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SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY



In Search of the Developmental State

Economics and Labour in the Global South: Special Issue

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- ▶ China's era of "reform and opening up": Lessons for South Africa
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Editorial

In search of a 'developmental state'

– By Martin Nicol

This Special Issue on Economics and Labour is divided into two sections. Contributions on current economic development are followed by three articles presented at a conference marking 50 years since the Durban Strikes of 1973.

That said, all of the authors reflect widely on history and on immediate challenges, both for South Africa and the continent at large.

Roland Ngam cites examples of colonial era companies of the North who planned the exploitation of Africa to feed their own economic prosperity. He reveals the hollowness and dishonesty of present Northern calls for Africa to reduce its emissions of harmful greenhouse gases.

The uniting theme of the articles by Alan Hirsch, John Matisonn and Douglas Scott is the role of the state in economic development. This covers the specific issue of South Africa's troubled migration policy and debates on intervention frameworks for industry and agriculture. Comparisons are drawn with other African countries (with more fortunate growth paths) and set against the extraordinary economic progress of China.

In preparing for this issue, the Institute for African Alternatives drew from its bookshelves a volume edited by our founder Ben Turok, who assembled papers under the title "Wealth Doesn't Trickle Down – The Case For a Developmental State in South Africa". The content came from a seminar hosted by a senior government minister at the time, Sydney Mufamadi, and was attended by top leaders and officials of the state, State Owned Enterprises and academic institutions. This was in October 2007, a very different time – before the global economic crisis, Zuma, state capture and Covid. Although the seminar "produced a consensus of what needs to be done to move decisively to a developmental state that serves the people," it found "little evidence of a comprehensive development strategy directing the state and all its institutions."

Ben Turok's optimistic hope was for a national mindset change and a "grand agreement" to pursue a common agenda. "While we have managed what we have inherited reasonably well," he wrote in the conclusion, "our society needs a transformational approach".

Monique Marks' reflection on "the Durban moment" is used to draw us into considering the roles of youth and labour in social and political movements – and the intense challenges we face today in urban centres without jobs. Mbuso Nkosi and Sithembiso Bhengu look at worker organising both historically and into the present.

As usual, we feature a highly selective, but wide ranging, diary of African events in the last quarter – and a review of a book of stories by the remarkable Angolan author, José Eduardo Agualusa, translated from Portuguese by Daniel Hahn.

New Agenda 92 marked an editorial team effort to use the Open Journal Systems management software. After determined struggle, and with publication deadlines approaching, we had to take the final stages of the production process offline. But we have learned valuable lessons. Three months was not long enough to work through the too generous time limits we set for peer review. We will try again for issue 93. **NA92**



Where is the 'justice' in the 'just transition'?

Source: Midia NINJA



Degrowth in an African periphery

Recentring decoloniality around circular ontologies

– By Roland Ngam

Dr Roland Ngam is programme manager for climate justice and socioecological transformation at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Southern Africa, where he coordinates the climate blog *ClimateJusticeCentral*. Before that, he was a postdoctoral research fellow in the Emancipatory Futures Studies Programme at the University of the Witwatersrand.

In this article ROLAND NGAM focuses on Africa and the disarticulated colonial model on which it is built and argues that in order to build a fairer system that works for the majority, the world needs to quickly shift to an ecocentric degrowth ontology that leverages Africa's rich cultural heritage for the wellbeing of all people.



*There is a train that comes from Namibia and Malawi.
There is a train that comes from Zambia and Zimbabwe.
There is a train that comes from Angola and Mozambique,
From Lesotho, from Botswana, from Swaziland,
From all the hinterland of Southern and Central Africa.
This train carries young and old, African men
Who are conscripted to come and work on contract,
In the golden mineral mines of Johannesburg
And its surrounding metropolis, sixteen hours or more a day
For almost no pay.
Deep, deep, deep down in the belly of the earth
When they are digging and drilling that shiny mighty evasive stone,
Or when they dish that mishmash mush food
into their iron plates with the iron shank.
Or when they sit in their stinking, funky, filthy,
Flea-ridden barracks and hostels.
They think about the loved ones they may never see again
Because they might have already been forcibly removed
From where they last left them,
Or wantonly murdered in the dead of night
By roving, marauding gangs of no particular origin,
We are told. They think about their lands, their herds
That were taken away from them
With the gun, and the bomb, and the teargas, the Gatling and the cannon.
And when they hear that Choo-Choo train
They always curse, curse the coal train,
The coal train that brought them to Johannesburg.*

Hugh Masekela – Stimela - 1973



Introduction

There is no doubt about it: the origins of the world's numerous economic inequality challenges lie in the current iteration of the colonial capitalist system that shifted the frontier of capital accumulation from Europe to the Global South. Colonialism, the neoliberal economic order and the austerity policies that came with the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the late eighties have left many African people and communities without infrastructure, education or jobs. Through no fault of theirs, Africans are barely eking out a living on the ruins of what used to be beautiful, idyllic communities where their ancestors lived – mostly well – on their lands and on their own terms, without the kind of mental stress they are constantly under today. Worse still, the environment on which they still depend for their food and sustenance seems to be irretrievably damaged and they will be worst affected by the unfairness of the immanent green colonialism on which the just energy transition project is built.

Many Africans are governed by political systems that they barely understand and, needless to say, this is a ticking time bomb. Sooner or later, the world is going to witness an African Spring, much bigger and probably more violent than the Arab Spring.

On a broader level, the modern economy is built on a paradigm of exploitation, constant growth, and unfair wealth distribution. Although major advances in medicine, technology and governance have brought significant improvements to the lives of people everywhere over the last 100 years, unfair economic models have also dealt devastating blows to the financial and physical health of many – in fact, billions – of people as well as the planet's finite resources during the same period.

Over time, a shrinking group of people and interests has been appropriating most of the surpluses that millions of workers produce every day. The unfairness in wealth distribution has a face, and it has consequences. The closer you get to the core of global politics and business, the better off you find that people are. The farther away you move from the centre to the outer rings of this circle, the more difficult and dreary existence is for billions of people. The world's growing inequality and climate challenges require urgent litigation of the neoliberal economic order and if we do a proper job of this, then it can only lead to one conclusion: the hegemonic capitalism model has failed dismally.

The invention of Africa

Africa, under its current political iteration within the Westphalian state system, is the product of plantation capitalism. You can go through a list of countries and it is clear exactly why they were created: Nigeria (palm oil, groundnut oil), Senegal (cotton, groundnut oil), Cameroon (cocoa, coffee, bananas, rubber), Democratic Republic of

... the world
is going to
witness an
African Spring,
much bigger
and probably
more violent
than the Arab
Spring.



Congo (DRC) (rubber, cocoa, timber), Kenya (coffee, tea), South Africa (gold, diamonds), Liberia (rubber), etc.

Plantation capitalism worked in an insidious way to integrate African territories into the global system, albeit with no rights to dictate commodity choices, terms of trade or even what they could get for their labour. It proletarianised Africans and almost eliminated the notion of a peasantry. Depeasantisation was enabled and accelerated by taxation and forced labour regimes that required Africans to either contribute money or labour to empire-building activities.

Although the global centre laid claim to colonies and presented them as their property, the wealth from colonies did not necessarily accrue to all citizens of the Global North equally. Rather, slavery and then colonialism was underpinned by trading companies with a large investor base. Surpluses were extracted through an elaborate network of companies owned by banks, royals, wealthy families and shareholders. Here are just a few examples of the concessions that operated in Africa:

- Nigeria – the Royal Niger Company;
- South Africa – The Dutch East India Company, the British South Africa Company;
- Ubangi-Shari (now Congo Brazzaville and Central African Republic) – *Compagnie des Sultanats du Haut-Oubangui, Société commerciale, industrielle et agricole du Haut-Ogooué, la Société du Haut-Ogooué, Compagnie Minière de l'Ogooué; Compagnie Française du Haut & Bas-Congo*
- French West Africa (Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) – *Compagnie française de l'Afrique occidentale* (CFAO);
- DRC – King Leopold, *Compagnie Française du Bas Congo*, Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company (ABIR), *Société Anversoise*, Katanga Trust, Kasai Trust; and
- Liberia – Goodrich, Firestone.

Once they were constituted, colonial projects became the single most important economic units in the polities. They became the focus of all labour, transportation, administration and socioeconomic life of the colony. It is therefore not surprising that the vast majority of Africa's major cities today developed around the colonial nucleus in which they were constituted.

South Africa is an exemplar of the colonial appropriation systems. At the height of the colonial experience, hundreds of thousands of able-bodied young men were shipped into the country to work in the mines. They came from the entire Southern African region. The nature of their work was such that only men were brought in to do it. They were housed in hostels and spent months at a time deep in the bowels of cities like Johannesburg and Kimberley. When their months-long work was done, they were not even allowed to stay in the cities that their sweat helped build. The riches and good life that accrued from mining were for the enjoyment of whites only.

Colonial-era trade yielded investors profits beyond their wildest imagination and this spurred an unprecedented scramble for a piece of the pie. When the scramble turned into a stampede, King Leopold II of Belgium encouraged German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to convene a conference where spheres of influence would be carved out and shared equally among the rivals. Fighting was bad for business. The money generated through colonialism built the highly-industrialised countries. It built their banks, the skyscrapers, the highways and neat lawns, the gated communities and the cultural wealth of core empire.





While colonialism made the Global North rich, it left ugly legacies in the Global South. In many areas, large holes still stand where mines used to be. The mineral wealth from these gaping holes now rests on the English King's crown and in other homes across the globe – everywhere except in the homes of the young men who broke their backs for hours every day deep in the bowels of the African underbelly.

Food systems changed forever, and as Africa urbanised, it consumed mostly the type of food that it did not produce. It also changed the socioeconomic realities within communities. Before the colonial experience, the responsibility for producing food was shared equally between men and women. However, with the arrival of concessions, men were progressively drawn into cash crop production and growing food crops became a woman's responsibility. Men quickly understood that if they married more wives and produced more children, they could produce more commodities and pocket the proceeds. Polygyny thus became even more common across Africa (Jacoby, 1995).

When colonialism ended, the commodities that had defined the various colonies continued to be their biggest revenue generator. Agricultural commodities often represented up to 80% of some countries' GDPs. Nkwame Nkhrumah notes in *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) that the general modus operandi of neo-colonialism is to use foreign capital as a tool for the exploitation rather than the development of less developed parts of the world.

Many African countries attempted to diversify their economies through import substitution industrialisation policies. However, they soon ran into structural and liquidity challenges. In many countries, the public sector bill was ballooning and expensive projects (dams, sugar mills, aluminium plants, etc.) were not yielding enough revenue and loans were needed to stabilise countries. The reaction of development finance institutions was to put African countries under some of the toughest austerity measures that the world has ever seen.

Energy colonialism within the just transition

Thirty percent of the world's mineral resources are found in Africa. The continent has a critical role to play in the just energy transition as well as the global ambition to cap warming at 1.5° relative to preindustrial levels. Although – judging by current global trends – it is clear that the world is not going to cut CO₂ emissions by 40% before 2030, there is nevertheless major movement in key industries (auto, energy) to produce cleaner technologies.

The US' Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has turbocharged transportation electrification in that country. Thanks to the IRA's \$7,500 subsidy, sales of electric vehicles topped one million in 2023. There is also a big jump in the demand for clean energy. Between 2020 and 2023, South African households installed over 4,000MW of rooftop photovoltaic (PV) systems.

The big jump in the demand for clean technologies worldwide means that we require large volumes of energy transition minerals (rare earths, graphite, copper, lithium, cobalt, manganese, etc.) as well as water and the land that Africa has in abundance. The World Bank has predicted in its *Minerals for Climate Action* report (2020) that mining of transition minerals has to increase by at least 500% (3 billion tonnes of mineral sand metals) to meet the world's demand for clean energy technologies.

This reality is already causing a new scramble for Africa. China has a head start on the major Global North economies because it signed a raft of contracts with countries from Madagascar to Niger at the height of the commodity boom of the 2000s. In 2007, it



signed a nine billion dollar transition minerals for infrastructure contract dubbed “*the Deal of the Century*” with the DRC which gave it control over some of that country’s largest copper and cobalt deposits in Kolwezi worth over \$100 billion.

... unfair economic models have also dealt devastating blows to the financial and physical health of billions of people as well as the planet’s finite resources.

The rest of the world is catching up though. Electric car manufacturer Tesla has signed a contract with mining giant Glencore to acquire minerals from DRC. The Russian Wagner Group has been in operation in the Central African Republic in a minerals-for-security arrangement for almost 10 years.

The interest in transition minerals is big but there is much bigger interest in fossil fuels like oil and gas following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Since 2021, over \$500 billion dollars have been invested in various fossil fuel projects across Africa. In Mozambique, Total’s gas project worth \$20 billion, i.e. bigger than the host country’s entire GDP, has caused civil unrest and terrorist activity to escalate in Cabo Delgado. The violence has already claimed over 4,000 lives and displaced half the population of Cabo Delgado province.

In Senegal, DRC and Uganda, oil and gas projects have caused green grabbing, i.e. the taking over of prime forests

and wetlands for fossil fuel projects and presenting them as good for the just energy transition. The Uganda-Tanzania heated oil pipeline will run through the Murchison Falls, the Bugoma forest and the Lake Victoria Basin. In the DRC, the government has approved exploration concessions in the middle of the Congo Basin Rainforest, the world’s most effective natural carbon capture resource. In Senegal, the Sangomar offshore oil project has been set up in the middle of a Unesco-recognised world heritage reserve. These projects claim that they will help reduce dependency on biomass or coal, and say they are therefore good for the just energy transition.

Energy colonialism projects replicate asymmetric colonial relationships between core and periphery states. While the core states are decarbonising their economies, cleaning up their air, waterways and streets, they are doing so to the detriment of countries in the Global South that supply the mineral resources and sometimes labour required for these transitions. Once again, the large corporations that produce commodities in Africa for use in the Global North are externalising their pollution and exploitative work conditions to Africa.

No land is too sacred to be dug open and its biodiversity ripped apart if it has deposits of the resources they are looking for. Protests by indigenous communities do not matter either. Multinational corporations work with the comprador elite to clear any land they want of its inhabitants. Wherever these projects are rolled out, from Mozambique to Cameroon, Uganda and Senegal, environmental requirements have been



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hastily modified to ensure their approval. From Cameroon to Sierra Leone, French-based company, Bolloré, with its interest in international logistics to Africa, has worked with African governments to push entire villages off their lands to make way for oil palm plantations. The palm oil they produce is used to make ethanol for major brands like Shell and Total.

Calculations show that the highly industrialised nations have emitted at least 1.6 trillion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent since the beginning of the industrial revolution. To cap global warming at say 2°, we have to stay within a budget of one trillion tonnes of CO₂e



emissions.¹ Unfortunately, once again, that entire budget is being burned up by the rich nations. Research for the World Inequality Report shows that the average individual in North America used up about 20 tonnes of CO₂e in 2019 compared to only 1.6 tonnes for sub-Saharan Africans (Chancel, 2021:2). The reckless behaviour of highly industrialised countries creates a problem that shall be shared equally among the earth's inhabitants, in some cases placing unjustified stress on poor countries like Mali, Niger, Malawi, Madagascar that they cannot handle.

Although Africa bears almost no responsibility for global greenhouse gas emissions, it is already witnessing an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. Madagascar suffered the world's first famine caused by anthropogenic climate change. The event pushed over two million people into acute vulnerability and required significant efforts by the international community and the World Food Programme to be brought under control. The Horn of Africa and Southern Africa have also suffered major famine episodes in the late 2010s that affected over one million people. Countries like Uganda and Kenya are already witnessing significant challenges as their coffee trees come under more pressure from heat episodes and parasites like coffee borer disease.

The Sahel region which has witnessed many episodes of drought over the last half a century has experienced a significant increase in drought and in crop failures since 2010. These events are partly to blame for the instability in the region. Youth in countries like Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Niger have been migrating from villages and small towns to large cities as attacks from armed insurgents and the effects of climate change especially begin to bite. Favourable weather saw over 120,000 youth from the Sahel arrive on the Italian island of Lampedusa in September 2023. If efforts are not made to bolster Sahel towns and cities, this trend will continue to grow.

The case for degrowth

In 1972, a group of experts assessed development trends and compared them to the stock of resources that the earth had left. Their assessment led them to the following conclusion:

By now it should be clear that all of these trades-offs arise from one simple fact – the earth is finite. The closer any human activity comes to the limit of the earth's ability to support that activity, the more apparent and unresolvable the trade-offs become. (Meadows *et al.*, 1972: 86)

They argued that some of the earth's resource challenges could be resolved through techno-fixes, i.e. improvements in technology and its ability to develop more efficient processes. However, there were other problems that the world could not deal with quickly. For example, when toxic chemicals and pollutants were dumped into water bodies, the earth required a very long time to metabolise them. This called for a more cautious approach to utilisation of resources. The stark reminder by the Meadows report that we live in a world of finite resources led Andre Amar (Duverger, 2009) to say that "*La décroissance, au moins sous certaines formes, apparaît aujourd'hui comme nécessaire*" (today, degrowth appears to be a necessity, at least in some areas).

The Meadows report was not a stark enough warning to people like Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher who championed neoliberal policies that have created a system of footloose capital and greatly dispersed value chains. Once again, there was great pushback against these policies. This is symbolised in José Bové's resistance against the McDonaldisation of France, the Zapatista resistance against the North American Free Trade Area in the 1990s and, more recently, the *Gilets Jaunes* uprising in France.



For a long time, people were unhappy with the hegemonic system, but there was not very strong mobilisation against the system. Now, people are fed up. Too many people live from pay check to pay check. It is in this context that degrowth has become an urgent necessity.

Degrowth is a paradigm, a philosophy if you will, that calls for an end to the kind of annual growth that is typically represented through Gross Domestic Product (GDP) numbers and for the prioritisation of a fairer and more balanced type of improvement that works for all human beings as well as the planet. Writing in *Leur Ecologie et la Notre*, André Gorz (2010) says that the world needs a socio-economic and cultural revolution that is going to abolish the pillars of capitalism under its current form and introduce a new relationship between individuals and 1) their community; 2) environment; and 3) nature.

That is what degrowth is. It is neither an economic theory nor an already clearly codified set of laws. For his part, Latouche (2010) defines degrowth as: *“En effet, il peut s’entendre en un sens littéral, celui d’une inversion de la courbe de croissance du produit intérieur brut (PIB), cet indice statistique fétiche censé mesurer la richesse ; ou en un sens symbolique : décroître, c’est sortir de l’idéologie de la croissance, c’est-à-dire du productivisme”* (“in fact, it can be defined from a literal point of view, that is inverting the GDP growth curve, or from a symbolic standpoint, that is getting out of the productivism mindset”).

Although degrowth proponents have posited that it is not just an economic theory but rather a complete questioning of the utility of the *‘homo economicus’* ontology, some experts still insist on looking at it completely and only as economic theory. This leads them to offer preconceived rebuttals that deliberately leave out what degrowthers seek to achieve. Of course, abandoning all growth and progress would immediately be labelled heretical by many people, especially in the Global South. Which growth do you want them to abandon? This is what one often hears in Africa.

In fact, some academics in the Global South believe that they should not concern themselves with concepts like degrowth (Rodriguez-Labajos *et al.*, 2019). They believe that Global North experts pontificating to people who are still poor is patronising at best, or even an insult, considering that they bear no responsibility for causing global warming or rising inequalities. However, this position ignores a number of key facts.

To not participate in the degrowth debate is to cede correction of mistakes of the past to the same parties that created the problem and are even now still kicking the can down the road. The global economy is so integrated now that one simply cannot sit in their corner and say: “you deal with the mess that you created. I will just sit here and do my own thing”. The UK government has announced a decision to postpone a ban on sales of new fossil-fuel powered cars from 2030 to 2035. Across Western Europe conservative parties are pushing the narrative that the climate agenda is not a priority right now. Those decisions have a big impact on Africa that is already dealing with the consequences of climate change.

While
colonialism
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As Latouche (2010) and Foster (2023) have pointed out, degrowth cannot be rolled out in the same way in all parts of the world. The Global South certainly cannot approach the degrowth debate from the same position as the countries of the Global North. They cannot stand on the same principles and demand the same or similar changes. Africa has a population of two billion people, 60% of whom still live in poverty. Although the continent is urbanising rapidly, it is only growing at about 1.1% per year, and services in many urban areas are either in a piteous state or non-existent. The entire African continent produces less than 400 gigawatts of electricity and over 600 million people have no access to electricity at all.

The Global North will focus on certain things (e.g. demilitarisation, decarbonising the transport sector, phasing out coal, offering farmers a living wage, class action lawsuits against rogue corporations, etc.) and the Global South will have to do different things (decolonising how we build, educate ourselves, travel, etc.; reconnecting with circular ontologies; abandoning austerity measures; ending reliance on food imports, etc.).

The deep levels of deregulation engineered by the Post Washington Consensus have created value chains that bring together dozens of countries to manufacture a single item. It sometimes takes up to more than 20 countries to produce one product. This is certainly the case for mobile phones where the rare earths may come from the DRC and China, the chip from Taiwan, the design from the US, the assembly from China and so on. South Africa for example is a major manufacturing site for Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Volkswagen, Ford and other car brands. It is also a major supplier of fruit to supermarkets all over the world. This value chain model often offshores the dirtier and labour-intensive processes to the Global South.

While the shareholders of Tesla and Apple get to pocket large profits year after year, countries like the DRC inherit contaminated waterways, endemic poverty, disembowelled landscapes and artisanal mines with thousands of workers who can cause social unrest or even switch to militias at any moment. Bringing large corporations to account will require everybody working together.

The citizens of the Netherlands need to know how Shell behaves in Nigeria. The citizens of the US need to know how the cheap meat on their supermarket shelves is produced in the Amazon. Those who call for electric cars need to know how transition minerals are mined in the DRC.

Degrowth and then what?

From a Global South perspective, it is very clear: the savings from degrowth must go towards building a better world, and in large part this means repairing some of the damage that the Global North has done to Africa. We must understand what has caused the emaciated children with flies all over their bodies whose images NGOs use to appeal for donations in many Global North media: it is precisely the genocidal activities of empire and their corporations that led to the arrested or maldevelopment in these countries. Many parts of Africa are poor because their wealth is being transported to the Global North every day, and it has to stop.

Savings do not have to flow to Africa in the form of cash. For every dollar saved by reforming the financial sector or rogue behaviour from large corporations, we can provide universal basic infrastructure in Africa. Different mechanisms can be put in place for country-to-country as well as city-to-city relationships that provide roads, internet, schools, hospitals and mass transit systems in Africa. It is very important



Refugees risk a perilous journey

Source: NDLA

to provide a lot of direct support to communities rather than relying on African governments to do that work.

Many Global North countries are well aware that many African leaders were not put there by their citizens. Elections in Africa have become a process of manufacturing credibility before the international community. The West knows very well that every time aid is given to Africa, there is a massive spike in money transfers from Africa to Europe or America.

We have to ask ourselves what would happen if degrowth policies are not rolled out to repair some of the damage that colonialism and bad corporate behaviour has done to Africa. For example, we have seen an increase in Mediterranean crossings to Europe by migrants from Africa in the last decade. A lot of that is due to dishonest relationships between European Union (EU) countries and corporations working in tandem with illegitimate African leaders. Climate change is obviously a problem, but what little resources many communities have has a way of vanishing into foreign bank accounts. If EU corporations do not stop stealing uranium from Niger, gold from Burkina Faso and so on, the so-called illegal migrations will get worse.

Another example: Africa has a lot of fossil fuel deposits – South Africa has enough coal to last 200 years; Nigeria has enough oil and gas to last a century. The carbon credit that we have left has to be better managed to cap warming below 1.5-2°. That will only happen if we phase out fossil fuels. The expectation that African countries should just move away from these fuel sources to green ones without adequate support is unrealistic. African countries must be given the resources that they need to operationalise a just energy transition. That support should not happen in the form



of concessional loans. It cannot happen as loans. African nations deserve no-strings-attached grants and massive transfers of technology to end energy poverty on the continent. That is only fair. **NA92**

*This is an abridged version of a paper that was presented at the “Summer School of Political Ecology 2022-23” held in Ljubljana, Slovenia in 2023. The extended text may be consulted in “Overcoming the Inequalities of Green Transition, proceedings from the Summer School of Political Ecology 2022-23”, pp 77 to 104. Edited by Dr Andrej A. Lukšič, Sultana Jovanovska, Boštjan Remic. Ljubljana, 2024. Available at <https://www.politicalectology-ljubljana.si/2023p/>
View the presentation by Dr Ngam at <https://www.politicalectology-ljubljana.si/2023p/>*

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ENDNOTES

- 1 CO₂e or “carbon dioxide equivalent” is a measurement of the total greenhouse gases emitted, expressed in terms of the equivalent measurement of carbon dioxide.



Job Creation

Where is the *development* in SA's developmental state?

And where is the road to sustainable job creation?

– By John Matisonn

Journalist and author Matisonn began political reporting in 1974. He was foreign correspondent in Washington for the Rand Daily Mail and reported for National Public Radio in the US. He has been published in the New York Times, Financial Times, Washington Post, The Observer and many others. After four years as a broadcast regulator in the Mandela administration, he became the UN's Chairperson of the Electoral Media Commission in Afghanistan. He has published two books on South Africa's political transition process.

The ruling party defines South Africa as a 'developmental state', but with its rising job losses, growth that is lower than most of its African neighbours and rising inequality can that really apply? What's missing, asks JOHN MATISONN?



The term “developmental state” was first used by the US political scientist, Chalmers Johnson, in his seminal book, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (1982) to describe a state that leads the drive to industrialise, decrease inequality and protect its people from the negative consequences of foreign corporate exploitation. Since then, China has become the best example of a successful developmental state,¹ followed by Thailand, Taiwan, Malaysia and South Korea.

If South Africa could come close to matching the achievements of any of these states it would be well on the way to tackling its desperately serious unemployment crisis as well as the threats of poverty and inequality. Why has this not happened, given that it is ANC policy that South Africa, too, is a “developmental state”?

Instead, not only has unemployment risen steadily from the teens to 42.1% on the expanded definition, but South Africa’s Gini coefficient, the measure of inequality, is the worst in the world on record and has risen from 59.3 in 1994 to 63 by 2023. It fell to its lowest point by the end of the Mandela years, 57.8 in 2000, after which it rose to a peak of 64.8 in 2005. Since then it has stabilised at around 63.

On many indices, South Africa is doing worse than most of its neighbours and most of Africa in terms of unemployment and economic growth. While we can legitimately question the accuracy of data in other states, our comparative record cannot be characterised as adequate.

There are three main excuses given by both academics and politicians to explain why comparisons to Asian developmental states are inapplicable. Coming from both left and right, these critiques are:

- Japan and the other Asian states are homogenous – their populations are not as diverse as ours is in education levels, cultures or economic expertise and their development cannot be replicated in Africa.
- South Africa cannot follow the Asian route of cheap manufacturing of clothing, textiles and electronic goods because South Africa’s strong unions and their alliance with the ruling party has made its wages too high to compete with Asian workers who have fewer rights.
- Asian countries are more authoritarian and less democratic than ours and can impose their will in a way a democratic state can’t.

This article aims to show that these responses fail to examine the true nature and lessons of the developmental state and to delve deeply enough into the specifics of the South African economy to ascertain the missed opportunities best suited to grow and provide jobs in the current global environment. In fact, the tools of developmental states have been applied successfully in countries outside Asia, including Africa. More

On many indices, South Africa is doing worse than most of its neighbours and most of Africa in terms of unemployment and economic growth.



important, these responses misunderstand the nature of successful developmental states and what they can teach South Africa.

Since our comparative position is worse than other countries operating in the same global conditions, our exceptionally poor performance for 15 years cannot be explained by global trends in politics and trade, or the impact of the Covid lockdown. State Capture and electricity failure are two major causes. Yet it is likely that even without those two massive failures, job creation would remain tepid.

The greatest economic reformer in history, Deng Xiaoping, leader of the Chinese Communist Party throughout the period of China's rapid transformation that brought an astonishing 800 million people out of poverty, tried to pass on the lessons he learnt to his African counterparts. From what he said to them it is evident that he did not believe the lesson was to follow China's specific path starting with cheap manufacturing of clothing and electronics, which happened to be the path chosen by China based on then prevailing domestic and global conditions.

Deng never held office as the head of state or government, but was the *de facto* leader of the People's Republic of China from 1978 to the early 1990s. He formally retired in 1992 but was referred to in the Chinese press as the paramount leader and remained influential until his death in 1997.

Deng met with a number of African leaders to pass on what he had learnt and gave each the same advice about the lessons from China's rapid job-creating development. To Ghana's President Jerry Rawlings, he said: "We have found our own way ... Don't just copy China's model. You have to walk your own path. If there is any relevant Chinese experience for you, I'm afraid it's only one thing: 'seek truth from facts.'"

"You must formulate your own policies and plans according to the actual situation of your own country. During the process, you must learn the lessons in a highly timely fashion – to keep the good things and correct the wrong ones. This perhaps is the most relevant experience for you."

He made the same case to Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe: Seek truth from facts. Don't be stuck in dogma. The problem to be solved is creating jobs and lifting people out of poverty. The reform path must be driven by the economic realities on the ground, not ideology.

Deng spent a considerable amount of time with Mugabe recounting the lessons China learnt from the effects of rigid state control and the destabilisation brought about by the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. "We were punished for these mistakes," Deng told Mugabe (Zang, 2014; Matisonn, 2015).

He was making the case for two key things: political and security stability, and constant learning and error correction. Without stability, China's modernisation would have been impossible.

According to Deng's interpreter, Prof Zang Weiwei, Mugabe responded by scolding Deng for deviating from the policies of Mao Zedong. "We friends in the third world still hope China will uphold the socialist path," Mugabe said. Deng was irritated that his proven success and historic achievements were summarily dismissed.

It is clear from these anecdotes that Deng was not suggesting other states mimic the Chinese path, which started with large-scale production of clothing and textiles, moving into simple manufacturing and steadily up the value chain of more sophisticated goods.

In essence, what Deng appears to have focused on, and what was adopted successfully by others, was that the key to success lies in understanding the details of



your existing economic capabilities and potential, and matching them to the global trends most appropriate to be harnessed to your benefit: “Seek truth from facts.”

We now have examples in Africa that show it can work on our continent. Stefan Dercon, an Oxford development economist and former chief economist at the UK government aid agency, the Department for International Development (DFID), who has done extensive field research in Africa, has pointed to exceptional successes in African countries that are not rich in resources that disprove the argument that rapid job-creating growth cannot be achieved on our continent (Dercon, 2022).

He highlights three preconditions for driving economic development. They overlap strongly with Deng’s: as precise as possible a grasp of your own state’s specific capabilities, real time error correction and a stable polity.

“The challenge for Africans is therefore to use the Chinese model as a benchmark to develop their own model,” Zimbabwean political economist Heather Chingono notes, blaming lack of capacity and innovation as among the causes of African countries’ failure to grow sufficiently (Chingono, 2018).

Industrialisation, bringing the economy steadily up the manufacturing value chain, is key to the developmental state. Yet South Africa is far down a 40-year slide that former Trade and Industry (DTI) Minister Rob Davies described as “premature deindustrialisation” (Matisonn, 2019:183). On these grounds alone, South African government policy would not classify as that of a developmental state. Quite the contrary, South Africa is losing ground every year. This is despite the long-running Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP) of the DTI.² The IPAP has not ‘worked’ – but it is there as a developmental plan.

The same is true of mining. The volume of South Africa’s mining output has also been sliding downwards for 40 years. To a degree, the severity of the slide has been masked by high commodity prices. Mining companies continued to make profits, even though they produced less tonnes of minerals and employed fewer workers each year.

Dercon’s third precondition for rapid job-creating growth is a stable polity, by which he meant stable government and a level of corruption that is sufficiently contained not to constrain development. South Africa has remained relatively stable, but there are warning signs that corruption has not been contained and law and order are under growing threat from petty as well as organised crime.

Other African governments have applied developmental state principles successfully to produce rapid growth, for example in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Kenya. These countries offer lessons relevant to South Africa because they result from government decisions, not from unearned windfalls from oil or gold discoveries that may have little to do with government initiatives.

Eskom’s failure to meet the country’s demand for electricity as well as State Capture are the obvious culprits.



Coffee farming is Ethiopia's largest foreign exchange earner

From 2009 to 2019, an African country notched up the fastest growth *in the world*, beating China in the middle of China's big surge. That country was Ethiopia, a country that could not look less like China by any measure. Yet Ethiopia consciously set out to learn from east Asian success.

What is clear from both the Asian and African examples is that choosing the sectors to fast track is critical, and will vary from country to country depending on a combination of relative sectoral domestic strength and global trends best suited to create large-scale employment.

Ethiopia's record as the world's fastest growing economy ended only when a new civil war broke out in 2020. Ethiopia adopted the simple principle of analysing the state of its economy and identifying the biggest opportunities for growth given its resources and its levels of expertise, and the global trends it could capitalise on. This track record is so remarkable that South Africans should study it and the politicians who implemented it.

Dr Arkebe Oqubay, a former mayor of Addis Ababa who became Senior Minister and Special Adviser to his country's Prime Minister, has explained how Ethiopia applied the lessons of east Asia. He understood those lessons to be to selectively focus on specific



industrial sectors to shape structural change in line with a broader vision and strategy (Oqubay, 2017).

For Ethiopia, the starting point was obviously totally different from China's or South Africa's. Ethiopia had large agricultural potential and little industry. The government realised there were great gains to be made in improving and supporting agriculture. In 1994 the policy led with agricultural development. From that start support grew steadily into floriculture, which turned out to be a massive growth sector, adding value and jobs. Growth and profits from flowers helped facilitate government's infrastructure build and its other industrial policies.

The government's industrial strategy kicked in from 2003. A handful of key commitments, driven purposefully by government officials working with the private sector, were responsible for the country's runaway success. Besides steadily improving the volume and sophistication of agricultural production, its growing need to expand infrastructure led to the decision to replace cement imports with local production. Here again success was substantial.

Then came industrial parks and enhancing relevant technical knowledge. Exports in a few areas had other spinoffs, driving increasing technical sophistication, the discipline of keeping quality and prices at international standards, leading to productivity gains and increased foreign earnings that could pay for additional national strategies.

State-owned enterprises were managed differently from South Africa, leading to spectacular success with Ethiopian Airways, which has long surpassed South Africa's endlessly troubled SAA and taken over some of its routes.

The Ethiopian government adopted a policy of non-interference in the airline's affairs, and offered no bailout funding if it failed. Airline experts were free to run it as they pleased, but if they failed, the company would go under. It was a winning formula because managers were correctly incentivised. The government did support the airline when the expansion of floriculture into a major export – flown to Europe and elsewhere by plane – provided a springboard to expand its cargo capacity.

After Ethiopia, Rwanda is the next most successful African country in growth and rapid job creation. What can South Africa learn from the faster growing Rwandan economy?

Rwanda also carefully chose a handful of sectors based on a keen understanding of their potential and global trends, then pursued them with dedication. As in Ethiopia, Rwanda looked to what already existed as starting points for what it could build.

Rwanda already produced coffee and tea. Its National Coffee Strategy increased job-creating value add by increasing the share of high value-added coffee – beans that are “fully washed” – from less than 1% in 2002 to 54% by 2017.

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– Deng Xiaoping



Agriculture diversified into higher paying crops like avocados, and like Ethiopia, Rwanda greatly increased its production of flowers for export. In 2015 it launched its Made in Rwanda policy, and by 2018 it exported 20 million roses to Europe. Like Ethiopia, it saw cement as an obvious place to increase volumes and efficiency, and began light clothing manufacture.

Rwanda has built a track record of increasing the range and volume of its exports, and its tourism opportunities led to a growth in various travel sector services. It improved recovery rates on its mines. For 15 years up to 2018, it has averaged 20% growth in goods exported and 25% in services. Growth has rarely fallen below 7% since 2005 (Nimusima *et al.*, 2018).

One cannot mention Rwanda without referring to its dark side – both the authoritarianism of its President Paul Kagame, and questions about its economic data, since it was puffed up by looting from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), “vacuuming up Congo’s diamonds, gold, cobalt, columbo-tantalite (coltan), cassiterite, and iron,” according to journalist and author Michaela Wrong (2021:328). Non-mining products also crossed the border for export abroad “miraculously rebranded as Rwandan”. But even Wrong concluded that Rwanda’s officials involved in the looting were using most of it to advance Rwanda as well as financing the DRC war. Plunder is a source for Rwandan success.

Kenya’s example has particular relevance for South Africa. After a period of State Capture, in 2002 a reform process began which led to rapid economic improvement. Kenya adopted a developmental state approach, and in June 2008 it published its programme, Vision 2030, a roadmap to build a rapidly industrialising middle-income country by 2030. It met that goal in 2015 – 15 years early.

Its key areas were communications, including rail, road and internet, increasing electricity supply and agriculture. Its greatest successes have been in infrastructure including renewable electricity, agriculture and fintech. There is lively debate among Kenyan academics about its success, but also criticism that its building projects have been monopolised by large Chinese companies at the expense of local ones.

Kenya outperformed regional average growth for eight consecutive years, with GDP growth above 5%. Peter Kagwanja, an academic and CEO of the Africa Policy Institute (API), who was involved in the genesis of this development strategy underlines the multiple indicators of economic growth as follows:

Kenya’s economy has expanded from GDP of Sh 1.3 trillion in 2002 to Sh 7.8 trillion in 2017, with its GDP per capita expanding from Sh 27,000 to Sh 166,000. Its paved road network has expanded from 8,938 kilometres to 11,796. (...) The country’s electric power has grown from 1,142 MW to 2,264 MW, increasing its capacity to power industrialisation and enabling to connect 5.9 million households to the national electricity grid, up from 0.48 million in 2002.

Large-scale infrastructure projects completed include the high-speed train between Mombasa and Nairobi; the modernisation of the port of Mombasa, which has tripled its cargo handling capacity in ten years; a new deep-water port is under construction in Lamu; and the expansion of airports allows twice as many passengers as in 2002 (Maupeu, 2021:45).



Unemployment is rocketing in South Africa

Source: Flickr

Does South Africa have a developmental state?

What went wrong in South Africa? Eskom's failure to meet the country's demand for electricity as well as State Capture are the obvious culprits. But developmental states deal with corruption too. Corruption exists in most states, including China and other high-growth states, but even corrupt officials feel compelled to ensure that economic growth remains robust. When it is time for promotions, China's Communist Party incentivises mayors to increase economic growth in their towns.

The South African government's 2011 New Growth Path aimed to create five million new jobs between 2010 and 2020. The 2012 National Development Plan (NDP) set the goal of "faster and more inclusive economic growth". The NDP's target was to reduce the unemployment rate from 24.9% in June 2012 to 14% by 2020 and to 6% by 2030, requiring an additional 11 million jobs, total employment rising from 13 million to 24 million and for GDP to increase by an average annual GDP growth of 5.4%.

The reality could not have turned out more differently.

South Africa added less than two million jobs in the period, rising from 14.7 million in 2012 to peak at 16.5 million in 2018, nothing near any of the targets set. Instead of unemployment falling to 14% by 2020, it rose to 32.6%. Meanwhile, GDP growth peaked at 3.1% in 2011, before the NDP was published, falling below 1% within two years.

But officials' careers do not depend on their success in delivering growth. And anyway, state officials and government politicians have never displayed a sense of urgency about development actually including the poor. The African Development Bank (AfDB) said the continued underperformance by southern Africa compared to other African regions was primarily because it was dragged down by South Africa. According to the AfDB, southern Africa had the worst economic performance of African regional economies in 2022, growing only 2.7% and projected to decelerate by 1.1 percentage points in 2023. Growth in Africa was projected to stabilise at 4.1% in 2023-24.



The projected sharp decline in 2023 largely reflects continued growth weakness in South Africa, the region's largest economy and trading partner, from 2% in 2022 to an estimated 0.2% in 2023, as the country grapples with the impact of high interest rates and persistent power outages affecting economic activity.

The economic outlook report shows South Africa's economic growth is projected to average 0.8% in 2023 and 2024 — the second lowest in the whole region — while Nigeria's growth is estimated to average 3.3% in the same period. Economic growth for Egypt and Kenya is expected to average 4.8% and 5.8% respectively. Nor is South Africa experiencing "jobless growth." Since economic growth is smaller than population growth, South Africa is falling behind in real terms.

Free State University economist Phillipe Burger once described South Africa as a "social investment state" rather than a developmental state, with its emphasis on investment in human development and enabling people to participate in skilled and thus better-paying jobs (Burger, 2013).

The government's real focus on assisting the jobless has been on programmes that can be categorised as welfare. It's most effective policy here is the social grant, which now reaches about 19 million poor South Africans. Two other important social programmes, National Health Insurance (NHI) and the universal basic income grant, which would be a monthly grant to all citizens, are under discussion.

The social grant has been extremely important to its beneficiaries, and there is a good case to be made for the NHI and a universal basic income grant, but all three are primarily welfare programmes. They are not part of most developmental states' core policies, though – if the fiscal constraints can be overcome – they have some developmental impact by contributing to the health and welfare of citizens, who put their grant money into the economy, and improved health is developmentally beneficial.

The importance of these programmes has increased to combat the "triple threats" of poverty, unemployment and inequality as the economy has failed to deliver jobs. But expanding welfare payments in a stagnant economy will eventually prove unsustainable. Job-creating growth is needed, not only to provide hope for the future but also to sustain grant funding in an increasingly inflationary environment.

South Africa's practices and outcomes do not look like those of a developmental state.

The Promise: What a successful SA developmental state would look like

Since Africa's peer countries and neighbours performed significantly better than South Africa in the same global environment, the reasons must be found in South Africa. To blame global conditions is passing the buck.

The NDP's 484 pages are replete with recommendations covering almost every government department, from education to foreign policy to energy and finance. Government departments were realigned to link outcomes to NDP goals on paper, but this generally failed to produce the reforms envisaged. Recommendations across the board, to cut the size of the foreign service, to realign the energy mix or make educational reforms have not materialised.

South Africa has extraordinary advantages over other African countries, in industrial, mining, financial and infrastructure terms. It has strong universities, and advanced agriculture. Its youthful population provides potential workers not available in more mature economies. Surely if Ethiopia, Rwanda and Kenya can apply these tools successfully, South Africa can?





The potential for job-creating growth in South Africa is enormous. But it requires that the lessons of developmental states be examined and implemented, constantly checking outcomes and correcting errors. In developmental states, the role of the state is not usually to run businesses, but to support businesses in chosen sectors as part of a long-term strategy to exploit current opportunities to build steadily greater industrial complexity.

The NDP is full of wide-ranging recommendations for multiple ministries. ANC policy documents also embody bold recommendations. But the clear lesson from high-growth countries in Africa and Asia is that a developmental state requires that government first narrow down its laundry list to prioritise carefully chosen economic sectors in the public interest.

Drawing on published research and the NDP and Treasury documents, the focus should be on just three drivers of substantial growth, producing hundreds of thousands of sustainable new jobs each. These are the information economy (not to be confused with the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'), mining and the green economy (Matisonn, 2019). A fourth, agriculture, offers similar employment rewards.

There are strong reasons why these three sectors stand out for the opportunities missed. These were the three great global economic trends of the 30 years of our democracy, and South Africa botched its opportunities in all three.

The information boom of the 1990s provided the opportunity to create hundreds of thousands of jobs, most of which would have suited young graduates or school leavers. The government was required to ensure that internet access was cheap, fast and as widely available as possible. A Treasury study anticipated an increase of 0.6% in GDP just from this sector, and private researchers expected far more. A series of government failures has dogged this sector since the mid-1990s. The government set up a blue ribbon panel of international information economy experts, but they gradually stopped attending meetings because they felt their advice was being ignored (Matisonn, 2015). Poor decisions damaged the chance of creating a more competitive market for Telkom and bringing down prices. The two main new telecommunications companies set up during this time were Neotel and Cell C, neither of which has met expectations to create competition for Telkom, Vodacom and MTN, all set up prior to 1994.

The next opportunity to repair the damage came with digital migration. By moving SABC and eTV television stations from analogue to digital, valuable frequency spectrum would be freed up and made available for broadband, increasing speed and decreasing cost of access to the internet. Almost every country in the world has done this.

The government missed its first migration deadline in 2008, then missed the International Telecommunications Union's cut-off date in 2015. The Department of Communications lacked the commitment to ensure this valuable process was completed

**The potential
for job-creating
growth in South
Africa is not
just possible
– it is
enormous.**



on time. The process still was incomplete in 2023. More recent reasons for the failure included a dispute over encrypting the signal when Hlaudi Motsoeneng was Chief Operations Officer. Private manufacturers planning to manufacture set-top boxes needed by households with TVs were disappointed when deadlines were not met. The process is still under way, marred by a shortage of set-top boxes that has left many household without TV access.

As government stalled, new methods of accessing the internet emerged, and have proved the job creation potential was there. Though migration would speed things up, by 2020 jobs created by the information economy in global business services hit 250,000 – more than double the automotive industry. Of these, 50,000 serviced overseas companies, growing at the phenomenal rate of 24% a year. That should have happened more than a decade earlier. Though decades have been lost, if digital migration is completed competently, those gains can still increase exponentially.

A true developmental state would not have allowed this endless fiasco. The communications ministry has been a revolving door. On average, ministers are rotated every 14 months. There were six communications ministers in Jacob Zuma's nine years; Ramaphosa has had four in his five years. Zuma split the department into two, telecommunications and broadcasting, against the advice of sector experts. As president, Ramaphosa correctly reunited them. The essence of the information economy is that it is the consequence of the convergence of telecommunications, broadcasting and IT. Splitting it up took the country back to the pre-information economy era.

Though mining raises increasingly important climate change issues, the steady long-term decline of South African mining output has largely been caused by government missteps rather than concern for global warming.

Many think jobs declined naturally because our mines are old. That's not true. The missing factor is exploration. Exploration using new methods has found new deposits on every continent, but exploration has slowed down markedly in South Africa. Former South African mining houses join the global players to establish new mines elsewhere. Exploration contracted because South Africa is considered increasingly unattractive to investors compared to other mining countries. The Fraser Institute measures investors' perception of South Africa as a mining investment destination. By 2019, Namibia and Botswana ranked in the top two in Africa while South Africa was 12th out of 15. For the last two years South Africa ranked in the bottom ten global mining jurisdictions, at 57 out of 62 in the Investment Attractiveness Index in 2022. The year before it was 75th out of 84 jurisdictions.

Even allowing for environmental concerns, mining will be important to the third great global trend South Africa has been woefully slow at responding to – the green economy.

Government handling of the green economy potential has been tragic. After promising a renewable energy programme, foreign and domestic firms established factories to make components to produce solar and wind electricity. The programme to commission green electricity began and was widely praised. Then in 2015 Eskom took the decision to stop approving new renewable electricity projects.

Germany's SMA Solar, the world's biggest manufacturer of solar power inverters, a critical component in solar power systems, had opened a multimillion-rand manufacturing facility in Cape Town in 2014. The facility included a production line and quality test centre for SMA's Sunny Central inverters, warehousing, as well as the



African branch of the SMA Solar Academy training centre. After Eskom froze new renewable electricity projects, SMA closed shop in South Africa, citing government's lack of commitment to renewable energy.

Matla, a 7,500m² factory project opened after Energy Minister Dipuo Peters declared that South Africa should aim to install one million solar water-heating units by 2014, closed after two years. Well-known former journalist and businessperson, the late Zwelakhe Sisulu, a former Matla director, said Eskom's new quota arrangement for low-pressure heating systems had made the manufacturing operation uneconomical.

There is no shortage of investment funds available for these sectors. The programme attracted R194 billion in investments in six years, with over R53 billion (27%) coming from foreign investors. Yet it is obvious why decision-makers in these industries feel unable to invest. Something bigger even than State Capture has gone wrong, and we will not fix it till we face it. The fact that growth and employment went backwards, and that State Capture was able to do so much damage, point to the weaknesses of the government's commitment to a developmental state, which is evident by the:

- Lack of unity of the cabinet and state-owned enterprises to achieve these objectives.
- Rapid change of ministers. Ministers serving for little more than a year barely have time to develop a plan before they are moved.
- Many of the targets were too broad and vague.
- There is little evidence that these goals were top of ministers' or their departments' priority lists.
- Perhaps most important of all, the government has not focused systematically on its failures and engaged with the best advice to reverse each failure, one by one. For all the references to prioritising, there is little evidence of it in practice.

The government has proposed a grand social compact across business, labour, government and other stakeholders as the key to unlock development. Failure to develop successful agreements with business was, in part, because the focus was national instead of sectoral. If members of the government contradict each other as described above, the business community feels burned. The 2015 Eskom decision to block renewables and the missed digital migration deadlines since 2008 have left scars.

The world can't wait. Neither can South Africa's unemployed.

Prioritising three or four sectors, reaching agreements with stakeholders in which every member of the government is required to be in lockstep will move South Africa many steps forward towards a developmental state. This seems to be exactly what Deng Xiaoping had in mind when he said: "Reform is China's second revolution." **NA92**

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ENDNOTES

- 1 On all these measures excluding social inequality, which has grown enormously.
- 2 See
<https://www.gov.za/faq/documents/where-can-i-find-latest-industrial-development-action-plan>



A poster of Deng Xiaoping in Shenzhen, Guangdong, one of the first Special Economic Zones approved by Deng in 1979 that played an important role in China's economic miracle

Source: Wikimedia Commons



Lessons for South Africa

China during the era of 'reform and opening up'

– By Douglas Ian Scott

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China's four decades of spectacular economic growth may now be slowing down, but the lessons for South Africa – with its own development challenges – remain important. DOUGLAS IAN SCOTT argues South Africa should re-orientate its relationship with China so as to learn from, and recreate, the successes of China's "reform and opening up" era.



Introduction

China's economic rise may now be slowing down, but the lessons for South Africa, grappling with its own stubborn development challenges, remain important. While Beijing currently navigates potential stagnation after four decades of breakneck speed economic development, its "reform and opening up" era offers valuable insights for Pretoria. This article argues that South Africa should re-orientate its relationship with China so as to better learn from, and recreate, the successes of China's development experience. To do this requires appreciating what those successes are and where, as well as which lessons are not worth repeating on South Africa's own development path.

Currently South Africa seems to be learning many of the wrong lessons from China. Political training missions from South Africa to Beijing are intended by China to normalise China's one-party-dominant political system in the rest of the world, rather than meet South Africa's primary needs (Sun, 2016). This spreads the ideologically rigid message of Xi Jinping (and formerly Maoist) China, not the lessons of the "reform and opening up" period (1979-2017)¹ that propelled China forward. South Africa already has a well-developed, vibrant and dynamic democratic system; we don't need to be taught things that run counter to those hard won gains.

It is worth noting that the current South African focus on centralising power in national government contrasts with the reality of the decentralised and semi-autonomous provincial power structures that have long existed in China; a decentralised system of government, born of historical and geographic necessity, that has allowed for local innovation and local accountability. Focusing on setting up Special Economic Zones, whilst a powerful tool of development, ignores the broader reforms that were implemented and the unique situation of Hong Kong as a gateway to the rest of the world. No South African equivalent to Hong Kong exists. Finally, the creation of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) to drive development policy ignores the reality that the SOEs have always been a significant drag on China's economy, one that the reforms usually sought to address and minimise.

So what are the lessons that South Africa can learn from China's "reform and opening up" period? To answer that question we need to examine how China did it.

Background

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping and his coterie of pragmatic modernisers replaced almost 30 years of rigid Maoist dogma, which in turn replaced "100 years of shame" and domestic turmoil, overturning and replacing Mao Zedong's strict ideological purity with a practical, open-minded and flexible focus on economic development (Naughton, 2006, Part III). They looked to Japanese, Korean and Hong Kong economic development policies and history (which in turn were largely based on German economic history and the writings of Friedrich List) for inspiration. This created a broad intellectual bedrock on which to build and inspire new development policies that were tailor made for China's needs.

Reopening trade and scientific exchange with the West, particularly the US, gave them access to a vast and wealthy market to drive export-led economic growth. It also allowed for the importation of productivity-enhancing technology that would enable this export-led growth model. A pivotal move marked by China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 accelerated growth further. Despite its entry into the WTO, China maintained various policy tools that effectively protected its own industries



against foreign competition through subsidies and maintaining the low value of its currency.

High levels of domestic savings provided the capital to acquire the technology and capital goods necessary (Wang, 2018). This, along with the policy approach expanded on in this article, drove 40 years of powerful economic growth (averaging 9% a year) that lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty and resurrected one of the world's great historical powers.

China's strategic initiative, "Made in China 2025," implemented in 2015, aimed to leverage its economic growth, propel a new era of reforms and policy objectives, and elevate the nation to developed nation status. The intention was to steer clear of the middle-income trap that currently challenges South Africa. Made in China 2025 sought to do this by encouraging investments in 10 key high productivity, high technology industrial sectors. These are: information technology; robotics and semiconductors; renewable energy and electric vehicles; aerospace; blue economy; railway equipment; power equipment; agricultural technology; medicine and new materials.

Made in China 2025 triggered alarm in Washington and Brussels, alienating China from its most important export markets and sources of technology imports. It fostered concern that China might be able to shed its technological dependency on the US in particular and the West in general. In this way, China failed to continue heeding Deng's advice to "hide its strength, bide its time" under Xi's now partially abandoned wolf warrior diplomacy.

A notable element of Made in China 2025 that caused considerable consternation in Washington was its focus on establishing import independence on microchip design and production, of which China imported hundreds of billions of dollars' worth annually to fuel its vast electronics industry in the Pearl River Delta region. The policy prompted the Trump administration to adopt a more hostile economic and trade posture towards the country after the policy was declared a "threat to U.S. technological leadership" by the Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). It, along with the later election of President Biden, also catalysed the development of new American industrial policy in the form of the CHIPS Act to fortify American dominance in this sector.

Despite pouring hundreds of billions of dollars into Made in China 2025 priority industries, the policy has produced mixed results, far from the levels of its 40-year rapid growth era. China's dominance in renewable energy and electric vehicles has been successfully secured for the foreseeable future. However, its investments in aerospace have yet to produce a satisfactory, domestically designed and built commercial aircraft industry. A viable independent domestic aeronautics industry remains elusive.

The policy's impact on semiconductor production has been mixed – working at the tiny scale required for the most advanced micro-chips is difficult. Whilst the hundreds of billions of dollars China has invested in developing its domestic semiconductor industry has produced some notable advances, such as the seven nanometres (nm) domestically produced Kirin 9000S chip, it has not yet been successful in establishing the strongly desired semiconductor independence or production capability at the bleeding edge 3nm level.² American pressure on Dutch and Japanese suppliers of the extreme ultraviolet (EUV) photolithography machines, the super high-tech hearts of the multi-billion dollar foundries that produce cutting and bleeding edge microchips, has contributed to this outcome. It also illustrated the difficulty, enormous complexity and extreme cost needed to establish a competitive foothold in the rapidly evolving semiconductor industry.



Although this era of aggressive reform and opening up might be over now, in Xi Jinping's China, instead of returning to the older obsession with ideological purity and state control, the lessons and legacy from this opening up period remain. The lessons for South Africa from Deng's reforms can be broadly described as: be pragmatic; incentivise good accountable governance and innovative local government; develop a high functioning and professional bureaucracy; and ensure there is sufficient political will to successfully follow through in implementing economic development policies unhindered by unrelated policies.

Pragmatic governance – practicality ahead of ideology

No matter if it is a white cat or a black cat; as long as it can catch mice, it is a good cat. – Deng Xiaoping

This quote, mentioned in a number of Deng's speeches, encapsulates this spirit of pragmatism when pursuing the goal of economic development. So much so that it evolved into an often touted slogan and a political theory of its own, one that can be summarised as "whether it is a planned economy or market economy, it is only a means of resource allocation and has nothing to do with the political system; capitalism can have a plan, and socialism can also have a market" (Ke, 2013).

This slogan acknowledged the political backdrop of Chinese Communist Party politics and the existing economic landscape, largely controlled by inefficient SOEs. Simultaneously, it acknowledged the tangible impact of privately-led capitalism, guided by government policy, in propelling economic development. All economic policy is driven by a desire to move up the industrial value chain through beneficiation, achieve economies of scale and adopt productivity-enhancing technology.

A pragmatic, government-guided approach adopted during Japan's industrialisation, was inspired by German and American industrial policy of the 19th century, which in turn was inspired by early English industrial policy adopted during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547).

Unlocking the success of this type of industrial policy necessitates a practical approach that requires getting the basics right. Total factor productivity,³ the ratio of aggregate output to aggregate inputs, needs to be maximised to make beneficiated goods competitive on international markets. To achieve this, productivity needs to be increased, the domestic costs of inputs decreased, economies of scale established and transaction costs minimised.

- Productivity was increased through the adoption of new technologies and investments in high-end capital goods, all underwritten with government subsidies and incentives.
- Input costs were similarly reduced domestically through a mix of government incentives and subsidies. This also required ensuring a reliable and cheap supply of electricity which, despite occasional brownouts due to rapidly increasing demand, has largely been achieved through long-term planning and the successful rollout of new power plants. This is an area where South Africa, plagued by ever-worsening loadshedding since 2007, has notably failed.
- Economies of scale were established through government policies and encouraging the formation of business clusters. A good example of this is the Chinese cities that specialise in specific economic services such as Yiwu's dominance in small commodities or Hangzhou's 1980s era economic cluster in sock production. This is



already present to a limited extent in South Africa with cities such as Gqeberha with its automotive assembly, but greater potential exists to expand this phenomenon.

- The minimisation of transaction costs required trade agreements to reduce export tariffs (which is why the WTO accession was so important to China) whilst improving and streamlining the country's logistical capacity. This required large and ongoing investments in rail, road and port infrastructure whilst ensuring strong and effective management that is well maintained and run. The effective management, investment and operation of ports and rail infrastructure is another area where South Africa requires urgent attention (Naughton, 2006).

An often celebrated model to come out of this practical approach has been the establishment of Special Economic Zones at easy access points to international markets. These are areas where normal laws and taxation policies are relaxed or otherwise modified to encourage international investment and export. South Africa already has an established policy encouraging this phenomenon with a number of Industrial Development Zones (IDZs) already in the country. A good example of this is the Freeport of Saldanha IDZ, which seeks to specialise in marine engineering. However, total factor productivity still needs to be improved to enhance the international competitiveness of these IDZs.

Innovative local government

"The mountains are high and the emperor is far away," is a popular old Chinese saying that highlights the challenges of ruling a large country. China's approach to solving this problem has been to decentralise decision-making and give greater autonomy to local authorities.

This empowers the government to formulate policies that are more attuned to local needs and expedite their implementation. The persistent challenge lies in overcoming the corruption and mismanagement that may accompany decentralised decision-making. Much of China's governmental history is marked by endeavours of central government officials to monitor and address these issues. However, considering both China's geographical vastness and the enhancement of local governance, this emerges as a more viable approach, one that South Africa could potentially learn from. Indeed, certain detrimental policy debacles, such as the Great Leap Forward, stemmed from centrally imposed decisions that disregarded local realities.

The Great Leap forward was Mao's attempt to rapidly industrialise China from 1958 to 1962. It was one of the most famous failed industrialisation efforts in history resulting in the deaths of between 15 million and 55 million Chinese. An aggressive industrial plan that focused on heavy industry and agriculture, it was implemented in a ham-fisted top-down manner that operated independently of local realities, resulting in gross distortions on the ground (Naughton, 2006). It was during this period that Deng first started advocating for less ideologically driven policies. This advocacy work would result in his temporary banishment from Chinese politics.

Following Deng's rise to power much of China's growth and poverty alleviation has been driven by local governments doing practical things village by village and city by city. To do this they needed a political mandate and bureaucratic flexibility to implement and experiment with policies and projects. Special Economic Zones, most notably Shenzhen which was able to develop a symbiotic economic relationship with neighbouring Hong Kong, served as laboratories for experimentation.



Local autonomy, in conjunction with the lessons outlined in this article, not only provided local governments with the flexibility to leverage regional conditions but also enabled them to experiment with fostering specialised business clusters and identifying the unique economic strengths of their respective areas. To support these initiatives, the local government established networks facilitating the exchange of outcomes and insights from local development experiments and showcasing model projects and policies to inspire and motivate others.

Local governments are free to set up business development support offices that offer practical advice and services to local businesses. This can range from encouraging local businesses to take advantage of government business development programmes to helping them access international markets to support the export of their goods. In 2008, the author visited one such support office in a rural district of Hebei province which was known for exporting peaches and being one of the largest producers of violins in the world, an achievement that would not have been possible without the practical support of their high-functioning local government-run business support office.

This does come with some risk. Without systems of accountability and adequate monitoring, local officials are more likely to pursue unproductive vanity projects or become corrupt.

Accountable governance

If government officials are not accountable for delivering results and properly motivated, it is unlikely that anything will get done. Different countries have different ways of dealing with this problem. In most democracies it is the role of the electoral process to appoint politicians who will hold bureaucrats to account if they do not deliver.

Being a one party state China has sought to resolve this problem in a different way. By setting a few simple metrics, and rigorously measuring the performance of party and government officials against those metrics, officials are strongly incentivised to focus on development priorities. During China's period of rapid growth these metrics were primarily focused on economic growth, and included the amount of private and foreign investment each municipality's leadership could attract. Within the context of promoting economic growth the metric was purposefully left broad so as to allow for experimentation, innovation and taking advantage of local opportunities.

So long as economic growth was maximised within the rules of the law, the best performing officials stood a good chance of being promoted into higher levels of government. This provided an effective mechanism for ambitious officials to gain higher office whilst driving growth.

Much needed anti-corruption drives, along with a change in government policies to reduce pollution (also a much needed change), have altered this approach in recent years. However, the lesson remains that strong mechanisms incentivising good local government whilst punishing non-delivery are needed as are clear lines of accountability for both local decision-makers and the public servants that execute policy on the ground. This is something South Africa is in great need of.

Professionalised bureaucracy

China has a long established norm of trying to appoint the country's best educated and most capable to government. Culturally, working in the civil service is seen as a high-status job, adding to the allure of government employment. The *kējǔ* or Imperial Examination for government helped establish this tradition during the Sui dynasty over



1,500 years ago. This policy, of always trying to hire the country's best and brightest for government, has been continued by the Communist Party government. China is not the only country with a tradition of doing this, Japan and the United Kingdom are also reputed to have a similar culture.

This has ensured that there is a strong talent pool within government that can be recruited from and relied upon to implement government policies and projects. High quality, energetic and highly motivated government officials are especially needed when trying to implement projects at a local level. High-quality politicians with an intimate understanding of local needs and the power to hold bureaucrats accountable is also vital. However, even the most talented political figure needs highly effective bureaucrats to implement policies and deliver on political promises.

South Africa, sadly, has never had a culture of recruiting its best and brightest for government. Nor do we have a culture of competitive examinations for the civil service. Whilst there are many highly capable and dedicated people working for government the culture within government, at least since the formation of the Republic, has been to use the recruitment of civil servants as a tool of implementing political goals (such as entrenching Afrikaner control over the state during apartheid) instead of building an effective government. By adopting a culture of recruiting our best and brightest into the civil service, the government's ability to implement policies and do so efficiently is enhanced allowing the country to do more with less and increasing the chances that better implementation decisions will be made.

Political will

In China, effective political support for long-term strategic planning allowed China to leapfrog over the pre-established industrial dominance of developed countries through the early development of new technologies. Established industries in electronics and steel could transition to renewable energy and electric vehicles. China's early investment in these technologies when they were new, 10 or 20 years ago, has given it a strong head-start over other nations. Now China increasingly dominates the global export of solar panels and electric vehicles, sectors in which it enjoys a strong competitive advantage (Lin, 2023).

At around the same time, South Africa established several factories making equipment for renewable electricity, but these closed when government withdrew the promised scale of support for renewables.

South Africa has the potential to be strong in this type of industrial planning. The Department of Trade, Industry and Competition has a long legacy of producing industrial plans. But the political will to implement these plans, unhindered by other, often contradictory policies, has not been present in the current political climate. Until a political consensus that prioritises economic development emerges in South Africa, it is unlikely that even the best conceived industrial policies will be implemented successfully.

Caution

Despite China's extraordinarily successful example, blindly copying China's playbook would likely invite disaster. White elephant projects and unchecked corruption are serious risks that China has been trying to come to terms with over the past 10 years. Overinvesting in specific sectors, like the construction and steel industries, distorts markets and wastes capital. Unsustainable debt-fuelled growth has created a nasty hangover which, as in Japan, might take decades to work through.



Growth has slumped in the past few years and this has been made worse by the end of the country's demographic dividend, in addition to high rates of municipal debt, shifting trends in international trade and Western industrial policy, weak productivity growth, and an economy that is overly dependent on a stagnant and highly indebted construction industry. All of this is pointing to the possibility that China might be entering into a middle income trap and a long period of low growth (Magnus, 2018).

Conclusion

China is not alone in proving the success of applying the principles of pragmatism, professional government, political will to implement industrial policy and a culture of entrepreneurship. It is an extraordinary fact that, after preaching the minimal state, avoidance of debt in an unrestricted free market economy for 40 years, the United States under President Joe Biden has made the historic turn back to the state-driven industrial policy it applied when its economy was being built, and again during the New Deal under President Franklin D. Roosevelt following the Great Depression of the 1930s. Biden has revived exactly the policies applied when the US economy was thrust into becoming the foremost economy in the world.

Although the country is currently experiencing a period of significant political partisanship there remains a surprisingly strong, although seldom talked about, consensus that has emerged in industrial policy. Similar to the Made in China 2025 strategy, the Biden era CHIPS and Science Act have injected \$250billion into a raft of high technology, high productivity industries over the next 10 years, partly with the intent to re-establish its once dominant semiconductor industry. The success of its implementation, with the majority of the investments going to more conservative Trump voting areas of the country, is an example of good industrial politics enjoying – however begrudgingly – bipartisan support and a broad political mandate. His interventions to promote the green economy have been no less substantial.

Other factors have also contributed to this period of American growth. Trump tax cuts created a period of growth before the Covid pandemic. Biden's economic stimulus spending during the pandemic through the CARES Act unlocked an enormous multi-year-long consumer spending spree driven by excess savings. A boom in productivity-enhancing technologies such as AI, along with the easy availability of capital to deploy them, has significantly increased the productivity and competitiveness of American manufacturing. This process has been further stimulated by policies supporting the reshoring of manufacturing back to the US following the country's panic resulting from the Made in China 2025 policy.

The success of implementing these acts and industrial policies required a pragmatic approach, strong political will, a culture of enterprise, as well as autonomous and responsible government. Although very different from China in many ways, the US provides a good example of the power of applying the same principles adopted by China to drive development.

Currently the economic picture is not as good in China as it once was, partly due to the country's current leadership abandoning the ethos and reforming drive of the previous generation of Chinese leaders (Magnus, 2018). A generation of Chinese leaders, starting with Deng Xiaoping, created the conditions for one of the most significant economic success stories in history. China's current slowdown is a cautionary tale: abandoning reforms stifles progress and Xi Jinping's retreat from openness underscores this.



Despite this, the country's official annual GDP growth rate remains above 5%, much to the envy of South Africa which has averaged a sluggish 1.08% between 2012 and 2022. This number is lower than our population growth rate⁴ indicating that the average South African is getting poorer.

South Africa's current approach, fixated on SOEs and centralised control, mirrors China's pre-reform struggles. Learning from both China's successes and failures requires embracing pragmatism, professional governance, political will for well-designed industrial policy, and a vibrant entrepreneurial spirit. Rather than fixating on political intrigue and SOEs, the focus should shift towards pragmatism, professionalisation, experimentation, regional autonomy, incentivisation and a robust political will to foster holistic development.

China's rise from the shadows of Maoist dogma to an economic powerhouse is a testament to strategic reforms. Deng Xiaoping spearheaded transformative changes, overhauled SOEs, revolutionised property laws, and embraced global trade and investment. This laid the groundwork for its unprecedented economic growth. Crucially, China didn't stop at traditional sectors. It strategically cultivated industries that allowed appropriate technological leaps. From the ubiquitous presence of social media giants like WeChat and TikTok to pioneering advancements in solar energy and electric vehicles, China strategically positioned itself as a global innovator.

As South Africa navigates its own development trajectory, the key lies not in replicating political models or fixating on SOEs, but in embracing a dynamic approach. China's journey teaches us that prosperity stems from adaptability, strategic planning and a relentless pursuit of innovation, providing a blueprint for nations aspiring to lift millions out of poverty and onto the path of sustainable progress.

Learning from China's successful period of "opening up and reform," South Africa should strategically reorient its relationship with China to enhance its development prospects. It should use its positive relationship to study China's lessons in job-creating rapid growth. This involves embracing a pragmatic approach, discarding ideological dogmas and making substantial investments in domestic infrastructure and human capital. South Africa should also engage in strategic diplomacy, diversifying its international partnerships beyond a singular focus on BRICS nations to maximize development options.

Focusing on sectors where mutual benefits and synergies exist between South Africa and the rest of the world is crucial. This strategic alignment ensures that collaborative efforts contribute to both national and global development. Geopolitically, South Africa should recognize that China, like any other country, prioritises its own interests. Hence, South Africa should prioritise its own interests first and reclaim its geopolitical agency.

South Africa's access to the Chinese leadership through BRICS provides a tremendous opportunity to learn the right lessons, and set our diplomatic priorities clearly on economic development. This also applies to other BRICS members, particularly India.

Empowering all levels of government with a strong political mandate to implement both localised and national development strategies is essential. This decentralisation approach enhances adaptability and responsiveness to diverse development needs. South Africa should address the investment strike by fostering a constructive relationship with businesses, unlocking vital development capital for economic growth.



By combining these strategic initiatives, South Africa can recalibrate its association with China, leveraging pragmatism, global engagement and domestic empowerment to fuel comprehensive and much needed sustainable development. **NA92**

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ENDNOTES

- 1 This period starts with the ascent to power of Deng Xiaoping in 1979 following the conviction of the 'Gang of Four' and concludes in October 2017 following the conclusion of the 19th Communist Party Conference during which presidential term limits were abolished. Although there is no consensus on the exact date upon which the reform and opening up period ends, the 19th Party Congress represents an important milestone in the entrenchment of Xi Jinping's power at the expense of Deng appointed successors.
- 2 Because the semiconductor/microchip and software industries develop so fast, those industries have adopted the term "bleeding edge" to describe an edge that is further ahead than "cutting edge" or "leading edge". It's typically an edge that is about 16 months ahead of the cutting edge competitors and comes at a cost of increased risk from the unreliability of new technology. A good example in 2024 is Nvidia's dominance in AI chip design and production.
- 3 Total factor productivity (TFP) is an economic concept that describes the portion of a company's increased output that cannot be explained by increased capital or labour inputs and thus is considered a measure of operational efficiency.
- 4 Average of 1.2% per annum in the same period, World Bank data, accessed January 2024



 **home affairs**
Department:
Home Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Control No. ZEP 0105000111

Zimbabwean Exemption Permit (ZEP)
Section 31(2)(b)

Ref No: CAZ [REDACTED]

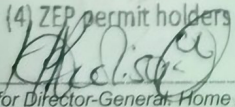
Name: [REDACTED]

Passport No: [REDACTED] No. of Entries: MULTIPLE

Issued at: HEAD OFFICE On: 2018-07-30 VISA Expiry Date: 31 December 2021

Conditions:

- (1) ZEP permit entitles the holder to conduct work/employment
- (2) ZEP permit does not entitle the holder the right to apply for permanent residence irrespective of the period of stay in the RSA.
- (3) ZEP permits will not be renewable/extendable.
- (4) ZEP permit holders cannot change conditions of his/her permit in SA.


for Director-General: Home Affairs

South Africa's migration policy mess

Where did it come from, and can it be fixed?

– By Alan Hirsch

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ALAN HIRSCH comments on the draft White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection issued by the South African government in November 2023. The government wants to make laws still tighter when it is unable to implement existing laws. He finds that what is proposed simply won't help and suggests what could be done to fix the urgent need for better migration policy.



The minister

On 30 May 2019, Aaron Motsoaledi, a medical doctor, was appointed by President Cyril Ramaphosa as Minister of Home Affairs. Before joining national government as Minister of Health in 2009, Motsoaledi had a chequered career in provincial government. It may have seemed that because he was the nephew of struggle hero Elias Motsoaledi he had several chances to succeed. But when he was appointed by former President Jacob Zuma as Minister of Health he found an opportunity to shine.

I was present (as a senior official in the presidency) at the cabinet meeting where Motsoaledi presented his plan to fight HIV / AIDS. It was an exciting and inspiring moment, and Zuma rose to the occasion giving his new health minister his full support.

Motsoaledi's campaigns against AIDS and other infectious and non-infectious diseases were widely lauded. Even the chairperson of the Treatment Action Campaign, which had fought bitterly for a change of course in the Mbeki era, lauded Motsoaledi saying "he's one of the best deployments the ANC ever made".

The mess

In 2021 Motsoaledi, frustrated by the poor performance of his Department of Home Affairs (DHA), appointed a ministerial committee to investigate the mishandling of the system of permitting and visas, which also decided on permanent residence and naturalisation. This was sparked by a public outcry when fraudster pastor Shepherd Bushiri and his wife Mary were granted permanent residence and South African citizenship even though they had no right to either. The terms of reference were to investigate the implementation of the permit/visa system between 2004 and 2020.

The investigation began shortly after 14 members of the permit section of the department signed a petition demanding that the Counter-Corruption Unit should cease investigating "their errors". Chief investigator was the former Secretary of Cabinet and Director General of the Presidency, Dr Cassius Lubisi. Lubisi had served throughout the presidency of Jacob Zuma but his reputation was solid. He was joined by a small group of experts, including some with experience and skills in forensic investigation.

The headline finding in his report was that 36,647 applications for visas, permits or status over the 16-year period under investigation had used fraudulent documentation. Of these, 880 were immediately approved and 288 were pending. A total of 4,160 of the fraudulent applications were first rejected, and then accepted after reconsideration. It found that "all [permit] applications were manually processed, finalized and approved with minimal to no electronic capability"¹.

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Lubisi discovered that systems which had been replaced were still being used illegally from time to time for suspicious purposes. He found cases where applications were processed in zero days, and visa expiry dates issued beyond the legal limit.

The Lubisi committee found a huge disjuncture between the naturalisation database of the DHA and the population registration database, which falls under the same department. They found that the ‘V-list’ which designates undesirable immigrants was “fatally flawed due to incomplete and missing crucial data”.² They found cases where files had been inserted illegally into the information system – a process that would require “a highly skilled IT user with administrator rights to execute”.³

Even the introduction of VFS Global (a private international immigration service company) in the application process did not inhibit various forms of bribery and corruption. Decision-making on visas and permits had been centralised in the DHA in Pretoria in 2009. The complete catalogue of serious issues uncovered by the ministerial committee is far too long to include in this article.

A parallel investigation headed by Mavuso Msimang, Umkhonto we Sizwe veteran and distinguished former civil servant, recommended a range of reforms in the administration of the visa process for key business people and expert professionals (Msimang, 2023). His investigation was commissioned by the Presidency’s Operation Vulindela. In response to the Msimang report there was a recent simplification of the regulations for business visas⁴ but the business community remains sceptical about implementation of policy.

Apologies

Just a few months ago Minister Motsoaledi was quoted as saying, in legal papers,

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere apology to the Chief Justice, all judges of the high court and Constitutional Court, the President of South Africa, Minister of Finance, LHR [Lawyers for Human Rights] and its legal representatives and the people of South Africa for the mess created by officials of the Department of Home Affairs. (Hawker, 2023)

Legal grievances against the South African DHA, including myriad contempt of court cases, are common. Far too frequently the minister is required to apologise to the court or to ask for more time on behalf of the DHA.

This particular “mess” was where the minister had failed to amend an unconstitutional law which allowed for the detention of irregular migrants for 120 days. Motsoaledi described how he was “shaking with anger” when he saw a legal instruction his department had made on his behalf, without his knowledge.

Frequently, the minister has had to apologise for delays in the issuing of various permits which concern the right to live and work in South Africa. He regularly is forced to announce that people who should have a response to their permit applications but have not heard anything may continue their lives under temporary exemption. Temporary exemptions are as common as the court cases and the apologies. The visa and permit section of the DHA and of many of the department’s information systems are virtually dysfunctional. These huge inefficiencies till the soil for corruption.

The draft White Paper

Yet the new draft White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection, subtitled *Towards a Complete Overhaul of the Migration System in South Africa*, fails to make any reference to the findings or recommendations of the Lubisi and Msimang



reports.⁵ It says very little about the deficiencies of systems and personnel. Instead, it proposes to tighten laws and regulations that will be impossible to implement.

It proposes the amalgamation of the laws on citizenship, immigration and refugee protection. These three laws will become a single law. However, there is no draft legislation accompanying the White Paper. As many of the proposals are quite vague, it is not possible to know exactly what is being proposed. It is hard to say if this is accidental or deliberate.

The central purpose of the White Paper is to tighten the management of refugees and to withdraw socio-economic rights from prospective refugees. The intention is not to allow those without a genuine claim to get 'pending asylum' status. Decisions will only be made at official ports of entry and appeals will be swiftly dealt with by a special tribunal.

The new laws will override current jurisprudence which allows asylum seekers awaiting decisions to access socio-economic rights such as the right to education and health care. These rights are embodied in South Africa's commitment to United Nations and African Union conventions on refugees and asylum seekers. South Africa will withdraw from the conventions and re-join them with reservations regarding these rights. The White Paper cites examples of other countries that belong to the conventions with similar reservations.

The rationale for this shift is that many asylum seekers, especially those who apply for asylum only when they are detected as irregular migrants, are actually economic migrants who have not gone through the proper channels to obtain visas and work permits.

The draft White Paper argues that more than 90% of asylum seekers are not eligible for asylum.

South Africa intends to apply the 'first safe country' principle for refugees – if asylum applicants have entered South Africa after passing through other 'safe countries', they will be returned to the first 'safe country' they entered.

The White Paper also notes the need to upgrade institutions administering refugee law. Refugee status should be determined very rapidly and any appeals must be dealt with without delay. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees website, there are currently about 129,000 asylum seekers awaiting decisions and about 91,000 stateless people in South Africa.⁶

The White Paper has little detail on citizenship policy, but its purpose is to make access to naturalisation and citizenship much more difficult to obtain. It proposes that asylum-seekers should be blocked from obtaining a path to naturalisation or South African citizenship in any way. Even their children born in South Africa would be ineligible. There is also a proposal that the national population register should distinguish between citizens and non-citizens.

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How this is all to be done is far from clear because of the absence of draft legislative text for any aspect of the White Paper.

The remaining recommendations of the draft White Paper are about tightening border control through the new Border Management Agency and preventing the immigration of foreigners who will “adversely impact on existing labour standards and expectation of SA workers”.

There are several additional unexplained institutional proposals such as the establishment of an Immigration Advisory Board and a new Immigration Division in the Department of Home Affairs.

Much of the draft White Paper remains open to a wide range of interpretations. The most cynical among us might speculate that the proposals are deliberately vague, doing little more than enabling the ruling party to campaign on an anti-immigration platform.

Immigration politics

South Africa is not alone in using the threat of immigration as a political weapon. Immigration anxiety was a determining factor in Britain’s departure from the European Union. This proved futile – the Conservative Party which called the referendum is still tearing itself apart over immigration policy (Lawless, 2024). In the Netherlands, a far-right leader got the most votes and seats in the latest election on an anti-migrant ticket (Adler, 2023). The president of Italy is a right-winger with strong anti-immigration credentials. In the United States, the Republican Party wants to turn this year’s election into a referendum on President Joe Biden’s immigration policy (Del Valle, 2024).

Many politicians all over the world maintain some eminently refutable fictions about immigration, despite evidence to the contrary. One fiction is that tighter rules reduce migrancy – they only increase illegality. Another fiction is that centrist or leftist parties can neutralise right-wing parties by adopting their stance on immigration. Invariably the policies will fail, and the failures will simply feed the electoral machine of the far right. Several countries in western Europe have experienced this in recent years.

It seems that politicians appear to hold onto their fictional beliefs mainly because they think it will be to their advantage, and electorates swallow those fictions either because they don’t know any better or because they want to believe them. Sometimes anti-immigrationism is a mask for racism or religious intolerance.

Colonial and liberal

In the late 19th century, the first bilateral labour migration agreement was signed between the South African Republic and Portugal over Mozambican migrant workers. Colonial in design, it excluded virtually all rights the workers may have wished to have.

Similar treaties were concluded with other countries. Current Bilateral Labour Agreements are barely changed from their colonial forebears except that they are now between South Africa and five independent countries.

South Africa’s first immigration law was the Aliens Act of 1911 (which later became the Aliens Control Act). It essentially excluded any foreign black Africans from legal long-term residence in South Africa. It was also designed to block immigration from India. In the 1930s, the rules were extended to sharply limit the immigration of Jews and Catholics. The Aliens Act continued to be the basis of immigration law until the new Immigration Act of 2002.

During the 1990s, the humanitarian attitude of the Mandela government softened South Africa’s stance towards immigrants, especially those from neighbouring African



countries. Mozambicans living illegally in South Africa were allowed a once-off amnesty to regularise their status. South Africa became a full signatory to international treaties on refugees, and the Refugee Act of 1998 was a landmark in liberal, humanitarian immigration law.

The Mandela period was the highwater mark in South African immigration law. The Immigration Act of 2002 retained part of what Professor Jonathan Crush called the “two-gate” system (Crush, McDonald, 2001) – one law for Africans from the countries which had come to depend on South Africa to employ their migrant contract workers and another regime for others.

When hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans fled their country’s economic fiasco in 2008, South Africa granted temporary permits that allowed them to remain in South Africa with socio-economic rights, but with no right for them or their children to naturalisation. This permit was renewed in several forms and remains in place due to a court case and the inability of the DHA to swiftly process applications for a different status for the people who want to remain.

There is a similar provision for some citizens of Lesotho. The total number of Zimbabweans and Lesotho citizens living in South Africa under special exemption permits is thought to number less than 250,000 in total. In the 1990s, South Africa gave an amnesty to a larger number of Mozambicans living in South Africa, many of whom had fled the civil war. They were allowed to apply to regularise their status.

Numbers

Let’s consider the dimensions of immigration into South Africa. In the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs data it is estimated that between 2000 and 2020 the number of people living in South Africa who were not born here increased from 1 million to 2.9 million. So, accepting that migration data is not very accurate at the best of times and that 2020 as the first year of Covid-19 is not a good basis for comparison,



Migrants seek refuge outside the offices of the UN Refugee Agency, Cape Town (archive photo)

Source Ashraf Hendricks, GroundUp



the increase from about 1 million to about 3 million people amounted to an almost 200% increase in migrant stock over a roughly 20-year period (Mutava, 2023).

The proportion of foreign born to locally born in 2020 was about 4.8%, up from about 2.1% of the population in 2000, more than double.

How does that compare to the rest of the world? The proportion of foreign-born residents to locals is about 3.5% for the world as a whole. It has remained around that level at least since the 19th century, which incidentally belies the myth that we are amid a global migration crisis. Countries of mass immigration like the US, Australia and New Zealand have a larger proportion of foreign born. The US, for example, has a foreign-born population of about 16%. Côte d'Ivoire has one of the largest foreign-born populations in Africa at around 10%. So, South Africa at about 4.8% is far from extraordinary.

Where South Africa does stand out is in the relatively rapid increase in foreign born residents in the past two decades. The growth rate was unusually fast. Reasons for this include political and economic shocks in the region, such as the Zimbabwe crisis, and the historical dependence of the poorer countries of our very unequal region on South Africa for labour remittances.

The preoccupations informing the White Paper include the concern that economic migrants are drawn to South Africa because of the size and complexity of its job market and because of the social services which are available to all residents. A key assumption of the White Paper is that restricting access to jobs and social services will reduce the attraction of South Africa and reduce immigration, especially of poor people from nearby countries.

Impact on society

While it sometimes is claimed that the immigration of low-skilled workers contributes to the high level of unemployment, two recent studies have argued that immigration has contributed to net job creation rather than to net unemployment (OECD/ILO, 2018; World Bank, 2018). The World Bank found that “a one percent increase in the number of immigrants relative to the previous period raises local employment by 0.2 percent”. The International Labour Organization found that immigrants likely had a positive effect on South African economic growth, but in some areas “the presence of immigrant workers has both negative effects (lower employment rates) and positive effects (higher incomes) for the native-born population.” So, for certain people in certain areas there are negative employment effects.

The perception is widespread that migrants, especially irregular, low-skilled migrants, compete with poor locals for housing and social services. This is partly an outcome of the fact that when formulating refugee regulations, South Africa decided that, unless they were destitute, asylum seekers and refugees could live wherever they preferred.

The decision not to house refugees and asylum seekers in camps is widely considered progressive and humanitarian. However, there has been no systematic attempt at any level of government to manage and promote the inclusion of poor migrants. The progressive step of allowing the integration of migrants into local communities was radically undermined by the absence of policies and strategies for inclusion.

Evidence in a recent in-depth research paper suggests that xenophobia is not an apt term to describe the attitude of poor urban citizens to migrants. What the researcher, Ringisai Chikohomero, himself a former refugee (and a former student of mine), found



was that residents of Atteridgeville and Diepsloot did want foreign migrants to leave, especially the irregular or undocumented migrants. They told Chikohomero in focus groups and individual interviews that this was not because they didn't like them but because they competed for jobs and economic resources (Chikohomero, 2023).

There is no doubt that the primary reason for the lack of jobs for poor South Africans is the low growth rate of the economy, which is in turn largely a result of poor government policies and weak government management. There is clear evidence that South Africa is performing poorly by any standards. Growth is slow by global standards and by developing country standards and we are way down among the poorest performing African countries. Average household incomes have declined in almost every year in the past decade. This is why poor people don't have jobs, and why many of the jobs they do have are poorly rewarded and precarious.

Nevertheless, it is convenient for politicians on both sides to blame foreigners. Populists who want to oust the government claim that the ANC is not protecting 'our people'. The government sometimes excuses its own poor provision of services on the 'flood' of migrants from African countries.

This is a toxic and dangerous mess that can have huge ramifications. Already we have seen, in the past 16 years or so, many horrifically violent attacks on poor migrants from other parts of Africa.

How to fix it

The priorities signalled in the draft White Paper are intended to show to the people, and voters in particular, that the government is making an effort to defend the interests of citizens and residents. But what is proposed simply won't help. The government wants to make laws still tighter when it is unable to implement existing laws. So, what else could be done?

This is the main thing – first fix the operations of the relevant parts of the department. This will require the government to make a serious commitment. Rooting out and prosecuting the corrupt staffers, reorganising existing IT systems, investing in effective integrative systems, and appointing high quality staff in operations and in the IT department will cost a considerable amount of effort and money.

It would be easier and cheaper to pass new laws, but what is the point of doing so when systems are so corrupted?

The government should make an urgent, firm and fully budgeted commitment to major upgrades of information systems and to the appointment of trained, competent officials managing and implementing the visa and permit systems.

In addition to that, there are some areas where laws and regulations can be improved to make them more implementable and to achieve the objective of more orderly, more regulated migration.

a) Critical skills

The Critical Skills List (CSL) – a list of occupations where obtaining work permission and residence is facilitated – could be replaced with a points system like the UK, Australia and Canada for example. This addresses two issues – it is less subject to interpretation and manipulation than a CSL, as I understand, and it makes the system of attracting high-skilled labour more market efficient. Highly skilled people will only emigrate to South Africa if they have jobs lined-up, so there isn't a risk of opening the floodgates. A combination of a CSL and points system could work too.



Source: Muhammad-Taha Ibrahim, Pexels

b) Zimbabwe & Lesotho Exemption Permits

It might be politically complex to allow for the regularisation of law-abiding Zimbabweans and Lesotho citizens who came to South Africa under special permits, but the number isn't that large. There are about 178,000 Zimbabweans and 55,000 citizens of Lesotho living in South Africa under special permits. Most are long settled and have jobs and families, and some have children born in South Africa. Some are highly skilled.

In 1997 Mozambicans who had entered South Africa legally or illegally were offered amnesty to regularise their status. A similar approach should be offered to the Zimbabweans and Lesotho citizens who were allowed to enter under exemption arrangements (and their children born in South Africa) if they are properly employed or self-employed and don't have criminal records. This would be no greater gesture than was made to the Mozambicans and not costly to South African citizens, though it is true that the political atmosphere is more hostile to migrants than in 1997.

c) Bilateral Labour Agreements

The Bilateral Labour Agreements could be modernised along the lines of the Canadian system which allows for long-term temporary migration with a wide array of rights,



but completely prohibits permanent residence for contract migrants or their dependants. This would encourage more people from neighbouring countries who need to work in South Africa to use the regular Bilateral Labour Agreement channel, rather than to immigrate illegally.

d) Quotas?

Two years ago, the Minister of Employment and Labour issued a draft National Labour Migration Policy for South Africa (another, earlier draft White Paper) with draft legislation in which he proposed the establishment of quotas on an industry sector basis which would reserve a certain percentage of jobs for South Africans, not counting CSL employees. On the face of it this is unpalatable protectionism. However, it is true that many countries worldwide have similar rules, including many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries and some neighbours of South Africa. Quotas could help to appease people who feel disadvantaged by immigrant labour.

If a quota system is introduced, the levels must be set at industrial sector level by representatives of government, business and labour who are mandated by their peers. Quotas should not apply to small businesses and should be required to be reviewed regularly.

e) Asylum seekers

The 2023 draft White Paper notes that better systems for asylum seekers would include the strengthening of the quality of personnel in DHA, efficient border posts, better prepared Refugee Status Determination Refugee Appeals Authority officers and an effective Standing Committee for Refugee Affairs. Professionalising and ensuring coordination between departments and agencies is the mandate of the new Border Management Agency.

Also, the 'first safe country' policy recommended by the 2023 White Paper could be explored, but implementation would have to be subject to bilateral or multilateral agreements. It would have to accord with the principles of international law which South Africa is so supportive of.

f) Camps vs. inclusion

Some political parties have called for refugee camps for asylum seekers pending decisions instead of housing only those who cannot afford accommodation. This proposal is thankfully not included in the 2023 draft White Paper. However, the issue of finding ways to reduce tensions between refugees, other foreigners and locals is also not covered.

Currently, the three spheres of South African government have virtually no formal programmes to integrate migrants with local communities nor programmes to assist migrants, especially refugees, to get started. Such activities are undertaken by a

The draft White Paper argues that more than 90% of asylum seekers are not eligible for asylum.



range of civil society organisations, but on a relatively small scale. All three spheres of government must get more involved in inclusion programmes and support the settling-in process for refugees, possibly in cooperation with existing programmes driven by civil society and international organisations. **NA92**

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ENDNOTES

- 1 South Africa, Department of Home Affairs, 'Report of the Review by the Ministerial Committee on the Issuance of Permits and Visas' Ministry of Home Affairs, 10 June, 2022, p.31
- 2 *Ibid.*, p.42
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.53
- 4 Government Gazette, 11666, Vol. 704, 8 February 2024, No. 50098
- 5 Government Gazette Vol. 701, 10 November 2023, No. 49690
- 6 See <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/south-africa-multi-country-office#toc-populations> accessed 02 February 2024



Farming support must switch to black smallholders

Focus on urban elite amounts to rural State Capture

– By John Matisonn

Journalist and author Matisonn began political reporting in 1974. He was foreign correspondent in Washington for the *Rand Daily Mail* and reported for National Public Radio in the US. He has been published in the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Observer* among others. After four years as a broadcast regulator in the Mandela administration, he became the UN's Chairperson of the Electoral Media Commission in Afghanistan. He has published two books on South Africa's political transition process.

Job creation in South Africa is an urgent and paramount project and one of the target areas has to be the agricultural sector. Other targeted economic sectors can deliver jobs for urban matriculants and graduates, but JOHN MATISONN argues farming and agro-processing have the potential to provide hundreds of thousands of new jobs for black citizens in rural areas without advanced education as well as for graduates.



FFor South Africa to truly build a capacity to create jobs, a reform programme must target a small number of sectors where research has shown that each can deliver hundreds of thousands of new jobs. Together, these new jobs must take in all levels of the unemployed – entry-level university graduates, matriculants, workers in trades, as well as less skilled urban and rural work seekers.

One of these sectors has to be agriculture. It's a key piece of the puzzle. Other targeted economic sectors can deliver jobs for urban matriculants and graduates, but farming and agro-processing have the potential to provide hundreds of thousands of new jobs for black citizens in rural areas without advanced education as well as graduates.

Growing agricultural jobs is an area where other African countries have a lot to teach us. Data in some countries may be open to challenge, but most, if not all, African countries have less unemployment than South Africa, and agriculture typically provides more than 50% of jobs in these countries.

African countries that have succeeded in turning around a period of kleptocracy – often hardly distinguishable from South Africa's State Capture – have started their journey towards economic health with agriculture. The obvious reason for this is that poor countries are largely agricultural. But there is a second important reason: new methods, up-to-date information about high value crops that produce the most revenue, and changes in global demand for higher value products can kick-start struggling economies as well as yield foreign exchange to buy machinery that puts them on a path towards a new level of growth and future job creation.

Renewed growth in African states turning around their economies has often started with farming reform measures, steadily expanding into agro-processing and establishing industrial parks to house them, steadily moving up the value chain.

Ethiopia is an excellent example. Ethiopia was the fastest growing country *in the world* from 2009 until 2019, when war interrupted a remarkable run of job-creating growth. Ethiopia had large agricultural potential and little industry. The government realised there were great gains to be made in improving and supporting agriculture, beginning in 1994. Having found great export demand for flowers, the focus was on supporting growth and crop switches, and floriculture turned into a massive growth sector, adding value and jobs. Growth and profits from flowers helped facilitate the government's infrastructure build.

From 2003 the government's industrial strategy kicked in. Government facilitated industrial parks, enhancing relevant technical knowledge. Exports in a few areas had other spinoffs, driving increasing technical sophistication, the discipline of keeping quality and prices at international standards, leading to productivity gains, and increased foreign earnings that could pay for additional national strategies.

Key to agricultural growth is support for farmers *after* they acquire land, and a key component of that support is extension officers attached to the department of agriculture. They provide advice and guidance on profitable crops and methods, and feed back to government what farmers need in the form of roads and other infrastructure, crop advice, markets and finance.

Ethiopia invested in dramatically expanding public sector extension services. By 2019, 17 million producers were served by around 60,000 development agents and 14,000 farmer training centres. This is an obvious lesson for South Africa. Government reports show the state is fully aware of this need and inadequate extension services and other



farmer support have been mentioned in government reports. Yet in 2022 South Africa had only 2,492 agricultural extension officers, less than 5% of much poorer Ethiopia.

The National Development Plan (NDP) of 2012 recognised the centrality of large-scale job creation, and the important role of agriculture, not just as a matter of just restitution but also for food security, economic growth and the dignity and security of ownership and self-employment.

The NDP was published five years after the global financial crisis and the ascendancy of Jacob Zuma to the presidency. While South Africa's economy weathered the financial crisis well, largely as a result of its strong financial regulation and strong banks, following the global financial crisis employment fell by a greater percentage than the overall economy.

It is difficult to apportion the share of responsibility for South Africa's declining growth to individual factors, but it is likely that two factors – the disruption of the global crisis and the misgovernance of the Zuma administration -- were decisive. Those two events mark the negative turning point in South Africa's effective job creation and growth.

South Africa had experienced the early 2000s as a period of high growth and job creation, though its performance even during this period did not match the highest growth African economies. But after 2008, growth and job creation did not resume. GDP growth peaked at 3.1% in 2011, before the NDP was published, falling below 1% within two years.

The NDP concluded that agriculture “has the potential to create close to one million new jobs by 2030,” which it said would constitute a significant contribution to its overall target of 11 million new jobs, to bring unemployment down to 6% (NPC, 2012:219). The NDP set the goal of “faster and more inclusive economic growth” at an average annual GDP growth rate of 5.4%. The reality turned out very differently.

Ten years later, the National Planning Commission (NPC) reviewed the NDP's performance (NPC, 2022). It found South Africa added less than two million jobs in the period, rising from 14.7 million in 2012 to peak at 16.5 million in 2018, nothing near any of the targets set. Instead of being on the road to 6% unemployment by 2030, it soared in the wrong direction, to 32.6% by 2022 using the same criteria.

As for agriculture, the 2022 review found agriculture employed a total of 829,000 people in 2021, an increase from a 2010 figure of 627,000 (NPC, 2012-21). For comparison, in 1992, before the end of apartheid, 1,051 million people had been employed on commercial farms, albeit at very low wages.

What happened to the target of one million new farm jobs?

It is clear the goal of one million *new* farming jobs is not on track, and it's essential to establish why. Was it unachievable, was it not attempted seriously enough, or were the methods wrong? There are two broad schools of thought about how to drive agricultural growth in South Africa, represented particularly by academics at the University of Stellenbosch and the University of the Western Cape; Stellenbosch tends to favour commercial farming, UWC black smallholder farmers.

Small-scale farming systems in South Africa tend to be labour- rather than capital-intensive, and have the potential to create jobs on a significant scale. They tend to focus on high-value horticultural crops, such as fresh vegetables, rather than mechanised dryland cropping systems in which economies of scale are possible. They also focus on extensive livestock production, including small stock such as sheep and goats.



The school that ended up influencing government policy is clearly Stellenbosch, which is committed to large-scale commercial farming. Big agriculture is in that camp, and government has followed.

Detailed recommendations for an alternative approach are available. A recent study for the Treasury provided empirical evidence of the potential for employment growth through land redistribution aimed primarily at smallholders and small-scale commercial black farmers (Treasury, 2019).¹ It has received little attention from policymakers, including those managing the multi-stakeholder Agricultural and Agro-Processing Master Plan “Social Compact” of May 2022 (Qobo, 2022).

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The democratic government did not start that way. The Mandela administration began its term in office with a pro-poor policy that included a means test for land allocations. During that time, the Gini coefficient came down, meaning that inequality declined. But in 2000, after Mandela left office, the means test was abolished. After Mandela left office, the Gini coefficient ticked up a bit to where it currently stands, the highest in the world.

It’s not clear what the contribution of farming may be to increasing inequality but small local studies show areas where the land awards went disproportionately to well off, politically connected urban dwellers, often people who did not earn their main income from farming, favouring elites rather than farmworkers or small-scale black farmers.

To the degree that this occurred, it constitutes a form of rural State Capture.

“The (land reform) system has been captured by the elite,” wrote Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, “Women, who are meant to be the prime beneficiaries of land restitution, have been displaced from the queue by politicians and their cronies.” (Ngcukaitobi, 2021)

Ngcukaitobi is referring to chiefs and traditional leaders as well as local politicians. In particular, the Ingonyama Trust, created shortly before the end of apartheid rule, holds vast tracts of land for the “benefit, material welfare and social well-being of the members of the tribes and communities”. The trust is administered under the authority of King Misuzulu kaZwelithini.

“Despite the government having been advised by at least three credible research-based bodies that the correct approach is to redistribute [Ingonyama Trust land] directly to the communities occupying it, there is official reluctance, as the state yields to the pressure exerted by chiefs and traditional institutions,” Ngcukaitobi wrote.

Communal tenure reform focused on transferring land to traditional leadership structures, with community members offered only “statutory user rights”. This prevents

**Renewed
growth in
African states
turning around
their
economies has
often started
with farming
reform.**



farmers from using their land as collateral to borrow money. Critics have argued that the Ingonyama Trust land and other land over which traditional leaders have influence, disadvantage women as males receive preference. Without tenure, most tenant farmers will have difficulty raising loans. This is not the only unresolved problem around land tenure. Some land allocations carry a 30 year lease period before ownership may be acquired.

South Africa's land reform has had minimal impact on poverty. There are now an estimated 400,000 farmworkers in the formal farm sector and about 200,000 black smallholder farmers who produce for the market (compared to two million who produce some extra food for their own use).

University of Western Cape Emeritus Professor Ben Cousins agrees that land reform has been captured by elites. "The most powerful voices are those of emerging black capitalist farmers (often with non-farm incomes), traditional leaders, large-scale white commercial farmers and agribusiness corporates, who are all benefitting more than the poor" (Matisonn, 2023).

Rhetoric about land reform for smallholders "disguise the elite bias of current policies," Cousins argued, and the focus should shift to stepping up support for black smallholder farmers.

Farmworkers have seen their wages improve, but many have been evicted, and now are casual or seasonal workers not living on farms.

There are reports of widespread and state-supported corruption by traditional leaders in areas with significant mineral endowments. Chiefs are seeking to extend the territories under their control through large restitution claims lodged under the amended act of 2014.

Reformers propose that land reform and agriculture – food production – be linked and understood as part of the same process. Cousins and others argue that the first priorities need to be tenure reform and distribution of land to black small-scale farmers who have the most capacity to grow black agricultural jobs.

Why did land reform happen this way? Looking back, it seems that the key reasons land reform has not been done properly were because aspects are politically risky, because doing it properly is difficult and requires increased budget, and because the lobbies that have had most influence have been commercial agriculture and traditional leaders.

As a result, land reform experts point out that the beneficiaries have been large-scale agriculture, white and sometimes black, and small-scale black farmers have not

... the global
crisis and the
misgovernance
of the Zuma
administration
... mark the
negative
turning point in
South Africa's
effective job
creation and
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had the support they need. Also, farmworkers are weakly organised, and small-scale farmers interests are not adequately represented within organisations such as the African Farmers Association of SA (AFASA) (Cousins *et al.*, 2020:45).

To grow black farming requires planning, training and extension services that include access to capital and credit markets, inputs, transport and marketing. Cousins proposes government begin by targeting support to the 200,000 to 250,000 black smallholders who, “against all odds, already produce crops and livestock for sale in markets. People in this category clearly have the potential ... to provide a platform for increasing levels of output from labour-intensive farming.” They currently supply informal traders and loose value chains with less demanding requirements than formal markets and supermarket chains (Cousins *et al.*, 2020:14).

There was a parallel development in Zimbabwe after the controversial land grab of 2000. Zimbabwe started off with advantages over South Africa – better agricultural extensions services, a better educated population and a considerable number of trained small-scale black farmers.

Much media attention rested on politically connected beneficiaries. The Mugabe family became Zimbabwe’s biggest farming family during the “Fast Track Land Reform Programme” by coercing white farmers to give up their farms, by taking land from some black activists who had seized it from white farmers and by purchases at retail prices far beyond what a presidential salary would have allowed (Matisonn & Thornycroft, 2023).

In 2023, new details of tens of thousands of hectares of the family’s holdings were provided in court documents filed in divorce proceedings by Simbarashe Chikore, estranged husband of the late president’s daughter, Bona Mugabe. Chikore claimed that many Zimbabwe farms taken during that time now belong to him and his wife and should be allocated equally between them. This confirmed the family’s connection to the spoils of the “Fast Track Land Reform Programme,” which government said was to provide deprived black Zimbabweans with no more than one farm each.

Some of the Mugabe family holdings were managed and funded by the state until the inclusive government was formed in 2009 and the practice was exposed. After that, some continue to function effectively but others, including the country’s Mugabe-owned premier dairy farm, are now derelict (Matisonn & Thornycroft, 2023).

But less widely known are the majority of Zimbabwe’s beneficiaries, who are small-scale black farmers, many of whom are very productive, supplying most of the tobacco that was previously the domain of white farmers. As in South Africa, they have received little or no support from government. Support has gone predominantly to the small number of farms acquired by the political elite.

Land reform in South Africa needs prior planning for all the elements going in to farming: capital, equipment, training, extension services, infrastructure, seed production, fertiliser and transport.

Government reform needs to extend to municipalities, to provide markets and encourage the supply of small-scale farmers’ produce to institutions like schools, prisons and hospitals. With support, these small-scale producers will begin to supply formal markets, grow and hire more workers. Tenure reform is needed to secure rights for women so they are not dependent on male relatives or traditional leaders. The more land under irrigation the better for job creation and poverty reduction.

The NDP proposed adding 500,000 hectares of irrigation from the current level of 1.5m hectares, converting underused arable land in communal areas and developing



land reform projects to give black farmers access to value chains and encourage higher levels of support from white farmers and agribusiness for black farmers. However, Cousins references studies that believe only 200,000 hectares of new irrigation is realistic.

The forces that led to elite enrichment in post-liberation countries are obviously extremely powerful and little recognised. In the aftermath of liberation, both Zimbabwe and South Africa's new governments lacked the political will and experience to drive through a programme and stick with it until it succeeded.

Instead of being on the road to 6% unemployment by 2030, it soared in the wrong direction, to 32.6% by 2022.

Both also took office in an era of globalisation, with strong international forces demanding a move towards less and less government – obviously a trend that inhibits a strong, government-supporting land reform programme for small-scale farmers.

After 1994, South Africa deregulated agriculture, removing government programmes that had subsidised white farmers. Government abolished subsidies for credit, inputs and exports, and did away with single product marketing boards. It also attempted to enforce housing security for farmworkers and later a minimum wage.

Between 100,000 and 250,000 rural households are estimated to have benefited

from land transfers, including land restitution. Some traditional leaders of mineral resource-rich land have become members of a wealthy rural elite.

Empowering an elite, increasing unemployment and rising inequality continued. But these problems are not addressed by recent changes to the Constitution to allow for confiscation without compensation. "Insufficient political will is more of a constraint than the Constitution," according to Cousins. Legal scholars have echoed this view, but their analysis failed to shut down the political narrative that the Constitution was the obstacle. In private, retired judges have commented that they wished the state had brought a suitable land reform case to settle the constitutional matter, but major cases have not come before the courts.

Failure to act

The NDP predicted that the market for fresh vegetables will grow by 60% – a major opportunity requiring the reallocation of water rights. It saw substantial opportunities in citrus, table grapes, subtropical fruit and vegetables, smaller labour-intensive crops like nuts, berries, olives and figs and rooibos tea, and labour-extensive subsectors like poultry and grains and oilseeds. These opportunities received insufficient government attention.

In 2016, AFASA summed up its experience of government support for agriculture: "the government has consistently been in planning mode and hardly ever gets to execute the plans with meaningful impact" (Cousins *et al.*, 2020:45).

The failings of its agricultural programme were not unknown to government. Multiple government reports have chronicled what was missing and recommended



appropriate reforms, and several research studies confirmed smallholder farmers' poor experience of government.

Foreign development agencies have funded studies here that reached the same conclusions. While the experts at Stellenbosch University and UWC might disagree in emphasis on commercial versus smallholder focus, their reports and commentaries agree on the lack of necessary government support.

Government's own reports are consistent and devastating: the R4 billion a year government spends on smallholder and small-scale farmers is not effective. As early as 2008, a Department of Agriculture report found the state of extension and advisory services was "near collapse". It cited a survey showing that only 18.6% of smallholder and 8.9% of subsistence households found government support "very useful". Pointing to the difficulties for farmers to own land, it concluded that government failure turned many black farmers into illegal squatters.

A 2010 study estimated that between 50 and 200 households receive over R500,000. Another 350,000 got R17,000 (in extension services and other advice), and 2.2 million households received close to zero. Yet another time policy has had the effect of favouring elites.

In 2017, the High Level Panel assembled to assess "Key Legislation and the acceleration of fundamental change" noted the shift in government land reform policy from pro-poor to supporting commercial farming. The Panel ranked support for beneficiaries after land was transferred as a key challenge, emphasising poor infrastructure, the lack access to inputs, and lack of support from official agencies. (Parliament, 2017).

In 2018, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries still found a lack of capacity, pointing out that only a tiny minority of farmers receive support. It found government support schemes were chronically underfunded, one of the lowest levels of any country in the world. It pointed to the need to spend R2 to make the land work for every R1 spent buying it, but found South Africa spent only around 25 cents.



Source: Bill Burke, Food Tank



South Africa's land reform has had minimal impact on poverty.

Among the widely repeated complaints were that government departments work in silos without interdepartmental coordination, failing to iron out role confusion and insufficient budgets. With rare exceptions, there was little effective monitoring and evaluation of programmes. It recommended government departments be “joined up” – both transversal integration (between national departments) and vertical integration (between national, provincial and municipal government).

A 2019 study of wool production in the Eastern Cape found many state extension officers “never come”. A study in the sugar cane

sector found only 21% of small scale growers could remember their last contact with extension officers, either government or private.

That year a Presidential Advisory Panel (PAP) on Land Reform echoed many of the same failings, pointing out that there is no law requiring state support after a land settlement has been concluded (RSA, 2019). It found that agricultural support reached 0.44% of national expenditure at its peak, and by 2019 was down to 0.2%. Management was inefficient. The PAP blamed lack of security of tenure and title deeds, poor state capability, misaligned allocation of resources for continuing poor performance.

The 2019 PAP study proposed that smallholders be prioritised, arguing that the individual smallholder models were the most successful in the developing world, as an alternative to group farming models which provide room for corruption and are universally unsuccessful.

The NPC conducted two reviews of the NDP's performance, in 2020 and a ten-year review in 2022. The first found that progress with the inclusion of black farmers remains slow due to factors such as the failures in land reform delivery and the government's reluctance to transfer land rights to beneficiaries, limited access to finance, inefficiencies in state administration and capacity to support farmers, and lack of infrastructure in former homelands.

It recommended government provide comprehensive support to smallholders to ensure increased productivity and the expansion of production and investment in agro-processing. It also called for improving the provision of rural infrastructure, access to finance and skills, access to inputs and capital equipment, and marketing and transport infrastructure.

Cousins, who was commissioned by the European Union and other international agencies to conduct a separate study (Cousins *et al.* 2020), has long flagged the lack of support for black smallholder farmers and their potential if properly supported. He argued that key subsectors in which smallholders can be competitive include vegetables, subtropical fruit and nuts, sugar and extensive livestock production.

Livestock is crucial, because most of South Africa is arid or semi-arid and unsuitable for cropping. Resilient small stock species such as goats and sheep survive droughts better than cattle. They are sold in large numbers in ceremonial markets in rural areas but have the potential to supply consumers in urban markets too. Wool farming by smallholders in parts of the former Transkei is increasingly profitable.



Statistics suggest there are about 200,000 market-orientated smallholders who supply informal agricultural markets at present. Including occasional livestock sales, that probably rises to about 500,000. These farmers should be the key beneficiaries of rural land reform. They have the potential to begin to accumulate “from below” and over time even begin to challenge the dominance of white commercial farmers.

Cousins’ study estimated that opening up export markets for citrus and other labour-intensive crops could generate another 152,000 jobs, and enhancing livelihoods through communal area agriculture could benefit 194,000 people.

A problem facing smallholders is that value chains of formal sector food processors and retailers are concentrated, tightly integrated and difficult to penetrate. Government procurement from smallholders could play a role, together with policies to support local, informal markets.

Bakkie traders who link farmers and consumers in the informal economy already exist in large numbers and could play a key role in efforts to invigorate the informal economy. Municipalities could provide space for food markets supplied directly by farmers as well as bakkie traders. Supermarkets in rural towns could also purchase fresh produce from such markets.

He warned that failure to deracialise commercial farming could gift the land question to populist politicians. The constituency for this kind of politics will grow, increasing the likelihood of short-sighted confiscation policies being adopted without an economic logic behind them. Cousins argued that the problem with rural land reform aimed at supporting only black commercial farmers is that the jobs numbers simply do not add up. It is not a sustainable solution to an explosive political issue, and it increases inequality.

The model of farming that underlies government’s policies for land and agricultural reform is one of modern, high-tech, large-scale commercial production of agricultural commodities by skilled business managers, in which economies of scale are paramount. This largely unexamined choice has resulted in lip service being paid to the need to provide land to smallholder and semi-commercial farmers, while in practice, its model sidelines farmers operating small-scale farming systems, often successfully, despite inadequate support in a hostile economic environment.

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of rural State
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Cousins' report recommends legislation to provide extension services to smallholders, including improved communication, information flows, and missing infrastructure. This programme should be increasingly localised, take account of climate change and make "small bets" on new crops based on research backed by farmer field schools and peer-to-peer extension methodologies. "We strongly recommend that government launch a small number of pilot programmes to investigate the policies recommended in this report."

This recommendation is in tune with best practice advocated by Oxford development economist Stefan Dercon in the title of his book "Gambling on Development". Development requires these bets at manageable risk in order to find the best commodities for the market (Dercon, 2022).

Each local municipality needs an audit of land available. Underused arable land in communal areas should be allocated in sizes of around one hectare each, and smallholder farmers given access to value chains (Cousins *et al.*, 2020).

This study identified key commodities with employment creation potential – vegetables, subtropical fruit and nuts, grapes, sugar cane, wool, extensive livestock production, the replacement of grain crops with vegetables, cattle with goats and fruit on grazing land.

A review of the literature makes it clear that government's approach to agriculture requires a major overhaul. It is long overdue and it's astonishing that shortfalls so well documented have gone unaddressed for so long. It will require a rethink of the national budget. Clearly the case for reprioritising agriculture is overwhelming. The collapse of infrastructure in farming districts is well known through the popular media. Rural poverty and unemployment cry out for attention that is targeted quite differently from urban areas.

A key component will be to train a significant cohort of agricultural extension officers. Based on international experience, two-year crash courses to train extension officers would be appropriate.

The case for promoting black smallholders should need little argument. Clearly, providing land to the politically connected for whom farming is not their primary income fits the category of State Capture rather than the original purpose of land reform.

Finally, it is an important practical route to decreasing inequality and lowering South Africa's Gini coefficient, which politicians often talk about but show little evidence that effective practical policy redress and implementation has followed. Without increasing the number of black smallholders to build a new class of currently excluded farmers and potential farmers it is hard to see any alternative that will increase farm employment or reduce inequality.

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The track record is clear. So are the viable options. It seems trite to end with a quote from the Freedom Charter: “The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and dams to save the soil and assist the tillers.”

What could be more obvious, necessary or timely? **NA92**

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Also see Cousins, 2015 and Cousins *et al*, 2020.



Cosatu's mute response

Waves of social movement unionism in South Africa and its crisis during Covid

– By uMbuso weNkosi

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Cosatu's failure to be the voice of the working class in times of crisis, such as during Covid-19 and the July 2021 unrest in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, reflects its inability to envision a future beyond the ANC, writes uMBUSO weNKOSI. He argues that as long as organised labour is locked in an alliance with the ruling party it cannot be rooted in community struggles, to the detriment of the social movement unionism of the anti-apartheid struggle.

Introduction



The history of the South African struggle to attain democracy is linked with the struggle of the working class for the right to organise in the workplace and have unions officially recognised. This struggle by organised labour, which was not limited to attaining rights in the workplace but was linked with the anti-apartheid community struggles, was characterised as social movement unionism (Webster, 1988). However, over the past decade, this link between unions and community / social movements has been declining. The Covid-19 pandemic and the various lockdown measures passed by the South African government in March 2020 exposed how organised labour has lost its links with the community struggles.

This article focuses on the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and its affiliates. Cosatu has been chosen for two reasons. Firstly, it is the largest union federation with a membership of 1.8 million workers. Secondly, despite the many neoliberal policies adopted by the ANC, Cosatu is still part of the tripartite alliance, together with the South African Communist Party (SACP). Cosatu is of the view that through this alliance it can influence the governing party's policies. Yet, since the 2000s, Cosatu has become a junior partner in this alliance, working for the ANC and rescinding social movement unionism (Barchiesi, 2006; Buhlungu, 2010; Mosoetsa and Tshoaedi, 2013). There has been a plethora of scholarly calls for a return to social movement unionism beyond Cosatu's alliance with the ANC or in other spaces where the community struggles continue (see Paret, 2015; Cherry, 2017; Mmadi, 2023).

This article aims to show that the Covid-19 pandemic further exposed how Cosatu lost its vision and its ability to link up with community struggles. The Covid-19 pandemic showed the depth of the crisis of social reproduction as many South Africans became unemployed and faced food insecurity and a looming crisis in the health sector. During this period, Cosatu did not have a clear response to the challenges faced by the South African working class and communities.

South Africa also experienced mayhem in July 2021, when looting broke out in parts of Durban and Gauteng. During this chaos, Cosatu was silent and did not offer any voice of reason.

This article argues that unions are struggling to find their identity – the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed this. I reconsider what is social movement unionism and focus on the ideological character, the drive of the community-labour alliances and the imagined future. Key to social movement unionism is that workers were not only mobilised around their identity as workers, but as part of the oppressed working class community, enforcing ideals of democratic rights and citizenship beyond the workplace struggles (Mosoetsa and Tshoaedi, 2013).

... over the past decade, [the] link between unions and community/ social movements has been declining.



Social movement unionism and alliances with the community

From the 1970s, we saw the re-emergence of militant Black trade unions who established strong ties with communities in fighting the apartheid state (Ballard, Habib, Valodia, 2006; Webster, 1988). This resistance was to revive the political landscape as well, following harsh state repression in the 1960s. In 1973, over 100,000 Black workers in the cities of Durban and Pinetown embarked on a series of strikes in protest against low wages and poor working conditions (Webster, 1988). In 1976, the youth of Soweto, inspired by the ideology of Black Consciousness, took to the streets to reject Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in Black high schools (Magaziner, 2009). During this period in South Africa, and especially from the 1980s, we saw the rise of “social movement unionism” between trade unions and communities, a term drawn from trade unions in Brazil and South Korea (Webster, 1988; Seidman, 1994; Waterman, 1999).

Von Holdt (2003:147) argues that the analysis of social movement unionism has concentrated on the role of the union in community struggles and “the impact of community alliances on the union social structure...” Von Holdt (2003:147-148) says social movement unionism is a “complex and dynamic network of political, community and workplace struggles woven together by a discourse of national liberation struggle.” He (2002) also argues that by focusing on social movement unionism the literature fails to speak to the intra-dynamics within the alliances between communities and trade unions and questions of popular consciousness within the alliances are rarely investigated. There is no one unifying ideology relating to the future within social movement unionism, except that it is driven by left political ideas, seeks to overthrow an authoritarian state and values principles of participatory democracy linked with building strong community alliances. Within social movement unionism, one finds various Marxist activists (Marxist-Leninist, Trotskyist), anarcho-syndicalists, Black Consciousness activists, Pan Africanists, etc. So ideologically these multiple ideologies differ in their imagination of the ‘future’.

At the ideological level, the period was influenced by the emergence of a “non-Soviet New Left Marxism” which was critical of the Stalinist approach which saw unions as merely transmission belts of the vanguard party (Pillay, 1996:331). The move towards Left politics beyond a Soviet influence has to be understood within the broader revisionist debates outside of South Africa in the United Kingdom, and within South African institutes of higher learning in the 1970s between the National Union of South African Students (Nusas) and

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the newly formed South African Students Organisation (Saso) which gave birth to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which questioned what they called the irksome role of 'white liberals' who had come to shape and influence how Blacks responded to their subjugation (Ally and Ally, 2008).

The tenets of the BCM argued that only Blacks (by Blacks they referred to Indians, Coloureds and Africans as the oppressed groups in South Africa) could come up with the solution to fighting their own subjugation and the white liberals who directly and indirectly benefitted from apartheid. The BCM advanced that these white liberals needed to focus on their own communities and deal with questions of white supremacy amongst themselves (Biko, 2004, Ally and Ally, 2008; Friedman, 1987). The white liberals "accepted many of the Black students' charges, but refused to watch the battle for change from the sidelines ..." (Friedman, 1987:42).

Students inspired by Marxist approaches (Marxist-Leninist, Trotskyist), the academic Rick Turner and anarcho-syndicalist ideas began developing independent trade unions that had strong ties with students and they viewed African communities and workers as important allies (Friedman, 1987; Van der Walt, 2023). This group emphasised 'workers control', participatory democracy and the empowerment of the African communities within the union structures (Webster, 1988, Baskin, 1991, Van der Walt, 2023). The BCM movement also established new unions, for example the Black Allied Workers' Union (BAWU), which was formed in 1971 under the leadership of Drake Koka.

Because of the state's repression of political movements such as the ANC and the unions that were associated with the ANC (such as the South African Congress of Trade Unions [Sactu]), the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (formed in 1974), a predecessor of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu) formed in 1979, did not adopt explicit or radical alliances with exiled political movements. They feared repression would weaken shopfloor structures (Von Holdt, 2003). Buhlungu (2010) argues that to survive the state repression, unions that emerged after the Durban strikes drew heavily on the lived experiences of Black workers and their intellectual influences in their unions, cultural and religious groups, mutual-help clubs and societies (*stokvels*), school struggles, etc. In reference to the intellectual contribution towards the emergence of democratic unionism, he refers to university intellectuals who had formal education, party intellectuals (who had links with political parties), union-made intellectuals (who attained their experience through participating in unions) and grassroots intellectuals (borrowing the term "organic intellectuals" from Gramsci to refer to those who never had formal university training but attained knowledge through their participation in different struggles) (Buhlungu, 2010: 34-49; Bonnin, 1999).

Faced with intense resistance from the workplace and communities, the apartheid government passed reforms recommended by the Reikert and Wiehahn commissions of the late 1970s such as recognising the right of trade unions to exist and the right of urban Blacks to live in cities and towns (Swilling and Phillips, 1989). The apartheid government also tried to win over Indians and Coloureds by creating a tricameral parliament where they had their own Houses of Parliament.

On 20 August 1983, the United Democratic Front was formed in opposition to the narrow reforms; affiliates were drawn from across society, including community-based organisations, churches, football clubs, burial societies, etc. Cosatu was established on 1 December 1985, after four rounds of unity talks between unions opposed to apartheid and committed to a non-racial, non-sexist society. (This involved unions active in



Fosatu that eventually became part of Cosatu). Cosatu and the UDF aligned with the ANC, engaging in strikes and insurrection to make the country ungovernable. Cosatu's relationship with the ANC mirrors that of its predecessor, Sactu, which had an alliance with the ANC and the SACP (formerly known as the Communist Party of South Africa).

The complex nature of community-labour struggles in the 2000s

In 1994, democratic elections took place in South Africa and the ANC became the governing party. It presented the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) as its election campaign manifesto, to remedy the socio-economic ills created by the apartheid regime (Turok, 2008). The RDP was driven by ideas of growth through redistribution meaning that redress was needed first in order to boost economic growth in South Africa (Marais, 2001). However, in 1996, the ANC adopted the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) policy which was criticised by Cosatu and the SACP as a neoliberal policy (Turok, 2008).

In 1997, the Greater Johannesburg Municipal Council (GJMC) stated that the city of Johannesburg was facing a financial crisis which would affect the delivery of services and that the Gauteng provincial government needed to intervene (Naidoo, 2010). In 1999 "a 'Transformation Lekgotla', an ad-hoc, unelected administrative body composed by the chairperson and the deputy chairpersons of the GJMC and the MLCs [Metropolitan Local Councils] plus five co-opted councillors [was] established as a transitional political organ in charge of running the five councils as a single structure" (Barchiesi, 2006:18). The management team with the Transformation Lekgotla presented the iGoli 2002 plan to the Council and it was approved on 16 March 1999 (Barchiesi, 2006). The iGoli 2002 plan was based on the separation of services provided by the GJMC and was seen as a cost effective strategy to deal with the city's fiscal crisis (Barchiesi, 2006).

In 2000, Wits University and the GJMC co-hosted an international conference called 'Urban Futures' where prominent academics such as Immanuel Castells and Saskia Sassen presented papers on urban development. The conference also served the purpose of unveiling plans for restructuring the city via the iGoli 2002 plan and the university via the Wits 2001 plan. This conference was boycotted by the Wits University branch of the South African Students Congress (Sasco), the South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu) of the Johannesburg city council, the Johannesburg central branch of the SACP, Cosatu, the National Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu), the anti-iGoli Forum, and members of various ANC branches in and around Johannesburg (Naidoo, 2010; Buhlungu, 2006).

Buhlungu (2006:69) argues that "[U]p to that point, left-wing activists outside the tripartite alliance [which comprised the ANC, SACP, and Cosatu] were uncertain about how to proceed and were thus searching for political relevance in a context where left-wing ideas were no longer fashionable" and those within the tripartite alliance were frustrated by the ANC's adoption of Gear. The coming together of different activists, as Naidoo (2010) shows, was not merely about the recreation of Left ideas. It represented the multiple diverse responses to the neoliberal policy recommendations that had been adopted and promoted by the ANC government. These affected the communities, academics and trade unionists; recommendations such as labour market flexibility (also restructuring of the university) meant that workers would lose their jobs and unions their members. It also meant that a number of townships residents would not be able to pay for the commodified public services such as electricity and water. The coming together of the groups led to the formation of the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), on 6



July at Wits University, and in September that year the founding conference was held at Cosatu House.

Focusing on the APF as a case study, Buhlungu (2006) asks what is new about the 'new social movements'? He shows that in some cases, the 'new' tends to be exaggerated as the APF was formed by activists who had linkages with the tripartite alliance and included some people who had been expelled from the SACP or Cosatu. It also had links with Samwu for example, which was formed in 1987 as a result of a merger between the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association, the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), and some community unions that had started in the 1980s (Barchiesi, 2006). Samwu's relations with the 'new social movements,' particularly the APF, as indicated, was a result of the opposition to the iGoli 2002 plan.

Samwu criticised municipal corporatisation, arguing that it posed a threat to working conditions and wages of the working class and would also exclude poor communities from accessing public services (Xali, 2005; Barchiesi, 2006). Barchiesi shows that the relationship between Samwu and the APF was short-lived, citing a strike called by Samwu on 30 November 2000 in protest against the Council's unilateral approach. The strike was suspended on 4 December 2000 because the union faced direct pressure from the ANC and Cosatu. Local government elections were about to be held and civil movements such as the South African National Civics Organisation (Sanco) had accepted the iGoli 2002 plan and were supporting the payment of services. Samwu capitulated to the pressure (Barchiesi, 2006; Zuern, 2006; Naidoo, 2010) because, despite its opposition to privatisation, following the intervention of Cosatu and the ANC some of its national leaders had begun to argue that the privatisation struggles could facilitate anti-government sentiment within the labour movement. The idea emerged within Samwu that the union had to break ties with the APF because it was 'anti-ANC' (Buhlungu, 2006).

The ANC perceived the movements as actively criminal and activists in these 'new movements' became victims of state repression (McKinley and Veriava, 2005). As movements outside the state, or, more accurately, outside the tripartite alliance and thus also in direct opposition to the fundamental developmental trajectory chosen by the ANC and the state it controlled, their tactics mostly included direct action (through strikes) and civil disobedience. For example, in cases where Eskom had disconnected communities from the electricity grid, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) would 'illegally' reconnect them.

Naidoo (2010) shows that within the APF and its affiliates there was an internal struggle for power; those belonging to the Socialist Group sought to control the APF,

Cosatu has become a junior partner of the alliance, working for the ANC and rescinding social movement unionism.



which alienated the ‘ordinary’ members who were not Marxists or Trotskyites but simply wanted to find solutions to their problems. This competition within the movement, and its shift from horizontal democratic participation to a focus on seizing power at state or local municipality level, undermined the movement’s relevance in the communities. This also meant that the APF was now seen as a space for upward social mobility; struggles were seen as “...a transition, you do the struggles and then you move to positions” of power (Hlatshwayo, *interview* 19/03/2010).

What can be observed from this period is that the ideological shifts within the ANC, the emergence of new social movements and the limitations on the envisioned future highlighted the complex and contested nature of South Africa’s dynamics within social movement unionism. The shifts and alliances reflected an ongoing struggle to readdress the socio-economic disparities resulting from colonialism, slavery, segregation, and apartheid. At the same time, the challenges to reconcile various ideological and practical approaches in pursuit of social justice and economic transformation continued, but after the democratic transition and the demise of the oppressive state the tripartite party no longer shared the state as a common enemy. Cosatu, as indicated, has been accused of making the neoliberal policies palatable to the workers. This new role portrays the federation as working for the ANC and not for the workers and communities, effectively rescinding social movement unionism.

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Split and no alternative vision

Cosatu also failed to organise unorganised workers who are in the ‘informal’ economy. Another challenge was the Marikana massacre in 2012, which prompted the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), an affiliate of Cosatu at the time, to question its alliances with the ANC (Numsa, 2014). Gentle (2014) argues that the massacre exposed the fact that the ANC was no longer a “broad church”, but a party of the very rich, “...those whose interests must be defended, violently, if necessary. In so doing, it freed activists from any further illusions of transforming the ANC into the movement it was in the 1980s.” In its resolutions adopted at a Special National Congress on 16-20 December 2013, Numsa (2013) indicated it would not support the ANC in the 2014 national elections, but would try to form a united front which would link the struggles in the workplace with those of the community. The position taken by Numsa in questioning the role of trade unions within the alliance was not new. During the transition period, it had already started asking whether it should align with the ANC as the governing party of the state or form a new vehicle to represent workers’ interests (Baskin, 1991).

Numsa indicated that it would also try to organise across value chains including mining (Numsa, 2013; Ashman and Pons-Vignon, 2014). This was welcomed in a



statement released by nine Cosatu affiliates who argued that Numsa's move would help in organising workers in atypical employment, which offered a pragmatic way of dealing with the changing nature of the South African economy (Numsa, 2014). Ashman and Pons-Vignon (2014) have argued that the move to try to come up with a united front meant a rejuvenation of labour-community alliances and a shift in Numsa to dealing with community issues ranging from "housing to water and electricity distribution".

Numsa, which was the largest affiliate of Cosatu, was expelled from the federation in 2015, which led to the emergence of a new federation, the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Safu) in 2017, led by Numsa. This split was not only about the failure of Cosatu to question its ideological relationship with a party like the ANC that was considered anti-working class. It also reflected a deep political tension about who would lead the working class in South Africa.

The pandemic and the crisis of social reproduction

At the beginning of 2020 the global capitalist system was showing signs of moving towards a major economic slump; economic growth was slowing in China, Japan was possibly facing a recession, emerging economies in the Global South such as Mexico, Argentina and South Africa were already in a recession (Rethink Africa, 2022). South Africa was already plagued by unemployment, poverty, inequality and gender-based violence.

On 15 March 2020 President Cyril Ramaphosa declared the Covid-19 State of Disaster which was followed by a three-week level five lockdown effective from 26 March 2020. The lockdown measures were non-medical interventions intended to restrict person-to-person contact to prevent the virus from spreading. The aim of the lockdown was also to help prepare the healthcare system for a looming surge of patients in need of hospital care (to provide relief to a national healthcare system which was already in a crisis). The decision-making processes which informed the 'tough' lockdown measures have had a detrimental impact on the country's economic and social relations. Saving lives became a priority of the strategy and livelihoods suffered as many industries that were not providing essential services had to close. It was even worse for those in precarious working conditions in the informal economy (Bezuidenhout, Bischoff, Tshoaedi, 2023).

Early days of lockdown and Cosatu's response

During level five, Cosatu's response was to release statements calling for support for the government's measures to fight the virus (McKinley, 2020). Bischoff (2023) in her chapter on trade unions during Covid-19, shows how affiliates within Cosatu effectively communicated their needs regarding the shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the protection of those at the forefront of the pandemic, i.e. the nurses. Yet Cosatu and the federations that Bischoff studied failed to link up with other movements on the health care front. For example, the Gauteng Community Health Care Workers Forum exposed the government's response to the crisis as inadequate since it did not protect the community health care workers (CHWs) who did not have sufficient PPEs, although at the same time, the government argued that the CHWs play an essential role in the fight against the pandemic (McKinley, 2020; Hlatshwayo, 2020). The forum promoted the idea of permanent employment of CHWs. The same criticism of the government lockdown was expressed by the Reclaimers Organisation, who took the government to court on 7 April to have their duties recognised as essential services. They



lost the case, but they were able to highlight how the government's interpretation of essential services was biased towards the formal economy (Krige, 2020).

While all of these struggles were happening there was also the formation of the C19 People's Coalition comprising various social movements. One of the issues it has taken up is the promotion of the Basic Income Grant (BIG), indicating the inadequacy of the social security measures provided by the government. The C19 People's Coalition has been at the forefront of the campaign to show that the Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant – introduced in May 2020 for the unemployed – was not sufficient to mitigate the crisis of social reproduction in the country. The campaigns by the C19

... the Marikana massacre exposed the fact that the ANC was no longer a "broad church", but a party of the very rich.

People's Coalition for BIG build on debates that had occurred within Cosatu in the 2000s around the importance of the BIG. Yet, the federation is nowhere to be seen within this coalition and has not engaged in the struggle for BIG with these new social movements that have been dealing with questions that affected the working class during the pandemic.

Community health care workers and the July 2021 unrest

Hlatshwayo (2018) shows that 70,000 health care workers are women and in times of a pandemic, as other scholars have demonstrated, it is women who are most affected because of their "their principal role as caregivers within families and front-line health-care workers" (Parry and Gordon, 2020). CHWs are a good example of social movement unionism since their workplace is their community as well. They perform double care, at the community level as well as at home (Hlatshwayo, 2020). Thus, their role as front-line agents is important in life-making work, i.e.

"cleaning, feeding, cooking, washing clothes ... public transport, nursing work, garbage removal, food production" (Bhattacharya, 2020). Life-making work became known as essential services during the lockdown, and I have argued that in some cases essential work was ignored by unions.

From 25-26 November 2020 one of Cosatu's affiliates, Nehawu, went on strike to put pressure on the government to employ 20,000 CHWs. This move by the affiliate has been praised as it has taken up the necessary community struggles – especially the neglected issue of CHWs – who are mostly women. Hlatshwayo (2020:48) argues that "[p]aradoxically, the pandemic, which destroyed lives and the economy, presented CHWs with the rare opportunity to intensify their struggles for permanent employment and better wages." Interestingly, this fight for CHWs also saw Nehawu (2020) attacking the National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers (Nupsaw) in a press statement as a fly-by-night union. Yet Nupsaw and non-profit organisation Masincedane were part of a protest in September 2020 in Cape Town for making CHW permanent workers and calling for all provinces to do the same (Hlatshwayo, 2020). The tension between Nupsaw and Nehawu revolved around who would lead this fight, with Nupsaw



questioning the intentions of Nehawu and the latter arguing that they have a 33-year-old “history of fighting for workers against exploitation and we will continue to champion workers interests at all material times” (Nehawu, 2020). This was telling since it suggested Nehawu saw itself as a de facto leader because of its history instead of its partnership in a new alliance. This is a challenge that many affiliates of Cosatu have faced; it is difficult for them to let ‘newcomers’ take the wheel while they have been leading in society for longer (Barchiesi, 2006).

Another challenge emerged in the country with the unrest from 8-17 July 2021 in Gauteng and Durban. The impetus for this unrest was the arrest of former president Jacob Zuma after being sentenced to 15 months of imprisonment for not appearing before the judicial commission of inquiry into allegations of state capture led by Chief Justice Raymond Zondo. As a result of the unrest, looting and destruction of private property, 354 people died and R50 billion was lost to the economy. The July 2021 mayhem revealed a crisis of leadership; a working class that adopts a short-sighted outlook employed by the political elite. A looting working class does not indicate a sustained collective consciousness because, after the looting, its problems remain. Cosatu was not present in these urban communities during the unrest to provide a voice of reason or even in the process of reconstruction and cleaning up the mess that followed. It did not address the issues behind the looting – that most people in the communities were faced with hunger resulting from the strict Covid-19 regulations. Much more telling is that in the *Report of the expert panel into the July 2021 civil unrest* trade unions are mentioned as key stakeholders, yet there is nothing in the report about the position of Cosatu or any other trade unions. The report refers only to Gauteng’s Premier David Makhura who engaged with hostel dwellers, *izinduna* (traditional authority), taxi associations and political parties to stand against the violence (Africa, Gumbi and Sokupa, 2021).

Conclusion

The argument raised in this paper is that to assess social movement unionism there is a need to understand its ideological character, the union’s engagement with the community and the imagination of the alternative future. The ideological character of Cosatu from the 2000s has been about criticising from the position of the Left yet failing to carry through this criticism by substantially linking up with the communities to oppose the policies adopted by the ANC. This is because Cosatu fails to see a future beyond the ANC. Instead Cosatu sees a future where its former leaders like Bheki Ntshalintshali argue that Cosatu is not present in the streets but “in the boardroom we have sound policies that cannot be refuted” (AmaShabala, 2022). The article indicates that during the Covid-19 pandemic and its various lockdowns there was a gap where there should have been a linking up with the community struggles, and the federation did not move into that vacuum. Similarly, during the 2021 July unrest the federation was mute.

The desire for the return of social movement unionism in scholarly articles (see Paret, 2015; Cherry, 2017; Madi, 2023) fails to assess the ideological character of the present relationship in which unions are subsumed by the vision of themselves as partners, albeit in an alliance that treats them as junior partners. **NA92**



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40 years of shop floor resistance

Racial ordering and history of militant culture

– By Sithembiso Bhengu

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Based on four decades of ethnographic research into growing workplace resistance and militancy in the 1980s and 1990s at a Durban rubber factory, SITHEMBISO BHENGU adds his own study of the factory workers – their struggles, identities and everyday lives – more than a decade into democracy. In piecing together their narratives over a span of four decades, he identifies the clear continuities in the objective conditions workers live and work in, as well as in their subjective consciousness, and also the significant discontinuities between the two critical eras of worker formations and struggle in South Africa.



A comment on method

Sitas' longitudinal ethnography of factory workers in Durban (1984, 1986, 1989, 1996, 1996a, 1997, 2002 and 2004) is an attempt to move beyond the limitations of labour process theories in studying and theorising the resurgence of militant worker formations from the late 1970s in Natal.¹ Sitas' cultural formations approach extended burgeoning labour studies and highlighted new terrains of struggle in South Africa during the 1980s and 1990s. His research was not only concerned with a cultural formations approach, but also with coalescing cultural formations into the broader struggle for freedom and linking workplace and community struggles at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle.

The ethnographic approach also became an active research approach through which cultural associations and social formations used by African workers in everyday life for leisure and de-stressing became avenues for social mobilisation and struggle. Sitas researched and engaged with factory workers around brewing and cultural activities such as *indlamu*, *isicathamiya*, plays and poetry as a means for mobilising, political education and struggle. The majority of militant and vibrant shop stewards in the 1980s and early 1990s took part in plays, sometimes travelling across the country and even abroad to perform theatre depicting workers' lives under the apartheid work regime.

This article draws on 16 months of critical ethnography in which the author revisited factory workers in the second decade after democracy to examine the social reproduction of the African working class in post-apartheid South Africa.² It argues first that social reproduction, lives and livelihoods of working-class South Africans are organised, reorganised beyond the rural-urban divide. Wage income remains the most important resource in the production and reproduction of the African working class in post-apartheid South Africa. Second, institutional production regimes continue to be organised through a *racialised ordering*, a lack of substantive transformation on the shop floors (Bhengu, 2014). These precipitate antagonistic relations between workers and management as well as a militant workforce.

Persisting migrant labour identity

Migrant labour identities constitute a continuing set of relations and meanings in both objective conditions and subjective consciousness of factory workers. The everyday life of workers and their households continue to reach beyond the rural-urban divide. By the 1980s most factory workers were second-generation urban residents, but many had active links with the Natal (Kwa-Zulu) countryside. Revisiting shop floors between 2007 and 2010, the research shows that some workers are third and fourth generation urban residents, some with fully functional households in urban townships, yet many still

It ... reflected a deep political tension about who would lead the working class in South Africa.



maintain active links with homesteads in the countryside. While figure 1 shows that 80% of factory workers have a secondary household in the countryside, figures 2 and 3 show that the majority of workers maintain rural-urban household networks through remittances and regular visits to secondary households.

Figure 1 Secondary households

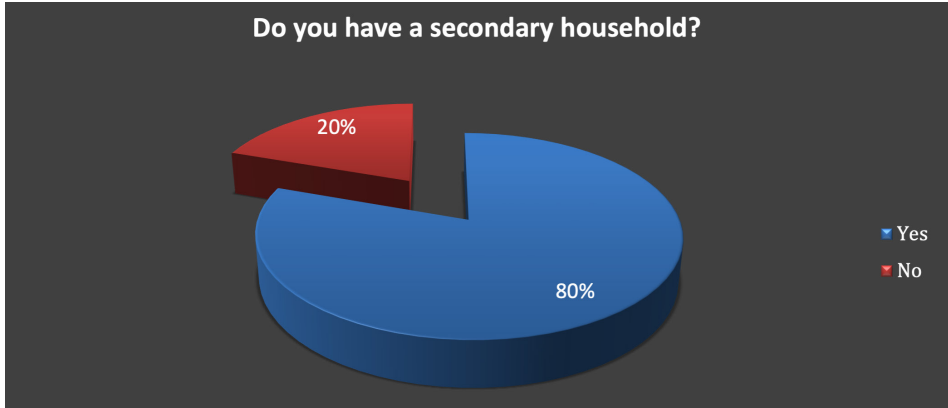


Figure 2 Visits to the secondary households

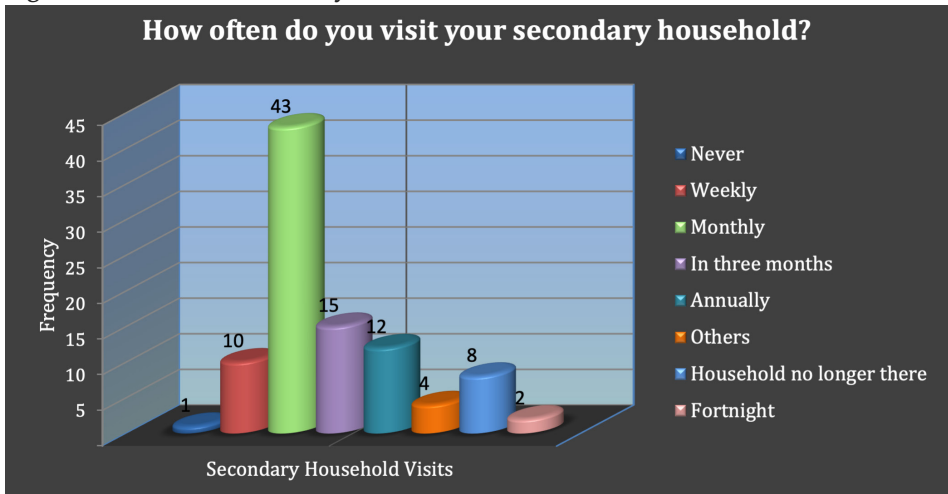
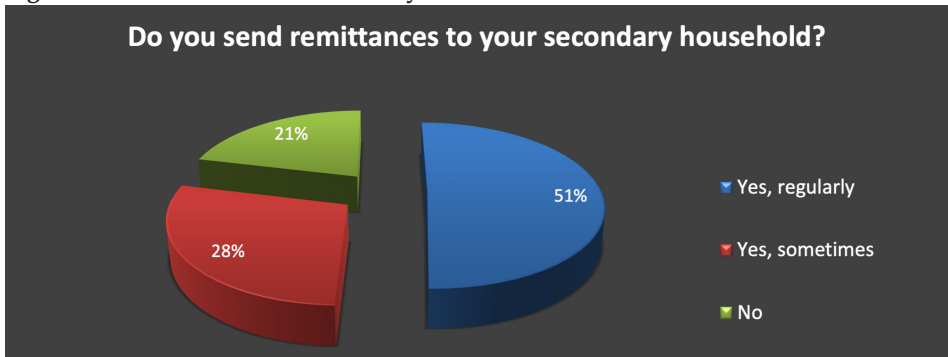


Figure 3 Remittances to the secondary households





While factories no longer use apartheid recruitment patterns in KwaZulu-Natal, the migrant identity amongst workers is still prevalent. By the 1980s Sitas (1989) observed that migrant identities on the shop floor represented both the objective reality as well as the subjective identities workers invoke in making meaning of everyday work life. The migrant identity itself became a constellation of workers' experiences and the invoking of popular memories and popular histories, which have become a fabric of worker culture and worker consciousness on the factory floor. By invoking migrant discourses, workers mould and reproduce a workplace culture of resistance, militancy, unity and solidarity on the shop floor.

Rural-urban linkages also endure because the countryside continues to be a place of meaning and a place of refuge for workers. While family networks in the countryside seek work in the city and send children to the city for school, etc, workers continue to return to the countryside to perform rituals which constitute social capital, as well as retreat to the countryside when they retire or are unable to work (either because of old age or frailty). Almost all workers and worker leaders interviewed indicated a wish to retreat to the countryside after they retire as a place to finally rest with their ancestors. Sitas (1989) argued that workers invoked notions of inextricable connections to the countryside, even among the second-generation migrants in the 1980s and 1990s. A popular saying in isiZulu is *'inkaba yami igqitshwe le emakhaya*, ("my umbilical cord is deeply rooted in my rural homestead").

Urban-rural linkages are not one-dimensional; a common assumption of the unilinear direction of urban-rural connections neglects the reciprocal nature of urban-rural networks. While workers send remittances, household networks in the countryside fulfil other functions of social reproduction in African working-class households.

Racialised institutional apparatus of production

Multiple generations of workers from the 1980s to 2010 expressed similar experiences and invoked similar stories of shop floor struggles and intransigence of factory bosses towards workers. The 2007 rubber strike almost resembles in every form the historical 1984 Dunlop strike. In both strikes workers expressed frustration at what they regarded as the intransigence and unwillingness of factory management to engage with workers reasonably. The friction, the sparks, the explosion and the discipline of the strikes were the consequences of a collision between a strong, confident shop steward leadership and the traditional managerialism of a tough, anti-union company.

Associated with these tensions was also a strong feeling by workers of continued racial ordering of industrial relations at the factory. While in 1984 the political apparatus of apartheid was intact and manifest in the structural setup of industries in South Africa, between 2007 and 2010 workers lamented the lack of transformation in managerial layers of the company. During the 2007 rubber industry strike (and its aftermath) workers still used racial categorisation to differentiate between shop floor and management. During the strike the content of most revolutionary songs and slogans highlighted the workers' views of the employers and factory bosses. Many of these songs date back to the 1980s and 1990s during times of resistance to apartheid and white capitalist oppression. In these songs and slogans words like 'capitalists', 'whites' and 'employers' are used interchangeably to refer to factory bosses. The songs declare *"Ongxiwa basaba umbimbi, ngoba befuna ukuphatha umhlaba ngabodwa"*, ("Capitalists are afraid of the collective alliance because they want to own the land by themselves"); *"abelungu bayasicindezela"*, ("These whites are oppressing [exploiting] us"); and *"umqashi naye kumele abuzwe"*



ubuhlungu balesisiteleka” (“the employer must also feel the discomfort of the strike”) (Bhengu, 2010:208). Furthermore, workers highlighted the lack of transformation at the factory and shop stewards showed company organograms that demonstrated that management was still white and male.³

In one of the meetings during the strike some workers put forward a motion demanding factory bosses address transformation in line with national priorities (employment equity), especially at management levels. In the same discussion, workers adopted a demand for the factory to transform, noting however that employment equity and Black Economic Empowerment are not a panacea for all workers’ problems. One striking worker cautioned that they (the workers and shop stewards) have lobbied for Black (African, Coloured and Indian) workers to be promoted to foremen, supervisors and even middle management. He went on to say:

Umuntu sifike simulwele, simxhase, uma elwa nabaqashi ukuthi aphakamiswe. Uma esebekiwe phezulu bese yena futhi asijikijele ngamatshe. Uyababona nje, nalamaqabane esawayisa epalamente, asesijikijela ngamatshe manje sikhuluma nje! (“We as workers fight for people to be promoted, all of a sudden once they have been promoted people throw stones at us, even comrades that we have deployed in parliament, are now throwing stones at us!”)

A racialised workplace ordering results in worker valorisation, precipitating shop floor militancy, animosity towards factory bosses and tenuous industrial relations between workers and management. As indicated above, worker militancy is accentuated by the perceived lack of transformation in management in line with national equity priorities.

The actual construction of shop floor militancy and how it plays out in everyday life on the shop floor is another interesting observation that emerged from engaging with Dunlop workers. Workers construct and mobilise shop floor militancy by invoking what Sitas (1997) calls the popular memory (popular history) of trade unions and through the shop floor socialisation of new and younger workers by their older familial networks.

Generational history of shop floor militancy

Worker militancy is also explained by the experience of persistent super exploitation. In the 1970s and 1980s the factory was regarded as a better paying institution, but workers lamented that the factory still paid the workers too little given the profits and productivity the workers consistently produced. When older workers speak about the span of time from the 1940s to the present, the themes of “thankless toil” – sacrificing years for nothing in return – and managerial harshness predominate. One worker said, “For over thirty years, I have been working for this company ... and the only thing I managed to buy over and above the bare necessities was a bicycle” (Sitas, 1984: 32). However, this too proved to be useless after his move to KwaMashu where the bicycle was damaged by rust and the worker exchanged it for part of the price of a head of cattle. Enlarging on the theme, a worker said: “Dunlop has been a very, very hard firm. The saying goes that if you work there, stay unmarried, for you can’t afford a family ... wages, night shift, tiredness ... if you are married already, don’t have any more than two children or you will be crying ... They feel no pain there ... they make more and more profit but don’t pay the worker anything to match it. It annoys us a lot to read about their profits in the *Dunlop Gazette* ...” (Sitas, 1984: 32).

The relationship between profit extraction and income has been a source of great dissatisfaction. As one of the elders commented: “I used to make 120 tyres for them a



day, that was about R6,000-R7,000 ... You want to know what my wage saw of all that?" (Sitas, 1984: 33) The messages transmitted down the generations to younger workers were simple: they too should expect nothing from Dunlop. It was not the benevolent employer it claimed to be.

Worker militancy represents a constant tussle, what Sitas calls trials of strength between traditionalist, anti-union employers and strongly organised workers. "It is like a Mlabalaba game," explained a worker, "where the winner takes all. You throw the stone.

In songs and slogans words like 'capitalists', 'whites' and 'employers' are used interchangeably to refer to factory bosses.

He blocks it. You throw another one. He blocks, but at the same time he is on the offensive ... You block ... The difference is that there is no time for the struggle to end. In each minute that goes by, you both lose something. In the beginning you lose a finger, by the second week you are a cripple. The same with him. He loses money, profits. So, one of you will have to stop and say okay" (Sitas, 1984: 34). Trials of strength are costly for all concerned: "They are in many respects," asserted Richard Hyman, "the industrial equivalent of war between nations" (Sitas, 1984:34).

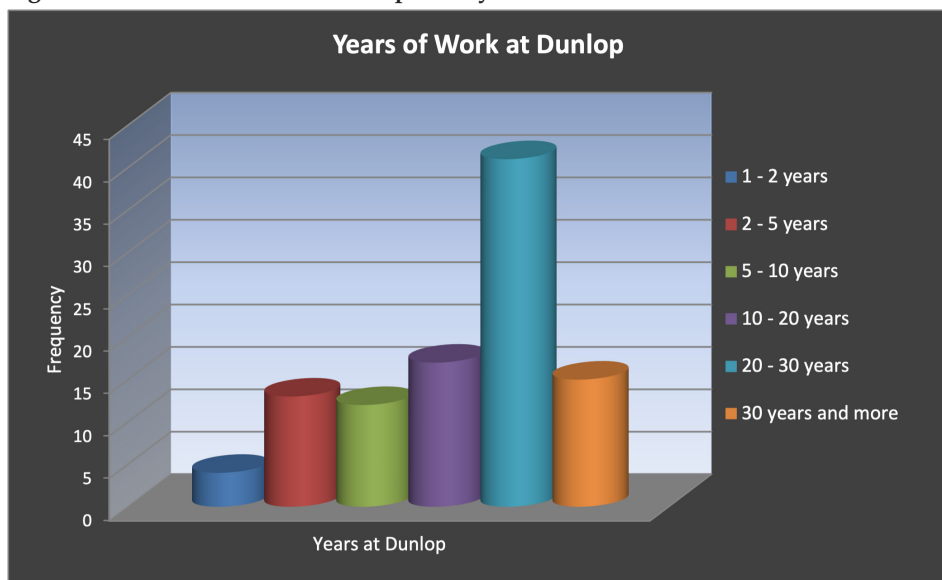
During the 2007 strikes, older workers narrated how strikes constituted trials of strength and how strike victories were uncertain, short lived and always contested. They related that in the aftermath of the groundbreaking 1984 strike, the victory of trade union recognition and wage agreement was followed by a plethora of disciplinary actions and dismissals of workers by the factory.⁴ After

the workers' victory in the 2007 strike, factory bosses began to contest the resolutions on labour brokers as well as attempt to force a new shift pattern, which workers had successfully rejected and resisted at the end of 2003. Worker leaders also suspect that management attempted to manipulate the 2007 November shop steward elections to remove shop stewards that management viewed as a problem and replace them with new management-friendly shop stewards. The plot backfired and workers ordered the regional executive of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) to administer another election, which resulted in the return of all the previous militant shop stewards and the replacement of two of them with older militant workers who had been part of the shop stewards committee during the 1980s.

Older workers also spoke of the contradictory possibilities and simultaneous challenges of their struggles. In discussions with shop stewards in 2008, they acknowledged the victory of democracy – the gains for workers because of legislative instruments such as the Labour Relations Act of 1995, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997, the Employment Equity Act of 1988 and many others – but they also mentioned that at some point between 1984 and 1992 many victories won on the factory floor through struggle were regulated and, in some cases, reversed by the new legislation.



Figure 4 Years of work at the Dunlop factory



Worker retention at the rubber factory also contributed to the strength of workers and trade union on the shop floor. Figure 4 show that the majority of workers had been working in the factory for more than 10 years. Almost half of the sampled workers had been working at the factory for more than 20 years and more than 10% worked there for more than 30 years. Two of the inaugural Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu) shop steward committee members were still working at the factory during the course of this research, one of whom was re-elected onto the shop steward committee in 2008. The vast majority of the members of the shop stewards committee of 2007/2008 had been working at Dunlop since the late 1970s or early 1980s. Many of them had been shop stewards before.

In conversation, Dunlop shop stewards highlighted the crisis in many trade unions in the region. They raised concerns about the lack of training of shop stewards on basic shop steward functions like representing a worker in a disciplinary hearing or declaring a dispute with management. They highlighted that Dunlop workers are lucky because shop stewards and workers train each other on these matters. The chairperson even acknowledged that he was only in his second stint as a shop steward, but during his first stint (2003 to 2006) older and more experienced shop stewards helped him and other younger shop stewards to understand what it meant to be a shop steward and how to deal with management.

Sitas argues that the continuity of service amongst older workers at Dunlop ensured the survival of a mercurial factory tradition: partly a mechanism of adjustment to mass production, partly a lever of discontent. This factory culture, handed down over the years from older to younger recruits, influenced both behaviour and expectations from management. One such lineage of factory socialisation runs as follows: Mr Melebane, now retired, was employed in 1944 in the fabrics department and became the reference point and adviser of Mr Kambule who was employed in 1946. In 1954, Mr Kambule socialised Mr Banda in the “Dunlopillo” department; he, in turn did the same to Mr Bhaca in the light-truck department, and so on (Sitas, 1984: 28). In the factory there was



not so much an informal organisation of workers but a crisscrossing of reference groups, leaderships and brotherhoods made up of a multiplicity of defensive combinations of workers and a repository of useful public knowledge (Sitas, 1984: 29). It demarcated an 'us', which belonged together, and a 'them'. Furthermore, within the Black labour force itself, it also demarcated an "us" against 'them', the "*impimpis*" (police informers / traitors) (Sitas, 1984: 30) This contest was violent; over the years many such disputes were settled in the factory, in the locations or in the bus queues.

In 2007, workers still used generational and familial networks to socialise younger workers into shop floor militancy. In both the 2003-2007 as well as the 2007-2011 shop steward committees, the majority of the 12-member committee had family members of different generations working with them at the factory. Bomshel Khumalo came to the factory through an elder relative in 1976 and his son joined the factory in 2004. Buthelezi heard from the hostel that the factory was recruiting and was employed in 1982 and in 2006 his son joined through labour broker workers but became a full-time employee after the strike. Mthethwa joined the factory in 1988 after being told about the job by his uncle (who still works there). In 2007 his nephew joined the factory a month before the strike. Sompisi joined the factory in 1975 because he knew workers from his hometown of Flagstaff working there. He had a brother who worked there, although he was retrenched in 1993 and has a nephew working at the factory.

The workers utilise these familial and generational networks and connections to build a militant work culture on the shop floor. In the 2007 rubber strike, almost all labour broker workers (new recruits) joined the strike and attended strike meetings consistently. Permanent workers devised a strategy to include new recruits in the strike by holding a regular open gathering session in the canteen at 8:30am. Workers would open the meeting with a prayer, followed by a revolutionary song and marching outside the factory gates, which new recruits joined, before marching back inside the factory floor to discuss the issues on the agenda.

Workers attribute the high continuity of employment at the factory to the fear of the alternatives: "You stay at the factory because it is slightly better with the wage than most of the others. This doesn't mean that it pays well" (Sitas, 1984: 27). Workers stated unequivocally that given the profits they made for the company, their wages were minimal.

What was remarkable in the interviews with workers was the low level of trust between workers and management. Given the lengthy service records of many of the employees this "low trust" has a historical and contemporary dimension that has cemented over time into a tradition of mistrust and a grumbling acquiescence to

... worker militancy is accentuated by perceived lack of transformation in management in line with national equity priorities.



managerial authority. Both memory and contemporary experience are important in explaining why a degree of polarisation and trial strength of such proportion could develop on the shop floor.

Concluding remarks

Workers at Dunlop have reproduced their shop floor militancy by invoking histories of workers' struggles and through the socialisation of younger workers into the militant shop floor culture by older workers. Workers have appropriated generational familial recruitment to reproduce shop floor militancy. Older working men socialise their sons and nephews drawing on the memory of their struggles and victories.

The research also showed that persistent racialisation on the shop floor at Dunlop contributes to the anti-employer, anti-management and anti-discrimination attitude among workers. Persisting racial ordering and the experiences of untransformed management reproduces antagonistic industrial relations between management and workers on the shop floor.

Finally, African and migrant workers make meaning of their lives on the shop floor though developing solidarity in response to oppressive work regimes and culture, dance, songs, sports, etc. became everyday expressions through which workers constructed their lives on the shop floor (Bonnin, 1987; Moodie, 1994; Sitas, 1996a, 1997; Von Holdt, 2003).

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Until the ground-breaking writing of Turner (1972), literature in labour history, leftwing historians and Marxist sociologists did not believe that African workers could become a militant social formation in South Africa because of the nature of the repressive state apparatus of apartheid and the banning of progressive organisations in the 1960s. In the aftermath of the 1973 Durban strikes, Marxist-leaning industrial sociologists attempted to explain the explosion of militant African trade unions using the labour process theory. Sitas (1984, 1989, 2004), as well as Bonnin (1987), Moodie (1994) and Nzimande (1991) made a significant contribution to labour studies by introducing a cultural formations approach.
- 2 Bhengu's PhD thesis incorporates Burawoy's (1991, 2000) extended case study method as well as Hart's (2006) critical ethnography, what she calls relational comparison. Bhengu visited the factory floor for over 16 months, having conversations, administering questionnaires and conducting interviews with workers and shop stewards, as well as visiting several rural households of the workers (and worker leaders). In his research, workplace and factory regimes represent sets of relations that reach beyond the boundaries of the shop floor. Bhengu critiques a conception of workers' lives in South African macro-economic literature that presents rural-urban, workplace-household, employed-unemployed and first-second economy as binaries. Instead he argues that the everyday life of African workers represents a complex set of relations and workers construct complex identities and meanings that play out on the shop floor and in their everyday life experiences as workers, comrades, migrants, husbands and men.
- 3 The international holding company that owns the factory established a new board in 2011 for its African operations and appointed to the board two local African women as non-executive members, a South African Indian man as the general manager of the Durban factory and a Brazilian CEO (and President of African Operations).
- 4 Strikes as trials of strength are depicted in worker struggles in the rubber factory throughout the 40-year continuum. While workers would celebrate strike victories, management would respond by instituting disciplinary proceedings against militant workers. Workers though intimidated that these reactive measures by employers, especially between 1985 and 1992, were always challenged by the strength of the workers and the trade union militancy and unity on shop floor.



Making sense of today's labour movement

as we confront the burden of the future

– By Monique Marks

Marks is the head of the Urban Futures Centre at the Durban University of Technology. She is an internationally recognised and rated researcher and has won a number of prestigious awards for her research and engagement work. She is a visiting research professor at the Australian National University, Chairperson of the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) Press and a director of the Bellhaven Harm Reduction Centre.

Professor MONIQUE MARKS presents a unique take on the new challenges and opportunities facing the labour movement in South Africa today. In a speech she gave at the 1973 Durban Strikes 50th Remembrance last year to celebrate the significance and the gains of the 'Durban Moment',¹ she emphasised the need to provide hope and a sense of belonging to those currently relegated to the margins of society.



While celebrating the 1973 Durban Moment, our reflections at this time require a blunt honesty and a perspective that does not rely on nostalgia. It is time for us to provoke, to challenge and then to find ways of consolidating.

I begin by telling a story that helps to make sense of our current reality, or at least one aspect of it. From this story I will draw a couple of conclusions and present some provocations. I am going to reflect first on the changed landscape of youth politics in South Africa – from apartheid to close to 30 years post-apartheid. This, I hope, will provide a lens into what the labour movement needs to confront and embrace going forward.

As a young person I was part of the Johannesburg Youth Congress (Joyco), an affiliate of the United Democratic Front (UDF). My political activism informed my academic work and my first book, *Young Warriors*, focused on youth politics in the 1980s and early 1990s. I researched and wrote the book as an insider to the movement but an outsider to Soweto where the study was located.

Those were tumultuous times, but young people were inspired, engaged, hopeful. Young people, even those from primary school age, were at the coalface of the liberation movement and were arguably the greatest force of the mass democratic movement. In the face of heavy repression and loss, young people had hope. Hope of a responsive and responsible government. Hope of a future free of racism and racist thinking. Hope of social mobility bound by collective aspirations. At one of the most difficult and repressive periods of South Africa's history, young people were actively changing the world and could imagine – imagine – a new horizon, one that promoted and secured social, political and economic rights.

The Freedom Charter provided a frame for this imagination – a roadmap of a new, a better society, free of socially constructed divides and discrimination. This imagination was a mobilising force. And in this looking forward they were not alone. Organised youth worked alongside the trade union movement, civics and other social movement organisations. They felt a sense of connection to people, to place, to politics and to a social movement.

I have my own memories of attending weekly Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) shop steward meetings as a Joyco representative. To be frank, at the time I was not entirely sure why I was doing this, but I do know that I was excited to be part of a broader movement and to join hands with organised workers. Connection, hope and purpose characterised this period for South African activist youth.

I fast-track now to the present moment. Much of what I do now remains youth focused though without an obvious political dimension. Aside from running the Urban Futures Centre at the Durban University of Technology, I also co-direct a harm reduction centre for homeless people and low-income people with substance use disorders. The majority of our beneficiaries are under the age of 35, with most in their 20s. The

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Bellhaven Harm Reduction Centre provides free medical and psycho-social interventions to 200 people who have an opioid use disorder. Most are using low-grade heroin, known to most of us as *whoonga*, *nyaope*, *unga* or sugars. As harm reduction practitioners our role is not to judge our clients, or to prescribe what life normalisation means to them. This is determined individually as we recognise that the drivers of problematic drug use are complex and that an abstinence-based approach does not take heed of the agency of individual users, nor the context that drives problematic drug use.

The Bellhaven Harm Reduction Centre has its roots in the Covid-19 lockdown when a team approached by the then Deputy Mayor of eThekweni Municipality, Belinda Scott, was asked to establish a withdrawal management programme in the homeless lockdown safe spaces. Within a week, in the underground parking lot of Moses Mabhida stadium, a medical programme was established offering those in moderate to mild withdrawal from low-grade heroin an opioid substitute medication. By the end of hard lockdown roughly 450 homeless people were beneficiaries of the programme – receiving methadone, an opioid substitution medication that minimises withdrawal symptoms and thus provides a platform for life normalisation. A private medical team under the supervision of specialist psychiatrist Dr Shaquir Salduker was responsible for running this programme.

This intervention quickly transformed the lives of its recipients, most of whom were youth between the ages of 19 and 35. The programme received substantive press attention and was acclaimed as a ‘good story’ by the eThekweni Municipality. As a result, the Municipality, in a forward-looking manner, determined that one of its buildings – Belhaven Memorial Museum – would be designated for the running of a full-time harm reduction centre. The Bellhaven Harm Reduction Centre opened its doors on 1 June 2020 and has been running ever since. As harm reduction practitioners, we do not set a one-size-fits-all goal for our clients. Rather, harm reduction practitioners accompany clients to meet their self-determined goals. These may or may not be abstinence.

We recognise that, for a range of reasons, our clients may be unwilling or unable to stop using drugs. Harm reduction practitioners and advocates recognise the fundamental human rights of people who use drugs to self-determination and to access services that provide a platform for life change in a non-stigmatising environment. Instead of seeing drugs and the people who use them as a problem, we seek to understand the problems that drive problematic drug use. Where possible, we work with our clients to resolve these. Where these are structural, it is critical to engage actors and organisations that are in the business of effecting social and economic justice.

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It is in the harm reduction space that I meet with and learn from young people living on the margins of society but representing the broader youth cohort. Through my daily interactions, psycho-social service provision and oral history making, I have come to understand that the biggest drivers of problematic drug use is not individual failure nor sheer recklessness. Rather, it is a rational response to staring into a future that is bleak and hopeless. It is a release from a life that lacks connection to place, people and purpose.

My daily interactions with young people now are about bleakness rather than light, despair rather than hope and isolation rather than connection. Given the socio-economic and political context, this is hardly surprising. Beneficiaries of the Bellhaven Harm Reduction Centre have little or no chance of employment or decent livelihood opportunities. They are disconnected from key institutions and from organisational life. Family structures are in disarray. Non-communicable illnesses are on the increase. It is this reality that drives problematic drug use. Instead of understanding these drivers, people who use drugs are subject to prejudicial moral judgement. As 'degenerates' they are pushed further to the margins adding fuel to active drug use rather than resolving it.

The reality is that drugs are a solution rather than a problem. The problem is not the drugs or the people who use them, but rather the structural problems and disconnect that characterises South Africa. It is therefore not surprising that problematic drug use is on the increase in South Africa. Youth are looking straight into what is best called the burden of the future. As hope fades, drugs bring comfort and relief. But with drug use comes homelessness and further disconnect from loved ones and from key institutions. Blunted to this reality, we retain drug policies that punish users, while providing no alternative solutions.

What does all of this mean for the labour movement? While we might like to believe that our young people are engaged in 'productive work' either in the formal or informal economy, my view of this cohort's reality is very different. Hustling has become the



dominant way of getting by – a survivalist strategy that does not generate a sense of meaning, purpose or productivity. They are not part of what could be termed the working class. Rather, what we have is a huge population grouping that could best be defined as the lumpen proletariat. Their plight is beyond that of the reserve army of labour given that there is a labour market deficit. Moreover, the hustle is not a good hustle. It is one that gets the hustler from one fix to the next, with a four-hour window of opportunity. There is no future in this hustle, just a blurred present. And money from

the hustle is ‘sweet’ – it comes and goes without accumulation. It is enjoyed in the moment with no lasting effect other than inflaming the problem, much like sugar does to the body.

The burden of the future frames much of what South Africa has to face going forward, but it is not the sole determinant of where we could and should be headed.

Given that in most cases, the hustle is linked to drug use, engaging in productive labour is unlikely. In our social context problematic drug use is harmful as its ability to fix a void is temporary, while the fall out is etched into the lived realities of the drug use community. What is salient in young people’s lives is not productive labour or engaging in formal organisations, it is substance use. As a harm reduction practitioner and advocate, I am respectful of the choices people make as to what they put into their bodies. I recognise their agency and their fundamental rights. And, in line with the harm reduction approach, I am cognisant that people who use drugs do so as a solution to underlying problems – they are true survivors of inequity, trauma and disconnect. Their very existence should prick our consciousness and nudge us to rethink dominant narratives about drug use, productive labour and a post-apartheid future.

The drug use community, particularly those who are homeless, live lives that are beyond precarious. They are momentary with little meaning other than making it from one fix to the

next. The hustle is their business, bearing no reality to the term ‘productive labour’. The hustle has no real value (use or exchange). To the contrary, it is degrading to those who engage in it and generates fear for those who encounter hustlers. This reality – the space of non-productive labour and purposeless existence - calls upon us to gaze less at the burden of the past (colonialism and apartheid) and more to the burden of the future.

The burden of the future frames much of what South Africa has to face going forward, but it is not the sole determinant of where we could and should be headed. It is time now to make sense of this present future reality and to rethink labour movement strategies from this perspective. Doing this requires new narratives and strategies to break away from burdens of the past and towards resolving the conditions that make looking ahead so bleak, particularly for young people, our largest social demographic.



This is critical if we are truly committed to generating possibilities for human flourishing and decent living.

Secondly, those of us who consider ourselves on the 'Left' should lead the way in countering moralistic narratives about drug use, homelessness and even the hustle. In understanding the underlying drivers of homelessness and substance use, it is our duty to ask pertinent questions such as: What were the social conditions that led to homelessness and drug use as a solution? What is required for young people excluded from the labour market to feel they live a life of meaning and purpose? What can we learn about survivalism and social cohesion from unexpected places like the streets, the shelters and the few harm reduction centres that do exist?

Making sense of this lived reality requires us to suspend moral judgement of the coping strategies of those living on the margins – people who use drugs, sex workers, the LGBTIQ+ community. These key population groupings are innovators and real disruptors. They shake us to our core because they make tough decisions and face the consequences of these decisions. Yet they are also vulnerable population groupings – vulnerable to illness and to powerful social ordering groups such as the police.

Reducing vulnerability, and creating opportunities for meaning, engagement and connection is an excellent project for the labour movement. So too is providing platforms for truth speaking for those that are truly voiceless.

It is connection and purpose that will bring back to life the hope and contagious energy that characterised South Africa's youth at a time we thought would be our darkest. This requires a different type of organising – one that recognises the chaotic existence that presently typifies the lives of our youth.

This challenge is not just for organised labour. It is extended to intellectuals who engage with labour and the unions. We need to think more seriously about what is meant by 'productive labour' and if what most of our youth are engaging in to get by can and should be defined as such. It is my view that by not viewing the hustle as a social activity that exists outside of what is typically viewed as productive labour, we are appeasing our conscience. Advocating all forms of labour as 'productive' is of little material value to the hustlers and the dumpster survivalists. Our role is to demystify by calling social reality by what it is, and finding solutions where they already exist. These solutions exist on the margins amongst those who are in survivalist mode. It is this growing social cohort that gets by despite the lack of insight, vision and strategy of our labour movement and its allies.

At the start of this article I referred to the significance of political organisations in the 1980s and the 1990s in regard to the youth. Organisations such as Cosatu, civic

... factory
culture, handed
down over the
years from
older to
younger
recruits,
influenced both
behaviour and
expectations ...



organisations and others under the UDF umbrella worked alongside young people. In so doing they provided direction when required, but most importantly they generated meaningful connection. This meaningful connection with ‘adult’ organisations no longer exists in the youth space. Not only does this diminish the legitimacy and the mobilising capacity of our social movement organisations, the unions included, it also entrenches disconnect.

If we are serious about reducing the harms associated with problematic drug use, it is critical to rekindle meaningful connection. It is this connection, not sobriety, that is the opposite of addiction. Without connecting in a meaningful way with our young people and recognising how they are navigating the burden of the future, we are likely to find ourselves in an ever-increasing storm of problematic drug use and hopelessness. It is time for reinvention, not replication.

My final point is about the importance of humanising as a universal practice. At the end of the day, no matter where in the world your ‘accident of birth’ (to borrow from sociologist Arundhati Roy) lands you, your humanity and humanness remain. This universal humanity is what connects us not just as a nation but as people of the South with people of the North. It is with this in mind that the labour movement should be forging global solutions. It is an absurdity that there are parts of the world where jobs cannot be filled. In these countries there are job summits being held to fill the vacant positions in both skilled and unskilled jobs. This, simultaneously with places in the global South where labour market opportunities simply do not exist. Real internationalism of labour would talk to this connectedness, placing young people at the centre of both sense-making of the present and of solution-making. Put this way, the labour movement today is even more important than it ever has been. **NA92**



ENDNOTES

- 1 This talk was given at the final session of the 1973 Durban Strikes 50th Remembrance held at the Durban University of Technology in January 2023.



Dateline Africa

1 December 2023 to 29 February 2024

■ FEBRUARY

21 February: Türkiye – once the Ottoman Empire, a colonial occupier of north Africa for centuries – is extremely active in Africa once again. It is to assist in strengthening coast-guard services in Somalia. This comes amid infrastructure projects in east Africa and its dodgy ‘powerships’ all around the continent. Türkiye has diplomatic missions in 43 African countries, compared to India (40), China (51) and the US (47).

15 February: Senegal’s Constitutional Council rejected efforts of the government and the National Assembly to postpone the national election (that was scheduled for 25 February 2024) to December 2024. (The election was held successfully on 24 March. Two-term President Macky Sall was not a candidate.)

02 February: The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported intensified armed attacks against civilians in the North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri provinces in the far east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Clashes resumed between non-state armed groups and the army and 5,690,000 people have been registered as displaced in the three provinces. A lack of funding, physical access challenges and security constraints have forced many aid partners to reduce or partially suspend their support activities.

■ JANUARY

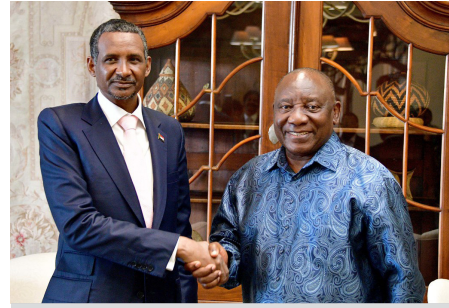
28 January: Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, three west African countries run by military juntas, said they would withdraw from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which has been pressing for a return to democratically elected civilian government. All three states had been members since its founding in 1975.

20 January: Senegal’s Constitutional Council ruled that Ousmane Sonko, an opposition leader, could not stand in the presidential election in February because of a conviction for defamation, following a case brought by the minister of transport. Sonko was already serving sentences for other charges, supporting evidence of a tendency for



ruling parties in Africa to use the courts to restrict political competition, often by bringing criminal charges against opposition candidates.

04 January: Muhammad Hamdan “Hemedti” Dagalo, Sudan’s most notorious warlord and head of the feared rebel army the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), visited Pretoria to brief President Ramaphosa on developments in the civil war which began in April 2023. The RSF has won a string of victories against the Sudanese army. He was welcomed by leaders in Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Uganda during his tour.



President Cyril Ramaphosa shakes hands with Sudanese warlord Muhammad Dagalo

Source: Flickr

01 January: Ethiopia signed a memorandum of understanding with neighbouring Somaliland for naval and commercial access to ports along Somaliland’s coast on the Gulf of Aden. Somaliland is not recognised internationally – or by the African Union – as a country. It is a breakaway region from Somalia, based on the boundaries of a former colony of Britain. At present, 95% of Ethiopia’s sea trade goes through the port of Djibouti.

■ DECEMBER

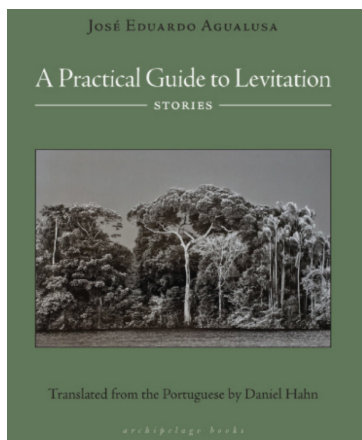
20 December: The DRC held chaotic national elections in which Félix Tshisekedi was re-elected president amidst credible reports of widespread voting irregularities.

15 December: South Africa declared a public holiday to recognise and celebrate the victory of the Springboks, the national team, in the Rugby World Cup in Paris, France.

15 December: Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a genocidal militia, occupied Wad Madani, one of Sudan’s biggest cities about 200km south-east of Khartoum. The defeated soldiers of the regular army, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), fled to the south with many panicked civilians. Since April 2023, seven million people have been displaced within the country. Another 1.4 million have fled to neighbouring states, many to Chad, after genocidal violence against the Masalit, a black African tribe, by the RSF. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) denied reports that it sent arms to the RSF.

06 December: In an excoriating three-page letter, ANC Veterans League deputy president Mavuso Msimang explained why, after 60 years as a member, he resigned from the ANC. The “litany of economic and social woes — crime, unemployment, destitution — associated with my beloved ANC is not only embarrassing, but also defies enumeration”. Ten days later he un-resigned, as the ANC announced that “only members whose reputations are beyond reproach will be included in our list of candidates for Parliament and Provincial Legislatures” (in the 2024 elections).

03 December: A Nigerian army drone strike accidentally killed at least 85 civilians observing a Muslim festival in the northwest village of Tudun Biri in Kaduna state. The government has been battling jihadists and armed groups of bandits who have terrorised large parts of the north.



A Practical Guide to Levitation: Stories

José Eduardo Agualusa

Translated from the Portuguese
by Daniel Hahn

Archipelago, 2023, 256 pages. Approx R211 for Kindle; paperback about R360

– Review by Jacqueline Nyathi

Mozambique-based writer José Eduardo Agualusa and his wonderful translator, Daniel Hahn, have a way with words, the fantastical and the surreal. They bring ghosts to life with dry humour, and immerse us in alternate cosmologies, showing us other ways the world might be.

Agualusa's treatment of Angola's history is always slightly farcical, very humorous, and also quite sad, which seems appropriate to histories of liberation movements in Africa.

Agualusa's boundless imagination and distinctive style are on full display in his wonderful collection, *A Practical Guide to Levitation*.

In the opening story Borges wakes up in an endless banana plantation – has he died and gone to heaven – or hell? In another, a man offers to teach a party guest how to float off the ground. Levitation is also the theme in a later story about a potential Angolan political leader. Old liberation war heroes and famous authors are a frequent theme, as we see when a pensive despot muses on how he got to where he is.

Also richly present is Agualusa's particular brand of the surreal. A dog-charmer trains dogs to help him swindle people; a bird-charmer first uses his skills in a war; a baobab offends the sensibilities of a modest public; and laughing lizards are offered for sale at the side of a highway.

Open To The Breeze is a beautiful and evocative story about a place that's trapped in time. There's a delightful story about butterflies and Queen Nzinga. Finally, in a thoughtful, although light, examination of Jonas Savimbi's myth and legacy, we meet Savimbi's daughter.

All of the stories are quite short, making this the perfect book to read whenever you want to take a break from the ordinary – real and boring life – to escape into the fantastical.

If you need an escape from reality, the stories of Agualusa are outside with the engine running: Get in!

Review first published in *The Continent*, issue 133. 2 September 2023 page 26. Available at https://www.thecontinent.org/_files/ugd/287178_d7a1370f1ba14866826753085e64b43d.pdf
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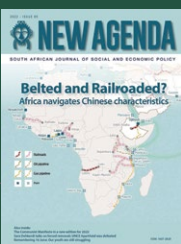
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"Our huge inequalities in wealth are intolerable, including the incredible gap between top managers and employees. Our legacy of social discrimination based on colour is unacceptable, including the persisting divide between affluent suburbs and desolate townships. Our state-owned enterprises, which are supposed to be engines for development, are actually serving as employment agencies for a small overpaid middle class. The public service has been allowed to slip into a dream walk where form filling and token effort is enough to bring in a stable income for officials.

"All this points to an urgent need for civil society and progressive intellectuals to raise their voices and demand a much more serious effort by all concerned to rebuild our country on a better foundation. Let us work on that." Prof Ben Turok, 26 June 1927 – 9 December 2019 Former editor of *New Agenda*

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