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## Editor's Note

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Africa, the most ancient of the continents and human cultures, presents rich experiences that are at once worthy of our marvel, sorrow, and yearnings. Waking up to that *first* morning's challenge of founding the rudiments of belonging and symbolic communication, followed by organizing patterns of daily work for survival, and making the subsequent millennia-long journey of historical evolution punctuated, like other branches of humanity, with remarkable attempts to build communities, cities, and institutions,<sup>1</sup> the continent's early encounters with other civilizations were primarily mutual—even, at times, accompanied with a degree of awe toward Africans.<sup>2</sup> The bulk of this story and its variable geometry are submerged, awaiting retrieval and telling.

Concentrated grief is a main feature of the past five centuries. This is the time in which Africa's domestic weaknesses, such as meager and technologically unprepared economies, feeble and fragmented politics, and mutual betrayal as well as naiveté colluded with ruthlessly expansionist European ambitions. From about 1500 to as late as the South Africa of 1990, the project was consistent: the cruel material exploitation, cultural humiliation, or, even worse, the inessentialization of Africans.<sup>3</sup> The methods varied from unequal commercial exchange, slaving, and finally outright conquest and colonization. In short, being *black* alluded to more than difference in pigmentation; it became synonymous with, recalling Franz Fanon's partly threnodic but apt expression, wretchedness. Of course, there were always counter-thrusts that, on occasion, were even heroic and later would add to the collective memories that inspired decolonization. As a matter of fact, the coming of independence in Africa, mostly in the late 1950s and 60s, was nothing short of a new chapter in African history<sup>4</sup>—a time pregnant with possibilities for reclamation and overall renaissance.

But this glittering but brief moment evaporated with the same speed it appeared.<sup>5</sup> With a few diehard colonialists such as the Portuguese in Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau, and settlers in South Africa and Rhodesia still defiantly holding on, the glow of independence was replaced, in many countries, by a descent into its antithesis—a bottomless pit of accelerating economic decline, deteriorating environment, solipsistic and incompetent despotism, and lethal hostilities among different kin groups.

Added to these, particularly in the 1980s, was a mounting debt burden that compounded the material impoverishment. By the end of this last decade of the century, the overall picture of many parts of the continent was so ghastly and self-wasting that Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka was compelled to offer these reflections.

The land of Syl Cheney-Coker, who declares himself content to be “the breakfast of the peasants,” “the hands that help the fisherman bring in their catch,” “a hand on the plough that tills the fields,” is silenced. This land also of the playwright Yulisu Amadu Maddy, of the urbane critic Eldred Jones, of skilled silver and goldsmiths, of the sublime sculptures of the Nimba peoples and timeless lyrics of their griots . . . has been turned into a featureless landscape of rubble, of a traumatized populace and roaming canines among unburied cadavers. How does a sculptor begin to carve with only stumps for arms? How does a village griot ply his trade with only the root of the tongue still lodged at the gateway of memory? The rest has been cut out—often the hand that wields the knife is the hand of the future, the ubiquitous child-soldier — and the air is bereft even of the solace of its lament.<sup>6</sup>

Soyinka, who spoke to an attentive audience at the University of Cape Town in the autumn of 1999, insisted that what he just described was not part of a primordial emanation. Rather, he asserted, it was, for the most, the result of wrong choices made in contingent circumstances.<sup>7</sup> For South Africa, the address had a dual purpose: to tell the truth about the preponderant tendencies of postcolonial Africa, and to warn South Africans of the dreadful costs of missed opportunities and failure of nerve. At the dawn of the new century, then, this new republic stands alone both as the *symbol* of the continent’s burden of superexploitation and the *promise* of a magnificent future.

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South Africa is a large country, blessed with an enchanting, variable topography and enormous resources. With an area of 1,219,200 square kilometers, it is the seventh largest nation in Africa—twice the size of Texas. The physical layout includes a 3,000 kilometer long coastline (with the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Indian on the other); interior highlands and the Drakensburg Mountains, which rise to 3,300 meters; a vast veld; and the charming deserts of the Northwest region. South Africa has a population estimated at around 44 million and

annual growth of 1.32 percent. Nearly 34 percent of all South Africans are under the age of fifteen. Life expectancy is about 57 years for women and 53 years for men. About 87 percent of the population are people of color (black/coloured and Asian) and 13 percent are white. There are eleven official languages, though English is the main medium of official transactions and education. Around 68 percent of South Africans are Christian, mostly Protestant, of which 8 million are members of African independent churches, and 4 million belong to the Dutch Reformed churches. Another 28 percent espouse traditional/native forms of worship, while the Asian population is equally divided between Hindu and Muslim, the latter growing fast. Urbanization is at 60 percent, with the cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria, and Port Elizabeth as the main nodes.

The South African economy is by far the largest and most sophisticated in the whole continent. Gross domestic product, in purchasing power parity terms, is about U.S. \$290 billion, with GDP per capita (PPP measure) of around U.S. \$6,800. Industrial production, including mining, accounts for about 35 percent, and trade and finance for 31 percent. Other significant sectors are agriculture, fishing, wine production, and tourism. The workforce numbers around 15 million, with unemployment as high as 35 percent.

To be sure, the people of South Africa enter this new millennium with numerous assets that range from rich cultural and racial diversity to impressive economic and educational infrastructure, peaceful supersession of the racist order by an enviable democratic polity buttressed by a vigorous constitution, a welcoming regional and international environment, and, perhaps most immediately critical, founding leaders of impeccable conscience. All of the above notwithstanding, there are also multiple drawbacks. None is more onerous than the dragging cost of a long history of European colonial/settler assault, consummated with the adoption of apartheid as official policy of the state between the late 1940s and 1991. Despite the electoral victory of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994 and 1999, the imprints left by this experience are omnipresent in contemporary South Africa. From land ownership and the commanding heights of the industrial and financial sectors, employment, income and housing, education and health, to the names of streets and public statues and memorials, the calculatingly rigged accumulation of white privilege is visible everywhere. To address this combination of dead and living everyday reminders of institutional and symbolic humiliation of the majority is

one of the most testing challenges that faces the new South Africa; another is how to build a future in which the great human and natural potentialities of the country will be realized.<sup>8</sup> Appropriately, it is for South Africans to decide. However, the rest of the continent, particularly the southern Africa region, and the world at large have a stake.

For Africa, South Africa's success breaks new ground in the epochal but stalled struggle against under/mal-development; that is, the crushing weight of poverty, ignorance, disease, violence, incompetence, and the feral politics associated with the syndrome. Any indices of accomplishment must include civic vigor, greater human capital and technological ingenuity, high and balanced economic growth with equity, and a deepening of democratic legitimization that accents deconcentration of power, rule of law, protection of human rights and individual liberty, and the positive value of the country's complex diversity. Such a South Africa could become a locomotive for the region, dynamizing the additional latent talents of over 110 million in a highly endowed zone.<sup>9</sup> Incidentally, even in the teeth of a continuing force field of an invasive neo-liberal globalization, such achievements could be a boon for further capacitation to exert choices—perhaps the most salient outcome of a successful development, and the only way to turn the dream of an “African renaissance” into a tangible possibility.

Insofar as the rest of the world is concerned, a new found dignity of a long despised continent will surely help to reset intersubjectivity between the dominant North and the South, deflating, in the process, both old racist arrogance and new forms of paternalism. If and when this comes to pass, we will have found novel ways of thinking about and then living a multi/non-racial human civilization.

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We start the volume with the keynote by **Crawford Young**. An expansive and knowledgeable piece from one of the most astute Africanists, the essay treats the evolution of political life in postcolonial Africa and the rise and fall of the state. With the cost of disorder already so large in the continent, Young underscores the *necessity*, continentwide, of a competent state to address these critical issues of the new century: democracy, cultural pluralism, and political stability.

Our South Africa-specific contributions begin with **Bernard Magubane**, a seasoned scholar of South Africa, whose long academic career combines hard-edged thinking and intelligent activism. His is

an excavation of the ways in which apartheid was dreamt and made, and the consequences of that odious project. Magubane stresses non-racial democracy as the pivot for both the transformation of institutions and the inception of vibrant multicultural citizenship.

The third essay is by **Pieter le Roux**. A progressive scholar and one of South Africa's most thoughtful economists, he offers an enlightening exploration of the different and contending paradigms on South Africa's socioeconomic past and future. This is impressive intelligence that combines analytical agility with a genuine hope that South Africa will stay on course toward a realization of its potential.

Public health, particularly among children, is the concern of **Peter Barron** and **Marian Jacobs**. Their piece concentrates on the most threatening of all the health issues—HIV/AIDS. They conclude with a discussion on child well-being in a country with a huge number of young people under the age of 18 years.

The last of the commissioned essays is by **Farieda Khan**. Given the pervasiveness of apartheid, not even the environment escaped its ramifications. Khan exposes how the socioeconomic policies of apartheid undermined any chance of a nationwide environmental movement. For her, a major task for the new dispensation is how to at once address the immediate livelihood needs of the majority and protect the natural beauty and diversity of South Africa.

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The contributions of Macalester faculty, based on a topic of interest to each participant, open with **Frank Adler's** reflections. He explores the fascinating complexity of what it means to be a South African Jew in the epoch of constitutional racism. Adler takes us into the new debates on the role and contribution of Jews in the resistance to apartheid.

**Kendrick Brown** concentrates on a consequential issue—that is, the ways in which apartheid policy of divide and rule used skin tone to separate “mixed blood” from “black” Africans. He discerns the social basis for the strategy and meditates on the effects of this legacy on postapartheid interactions between the two identities.

**Janet Carlson** highlights the presence of South African Chinese—a tiny fraction of the population that have been residing there for many generations and arrivals in more recent decades, as well. The numbers notwithstanding, Carlson underscores the *manyness* of the country.

**Beth Cleary** tells us about the relationship between “theatre making” and “space” in a South Africa undergoing enormous changes. She recalls in some detail an important conversation with the Director of the Kwazulu-Natal Play House in Durban.

**Duchess Harris’s** main curiosity is about the degree of positive impact of the new changes on the lives of “black women.” Of particular interest for her is the legal framework that has come into effect with the Interim Constitution.

**David Itzkowitz** presents a historical sketch of South African Jews in the evolution of modern South Africa, and then moves on to relay the community’s divided perspective on its place (i.e., to stay or not to stay) in the new time.

**David Lanegran** brings forth the general implications of the geography of apartheid. In this context, he describes the spatial and political anatomy of one of South Africa’s most attractive cities, George. He concludes with a brief comparative reflection on Pretoria (the capital) and Cape Town.

**Truman Schwartz** notes the ecological profusion and beauty of the country. His field journeys took him to Kimberly, the hub of the discovery of diamonds and subsequent wealth, to encounter the giant shadow of Cecil Rhodes. A second topic of interest is science education in South Africa.

**Vasant Sukhatme’s** attention is on economic development, and the twin challenges of growth and equity. His is an optimistic eye on both fronts of economic transition and the construction of a pluralistic democratic order.

**Peter Rachleff** registers the pivotal contributions of the South African labor movement to the long resistance and final victory. However, he points out how the initial postapartheid prominence of the Trade Unions, as major partners with the governing ANC, has been undermined by the state’s adoption of neo-liberal economic strategies. Rachleff examines a variety of ongoing attempts to “re-energize the labor movement.”

**Roberto Ifill** ruminates over what has thus far become of the promised transformation, particularly in the critical sphere of education. In that task, he focuses on the University of Cape Town—the oldest and most distinguished educational institution.

**Leola Johnson**, recalling C.L.R. James, reports on crime, public conversations, and popular culture, including *Mapantsula*, a much-discussed South African film.

David Chioni Moore offers a three-pronged discussion: this moment after transition; a comparative recall, for the present, of the 1950 African America; and the immediate appearances of a looming "globality."

James von Geldern enters the contested terrain of South African history. His observations are based on two significant and bloody confrontations in the Kwazulu-Natal region: the Battle of Blood River in 1838 and the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. Of particular note are his thoughts on the complex relationship between ethnicity of all types and the sedimentation of historical narrative.

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## Notes

1. Basil Davidson, *The African Genius* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969) and *The Lost Cities of Africa* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1959); and Roland Oliver, *The African Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

2. See, for instance, *From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire*, and *From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery,"* part of the series under the general title, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, edited by Ladislav Bugner (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

3. Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1968); Samir Amin, *Imperialism and Underdevelopment* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976); and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Devil on the Cross* (London: Heinemann, 1982).

4. Patrice Lumumba, *Congo: My Country* (New York: Praeger, 1962); Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Nelson, 1957); Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (New York: New York University Press, 1957); and Ndanabangi Sithole, *African Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

5. Always prescient, René Dumont captured this situation in his *False Start in Africa*, which came out toward the end of the 1960s. Equally instructive was his *Stranglehold on Africa*, translated by Vivienne Menkos (London: André Deutsch, 1983). Also, Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1968).

6. Wole Soyinka, quoted in *The Mail and Guardian* (September 3, 1999); Basil Davidson, *The Blackman's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (New York: Time Books, 1992); and UNDP, *Human Development Report, 1999 and 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 2000). One perceptive South African artist, who wrote a few years before, put the condition this way:

... to the world at large Africa has always been a dark hinterland of the psyche, perforce unexplored, a sunken continent of the unknown or the subconscious upon which to project all the delicious phantasies of magic and death. An updated variation of this fabulation is, to the outside world, the depiction of present-day Africa as a continent where dying is a mass past time, best left alone to



its starvation, desertification, tribal wars, AIDS, and the implosion of its social structure.

Breyten Breytenbach, *The Memories of Birds in Time of Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1996), 99.

7. On this point, see Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1996).

8. Anthony A. Ginsberg, *South Africa's Future: The Struggle Ahead* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Adrian Guelke, *South Africa in Transition: the Misunderstood Miracle* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Marina Ottaway, *South Africa: The Struggle for a New Order* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995); and Yvonne Muthien and Gregory Houston, "Transforming South African State and Society: the Challenge of Constructing a Developmental State," in Abdi Ismail Samatar and Ahmed I. Samatar, eds., *The State in Africa: Reilluminations* (London: Longman, forthcoming).

9. South Africa Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, *Science and Technology in the SADC Region for the 21st Century* (Pretoria, South Africa, 1999).