

# TRANS FORM ATION

critical  
perspectives  
on  
Southern  
Africa

*Special  
Issue*

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*Research and Social Transformation*



## **EDITORS:**

Bill Freund, Gerhard Maré, Mike Morris (University of Natal), Vishnu Padayachee (University of Durban-Westville)

## **ASSOCIATE EDITORS:**

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## **EDITORIAL AND CONTRIBUTIONS ADDRESS:**

**TRANSFORMATION,**  
c/o Economic History Department  
University of Natal  
King George V Ave  
4001 Durban  
South Africa

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## EDITORIAL PREFACE

This special issue of *TRANSFORMATION* is composed of the edited papers and discussion from our recent symposium (January 1992) on the *Role of Research in Transforming South Africa*.

Our rationale in holding this symposium was that research in the social sciences in South Africa, both inside and outside the universities, has had a major effect on both the maintenance of apartheid and attempts to dismantle it.

On the one hand, a variety of research activities and projects have had an important effect in empowering organisations to struggle against the apartheid system. The influence (and receptiveness of the different mass organisations) has not however been uniform. Some have resisted analyses from outside their own ranks which differed from their own policies, programs and agendas. Others have gained advantage enormously from independent research initiatives - whether these were abstract analyses, policy programs or service projects. However, in general, the relationship between research bodies and activities, and the mass organisations has not been an easy one. It has thrown up a number of contradictions - conflicts over academic freedom and accountability/relevance; between organisational control and independent analytic inquiry; between the immediate needs of organisations and the demands for more long-term research. As the emphasis shifts from the focus on the politics of opposition to that dominated by transformation, reconstruction, and policy research, there is a grave need to reflect on these issues.

On the other hand, research has played an important role in maintaining apartheid, particularly in so far as it has been institutionalised in certain state sponsored research centres. In the last decade research institutions also played a critical role in facilitating the process of reform. Agencies such as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Human Sciences Research Council, the Development Bank and the Urban and Rural Foundations have not been analysed in terms of the relationship between research and social change. The association between such research activities and state interventions has been fairly complicated. It is of major importance to unravel the complexity of this relationship as we enter into a new political phase, particularly where those brought up in the culture of opposition may find themselves in positions of power.

The articles comprising this special issue are not identical to the papers presented at the symposium. Most were much longer and some included a number of points that were not necessarily germane to the issue at hand. We have radically edited them to ensure that the main thrust of the various inputs is reflected in the published proceedings. Some of the inputs included here are based solely on the transcript of

the presentations, and as such are shorter or have a more colloquial ring to them. We have also edited the discussion and included some of the points we considered pertinent in a few pages on each session in this special issue in order to bring out the flavour of the debate. As always, some discussion, no matter how interesting, was not germane to the topic under examination and hence was also not reflected in our published discussion notes.

The symposium was a pathbreaking event in post-1990 South Africa as the first real attempt by participants to discuss the future of research in the country. Papers reflected a range of interests: universities and establishment institutions; the interests of political and labour organisations; committed service work projects with a research component. Much of the discussion became focussed on institutions and their future. There was a tension between thinking largely in terms of annexing "space" for progressive opportunities and hoping to transform or abolish those institutions themselves. Even the most radical alternatives were tempered by the enormity of the practical tasks of reconstruction ahead and the need to get workable answers to huge but mundane questions. This in turn put in question what was meant by transformation, which differed from one speaker to another. The notion of a paradigmatic shift from research for opposition to research for transformation evoked discomfort for many as to the relation of research to authority. Suspicions of a future bureaucracy and concern for the continued future of the critical dimension of research came clearly to the fore. Perhaps there is a tendency for people to use the same terms to mean different things. If the question of what is transformation was left unclear, so indeed was what we mean by research.

In the final analysis the symposium only opened discussion on this important topic. Hopefully the range of views presented here will be a further stimulus in encouraging and sharpening debate. The issues at hand must be the most important ones in terms of the relationship of intellectuals to a society in transition.

In conclusion, we would like to thank all those who made the symposium possible. In particular we would single out Marc van Ameringen and the IDRC for the financial assistance, Linda Price for administratively coordinating the symposium, our fellow editors Vishnu Padayachee and Gerry Maré without whom the symposium would not have been possible, and lastly, but not least, all the participants who attended for making the discussion such a vital and lively part of the symposium.

*Bill Freund*  
*Mike Morris*  
*(Special Issue Editors)*