

Review

Bill Freund and Harald Witt (eds) (2010)
Development Dilemmas in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press

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What is really meant by ‘development’ in twenty-first-century post-apartheid? This is the central organising question for the collection of 15 essays assembled in *Development Dilemmas in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. The contributors to this edited volume cover a wide range of topics, including questions of environmental justice, the energy crisis, land use conflict, urban sustainability, agricultural reform, and gender inequalities. The common starting point for these essays is the recognition that while much is written about ‘development’, there is little agreement over what it means and what is required to bring it about. One aim of this volume is to showcase the kinds of scholarly endeavours that have been sponsored under the broad umbrella of what was once the Department of Economic History, University of Natal (Durban) and has become the Economic History and Development Studies Programme, School of Politics, University of KwaZulu-Natal. The two editors of this collection – Bill Freund and Harald Witt – are both associated with this programme.

The book is divided into four separate sections: Part 1: The minerals-energy complex and its woes: a problematic growth path; Part 2: The state as agent of change: conflicts over implementation; Part 3: Struggles over resources and land; and Part 4: Household interventions: gender issues. While these areas of inquiry certainly do not exhaust the range of possible sites of investigation, they do provide a framework for evaluating the challenges and dilemmas of development in the ‘new South Africa’.

Bill Freund begins his Introduction with the observation that while development has remained an object of study, what it means, or even might be, has become blurred. Certainly, debates about development reached their apex in the 1970s, where advocates for state-led, Keynesian-style (or even socialist) approaches were juxtaposed against those who endorsed market-led, entrepreneurially-dominated ones. At present, the term 'development' has lost much of its critical edge, becoming a kind of empty signifier where almost anything goes.

The contributors to this volume try in their own particular ways to resuscitate the idea of 'development' as a useful approach through which to judge progress in South Africa after apartheid. In particular, the contributors frame their discussion of various sites of observation through the lens of 'development dilemmas'. 'Dilemmas' itself is a slippery term, referring sometimes to challenges, to obstacles, to conundrums, or to contradictions.

What is commonly shared in academic and policy circles is that the rise and (rapid) fall of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in the early years of the new democracy marked a turning point, at least ideologically, in the way the ANC-in-government chose to approach socio-economic transformation. It is impossible to say whether the jettisoning of the RDP was a wise move or not. But suffice it to say, as Stephen Gelb points out in his essay, the adoption of GEAR (Growth, Employment, and Redistribution) failed to attract foreign investment and for quite some time was accompanied by low economic growth rates, disinvestment, and job losses.

The three essays that make up Part 1 offer a sustained critique of the growth path that policy-makers have pursued in the post-1994 period. The so-called Minerals-Energy Complex reflects South Africa's competitive advantage in the world economy, but the undue reliance upon such a narrow basis for wealth creation has come at a price, particularly with respect to environmental degradation. David Hallows, Patrick Bond and Molefi Mafereka ka Ndlovo, and David Fig address South Africa's longstanding path of dependency on minerals extraction industries and their wasteful consumption of water and electricity. What lies behind these essays is the dilemma: can South Africa adopt a more environmentally-friendly, less water- and electricity-dependent growth trajectory?

The essays in Part 2 challenge a deeply entrenched assumption in liberal ideology, namely, the presumption that policy-makers and planners engage in rational discussion to come up with 'best practices'. Despite their best

intentions, policy-makers and planners sometimes make mistakes, and these mistakes can be addressed in further rational discussion. In his essay, Edgar Pieterse suggests that vested private interests often trump the best-laid plans of progressive policy-makers. The essays by Mary Galvin and Buntu Siswisa look at the difficulties that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the new anti-neo-liberal social movements have faced when seeking redress of the grievances of the black urban poor.

The essays collected in Part 3 look specifically at the land question. As a general rule, the contributors to this section reinforce the commonly-held perception that the rural poor have suffered greatly in the aftermath of the transition to parliamentary democracy. Not only has the reliance upon market forces to sort out relations between property owners and farm workers done little to undo rigid class and racial inequalities in the countryside, but claims for land restitution and redistribution have produced few positive outcomes. While these essays do not break significantly from what we already know from existing scholarship on rural areas, they constitute solidly-researched 'case studies'.

The three essays that comprise Part 4 of the book focus on the vast gap between a genuine state-sponsored commitment to human rights in post-apartheid South Africa and actual implementation under concrete circumstances. The establishment of a long list of constitutional rights does not mean that these are easily translated into practice on the ground. Gender equality has stalled in the face of enduring patriarchal ideologies, lack of resources, and tepid commitment at the local level.

What can we learn from this collection of essays? While 'development' as an analytic concept has lost much of its previous power, it remains a stubborn idea – an ideal, really – for scholars, policy makers and political activists who remain committed to the notion of human progress. Despite the fact that a new kind of normalcy has settled into everyday life in South Africa after the transition to parliamentary democracy, the far-reaching, transformative goals of the anti-apartheid movement continue to act as a kind of benchmark from which to measure success or failure, loss or gain. Collectively, the authors suggest that there is no easy solution to attain what might be called development. It is a never-ending process that seems to rest much of the time on the promise of a radiant future. The essays in this book show that the language of 'development continues to inspire those not satisfied with the present and wanting to build a better, more equitable future.