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after apartheid

The Future of South Africa

SEBASTIAN MALLABY

AFTER APARTHEID

THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA

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TIMES BOOKS

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AFTER APARTHEID

To Katty

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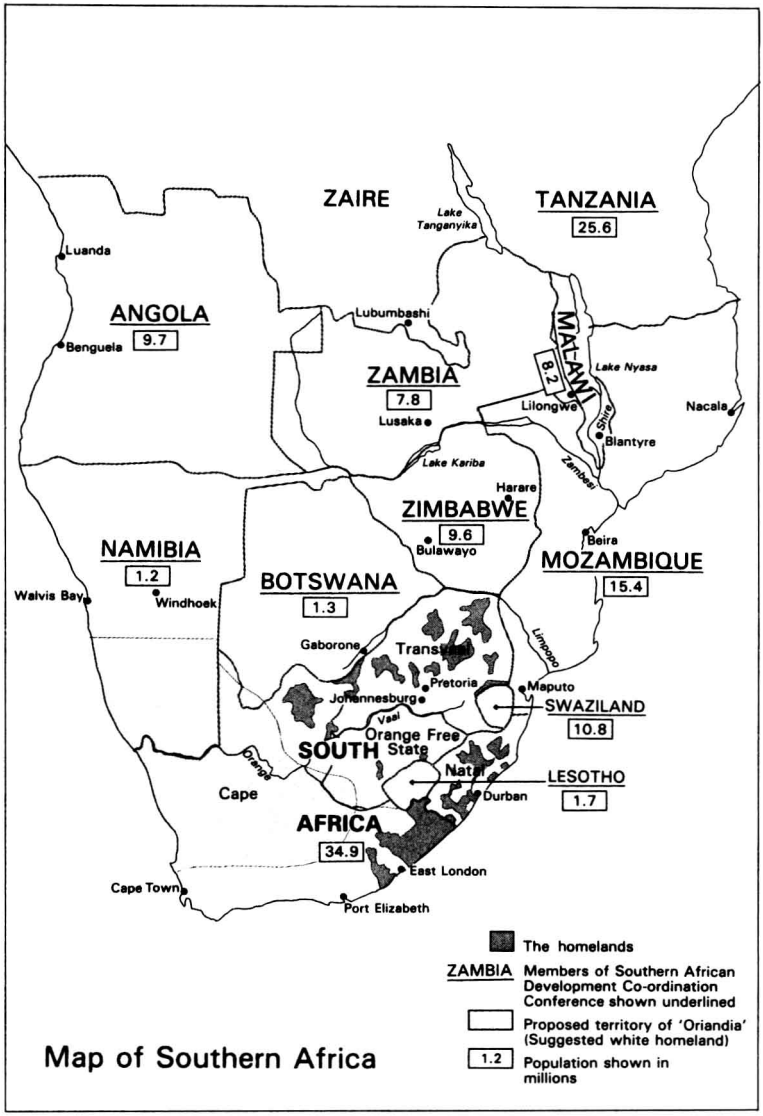
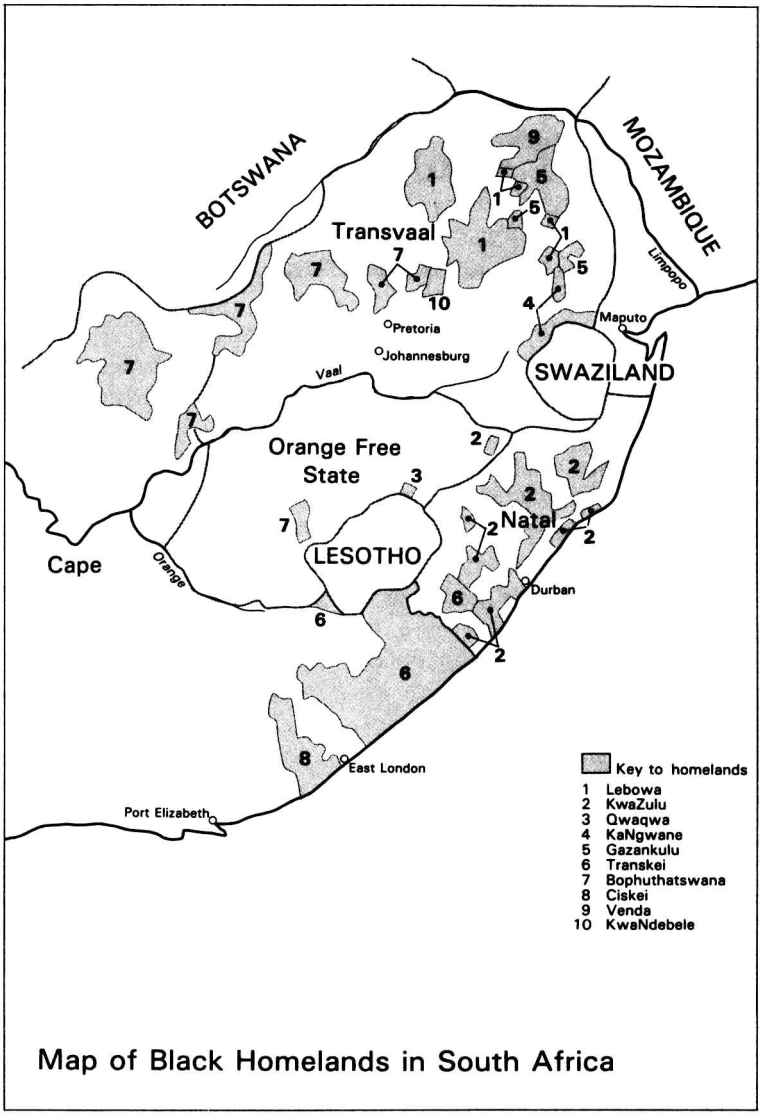
SEBASTIAN MALLABY
London, December 1991



Map of Southern Africa



Map of Black Homelands in South Africa

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Apartheid did violence to language, as well as to much else. It recognized four main racial categories: Africans, Whites, Coloreds and Indians. "African," meaning South Africans with black skin, is a misleading term, since all South Africans are Africans. "Colored" is an artificial term: it throws together mixed-race people as well as a variety of racial groups, ranging from the brown-skinned Khoikhoi and San people (or Hottentots and Bushmen) to the descendants of Malay slaves brought to the Cape by Dutch settlers. It is impossible to ignore these terms, since their use has given them political significance. But at times I have also described "Indians" and "Coloreds" collectively as "brown." This is less ideological, and therefore ought to be less offensive.

South Africa's currency is the rand. The average exchange rate during the first eight months of 1992 was 2.82 rand to the dollar.

About the Author

Sebastian Mallaby was born in 1964 and was educated at Eton and at Oxford, where he earned a first-class degree in modern history. After joining the foreign department of *The Economist* in 1986, he wrote extensively on South Africa and on a wide range of issues concerning the developing world. In 1989 and 1990 he was based in Zimbabwe and reported on East and Southern Africa, during which time he covered many stories originating in South Africa, including the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990. In addition to his duties at *The Economist*, Mallaby also contributes occasional radio comments to programs in America and Britain. In 1992 he became *The Economist*'s correspondent in Tokyo. His wife, Katty Kay, reports on Japan for the BBC.

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AFTER APARTHEID

INTRODUCTION

Africa has had a fresh beginning. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe sent a second wave of revolutions across the continent, with democrats rising against tired dictatorships in a dozen reenactments of the collapse of the Berlin Wall. From the Ivory Coast and Zambia to Mali and Benin, people have demanded the political and economic freedoms that they were promised at independence in the 1960s. On the tip of Africa, the last bastions of white rule have given way. Namibia has gained its first sovereign black government. And South Africa's white rulers have lifted the restrictions on black movements that had been banned for three decades; they have released Nelson Mandela, the most famous prisoner in the world. But, as in Eastern Europe, exhilaration has given way to bitter quarrels. South Africans are still struggling to replace white rule with something better. Nobody is sure what kind of country they will create.

This book is about South Africa's transition, and about its chances of success. It is written against a background of appalling political violence, which conjures fears of a national implosion to match Yugoslavia's. South Africa seethes with uncertainty and argument. On everything from constitutional theory to economic policy, its people are arguing from first principles. White tycoons and black revolutionaries spend weekends in hotel conference rooms, discussing land reform and labor law, education and exchange rates. In Europe or America debates on the relative merits of capitalism and communism hardly matter outside universities. In South Africa such argu-

ments will determine the future. The country is possessed by the thrill and terror of a new beginning, in which almost no policy can be ruled out. Its people try to distill lessons from foreigners' experience: for industrial policy some look to South Korea, for constitutional models they look to Switzerland or the United States.

The success or failure of South Africa's transition will be felt beyond its borders. In the 1980s the country's white government fueled the wars in Mozambique and Angola, destroying those countries' economies and flooding their neighbors with hungry refugees. In the 1990s South Africa seems ready to play a more constructive role on the continent. Its big companies may bring fresh trade and investment to the region, building new railroads and power stations, perhaps digging new mines. The importance of such involvement is hard to overestimate. The democratic hopes newly kindled across Southern Africa will be disappointed without economic growth; and economic growth depends on foreign investment and aid. The rich world cannot be relied upon to provide enough of this. With the end of the Cold War, the big powers no longer see a strategic importance in Africa. After decades of unfruitful aid programs, donors are tempted to give up. Reborn Eastern Europe presents a rival claim on Western purses. Africa cannot count on the northern hemisphere; it needs South Africa's help.

In order to assist its neighbors, however, South Africa must be prosperous at home. That is quite a challenge. In the rest of Africa, the collapse of white rule was followed by instability and decline. If it is to do better, South Africa will have to reconcile its rival black movements, which set about attacking one another in 1990, as soon as all of them had been unbanned. It will have to tackle the huge backlogs in black education and housing bequeathed by the white government. At the same time, however, South Africa will have to persuade its 4.5 million white citizens to remain in the country with their money and skills, for without them the economy would halt. Throughout the region, the democratic experiment hangs in the balance.

South Africans' skill in remaking their own country could tip it either way.

Before South Africa embarked on this adventure, most accounts of the country were obsessed with apartheid. That was quite right: racism exists everywhere, but no regime since Hitler's has espoused it quite so blatantly. Other societies have practiced discrimination on the basis of race, as in America's southern states; on the basis of tribe, as in Burundi; or on the basis of other criteria, as with India's castes. No other society has erected so complicated a legal scaffolding to support discrimination, and thereby appeared so universally offensive. South Africa's Population Registration Act, the keystone of apartheid, required that the race of each South African be registered at birth; but centuries of furtive miscegenation have blurred the tidy distinctions that the law implied. To determine borderline cases, bureaucrats scrutinized fingernails, peered at nostrils, and tested the curliness of people's hair by running pencils through it.

White South Africans built a vast edifice of privilege on these spurious distinctions. They reserved for themselves the best jobs, the best schools, nearly all the land and all political power. They bulldozed entire black suburbs, because they disliked having black communities living too near white ones. Those who resisted were treated viciously. Policemen gassed and whipped children at rally after rally in the black townships. Ordinary people continued to protest, even though they risked their lives.

Through all this, most blacks managed remarkably well to hang on to their humanity. In 1991 I asked Sampson Ndou, one of the older leaders of the mid-1980s township uprising, how his successive arrests and detention orders had affected his feelings toward whites. Did he feel pessimistic about the chances of racial reconciliation in the future? Did he look forward to the day when he could get his own back? He answered, "When you are looking at people who are torturing you, you don't know if they have feelings. Instead of being angry, you

doubt their normality. At times you feel sorry for them. . . . Electrical shocks, beatings, all that funny stuff. I thought: we are physically oppressed; the whites through their education are mentally oppressed. They could not see what they were doing." There was no trace of recrimination in his voice. I had no doubt that the forgiveness was genuine.

With such heroes and villains, it was only natural that South Africa became the preeminent moral issue of international relations during the 1980s; and that the resistance to apartheid generated libraries of volumes. This book is different: apartheid has been defeated, and South Africa's leaders have a different battle on their hands. Whites have to learn to live without so many privileges; blacks have the even harder task of learning responsibility. In the decades of "the struggle," as the campaign against apartheid was known, blacks' main aim was to tear down white institutions; now they must learn to build new ones. During the struggle it was enough to demand economic sanctions; now black politicians have to think about getting the economy off the ground. It used to be easy to denounce black poverty; now black politicians will share responsibility for relieving it. Like other revolutionaries before them, black South Africans have to replace the attitudes of struggle with something more constructive. As much as anything, therefore, this is a book about the struggle against struggle.

National psychologies often lag behind political changes. In Latin America it has been easier to set up democratic institutions than to breed democratic values. Some Argentines and Brazilians still talk as though the return of military rule might solve their problems; and Peru's president, Alberto Fujimori, suspended his country's democracy in 1992. Likewise, Eastern Europe's new governments have discovered that communism bequeathed an undermining passivity; people find it hard to make their own decisions rather than wait for instructions from party headquarters. For many black South Africans, blaming the white state was the equivalent of the communist practice of following party orders: both habits have corroded the willingness to take responsibility for oneself.