid. Most appear content to view their ancestry as peculiar accidents of history or the pursuit of an atrocious racism better quickly forgotten. Even if that racism engendered a demographics that have foregrounded the Cape’s coloureds as a “special case”, isn’t it better, the local argument often goes, that its distinction be attenuated through a more focused identification with the black majority. What is, after all, the sense of further institutionalizing an artefact of white domination?

The issue of coloured identity is one example of the general reexamination of ethnicity underway. Rather than thinking about ethnicity as some

immutable essence, it is more accurately conceptualized as the locus of relations among differences whose content and boundaries are incessantly shifting – what Amselle<sup>1</sup> describes as a “fluid space of composition, decomposition, and recomposition”.

Instead of constituting a significant difference in and of herself, the coloured acts as the most visible harbinger of the flexibility and contention to be permitted and required in the configuration of any identity in post-apartheid society. As such, she becomes the locus of negotiations, resistances, assemblages and marginalizations. However coloured identity is eventually viewed, it will stem from the various sites of interactions whereby a workable sense of multi-ethnicity and citizenship is configured. The key question in this article involves the kinds of considerations to be invested in these interactions.

However unable various discourses are to cohere colouredness as a unitary fiction or scientific category, politics and history have established coloureds as different – a difference framing their language, socialization and territory of operation. The ethical basis of postapartheid society substantially relates to the extent to which “the disquieting, untidy presence” (to use Miller’s words)<sup>2</sup> of this other – no matter how inadequately conceived – is respected and viewed as resourceful for the difference it bears.

The respect for difference does not invalidate contention over the discourses through which the difference is made significant. Certainly there is great debate over what makes coloureds coloured. As much as coloureds and others might wish to avoid the re-examination of identity, the impositions of apartheid and resistance to it collapse into a reformulated racial politics that will make such a re-examination inevitable.

First, the end of apartheid, far from diminishing the salience of racial classifications and cognition, significantly expands the range and "vitality" of racial significations. Competition for power, privilege and resources among all racial identities and ethnicities will increase and render more complex the kinds of interpretations that can be made in order to make sense of new political and economic processes. Racial ideology is embedded in the very form of mutual accommodation among whites and blacks established as the norm of national governance for the remainder of the century.

Second, as whites seek the tolerance and sensitivity from blacks they never accorded them, the decades of bitterness and frustration will continue to engender black attitudes that whites will more than likely interpret as evidence of black unreasonableness and treachery. Conversely, whites may also invoke apartheid history in order to excuse the absence of a reasonableness blacks are capable, despite oppression, of manifesting.

### **Impossible theories**

The dilemma of coloured identities rests in part with the way notions of identity are thought of and fought over in South Africa. When claiming to be a distinct ethnic group, coloureds often argue that whereas mixed race people in other countries may have constituted a discernable subgrouping within a larger community, their numbers were either not large enough nor social position sufficiently differentiated to become a community or people apart. Apartheid

produced a particular history, set of circumstances and issues of governance for mixed race people unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

On the other hand, the argument could be made that while apartheid may be a "special case" of colonial power, it is nevertheless a manifestation of white domination that has inscribed varying but logically compatible traces on the "body" of black people everywhere. While the coloured "community" may be an artefact of apartheid rule, mixed race communities everywhere are equally artefacts.

Certainly, mixed race people in other contexts often constituted a local elite, a hybrid of colonial power imbued with opportunities and privilege otherwise inaccessible to majority black populations. Mixed race people in the US were regarded by blacks as inferior and marginalized from the institutional mainstream of African American life until the political and cultural "reconciliations" of the early twentieth century and black "renaissance" periods.

Even within the functional multi-racialism of post-independence Mozambique, mixed race and light-skinned people, although residentially and occupationally integrated with blacks, still participate in an implicit, barely remarked upon "gravitational pull" to different slices of beachfront in the city's collective Sunday afternoon pastimes. While light skinned "high-yellows", long incorporated under the banners "black" and "African American", operate as the "fully fledged" – seldom either experiencing either the distinctive privileges or prejudices of the past – skin colour is a feature pointed to with a wide range of meanings inside the African American community.

Behind these dilemmas concerning the definition of coloureds, and their dissimilarity/similarity to mixed race people elsewhere, lies a recent history of debate about the integrity of identity, multiculturalism and a re-configured geopolitics which makes many of the past assumptions of who people are obsolete.

Ideas of identity based on common location in a fixed territory are now largely useless. As Appadurai<sup>3</sup> argues, notions of community are no longer dependent on a specific configuration of physical space. Communities are rather acts of a social imagination mediating the relations between the procedural concerns – of handling occupations, incomes, and habitat – and the wide network of globalized interdependencies which make a locality a node in a much larger unit of functionality.

The location of identities – their framework and ground – are increasingly dispersed. As Marcus<sup>4</sup> indicates, "cultural differences or diversity arise not from some local struggle for identity, but as a function of a complex process among all sites in which the identity of someone or group anywhere is defined in simultaneity". The fictions of origin and the mythologies of cohesiveness are often more enlivened and assured through refugees and migrants than those who stay "close to home".

Semblances of commonality are maintained, not through homogeneity but the engineering of differentiated positions whose complementarities become the basis for ongoing solidarities. Hausa identity, for example, would be vastly underplayed in contrast to what it is today if the Hausa had remained in Hausaland and hadn't made a point of locating themselves in as many territories and activities, ie differences, as possible.

As Guattari<sup>5</sup> points out, the constitution of the subjective parameters of identity – what is possible and legitimate to think, do and experience by virtue of being what one "is" – reflects an oscillating confluence of circumscribing external powers and a creative imagination of self-modelling. A system of general equivalence which once examined identities in terms of their functions and significance to some abstract notion of human progress is today not sustainable. Instead, we witness the proliferation of multiplicities, where first and third worlds, the archaic and the modern, simulation and dissimulation

exist side by side, simultaneously having nothing and everything to do with each other.

Given the rampant indistinguishing of formerly distinct worlds, identity is not a matter of discovery, designation, or science, but of politics. And politics, in turn, is about emancipation – ie, the working out of the absence of equality. For the interpenetration of worlds has taken place within a space of power relations that have generated inequalities and hegemonies. The blurring of worlds is a product of migrations, exiles, colonialisms, dispersions, mimetic encounters, transferences and capital flows that have acted violently on social bodies everywhere.

As such, stresses Ranciere,<sup>6</sup> politics is about negotiating a state of “in-betweenness” among identities, an identification with what one-is-not in order to undo the imposed definitions of what “one is”. Here, politics operates between statuses – a process where a people who have been made outcasts from the power necessary to institutionalize an identity “link” themselves to a “name” or “designation” which is technically wrong but which makes them visible and brings them on stage.

Thus, the idiomatic and the particular become the vehicle for the piecing together of identities – an exemplification of a universality otherwise the property of globalized superpowers. For when a community seeks to act out its rights of emancipation, argues Ranciere, it does so not by making reference to its specific features or hurts, but to the sense of its “ordinariness”.

In other words, the community asks to be regarded as anyone, as equal – taking full consideration of its differences. The latter are not set aside or swept under the carpet. For these differences displace the characteristics of the dominant from acting as some universal standard, as the judge of ordinariness. Equality is demonstrated then, not in the abstract invocation of some common humanity, but in the specific demonstrations that what people do, what they say and how

they organize their lives have usefulness for the lives of anyone else in their own terms.

As Ranciere states, “the place of truth is not the place of a ground or ideal ... when oppressed groups set out to cope with a wrong, they may appeal to ‘man’ or ‘human being’ ... but universality is not in these concepts; it is in the way of demonstrating the consequences that follow from this”.<sup>7</sup>

Across the world, one can observe the salience of these notions. In the desolate high-rise suburbs of Marseilles, third generation French Algerians, blacks from Antilles and Africa – many having lost their “ethnic” languages and having never seen the birthplace of their grandfathers – call themselves “Bedouins”. What is appropriated is a designation historically ambiguous in terms of just what it refers to – is it a mode of economic living, a cluster of languages, a genealogy of non-arabs? Here, ethnically unrelated youth, increasingly denied French national identity through recent legislation, aim for some abstract, practically impossible form of mobility which this designation of nomadism implies.

Their objective conditions severely limit what these marginals of Marseilles can actually do and where they can go. There can be no return to some “authentic” homeland – the recommendation made by an increasing number of white French – just as their marginality and the tightening borders elsewhere tend to compound their ghettoization. Yet in this delinking of nationality – for after all Bedouins have incessantly crossed and never belonged to borders – they attempt to endow themselves with “navigational” capacities their socio-political positioning otherwise denies them.

Similarly, in London, “black” is increasingly a mobile term forging otherwise impossible commonalities. A young generation of Pakastanis and Bengalies are referring to themselves as black – something which they couldn’t possibly get away with anywhere else and which provokes

constant contention even in the circumstances which implicitly support its increased usage.

In Sierra Leone, spirit worlds have always existed in tandem with human societies. Yet recently in the upheaval of civil war and a crumbling socio-political infrastructure, spirit and human merge outside the “traditional” vehicles of liminality: taking the concept “terminator” from the popular Arnold Schwartzegger movies, a new “breed” of warrior has been created – one that has converted several regiments of a rag-tag guerrilla army into a band of space age killers able to pass through walls and travel miles in a matter of seconds.

These “terminators” – whatever they indeed are – have become the topic of conversation for the entire country, inviting endless speculations as to their origins. Whether these “terminators” are the projected anxieties of a nation pulled in all kinds of contradictory directions or the carefully crafted image of a faction within a highly contentious ruling military council remains a matter of debate. But youth throughout the capital, Freetown, are forming chapters of “terminator armies” that pledge to rewrite the history of Africa.

As desperate as these “impossible” identities are, they point to a process potentially more fruitful than the “neo-essentialist” aspirations of, for example, American Africentricity. A more self-conscious effort to look at the linkages between Africa and America, has indeed enabled black Americans to become cognizant of the persistence of a range of “African” practices within the diaspora and, thus increase their conviction that African American culture exceeded being a series of endless compensations for and compromises with racism. Yet, in the periodic emphasis on roots and authenticity, highly complex cultural elaborations are devalorized and forgotten.

For in the effort to recover an African culture and identity, the power of race is reinvigorated. As Michaels<sup>8</sup> points out, it is only when African Americans think that its

culture is not what they presently do or believe, but instead what it should do as an African American people, that belonging to African American culture can count as a reason for doing something. Crucial to this argument is the notion that only race makes it possible to think that a particular culture is right for a certain type of people.

Instead of blacks being constituted by what they do, they instead are constituted by what they are – ie, the artefact of race. “Appropriateness of values (of course) becomes dependent on identifying which culture we belong to ... but if culture can function only as a justification of our values insofar as it is transformed into something more than a description of them, then the question of which culture we belong to is relevant only if the definition of culture is anchored in race.”<sup>9</sup>

It is this resurrection of the colonial artefact – a discourse of racial classification and signification – which leads Bhabha<sup>10</sup> to emphasize that it is the very undecidability of the postcolonial’s origins and identity which constitutes the possibility of for him or her to operate as a significant presence in today’s internationalized world. It was colonialism which forced language into operating as the mime of some pre-given natural reality – where people of colour remained in a state of “underdevelopment”. “Claims to identity must never be nominative or normative. ... They are never nouns when they are productive; like the vowel, they must be capable of turning up in and as an other’s difference and of turning the “right” to signify into an act of cultural translation.”<sup>11</sup>

Here, once again, we return to identity as the particular locus through which equality is to be demonstrated time and time again, unanchored to any original set of criteria. Instead, equality is the impetus of repetition – an act rather than status that must be repeated over and over, able to demonstrate itself in shifting voices, various bodies and appearances, and on different terrains. Equality can

never “settle” into one form, institution, people or social arrangement, but itself becomes the “Beduoin” erasing its tracks, anticipating its next move. The hunt for difference thus becomes the affirmation of universality able to relocate itself everywhere, without exclusiveness or exclusion.

### Negotiating history

Outside the realm of social theory, mixed race people do confront concrete political and cultural circumstances unparalleled anywhere else. These circumstances make the process of their negotiating questions of identity and power significant to the broad and continuing deliberations on race, culture and identity everywhere. Perhaps the most significant factor is that coloureds constitute the statistical majority in a region located in a country where otherwise they are an overwhelming minority. The majority they constitute in the Western Cape is in relationship to almost equally sized white and black populations.

Within a political dispensation which accords substantial autonomy in governance to regions, coloureds find themselves the majority of a quasi-state, capable of engendering either a stolid, ethnic-based politics or a volatile interaction of alliances themselves engineering fuzzy delineations of racial, ethnic, historical and cultural variables. Therefore, the characteristics of regional governance, as well as the practical dimensions of the continent’s strongest challenge to multiracial collaboration, largely depend on how coloureds deliberate their identity in the future.

Such deliberations of course have a history. Initially the designation “coloured” referred to all non-Europeans, and it was not until 1904 that the term was used to refer to mixed-race peoples. The combination of economic depression and intensified racialist ideology at the beginning of the twentieth century led to a progressive exclusion of coloureds from the construction trades and artisan craft

unions. Non-Bantu-speaking coloureds began to differentiate themselves from Bantu speakers – a move further substantiated by Islamic practice and the use of the proto-Afrikaans language. The invocation of coloured identity became a defence in a period where franchise rights were being eroded and social Darwinism informed social structuration.<sup>12</sup>

The state assumed a more active stance in constructing functional divisions of African and coloured communities. In 1901, the plague epidemic in Cape Town provided an excuse for the advent of racial segregation. Henceforth, a policy of influx control was pursued which limited the number of Africans permitted to live in the cities. The African People’s Organization, set up by A Abdrahman to protect the political and economic interests of coloured people, excluded black Africans from the organization. A prolonged period of mutual exclusion in coloured and black organizations during the 1920s and 1930s further solidified the split, as did coloured exemption from influx controls. An ambivalent state policy was directed at the coloured community. On the one hand, their economic interests were protected by curtailed competition with Bantu-speaking Africans. On the other, economic advancement was undermined, eg, the Apprenticeship Act of 1922, which set standard six as the minimum educational requirement for skilled jobs.<sup>13</sup>

When Christian Nationalists seized power in 1948 through a slim plurality, the situation for coloureds changed rapidly. Afrikaner hegemony was to be maintained through a policy of enforced group identity and territorialization. It was predicated on terminating the practice where coloureds could pass for whites (indeed, in the 1930s, perhaps as many as 40% of the coloured community passes as whites).<sup>14</sup>

In the Population Registration Act of 1950, coloureds were given an imprecise and ambiguous definition – in some instances appearing as an overly arbitrary designation. A

coloured nation was to cohere and be assigned a territory, but there was little basis for coherence. As a result, Afrikaners passed legislation to register the population and limit miscegenation.

In 1953 coloureds were given formal preference in employment in the Western Cape – in an attempt by the state to develop a coloured middle class capable of providing the intellectual and economic leadership for a separate nation. A policy of removing Africans from Cape Town was also pursued and by 1962, 30 000 Africans had been expelled. Viewing coloured representation as a threat to their slim majority in parliament, direct coloured participation was rescinded in 1956. The Non-European Unity Movement and the South African Coloured Peoples' Congress attempted to prevent the reassertion of coloured identity during this time, but with limited impact.

Until the Group Areas Acts of 1950, 1957 and 1966, which removed black and coloured populations from the bulk of central Cape Town and relocated them to the flatland areas southeast of the city, Cape Town showed glimmers of a progressive, multiracial city. Even a small African middle class existed in parts of what is today Rondebosch – a residential area of cottages on tree-lined streets with parks all around.

District Six, a dense neighbourhood rising from the harbour to the east of the city centre was the centre of Muslim and coloured life. Everybody knew everyone else. Tightly organized gang structures (eg the Globes, Killers) integrated coloureds of different religious and ethnic backgrounds into a generalized social-urban identity as religious institutions integrated their respective communities. The intensely fought competition, characteristic of the patterns established by immigrants in American cities, was coupled with well-established networks of social support and basic community trust. District Six embodies the sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency that had been the vital compensation for the lack of access to

political rights and real economic power.

When District Six was destroyed in 1966 during the re-engineering of social space, coloureds were forcibly relocated to specially constructed government townships. Some of the original ones, such as Hanover Park, Mannenburg, and Retreat, were nothing more than glorified army barracks built on sand flats, cold and damp even in the summer months. Soon to follow were Bontheuwel, Athlone, Landsdowne, Primrose Park, Elsie's River, Grassy Park, Belhar, Bishop Lavis, and Mitchell's Plain. Rail lines, highways and industrial zoning were all used to ghettoize and separate each individual township from the other.

Coloured and African townships were interspersed to preclude large and homogenous racial territorial blocs from developing. Basically, each township had two access points with a police station at each one in order to maintain surveillance. In most townships, homes consist of simple cement-block constructions with three rooms. As many as fifteen people are sheltered in each house; many living in small shacks that have been constructed in the back yard. The township scheme was used to stratify the coloured population according to class as well, with the more well off and stably employed populations securing better housing in Rylands, Surrey Estate, Bellville, Strand and Walmer Estate. Today there is an extreme shortage of housing stock for both black and coloured populations throughout the country. Small quarters are overcrowded. Marriages are often delayed or face the strains of living in households where as many as four generations reside. Meanwhile, there are an estimated 35 000 vacant residential quarters in Cape Town's white areas.<sup>15</sup>

For most of the past two decades, the youth have assumed the primary burden in keeping some kind of political pressure alive. During the years prior to the state of emergency decrees, 1984 and 1985, and the attempt to restore limited franchise to

coloured voters through the notorious tricameral system, Cape Town was the sight of a sustained insurrection unlike anything that had existed since those of the early 1960s. Youth engaged the police in armed combat, closed schools, organized widely and cemented relationships with African youth. As elsewhere in South Africa, funerals of slain comrades became focal points of political dissent, often the only occasion where large groups of people were permitted to assemble.<sup>16</sup>

### The advent of the "so-called"

In the post-1976 periods of concerted challenges to white rule and the advent of black consciousness, there emerged an unwritten obligation for mixed race people to refer to themselves as "so-called" coloureds – representing both the sociological inadequacy of any available umbrella term capable of cohering a highly heterogeneous group of people and the resentment of being imprisoned in an administrative classification system whose primary purpose was to be a "buffer" between African black and Afrikaner white.

In that system, coloureds were more important for what they were not, than for what they were and, indeed, what they were could not even be identified with any sense of coherence. Always present, then, was a sense of absence, of not being a part of something larger that could explain, however inadequately or stereotypically, what one was. For even as a receptacle for the projections, violence, scientific theories, and fears of whites, African Americans could at least invert these white productions as elements of a commonly shared identity.

In South Africa, the cultivation of coloureds as an identity was more an act of whites hedging their bets, inducing the byproducts of a miscegenation to become the anxious partners of their administration. The "colouring" of the Cape became institutionalized as a mechanism for keeping Africans out. What was cultivated as the basis for identity

consisted of a common anxiety – being neither black nor white, the coloured was really nowhere. Because coloureds were often better off economically than the majority of blacks there was limited psychological refuge available within the black communities coloureds were largely separated from either by distance or infrastructural design.

Additionally, coloureds, as the historical products of miscegenation, were subjected to a kind of metaphorical genocide under apartheid legislation. A government which obsessively bans and hunts down any transgression of interracial sex basically conveys the attitude that the products of such an act should not exist. Therefore, coloureds were to be seen as an unfortunate accident, a transgression of the will of the God. Africans may have been born as savages, yet coloureds essentially should never have been born at all. Denied fundamental access to the African world, coloureds were thus denied access to the locus of opportunities for upending such connotations of their existence. Not that they in the past or now are rushing to engage various African communities within the country.

That coloureds did exist, however transgressive or unwarranted the circumstances of their birth, required that the transgressive elements of their existence be undone as much as available symbolic frameworks would allow. Thus, coloureds largely found themselves attached to the white world. They spoke the language of whites, the Christians among them adopted their sectarian ideologies, configured a mutual series of cultural pastimes, and did their best to become complicit in the obliteration of their Africanities – eg, the usual “toolbox” or hairstraightening, aping of mannerisms, etc.

But for a white society threatened by the omnipresent reality of a black majority, a vigilant defence against “racial slippage” had to be maintained at all costs. So no matter how “white” coloureds might become, they were still too “black” to share official common membership with whites in

any institutional sphere. Subsequently, much of the lingering resentment and hatred of whites by coloureds stems not so much from white repression, but from their sense that they were, in reality, whites after all – as good and competent in terms of the characteristics seen as the defining elements of whiteness.

Within coloured communities there are many jokes about how whites, especially Afrikaners in rural areas, small towns, and poor urban suburbs, have “let themselves go in the bush”. In other words, many whites have forgotten how to be whites, have grown sloppy and stupid, whereas urbanized coloureds could far exceed them at their own whiteness in terms of being well-mannered and disciplined.

Not only does this ability restore an elaborated vitality to whiteness by universalizing its application to nonwhites, but coloureds are implicitly punished for it since their proficiency in mimesis is unable to transform the situation where “stupid” whites remain in control.

The practice of invoking the “so-called” also stems not only from the ambivalent sociopolitical position enforced for coloureds and their own ambivalent responses to whiteness – believing themselves whiter than white since they could display whiteness at times more effectively than whites. The “so-called” also represents coloured unwillingness to assist whites in “cleaning up the messiness of a messy history of racial interactions” – of which apartheid was the instrument. The Cape area, especially, had been the site in its early history for a wide spectrum of convergences, the products of which the “black and white” logic of apartheid would have a hard time conceptually addressing.

Enslaved political prisoners from Indonesia, indentured labourers from India, diverted West African slaves, a highly diverse indigenous population, Arabs, English, Dutch, Portuguese all entered into the early colonial mix. All eventually engaged in various sexual combinations whose complexities only increased. Throw in a simultane-

ously fluid yet constant religious divide that has produced the current 60–40 Christian-Muslim breakdown in coloured communities, and you have a highly heterogeneous regional population which, under other circumstances in other terrains and polities, would find little basis for commonality. To affirm that this “messiness” is a coherent, stable ethnicity is then to deprive the resistance to apartheid racial simplicities of a symbolic, yet highly visible, contravening occurrence.

For the heterogeneity of the mixed race people of the Cape point to the historical reality of transgression which the apartheid system seeks to deny by “naturalizing” the inevitability of racial separation. The “Mother city” – Cape Town, seat of parliament and symbolic seat of the nation – proves to be “wanton” and indiscriminate, placing sexual desire above the rule of God. Seeking to undo being the “bastard children” of a society by identifying with the oppressor (and the most frequent initiator of miscegenated sex) was to be balanced with maintaining the status of bastardization as a reminder of a reality more ultimate and real than the reality engineered by force under apartheid.

The “so-called” is thus deployed for surface divergent aims – connoting both a desire to erase the absence of a coherent collectivity it implies and to maintain it as a sign of a collectivity united by its subversion of clear-cut racial polarities and politics – ie, a sign of a fundamental collectivity powerful in that it demonstrates that no “real” or “authentic” collectivity is actually involved. In other words, “coloured” as a designation of some social body is forceful to the degree that it undermines the “fabricated” authority of designations such as, “white” and “black”.

The “so-called” also emerges as a by-product of the black consciousness movement, whose theoretical formulations were largely imported from the Diaspora – where the common blackness of light and dark-skinned people was viewed as an historical achievement. For a people who were

“nowhere”, the amplification and affirmation of blackness not only seemed on the surface to undo the status of coloureds as a “safe version” of Africity and involuntary supplicants to white authority but provided the conceptual tools for the joint action with black Africans that might hasten the demise of apartheid. After all, the majority of coloureds experienced everyday life conditions no better than that of urban blacks.

Despite the fact that apartheid had produced a strata of middle class coloureds made up of state employees, professionals and business people, the system has done little more for the majority of coloureds than to inculcate in them a sense of superiority in relationship to the African majority.

#### **No matter how black not black enough: Superiority and commonality**

The coloured sense of superiority could not be buttressed or reinforced with either any demonstratable material gains, set of autonomous institutions, or political power. Rather, it was a sense of superiority by default. “We, at least, are not them, are not the kaffir” – proves to be sense of identity that does not provide any clue of what the coloured indeed is – except the absence of blackness. The move to describe and call oneself as black – a practice prevalent amongst politicized youth – became not so much a vehicle of identification with Africans but a mechanism of undoing the absence and filling the void.

That void was particularly strong for a generation of coloureds who, because of the Group Areas legislation and the forced removals from the central city coloured stronghold known as District Six, grew up in “fabricated” neighbourhoods with little history, few institutions and without much of the organic framework of cultural practices, social networks and urban inventiveness that had characterized everyday life for their parents.

On the other hand, the self-design-

ation of blackness for many was just common sense. The hair texture, facial features and skin colour of many coloureds are either indistinguishable from local Africans or in another context, eg, the Americas, would be immediately read as blacks. That a coloured person was endowed with such characteristics and still ended up “coloured” – through bureaucracy and acculturation – demonstrated the arbitrariness and political construction of racialist classification systems. “African” and “Coloured” could be dissolved into the commonality of “Black”, again undoing the apartheid logic that every person has their naturally-assigned places in heaven and earth.

Yet recognition of the arbitrariness of racial distinctions cuts many different ways. If blackness then has no unequivocal defining features in the last instance – note the persistent complications of including blue-black skinned Tamils with straight hair and kinky-hair Arabs with light skins – those “coloureds” looking just like Africans could as well avoid the “inevitability” of black identification as concur with it. Such “avoidance” – or “exercise of one’s options” (as one woman from Mitchell’s Plain puts it) – persists as the most likely tendency for coloureds today.

For the large Muslim community in the Cape, dislike for white Christian nationalism, identification with the Arab world, and mythologization of its supposed Malay (in actuality Indonesian and West African) origins, constitutes an elaborate series of “defence mechanisms” to mediate the deliberation of social identity in relationship to Africa and Africans. The persistence of apartheid was largely useful to the preservation of a coherent Muslim community and a concomitant series of authorities, institutions, and cultural practices. The complicity in keeping Africans out of the building trades, historically the largest source of employment for Muslim workers, cultivated an ongoing mutual hostility.

Although Islamic ideology in theory and practice constituted an important

cutting edge in the battle against a regime legitimated by reference to a distorted and orthodox Christianity, Muslims largely are interested only in highly parochial and circumscribed concerns. Ghettoization inherent in the apartheid system allowed them to function as a discrete ethnicity. For the majority of Cape Muslims, Islam more powerfully operates as an ethnic rather than religious identity – especially when compared to the practice of Indian Muslims in Durban and Greater Johannesburg who “start out” with a strong sense of ethnic identity to which religious identity is added.

The issue of Muslims is important to our discussion here since the Muslim community is frequently referred to as evidence of the difficulties inherent in consolidating coloureds as an ethnic group in themselves or in referring to coloureds as a somehow cohesive social grouping, even if it is coherence by default. This is not to say that Muslims have not played a significant role in anti-apartheid movements or have been relied upon by many African progressive organizations as trustworthy partners in the multifaceted struggles against white domination. Certainly many Muslims refer to themselves as black and African. Yet there is a pervasive uneasiness throughout the entire community as to the future of Islam in the post-apartheid era.

Although black consciousness provided an essential point of departure from the vacuum of identity experienced by many coloureds, it did not constitute a substantial vehicle of actual connection between coloureds and Africans. During the intense periods of active resistance to the Nationalist regime – 1976, 1984–1985, 1988–1990 – black and coloured activists came together in rallies, in strategy meetings, at funerals, in political organizations and trade unions but remained largely separate in all other aspects of their everyday lives.

Within the confines of political resistance, coloureds largely accepted

the notion that African leadership was the most reliable force for the completion of the tasks of national liberation – requiring a special role for the African masses in the liberation struggle.<sup>17</sup> The commitment to multiracialism espoused by the African National Congress was also reflected in the practice of mutual consultation among differentiated communities. Such collaborations and principled acceptance of African leadership did not hold at bay, however, a plethora of misunderstandings, resentments and fractionalism which continue to characterize black and coloured relationships within the “progressive” movements in the region today.

Coloured activists have frequently felt marginalized and infantilized by their black African compatriots. There exists a persistent feeling that Africans are unwilling to acknowledge the sufferings of coloureds under apartheid and, conversely, that the socio-cultural distance enforced by the system readily translates into an inevitable inability of coloureds to fully appreciate the realities at stake. Coloureds, on the other hand, frequently view African comrades as inept, power-hungry and corrupt, while their own selfless work embodies the spirit of the revolution. After all, as one coloured activist argued, the coloured communities in the Cape were the ones to deliver the death-blow to apartheid by making the region nearly ungovernable during the mid and late 1980s.

Whatever the inaccuracies of perceptions and the fruitfulness of significant collaborations between coloureds and black Africans, a wide social divide persists. This is no better illustrated than at the University of the Western Cape, renown for advertising itself as the “intellectual home of the Left” and of the anti-apartheid struggle. That it has indeed gone out of its way to construct the institutional framework for a point of convergence between coloureds and Africans illustrates the distance that has yet to be covered.

Originally the only tertiary institu-

tion accessible to coloureds (and then largely one to produce teachers for the coloured school system), the past ten years has witnessed the concerted effort to include black African students so that now the student population is nearly 40% black. Despite the university’s close links to the ANC and official cultivation of a climate of mutual blackness among coloureds and Africans, coloured and black students, for the most part, continue to operate in parallel social universes, socializing and territorializing themselves in different spheres outside the classroom.

It could be argued that such tendencies are not really that different from other multiracial universities such as Hunter College of the City University of New York or San Francisco State University. But the key point of distinction here is that the territorialization of UWC is more starkly drawn and operates between students of colour that, even though differentiated under apartheid, were still its common victims. Additionally, it occurs at an institution largely predicated on ensuring a functional mutuality.

### **Reticence and caution: Is there an identity to be made?**

As an ANC stronghold, the university attempts to underplay any tendency to sedentarize the particularity of coloured identity, even though as the largest university of coloured students it brings together coloureds from across the country in an implicit solidification of distinct versions or locations of colouredness. The fear is that foregrounding coloured identity not only violates the tenets of multiracialism long taken for granted (and largely critically unexamined) by the democratic movement but risks endangering coloureds by unnecessarily amplifying their differences from the African majority.

But given the fact that such differences are played out in everyday social organization and as an increasingly explicit feature of regional and national politics, it may be necessary to tackle the questions of coloured ethnicity and identity head on and

push them into new levels of deliberation and explicitness. Despite the volatility of the current phase of transition, too much caution in deliberating coloured identity is also dangerous.

For caution itself may be as much a residual of apartheid as the classification itself. In other words, to deny the possibility of a widespread heterogeneity among people of colour, within the conceptual framework of blackness and Africanity, may be the flip side of the racial simplicities enforced by the white regime. Yet the parameters of such explorations remain narrow as long as caution is the priority. For example, in a recent article on developing a strategic perspective for coloured areas, the bottom frontpiece of the article is stamped in boldface, “A note of caution on the term coloured”, like a surgeon general’s warning on a packet of cigarettes.

The article goes on to say:

There is a problem with the terminology that we are forced to use in this paper. In particular, the word ‘coloured’ and the idea of a cohesive coloured racial or ethnic group or even community is contentious. In this paper we use the term ‘coloured’ not to identify a specific homogenous community defined by one culture, language or set of values. Rather we use this term to assist us in talking about a set of communities spread across the Western Cape region in particular, who have a similar experience of apartheid. They have been defined by apartheid, and they have been forced to live together. The effects of racial classification have been real and, in some ways, there is a consciousness amongst people that in these communities they form a defined community. At the same time, the short-hand term ‘coloured’ should not deceive us about the marked differences that exist within this group of people. Nor does the term imply that such a community should be developed.<sup>18</sup>

The disclaimers and exposition here are all quite reasonable and accurate. Yet, at the same time, such language seems to perpetuate the hesitancy, anxiety and ambivalence at

the heart of coloured identity during apartheid rule. At the same time, the qualifications also miss important aspects of the impetus and grammars of social solidarity current in other parts of the world today.

Anyone who has been to Roseland, a nightclub in New York City, on a Saturday – full of Dominicans, Columbians, Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans and Panamanians – would know that it is futile to hunt for sociological inaccuracies when DJs call out for collective affirmations of Hispanic or Latin identity. Although united by a common language spoken in different dialects, dark skinned Panamanians two weeks off the American Airlines flight to JFK certainly would be hard pressed to detail a long list of commonalities eligible for mutual ethnic identification with a light-skinned, fourth generation Nuyorican whose family has lived in the North Bronx for over forty years.

While it can be argued that this construct of Latin identity is simply added on to the certainty and primacy of a national base, (ie being Cuban, Dominican, etc) in the “slug-it-out rumble” of New York City, where every nationality is represented several times over and competing for everything, one’s being Latin usually signifies louder than anything else. Albeit South Africa has been thrown into a highly volatile political game where identity claims and politics play for enormous stakes at enormous prices. Yet the reasonableness of political behaviour is predicated on the degree of confidence a community or group maintains about itself. Subsequently, the strengthening of various solidarities, not necessarily mutually exclusive, could contribute to such confidence.

At the same time, the further delimitation of coloured identities emerge in a global context of a renewed amplification of ethnonationalism and local particularities coupled with the diminished authority of national states and consciousness, particularly in Africa. What Malcomson<sup>19</sup> so ingeniously labels deterritorialized commercial tribes increasingly com-

pete with and sometimes supplant the state as brokers of fundamental economic relations – and further cement the power of free market politics.

Ethnic particularism, therefore, does not operate exclusively as some parochial, ghettoized defence of circumscribed territory or place, but is a vehicle to cohere relationships and transactions occurring across wide geopolitical divides and distances – witness the Palestinians, the Hausa, or the Chinese. The breadth of location and distance exert differentiating pulls while at the same time elaborating the networking across localities that is increasingly necessary for the survival of any community.

### **Recipes and ingredients: A sampling of coloured notions on identity**

The process of elaborating a more opened-ended theoretical examination of coloured identity may be facilitated by considering several statements made by coloureds about coloured identity. These statements are not representative of anything but the existence of certain considerations, and there is no pretence here that they reflect either widespread or marginal opinions.

Of all the discussions I have had with young coloureds as the prelude to writing this article, I have chosen here some of the most idiosyncratic. By exceeding politeness and conventionality, they perhaps reveal a more dangerous and thus enriching set of ideas and experiences.

The idea is not to provide a definitive interpretation for the speaker’s meanings or intentions, but to stretch the field of possible readings. For identities must also stretch beyond their conventional readings in order to facilitate their mobility, adaptiveness and salience to other identities. The following are speculations about what these speakers might be up to and what basis they provide for unfolding or piecing together a fabric of coloured identities in the future.

**Winston Prinsloo:** What are coloureds? First of all, take away the

kaffirs (Africans), then the Indians, then take away the whites, and what you have left after all of that is us.

**Yasmina Said:** It can be difficult to imagine where one really comes from. To get it into your head that your ancestral moment is when some African woman “stooped to conquer” some white man’s dick, or the more likely scenario is that some European got into that pussy with endless promises and/or torture. Of course, one hopes for other things, especially having no reason to believe that love had anything to do with it.

**Ernest Setai:** (In response to a query about why hip-hop culture is a strong point of reference for young coloureds in Cape Town to the disinterest of most African youth. Only we have the sophistication to be real niggaz.

It is generally true that in the coloured pecking order of prejudices, black Africans usually top the list and that the integrity of coloured identity is “preserved” through its animosities toward others. Yet attempts to pinpoint an identity by citing a list of those of which one is not – but obviously contains traces of – exceeds being more than ritualistic “top ten” citations recited daily on TV shows across the world.

For in Prinsloo’s statement, what is seemingly a reproduction of the sense of coloured identity as absence – what is left over after all the clearly defined and coherent identities have left the scene – can be a comment about the need to think of or become a “clear” identity itself. More than simply a list of hatreds – “get rid of the kaffirs first and – proceed toward the whites whom I respect and am more similar too” – this statement about identity through subtraction points to a certain ridiculousness of having to come up with an identity at all.

Prinsloo could as easily be saying, “well, get Africans out of the picture first, implicate them the least in this whole stupid process and get to the core of the matter which is whites and their system of governance”. Though

black Africans have been incessantly suspicious of coloured behaviours and resentful of their status, it is not coloureds but whites who established the matrix of rules, expectations, institutions and policies which sought to define a normalcy for coloured identity and behaviour.

The speaker makes clear the need to take away these black-white clarities and definitions, to get them to leave the scene. For “black and white” constitute a roadblock, a permanently barred gate at the doors of mobility and self-invention. As white and black dominated political parties competed for their attention and votes before the election, the message was clear: Blacks were telling coloureds they can’t trust whites, whites were telling them they can’t trust blacks, leaving the impression for many coloureds that, no matter what, their interests would be sold out regardless of how they are defined.

One is an identity first and foremost for someone else – a son or daughter to a parent; a citizen to a state, etc. Whites, as a minority rapidly losing political power, obviously needed coloureds to think of themselves as coloureds in order to gain an important ally in their efforts to at least preserve their substantial economic privilege in the Western Cape. Black Africans, although active in courting coloured allegiances, basically operated under the assumption that time was on their side. They are the overwhelming majority in the country and will, in the not too distant future, achieve majority status in the only region where they presently are not.

In order to free oneself from the prison-house of stilted significations, to exceed being simply the freak wedged in-between the real identities “black” and “white” requires a pragmatics of dismissal. Whites will be the most difficult “term” or “gate-keeper” to deal with since they are not only most in need of a reified coloured identity but have the most to offer in terms of both material and symbolic benefits. Just as a parent compels the child to speak her identity with promises of attention

and security, white is closer to the practice of making coloured identity because it is that which promises to give it regard, to make it stable as “black” and “white” are stable.

Yet we must take seriously the speaker’s notion of taking such attention away. For the stability of coloured identity rests in its instability – in a field where clear distinctions are at least ambiguated and inverted, and where the mechanisms for engineering a sense of commonality amongst coloureds can themselves ebb and flow.

Even though whiteness and blackness can be construed as the “raw materials” for making coloured identity, that identity will be reconfigured only in the absence having to make constant reference to those who participated in enforcing the separateness of coloureds from blacks and whites. In other words, coloureds may only be able to capitalize on their history of mixture and betweenness if they begin to act as if whiteness and blackness had nothing to do with who they are. Here, once again, reemerges the notion of thinking about a functional identity in terms of an impossible one. For identity is a matter of conviction. Whatever happens, no matter how illogical the outcome, or how much the senses or proper identity mathematics are violated, something (an identity) remains – perhaps based on nothing more than faith.

Far from being the remainders, what is left over after the “real show” is finished, coloured identity is excessive; it disrupts the very act of addition and subtraction. One may be nothing as a static identity – that empty space, the vacuum – but identities are not simply that which stay put and stand in one location for all to see. To find “coloured” may necessitate looking in the least expected places, and then, only if one is prepared to see something other than what has been expected.

As Prinsloo moves through his list as some mathematical formula, some anti-recipe or journey from dark into light, an easy conclusion is to view

this statement as a simple act of abnegation or ethnocentrism. Yet, in this string of minuses, the conclusion, ie coloured identity, is obviously illogical.

For it is possible to take away blackness and dark skin – as one moves along the colour spectrum to the absence of colour (white) – but after a while, there still remains a trace that cannot be eliminated, that refuses to disappear no matter how dysfunctional or derogated blackness might be. And it is the coloured that remains – not as a manifestation of some mystical interracialism – but as a stubborn reminder of what cannot be stamped out. The blackness that remains is not necessarily regal or essential. Wounded, frequently despised and distorted, it, nevertheless, persists as something beyond either conqueror or victim.

### **Empowering the possible**

The woman who finds it difficult to imagine her ancestral origins is at least capable of imagining the act of miscegenation as possibly a form of woman’s defiance and power – indeed difficult to imagine in South Africa’s patriarchal world. Beyond the fact that most children have always had a hard time imagining their parents “doing it”, it seems that she quickly abandons this thought and opts for the more conventional interpretation of miscegenated sex as male domination and duplicity.

The emotions surrounding miscegenation have never been warranted by its statistical occurrence. With much of the Americas the product of miscegenated sex, there is little historical reason to find it either odd or dangerous. Yet interracial sex continues to invite a wealth of speculations, interpretations, gazes and commentaries. As Said quickly identifies the “more likely” scenario, she abandons her initial formulation, “she stoops to conquer”. Perhaps she retreats because it seemed odd to her that there could be anything to conquer and, if there was, that sex would be the methodology in this colonial instance – unless all the old

stereotypes about the dangers of female sexuality are being revived.

But what is important about her initial comments – holding open the possibility of the sex being initiated equally out of the black women's move for power as well as the man's – is that the gender politics implied here point to another set of possibilities which seem to confirm a more significant role for women in these myths of origin. (Note that the possibility of a black man having sex with a white woman is not even considered – even though historians of the Cape point to its, albeit infrequent, occurrence.)

Where black women in the colonial situation might have been able to gain physical security for themselves and their families, manumission, or material benefits from sex with white men, it is difficult to imagine the white sexual organ being "conquered". Yet by raising this "unreasonable" possibility, a space for imagination is opened up in a scene otherwise found difficult to imagine.

"One hopes for other things" beyond simply the practices of gender and colonial warfare; one hopes for a personal and ancestral history which exceeds this warfare, "especially since one has no reason to believe that love had anything to do with it".

The basis of the hopes for excess and transcendence, then, is not based on any romantic sentimentality of love or pure desire. Where the presence of romantic love might be expected to form some counterpoint to the prevalence of power and manipulation in interracial sexuality – ie, there is nothing to be gained in this "abnormal" instance of racial mixing – the speaker bases her hopes for transcendence here simply on her knowledge that no such sentiments are anywhere in the picture. More importantly, the seeming acceptance of power is acknowledged as wrapped up in the very infatuation with love.

Whatever is to exceed connotations of sex and origin as acts of conquering, torture, income generation, power displays, projection, and degradation must thus emerge with these elements fully in mind. There is not

some overarching magical impetus to humanity which will bring racial identities together in selfless, disinterested acts of sharing, and certainly coloureds won't find themselves either the beneficiaries or manifestations of such wondrous interactions. The birthing of coloured identities was messy from the start and any remaking of them will be messy as well.

Wheeling and dealing, trade-offs, and back-room bargaining will be part and parcel of coloured identity formation. To face this inevitability squarely and competently at least provides the opportunity for something more. There are no guarantees, but only by keeping the "cynical" vision in view, does something else emerge that might release "love" from being the hoped for, yet impossible counterdiscourse for a sexuality weighted down with symbolic baggage.

As unlikely as it seems for the white sexual organ to be conquered in the origin of coloured identity – to what use would the conquering be put? – the speaker lends credence to that very possibility by the way she holds out here for more. Like the woman stooping, Said retains this aspiration, not for the conventional "female" motivations of love, but for a power to put together something not quite clear or certain. The aim is to put together some excessive motivation. Such motivation would take the colonial, postcolonial, or national transition periods – full of their violence, manipulations and torment – and convert interactions among different ethnicities and races into something not readily identifiable and, therefore, not easily controlled.

What is hoped for here is a return to an origin out of control, beyond control, yet established full of the most immediate and base motivations – ie, "getting ahead" and "jockeying for position". If some functional, open-ended rapprochement with whites, Africans, and Indians is to take place for coloureds, it probably won't come from avoiding the nitty-gritty warfares of ethnic politics. Whatever spirit of generosity coloured commu-

nities may presently possess, their possibility of survival rests in the multiplicity of relationships they can broker among South Africa's various groups and beyond.

### Hopping among identities

At its best, hip-hop is about an ironic bravado, a kind of self-promotion that delivers a running commentary on who is doing what to who. Lately it has constituted an important commercial activity for black youth who otherwise dealt drugs exclusively. Although rappers, "gangstas" and djs have their territorialized crews, posses, houses and tribes, hip-hop moves to elaborate an ever-expanding network of connections, deals, and alliances aiming to provide "territorialized" and "imprisoned" black youth a mechanism for mobility. Much of the music is designed for moving in four-wheel drive, high powered land-cruisers.

Having started as a parochialized form of rage from the invisible streets of America, hip-hop has become a culture of making deals that ply the dopeseller's sensibility into abstract markets – as an "alternative" corporate America. No matter how few hip-hoppers actually rake in the big bucks, the art of making the deal has become the aspiration.

Gangsters, once specializing only in coke, smoke and shooting each other in turf wars, make tentative moves toward coalescing their skills and profits in the soft yet lucrative industries of entertainment and services. The fascination for "black" has never been stronger for white consumers, and majors in the music business have thrown large dollars behind the hip-hop business.

Black South Africans, long enamoured with African American culture as well, have been slow to get behind hip-hop, preferring the "softer" and more soulful products of black dance music. Cape coloureds, the majority of whom live in conditions very similar to South Central, Compton, Inglewood and Long Beach and whose fathers and grandfathers were usually members of gangs, have more

widely embraced the music and cultural trappings.

The point of interest here is not so much a sociological discussion of the reasons underlying this coloured appropriation of hip-hop, but in looking at how Setai associates it with a certain level of sophistication, and why coloureds are the ones capable of it – the only ones who can be real “niggaz”. What is especially curious is how Prinsloo is anxious to get rid of the “kaffir” only for Setai to not only become the appropriation of the despised black American but to associate that status with sophistication.

There is of course the romance with the power of the street, with guns, drive-bys, gangster attitudes of toughness and invincibility, even though gunshot wounds are the highest cause of black male mortality for youth in the US. The driving beat, uncompromising lyrics and truth-telling provide something to latch onto for people uncertain as to where they’re going or what their future prospects might be.

But beyond these obvious renderings of hip-hop culture lies the crux of current street “ideology”: How does one convert being a “nigga” into a money-making opportunity; how does one “front” one’s marginality into a mainstream occupation? How do the street sensibilities and urban practices cultivated in desolate, implosive landscapes get constituted into a corporate strategy?

In a South Africa of an overwhelming repressed blackness, the majority are finally taking up their “rightful” place. What place do coloureds have within this correction of the anachronistic racialist order? With the prospect of being turned from half-victims into the authentic marginals by those with the economic and political powers, coloured youth “move on” to a new generation of identities not surfacely beholden to the past. Yet as the music “samples” the recent history of African American music for rhythms and riffs, the appropriation of hip-hop continues a “sampling” technique long familiar to

mediations of coloured identity. The appropriation of minstrel shows (coon bands), a cappella doo-wop groups and dixie land jazz were the key elements to “carnival” – the primary manifestation of coloured popular culture.<sup>20</sup>

As hip-hop imitates the roughneck characteristics of everyday street life and, in turn, elaborates a politics which acts to reinvent that roughness, it seeks to be more than a catalogue of truths, but to force the imitation into spilling over boundaries between the street and corporate world, the prison and suburbia, the world of entertainment/high finance and the world of getting high. Being seen as “America’s most wanted and dangerous” by consumers is a fiercely competed-for status – so that even on the eve of hip-hop’s most eagerly anticipated record release, the artist, Snoop Doggy Dog, is arraigned for murder.

In South Africa, the field of antagonism is dominated by claims of primordial and immutable ethnonationalisms, ie, Inkhata, versus the incessantly repeated invocations of multiracialism trying to forge a functional patchwork among traditions, languages and colonially defined ethnicities. The local practice of hip-hop seems to “skip” these domestic issues altogether and invites the hard edge of the Diaspora to return to a mongrelized “momma” at the continent’s southern tip, at its most “Americanized” city, Cape Town.

Here, a relay is established between a chain of mimetic manoeuvres that undermine clear distinctions between Black America and Black Africa – in turn, operating as a means of undermining and (underlining) distinctions between black and coloured. As hip-hop popularizes a reinvented African oral tradition of testifying to everyday life and relationships, it is brought back “home” (to Africa) but appropriated without any appreciation of its supposed “Africinity”.

Whereas the Cape’s coloured hip-hop devotees lack the rough and tumble edge and media opportunities of their Los Angeles compatriots, the substantiation of actual connections

with artists, scenes, media has far exceeded that anywhere else in the Black World. It is easy to conclude that young coloureds latch on to this infatuation with American fierceness as a crutch in uncertain times.

Yet the remark of the speaker that the aspiration is to be real “niggaz” seems to position coloured identity, in this instance, as both blacker than black and thus, not only the real dispossessed of South Africa, but the country’s fiery soul as well – straight out of Cape Town. A version of blackness which can “cruise” is taken into Africa through “the back door” – ie, through the allegiance of blacks (ie, coloureds) historically least rooted in conventional Eurocentric conceptions of what an African is. Thus, that Africinity is decentered as the ultimate arbiter of a “rightful” blackness

Equating “niggaz” with sophistication is a move to convert coloured marginality into the locus of brokerage with connections not only to urban American streets, but anywhere. For just as hip-hop reflects the tiredness of an African American community knocking on the door of opportunity and of trying to get into the real action by being good “negroes” and accomplished professionals, coloureds may have to go beyond hoping that African blacks will accept them as real blacks and unmake and remake different versions of blackness.

Having at least the symbolic assuredness that, placed inside American urban settings, their status would, with few exceptions, be unequivocally black, no black African in their right mind could possibly exercise a superceding claim that coloureds don’t have the real legitimacy to play with black identity. After all, hip-hop is nothing less than staying alive and making money off of playing with identity – often nothing more than self-promotion based on the ability to promote.

The hip-hop “movement” in Cape Town has managed to promote itself as significant far beyond what its numbers might suggest. As one hip-

hop "activist" indicates, "we've done a better job than the brothers in the states in terms of hooking up with what's going on in Brazil, Malaysia and Europe". (Interestingly enough, the first two countries mentioned might be considered "powerhouses" of the "brown" world.) What this nascent entrepreneurship might suggest about coloured identity concerns its ability to make and remake itself in terms of a broad series of interactions it brokers amongst other identities. The ambiguities involved in demarcating the borders between what is coloured and what is not is addressed by a practice where all terrains of identity are "borderland".<sup>21</sup>

The distinctions between "us" and "them", therefore, might be made fuzzy, just as the grounds of coloured definition outside administrative artefact are themselves fuzzy. Yet even the deployment of multiplicities and resilience require solid institutions and competent business practice. The pursuit of brokering interconnections as a means of continuously "putting the make" on something never fully "made" to begin with will require a coherent political and cultural machine capable of mobilizing energies and resources.

Given the apartheid regime's emphasis on a separate destiny for "invented" homelands and the resurgence of Zulu nationalism, the elaboration of such machines will inevitably be looked upon with either the glee of conservative reactionaries or the alarm of progressives. Yet the celebration of ethnicity or other forms of social solidarity on the basis of distorted biological or historical claims does not invalidate the usefulness of celebrating solidarity. For what coloureds have to offer South Africa in their deliberations of identity is the resilience entailed in crossing all types of boundaries rather than in simply forging negotiated agreements which harmonize interactions, but essentially allow the boundaries to remain.

The appropriation of hip-hop culture by Cape coloureds not only provides a hint of the mentalities emerging in such process but also

posits the dangers involved. As Setai clearly says, "only we have the sophistication ..." as if this remaking of blackness is the purview of coloureds alone. Whereas coloureds might be theoretically and politically positioned to both embody and elaborate substantial flexibility and breadth in how blackness is drawn, that flexibility is attenuated as soon as the content of the boast is taken seriously as a feature of coloured identity itself.

Such narrowness and arrogance has always been the delimiting element of hip-hop culture. Rather than fronting ethnocentric claims, American hip-hop loses its irony, and thus creativity, in its insistence upon sequestering women in the rigid terms of either overly romanticized Nubian princess or money-hungry bitch. In the twilight zone of in-betweenness that coloureds have been located, the practice of overcompensating – being whiter or blacker than the "opposition" – was often drawn along gendered lines and produced not only a highly parochialized relationship between coloureds and the outside world, but a wide chasm between the everyday worlds of coloured men and women.

Thus the appropriation of hip-hop points to the larger positioning of coloureds on the cusp between a yearning to radically expand the locus of their operations in the world and a tendency to draw the wagons around a surfeit of arrogance and isolation.

Whatever the future of coloured communities in South Africa, it is a future that warrants being talked about explicitly – accepting the contentiousness and vocality of the process. On the basis of sheer demographics, coloureds have the opportunity to remake a region in their own image.

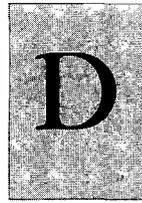
The success of this venture will largely rest in the "electricity" of the image – ie, the fraying of boundaries be they colonial, conceptual or ethnic. Differences will remain recognizable, perhaps salient, but ragged at the edges, no longer capable of "carrying a charge" and charged with a reassemblage of circuitries.

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# South Africa's Karoo region: A desert in the making?

*Dr D W Myburgh, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of the Western Cape, examines the extent of the deterioration of the natural environment in the Karoo and puts forward some suggestions regarding future management options.*



During the 1980s and early 1990s the Karoo region in South Africa suffered prolonged periods of severe drought and several flood events, the Laingsburg flood of 1981 having been a major disaster.

These two phenomena are hazards to the inhabitants of regions where they occur, especially to farmers whose livelihood is threatened by their occurrence. They are regarded as natural hazards in the sense that they have their origin in the natural environment.

Hazard has been defined as “the potential for damage that exists only in the presence of a vulnerable human community”.<sup>1</sup> The concept of natural hazard therefore clearly incorporates both a natural and human component. This article focuses on the human component of the hazard and examines the role played by humans in constituting a drought and flood hazard in the Karoo region.

The analysis is based on the premise that the Karoo region is an ecosystem which has been subjected to stress and modification by the presence of humans and their exploitive practices, resulting in the heightening of the hazard of natural processes present in the environment. It attempts to show that the spread of settlement and with it the more intensive use of the land, occasioned by socioeconomic pressures associated

with a system of production and a set of values which is out of harmony with the dynamic equilibrium of the environment, have been responsible for these conditions.

## Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework within which the analysis is conducted, is summarized in the diagram given in figure 1 on the next page.

The natural environment consisting of the climatological and meteorological, pedological, biotic (botanical and zoological) constituents, geomorphological process, and hydrological elements, is seen to exist in a state of dynamic equilibrium. Extreme events involving substantial variations in rainfall above and below the average amount, resulting in protracted periods of dryness, on the one hand, and excessive moisture and the overtopping of river channels on the other, exist as normal features of this natural environment.

Human intrusion of this natural environment is related to people's perception of its potential for farming and rural and urban settlement. Patterns of economic activity and settlement are a function of the cultural, social, economic and political base of such settlers, these factors being reflected in their attitudes and approaches to land utilization. The presence of humans immediately creates a state of hazard with respect to droughts and floods. Their adaptive

*All photographs by Dr D W Myburgh*

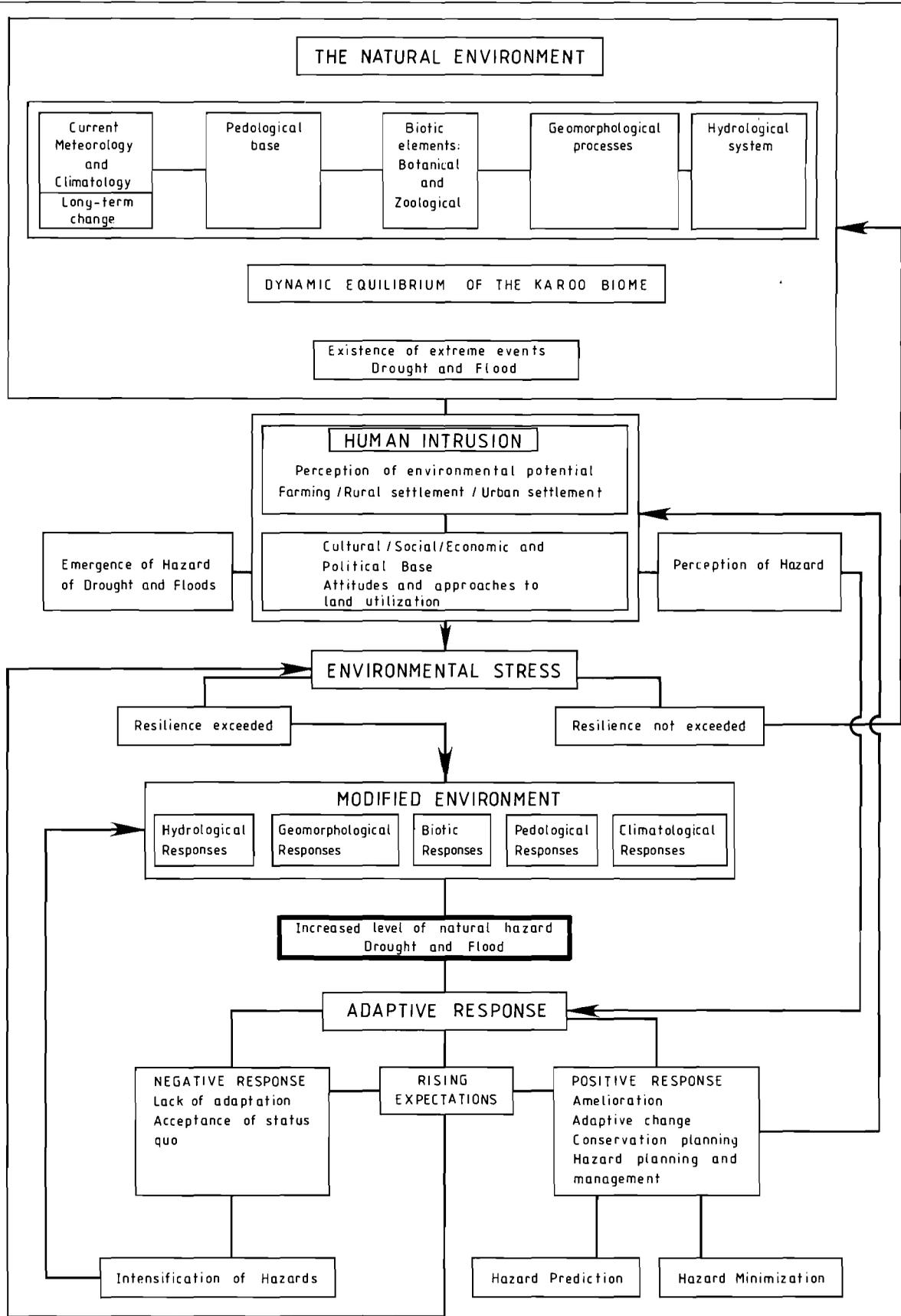


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of increased level of drought and flood hazard

response to these hazards is filtered through their perception of them.

By human intrusion the natural environment can be subjected to stress, provided the resilience<sup>2</sup> of the natural environment is not exceeded, its equilibrium is not disturbed and it continues to retain its essential character. However, if human activities are sufficiently pervasive, the resilience of the natural environment is exceeded and changes do occur. Hydrological, geomorphological, biotic, pedological and possibly climatological responses produce a modified environment. If human understanding of the changes resulting in concomitant adjustment responses does not keep pace with the changed (usually deteriorated) environmental conditions, an increased level of natural hazard with respect to moisture relationships will occur.

Human response can have either positive or negative features. Negative response is associated with lack of adjustment and an acceptance of the status quo, which in itself further intensifies the hazard and exacerbates the process. Positive response is expressed in amelioration attempts, adaptive change, conservation planning, and hazard planning and management. Possible consequences are progress in hazard prediction and hazard minimization.

In Western capitalist society a complication in this response situation is the prevalence of rising human expectations. This proceeds from the competitive nature of relations and rising levels of consumption which are inherent in the capitalist mode of production. An outcome is a tendency for human activities to be exploitive rather than conservative as people seek to obtain maximum short-term profit from the resources of their environment. Heightened environmental stress is the consequence. Rising expectations related to their own aspirations and the system of values engendered by the society of which they are a part, are therefore seen as an important source for the perpetuation of a process of which

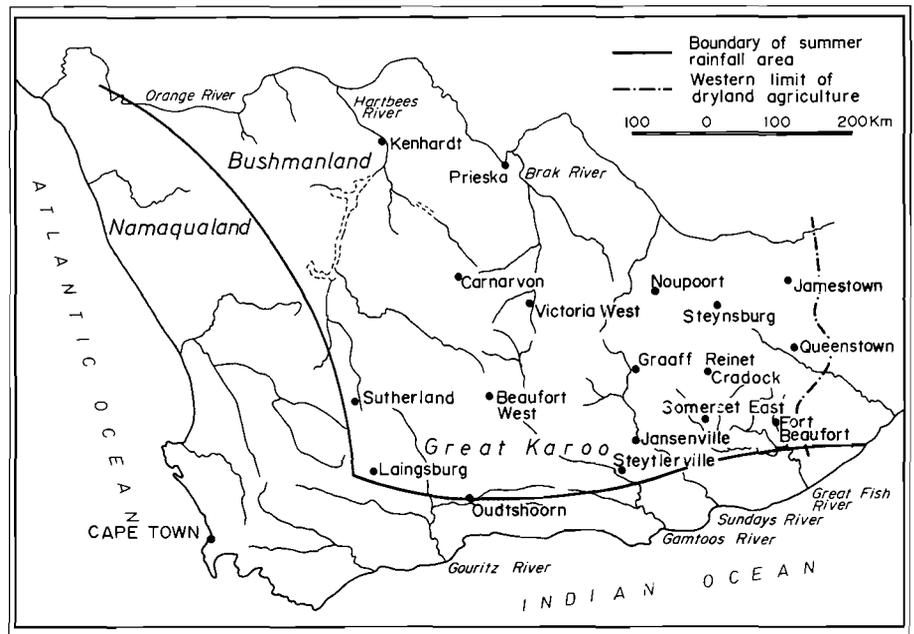


Figure 2: The Karoo region. As delimited here, this region covers roughly one-quarter of the area of South Africa

increased natural hazard level is a significant feature.

### The Karoo: A changing ecosystem

The Karoo region (see figure 2) is defined as the area south of the Orange River where rainfall occurs mainly in the summer and annual precipitation is less than the minimum required for dryland agriculture. The region covers about a quarter of the area of the country and has a third of the country's sheep. It supports a population of slightly more than half a million people. Annual rainfall is highly variable. Variability (the standard deviation of annual rainfall expressed as a percentage of the mean annual rainfall) ranges from 20% in the east to as high as 50% in the north-west. The natural vegetation consists essentially of low scrubby bushes with some annual grasses. This dry region is used mainly for extensive livestock farming. Along rivers where irrigation is possible, some agriculture is practised on a small scale, the main products being fodder crops, especially lucerne, and deciduous fruit. Droughts in the region result mainly in losses of grazing land and livestock and the general deterioration of the environment, while the losses suffered

as a consequence of floods include crops, fruit trees and agricultural land, structures such as buildings and bridges, and, owing to the suddenness of their occurrence, also human lives.

The Karoo ecosystem consists of abiotic and biotic components. The abiotic components considered relevant to this study of drought and flood in the Karoo environment are mainly those factors that relate to the climatological, hydrological and pedological base of the region. There have been numerous suggestions in published material that changes are occurring in the realm of the abiotic components of the global ecosystem, especially in respect of climate. This is due to rising levels of carbon dioxide and pollutants in the atmosphere and the depletion of the ozone layer. However, investigations by researchers such as Tyson<sup>3</sup> have shown that in South Africa there is no clear evidence of an increasing or decreasing temperature or rainfall trend. There are no indications that other abiotic elements such as the chemical composition of the hydrospheric or lithospheric components of the Karoo ecosystem have been subject to significant variation. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that an explanation of any deterioration that might



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have occurred in the Karoo environment in the recent past should be sought in the biotic rather than the abiotic components of the system.

As pointed out earlier, any ecosystem has the ability to withstand or recover from externally imposed stresses. The stability it possesses is maintained amidst constant change that occurs within the system. It exists in a state of dynamic equilibrium. However, its resilience to recover from outside disturbances if they are

not too severe, and to restore itself to an original condition, can be exceeded. If this happens, a variety of consequences are possible. There can be changes at the organism or population level, an example of which is a change in the composition of the population. Changes at the community level can also occur, one of these being simplification in which there is a reduction in the number of species, reduction or elimination of habitats and filled ecological niches, less

complex food webs and lowered stability. There is evidence of such changes in the Karoo environment.

#### **Initial environmental equilibrium**

From early descriptions of the interior of Southern Africa by travellers such as Lichtenstein, Burchell, Baines, Borchers, Somerville and Thompson it is possible to deduce only some general characteristics of the Karoo ecosystem as it was at the time of the arrival of Europeans in the region

While it is beyond the scope of this study to attempt a detailed reconstruction of conditions of that time, it is necessary to identify certain aspects that are relevant to the question of whether ecological stability existed at that time.

#### **The natural components**

Acocks<sup>4</sup> has described the likely distribution of vegetation at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The study region was characterized by four main types of vegetation. Covering most of the central and western parts was the vegetation of the Karoo community. About one quarter of the region in the east was covered by sweet grassveld. Scrubby mixed grassveld occurred along the great escarpment in a zone beginning around Calvinia in the north and stretching southwards almost to Laingsburg and then extending eastwards as far as the vicinity of Murraysburg. Along the margins of the Karoo community in the south there was a narrow zone of bushveld, widening in the Jansenville area and becoming more patchy in the east between Graaff-Reinet and Somerset East. In the extreme east around Bedford, Adelaide and Fort Beaufort there was some forest and scrubforest.

Large herds of antelope and other wild animals abounded throughout the region, as is attested to by early written accounts.

#### **The human components**

At that time the Karoo region was peopled by two groups, the San and the Khoi. It is impossible to reliably estimate the numbers of these people but it is clear that they were encountered widely throughout the area. Their economy was Late Stone Age and accounts of their way of life indicate that they lived simply and close to nature. The San lived on roots and berries gathered in the veld and on game hunted with their bows and poisoned arrows or trapped in concealed holes in the ground. The Khoi were nomadic herdsman possessing cattle and sheep which they reared on the abundantly available natural grazing.

The impact that these two groups had on the natural environment is undocumented. Christopher<sup>5</sup> notes that the herding economy apparently became well organized with marked seasonal migrations depending on the availability of grazing and other foodstuffs. Indeed, an absence of any barriers imposed by rights of ownership or sedentary lifestyle made overgrazing unnecessary. Game does not appear to have been overhunted. The presence of large herds of antelope and other game was consistently mentioned by travellers through the region, eg Somerville (1799–1802), Thompson (1824) and Baines (1842–1853). This supports an assumption of ecological balance between the human and natural components of the ecosystem that still existed at the middle of the previous century.

Of course, the hazard of drought existed. Floods were probably far less significant. Periods of drought were part and parcel of the natural environment inhabited by the Khoi and San. The Khoi settlements were at best no more than semi-permanent, while the San constructed only the most rudimentary of shelters or inhabited caves. There was no cultivation, and loss of property as a result of floods was probably negligible. Drought constituted a greater hazard because it brought about a reduction in the food base. As grazing was reduced, the existence of the herds was threatened and the game disappeared. But there were no artificial barriers to movement, and migration was a natural response for both game and humans with their herds.

That drought imposed stress and hardship is without question. Thompson refers to conditions that prevailed during the great drought in the western interior in the early 1820s. He had expected to find plenty of game but discovered that the great drought that had long prevailed in the region had driven almost all of the game to other quarters.<sup>6</sup> The indigenous people had also moved away from the drought-stricken area. The aged and infirm had been left behind

to eke out an existence until nature took its course. Thompson describes the miserable condition of two Koranna women, one advanced in age, the other young but a cripple and nursing an infant. They had been left to perish by their relatives and because they were unable to provide for themselves, were completely emaciated and close to death.<sup>7</sup> In the absence of an advanced technology people were very much a part of nature and subject to its vicissitudes, not excluding even a degree of natural selection on the human level.

Migration in response to pressure from extreme natural events appears to have been an important principle in the maintenance of dynamic equilibrium in the ecosystem.

#### **The rise of hazard**

The occupation of the Karoo region by white people signalled the onset of a period in which the hazards of drought and later floods gradually increased. Several factors were responsible for this.

#### **The spread of permanent settlement**

The San retreated before the Khoi and were pushed into progressively more remote areas. The spread of European settlers toward the interior after the establishment of the settlement at the Cape also forced the hunter-gatherers to retreat and they were eliminated from the Karoo region in the course of the nineteenth century.

The arrival of the whites was disastrous for the Khoi. Competition for grazing land followed the acquisition of sheep and cattle by the whites. Contact with diseases introduced by the settlers, especially smallpox, against which the indigenous people had no immunity, resulted in epidemics which decimated their numbers. In the course of the eighteenth century their traditional grazing grounds were appropriated by the white graziers.<sup>8</sup>

The graziers were granted use of grazing land by the Dutch East India Company for which a small rental had to be paid. Farms were approximately 2 500 ha in size. With the British

occupation of the Cape came a process of land reform.<sup>9</sup> In 1814 the British government introduced the concept of perpetual leases with surveyed boundaries in an attempt to end the stock farmers' nomadic habits and give them greater security of tenure. The standard farm of 2 500 ha was established widely over the southern Cape of Good Hope.<sup>10</sup>

It became apparent, however, that in the drier interior these farms were too small, and after 1829 greater flexibility was allowed in the surveying of farm units: in some cases units of 50 000 ha were allocated. Christopher<sup>11</sup> remarks that the theme of most legislation was to encourage families to settle on the land. Large commercial companies were never encouraged and consequently a far closer pattern of settlement developed than would have been the case under individual farming. The quit-rent system by which land was leased to the farmers was abolished in 1934 and today some four-fifths of farmers own the land they farm.

The closer settlement of the Karoo region brought with it an increase in the level of natural hazard, particularly of drought. Many of the farm units, especially those in the northern parts, had no permanent sources of water during periods of drought. Moreover, owing to individual ownership and the enclosure of farm units with fences, increasingly since the beginning of the present century,<sup>12</sup> the traditional system of trekking with livestock to areas unaffected by drought was no longer possible.<sup>13</sup> Stock farmers could no longer escape from the drought; it had to be endured and the losses suffered. These were new circumstances which they had probably not anticipated and to which they had to adjust as best they could.

#### The emergence of commercial pastoralism

The needs of the indigenous Khoi and San peoples were met by their subsistence economy and a surplus was neither required nor was it of any particular value to them. If nature was extraordinarily bountiful at a particular time it merely eased their burden

of effort and they could enjoy the abundance with simple acceptance. Similarly, when nature imposed conditions of dearth and hardship, these were either borne with resignation or avoided by migration.

The occupation of the land by European settlers brought with it a system of commercial pastoralism. The essence of the change in relation to the environment was that now people no longer existed in a state of symbiotic equilibrium with nature. The motive of the economy had changed from one based on the fulfilment of needs to one founded on the pursuit of profit. The people began to extract from nature what they could get, rather than receive what it gave them. While this practice operated within the bounds of the resilience of the ecosystem, the dynamic equilibrium was maintained but any transgression of these limits ensured the onset of deterioration. Several such stress-producing factors can be identified.

#### The demand for land

The most suitable and productive land in terms of distance relationships or productive potential was occupied first. Demand for land increased as land became scarcer and an increasing number of prospective farmers were directed to attempt to make a living in areas that were unsuitable for farming. Increased demand also had the effect of driving up land prices to levels little related to their economic potential and farmers were tempted to sell off part of their land, especially during poor years. The remaining land was often transformed into uneconomical units.<sup>14</sup> As a consequence it became a necessity for the very survival of farmers to extract as much as possible from the land, either to make a living or, if they purchased land at an inflated price, to compensate for the high price they had paid.

The tendency of farmers to purchase additional land adjoining their own was often to counter declining profits per unit area. However, the high price of land in some instances had the effect of increasing

debt per unit area and therefore turning an economic unit into an uneconomic one.

#### Expansion of the world economy

The expansion of the world economy during the nineteenth century had a profound effect on the pastoral farmers of the region. Associated with it was an increased demand for wool, ostrich feathers, hides and skins. The transport system had expanded sufficiently to facilitate the marketing of products even from the more remote areas and pastoral farming changed from a semi-subsistence state to a commercial undertaking.

#### Social and cultural factors

##### *Farming as a way of life*

The spirit of independence that characterized the trekboer who moved away from the Cape settlement into the interior to attenuate control of the Dutch East India Company over him, has been passed down to later generations of the Afrikaner farmer. It has been an important factor in his attachment to the land. Land of his own increased his self-sufficiency and gave him security.<sup>15</sup> On his own land, subject only to his Maker and as little control by government authority as possible, he could be master of his own destiny. Farming as a way of life became an important element in Afrikaner culture, and even today the vast majority of Karoo farmers are Afrikaans-speaking. Viewed in this light it is understandable that farming as a way of life was to be abandoned only in the face of total failure. It is likely, therefore, that many people continue to be farmers even though they might be more suited to some other occupation and that the farm might be run inefficiently. In the long term, inefficiency, coupled with exploitive farming practices, leads to a deterioration of the natural environment, increasing the hazard of drought and floods.

##### *The subdivision of holdings*

The great value attached to landownership is also reflected in the custom of a farmer's land being divided

amongst his children as their inheritance. This led to excessive subdivision and the creation of uneconomical units. Exploitive practices occasioned by the need to make a living from too small a unit, promotes environmental deterioration and leads to a rise in the level of hazard.

#### *Rising standard of living*

The changeover from subsistence to commercial farming and the emergence of secondary industry in South Africa broadened the wage base and brought with it a higher standard of living for many. Grosskopf<sup>16</sup> refers to the rapid rise in the demand for a higher standard of living that characterized the first two decades of the present century and associates the depopulation of the rural areas with it. As has been pointed out, leaving the land was not done lightly. Owing to his attachment to the land, the farmer would resort to such action only when all else had failed. It is therefore not unreasonable to deduce that this would have occurred only after he had taken the land to the very edge of its capability to provide him with as good a livelihood as possible.

#### **Inappropriate farming practices**

In 1923 the report of the Drought Investigation Commission was published.<sup>17</sup> Its message was clear. Unless something was done to curb the deteriorating conditions, South Africa was destined to become a desert uninhabitable by man. Bad farming practice is mentioned as one of the main contributory factors.

The kraaling of sheep was identified as one of these practices. Apart from the damage the vegetation suffered as a result of repeated trampling, it was also heavily overgrazed in the vicinity of the kraals or other overnight places.

Overstocking and associated overgrazing was identified as another contributory cause. The climate is subject to great variations. Farmers tended to be optimistic and, following the desire to derive the maximum benefit from their land, stocked their land according to its perceived

carrying capacity in good years. It followed that the land was overstocked at all other times, with disastrous consequences for the grazing.

A third major problem was insufficient watering points for stock. Sheep had to move over long distances to find water. Here too, the consequences of the increased expenditure of energy and heightened demand for food were the trampling of the veld and destruction of the grazing around the watering points.

#### **The establishment of towns**

The rise of hazard should not be seen only in relation to the effect of a deteriorated natural environment on a farming population. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century all the towns that exist in the area today had been founded. With them was introduced a new dimension to the hazard of drought and flood.

A reliable permanent water supply had to be found for both domestic and industrial purposes. The hazard of drought remained a problem until subterranean water could be tapped and storage reservoirs could be constructed to provide sufficient water during periods of drought. Today, apart from the necessity to occasionally impose restrictions on the use of water, the hazard of drought to urban dwellers is not great.

The recognition of the importance of a water supply is clearly evident from the sites chosen for the first towns in the region. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the example of Graaff-Reinet, which was the first town to be established in the Karoo. The site was a section of flood-plain land almost enclosed by a meander of the Sundays River. Cradock, the second town to be established, is situated on the banks of the Great Fish River. Other towns situated on the banks of rivers or water courses are Kenhardt, Prieska, Vosburg, Carnarvon, Victoria West, Richmond, Noupoot, Steynsburg, Molteno, Jamestown, Sterkstroom, Queens-town, Nieu-Bethesda, Beaufort West, Merweville, Laingsburg, Aberdeen, Jansenville, Pearston, Steytlerville,

Bedford, Adelaide and Fort Beaufort, though the streams are without water for most of the year in many instances.

The establishment of towns in riparian locations magnified another hazard that had previously been relatively insignificant. Although some farmers had sought to augment their income by cultivating small tracts of riparian land in favourable locations, the total amount of land was small and very few depended on it for a livelihood. Losses caused by floods were not great. However, with townspeople inhabiting sites on the banks of rivers and streams, floods now became a very real hazard to lives and property.

#### **The state of the natural environment**

It is clear that the Karoo environment has deteriorated as a consequence of man's presence. In its report in 1923 the Drought Investigation Commission<sup>18</sup> repeatedly emphasized the deteriorated state of the veld. It was recognized that much of South Africa had been dry long before the coming of white people, as could be deduced from the natural vegetation that was well adapted to conditions of drought. The Report further stated that since the arrival of white settlers the original vegetation had been either fully or partly destroyed over vast areas of the country, with the resultant disappearance of rivers, springs, pools and marshes that had once been known to earlier travellers. Moreover, it saw the process of desertification as progressing rapidly.

The Carnegie Commission of enquiry into the poor-white problem confirmed the existence of these conditions in 1932<sup>19</sup> and Dyer referred to "the general advance of desert conditions" some twenty years later.<sup>20</sup>

Degradation of the natural environment is evident with respect to three main categories: vegetation and fauna, soil erosion, and water resources.

#### **Vegetation and fauna**

The virtual disappearance of grass from the Karoo is one of the important consequences of man's carelessness.<sup>21</sup>

The condition of bareness is artificial. The grasses, even those that tend to be unpalatable, are eaten down to the ground, indicating that they are preferred to the Karoo bushes. Karoo bushes are valuable mainly as reserves for winter or droughts when there is no green grass left. Furthermore, the majority of the Karoo bushes are unpalatable and since the more palatable ones are preferred food, the unpalatable ones are steadily increasing.

Selective grazing is seen to be responsible for this. The wild animals that were formerly present in large numbers were of many different varieties, each with its own grazing habits. They were also free to move about when water and grazing grew scarce and did not return until grazing had recovered. Sheep, which have replaced the game, graze selectively and flocks are maintained in an area, whether the state of the grazing justifies it or not. In this way a change occurs in the composition of the veld, reducing its value as grazing for sheep.

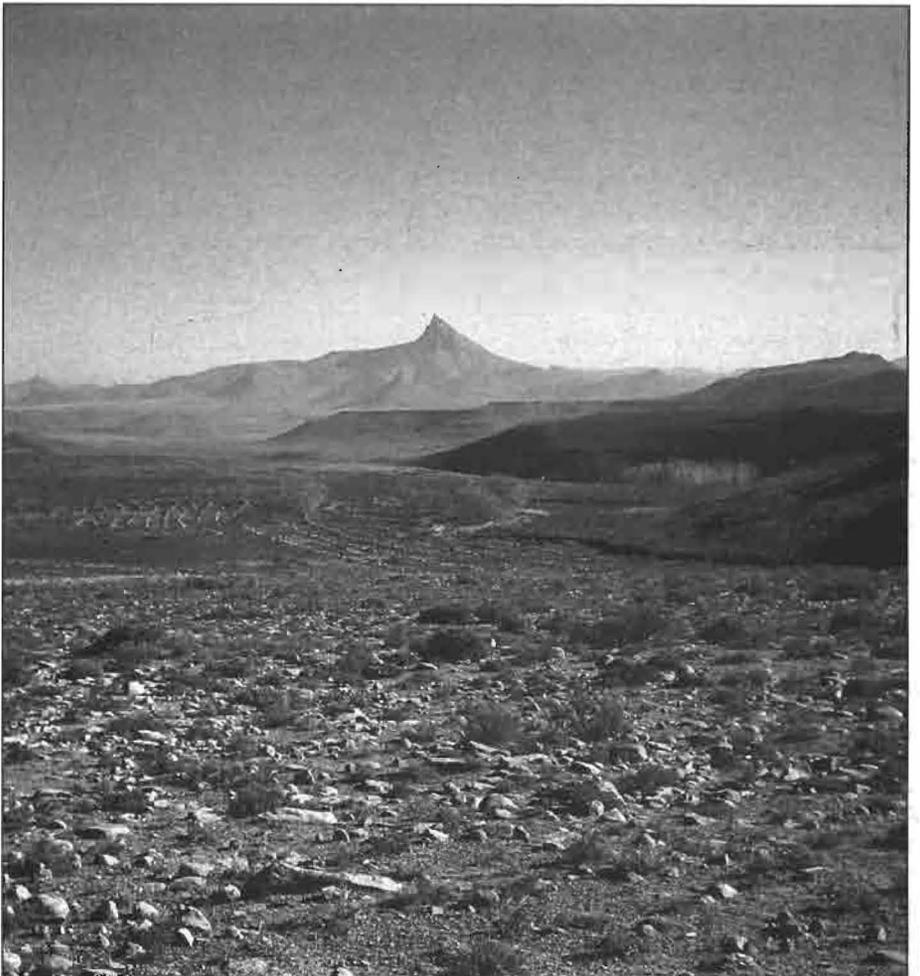
On a regional scale Acocks<sup>22</sup> recognizes several major changes. The sweet grassveld that formerly characterized the eastern third of the study region has completely disappeared, its place being taken by Karoo vegetation. Another change is the invasion of the upper central karoo by arid karoo. The arid karoo and western mountain karoo has also been invaded by the succulent karoo. Most significant is the desertification of the west where there is no longer a permanent, unbroken vegetation cover, and only rarely a temporary cover.

#### Soil erosion

That soil erosion is a serious problem in South Africa is without question.

The problem has received attention in many studies, been identified by several commissions of enquiry, and been the subject of legislation in numerous acts of parliament.

One of the earliest authoritative documentations of the seriousness of soil erosion was the Report of the Select Committee on Droughts, Rainfall and Soil Erosion of 1914.<sup>23</sup>



The commission indicated that drastic destruction of the natural vegetation had occurred and concluded that the desiccation that was evident in certain areas of the country was the result of soil erosion.

The report of the Drought Investigation Commission<sup>24</sup> reiterated the statements of the Select Committee and found that faulty veld and stock management, especially kraaling of stock, overstocking and destruction of the natural vegetation were principal factors in drought losses and that these factors were also responsible for soil erosion.

The seriousness of the situation is evident from the legislation that was deemed necessary to control soil erosion. The first substantial legislation aimed at combating soil erosion was the Forest and Veld Conservation Act 13 of 1941. This was followed by the Soil Conservation Acts of 1946 and 1969. Other related legislation includes the Water Act 54 of 1956, the Forest Act 72 of 1968, the Mountain Catchment Areas Act 63 of 1970, the Common Pasture Management Act 82 of 1977, the Unbeneficial Occupation of Farms Act 29 of 1937, and the Subdivision of Agricultural Land Act 70 of 1970. The Stock Reduction Scheme that operated during the 1970s was also an attempt to allow the natural vegetation to recover and reduce the process of soil erosion.

In summing up the state of soil erosion in South Africa, Rabie and Theron<sup>25</sup> conclude that in spite of all the measures that have been adopted to counteract it, soil erosion has steadily increased. As a consequence of soil erosion there is less grazing per unit area and direct runoff is more rapid. Together with soil erosion the hazard of drought and floods has therefore also increased.

#### Water resources

A consequence of the destruction of the vegetation has been a reduction of surface retention and the capacity of the land surface to absorb water. Enhanced sheet-flow initiated a process of erosion which has opened up, multiplied and enlarged channels

by which the water reaches the sea, resulting in a lowering of the water table and a drying up of waterholes and rivers. The silting up of dams and the deposition of silt during floods is also increased.

In his account of the past and future ecological condition of South African rivers, Chutter<sup>26</sup> stresses the deterioration that has occurred in these rivers over the past three hundred years, pointing out that perennial rivers have become seasonal and carry increased silt loads. Apart from the loss of valuable topsoil that this silt load represents, it adversely affects the water resources of the region. One of the most serious consequences is the deposition of silt in the river beds and, more important, in the dams built to impound the water of the rivers.

Several dams in the eastern part of the Karoo have been filled with silt to such an extent that the walls have had to be raised to extend their period of usefulness. The wall of Lake Mentz in the Sundays River, completed in 1922, had to be raised twice to compensate for the 104 million m<sup>3</sup> silt that had reduced its capacity by half by 1966. The impounding wall of Lake Arthur in the Great Fish River has also had to be raised twice as a result of an accumulation of silt.<sup>27</sup>

The consequences of this pattern for the drought and flood hazard are clear. Diminished surface water and a reduced water table mean that even relatively small negative deviations from an expected amount of rainfall produce shortages of water that would previously have been unknown. Similarly, positive deviations produce an accelerated and increased runoff response and greatly enhances the danger of flooding. Exceeding the resilience of the natural environment has destroyed the built-in "cushion" which absorbed the normal variations in rainfall and by which the dynamic equilibrium was maintained. As a consequence the natural environment has become far less stable, a condition which will deteriorate further as long as the pressure that produced it is maintained.

#### Hazard reduction strategies

The study draws attention to evidence of change in the natural environment that has accompanied the process of settlement and human occupation of the Karoo region. As population density grew, increased demands were made on the environment. The land was required to yield more and more as simple subsistence farming changed to commercial pastoralism in an expanding capitalist economy. A social and cultural system emerged in which farming as a way of life and rural landownership were cardinal values. These found expression in the custom of subdividing farm units to provide land for children in the family, often resulting in uneconomical units. Rising standards of living further increased the pressure on the environment as farmers found it necessary to resort to exploitive practices in generating wealth to meet rising expectations. Increasingly, farming practice became based on conditions which prevailed during favourable years. In less favourable years the demands imposed by such farming practice reached beyond these limits, and the resilience of the environment was exceeded. The degradation of the natural environment that occurred as a result has been attended by increased drought and flood hazard through the mechanisms of accelerated runoff, soil erosion, a reduced water table, deteriorated pasturage and generally diminished environmental stability.

#### Technological intervention

A cardinal question is what intervention is necessary or indeed possible in order to reduce the level of hazard in the region. Earlier it was pointed out that the drought and flood hazards had their source in both the natural and the human environment. In general the physical basis of droughts and floods is fairly well understood. There is, however, as yet incomplete comprehension of the exact causative mechanisms involved in the production of wet and dry periods. In view of this deficiency there is very little control over the physical sources of

these hazards and little likelihood of it ever being fully achieved. The very limited success achieved in cloud-seeding experiments aimed at modifying the rainfall pattern in South Africa and elsewhere attests to this fact. A large number of multi-purpose water storage reservoirs have been constructed in the region. Engineering works as a response to the flood and drought hazards in the region have been employed to the extent that further major developments in this field are unlikely in the near future. Reducing the level of hazard therefore lies firmly in the realm of human adjustments to prevailing conditions in the natural environment.

#### Human adjustment

Ultimately, the hazard of drought and flood can only be eliminated by people returning to a state of equilibrium with nature; a state in which droughts and floods are not seen as threats to their way of life but as part and parcel of the natural order. Such a possibility is prevented by the economic, social and cultural system of which they are a part. Permanent evacuation of the Karoo as a hazardous area is not a feasible solution. Farming in the area is a source of livelihood for thousands of people. Great capital investment and entrenched traditions and values associated with the occupation of the Karoo further make permanent evacuation an untenable option.

Ameliorative measures to reduce rather than eliminate these hazards are left as the only feasible alternatives. Such measures include efforts directed toward the better management of farming activity and schemes to restrict usage of high risk locations for both rural and urban settlement. With respect to the latter, in an arid environment river bank locations are amongst the most desirable for both urban settlement and agricultural production. Where such riparian development exists it is unlikely that relocation away from these hazardous sites will occur. Measures to reduce the flood hazard in these areas therefore have to be directed to the



management of future development. Such measures are already in place as central and local government have specified certain statutory restrictions on structures and land use and have encouraged the establishment of warning systems.

Schemes already operating with respect to farming practice include the dissemination of information on sound drought management principles.<sup>28</sup> Fine-tuning farm management to account for long-term conditions could go a long way towards making farmers less vulnerable to droughts. In practice, however, attempts by farmers to adjust their farming operation to deteriorated moisture conditions are often frustrated by structural forces beyond their immediate control. If the drought is widespread, the market for livestock (as units of production of meat) becomes oversupplied. This is because farmers, in the attempt to maximize returns, stock their farms to a capacity suitable for favourable conditions; under drought conditions they are therefore forced to get rid of excess stock. With so many farmers in a similar position

the market is unable to absorb the excess, which means that the farmers have to retain their excess regardless of what effect this might have on the natural environment.

The consequences of such overstocking are, of course, masked by the general effects of the drought itself, which is attended by deteriorated pasturage. The more permanent damage to the environment is easily and conveniently interpreted as the consequence of the phenomenon of drought rather than inappropriate farming practice. This is so because the difference is not easy to assess in accurate terms while the direct connection to the drought is straightforward. It is unquestionably more convenient to blame a natural phenomenon over which nobody has any control than to unravel the complexities of possibly irresponsible acts in the farming process, whether such acts were deliberate, committed unwittingly, or occurred in response to apparent necessity.

At this point it is necessary to note that most farmers are well aware of the advantages of environmental

conservation. They are, however, unable to reconcile the cost of measures required to effect it with the idea that it might hold some tangible benefit for them. In keeping with the values of the wider society of which they are a part, the maintenance of their standard of living (if not an improvement in it) is what counts. This is to be achieved by making their farms as profitable as possible, an endeavour which is directly related to stocking their farms with as many sheep of as good a quality as possible. The practice endows them with credit-worthiness if bank loans have to be negotiated, the livestock being a ready source of collateral security. Structural relationships that are inherent in the capitalist economy therefore make it very difficult for farmers to adjust their farming operation to conform to the principles of environmental conservation without sacrificing the standard of living to which they have become accustomed, at least in the short or medium term.

#### Restructuring the farming economy

That the whole answer to the problem of hazard reduction does not lie in management adjustment by itself is indicated by the results of another study by the author, of ameliorative measures adopted by farmers in the region.<sup>29</sup> Evaluation of these measures revealed that they were relatively ineffective in providing adequate protection for farmers against the adverse consequences of prolonged drought. During times of severe drought the overwhelming majority of farmers rely on the drought aid scheme of the state to carry them through. The message of this practice is clear: extensive livestock farming in the region does not operate as an independent segment of the economy. Farmers do not (or are unable to) accumulate sufficient reserve capital of their own to draw on in times of severe drought when farming operations have to be drastically scaled down. This could only occur if reduced expenditure could effect sufficient savings during the good years. In turn the possibility of such

savings depends on the profitability of the farm and the farmer's perception of what it offers him in terms of a reasonable standard of living. For farmers to become independent of outside assistance, considerable restructuring of the farming economy of the region as a whole would be necessary. As it stands, its economy is integrated with the wider economy of the country, and represents an arrangement that has evolved for the benefit of society as a whole. Until this arrangement no longer accords with the requirements of South African society, there is no need for such restructuring. Meanwhile the deterioration of the resource base of the natural environment will occur more easily where the responsibility for a viable farming economy is divided.

In view of changes that have recently occurred in South African society it is necessary to consider whether there should be concomitant adjustments in the social economy of this region. More specifically, how appropriate are land reform measures, such as those conceptualized in the Reconstruction and Development Programme, for the Karoo region?<sup>30</sup> The main relevant objectives of the programme are that land redistribution should ensure security of tenure for rural dwellers, increase rural incomes, generate large-scale employment, free underutilized land and promote the productive use of land. In relation to the Karoo region, reallocation of land to people inexperienced in the management of farming under conditions of elevated hazard of drought and flood would not necessarily provide the security of tenure that is desired. Tenure might be secured legally but in practice a farmer's occupation of the land would be only as secure as the success of the farming operation. There is no reason to believe that, in general, newcomers would make more successful farmers than present ones. With respect to increasing rural incomes and generating large-scale employment, the region is without great potential. The arguments presented in this article indicate that farming in the region is

overextended rather than underdeveloped. The viability of farming is ensured only by importing resources during recurrent extreme events. Many farms are known to be unoccupied in this semi-arid region. This condition might be seen as a symptom of the suboptimal use of land rather than the consequence of a need for larger farm units. Land bank assessors from the area are of the opinion that current farm size represents the minimum economic unit,<sup>31</sup> while Hattingh<sup>32</sup> affirms that farming economy is improved with increasing size of farming units. Larger rather than smaller farm units are required if environmental and economic sustainability of the region is to be achieved.

Alienation and reallocation of land in this region might be appropriate in certain individual cases. Where individual farmers have found themselves to be unsuccessful in their farming enterprise and wish to leave the industry, the state could assist them to realize their assets and become re-established outside farming. Land so acquired by the state could be used in the reallocation process.

#### Environmental conservation

The very limited success of individual attempts to reduce the adverse effect of drought and flood hazards emphasizes the importance of the role of the state as a mediator of appropriate strategies. While it might not be possible to eliminate these hazards given the constraints of the prevailing mode of production, the greatest hope of reducing them evidently lies in the promotion of environmental conservation. The Livestock Reduction Scheme that operated in the 1970s is an example of efforts by the state to promote the conservation of the environment. It was designed to assist the natural pasturage to recover, but despite clear benefits of the scheme to the pasturage, most of the farmers reverted to stocking their farms with the same number of livestock that they had prior to the introduction of the scheme. The government drought aid policy, applicable to the extensive grazing areas of the country, is also

directed towards this objective, since it makes the practice of environmental conservation a prerequisite to the granting of assistance in times of drought. In this way farmers who are not sufficiently committed to conservation practices will gradually be eliminated. Current programmes of information for environmental conservation are, however, insufficient as they do not address the fundamental material drive of farmers. Farmers need to be convinced that the results of conservation are materially desirable. There is a need for programmes designed to promote the conception that a restored natural environment is an essential mark of the quality of a farm. Incentives to involve farmers in conservation to a greater degree, such as relief in income tax or estate duty in relation to the successful application of conservation principles, might provide some motivation. Ultimately, however, it is the farmers themselves that have to take responsibility for the commercial performance of their enterprises. In the interests of equity throughout the farming sector and in view of existing demands on the country's financial resources for the implementation of the reconstruction and development programme, it is probable that aid programmes such as the Drought Aid Scheme for livestock farmers in the extensive grazing regions will come under review. Less favourable terms of assistance would have to be met by adjustments that farmers would have to make themselves. Greater independence of outside resources to sustain farming in the region appears to be a scenario farmers in this semi-arid region will have to face.

### Conclusion

Farming beyond the limits imposed by prevailing climatic conditions brings the risk of land degradation, declining farm productivity and reduced farm income in the longer term. The findings of this article suggest that farmers in the region will have to move away

from crisis management and increasingly adopt a risk management approach to their farming enterprise. Climatic variability, including possible extremes, will have to be accepted as part of the commercial risk of farming and measures for income distribution integrated with its financial management. This accords with current ideas on sustainable development, particularly those relating to the conservation and enhancement of the resource base, and the merging of environment and economics in decision-making.<sup>33</sup> The actual implementation of these ideas, however, remains a major challenge in practice.

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# India and Africa

*Eduardo Serpa examines past, present and possible future relations between India and Africa.*

**D**emographic, economic and military developments taking shape in India indicate that it is set to become a major power in the near future. India's 862 million people make it the second-most populous country on earth. China's population of 1,1 billion makes it the most populous. However, if present demographic trends continue, India will overtake China by the year 2030.<sup>1</sup> India's rapid population growth (above 2% per year) threatens to outstrip its land and water resources. Its territory is barely 2,5 times the size of South Africa and covers no more than the equivalent of 10,8% of Africa's surface. Yet, despite the obvious problems posed by such rapid population growth, India's population is one of the most valuable assets of its growing economy.

India's GDP, estimated at US \$270 billion in 1989–90, is the largest in the Indian Ocean region. It stands slightly above Australia's and far ahead of both South Africa and Indonesia. India's GDP is also growing fast – at an average of 5% in the 1980s. This growth rate has been faster than those recorded in both South Africa and Australia despite the fact that India's economic growth rate dropped below 3% in 1991–92 owing to the combined effects of a world economic slump and a balance of payments crisis.<sup>2</sup>

The indications are that the 1991–92 difficulties could be considered a

temporary slow-down. India is a well-endowed country in terms of natural resources. It possesses large reserves of iron ore, coal and bauxite. Its mighty rivers can be harnessed to provide irrigation and electricity.<sup>3</sup>

Indian industry has also shown an impressive record of growth over the past fifty years. At independence, in 1947, it produced a limited range of manufactured goods. These included cotton textiles, jute, some iron and steel, but hardly any machinery.<sup>4</sup> At present India's manufacturing sector accounts for about 22% of the country's GDP,<sup>5</sup> and there is no reason why India's industrial capacity should not continue to expand, both quantitatively and qualitatively. India is the region's scientific and technological leader with a corps of scientific and technological personnel that is the third largest in the world.<sup>6</sup>

## **India and its African policies: Potential and constraints**

India's association with Africa and, more specifically, with East Africa is a very old one. Some authors claim that trade between the two shores of the Indian Ocean dates back to a period before the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>7</sup> There is also reason to believe that these contacts generated sizeable Indian settlements in Africa; later to be followed by some migration of Africans to India. These movements seem to have produced a considerable cultural impact on populations settled

on the western shores of the Indian Ocean.

However, Africa's present Indian population is the result of a wave of immigration that began in the last half of the nineteenth century. In the 1860s Natal started receiving indentured immigrants who were mainly employed on sugar plantations. They were followed by traders, mostly from the north of India. The South African Indian community, numbering about one million, is the largest in Africa. British East Africa began receiving Indian immigrants from 1886 onwards, where they provided valuable skilled and unskilled labour. By 1960 there were about 330 000 Indians in East Africa, many of them business and professional people.<sup>8</sup> The newly independent India therefore placed Africa among its foreign policy priorities after 1947, not only because of economic and strategic interests, but also because of the large Indian population in Africa.

India's first post-independence Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, viewed an independent Africa as an important component of the non-aligned force that he was attempting to create in order to minimize the effects of the Cold War.<sup>9</sup>

In 1962 the Sino-Indian War provided further impetus for New Delhi's involvement in Africa. Africa's mixed reaction to the war showed that India did not have the strong ally it had hoped for in Africa and it therefore actively worked towards countering Chinese penetration in Africa. This action included:

- increased material support to the liberation struggle in Southern Africa;
- expanded economic cooperation, with the participation of Indian settlers.

When the conflict with China was terminated in 1976, economic motivations prompted the continuation of the action launched after 1962.<sup>10</sup>

India is capable of providing important assistance to Africa because it has the kind of agricultural know-how that made India self-sufficient while also producing a surplus of food

grains.<sup>11</sup> This form of cooperation is mutually beneficial, as can be seen from the fact that India has already benefited from the introduction of crops from Africa.

There are, however, factors which hamper India's cooperation with Africa. The perception of the Indian trader as somebody who engages in commercial exploitation has old roots in East and Southern Africa. The anti-Indian riots which caused 142 deaths in Durban in January 1949, incidents which occurred in East Africa in the 1950s and Idi Amin's expulsion of Indians from Uganda are some examples of the intensity of the feelings caused by this perception.

Some circles have expressed the idea that India could have territorial ambitions with regard to Africa. In 1951 India's High Commissioner in Nairobi reacted to some press reports published in Kenya and Tanganyika, stating that his government "never did nor does contemplate making use of other people's territories for colonization".<sup>12</sup> In September 1953 Prime Minister Nehru himself reacted to similar accusations. Speaking in parliament, he said that he had been warning his own people who had settled in Africa "that they can expect no help from us, no protection from us, if they seek any special rights in Africa which are not in the interest of Africa..."<sup>13</sup>

Afro-Arab interaction is another factor which may eventually limit Indian influence in Africa. Up to the late 1960s the Arab countries played a limited role in sub-Saharan Africa. This was due to Africa's unwillingness to take sides in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The effects of technical and other assistance offered by Tel Aviv to economic and social reforms launched by African governments probably also played a role. This attitude started changing after 1967, when Israel occupied Egyptian territory – an "African territory". The early 1970s saw the beginning of Afro-Arab economic and financial cooperation. These developments will have an impact on India's action in Africa but their implications will not necessarily

be very serious, as India is able to help both Arab and African countries' development efforts by supplying goods and technology and by establishing joint ventures.<sup>14</sup>

This potential for cooperation may be undermined if Africa becomes aggressive towards a non-Muslim presence as a result of increasing Islamic fundamentalism. At present about half of Africa's population is Muslim. The presence of Islam is very strong, even south of the Sahara. The number of Muslims living in Nigeria is higher than those in any Arab country, including Egypt. Africa is furthermore experiencing the fastest rate of conversion to the Koranic faith recorded anywhere in the world. This, and the fact that fertility rates among Muslims in Africa are higher than those recorded among other Africans, led the Tanzanian scholar Ali Mazrui to postulate that Africa might become the first Islamic continent.<sup>15</sup>

However, the rapid spreading of Islam is not necessarily an indication that fundamentalism will spread rapidly south of the Sahara. This can be ascribed to the tendency of Africans to retain their religious traditions even after accepting either Christianity or Islam. This attitude has led to the development of symbiotic forms of religious life which are incompatible with the tenets of fundamentalism.<sup>16</sup>

### India's economic policy for Africa and its rationale

The political and economic conditions discussed in the previous section seem to favour the expansion of economic and technological cooperation between India and Africa. This prospect seems to apply particularly to the areas of trade, agriculture, industry, joint ventures and consultancy.

India's present economic policy for Africa is the result of a political and economic evolutionary process which has been shaped over the past five decades. Before 1947 India and most territories on the eastern coast of Africa were part of the British Empire. This situation granted Indians more or

less unrestricted access to markets located in that region. But the independence of those countries and a concomitant desire for indigenization produced a phase of stagnation in the field of economic relations which lasted up to the early 1970s. This was followed by a period of decline which continued until the mid-1980s.<sup>17</sup>

These difficulties were not ignored by the Indian government. In November 1963 it called a meeting of heads of its trade missions in Africa and West Asia. The goal was to look at ways for improving technical and economic cooperation with Africa.

The result was the launching of the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme which placed emphasis on a multi-pronged effort aimed at countering China's aid diplomacy. However, this initiative, which was driven mainly by political expediency, fell short of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's expectations. South-South cooperation was not, at that stage, very popular in Africa, as Africa was obtaining massive financial assistance from the North.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of these difficulties India increasingly cooperated with Africa in a number of fields from the mid-1970s onwards. This is to a large extent due to the Third World's call for a New International Economic Order, which focuses on South-South cooperation and the shaping of a philosophy of Economic Cooperation between developing countries. This new doctrine was formulated at the Non-Aligned Summit held in 1979 in Havana and at the conference of the Group of 77, which adopted the Caracas Programme of Action in May 1981. India reacted to these developments by devising a "conceptual framework" that lays down guidelines for its economic interaction with Africa. This document proposes that priority should not be given to high-growth criteria of development. Instead, it should pursue structural transformation and coordination between each country's vital economic factors – eg between agriculture and manufacturing, a goal which had

been overlooked both before and after decolonization.<sup>19</sup>

### Main areas for interaction

#### Agriculture

India is fully aware that agricultural development, rather than food aid, is the answer to Africa's chronic food shortage. Hence the need for an effort to expand agricultural output by means of an adequate supply of improved seed and other agricultural inputs. However, this form of assistance will be of little use unless it is supplemented by the construction of simple irrigation schemes and the implementation of training programmes aimed at convincing African farmers of the dangers posed by many of their traditional practices.<sup>20</sup>

#### Technological assistance and consultancy

There is good potential for technological cooperation between India and Africa, as most African countries lack the necessary conditions to implement the kind of capital-intensive technology offered by the West and Japan. India has been playing a leading role in the development of a wide range of cost-effective intermediate technology products, such as mini-cement plants, mini-sugar plants and mini-hydro units, which are characterized by their low cost and high productivity (in some cases higher than that of their sophisticated Western counterparts). The same applies to tube-wells which are used to irrigate arid areas, thereby making the need for costly tank systems superfluous.<sup>21</sup>

India has already become involved in a number of projects in Africa involving infrastructural upgrading, power generators, mining and manufacturing.<sup>22</sup> Consultancy and management services have also been supplied in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Libya, Sudan, Mauritius and Nigeria.<sup>23</sup>

Suggested strategies for the further development of technological cooperation between India and Africa include, among other initiatives:

- the establishment of an India-Africa Technology Cooperative Organi-

zation, which will be responsible for the fostering of indigenous technology in member countries;

- the involvement of India-Africa Chambers of Commerce in the promotion of technological products trade;
- the establishment of an Indo-Africa technology register for screening and evaluating imported technology.<sup>24</sup>

#### Joint ventures

India sees itself as an ideal partner for Africa in joint ventures, but has not managed to establish as many as it would like. The main cause appears to be the financial crises affecting most African countries coupled with the fact that India is unable to finance joint ventures alone. Another negative factor is that India's bureaucratic machinery is not geared to deal with cooperation affairs. (Indian aid to developing countries is channelled through 13 departments.)

However, the Indian Investment Centre (IIC) has had some success in promoting joint ventures. The IIC collects and disseminates information about procedures and opportunities in countries with scope for the establishment of joint ventures. It also assists both Indian and foreign entrepreneurs to locate potential partners for joint ventures.<sup>25</sup>

Most joint ventures entered into with Africa give priority to manufacturing, in spite of the fact that some of them may have an adverse impact on the volume of Indian exports to Africa, as is the case with textiles. A great deal of success has also been achieved with projects which integrate agriculture and industry. Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe are some of the countries that have entered into such ventures with India.<sup>26</sup>

Nigeria has been the main focus of Indian investment in Africa: in 1986 it accounted for 16 out of a total 36 Indian joint ventures in Africa. India entered into ten in Kenya and four in Mauritius.<sup>27</sup> In September 1985 the total value of those ventures

amounted to R488 million, a figure equivalent to 40,5% of the total amount invested by India in joint ventures.<sup>28</sup>

It may be necessary for India and Africa to enter into tripartite agreements with bodies such as the World Bank, Lomé Convention or donor states in order to get mutually beneficial ventures off the ground. However, some authors believe that India may not be too keen on this kind of arrangement because it may deprive the country of the level of prestige which can be drawn from bilateral joint ventures.<sup>29</sup>

### Trade

Indo-African trade started to take off in the mid-1980s, as shown in Table 1. The value of India's exports to Africa more than trebled from US\$162 million in 1985 to US\$522 million in 1992. Trade in the opposite direction grew at a slightly slower pace from US\$387 million to US\$1 018 million over the same period.

This expansion of trade in absolute terms was accompanied by a similar trend regarding its relative importance. Over the 1985–91 period, as shown in Table 2, Africa absorbed between 1,8% and 2,2% of India's annual exports. Over the same period it supplied between 2,3% and 3,2% of the goods imported by India. During the 1985–91 period, as shown in Table 3 below, India also received between 0,58% and 0,79% of Africa's exports annually, while satisfying between 0,29% and 0,44% of Africa's import requirements.

Until the early 1970s India's trade with Africa maintained a negative balance. This trend was reversed as a result of a change in the composition of India's exports; primary commodities being replaced by value-added products. In 1974–75 India scored a positive balance (Crores<sup>30</sup> Rupees 87) after the permanently negative balances recorded since 1966–67. A record Crores Rupees 217 million positive balance was registered in 1982–83, but negative balances against India have become a permanent feature since then.<sup>31</sup> A record

**Table 1: India's trade with Africa (in US\$ million)**

Year	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Exports	162	197	201	248	302	328	463	522
Imports	387	399	435	512	444	663	910	1018
Balance	-225	-202	-234	-264	-142	-335	-447	-496

Source: *Direction of Trade Statistics Year Book 1992*, Washington: IMF Publication Services, 1992, p 222; *ibid*, 1993, p 222.

**Table 2: India's trade with Africa (% of total foreign trade)**

Year	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Exports	2,0	2,2	1,9	1,9	2,0	1,8	1,8
Imports	2,4	2,7	2,6	2,7	2,3	2,8	3,2

Source: Information compiled from *Direction of Trade Statistics Year Book 1992*, Washington: IMF Publication Services, 1992, p 22.

**Table 3: Africa's trade with India (% of foreign trade)**

Year	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Exports	0,58	0,73	0,67	0,78	0,61	0,76	0,79
Imports	0,29	0,35	0,33	0,35	0,42	0,39	0,44

Source: Information compiled from *Direction of Trade Statistics Year Book 1992*, Washington: IMF Publication Services, 1992, p 20.

US\$496 million negative balance occurred in 1992, as indicated in Table 1 above.

Zaire, Zambia, Tanzania, Ghana and Senegal traditionally keep higher balances of trade with India. Morocco joined this group in 1989. The opposite is true of Kenya, Nigeria, Mauritius, Swaziland and Uganda.<sup>32</sup>

The composition of India's trade with Africa has not remained static. India's main imports from Africa until the late 1970s were raw cotton, cashew nuts, non-ferrous metals, semi-precious stones, phosphate and colouring materials. Cotton and nuts started disappearing from India's import schedule from 1978 onwards as these items were beginning to be processed in their producer countries. A change occurred in the late 1980s when India started importing some manufactured goods from Egypt, oil seeds, nut-kernels and cocoa from Nigeria and Kenya, phosphoric acid and fertilizers from Morocco and some petroleum products from Algeria.<sup>33</sup>

Tea, spices, cottonades, cotton yarn

and clothing are India's most important traditional exports to Africa. At present engineering goods, tea, cottonades and chemicals make up about 80% of the value of these exports. This situation reflects neither the diversification and progress of India's economy nor the needs of most African states. India is able to supply a much larger quantity of engineering goods for which there is a large market in Africa, as most African countries import all these goods, from nutbolts to electronic equipment. At present India's share of the African market for engineering goods does not exceed 2–3% of the total.<sup>34</sup>

In the early 1980s India had trade relations with more than forty African countries, of which eleven countries – Algeria, Benin, Egypt, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia – absorbed almost 80% of its exports to Africa. At the same time seven countries – Egypt, Sudan, Zaire, Zambia, Morocco, Kenya and Ghana – supplied almost 70% of Africa's exports to India.<sup>35</sup>

In the late 1980s and early 1990s India's main trading partners in Africa changed. Algeria, Egypt and Swaziland lost their importance as importers of Indian goods, while Ethiopia and Zimbabwe became important clients. Egypt and Ghana lost their place among India's main African suppliers while Tunisia and Togo became new suppliers. In 1991 ten African countries received 72% of India's exports to Africa, while ten other countries supplied 95% of Africa's exports to India.<sup>36</sup>

As mentioned before, Nigeria is India's main client in Africa. The value of India's exports to Nigeria has been rising steadily: from US\$25 million in 1986 to US\$104 million in 1991, ie with 22% of the value of India's exports to Africa. In spite of this, Nigeria was able to build a positive balance of trade with India by increasing its exports to India from US\$1 million in 1986 to US\$125 million in 1991. Morocco is India's main African supplier, with the value of its exports increasing from US\$156 million in 1986 to US\$361 million in 1991, ie 39% of all African goods exported to India in the same year. Senegal more than doubled the value of its exports from US\$46 million in 1986 to US\$101 million in 1991. This growth pushed Senegal ahead of Zaire and Zambia, who have been exporting in an erratic manner. The value of India's imports from Zaire increased from US\$40 million in 1986 to US\$78 million in 1988, but this trend was reversed with a decline to US\$63 million in 1990, followed by a recovery to US\$69 million in 1991. Zambia's exports almost doubled from US\$61 million in 1986 to US\$104 million in 1987. After a period of stagnation, these dropped from US\$100 million in 1990 to US\$49 million in the following year.<sup>37</sup>

However, the present financial crises in most African countries together with the slow-down in the Indian community is likely to put a brake on Indo-African trade for the time being.

There are several constraining factors that limit the extent of Indo-African trade. A K Dubey is of the

opinion that these factors may be grouped into three main categories:

- *Unfavourable conditions in Africa.* The external trade of African countries is usually directed at their former colonizers. The effects of this trend have always been a serious obstacle to the development of Indo-African trade. This situation has been worsened by Africa's low or even negative growth rates, unfavourable terms of trade, high debt service ratios and a lower inflow of external capital. This has two implications for India:
  - It is easy for Africa to import goods from developed countries which grant aid for this purpose.
  - Africa's import capacity has been reduced in absolute terms, a situation which has delayed remittance or caused a total block on the payment of imports.
- *Infrastructural inadequacies.* Irregular shipping services have affected delivery schedules and therefore India's reliability as a supplier. High freight and insurance rates have also hampered competitiveness.
- *Inadequacies on the part of India.* In spite of the abovementioned conditions, some Far Eastern countries have developed healthy trade links with Africa. This seems to point to inadequate sales and marketing strategies on the part of India. The commercial wings of India's diplomatic missions are also poorly organized.<sup>38</sup> In addition, many Indian firms seem to think that Africans are not discerning consumers and that they will be satisfied with inferior goods.

### Some regional aspects of Indo-African interaction

#### India and Southern Africa

Over the past few decades, India's policies with regard to Southern Africa have been dominated by the need to deal with a dual process of liberation and integration. Whereas the first factor was relegated to the past with the emergence of the new South

Africa, the latter is enhanced by South Africa's joining of the Southern African Development Community. This integrational process may pose difficulties for India, as South Africa has the economic power to make the SADC pursuit of a strategy based upon collective self-reliance and interdependence a viable possibility. The potential of South Africa's regional economic role can be illustrated by the fact that by the 1970s it had become, with Britain, Zambia's main supplier, in spite of that country's opposition to apartheid.<sup>39</sup>

India's economic penetration in the region may become particularly difficult if the end of two-digit inflation in South Africa results in the prices of its products becoming more competitive.

Furthermore, some Western powers have developed significant interest in this mineral-rich region. As such, it is to be expected that its countries will continue receiving a good deal of Western assistance, particularly from the EEC.<sup>40</sup> This policy may imply that the concession of Western credit lines will entice those countries to import European goods to the detriment of their Indian counterparts, which are cheaper but are not backed by matching credit facilities.

India, however, believes that valuable opportunities still exist in Southern Africa. Both Zambia and Tanzania figure among India's main trading partners in Africa, while trade with Zimbabwe has been expanding. There is a good record of cooperation with these countries as well as with Botswana. India's willingness to adapt its programmes of cooperation to accommodate their national programmes has been favourably received.<sup>41</sup> Mozambique, currently undergoing a deep reform process, is another area with good potential for cooperation. Since the mid-1980s the Mozambican press has been showing great interest in Indian intermediate technology. Indian railway technicians have done a valuable job in rehabilitating locomotives and rolling stock.<sup>42</sup>

#### Francophone Africa

Francophone Africa constitutes a

geographical region on its own. Seventeen of its eighteen countries are contiguous and are located across West and Equatorial Africa, while the eighteenth, Madagascar, lies off the eastern coast of Africa. This region accounts for about 40% of the surface and 30% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa. The post-independence economic performance of these countries has been generally poor at macroeconomic level. This evaluation is illustrated by some figures regarding the sectors of agriculture and manufacturing. During the 1970s only one of them, Côte d'Ivoire, achieved an annual average growth of 4% in agriculture. Over the same period only Cameroon could reach the recommended annual growth of 8% in its manufacturing sector. The import capacity of most Francophone African countries is quite limited. Even the "richest" ones, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Zaire, have been struggling with a serious external debt crisis, which absorbs a large share of their foreign currency earnings.<sup>43</sup> However, potentially good markets for Indian goods exist in both Zaire and Senegal if a barter approach is adopted, as these two countries have highly positive balances of trade with India.

India launched an effort to increase economic and political relations with Francophone Africa as soon as the various French- and Belgian-ruled territories were granted independence. However, little resulted from this attempt. By the mid-1980s India had maintained a heavily negative balance of trade with this region. In 1984–85 it received no more than 3% of India's exports to Africa, while supplying 24,6% of India's imports from Africa. This occurred in spite of a spectacular growth of India's exports to the region, which rocketed from Rs0,55 Crores in 1966–67 to Rs74,87 Crores in 1981–82. This progress was interrupted by the economic crisis which affected Africa as a whole. In 1984–85 India's exports to Francophone Africa had dropped to Rs11 Crores. This drop was not matched by a similar trend in imports. These continued increasing to a Rs102

Crores record figure in 1984–85, compared to Rs16,33 Crores in 1981–82.<sup>44</sup> Light engineering goods head the list of India's exports to Francophone Africa, followed by cotton products and yarn, while minerals and raw cashew nuts constitute the main imports.<sup>45</sup>

Little has been achieved in the areas of joint ventures and bilateral agreements. India only started its first joint venture in Francophone Africa in the mid-1980s – a fertilizer and phosphoric acid project in Senegal. Cameroon, Congo and Zaire with their rich forests, seem to offer great potential for the development of joint ventures in the paper and pulp industry, following the success scored by the Pan African Paper Mill in Kenya. By the late 1980s bilateral agreements existed with only three countries: Cameroon, Senegal and Benin.<sup>46</sup>

It must be stressed that the potential for intensive cooperation between India and Francophone Africa does exist. This region of Africa has huge mineral and agricultural resources. India is an importer of many of these commodities which could be bartered as a means to overcome the difficulties having to be met in the attempt to expand the "narrow base of India's export mix" to Francophone Africa. At present, however, the volume of raw materials that India imports from that region is much lower, both quantitatively and qualitatively, than its market can absorb. Countertrade deals could stimulate trade between India and the region. Daleep Singh suggests that countertrade could be fostered by extending the special trading arrangements which have been concluded with Zimbabwe to Francophone Africa. These make provision for imports of minerals which are partly paid for by Indian exports of engineering items and other goods.<sup>47</sup>

#### The Indian Ocean islands

A combination of strategic, ethnic and economic factors explains the growing involvement of India with the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius, Réunion, Madagascar, Seychelles and

Comoros. With the exception of Réunion, which is a French department, all these islands are independent states.

The strategic importance of these islands for India is closely related to its attempt to create a Zone of Peace in the Indian Ocean. This idea, propagated by New Delhi over the past few decades, is presented as an attempt to restore the international regional order that prevailed in the Indian Ocean before the arrival of European powers in this region.<sup>48</sup> The success of this Zone of Peace can be highly beneficial to intraregional trade and security. The threat to the prosperity and independence of local polities which was caused by the arrival of the Portuguese, was aggravated by the subsequent encroachment of other powers which used the Indian Ocean as an arena for setting their rivalries. India feels that this situation has not changed, but is determined to change it by preventing the area from being drawn into the major powers' conflicts and by enhancing South-South cooperation.<sup>49</sup>

India's economic interaction with each Indian Ocean island is different for each island. Mauritius is the only country in the region which can be included among India's major trading partners in Africa. In 1979–80 Mauritius absorbed 4,91% of India's exports to Africa.<sup>50</sup> This figure dropped to 2,89% in 1983–84 but it recovered to 4,22% in 1985–86. It rocketed to a 13,41% record in 1991. India is also one of Mauritius's ten major suppliers. Mauritian exports to India have been close to nil since the early 1980s.<sup>51</sup> Joint ventures between India and Mauritius cover the areas of luxury hotels, the garments industry, and the assembling and manufacturing of power-driven pumps.<sup>52</sup> There is potential for expansion in the paper and food industries.<sup>53</sup>

The Seychelles' small economy seriously limits its volume of trade with India, whereas India has maintained a highly positive balance of trade with these islands. In 1989 India occupied the tenth position in the Seychelles' list of suppliers.<sup>54</sup> A joint

venture was established to develop a sea resort hotel and there is potential for cooperation in the fishing industry.<sup>55</sup>

India's trade with Réunion, Madagascar and Comoros remains at a negligible level and no joint ventures had been established by the early 1990s.<sup>56</sup>

### Scenarios for the future

Several factors suggest that India is set to play a major and growing role in Africa. India is an emerging power and its present process of economic liberalization may lead to rapid economic growth in the near future. This implies a growing need for markets and sources of raw materials. Africa offers major opportunities with regard to both. It is a major exporter of most of the commodities which India needs. Africa also needs new markets to replace its traditional ones, as the demand for African products has been dropping in the West. India can offer Africa (at very competitive prices) manufactured goods and services.

This is an ideal scenario for the development of economic and political interaction between India and Africa. However, serious difficulties could interfere with this process. India's inability to offer generous credit facilities is a major weakness in regard to the conquest of markets traditionally dominated by Europe and the United States. This constraint is, however, not necessarily an unsurpassable barrier. The main industrialized nations, with the possible exception of Japan, seem to be diverting their attention from Africa to other regions, eg Eastern Europe, with a concomitant reduction of their economic assistance to Africa. This trend may open the way for India, especially if it minimizes the negative impact of its inability to offer financing to exports by the correct implementation of joint ventures and barter trade. The potential of this solution is enhanced by the fact that it may be able to help Africa break the vicious circle of dependent development.

The current developments in China

may present serious obstacles to the growth of Indo-African trade. This country is also a world power in waiting, as its potential for economic growth is being liberated by dramatic reforms. China is becoming a major producer of inexpensive manufactured goods and may become a main developer and supplier of intermediate technology. Africa can provide an outlet for these types of exports. This may place China in direct competition with India in Africa. A repetition of the 1960s competition between these two countries can be expected, but with a capital difference. This time the clash will take place mainly in the economic rather than in the political and diplomatic fields. The outcome of this struggle, which cannot be predicted for the time being, will determine the fate of India's ambitions in Africa.

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# What should government “deliver” in terms of the RDP?

*Mr Johan van Zyl of the Development Bank of Southern Africa gives a personal view of which aspects of South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme should be given priority.*

**T**he ANC's “Reconstruction and Development Programme” (RDP)<sup>1</sup> is now officially on the table for practical implementation. In view of election promises made but also, more broadly, in terms of what the liberation struggle was all about (freedom from apartheid oppression), the new government is understandably under much pressure “to deliver”.

A little reflection soon leads to the conclusion that not only what to deliver is relevant but even more significantly *how, for whom*, and with what *purpose* in mind.

The sharp focus in the public debate on the total cost of the RDP and on quantifying (basic) needs and backlogs generally, has had an unfortunate and misleading side effect: the implicit assumption that government is responsible for directly “delivering” this range of goods and services to the people involved.

## **Empowering people or politicians?**

Under such pressure an apparently attractive political option would seem to be the “quick fix” solution of essentially playing Father Christmas and handing out a range of very visible “basic” goods and services to the disadvantaged supporters of the new government, whether they are, in fact, genuinely poor or not.

There are, however, many difficulties with such an approach. First, this

particular party is not likely to last long since there is simply not enough to go round. What then to do with the millions who received little or nothing? Secondly, and more importantly, such an option involves not much more than institutionalized charity, which flies squarely in the face of the highly commendable and refreshing human-centred development vision of the RDP.

The basic choice is clear: empowerment or charity? Developing people or handing out physical facilities?

The above critical choices arise directly from the strongly people-centred vision of development adopted by the RDP. A central proposition of this approach is that “development occurs inside people; either they do it themselves or it does not happen at all”. It follows that it is simply not possible to give or hand out “development” to people. People can indeed be given objects (goods and services) but if “development” is to occur they *have to get actively involved themselves*. In short, they have to learn to “deliver” their own development ie to become more self-reliant.

This is surely the opposite of institutionalized charity as well as of a narrow focus mainly on increasing the quantity of available goods and services through more (of the same) economic (GDP) growth.

Before appropriate answers can be given to the four key questions about



Photo: Paul Blokland

... eliminating hunger

... providing land and housing for all

... providing access to safe water and sanitation for all



Photo: Dept. of Information



Photo: Paul Blokland

the burden on government "to deliver", two important issues need to be considered first, viz:

- deepening and enriching the conventional interpretation of human needs in the RDP; and
- sharpening the focus of "basic needs" in the RDP.

### Interpreting human needs

Two very different approaches have emerged in the broad debate about human needs. These differences are important because any development strategy that is needs-based (as is the RDP) inevitably takes its practical cues from the particular interpretation of "needs" that forms the underlying basis of that strategy.

#### The conventional or "positive" approach

In mainstream (neo-classical) economics, which has had a major influence on the widely popular growth-centred vision of development, human needs are defined in terms of desires or wants for objects, viz goods and services. "Economic goods" therefore directly satisfy needs in a one-on-one relationship. In turn, "revealed preference" in a system of markets (ie the willingness to spend money on some goods and services and not on others) then guides the production of economic goods accordingly. Generally and in the aggregate, however, the greater the quantity of goods and services produced (ie the larger the GNP per capita), the greater the satisfaction of human needs. This relationship is, at its core, direct and simple.

#### The human-centred or "normative" approach

Development thinking centred on people rather than on objects, regards the above approach as too narrow, superficial and "economistic". It takes no direct account of major non-material human needs such as the dignity of people or their freedom to chart their own destinies without interference. Consequently, the relationship between economic goods and human needs, if the latter should be defined to include both tangible

and intangible components of "quality of life", is not direct and one-on-one but indirect and complex.

The practical challenge to this deeper and richer view of human needs has always been how to make it operationally significant. Considerable strides have recently been made in this sphere.

#### The contribution of "human scale development"

Manfred Max-Neef (an "Alternative Nobel Prize" winner) and a number of colleagues<sup>2</sup> provide significant and useful insights towards effectively implementing such an approach to human needs.

The bare bones of "human scale development" can be outlined as follows:

- The aim is to develop, as a first step, a theory of human needs for *development* ie making the multi-dimensional human needs issue understandable and operational for development purposes.
- The focus is on fundamental needs, defined as those deep-going dimensions or components of "quality of life" that have proved to be universally acceptable. An interactive system of *nine* such needs is proposed, viz the fundamental needs for  
 subsistence    understanding    creation    protection    participation    identity    affection    idleness    freedom
- At this deeper level, goods and services can no longer satisfy needs directly. Another level or dimension is required to come in between human needs (defined in fundamental terms) and economic goods. "Satisfiers" fulfil this role, generally defined as broader or more specific *processes* related to structuring the (infinite) ways that people might wish to live their lives.

For example, sustenance and shelter should not be seen as needs but as satisfiers of the fundamental need for "subsistence". Similarly, education, study, research and meditation are not

needs but satisfiers of the fundamental need for "understanding". Clearly, "satisfiers" are *not* goods and services.

- (d) A major advantage of this approach is that it focuses directly on all those "processes" or "satisfiers" that are, in fact, the very stuff of the everyday life of people seeking to address (ultimately) their fundamental needs. "Economic goods", on the other hand, can only address the superficial desires of people for particular material goods and services.
- (e) At the level of fundamental needs, appropriate satisfiers to address them can only be expressed and designed *collectively* ie by local and other communities themselves.
- (f) Briefly, the methodology involves bringing representatives of particular communities together and facilitating discussion focused on determining (serious) deprivations in all the dimensions of fundamental needs, and subsequently on designing specific "satisfiers" to address them. The whole process must be carried out with the full participation of the communities involved.

Development geared to the satisfaction of *fundamental* human needs cannot be structured from the top downwards. It cannot be imposed by law or by decree. It can only emanate directly from the actions, expectations and the critical but creative awareness of the protagonists themselves.

Moreover, fundamental needs can and must be addressed throughout the development process, so that everybody is given the opportunity of personally experiencing development on a continuous basis. Instead of a goal, *the process of addressing and satisfying (fundamental) needs becomes the engine of development itself.*

Such an engine to generate greater self-reliance through direct and continuous involvement in building an own future, would be completely shut off if political leaders take it upon

themselves to provide "five thousand houses, five hundred clinics and fifteen thousand drinking water taps in every province within one year".

### Sharpening the focus of "basic needs" in the RDP

"Meeting basic needs" is the first of five major policy programmes of the RDP. Its importance is clearly indicated by the statement that "the first priority is to meet the basic needs of people" (p 7).

Three key questions need to be posed to evaluate the approach to "basic needs" in the RDP:

- (a) How are "basic needs" interpreted and defined?
- (b) Who constitutes the target audience?
- (c) Who expresses and determines such needs?

### Defining "basic needs"

The RDP approach is in line with the so-called "complex" version of basic needs advocated in the Programme of Action that followed from the major 1976 World Employment Conference (supported by the ILO, World Bank and UNEP) which put the first official stamp on BNA (the basic needs approach). There is indeed a serious attempt "to place basic needs within a context of national independence, the dignity of individuals and people, and their freedom to chart their destiny without hindrance".<sup>3</sup>

However, broader context apart, the range and standards of "basic needs" proposed by the RDP exceed quite substantially the simple "minimum necessary for subsistence" approach of the chief architects of BNA, Streeten and Burki.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis was on "basics only" in the five core areas of drinking water and sewerage, nutrition, shelter, health and education. Streeten put the essential thrust of BNA succinctly as "attacking the evils of hunger, malnutrition, disease and illiteracy with precision".

The RDP, in turn, suggests that "an enormous proportion of very basic needs are presently unmet. In

attacking poverty and deprivation, the RDP aims to set South Africa firmly on the road to eliminating hunger, providing land and housing to all our people, providing access to safe water and sanitation for all, ensuring the availability of affordable and sustainable energy resources, eliminating illiteracy, raising the quality of education and training for children and adults, protecting the environment, and improving our health services and making them accessible to all" (p 14).

This above list clearly involves much more than some minimum development guarantee for the weakest social groups in society, which is the essence of BNA. In fact, its expansive content appears to be determined much more by quality of life considerations derived from the current living standards enjoyed by the First World sector of society (which includes *inter alia* the majority of whites).

Furthermore, the definition of "needs" used in the RDP is the conventional one expressed as desires for economic goods. In terms of *fundamental* needs it addresses mainly the need for "subsistence". All the others (listed on p 3) which are in principle equally important, are ignored whether serious deprivation exists in these spheres or not.

Moreover, since the "satisfiers" are directly goods and services, the opportunity to multiply overall impact by stimulating holistic and synergic, community-based processes *focused on addressing a whole range of fundamental needs* (the approach of Max-Neef's Human Scale Development), is disguised and may well be lost.

### The target audience

Given the expansive definition of "basic needs" employed in the RDP, it is not clear at what section of the South African population it is aimed. Certainly it is not directed only at the "poorest of the poor" ie say the bottom 20% or 30% of the population by income.

Do the many references to "our people" in the RDP suggest that the target audience is really the black

Photo: Paul Blokland



... ensuring the availability of affordable and sustainable energy resources

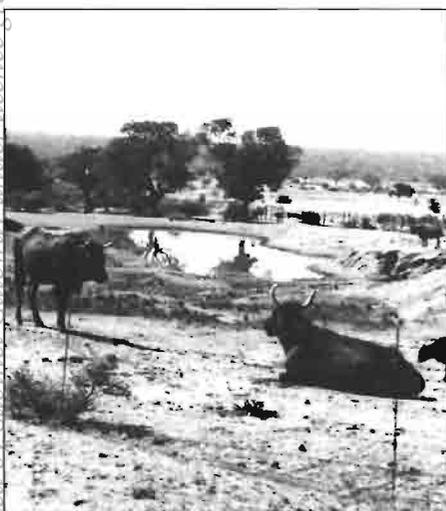
... eliminating illiteracy

... protecting the environment

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majority? Whether, in fact, they are genuinely poor or not?

It seems necessary to determine much more sharply who "the most poor and marginalized sections of our communities" (p 15) really are and to tailor the whole process of meeting (truly) "basic needs" accordingly.

### Who expresses and determines basic needs?

The intention here is quite clear. Emphasis is placed on "a process of empowerment which gives the poor control over their lives and increases their ability to mobilize sufficient development resources, including from the democratic government where necessary. The RDP reflects a commitment to grassroots, bottom-up development which is owned and driven by communities and their respective organizations" (p 15).

However, as much development experience has shown, intentions are one thing, practical application another. There are in the RDP itself already disturbing changes in tone and language when it comes to particular projects and programmes: "must" and "will" become the dominant mode of expression rather than the "should" or "facilitate" of the more general statements.

One example will have to suffice (own italics):

"As a minimum, all housing *must* provide protection from weather, a durable structure, and reasonable living space and privacy. A house *must* include sanitary facilities, storm-water drainage, a household energy supply ... and conventional access to clear water. Moreover, it *must* provide for a secure tenure in a variety of forms. Upgrading of existing housing *must* be accomplished with these standards in mind" (p 23).

There is certainly a danger that in its implementation the RDP may well become much more authoritarian and prescriptive than its people-centred, facilitative and enabling vision of societal development would indicate. If required, there is much experience and expertise available today on the

"how to do it" side, not least within the deeply people-centred approach of "Human Scale Development" mentioned earlier.

### What then should government "deliver"?

It was indicated earlier that four important questions arise in this context: not only delivering *what*, but also *how*, *for whom*, and with what *purpose*?

The broad principles and guidelines for answering these key questions are already *contained in the RDP*, some of which have indeed been quoted above. What follows below is therefore largely further elaboration of these general signals.

### Delivering for what purpose?

This issue has already been referred to earlier. The brief answer would be to empower people towards becoming more self-reliant.

Much development experience has shown that people are not empowered by handouts or institutionalized charity. They have to accept responsibility for and take an active part in managing the whole process of satisfying their own needs. It should indeed always be borne in mind that empowerment is aimed at people at large and not at individual politicians.

Such a thrust is well in line with the RDP people-centred vision of development. "The central objective of our RDP is to improve the quality of life of all South Africans, and in particular the most poor and marginalized sections of our communities. ... This (latter) objective should be realized through a process of empowerment which gives the poor control over their own lives ..." (p 15).

### What to deliver?

To start in the negative, certainly not service delivery projects that are in reality initiated, planned and controlled by government (whether at national, provincial or local level). The RDP's "commitment to grassroots, bottom-up development which is owned and driven by communities ..."

(quoted above) clearly rules out such an approach.

What should best be delivered, in broad terms, involves a number of elements:

- Central government should provide *general development support* in the form of establishing and maintaining national or nationwide infrastructure (for example, in the spheres of transport, telecommunications, bulk power and water, the legal system, relations with other countries, etc); making policies, laws and regulations of a generally enabling nature but still indicating broad priorities; and providing (some) funding for lower levels of government.

Regional and perhaps especially local government should become mainly *facilitators* of development projects initiated, planned and managed by the community level in civil society. In this way local communities are given the opportunity to take responsibility for delivering their own development and determining their own future. In turn, lower-level government should stand ready to provide *specific development support* wherever needed (largely in the form of funding and technical assistance). Such an approach would indeed be as the RDP states "development owned and driven by communities" (p 15) and not by government.

- All levels of government should address the issue of structural barriers that limit access to credit, productive assets, markets, reasonable wages and the like.
- What also needs to be "delivered" as a necessary institutional condition for making the above process of deep-going democracy viable, is much active support for building organizational capacity at local levels, for example, NGOs, CBOs, community-based umbrella organizations, etc.

#### How to deliver?

The short answer would be in a facilitative and participative manner, essen-

tially bottom-up rather than top-down.

Providing development support ie *inputs* into the development process, so as to enable local communities to accept responsibility for delivering whatever *outputs* they need, requires working through deep-going democratic processes and structures. If "development" is essentially something that happens inside people and cannot therefore be given to them by government, there is no other way of promoting it effectively. "Direct democracy" is a concept often used in this context.

The range of inputs or tools required by local communities to operate effectively in this kind of democratic environment requires much further thought and investigation. Proposals such as the one made recently by the HSRC to introduce a modern "informatics network" approach should, for example, be fully investigated.

More generally, the most appropriate kind of facilitation to pursue with local level communities would be along the lines of human scale development ie focusing on the *fundamental needs* of communities, rather than simply on their desires for goods and services. Such an approach should in itself greatly enrich the lives of ordinary people and lead to empowerment of a very special kind.

It would also help to shift attention away from the current obsession with the "how much will it cost" of reconstruction and development towards the more important developmental issue of "how to bring it about effectively".

Again such a broad thrust is quite in line with the RDP when it states that "thoroughgoing democratization of our society is ... absolutely integral to the whole RDP. ... Democratization must begin to transform both the state and civil society ... (as) an active process enabling everyone to contribute to reconstruction and development" (p 7).

#### To whom to deliver?

In the broad, the answer here clearly has to be "all South Africans". Yet two

priorities are likely to receive special attention in a post-Apartheid South Africa, viz eliminating genuine poverty and addressing apartheid backlogs more generally.

According to the RDP, improving the quality life of "the most poor and marginalized sections of our communities" is a first priority (p 15). Yet, as indicated earlier, the RDP approach to meeting basic needs (Chapter 2) goes well beyond the traditional emphasis on addressing mainly minimum levels of material subsistence and focusing any required support squarely on the genuinely poor.

Since it is evident that (amongst other thorny issues) sufficient resources will not be available to achieve both goals in the short term, priorities will simply have to be determined, both in terms of content and over time.

It seems necessary to distinguish clearly between eliminating poverty and alleviating apartheid backlogs. Otherwise the "first priority" of the RDP may well fade into insignificance and lead to a possibly serious devaluation of that programme as a major guide to a new South Africa.

Urgent research needs to be undertaken to identify "the genuinely poor" in South Africa. At the same time, the deeper insights provided by the approach of human scale development should also be taken into account, viz that serious deprivation need not be confined to the fundamental human need for "subsistence". Certainly in South Africa, serious poverty also prevails in respect of the fundamental need for "protection", violated in many communities by political, criminal and gender violence.

Assistance in identifying such communities for special attention could be provided by the structures of the National Peace Accord.

#### Summary

Within the context of the RDP, the four key questions about government delivery can be answered very briefly as follows:

Photo: Dept. of Information



... improving health services

... providing jobs for all

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#### For what purpose?

To empower people at large towards greater self-reliance: not top-down institutionalized charity largely aimed at empowering politicians.

#### Delivering what?

Development support in a variety of forms and at all levels of government, to enable local communities to accept responsibility for "delivering" their own development. (In particular, much support would be required for building institutional capacity in local level civil society.)

#### Delivering how?

In a facilitative and participative manner, with a focus on working through community-based processes and structures of thoroughgoing democracy.

#### Delivering to whom?

To all South Africans but starting with the genuinely poor and with (some) attention to broader apartheid backlogs.

Perhaps above all, the new government should "deliver" a radical change in mindset about development, away from the traditional authoritarian style of previous governments, towards a bottom-up, enabling and people-centred approach. Such a new and refreshing vision is already firmly part of the RDP document. It now requires to be consistently and courageously applied in practice.

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# Circumventing Ghana's constitution

*Dr Joseph R A Ayee, Commonwealth Research Fellow in the Department of Politics at the University of Glasgow, examines the disputed nomination of District Chief Executives by the Rawlings Government.*



Ghana's 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution gives the President the power to nominate District Chief Executives (DCEs) (the political heads of districts) upon the approval of the District Assemblies (DAs), ie the local government units. However, the President failed to follow the procedure laid down by the new constitution and his nominations are therefore unconstitutional. The article argues that the Rawlings government deliberately circumvented the provisions of the constitution in order to strengthen its position at the district level by having government nominees returned as DCEs. This should not have happened if the government were serious about upholding the new constitution.

## Background

One of the major innovations of local government reforms introduced in 1987 under the erstwhile Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government, which ruled Ghana from December 1981 to January 1993, was a non-partisan local government system. Consequently, candidates for the District Assembly (DA) elections, held between December 1988 and February 1989, were elected on their own merit and therefore did not belong to any party. Previously councillors had been elected to the district councils along party lines. Govern-

ment sponsored, non-partisan campaign platforms were organized by the National Commission for Democracy (NCD) and the District Election Committees (DECs) so that no candidate had an edge over the other because of financial advantage or party affiliation.<sup>1</sup>

Although the non-partisan campaign may seem reminiscent of the one put into place by a one-party state such as Tanzania<sup>2</sup> in 1965, very good reasons can be given for this move: First, the former district councils were felt to be ineffective because they had been subjected to unnecessary interference by successive governments, especially at the hands of the local officials of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) government.<sup>3</sup> Second, and more importantly, the DAs were seen by the PNDC as the fulfilment of its populist slogans of "power to the people" and "participatory democracy" as well as the building of a rural support base, which could not be achieved by the People's Defence Committees (PDCs) and Workers Defence Committees (WDCs) and their successors, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs), established in 1982 and 1984 respectively. In this connection, the DAs were not only expected to become the "pillars upon which the people's power would be erected",<sup>4</sup> but also the culmination of efforts to "democratise state power and collective decision-making at the

grassroots".<sup>5</sup> The non-partisan DAs therefore were to attract the ordinary person, who over the years had been marginalized in Ghanaian politics. For this reason, the local government reforms of the PNDC should not merely be seen as a "political programme which professional politicians can claim monopoly over", but also the "expression of the fundamental belief of the PNDC that effective participation in the productivity and development of our society and participation in political decision-making are the responsibilities of all of us".<sup>6</sup>

The populist tone of the reforms was also enhanced by the following aspects:

- The insistence that candidates be "ordinarily resident" in the district to ensure that persons were elected who lived in the district and who were directly affected by the performance or non-performance of the DAs.
- There was no requirement that a deposit be paid by a candidate, unlike in previous elections.
- Candidates did not have to finance their own public campaigns.
- English was not required as a qualification to contest the elections.
- Pictures of candidates rather than symbols were used in the elections, perhaps to enable illiterates, who formed the majority of voters, to recognize the candidates they were voting for.
- Civil servants, public officers, the military, police and others were no longer disqualified from standing as candidates.<sup>7</sup>

The non-partisan nature of the DAs was singled out by the National Commission for Democracy's (NCD) Report, *Evolving a true democracy*, and the *Report of the committee of experts on a draft constitution for Ghana*, as the main contributory factor for whatever progress the DAs might have made in the promotion of popular participation and the undertaking of development projects in their areas. The two reports therefore recommended that any future consti-

tution of Ghana should make provisions for a non-partisan local government system.<sup>8</sup>

In the programme of return to constitutional rule in Ghana by the PNDC, a Consultative Assembly was established on 26 August 1991 to draft a constitution for Ghana. The Consultative Assembly also endorsed the recommendations of the two previous bodies that a non-partisan local government system is ideal for Ghana and should therefore be enshrined in the constitution. Consequently, article 248(1) of the 1992 constitution states that "a candidate seeking election to a District Assembly or any lower local government unit shall present himself to the electorate as an individual, and shall not use any symbol associated with any political party".<sup>9</sup> Subsection 2 of the same article reinforces the stipulation of its predecessor:

A political party shall not endorse, sponsor, offer a platform to or in anyway campaign for or against a candidate seeking election to a District Assembly or any lower local government unit.<sup>10</sup>

The drafters of the constitution and the members of the two committees should have foreseen the grave debilitating implications of having a partisan central government superimposed on a non-partisan local government system, especially when the country was returning to constitutional rule. It is just wishful thinking to have party politics at the national level and expect the local government system to be insulated from partisan politics in a developing country, such as Ghana, particularly when, in theory, local government units are supposed to be the training ground for future national leaders.<sup>11</sup> The non-partisan nature of the DAs suited the political agenda of the PNDC and therefore all means were employed by the government to have it enshrined in the constitution, even if it meant manipulating most members of the NCD, the Committee of Experts and the Consultative Assembly. The PNDC itself, blinded by its own ambition to form the next civilian government, failed to realize the intricacies of a

non-partisan local government system working within a national political party system. The National Democratic Congress government therefore found themselves in a difficult position when it came to nominating district chief executives in 1993.

### The position of the district political head

The position of the political head of a district, under varying titles – Government Agent (GA), District Commissioner (DC), District Secretary (DS) and District Chief Executive (DCE) – has been very powerful one in Ghana since the colonial days. The district political head is always appointed by the central government. He is usually a local person, a "son of the soil". The political head is the representative of the central government in the district and is usually specifically charged with the responsibility for explaining government policies to the people and for mobilizing support for the government. He is also responsible for good order and control and security within the district. The DS or DCE is therefore the main link between the central government and the people in the district. As such, his role is essentially a political one. It was, however, during the regime of General I K Acheampong's National Redemption Council (NRC) in 1974 that the political head of the district started to combine two functions: those of order and control and development; and that of being the District Administrative Officer (DAO), the chairman and the clerk of the local government council. In heading both the executive and deliberative functions and through his additional chairmanship of the district council's statutory committees, the District Chief Executive's (DCE) (as he was then called) control of the local government reformed system of 1974 under the NRC was total and complete. The DCE was thus a "subprefect" who had command over its divisions both functionally and geographically. Indeed, the DCE was the key officer in the nomination of representatives to the district councils.<sup>12</sup>

The powerful position of the political heads of the districts (called district commissioners (DCs) during Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) rule, 1957–1966) is regarded by some scholars of Ghanaian politics as evidence of the establishment of one party or personal rule by Nkrumah. For instance, Austin has argued that the appointment of DCs was part of Nkrumah and the CCP's "measures taken to emphasize and augment the power of the party in the regions".<sup>13</sup> Amonoo also points out that "DCs had contributed greatly to the increase of the CPP's power at the expense of the opposition by 1960. In the Volta Region, for example, the cessation of political violence was attributed to the work of DCs".<sup>14</sup> Bretton, on the other hand, emphasizes that the DCs "were expected to act as the eyes, ears and mouth of the General Secretary of the Party, Kwame Nkrumah, and no more".<sup>15</sup> Bretton sees this as support for his argument that the CPP bureaucracy lacked substance below the level of the DC.<sup>16</sup>

Because of the significant position of the district political head, successive Ghanaian governments, whether military or civilian, have always appointed party faithfuls or sycophants or henchmen to the position to ensure that their policies and machinations at the district level are strictly enforced and complied with.

In spite of the strong position of district political heads, they are not independent. They work within a tradition of strong central control that has always characterized public administration in Ghana. Their activities are coordinated at the regional level by regional administrations which are headed by regional commissioners or regional secretaries or regional ministers (the title depending on whether the central government is military or civilian), appointed by the central government. Sometimes, however, the district political heads have direct access to the head of state. For instance, under the rule of the PNDC, the district secretaries (DCs), as they were called, reported directly to The Castle, the

seat of government, on security matters. Again, under the regime of the National Redemption Council/Supreme Military Council (NRC/SMC), 1972–1979, the Ministry of Local Government, anxious to protect its own control of the district councils machinery, communicated directly with the DCEs rather than through the regional administrations. The bypassing of the regional administrations contributed immensely towards "an attitude of apathy, and in some cases of subtle hostility, on the part of the Regional Organizations towards the Ministry of Local Government and the District Councils".<sup>17</sup>

### **The NDC and District Chief Executives**

In 1988 the PNDC promulgated PNDC Law 207 to its local government reform programme. Under the Law, the District Secretary (DS) is appointed by the PNDC in each of the 110 districts of the country. The DS is supposed to be responsible, within the framework of national policy as determined by the PNDC for the day-to-day supervision of the 22 departments and organizations, listed under the First Schedule of PNDC Law 207, of the districts. This day-to-day supervision of the DS has not been achieved because personnel of the departments and organizations still owe allegiance to their regional and national headquarters, who, despite decentralization, still control the recruitment, promotion and discipline of their staff in the districts. In other words, the 22 so-called decentralized departments have never been fully decentralized and could therefore not be placed under the sole direction and control of the DS and the district administration. Despite this handicap, the DS wields tremendous power. He is the chairman of the Executive Committee of the District Assembly (DA) – the most powerful committee of the DA – in charge of the executive and coordinating functions of the DA as well as its day-to-day administration. The DS's position is further strengthened by the stipulation that he may address the DA in session on policies determined

by the PNDC and present a report on the performance of the functions of the Executive Committee to the Assembly at the beginning of each session. He is also required to submit recommendations made by the DA on matters of national concern to the PNDC.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of the enormous powers given to the DS, he is not accountable to either the electorate or the DA. In fact, he is the only member of the DA whose appointment cannot be revoked either by the DA or the electorate, so long as he remains the darling of the appointing authority, the PNDC. Consequently, most of the District Secretaries (DSs) behave like minor gods in their districts and tend to be corrupt. This is not to say that the DSs get away with absolutely anything. In fact, some of them have been dismissed by the PNDC government for all kinds of misdemeanours, such as corruption, insubordination, arrogance and deceit. However, it must be pointed out that the PNDC took such drastic action only when it was forced to do so by chiefs and other local notables from the districts concerned. Most of the time, however, the appeals for the removal of erring DSs are ignored by the PNDC.

During the transition to constitutional rule in 1992, the DSs of the 110 districts in the country used their offices to vigorously campaign for Flight Lieutenant J J Rawlings and his National Democratic Congress (NDC) party. Twenty out of the 110 DSs contested and won the 1992 parliamentary elections on the NDC ticket. The contribution of the DSs to the victory of Rawlings's NDC party in both the presidential and parliamentary elections in November and December 1992 respectively, was very large indeed.

In the presidential elections, Rawlings polled 58,4% of the votes, to beat Professor Adu Boahen, a retired history professor of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), who gained 30,4%. Dr Hilla Limann (President of the Third Republic, 1979–1981) of the People's National Convention (PNC) received 6,7%; Mr Kwabena Darko of the

National Independence Party (NIP) got 2,8%; while Lieutenant General Emmanuel Erskine (a former commander of the United Nations Forces in Lebanon (Unifil)) of the People's Heritage Party (PHP), trailed behind with 1,7% of the votes cast.<sup>19</sup> The victory of the incumbent head of state, Rawlings, in the presidential polls was disputed by the opposition parties, who alleged that it was rigged, despite the fact that international observers, such as the US-based Carter Center Election Mission and the Commonwealth Observer Group, had described the elections as "free and fair". On 17 November 1992, the opposition parties (the NPP, PNC, NIP and the PHP) announced their intention to boycott the parliamentary elections unless the PNDC government agreed to compile a new voters' register in the place of the existing one, which the international observers had considered to be flawed – but not to the extent that it would invalidate the results of the presidential elections. The opposition parties also demanded the issuing of Ghanaian citizen identity cards.<sup>20</sup> The refusal by the government to meet these demands led to the boycott of the 1992 parliamentary elections by the four opposition parties. This decision seems likely to undermine the chances of the opposition in the next elections scheduled for 1996, since they have no voice in parliament to put across their policies as an alternative to those of the government, notwithstanding the NPP's overtures to do "business" with the government.

When the Fourth Republic was inaugurated on 7 January 1993, the 1992 constitution came into force. The NDC government immediately reappointed the DSs as acting District Chief Executives (DCEs), the new title of the district political heads under the constitution. On 12 August 1992, an emergency meeting of all the 110 acting DCEs took place in Accra, the nation's capital. The meeting was to officially afford the acting DCEs the opportunity to exchange views on the transition from the PNDC to constitutional rule *vis-à-vis* the problems

related to district level administration. It was at this meeting that some of the acting DCEs realized that they were not going to be confirmed as the substantive DCEs. In the words of Mr P V Obeng, the Presidential Adviser on Governmental Affairs:

The PNDC is not everything ... and acting district chief executives who may lose their jobs should not consider it as being redeployed, since there are many ways they could contribute towards development at the grassroots. ... The time has now come to open the front to new people who are willing to accept responsibilities. We should retain some and bring in new ones. This should not embarrass any acting district chief executive. ... An unexamined life is not worth living ... even shopkeepers undertake stock-taking.<sup>21</sup>

This speech reveals that some of the acting DCEs should have been removed from office long ago for their misdemeanours, but were retained by the PNDC in order to maintain a united and coherent front to enable them to campaign effectively for the 1992 presidential and parliamentary elections. As a token of gratitude to the acting DCEs while at the same time consoling them, Mr Obeng concludes:

You have performed your duties without blemish and have dedicated yourselves to noble principles. ... The people themselves would, however, determine how you have fared.<sup>22</sup>

Consequent to the meeting the NDC government dismissed a number of acting DCEs without providing reasons. It is, however, believed that the incumbents may have been stumbling blocks to the nominations of substantive DCEs the President was going to make. Also, the government knew that most districts would demonstrate their opposition to certain acting DCEs being retained.

The dismissals were followed on 13 August 1993 by the President's nomination of 110 persons to be considered for the posts of DCE in the districts. Under the 1988 Local Government Law, PNDC Law 207, the District Secretary (DS) is appointed by the PNDC. The District Assembly (DA) consists of the following:

- (a) the District Secretary (DS);
- (b) one person from each electoral area within the district who shall be elected directly by the electorate in accordance with regulations made by the National Commission for Democracy;
- (c) such other persons ordinarily resident in the district not exceeding one-third of the total membership of the DA as may be appointed by the PNDC acting in consultation with the traditional authorities and organized productive economic groupings in the district.

The life span of the DA is three years.<sup>23</sup>

Under the 1992 Constitution the situation is, however, different with regards to the appointment of the DCE, the composition of the DA and its life span. Article 243 (1) of the constitution stipulates that there "shall be a District Chief Executive for every district who shall be appointed by the President *with prior approval of not less than a two-thirds majority of members of the Assembly present and voting at the meeting*". (Author's italics.) On the composition of the DA, article 241 (1) of the constitution enjoins that a District Assembly shall consist of the following members:

- (a) one person from each local government electoral area within the district elected by universal adult suffrage;
- (b) the member or members of Parliament from the constituencies that fall within the area of authority of the DA as members without the right to vote; and
- (c) the District Chief Executive of the district;
- (d) other members not being more than thirty % of all the members of the DA, appointed by the President in consultation with the traditional authorities and other interest groups in the district.

According to article 246 (1) "elections to the District Assemblies shall be held every four years except that such elections and elections to Parliament

shall be held at least six months apart”.

Clearly then the appointment of the DS, the composition of the DA and its life span under the 1988 Local Government Law are significantly different from those provided for under the 1992 constitution. The President submitted nominations for the position of DSs (to be called DCEs) under the provisions of PNDC Law 207 and not under the 1992 constitution. Since the NDC government must be aware of these differences between the provisions of PNDC Law 207 and the 1992 constitution, it is a reasonable assumption that it also knows the nomination and subsequent election of DCEs is unconstitutional.

In the afternoon of the day the President nominated the 110 persons for election as DCEs, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) announced that the elections of DCEs would take place from 18 August to 30 August 1993. The voting procedure for the single nominees of the President was to be a “yes” or “no” by secret ballot of members of the DAs present and voting.

Meanwhile, the President's nominations for the positions of DCE generated a lot of controversy and intrigue. Interestingly, some districts wanted their former DSs back and rejected the President's new nominees by demonstrating in their districts. For instance, demonstrations were held in Cape Coast against Sam Pee Yalley, in Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam against Kwesi Addae, while at Agona District, the chiefs joined the Asafo companies to demonstrate to protest over the nomination of Mrs Beatrice Hammond. Most of these protests arose from concern over the competence of the people appointed.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, in the Awutu-Effutu-Senya district, the three traditional councils wholeheartedly supported the resolution passed by 97% of the DA requesting the government to retain the incumbent acting DCE, Joshua Bentum, and appealed to the President to withdraw his nominee, M K Abbiw.<sup>25</sup> In the Kwaebibirem district,

the Akwatia-Kade constituency secretariat of the NDC sent a resolution dated 19 August 1993 to the President stating that the nomination of Mrs Mercy Owusu-Nimoh as the DCE for the district would never obtain the two-thirds majority vote required in the DA.<sup>26</sup> The resolution called for the reinstatement of the acting incumbent, Albert Kumi. These appeals, protests, resolutions and demonstrations did not move the President to replace his nominees. They have been retained. This may be seen as a negation of Rawlings' much professed rhetoric or participatory democracy and “power to the people”.

While the wranglings about the President's nominations were going on, the NPP, the main opposition party, brought an action against the NEC and the Attorney-General to the supreme court. It sought a ruling from the court that the “holding of the elections to the office of District Chief Executive for each district by the NEC contravenes the provisions of Articles 242, 243, and 246 of the 1992 Constitution”.<sup>27</sup> The NPP also sought an order of injunction restraining the NEC from holding the elections. On 19 August 1993, the sole judge, Mr Justice G E K Aikins, a former Attorney-General under the PNDC, granted the application of interim injunction and ordered the NEC to suspend the elections until the supreme court had reached a unanimous decision on this case. On 16 September 1993, a five-member panel of the supreme court, comprising justices I K Abban (presiding), a former electoral commissioner under Acheampong's Supreme Military Council government, G E K Aikins, K E Amua-Sekyi, E K Wiredu and A K B Ampiah, in a unanimous decision, ruled that it was *unconstitutional for the Electoral Commission to hold elections to the DAs as presently constituted (under the 1988 law) for the purpose of approving the President's nominees for the position of DCEs*. The court, therefore, ordered the NEC not to hold the elections until new members of the DAs in terms of Article 242 of the constitution have

been elected. The court further noted that the proper bodies to approve candidates for appointment as DCEs are the DAs as provided for in article 242 of the constitution.<sup>28</sup>

When he was asked about his comments on the verdict of the supreme court, the Attorney-General, Mr Anthony Forson, who represented the government in court, replied that “the judgement represents the law. I agree that the two district assemblies are different”.<sup>29</sup>

This question then remains: why was the President prepared to ignore the constitution by nominating persons to be approved by the existing DAs as DCEs? The President seems to have a hidden agenda and I shall return to this later on.

On 19 September 1993, the government's reaction to the judgement of the supreme court came in the form of an announcement that the President had appointed district secretaries for all the districts under the provision of the 1988 Local Government Law, PNDC Law 207. An official statement said the appointments follow the decision of the supreme court restraining the NEC from using the existing DAs for conducting the elections of DCEs.<sup>30</sup> It is believed that the list of appointees published in the *Ghanaian Times* and the *People's Daily Graphic* of 20 September 1993 appears to be mostly the same people who were nominated for the aborted elections. If the President has power to appoint DSs under both PNDC Law 207 and the new constitution, why does he prefer to infringe the constitution which he is supposed to faithfully uphold?

## Conclusion

After winning both presidential and parliamentary elections, it seems as if Rawlings' NDC government still feels insecure. And in order to consolidate his rule, Rawlings decided to nominate DCEs to the 110 districts to be approved by the existing DAs *which are mainly sympathetic to his cause*. He is aware that if he has to wait until the next DA elections, tentatively fixed for the latter half of 1994, before

he puts forward his nominees for the position of DCE for approval, it is likely that he may not get the required two-thirds majority of members of the new DAs. This is because it is possible that the opposition parties would sponsor candidates for the elections to frustrate the nominations of the President and government policies at the district level. In this way, the government may lose credibility while at the same time possibly failing to control local structure and institutions that will help to win future elections for the NDC party. This is essentially what the NDC government tried unsuccessfully to avoid. The result is that the non-partisan nature of the DAs in Ghana has been severely undermined.

The NDC government's nomination of DCEs once again proves the assertion that successive Ghanaian governments' attempts to gain legitimation have often resulted in their disregard for constitutional democratic norms. Although the government was aware that the election of DCEs for the present DAs was unconstitutional, it went ahead, because it wanted to control local authorities, as in the case of the Tanzanian experience from 1965 onwards. The government's action does not reflect Mayo's assertion that in democracies, a government is regarded legitimate if it regulates its conduct in accordance with a constitution, especially if the government complies with the legal rules for elections.<sup>31</sup>

## Notes

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# The African public service and democracy

*A S Wamala of the University of Swaziland, discusses the challenge facing the African public service in culturally and ethnically divided societies on their way to democracy.*



Over the past few years Africa has witnessed, successfully in some cases, a revolutionary demand for a more open and democratic system of government. The masses from Togo to Madagascar, from South Africa to Kenya, from Zaire to Zambia, to name just these few, have been demanding a change in their system of government.

As countries are pressurized and concede to a more democratic system of government, a number of “constituencies” besides those at the level of political parties are bound to be affected by the changes.

One of these which will have to face the new pressures of the emerging democracy, is the public bureaucracy. The civil service in Africa will have to brace itself for the added challenge in a democratic environment.

This article examines the principles and pillars on which the civil service rests and attempts an analysis of how these were eroded or side-lined in most of the African countries. A brief examination will be made as to why the pre-democratic countries were unable to adhere to these principles. The article will finally argue that in the new democracies the civil service will have to attune itself more closely to these principles despite the continuing ethnic, cultural and even linguistic divisions or conflict.

## **The theory and principles of civil service bureaucracy**

The British system of government, which was transplanted to many English-speaking African countries, is based on and operates along certain basic principles. Working with these, the civil service attempts to serve not only the government but also the public. Before we briefly examine these principles, it will be useful to look at the relationship between the civil service and liberal democracy.

## **Democracy and civil service bureaucracy**

The civil service bureaucracy is usually guided by, and dependent upon, the relationship established by the political set-up. Thus, in liberal democracies, this relationship would be different from other types of democracies. One of the most important characteristics of liberal democracy is political equality.

Democratic political equality allows individuals and associations the right to articulate their preferences.<sup>1</sup> This situation should create conditions under which the interests and needs of all – individual and communal – can be achieved.

The idea behind political equality is to give all citizens the opportunity of voicing how they wish to be governed. It also seeks to establish a mechanism of ensuring that the government remains responsive to the needs of the masses who put it into power. Thus, the government and its

entire administrative set-up are deemed to be controlled by the citizens.<sup>2</sup> The people have a right to be heard, attended to or served and also to be represented. There should be no alienation of any member of society from his or her government, political life or part of the community.<sup>3</sup> The civil service in liberal democracies should thus be able to assimilate the conditions under which it works, and develop an ethos which satisfies or enhances such conditions.

#### **Accountability and government transparency**

One of the principal pillars of the modern civil service is public accountability. The conventional view of the civil service and the whole government machinery is that it should be accountable for its actions and responsive to the nation's needs. Public accountability could be looked at from two viewpoints, as far as the civil service is concerned. On the one hand, the civil servants should be accountable to their superiors in whatever they do. The principle behind this is that the senior civil servant and his subordinates, in any ministry, are to remain accountable to their political boss, the minister. Thus, whatever programmes they implement, whatever they do, they have to be accountable to the minister.

At the second level, public accountability involves administrative responsiveness. The public servant should be responsive to the needs of the common person or public he/she serves. Kernaghan<sup>4</sup> emphasizes that public servants should show an active interest in the demands of the political institutions to the same degree as to the needs of the people. What is more, true accountability calls for democratic accountability, which underscores the importance of government officials being accountable for their actions to the citizenry.<sup>5</sup>

Closely related to the idea of accountability is the question of transparency in government affairs. This means access to information in areas and issues which do not infringe on national security.<sup>6</sup> The problem in

most countries is that national security is used as an excuse for excessive secrecy.

#### **Neutrality and the a-political nature of bureaucracy**

One of the principles of civil service ethics in the English tradition is political neutrality.<sup>7</sup> It is expected that a civil servant will treat all government clients and work in the same manner, regardless of political leanings and ideologies. Similarly, government bureaucrats are expected to serve the government of the day with unwavering loyalty. The aim is to ensure continuity in government and administrative work.

Of course this means that public servants are prevented from taking active part in politics. They are required to remain apolitical so that they are able to serve all citizens without fear or favour.

#### **Honest and meritorious service**

It is also a cardinal requirement that members of the public see in the civil service the elements of fairness and honesty.<sup>8</sup> Politicians may, for example, want to allocate national resources in areas where they derive most political support,<sup>9</sup> but civil servants are expected to formulate policies that cater for the well-being of the entire nation.

### **The civil service in Africa**

#### **Colonial civil service**

The civil service in Africa borrows a great deal from the legacy of colonialism. It continues to function along the guidelines laid down by the colonial powers. The most important factor affecting the civil service is the kind of nation state created in many countries south of the Sahara. Most of these countries are a mere conglomeration of tribes (or pre-colonial nations?) which have very little in common. The colonialists grouped together peoples whom they thought were homogeneous by virtue of their colour, when in fact they were not so. Countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania are made up of tribes which

at times seem to have irreconcilable cultural and ethnic differences. To the European there was no difference between a Yoruba and an Ibo, or a Chaga and Masai. Even in a country, such as Sudan, where cultural and other differences should have been more than obvious, the southerners were forced into a "marriage of convenience" with the northerners.

Having created these new nation states, the colonial rulers established a type of administrative structure which fell far short of the ideal. The civil service ignored the needs of the people and was accountable to the ruler, not the ruled. The bureaucracy was indeed politicized – in the sense that it deferred to the political (colonial) master rather than to the masses. In some states, where some semblance of development programmes and social services were attempted, the issues of honesty and fairness to all were totally negated. Thus some tribes benefited at the expense of others. Yet others were employed/deployed to quieten the recalcitrant ones.

Thus all in all, the principal pillars of the civil service bureaucracy were totally negated during the colonial era. The civil service was not expected to be a-political or neutral, but was in fact expected to align itself with the ideology and interests of the rulers. Hence the point of political neutrality was never applied. The attempts at distributing the few resources that were available, lacked any sense of justice or fairness. But, perhaps much more important than that was the fact that the question of accountability was completely ignored. This is not surprising as the rulers themselves only acceded to the democratic demands of the people under extreme pressure, and in most cases only on the eve of their departure. Thus the token civil service that they left, had never had the opportunity of becoming a proper civil service.

#### **The civil service in post-independence Africa**

The post-colonial countries of Africa developed two very significant

features which invariably had a immense impact on the civil service. On the one hand many a country quickly abandoned the multiparty (democratic) system of government that they had embraced on the eve of independence. They chose to replace democratic pluralism with what they termed democracy under one-party rule. Among the many reasons given in justifying this move, were the need to hasten the pace of economic development,<sup>10</sup> and the importance creating national unity in the already divided societies.

On the other hand some countries succumbed to military dictatorships. This category includes the few military leaders who “transformed” themselves into civilian rulers. Thus we have the likes of Mobutu, Traore, Eyadema, Bokassa, and others who rose to positions of heads of state through the barrel of the gun and later declared themselves civilians within single-party machinery. The military rulers justified their actions by claiming, among other reasons, that civilian rulers were corrupt and tended to divide their people with their political ideologies. For them, what Africa needed was unity and development rather than political ideology. The military, because of its “non-partisan” and “non-ideological” nature, would play a more unifying role in the new countries.

The impact and result of these two developments on the civil service in Africa were many and diverse. The first of these was the politicization of the civil service. Many of the single-party governmental systems, such as Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, to name a few, fully politicized the civil service. Perhaps the Tanzanian example serves to illustrate the systematic and clear reasoning behind this move. With the Arusha declaration one political party, Tanu (later CCM), became the supreme, legal, policy-making organ of the country. Policy and legal proposals had to be vetted by the party before being passed on to parliament for enactment.<sup>11</sup>

It also became a requirement for all civil servants to become party mem-

bers. They had to be seen to support and subscribe to the ideas and principles of the party if they were to be assured of career advancement. Thus political neutrality for civil servants was thrown overboard. The argument was that this principle was relevant and applicable only in countries with multiparty systems of government.<sup>12</sup> In countries that had evolved a single-party system of government, civil servants no longer needed to be apolitical. (They were nevertheless not allowed to stand for political positions while they were civil servants.)

The situation in Zambia also reflects a strong tendency towards politicizing the civil service. Though civil servants were not required to be card holders of Unip, Zambia’s ruling party, they were highly politicized in a way.<sup>13</sup> In similar vein the civil servants in Uganda under Obote towards the late 1960s were required to be closely aligned to the ruling party. Obote was concerned that there were members of the civil service who had no sympathies for the party. He thus expressed the view that “such [people] would be exposed so that the whole country would be aware of their selfish and *perhaps subversive aims*” (emphasis mine).<sup>14</sup> It seems strange that civil servants who were not card holders could be described as having subversive plans.

The second issue relates to loyalty and public accountability. In both the one-party and military systems of government, accountability and loyalty of the civil servants became skewed in favour of the party, military or more particularly the head of state. Thus in countries such as Malawi it was not clear whether the civil service was as loyal and accountable to the general public as it was to the party or government in power. Similarly, in a country such as Uganda, under Amin, civil service bureaucrats were expected by the military to be more responsive to those who had fought the so-called “economic war” during the early 1970s. The civil service was increasingly made to believe that its first duty and loyalty lay with the rulers rather than with the public. In

other words, loyalty to the public came second.

In addition, under the military regimes the civil service was required to be more actively involved in the work formerly regarded as the preserve of political office bearers. The civil servants, particularly those at the higher echelons, became more involved in policy-formulating exercises. In countries such as Ghana and Nigeria the policy functions were transferred to the permanent secretaries. In Uganda, in 1971, immediately after the military takeover, Amin appointed a large number of his ministers from the ranks of the senior civil servants.

Another important phenomenon was the secrecy and lack of transparency in the civil service during military rule in a few African countries. The activities of the civil service in Uganda became clouded in secrecy, usually in the name of national security. The government machinery became more and more secretive and less exposed to public inquiry. The more the military rulers felt insecure, the more they tightened the secrecy screw.

#### The South African experience

From the perspective of the minority white regime and rulers in South Africa, their government was always regarded as democratic. Elections were held for the white race, even though the great majority were excluded and regarded as non-citizens.

A number of issues can be identified in the life, development and operation of the public service in South Africa. The civil service in South Africa was made up of white citizens. As such the civil service structure identified with the aspirations and interests of a regime that the majority considered to be illegitimate. It was regarded by most as “unrepresentative and unaccountable”<sup>15</sup> to the people of South Africa. In fact the very nature of their duties meant that civil servants disregarded the interest of the majority of the blacks. In fact, many forms of

violence were inflicted on blacks by civil servants and other public officials under the pretext of maintaining law and order.<sup>16</sup> The Minister of Police, commenting on the unrest and demonstrations in South Africa, declared that the government would do all in its power to maintain law and order.<sup>17</sup> Brutality at the hands of the public servants became the norm in dealing with any black protest activity.

In similar vein the apartheid practices were a form of structural violence which depicted very little, if any, sense of accountability and responsiveness.<sup>18</sup> According to Gildenhuis, structural violence was exhibited by the laws which were racial and repressive.

The state machinery resorted to physical violence through its public service structure in an effort to impose these laws.

In addition to the lack of accountability, the civil service – as in many other African countries – has been overpoliticized. Examples of this politicization include the excessive control by politicians over the public service, particularly from 1978 onwards<sup>19</sup>. The bureaucracy on the other hand have always shown its political alignment by following, circulating and implementing the politicians' policy of treating Africans as second, third or fourth class citizens. The whole policy of pass books imposed on blacks was enforced and implemented by members of the government bureaucracy.

Coupled with the political nature of the civil service has always been its policy of secrecy. Among others, this may be partly elucidated by the example of the series of secret projects that culminated in the revelation of the information scandal in early 1981. The government had established a project to spread "Pretoria propaganda" so as to win foreign support.<sup>20</sup> Secrecy has always been an important weapon in the hands of the South African civil service departments.<sup>21</sup> The result of this has always been the persecution of citizens regarded as enemies of the politicians or "state".

#### **The bureaucracy in non-democratic divided societies**

Perhaps one of the most important issues that emerges from the above discussion is the failure of the civil service to abide by the necessary principles, thus leading to the loss of civil service ethics. Corrupt practices on the part of the leaders, such as favouring relatives and close associates, the use of the national/state coffers as a personal bank, and so on, are carried out under the eyes of and often with the help of civil servants. For example, as Woldring<sup>22</sup> records, the situation in Zambia became so untenable that ministers were called upon to resign because they were totally inept and corrupt. However, it had become impossible to check the corrupt tendencies of the civil servants as corruption had invaded every aspect of Zambian life.

In many an African country the problem is compounded by the state of the economy where a civil servant's monthly salary is no longer a living wage. Thus, if the minister or president steals with impunity from state funds, and no one can question him/her, the civil servant has tended to follow suit. Such corrupt practices should also be seen in the context of competing family or clan demands alongside an economy that cannot provide meaningful living wages. To complicate matters, the corrupt politician is in no position to discipline his permanent secretary. The rot would then be carried further down the line. An important public official, for example, may steal from government funds to buy a bus in order to serve the people in his/her home village. (Other equally deserving areas or needs will not be considered.) While the bus may be providing a much needed service, the profits will however go to the private owner – the civil servant.

#### **The civil service in democratic Africa**

While discussing the situation of the civil service in a democratic Africa, one has to bear in mind some of the factors which may have created non-

democratic tendencies. For example, as shown above, in countries that are divided ethnically and culturally, it became important to build strong, unified nation states. Multiparty democracy was abandoned in order not to waste valuable time fighting and squabbling in endless parliamentary discussions.

It is needless to assert, however, that despite these years of "unified" autocratic rule, many an African state still suffers from the very ills which justified the abandoning of multiparty democracy. As the experience of countries such as Kenya shows, the Kenyans are no more united now after years of Kanu rule. Nor are the people of Zaire under Mobutu or the people of Togo under the incorrigible Eyadema any more united than they were before. Even Said Barre did not succeed in uniting people who originated from the same stock.

At another level, the promises of accelerating the development pace were never fulfilled. After all the years of Unip rule, Zambians are not any better off economically than they were before Kaunda took over in the early 1960s. In similar vein, despite the rhetoric about Ghana's success and take-off under the IMF banner, ordinary Ghanaians are unaware that Rawlings has led them to the promised land.

It is perhaps because of such failures that the people in several African countries have risen up in arms demanding better governance. They have demanded government systems which are likely to be more responsive or accountable to their needs and interests. They want to have a say in the choice of their rulers at more regular intervals than has been the case hitherto. They also want to have a system of government which is more transparent and less closed or secretive. They demand the right to question the actions of their leaders without fear of reprisals. All in all, they want a more democratic system of government than has been allowed to exist in the last few decades.

Now, as these erstwhile autocratic regimes accede to the demands of the

people and open their system of governance, a big challenge will have to be faced by the various civil services. The culture and tradition that currently exists in the African public service negates any democratic ideals. The civil service in any new democracy will have to face up to some of the following problems:

First is the question of politicization. If democracy is to take root in Africa, the public service machinery will have to become a-political and therefore totally neutral. Politicization of the civil service is the antithesis to democracy.<sup>23</sup> The new South African bureaucracy, for example, will have to respond positively to the demands of all the different groupings in South Africa. Thus, the civil servant will have to transcend race and political sympathies to discharge his or her duties effectively. This is likely to be a daunting task. Similarly, in Nigeria, once the military go, the federal civil service officer will have to remember to be seen and not heard. Thus the status he/she may have enjoyed as a "policy maker" will have to be gracefully handed over.

The second problem is the lack of transparency in government. The civil service has been oversecretive. Information becomes available only as it is released by the officials. They control what is made public. According to Mokgoro<sup>24</sup> "excessive secrecy undermines the democratic requirements". If the government is democratic and if there are no real issues of national security, the public have a right to the information they require. This would make the civil servant openly accountable for his or her actions. For example, the use of civil service employees during political campaigns could be questioned by the public, especially if this work is done in government time.<sup>25</sup> Politicians from the ruling African elites are known to monopolize state institutions, personnel and time during political election campaigns/rallies. Information has hitherto been secretly handled for fear of criticism and opposition. Perhaps one lesson that Africa needs to learn fast is that

dissent and criticism as well as difference of opinion are not to be equated with treason or sedition. If that lesson is learnt by politicians and bureaucrats alike, then the road to democracy might be a more confident one.

Yet another problem which civil servants will have to face is the provision of fair, just and meritorious service to all. In the new democracies, despite the ethnic and other differences which exist, the civil servants would be required to "belong" to all cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups in terms of service. The bureaucracies of the new democracies will have to forget their practice of giving priority or prominence to people with similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds, regardless of the merit of their cases.

### Conclusion

The discussion above has centred on Africa's civil service in the failed democracies. The civil service structure is one which has been annexed by politicians to do their bidding. The bureaucracy has tended to be politicized and oversecretive. Coupled to this has been the resultant and increasing corruption and a disregard for moral ethical codes of behaviour. The civil service hastended to follow the example of political leaders in their corrupt activities.

It is clear that the civil service must be educated and sensitized to the principles and practices of good governance. They need to begin to embrace these principles if democracy is to survive. They ought to adapt to new democratic thinking and practice in their behaviour and actions if they are to satisfy the aspirations and interests of the people of different cultures and ethnic groupings. Thus it is not enough to have democratic elections, albeit along multiparty party lines, if the bureaucrats are not properly attuned to democratic behaviour. One might indeed add that the established democracies have taken time to assimilate the cultural, educational and legal aspects of democracy.<sup>26</sup> Thus training and education should be emphasized and initiated forthwith if the new democratic experiment is to

avoid the crisis of improper governance.

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# Book review: World Development Report 1994 Infrastructure for Development

*World Development Report  
1994. Infrastructure for  
Development and World  
Development Indicators, New  
York: Oxford University Press,  
pp x, 254.*



This is the seventeenth in the World Bank's annual series. It focuses on economic infrastructure which includes services from public utilities (power, telecommunications, piped water supply, sanitation and sewerage, solid waste collection and disposal, and piped gas); public works (roads and major dam and canal works for irrigation and drainage); and other transport sectors (urban and interurban railways, urban transport, ports, waterways and airports). Social infrastructure (eg, education and health care) is not dealt with but was the focus of the World Development Report for 1993.

Economic infrastructure, covering a complex of distinct sectors, accounts for as much as 6,5 to 9% of the GDP of low-income and lower middle-income countries to which groups nearly all sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries belong. Providing these services, essential to business, households and other users, is one of the major challenges of economic development.

In developing countries the availability of infrastructure has increased significantly in recent years. Roughly \$200 billion is invested in the sector annually in these countries. But in many cases the full benefits are not being realized, resulting in serious waste of resources and lost opportunities. For example, one billion people in developing countries still lack

access to clean water and nearly two billion lack adequate sanitation. Added to this and other inadequacies is the fact that population growth and urbanization are increasing the demand for infrastructure year by year. Clearly, it is not only the quantity of infrastructure that has to be increased but the quality also. The report covers developing countries in particular and in this summary emphasis on country examples from SSA are given preference.

## **Infrastructure: Achievements, challenges and opportunities (Chapter 1)**

### **The impact on development**

Infrastructure represents, if not the engine, then the "wheels" of economic activity. An analysis of the value of infrastructure stocks indicates that their composition changes significantly as incomes rise. For low-income countries more basic infrastructure is important, such as water, irrigation and transport. As economies mature into the middle-income stage, most of the basic consumption demands for water are met, the share of agriculture in the economy shrinks, and more transport infrastructure is provided. In high-income countries the share of power and telecommunications becomes even greater.

Whether infrastructure investment causes economic growth or growth

causes infrastructure investment is not fully established but the competition for new export markets is especially dependent on high-quality infrastructure. For example, in part, because of infrastructure problems shipping costs from Africa to Europe are 30% higher for plywood and 70% higher for tuna than those from Asia to Europe. The efficiency with which infrastructural services are provided is a key to realizing potential returns.

Infrastructure, too, is important for ensuring that growth is consistent with poverty reduction. Access to at least minimal services is one of the essential criteria for defining welfare, while the construction of, say, roads and earthworks, as in Botswana and Cape Verde, contribute to poverty reduction by providing direct employment.

Infrastructure's links to the environment are seen in the fact that each sector – water, power, transport, sanitation, irrigation – raises issues concerning the interaction between man-made structures and the activities they generate and the natural environment. Environment-friendly services, therefore, are essential for improving living standards and offering public health protection.

#### The record of performance

Public sector agencies have dominated all aspects of infrastructure services in developing countries in recent decades largely through vertically integrated monolithic government or parastatal entities. Recent experience, however, reveals serious and widespread misallocations of resources as well as a failure to respond to demand. Moreover, the blunt instruments of public ownership, financing and operation have not demonstrated any advantage in achieving poverty reduction goals and environmental sustainability. These deficiencies are embedded in the prevailing system of institutional incentives for the supply of infrastructure.

These findings indicate that efficiency and effectiveness of infrastructure provision derive from the institutional environment which often

varies across sectors in individual countries.

The challenge, therefore, is to eliminate these inadequacies – operational inefficiencies, inadequate maintenance, excessive dependence on fiscal resources, lack of responsiveness to users' needs, limited benefits to the poor, and insufficient environmental responsibility. Some examples are given: almost \$13 billion worth of roads or one-third of those built in the past 20 years in SSA have eroded because of lack of maintenance; in Nigeria only 43% of installed power capacity was in service by 1990; and in recent years 60% of Ghana Railway revenues consisted of government subsidies.

#### Directions for change

The weaknesses in infrastructure provision are inherent in the incentives built into current institutional and organizational arrangements. Three elements, states the report, are essential in creating the right incentives for efficient and responsive delivery of services. These are management-based on commercial principles, competition, and involvement of users and other stakeholders. The first involves giving service providers focused and explicit performance objectives, well-defined budgets and managerial and financial autonomy while also holding them accountable for their performance. The second means arranging for suppliers to compete in the market and for contracts in the provision of services of all kinds. The third aims at making suppliers more accountable to their customers.

The principles underlying these characteristics come naturally to a private business but not always to public sector organizations which have to balance many different economic, social and political objectives. Failures in some countries in the developing world reveal a lack of these characteristics. In SSA, for instance, water and power entities receive mixed signals from government about where to expand their networks. In Ghana the chief execu-

tive of a utility found his responsibility to the board of directors being shifted back to the relevant ministry, thus restoring direct political intervention. Successes, by contrast, reveal that a common feature is a high degree of autonomy for the entities concerned. Botswana's Water Utility Corporation, for example, is quoted as the right way to run a public utility since political influence has been kept out of the conduct of its operations. Moreover, it has been run on commercial principles although recently problems have begun to emerge.

#### The way ahead

The challenge is to determine those areas in which competitive market conditions can work and those that require public action. Within these broad parameters, there is a menu of institutional options that allow governments, public sector agencies, and private groups to assume responsibility for different aspects of service provision. The spectrum of options is broad but four main approaches can be identified:

- Option A envisages public ownership and operation through a government department, public enterprise or parastatal authority.
- Option B envisages public ownership with operation contracted to the private sector.
- Option C is private ownership and operation.
- Option D is community and user provision.

#### Running public entities on commercial principles — Option A (Chapter 2)

Since the public sector will continue to have primary responsibility for infrastructure services in most countries, improving the effectiveness of its performance is therefore critical. This can be achieved by applying three core instruments to reinforce commercial operation in the sector:

- *Corporatization* – the explicit separation of infrastructure service provision from government starts by changing a government department

into a public enterprise in order to increase management autonomy. It establishes the quasi-independence of public entities and insulates infrastructure enterprises from non-commercial pressures and constraints. But it takes time and much effort. Ghana's utilities, for instance, have been undergoing transformation for seven years and still have a long way to go.

- **Focused goals and accountable management** – explicit contracts between governments and (public and private) managers or private entities involved in infrastructure services which increase autonomy and accountability by specifying performance objectives that embody government-defined goals. Performance agreements have not achieved much success in SSA. Alternatively, management contracting gives responsibility for a broad scope of operations and maintenance to the private sector, usually for three to five years. As a result of a management contract signed for the power company in Guinea-Bissau, the new management team has doubled electricity sales in three years. Similar arrangements in some other West African countries have proved equally successful. Contracting out services, especially maintenance services, is becoming popular with public infrastructure providers. For example, in Kenya private contractors do limited locomotive repair and maintenance work for the state railway. Contracting out tends to be more cost-effective than using public employees to handle maintenance.
- **Pricing for financial independence** – a pricing strategy designed to ensure cost recovery which creates a desirable form of financial independence for public utilities and even at times for public works. Tariffs are set to cover costs, the three main cost components of most power and water infrastructure utilities being connection,

usage and peak-capacity costs. An example for Ghana indicates that by ending subsidies in 1988 its water utility increased meter coverage from less than 30% to 53% in 1993, and in revenue collection from less than 50% to 91% of billings. Many governments fear that fully recovering costs will hurt the poor but in fact it may actually help them. For example, easier access to water can free up time that can be used to pursue income-earning activities. In Nouakchott, Mauritania private water vendors were charging up to 100 times the public utility price.

Success in adopting commercial principles by governments and public utilities can be guaranteed only if supported by a political commitment to improve public sector delivery. Few successful examples of option A persist because they are vulnerable to changes in governmental support. In any case, establishing commercial principles is not enough. Competition is also necessary.

### Using markets in infrastructure provision — Options B and C (Chapter 3)

This chapter discusses the scope and techniques for marshalling market forces to create accountability through competition and, where competition alone is insufficient, regulation. The chapter also examines experiences with public ownership and private operation (option B) in which competition for the market is used, as well as private ownership and private operation (option C).

The consensus that is emerging from experience is that market forces and competition can improve the production and delivery of infrastructure services, displacing the long-held view that these services come best from monopolies. The need still exists, however, to regulate prices and profits to protect consumers.

To increase competition, unbundling of infrastructure services is proceeding at a brisk pace in many developed and developing countries. Vertical unbundling of the electric

power industry for example, ie, separating generation from transmission and distribution, has been effectively adopted in many developing countries, among them Côte d'Ivoire and Tanzania, where independent power projects are being constructed or considered. Horizontal unbundling seems less popular, ie, separating activities by markets either geographically or by service categories. Examples are given from Japan, Argentina and Poland (railways) but none from SSA.

### Competition for the market

A number of examples from SSA are cited where competition takes place *for*, rather than *in*, the market, ie, governments create competitive conditions through leases or concessions and firms compete not for individual consumers but for the right to supply the entire market. A lease agreement was recently adopted by Guinea, based on a French model, and is working well, ie, a new autonomous water authority (Soneg) took over ownership of the urban water supply infrastructure and assumed responsibility for sector planning and investment. Seeg, 49% government-owned and 51% owned by a foreign consortium, was created to operate and maintain the system's facilities.

Concessions, also, include contracts to build and operate new facilities. They have proliferated in recent years and include toll roads in China, Malaysia and South Africa, and power plants, telephone facilities and water and sanitation systems in other countries. Sodeci, the private water company in Côte d'Ivoire, has a well-established and successful concession contract. It started operations with the Abidjan water supply system 30 years ago and now manages more than 300 piped systems across the country. In Guinea-Bissau a management contract has been awarded by the Electricity and Water Company (EAGB) to Electricité de France for operation and maintenance of the system. About 75% of the remuneration is guaranteed with a possible additional 25%

based on performance. The contract is renewed at regular intervals.

Other arrangements, such as private ownership and operation (option C), are increasing. For example, 27 developing countries allow cellular telephone services to be competitively provided and many others allow private firms to construct electricity-generating plants and sell power to the national grid. Telephone systems that have been privatized in Venezuela, Chile, Argentina and Mexico, for example, have substantially expanded their networks.

The report concludes that the weight of evidence is that competition *in or for* the market for services is generally more effective in responding to consumer demands that are mechanisms for making public enterprises more accountable. Where regulatory barriers have been lowered, even limited new entry or the credible threat of competition has led to lower prices and substantial cost reductions.

### Beyond markets in infrastructure (Chapter 4)

While commercial and competitive provision of infrastructure can effectively deliver the services needed to meet social goals, a number of problems arise for which markets cannot guarantee solutions. Local, small-scale infrastructure, such as rural feeder roads, community water supply and sanitation, distribution canals for irrigation, and maintenance of drainage systems, will be undersupplied if markets alone are left to determine their provision. Government action, not always successful, appears to be the obvious solution.

A variety of responses and policy initiatives can help overcome the limitations of both markets and governments:

- *Decentralization and local participation.* Experience shows that decentralizing small-scale infrastructure projects to local communities results in cost savings and improved user satisfaction. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, insufficient commitment to local bodies re-

sulted in the malfunctioning, owing to lack of maintenance, of half the handpumps in a scheme costing \$115 million and supplying 13 000 water supply points. But unlocking local effort through decentralization requires adequate technical support at local level. Organizations such as Agtip (Agences d'Exécution des Travaux d'Intérêt Public) in SSA help develop local capacity, prepare projects and monitor project execution and operation.

The importance of participation in effective delivery of local public infrastructure is well recognized (option D). Successful community provision requires user involvement in decision-making, especially to set priorities for expenditures and to ensure an equitable and agreed sharing of the benefits and costs of service provision. Twenty-five agricultural and rural development projects reviewed by the World Bank after five to ten years of operation revealed that participation by beneficiaries and grass-root institutions was a key factor in the long-term success of those projects.

Moreover, participation is particularly important for the maintenance of facilities as a study of 121 completed rural water supply projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America showed. A self-help community organization in Ethiopia, devoted mainly to maintaining roads (the Gurage Roads Construction Organization) has worked well since 1962 because it sets its own priorities and allocates its own financial and in-kind resources (70% from GRCO and 30% from government).

- *Improved budgeting allocations to nationwide spending programmes.* This is necessary where the social value of major infrastructure networks is concerned, such as national trunk roads and large-scale irrigation. In Cameroon and Zambia, for example, certain budget allocations have been misdirected. Transport sector allocations have emphasized the construction of

new roads over maintenance or rehabilitation of existing networks, even though the latter are clear priorities.

- *Subsidies and transfers to the poor.* Infrastructure is a blunt instrument for intervening directly on behalf of the poor and there are various ways in which infrastructure subsidies can be structured to improve their effectiveness in reaching the poor. For example, for water, increasing-block tariffs can be used – charging a particularly low “lifeline” rate for the first part of consumption (eg, 25 to 50 litres per person per day) and higher rates for additional “blocks” of water. This block tariff links price to volume and it is more efficient at reaching the poor than a general subsidy because it limits subsidized consumption. It also encourages water conservation and efficient use by increasing charges at higher use.
- *Changes in pricing, regulations and project design to address externalities.* Infrastructure often has widespread indirect impacts – frequently on the environment – which can be beneficial or harmful. Because markets often fail to reflect these externalities their management usually falls to government which requires improved approaches to address them.
- *Project-planning techniques.* These need to take account of economic, environmental, social and sectoral concerns not addressed in individual commercial or local decisions. The geographical and sectoral complexity of many infrastructure projects calls for their spatial, sectoral and intersectoral coordination and planning by governments. Moreover, it is also necessary to coordinate the decisions of investors, including donors. In SSA, for instance, efforts to improve donor coordination in transport have been embodied in recent initiatives. On the one hand, there is the SSA Transport Policy Programme supported by a coalition of donors and, on the other,

the translation of this coordination into concerted action. The Integrated Road Project in Tanzania (16 participating donors) and the Roads and Coastal Shipping Project in Mozambique (15) are the two largest umbrella projects.

The institutional approaches given above are not universally applicable but they do address specific concerns for specific types of infrastructure, all of which should contribute to broad social goals. They may be effective only when efforts are narrowly focused and when the choice of instruments and approaches reflect sectoral needs and the capacities of implementing agencies.

### Financing needed investments (Chapter 5)

Implementing the four options referred to requires carefully designed financing strategies. Foreign and domestic sources of finance will need to be tapped but there are limits to the availability of the former and for most countries an ongoing infrastructure programme has to be sustained by a strategy for mobilizing domestic funds. Although an increasing share of the domestic savings needed to finance infrastructure provision can come from private sources, governments will continue to be a major source of funds and a conduit for resources from the donor community. At present 90% of financial flows in developing countries for infrastructure are channelled through a government sponsor which bears almost all project risk. For the present, as transitional measures to provide long-term financing, where sufficient private support is not likely to be forthcoming, governments are revitalizing existing lending institutions for infrastructure and creating specialized funds.

The challenge for the future is for governments to shift from being infrastructure providers to becoming facilitators with private entrepreneurs and lenders taking a more direct role. Private financing is needed to ease the burden on government finances but, more important, it will encourage

better risk sharing, accountability, monitoring, and management in infrastructure provision. Doing so will require institutions and financing instruments adapted to the varying needs of investors in different types of projects and at different stages in a project's life.

The report concludes that the move from public financing to more private sponsorship is likely to be a long and painful process. The good news is that private enterprise has been moving into a wide range of countries and projects. Legal and regulatory reform is already underway. Infrastructure providers are being privatized. Flows of foreign direct investment by new entrepreneurs are on the rise, as are international flows of portfolio capital. And the growth of domestic capital markets is a source of optimism. Finance follows enterprise. It is unfortunate or significant that no SSA examples are given regarding some of the new institutions and instruments being made available for infrastructure provision. Only Asian and Latin American examples are featured.

### Setting priorities and implementing reform (Chapter 6)

Infrastructure provision must be tailored to country needs and circumstances and to differences across sectors. In middle-income countries with good capacity the four major options can all work well. In SSA the only countries in the upper middle group are South Africa, Botswana and Gabon. The remainder are classified by the World Bank as lower middle-income (Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Cameroon, Congo and Namibia) and low-income of which there are 27 in SSA. In most of these countries, with modest capacity, commercial principles of operation can form the basis for reform in several sectors. Commercial approaches can be supplemented by reforms in procurement and contracting practices that foster competition and develop the domestic construction industry. Concessions or leasing arrangements are proven ways for a low-income country to draw on foreign expertise. Road maintenance,

for example, is now done privately in a large number of African countries. Côte d'Ivoire has managed a transfer of skills from expatriate to local staff in its water supply concession and indicates that well-designed programmes of training and technical cooperation can create an appropriate enabling environment for successful reform and development of infrastructure.

Community approaches, also, with technical and financial support can be efficient and sustainable in supplying services using intermediate technologies in rural areas and in low-income, peri-urban settlements.

### Sectoral agendas for reform

Although country characteristics are important, sectoral characteristics cast the deciding vote among institutional options. The "marketability" of infrastructure activities is determined by the following characteristics – production technology that leads to natural monopoly; the public nature of consumption; constraints on cost recovery; distributional concerns; and the importance of spillover effects. Thus, for instance, large network facilities such as transmission grids, primary irrigation channels, and railbeds, allow very little competition while activities such as urban waste collection and urban bus services are potentially quite competitive. Others, such as phone services or tertiary irrigation, are entirely private in consumption while many roads, for example, are public infrastructure, rural roads in particular having a low potential for cost recovery.

Thus, because of the great variation in performance, the payoffs from increasing the efficiency of infrastructure provision will differ from country to country and from sector to sector. But the rewards are potentially large across the spectrum for reform will produce three types of gains: reduction in subsidies, technical gains (raising operational efficiency) to suppliers, and gains to users.

### Main messages of the report

- Infrastructure can deliver major benefits in economic growth,

poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability – but only when it provides services that respond to effective demand and does so efficiently.

- The causes of past performance and the source of improved performance lie in the incentives facing providers.

- Manage infrastructure like a business, not a bureaucracy.
- Introduce competition – directly if feasible, indirectly if not.
- Give users and other stakeholders a strong voice and real responsibility.
- Public-private partnerships in financing have promise.

- Governments will have a continuing, if changed, role in infrastructure.

Infrastructure is no longer the grey backdrop of economic life, underground and out of mind. It is front and centre in development.

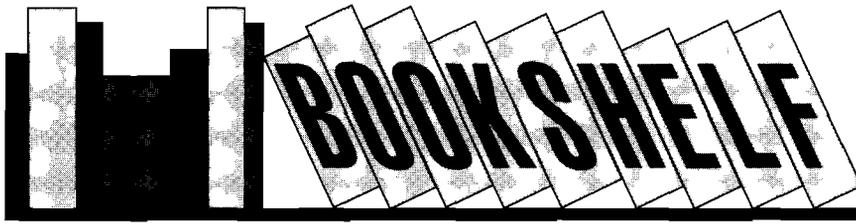
*Denis Fair, Fellow, Africa Institute*

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## Erratum

**“Health care in the new South Africa: Surveying the more radical options” by J M Luiz in vol 24, 2, 1994:**

This article is partly based on a MCOM dissertation submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand. The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC) is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the HSRC.



**Culture in Africa: An appeal for pluralism** edited by Raoul Granqvist. Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1993, 204 pp. ISBN 91 7106 330 7

This anthology contains 12 essays on subjects ranging from poetry and drama to church music, architecture and popular magazines. The book includes not only a great variety of subjects but also a medley of associative methodologies. In his introduction, Granqvist says that the objective of *Culture in Africa* is to broaden the perspective of what we normally mean by African culture and approaches to such culture and to confront or challenge the tendency towards essentialism and alienation.

All the essays attempt to bring together the disciplines of arts with those of the social sciences. African cultural expressions are treated as anchored in the experiences common to the black peoples, while the provincial exclusiveness of Afrocentrism is shunned.

**Social change and economic reform in Africa** edited by Peter Gibbon. Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1993, 381 pp. ISBN 91 7106 331 5

Economic liberalization has been underway in Africa for over a decade, but many of the claims originally made for it have not been fulfilled. The reform process has tended to be overtaken by certain broader economic, social and political developments which its designers underestimated, misunderstood or deliberately ignored. A proper understanding of the effects and prospects of the reform process therefore depends on comprehending the African context onto which it was grafted.

This second anthology, containing 12 papers, emanates from a conference jointly organized by the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies and Zimbabwe University's School of Social Work and forms part of the Institute's research programme on the political and social context of structural adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Africa-based authors of this volume provide a series of studies of recent developments in agriculture, the informal sector, the social sector and civil society in Kenya, Lesotho, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. They analyse main trends and forces operating in these fields and consider the economic reform programme's impact against this background.

**The search for Africa: A history in the making** by Basil Davidson. London: James Currey, 1994, 374 pp. ISBN 0 85255 714 0

The commentaries and essays in this collection were written at various times in response to various needs but are neither accidental nor unrelated to one another. They offer a line of thought that, according to the author, illuminates one of the truly liberating achievements, cultural achievements, of the twentieth century: the reinstatement of Africa's peoples within the culture of the world.

The book starts with perceptive overviews. The second part, drawing substantially on *The New Statesman* pieces, reflects the experience of the few people who had come to terms at that time with a closed colonial Africa. The next part "Sympathies", reflects Basil Davidson's experience and involvement when the African colonies of Portugal were breaking free.

The fourth part is chiefly concerned with the debates and proportions that led to Basil Davidson's writing *The black man's burden*, and which have led out of that – the crisis of institutions in post-colonial Africa.

The final section is focused on two hotly contested arguments. "Whose roots?" is concerned with the relationship between Ancient Egypt and the ancient world, whether in Africa or in Europe. "The curse of Columbus" takes issue over the celebrations.

**Africa within the world: Beyond dispossession and dependence** edited by Adebayo Adedeji. London: Zed Books with ACDESS, 1993. ISBN 1 85649 250 8

Africa's political independence has not translated into lasting economic empowerment. Hence its overall development now trails behind most other countries of the South. Dependent on its creditors and the world's highly volatile and competitive primary commodity and capital markets, the continent's capacity to weather crises and pressures is the lowest of any region in the world. This extreme vulnerability, ultimately manifested in armed conflicts and famine, erodes its political manoeuvring space and geopolitical relevance.

This book, which is the result of the first international conference held by The African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies (ACDESS), explores strategies and policies that would allow Africa to reverse the position in which it finds itself and to end its internal and external marginalization. Underlying all the contributions in *Africa within the world* is a deep scepticism about the development strategies which African countries have

pursued – or which have been imposed upon them. Aledji echoes contribution after contribution in his introduction when he points to the necessity for a fundamental rethinking and restructuring of economic rationales worldwide, and of governance from the global to the village level. “In the interest of its own survival, humanity has to shed the illusion – once and for all – that conflicts can be confined. The world of tomorrow will be about sharing – or it will not be at all. Men and women, young and old, have to choose and prevail upon their leaders to embrace a new agenda: cooperation, corresponsibility, community and commonality of a basic interest in survival, decency and a compact based upon this.”

**Towards an urban research agenda for South Africa** by Stef Coetzee and Christo de Coning. Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 1994, 112 pp. ISBN 0 7983 0118 X

The biggest challenge for development studies is the extent to which results can be translated into viable policy and strategy options for the future. This is especially true in regard to research on South Africa's urbanization, which is expected to expand even more rapidly in the future. In this discussion document, the authors – both specialists in socioeconomic development policy – provide a comprehensive framework for research on the problems of South African urbanization, including pointers to research priorities.

**Small wars, small mercies: Journeys in Africa's disputed nations** by Jeremy Harding. London: Penguin Books, 1993, 449 pp. ISBN 0 14 013433 6

In six extraordinary itineraries through Africa – covering Angola, Namibia, Western Sahara, South Africa, Mozambique and Eritrea – Jeremy Harding keeps track of a continent stumbling from the Cold War through a blasted landscape of relief camps, mountain trenches, overcrowded townships and burial grounds, in search of peace. The focus is always on the individual men and women caught up in Africa's small wars. Yet, according to Harding, if war brings out the worst in governments and nations, it is not the way with all their citizens. There is another story in “war-torn” Africa, of people contriving to live beyond the wars, or in spite of them – the small mercies: mercies which might have been greater, were it not for the scale of the adversity in which they flourish.

**Maqoma: Xhosa resistance to colonial advance** by Timothy J Stapleton. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1994, pp 261. ISBN 1 86842 015 9

Without question Maqoma was the most renowned Xhosa chief of South Africa's nineteenth-century frontier wars.

But was he the drunken troublemaker and erratic volatile ruler that colonial officials and three generations of historians described him to be? Both oral tradition and colonial and missionary documents paint a very different picture.

In this book, Stapleton reveals a man of considerable intellect and eloquence who strove to maintain traditional social structures and the power of the Xhosa aristocracy in the face of colonial depredations and dispossession. *Maqoma: Xhosa resistance to colonial advance* tells the fascinating story of a man who, after failing to negotiate peace, used his skills as a general and tactician to lead a guerrilla campaign in the forests and valleys of British Kaffraria that frustrated the most skilled British officers. However, war-induced famine, aggravated by the colonial scorched-earth policy, forced him to abandon his stronghold and submit to European domination. Maqoma was twice sent to Robben Island, where he died in 1873.

**Separate but unequal: The “coloured” people of South Africa - A political history** by Roy H du Pre. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1994, 292 pp. ISBN 1 86842 014 0

After 1948 the coloured people were systematically stripped of their political rights, formed into a “nation” against their will, deprived of the vote in violation of the constitution and legislated into oblivion simply because they were “different”. Today few people know what happened to the coloured people during the years of apartheid rule and how they felt about the treatment meted out to them. Very few know why they endured this humiliation in silence. Du Pre attempts to tear down the veil of reticence and to tell the story of their suffering.

**Population growth and agricultural change in Africa** edited by B L Turner II, Goran Hyden and Robert W Kates. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993, pp 461. ISBN 0 8130 1219 8

This book, which comprises papers presented at a workshop at the University of Florida in 1988, addresses the basic question of whether population growth in densely settled areas of rural Africa has led to the intensification of agriculture.

According to the editors, densely settled areas are examined because they offer examples of the land-pressure conditions that are to be expected throughout much of Africa if population growth does not abate. Hence they may offer many insights into the future of African agriculture. The basic question is further used to explore those factors that influence the population-agriculture relationship and its consequences for environmental and economic sustainability.

**Forthcoming:**  
**Africa at a  
 glance,**  
**1995**  
*compiled by*  
*Pieter Esterhuysen*

A comprehensive but concise compendium of useful data about Africa, easy-to-use and attractively presented in tables, maps and graphs (some in colour).

The tables and figures refer to Africa's 53 independent countries and island states, covering topics such as population, urbanization, languages, cultures, independence dates, names of political leaders, change of political systems and leadership, geo-economic regions and economic groupings of countries, as well as a variety of economic and social data, including GNP figures, foreign debt indicators, development aid, external trade, agricultural and mineral production, physical infrastructure, education and literacy, list of universities, life expectancy, infant mortality and human development ratings.

**Local  
 government in  
 the Third World**  
*The experience of  
 decentralization in  
 Tropical Africa*  
*Second edition*  
*Edited by Philip Mawhood*

Local government is a peculiar theme, always recognized in Africa as important yet seldom comprehensively written about or understood. This book is about political decentralization and the devolution of political power, written by authors who have worked close to the real situations. Its readership will range from those who are engaged in the work of government (including constitution-making) to teachers and researchers in the field of development and local administration.

Philip Mawhood and Nelson Kasfir's introductory chapters deal with the concept of decentralization/devolution and how that concept has fared in Africa since independence. There is a brief discussion of the enormous challenge facing South Africa in creating post-apartheid local authorities and the vital need for that country to take note of the experience in the rest of the continent. First published in 1983, this revised second edition also presents case studies: one French-speaking and seven English-speaking countries (Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan and Tanzania).

ISBN 0 7983 01155, A5 format, soft cover, 268 pages (June 1993).

**Price per copy:** R60,00 (VAT included) in South Africa, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland; elsewhere US\$30,00 or equivalent.

**South Africa  
 and the African  
 comity of  
 nations**  
*From isolation to  
 integration*  
*by Denis Venter*

South Africa's contemporary relations with the rest of Africa – marked by the development of mutually beneficial co-operation and a proliferation of South African missions to African capitals, and vice versa – have come a long way since the days when an exchange of representatives with African countries was seen as a potential threat to the apartheid state.

The interplay of forces shaping South African foreign (and domestic) policy perspectives in the course of the last two decades, culminating in today's "neo-realist" diplomacy, is the main focus of this research paper. Starting with the collapse of colonial buffer states (which sheltered South Africa from the "winds of change" blowing from the north), developments are analysed through the era of "Quixotic" responses to a perceived "total onslaught", to the final collapse of the principal obstacle to normal foreign relations – apartheid.

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