

Review

John Daniel, Prishani Naidoo, Devan Pillay and Roger Southall (eds) (2010) *New South African Review 1: development or decline?* Johannesburg: Wits University Press

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Many readers of these pages will remember that John Daniel, former Professor of Political Science at the University of Durban-Westville and now with the School for International Training in Durban, and Roger Southall, now Professor of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, were the founders and main editors of the *State of the Nation* series published by the HSRC Press, four volumes of which appeared between 2003 and 2007. After Daniel and Southall left the HSRC, a slimmer *State of the Nation*, for 2008, was published (the 2007 volume had run to well over 500 pages), edited by Peter Kagwanja and Kwandiwe Kondlo. The *State of the Nation* volumes were intended to be an annual assessment of the performance of the governing party and the state and society more generally, and they considered the topics in the President's State of the Nation address to Parliament as well as topics he did not mention.

This first volume of *New South African Review* does not continue the *State of the Nation* volumes. Instead it explicitly looks back to 'the tradition of critical scholarship established so firmly by the seven volumes of the *South African Review* which appeared in the 1980s and 1990s' (Preface). Older readers will remember that series as containing hard-hitting essays, as well as some brilliant surveys. Daniel and Southall are now joined as editors for the first of this new series by two lecturers in the Department of Sociology

at Wits University, Devan Pillay and Prishani Naidoo. The four editors usefully each introduce one of the four sections of the book, each of which has between five and seven chapters. The twenty-eight contributors are almost all academics or attached to an academic institution, and the individual original essays are buttressed by appropriate references, so all the essays are scholarly and some manage to be lively as well. This will help give the volume lasting life as a source that future researchers will want to turn to.

From the four sections in which the volume is divided – economy, ecology and sustainability; state, politics and policy; education, health and land; and crime and sex – one can see how wide-ranging the chapters in this volume are. Many of the issues addressed in its pages are clearly key ones, such as the implications of the international financial crisis for the South African economy, the threats posed to the country’s fragile ecology by the economic strategies adopted in recent years; the faction-ridden state of the African National Congress under President Jacob Zuma; the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic; why the ruling party thinks we need a national health service; the possibilities and problems of land reform; crime and conditions in the prisons; and aspects of the sexual behaviour of young people. Such a range means that most will find something of interest in these pages, but few are likely to read the entire volume.

The volume’s sub-title, which includes the year of publication, may mislead, in that much of its content, though it may have been written in early 2010, does not focus directly on that year, or even the preceding one. Instead, most of the chapters are more wide-ranging than that over time, and some do not even focus on the past decade. One that does focus on 2010 is the Introduction, written by Roger Southall, which is headed ‘South Africa 2010’, with the sub-title ‘From short-term success to long-term decline?’, which suggests speculation about a future we cannot now know, and is not the same as, though it links to, the book’s overall theme of ‘Development or Decline?’

That overall theme is captured by the splendid photograph on the cover of the volume, which is of Cape Town’s soccer stadium under construction emerging through the mists, as seen from the slopes of Signal Hill. Clearly the stadium was from the start a very ambiguous form of ‘development’, as acknowledged by Scarlett Cornelissen in her chapter on the economic impact of the 2010 World Cup. The photograph suggests a half-finished project. Recent revelations that the stadium will cost the city well over twenty million rand a year to maintain have led some to call for it to be demolished.

In his well-written Introduction Southall does not shy away from presenting his alternative to the present economic trajectory: he calls on business to commit itself more seriously to empowerment and job creation, for large capital to join with others to address the appalling levels of social inequality and for a move away from entitlement and excess. But he recognises, at the end of the chapter, that even if such changes happen, these may be swept away by ‘a developing crisis of survival whose parameters are almost unimaginable to the present generation’ (19).

The volume, then, contains much that is provocative, but it is also somewhat incoherent, being a cross between a kind of survey and a set of specialised essays; and nor is it comprehensive, which is not surprising, given that it is already a sizeable tome. Some of the chapters are on topics that are so specialised that, to this reviewer, they are hardly suitable for a volume of this kind, which promised to focus on ‘key issues and problems’ that faced South Africa as it entered the second decade of the twenty-first century. Seeraj Mohamed and Neva Magketla provide very useful chapters on aspects of the economy, the global crisis and unemployment, and Mark Swilling and Mike Muller write well on issues relating to the environment and sustainability, but Anthony Butler is the only one, besides Southall in the Introduction, directly to discuss the ruling party. Other political issues are played down or ignored, such as the role of the tripartite alliance and the opposition. There is an important chapter on migration by Loren Laundau and others, which illustrates the very different impact of internal and external migrant flows. There is not enough in the volume, in my view, on the regional context, however, and was this really the place for the chapter by the journalist Jeremy Gordin on conditions under which awaiting-trial detainees in prison are held, or for the chapter on South African female peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo? Should there not have been more on what are arguably the two most important issues facing the country, jobs and poverty? But no-one will be entirely happy with the contents of such a volume, and it would be wrong to end on a negative note: anyone seriously interested in understanding present-day South Africa will find much of interest in this volume.