

# TRANS FORM ATION

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTHERN AFRICA

50



THIS ISSUE: Labour Market

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# **TRANSFORMATION**

critical perspectives on Southern Africa

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We ask contributors to submit two (2) typed copies, following the format (on such issues as references and notes) of articles in this issue of *TRANSFORMATION*. Whilst the journal will cater for work at any level of abstraction, or detail, a number of criteria will guide the editors in selection of material for inclusion. Articles should aim for academic rigour but also clarify the political implications of the issues discussed. We are concerned not to compete with other South African journals that may cover related ground but in different ways – this will govern our selection principles. All articles will be assessed anonymously by the referees. Contributions should preferably not exceed the following lengths:

**Analytical articles:** 8 000 words

**Debates, comment and review articles:** 3 000 words

Also see inside back cover 'Notes for Contributors'.

The views expressed in *TRANSFORMATION* do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.

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Critical perspectives on Southern Africa

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## Editorial

### *Transformation* turns fifty

*Transformation* was born in 1986 at the height of the popular anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Its earliest days coincided with scenes of riot, violence and repression on an unprecedented scale. Depressing and overwhelming as was this backdrop much of the time, it was equally one of mass meetings, strikes, spontaneous organisation and feverish political activity. It was a period not merely of optimism amongst a people given to hope, but even of bouts of euphoria. The old regime clearly was dying and it was uncertain what would succeed it; the possibilities seemed infinite and infinitely liberating at times. But this was kept in check by the harsh reality of systematic repression – the regime was fighting back in the name of reform. Repression, by contrast with the Ice Age of the 1960s, could not succeed even in the short term without further institutional change and experimentation that left holes open for change and for new forms of resistance. The old regime was dying, but it was not dead yet by a long way and the impact of its final breath would be felt for some time; the popular movement was giving birth to a new society but it was not going to be born according to the beat of its own clarion call.

In some ways, this period of balance between repression and popular resistance suited the rise of *Transformation*. Its founders felt the need to provide a forum for analysis amidst the euphoria of idealistic spontaneity, reflection amidst the frenzy of popular action, independence amidst the compelling pressure to bow to the discipline of various political factions. The new journal was never euphoric or partisan. In mood, it always suggested the need to look about for complexities, for contradictions, for the possibilities of setback. Its roots lay in a clearly perceived need for an analytic forum and political voice that would marry the European academic traditions of left theoretical analysis with the organised and spontaneous mass movements operating on the ground. The very choice of name reflected the need critically to engage with transforming South African society as well as the political modalities of how this was to be brought about. The name embodied a space to reflect on both issues of structure and agency. So, for example, a dominant political theme in the early years was

an emphasis on *engagement* and involvement as opposed to outright boycott and irrevocable hostility to the surrounding realities. This could be understood in a reformist vein of course but it was largely couched in the language of structural change, of winning the battle for organisational hegemony with revolutionary intentions.

*Transformation* was a journal of the independent Left meant to take in the political economy and organisational life of a changing South Africa. It was not hostile to the resurgent African National Congress/South African Communist Party movement but it was also clearly not its political vehicle either. Fiercely independent, it provided a forum for views that were critical of strategies and tactics that might undermine a transition, perhaps a very gradual transition, to a socialist and non-racial settlement. Alongside the emphasis on institutional and economic issues lay, from the beginning, an insistence on the salience of class issues. Suspicion about the hijacking of liberation politics by a new ethnic or racial bourgeoisie lay behind this salience and united most early contributors. Yet the tone was not one of cynicism but of critical engagement and of optimism about the potential for structural change that would minimise the role of such a bourgeoisie.

The birth of *Transformation* was also a time of rapid growth in the alternative media, as has been documented and intelligently discussed in Nicholas Evans and Monica Seeber's recent book, *The Politics of Publishing in South Africa*. While journals aimed at a wider public such as *Work in Progress (WIP)* and the *South African Labour Bulletin* struggled to grasp historical and theoretical analyses, small academic journals such as Cape Town's *Social Dynamics* seemed to thrive on a diet of politicisation. *Transformation* had a particular political outlook, but its non-partisan approach allowed it to be respected and receive contributions both from those identified as mainstream liberals and from significant actors in the world of the ANC and the UDF. It tried to bridge the gap between political engagement and intellectual rigour while taking on material from a host of disciplines and concerning the entire southern African region. In so doing, *Transformation* took its cue from qualities perceived in other intellectual sources – that of the analytic independence of *New Left Review* coupled with the *Review of African Political Economy's* attempt to be immediately politically relevant. The original editors were delighted with the schematic chameleon created for our cover by Cape Town artist Cliff Bestall. The chameleon's robust little body marked by such appetite and capacity for change – especially colour change – was confined to a skeletal frame only

in its normally less visible rear end. This spoke for irony, for contradiction and for the need on the part of South Africans to have a good look at the product they were consuming.

*Transformation's* early production and distribution routines can only be called artisanal and were not without embarrassing flaws, derived as it were from the voluntary work of politically committed and engaged university academics who had not yet had to experience the philistine pressures of the management-run, profit-driven university of today. This collective enthusiasm, which made the journal available in all of South Africa's alternative bookshops and at many of the workshops and conferences which marked the struggle years, brought circulation up quickly to many hundreds.

The original team of founder editors were Bill Freund, Gerry Maré and Mike Morris, all of whom had recently taken jobs at the University of Natal in Durban. Bill was an historian by training, but his interests had tended to shift towards political economy. As a foreigner, he was always interested in situating the South African scene in a broader picture. He had a wide range of friends and contacts throughout the world and notably in a number of African countries where he had lived and taught. Despite idealistic opposition from his friends and colleagues outside the country he felt it important to come to Natal in order to participate in, and contribute to, the critical environment of the South African universities of the time. His wide range of intellectual interests ensured a broad coverage of the journal's scope. Gerry had a broad interest in development, particularly with reference to rural areas, having done a masters' course at the pioneer development studies programme at Wits. He had been a founder of *WIP* and thus brought much needed publishing experience and confidence in what was possible on a new journal. He was a sharp critic of any sort of ethnic nationalism deriving from his own experiences as an Afrikaner and student of Afrikaans literature. Mike, steeped in the French left structuralist Marxism of the 1970s, had been a founder of the new left analysis of South Africa's political economy which so heavily impacted on many academics of this decade. He came to the university and the journal after spending some years in the thick of the burgeoning independent trade union movement. This movement emphasised critical engagement in the act of constructing organisational strength and had thrived despite the suspicions of boycottist lobbies internationally. His background in development studies and philosophy, mixed with the sharp practicality learned in the union movement,

brought a unique combination of theory and pragmatism to editorial assessment. Vishnu Padayachee, an economic researcher at the University of Durban-Westville, joined this crew within a year (*Transformation* 5, 1987). He has long since shifted to the University of Natal but in fact the editors have ever since represented both institutions, now seemingly on the verge of merging under the aegis of the plans of the Minister of Education. Vishnu was engaged in researching the role of Indian workers in the struggle in order to reject the ethnic anti apartheid politics that dominated Durban at the time. Like the editors he joined, he was very interested in Marxism, labour issues, the implications for reform in South Africa, and in the creation of a genuine non-racial society. He brought a necessary broad knowledge of economics to the editorial board.

If we look through the early issues of *Transformation*, a number of themes come up already in the 1980s quite clearly:

- while contributors represented the whole country, there has always been a strong emphasis on Natal, on KwaZulu-Natal, and on the city of Durban. The peculiar feature of the province lay in the popular strength of Inkatha (later the Inkatha Freedom Party), the existence of the Natal Indian Congress and its ethnic-based anti-apartheid politics, and in the relative power of the trade unions vis-à-vis the UDF and by extension, the ANC. The questionable aspects of Inkatha politics came up frequently in articles. However, the non-dominance of Congress politics actually created a kind of free space for discussion of issues, which might have met vociferous condemnation in other centres;
- the journal has from time to time been successful in obtaining important interventions from significant intellectual voices from distant places such as Henry Bernstein, Gavin Williams, Raphie Kaplinsky, Dan O'Meara, Ronald Aronson, Linda Freeman, Ben Fine and John Saul. These would also include African voices such as those of Mahmood Mamdani, Thandika Mkandawire and Claude Ake;
- independent, but engaged voices such as those of Neville Alexander, Fallo Jordan, Blade Nzimande, Rob Davies, Alec Erwin and the late Siphso Maseko and Harold Wolpe have been featured. At the same time, we have sometimes run important documents or statements from more established ANC figures, particularly before 1990 when so much was censored;
- over the years, *Transformation* has been able to produce articles and reviews that consider virtually every country in the region including

Namibia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland. Zimbabwe has been examined in a number of issues over a long period of time;

- among disciplines, some have been represented better than others. Early issues pinpointed struggles and issues in education, an area of great importance to the editors and often neglected in such documents as the RDP. We have occasionally explored the doings of anthropologists, philosophers and psychologists. Historians of the calibre of Peter Delius and Colin Bundy have contributed to our pages. We have published from time to time in areas such as the media, social policy, human rights and, more consistently, labour organisation. Nonetheless it must be said that economics and political economy, not surprisingly given the bent of the editors, have consistently ranked high among subjects covered. We have always operated on the basis that interdisciplinary knowledge was of the greatest importance, however. Intellectuals need to understand what is happening in areas of interest other than their own;
- there has been a consistent long-term interest in issues concerning land and agriculture from the earliest issues to a focus issue (*Transformation* 44, 2000). An agriculture issue is being planned for 2003;
- another consistent interest has been in the conditions through which South African society could democratise, both formally and more profoundly with regard to a wide variety of issues. The form of debates about democracy has of course shifted markedly over the years;
- *Transformation* has made a contribution to the construction of South African feminism and ideas relevant to its development. The first overtly feminist contribution was by Jo [Metelerkamp] Beall, Shireen Hassim and Alison Todes and wryly called 'A bit on the side'. It featured in *Transformation* 5 in 1987. We produced a focus issue on gender in 1990, issue 15. In addition, *Transformation* tried to play a helpful role in the birth and early years of *Agenda*, South Africa's most significant feminist journal, which was also a Durban creation;
- we have tried from our first issue to support the culture of books in South Africa by reviewing significant new publications.

The history of *Transformation* has, however, been as complicated in a sense as the history of contemporary South Africa. A distinct new phase was reached, for instance, from 1990, when articles focused on the politics and economics of transition, while the politics of the struggle fell away. *Transformation* 12 in 1990 recorded some aspects of a groundbreaking

workshop in Harare attended by Mike, Bill and Vishnu in which COSATU and ANC intellectuals discussed the days to come. Issue 18/19 consisted of pieces produced at an important workshop held at the University of Natal in 1992 on the transition, covering a wide range of policy issues. Some participants at the conference have remained academics; most have not, and some have become prominent in the new government. These issues have an historic resonance now. The workshop was sponsored and created by *Transformation* and was partially subvented by the change-orientated Canadian IDRC.

In 1987, Alec Erwin, later to become Minister of Trade and Industry in the national government, was warning us (in issue 5) about elite pacting with regard to Natal politics: by 1994 this would ring a bit ironically. As early as 1994, we published an article in issue 25 by Vishnu co-authored with Asghar Adalzadeh telling us that the Reconstruction and Development blueprint was underpinned in fact by a strong conservative economic analysis, a critique which has certainly resonated since amongst left critics of the ANC government. Vishnu was part of the MERG team which attempted to forge a more left path for the new South Africa. At the same time, we published much material connected to the initiatives of the Industrial Strategy Project with which Mike was associated.

The very nature of the journal has meant that adjustment to the changes of a democratic South Africa have contained real dilemmas and difficulties. Subscriptions fell away as many individuals lost their taste and time and interest for critical debate. Debates within our pages certainly became less frequent. At the same time, it became hard to drum up quality articles in some phases, when it seemed as though everyone of intelligence had left the universities and NGOs to sign up as consultants. It proved in a way fortunate that *Transformation* had never depended on foreign funding. It was never a capital-intensive operation. Moreover it benefited from having met the formal criteria to achieve SAPSE accreditation in 1989, which gave authors who continued to be based at the universities, some standing or even funds from their home institutions providing an incentive to contribute. We survived – by contrast with other excellent journals such as *WIP* and *New Ground*.

In 1995 the editorial group was joined by John Daniel, whose years of exile had included time with Britain's renowned Zed Press. We finally had a political scientist rather than a political economist to write about politics! John was based at the University of Durban-Westville and he also became

involved in the riveting Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Mike and Vishnu both felt in 1998 that they needed to think about new directions and concentrate their activities elsewhere. With their disappearance Gerry, John and Bill brought into the editorial board a new team of colleagues belonging to a new generation - economist Imraan Valodia, literary critic Lindy Stiebel, political analyst Adam Habib (from 1998) and sociologist of youth and policing Monique Marks. Our cover was re-designed by Immie Mostert, with a somewhat more intact chameleon, still however looking for titbits, and perched on an uncomfortable thorn twig.

Diversity has worked! We are now picking up material at a much faster clip, attracting the attention of foreign scholars of the calibre of Bjørn Beckman and Antoine Bouillon in our recent issue 48, and finding more and better young local talent. The current brief calls on us to acknowledge the importance and impact of culture and we have been able to include relevant material for some time in our issues (although we have been concerned with cultural issues from an early point: Ari Sitas wrote about black worker poetry in our second issue). It has become possible to publish a slew of focus issues on subjects such as land, crime, race and agriculture. The pioneer focus issue on the TRC was edited by John and came out in 2000 as *Transformation* 42.

The South African Left today is looking at a whole variety of issues. It sets itself up against 'globalisation'; it looks with some sympathy at growing struggles around availability of infrastructure and basic economic rights; it expresses anxiety at the questionable attitude of the ANC to whites and other racial minorities while becoming the chosen steed of a black business elite; it interests itself over a broad range of human rights issues; it is concerned with the cultural and historical contextualisation of issues being investigated; and it confronts the social disasters of HIV/AIDS and poverty. We are trying to pick up on all these strands, and recognise others, and continue to make, we hope, an important contribution, to the development of intellectual activity and critical thought in a democratised but very imperfect South Africa. This issue is a landmark; we have been at it for 50 issues and we have continued to make that contribution. Let us hope that we can continue to renew ourselves and attract readers and contributors of the quality that have made this project so worthwhile thus far. Viva *Transformation* viva!

# Introduction

Haroon Borat and Imraan Valodia

For obvious historical reasons, labour market and poverty issues have attracted an intense interest from the South African research community and, to a limited extent, a small but growing group of international researchers. Spurred on primarily, yet not exclusively, by the availability of new national survey data sets covering these themes, the research work on labour markets and poverty has flourished in the post-*apartheid* South Africa. Despite this increased quantum of research activity however, no regular national forum was available for researchers and policy makers to present and discuss the findings of their research. It was the intention of the *Labour Markets and Poverty in South Africa* national conference in Johannesburg, in mid-November 2001, to try and fill this gap. The conference was hosted by the Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU), based at the University of Cape Town – in conjunction with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). Targeted at researchers, the conference had the explicit aim of trying to inform domestic policy-making in the labour market and poverty arenas.

A total of 35 papers were presented over two days.<sup>1</sup> The papers, three of which are published in this issue of *Transformation*, were presented in a multitude of different thematic areas including:

- The economics of education and the labour market
- Trade, industrial growth and labour market outcomes
- Employment and unemployment dynamics in South Africa
- Discrimination in the South African labour market
- Earnings and Indebtedness in the domestic economy
- Labour market regulatory reform and
- Inequality, segmentation and the labour market

As testimony to the 2001 conference, the DPRU and FES reconvened the conference in October 2002.

## Note

1. All the papers presented, together with the conference programme for the 2001 and 2002 conferences, are downloadable from the DPRU web site ([www.commerce.uct.ac.za/dpru](http://www.commerce.uct.ac.za/dpru)).