

# S. Africa's contradictory transition

**S**hortly before President Nelson Mandela of South Africa's impending visit to Pakistan, we had another visitor from his country. This was Ms Nazima Begum Jappie, who had come to Lahore on a teaching assignment with the Institute of Women's Studies. A conversation with her was like a walk down the dark alleys of the apartheid years in South Africa.

Nazima's life reflects many of the features of the collective experience of black people under the white racist regime set up by the National Party in the name of 'separate development' of the races that inhabit South Africa. It was the culmination of over three centuries of settler colonialism and racist oppression. Born and bred in Durban, Nazima experienced early the restrictions on a young woman of South Asian descent emanating from family and the state, the former along conservative traditional lines, the latter along racist ones. Even before obtaining her Masters in Industrial and Labour Studies in 1992 from the University of Natal, Nazima had been involved since at least 1986 as the National Education Officer for the Clothing and Textile Union, the third largest in the 15 unions originally grouped under the umbrella of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Despite graduating through a career in education to her current position as Dean of Student Affairs at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, Nazima retains her contact with the trade union and women's movements in post-apartheid South Africa. Much of what follows has been gleaned from her insights into the situation in her home country, without any pretensions to being comprehensively able to comprehend all the complexities of a South Africa in flux.

Post-apartheid South Africa remains a unique enigma. Contrary to the widely held apprehension amongst those with the most to lose, that the end of white supremacy would lead to anarchy and bloodshed, the 'revolution' never arrived. Instead, black South Africa, led by the African National Congress (ANC) of President Mandela, negotiated the white supremacists out of power. Such a conjuncture was made possible because of certain unique factors which characterised the South African situation. Western capital had found apartheid South Africa a lucrative market for investment and trade over many years. Under the pressure of growing international critical opinion however, the West was initially forced to pay lip-service to the condemnation of apartheid and eventually boycott the racist South African regime in a number of fields. This boycott, however, did not materially disturb the profitability of Western investments.

Nevertheless, it slowly dawned on the captains of Western industry and capital, and their governments, with the passage of time that if they wished to continue their highly profitable exploitation of the South African market, a political transition which met the aspirations for racial equality and human dignity of the black majority had become inescapable. In other words, the cost of maintaining apartheid began to outweigh its considerable commercial and strategic benefits. The combination, therefore, of internal struggles of resistance and for liberation and the external pressures from the world powers finally 'persuaded' the last white President, F. W. de Clerk, that the best alternative was a negotiated settlement from above, to avoid the possibility of a violent change from below.

This negotiated, peaceful settlement undoubtedly had the great advantage of rendering the transition from white minority to black majority rule a relatively peaceful affair, with little of the violence expected to accompany the birth of the new South

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Africa. However, it has also had certain drawbacks, which have caused the initial ebullience which accompanied the ANC's rise to power in the watershed 1994 elections, to fade into disillusionment and even, in some quarters in the black community, anger.

Two major factors may be traced to this alienation after five years of ANC rule. One, the sense that the process of forgiveness and reconciliation initiated through Bishop Desmond Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has proved less than satisfactory to all sides, and on the touchstone of historical justice. The functionaries of the apartheid state, charged with heinous crimes ranging from torture to cold blooded murder of anti-apartheid activists through four decades of the National Party's abominable racist 'experiment', got away virtually scot-free after 'confessing' before the Commission their crimes and asking for amnesty. Despite that, the lunatic fringe white supremacist parties reject the Commission's final report as too biased in favour of

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the ANC. The black victims of the crimes of apartheid, on the other hand, are asked to practice the Christian virtues of forgiveness and turning the other cheek to their oppressors and tormentors.

Second, the economic structures inherited from the apartheid years, which obviously favoured the white minority, remain virtually intact and unscathed, much to the chagrin of the black people. Out of a total population of 40 million, estimates of wealth distribution range from 5 per cent of the population controlling 80 per cent of the wealth, to 20 per cent controlling 70 per cent. The poorest 20 per cent of the population only has a share of 3 per cent of the national revenues. About 55 per cent of the workforce is employed in the major economic sectors such as mining, metallurgy, automobiles, general manufacturing, and agriculture. Current unemployment is estimated at 35 per cent, the overwhelming proportion of these coming from the black community.

None of this has changed appreciably in the five years of the ANC's stint in power, and impatience with the blighted promise of the transition to black majority rule appears to be growing. The ANC has tried to balance the demands for justice and the fruits of the transition emanating from the oppressed and deprived black masses, against the need to keep business reassured and investment flowing in. Despite their best efforts however, the ANC government has been unable to totally prevent the flight of skilled whites and inevitably capital out of South Africa. The 5 million whites remaining are appre-

hensive of rising crime (a consequence of the failure to satisfy the aspirations for economic betterment of the masses) and affirmative action which seeks to redress the historical legacy of the imbalance between the privileged white community and their oppressed black counterparts.

After five years of this attempt at political and social engineering in favour of the deprived black majority within the limits of the law and democracy, South Africa faces a new watershed in the upcoming elections on June 2. President Mandela and many of the old guard of the ANC are calling it a day from the political stage. The new generation is ascending to centre-stage. Nothing symbolises this more than the formal taking on of Mandela's mantle by his long-designated successor who has been actually running the government for long now, Thabo Mbeki. Mbeki is almost certain to become President after the June 2 polls, in which the ANC is expected to garner between 51 per cent and 60 per cent of the vote, still short of the two thirds majority needed to be able to amend the Constitution in favour of enhanced black rights.

Facing the ANC in the electoral field are six opposition parties. These include the reformed (i.e. post-apartheid) National Party, renamed the New National Party (NNP), and the newly formed United Democratic Movement (UDM) composed of breakaway factions of the NNP and ANC led by Roelf Meyer and former Minister Bantu Holomisa respectively. The NNP came second with 20 per cent of the vote to ANC's 62.6 per cent in 1994. This time round however, it is the UDM which is expected to emerge as a serious opposition. The ANC hopes to win in all nine provinces, including the strongholds of the NPP (Western Cape) and the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party (Kwazulu-Natal). Out of a voting population of 22.8 million, 19.5 million cast their ballot in 1994. This time, only 16 million have registered to vote, reflecting some of the disillusionment at the mass base with the results of ANC rule.

ANC is to receive the lion's share of state funding and private sector contributions for the electoral contest, and this financial clout is bound to go a long way in helping the ANC's ambitions. Under

the existing rules, parties represented in Parliament are guaranteed a share in the state's 52 million rand (\$8.6 million) campaign fund. Of this, the ANC will receive 30.8 million rand, more than all the other six opposition parties combined. The NPP will receive 10 million rand, while parties formed after 1994, such as the UDM, will receive nothing. The radical Pan-Africanist Congress, which espouses the cause of the poorest sections of the black community, will receive just \$146,000. In addition to this state funding, the ANC is being wooed with considerable campaign contributions by business and industry seeking the ruling party's goodwill with an eye to the lucrative contracts on offer after the elections. Such private sector contributions do not have to be revealed, bringing charges from the opposition parties that the present non-transparent rules run the risk of producing a one-party state through the ballot box. Business privately favours a pluralistic democracy, and some, albeit smaller, contributions may well be finding their way to other parties' coffers to keep the premise of democracy alive.

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