

### **Review: Devan Pillay, Gilbert M. Khadiagala, Prishani Naidoo and Roger Southall: New South African review 4: a fragile democracy - twenty years on**

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Devan Pillay, Gilbert M. Khadiagala, Prishani Naidoo and Roger Southall (eds) (2014), *New South African Review 4: A Fragile Democracy – Twenty Years On*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, ISBN 9781868147632, 380 pp.

This edition is the fourth in the annual assessment of South Africa assembled by the Department of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand and published by the same university's press. It sees the addition to the editorial team of the noted international relations scholar Gilbert Khadiagala. The genealogy of the review can be traced back to the annual *State of the Nation* series published by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa's statutory research agency. This series was edited by John Daniel, former professor of political science at the University of Durban-Westville, and Roger Southall, professor of sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand. The four volumes that appeared between 2003 and 2007 were of exceptional quality and provided a much-needed appraisal of post-Apartheid South Africa's journey. Of course, this series followed on from the *South African Review*, which was published between 1983 and 1994. That review was noted for its hard-hitting critical stance on events in what was then Apartheid South Africa and was one of the key sites for critical scholars to publish work. The *New South African Review* is consciously within this tradition.

The current editors may have had a harder time putting this volume together. During the *South African Review* days, there was little doubt as to who was on The Dark Side (and I don't mean the *swart gevaar*!). In post-liberation South Africa, criticism of the African National Congress is often unwelcome and can lead to all sorts of weird and wonderful accusations ranging from racism to treachery. It is a testimony to the editors' commitment to critical scholarship that a volume such as the *New South African Review* is eagerly awaited by scholars interested in the country and refuses to bow down to such anti-intellectual disciplinary moves by party hacks and their followers. This is particularly important given that the fourth edition coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the 1994 non-racial elections.

Each of the four editors introduces one of the four sections of the book ("Ecology, Economy and Labour", "Power, Politics and Participation", "Public Policy and Social Practice" and "South Africa at Large"). There are twenty chapters in total, all authored by South African-based academics and activists, with a good selection from the best universities in the country. Many of the issues addressed are key to the current state of the country. The introduction, by Devan Pillay and Roger Southall,

sets the scene and asks many pointed questions, not least of which is whether Zimbabwe represents South Africa's future. Currently, the answer to that question is not at all clear, although indications of ruling-party arrogance, corruption and untouchability are exposed on an almost weekly basis. Here, one is tempted to quote the exchange between a BBC reporter and Robert Mugabe. The reporter asked, "Mr. Mugabe, you have been president for 32 years; when are you going to say goodbye to the people of Zimbabwe?" Mugabe replied, "Why, where are they going?" One gets the impression of similar disdain from the ruling party for the people of South Africa: the useful (once every five years) voting fodder for a parasitic and corrupt political class that has taken over the ANC, root and branch.

The volume's contents provide an excellent overview of current developments in the country. I found the first and fourth sections of particular interest. The first is essentially a collection of essays examining various aspects of the political economy of contemporary South Africa, whilst the fourth section looks at South Africa's place in the world and the country's international relations. The idea of Pretoria "muddling through" as it claims some sort of continental leadership – as Khadiagala puts it – is spot-on and has both bemused and frustrated observers who had hoped for a more coherent foreign policy post-Apartheid. Mopeli Moshoeshe's chapter on the (often dire) leadership qualities in the region is excellent and certainly squarely presents us with the challenges facing the sub-continent and South Africa, which, if not in a "bad neighbourhood", could certainly do with some of its neighbours cleaning up their act. However, Justin van der Merwe's chapter on regional parastatals shows us that profits and capital accumulation by South Africa-based corporations continues and the issue of governance is perhaps not as important for the capitalist class as it may be for other less profit-oriented actors.

Overall, with the twentieth anniversary in mind, the latest volume of the *New South African Review* reminds us that the struggle continues, only now against a broader array of social forces, sadly including many who formerly cast themselves as the country's liberators.

- Ian Taylor