

*Africa Review* 3 deserves close reading.

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## **Endnotes**

1. Statistics SA. 2014. Gross domestic product, Fourth quarter 2013. Statistical releases P0441, pp 5, 9.
2. ANC. 2012. The second transition?: Building a national democratic society and the balance of forces in 2012, A discussion document towards the National Policy Conference, p 4 (Available at: <http://www.anc.org.za/docs/discus/2012/transition.pdf>).

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**Habib, Adam, *South Africa's Suspended Revolution: Hopes and Prospects*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press 2013, 305 pp.**

With South Africa celebrating its 20th anniversary of negotiated transition to a democratic dispensation, this book could not have been published at a more poignant time. Offering a robust and often compelling analysis in explaining the push and pull factors that have shaped the country's political, economic, social and cultural landscape, Adam Habib locates his thesis within an historical-structural analytical framework. Not only does this assist the reader in developing a critical understanding of the domestic imperatives that underlined South Africa's transition, but it also provides a sobering view of how changes in global post-Cold War structural realities informed the dynamics of our own transition. This is to be found in the balance of power "as a variable informing the choices and decisions of actors in South Africa's transition" (p 27), as Habib puts it. Using this as the basis for the overall argument of the book, he highlights that the configuration of the balance of forces had manifested itself in two distinct but related ways: on the one hand how the parameters of the negotiated settlement were informed (bearing in mind their inadvertent but inevitable impact on decision-making and policy processes in the Mandela Administration and the early years of the Mbeki Administration); and on the other hand how the evolution of these processes informed the crucial outcomes of the African National Congress' (ANC) elective conference in Polokwane in

2007. At the latter event, the balance of forces in the ruling party shifted from Thabo Mbeki towards Jacob Zuma, and resulted in enabling "certain choices and [constraining] other possibilities during Zuma's presidential tenure" (p 27).

The book is divided into eight chapters. The introduction (chapter one) sets the contextual argument of the book and provides a succinct overview of the intention and ultimate objective of the publication. From this introductory chapter it is clear that while Habib recognises the limitations of the negotiated transition and the accompanying challenges that underline the contemporary consolidation of our democracy, the book is really about finding a way out of the impasse of "South Africa's current suspended historical moment" (p 33) by advocating an alternative political agenda.

Chapter two focuses on the capacity of the state to deliver on its obligations, including basic social services, and the deficits associated with the state's accountability in this regard. Habib's main focus is the country's electoral system of proportional representation, the viability of an effective opposition and the dynamic that the former and the latter have had in creating an efficient set of accountability structures in government. He also explores the boundaries and functions of the three tiers of government (national, provincial, and local) and their interactions with each other; the character and skills set of the public service; and the impact of affirmative action, cadre and factional deployment, and corruption within the public service.

Chapter three explores the evolution of and debates associated with economic policy-making in the post-*apartheid* state. The chapter essentially assesses "the political variables, including the particular configurations of power that informed [the state's] policy choices as well as their social impact throughout the democratic transition" (p 30). Habib notes that defining democratic South Africa's future economic policy leanings was a critical feature of the negotiated settlement, especially in addressing the three fundamental socio-economic challenges of growth, poverty alleviation and inequality. The chapter takes the reader on an analytical journey through three distinct phases in post-*apartheid*'s economic policy reflections. As distinguished by Habib, these are the adoption of the Growth Employment and Redistribution Policy from 1996 to 2001; the rolling out of an expansive social support grant system and the advancement of a black middle and upper class under the Mbeki Administration; and the post-2007 Polokwane period under

the Zuma Administration.

Chapters four and five are complementary in that they examine the dynamics of engagements among business, labour, the state and civil society. In chapter four the focus is on the viability of the social compact between the state, the corporate sector and organised labour, especially in respect of the disproportionate levels of power and capabilities that exist among these competing constituencies. In reflecting on state-civil society relations, Habib locates his argument in chapter five within the prism of diverse engagements and the pluralistic nature of South Africa's civic organisations and movements, their role in dismantling *apartheid* and, subsequently, in shaping the transition and the democratic process.

Chapter six examines the contours of South Africa's foreign policy. A key argument is that the nature of post-*apartheid* South Africa's foreign policy is rooted in the character and views of the country's political elites, whom Habib identifies as second-generation nationalists. These elites see the country's foreign policy as advancing an agenda towards deracialisation and reform of the imbalanced power structures of the global order. In striving for a restructured equitable global system, they recognise the need for being part of multilateral institutions in order to compensate for, as Habib refers to it, South Africa's relative 'powerlessness'. Perhaps one of the more profound observations is the nexus between a human rights approach and Pretoria's global responsibilities to advance the protection of civilians and promote a reformed international system.

Chapters seven and eight are designed to provide the reader with concluding remarks. In chapter seven — targeted at activists and political leaders — Habib reflects on 'what is to be done', and suggests what the alternative political agenda should entail. He contends that the agenda should involve two important tasks: conditioning political elites to become more accountable and responsive to the concerns of citizens; and fulfilling the overall objectives of the Constitution when the provisions of different clauses come into conflict with each other (p 201). In chapter eight he focuses more on the discourse and scholarship of South Africa's democratic transition and directs his analysis towards academe and the intelligentsia. The chapter is aimed at extrapolating lessons from the South African experience for theories of democratic transition, social change and conflict resolution, while simultaneously critically reflecting on the intellectual divide between the different inter-

pretations of the transition and how this can be bridged.

Overall the publication is an important and stimulating contribution to the scholarship on South Africa's democratic transition. Notwithstanding its theoretical approach to the topic, it should be useful for a wide spectrum of readers who are interested in the evolution of South Africa's body politic, as it engages across the academic, activist, policy and broader civil society divides. Habib's solutions to the challenges afflicting South Africa today may be interpreted by some critics as simplistic, but he aptly demonstrates his astute knowledge of the topic through thoughtful and thought-provoking analysis. His book is definitely a significant analytical contribution to the body of literature on South Africa's two-decade long political journey since its first democratic steps in 1994.

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**Gibson, Nigel, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*. Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press 2011, 312 pp.**

Frantz Fanon, the Algerian theorist of revolution and social change, continues living through his profoundly luminous work that remains influential to the thinking and actions of many a people across the world even today.<sup>1)</sup> In *Fanonian Practices in South Africa* (2011), which comprises an introduction and five chapters, Nigel Gibson grapples with the important question of the relevance of Fanon's thought, 50 years after his death in 1961, to the South African situation especially from the time of Steve Biko to the time of the birth of the shack dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo (Abahlali) in Durban on 19 March 2005. Gibson acknowledges that the idea of *Fanonian Practices* is not limited to South Africa but relevant also for other African countries. Elsewhere, Fanon's ideas have been exported to Black theology of liberation by scholars such as James Cone in the United States of America (USA)<sup>2)</sup> and Paulo Freire in Latin America.<sup>3)</sup>

In chapter one, Gibson focuses on Biko's re-creation of *Fanonian Practises* in contemporary South Africa. As Gibson rightfully observes,