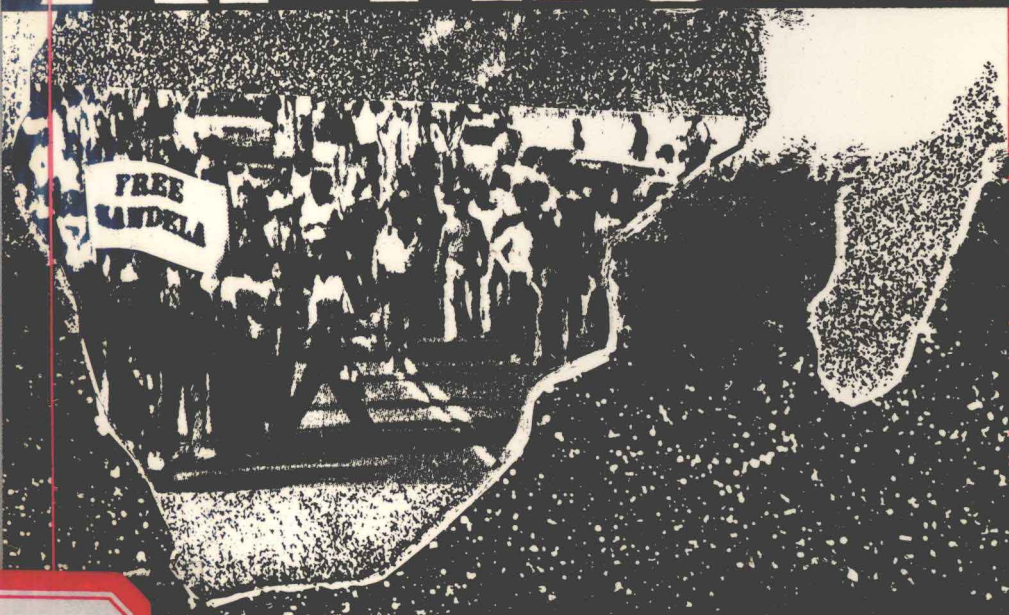


# Whither SOUTH AFRICA?



Edited by  
Bernard Magubane  
and Ibbo Mandaza



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**A Publication of the African Association of Political Science**



**Africa World Press, Inc.**

P.O. Box 1892  
Trenton, New Jersey 08607

(609) 695-3766

**Africa World Press, Inc.**  
**P.O. Box 1892**  
**Trenton, N.J. 08607**

First Printing 1988

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Cover Design by Ife Nii Owoo

Typeset by TypeHouse of Pennington, Inc.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 86-73224

ISBN: 0-86543-048-9 Cloth  
0-86543-049-7 Paper

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## Foreword

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### Opening Remarks To AAPS Seminar on "Whither South Africa"

*N.M. Shamuyarira*

This meeting has been convened at an appropriate time. The broad masses of South Africa have firmly decided to overthrow the yoke of apartheid and minority racist rule. Their decision now appears to be irreversible. Unlike in the past, when uprisings such as Sharpeville (1960), Langa, Pondoland, Soweto (1976), etc. were quelled by police and army opening fire and killing indiscriminately and arresting and removing the leadership, in the current uprising the masses are continuing their resistance and broadening their appeal to all strata of the black population. A related factor that should be underlined is the complete political disarray in the ranks of the ruling class in South Africa. They do not have a comprehensive political plan for their survival. In fact, the ruling class is breaking up into three distinct factions that quarrel openly about the character of apartheid. The growing disagreements among the rulers, and the mounting resistance of the ruled, creates very favorable objective and subjective conditions for revolution in South Africa. However, the regime has massive economic and military power which it can unleash to destroy any organs of revolutionary change.

The title of your seminar, "Whither South Africa," is also very appropriate. We will be waiting to hear and read about your analysis of

the dominant trends in South Africa as well as in the region. The events in South Africa have a direct bearing on developments in the region. If the rule of the present reactionary and fascist forces in South Africa is consolidated, all the reactionary forces and dissident/bandit groups in the region will be strengthened correspondingly. If progressive forces win power in South Africa, a major threshold will have been crossed in man's quest for freedom, and all progressive governments in the region will have been greatly strengthened. If, however, there is chaos and economic disorder in South Africa, many countries in the region will be equally, adversely affected. To put it briefly, wherever South Africa goes, the region will be propelled to follow, at least in part.

One of the issues you will discuss is the nature and character of the South African state. Excellent papers have been written by Martin Leggasick, Harold Wolpe, Joe Slovo, Ruth First, Ben Turok, and others on this topic. The papers have stated the dependent nature of the apartheid state on black labor from the bantustans and the black neighboring states on the one hand, and on foreign investment from Western Europe and America, either directly to the state or through the multinational corporations on the other hand. Again we will be waiting to read your conclusions. The apartheid state is both violent and exploitative. There is plentiful evidence for this. However, the most peculiar feature of the apartheid state is its racial character—the ruling class is a racial oligarchy that has vast privileges of education, skills, and expertise that are generally denied to the black majority. Therefore the critical question, in both the transitional stage and the future, is how the white oligarchy will fit in or be accommodated in the new social order in South Africa. The African National Congress has spelled out its position on this important question in “the Freedom Charter.” It proposes a land inhabited by all citizens, irrespective of race, color, or creed, who want to live in a democratic, independent, and sovereign republic of South Africa.

We should point out that when the South African whites realize that they can no longer suppress the mobilized black majority, in the interest of retaining some or most of their power, they will endeavor to build alliances with some of the black leaderships, especially chiefs and priests. Their functions in society make them soft targets for overtures from the rulers when they want to make peace with or divide the rising broad masses. An inventory of the actual characters who could be possible collaborators, and the categories from which they could be recruited, would be useful to the liberation movements, and especially to the OAU, which has a habit of legitimizing usurpers.

The independent African countries in the region of southern Africa are all targets of South Africa's destabilization measures at the economic and military levels. At the economic level South Africa is imposing economic sanctions on its neighbors through its control of the major transport network to the seas. A study of the transportation system in the region shows heavy dependence on South Africa's railway and harbors. The government of Lesotho was blockaded recently and consequently overthrown. We in Zimbabwe are paying heavily for our endeavors to reorient our traffic from South African ports to Mozambican ports.

At the military level, South Africa supports all the bandit and dissident groups in the region. Where the bandit groups are not making sufficient headway, the South African defense forces resort to direct military action and occupation. The intention of the apartheid regime is quite clearly to install puppet regimes in the region by direct or indirect military or economic means. There are no simple solutions to these economic and military problems. One is dealing with a web of complex and complicated issues. Before the signing of the Nkomati Accord some people tended to believe the South African and American propaganda that signing a nonaggression pact would end all acts of aggression. In Zimbabwe, some people say if ZANU and ZAPU unite, the problem of dissidents and bandits will be resolved. But that argument ignores the fact that the real origin of dissidents is in the apartheid state. The scholars of the region should look at the systemic dynamics and avoid simplistic solutions that are not solutions at all in the long run.

The US policy of "constructive engagement" is merely the other side of the policy of destabilization. Not only does the American administration support the South African state, but it is now supporting bandit and dissident groups, calling them "freedom fighters," and it is actively undermining the position of independent African states. Under the direction of the US administration, the implementation of Resolution 435 on the independence of Namibia, could now be used as a platform for strengthening the hand of South Africa in the region and weakening the progressive forces.

The Association of African Political Scientists (AAPS) should now be recognized by the United Nations and the OAU as an important nongovernmental organization that brings together scholars from all regions of Africa and engages in useful policy-oriented research activities. Faced with the problems of southern Africa, AAPS itself should assist in building the agenda for the action that is already taking place. Our enemies are on the move and in action. We are on the move

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and in action also, but are we taking the right steps to defend ourselves and to achieve freedom and nationhood for Namibia and South Africa? In setting out an action-oriented agenda, AAPS should involve South African academics both from inside and outside South Africa. Most academics within South Africa are equally opposed to the apartheid state. They should be politicized and mobilized against the system. They could also help us in the information campaign against the regime by supplying vital information on the work of the resistance movement there.

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## Introduction

*Bernard Magubane and Ibbo Mandaza*

The revolution is not a magical act by this or that 'leader.' . . . The revolution is the sum of varied and diverse circumstances, of multiplex elements that together add up and lead to the solution in a given historical moment of a crisis that has stubborn and deep economic causes.

—G.M. Serrati, cited by Fammett,  
*Antonio Gramsci and the Origins  
of Italian Communism*, p. 135.

Events in South Africa progress inexorably toward a climax that none but the blind can fail to recognize: the end of white minority rule. In March 1986 the Association of African Political Scientists (AAPS) sponsored a conference: *Whither South Africa?* The essays that follow are some of the papers presented at this symposium. The also mostly present views of black South Africans who seldom meet to discuss the problems of their country. These scholars represent various political tendencies in South Africa. The main objective of the symposium was not to achieve a consensus, but to provide a forum in which an informed discussion could take place.

The timing of the conference was also crucial. It was almost ten years since the collapse of Portuguese colonialism which caused a major breach in the white stronghold. June 16 would soon be at hand and blacks in South Africa were preparing to observe the 10th anniversary of the Soweto Uprising with major demonstrations. The Zimbabwe that Ian Smith had vowed in 1965 would never see black majority rule in his lifetime, or, indeed, in a thousand years, had achieved its independence under black rule in 1980. So, it was time to take stock and assess the achievements and hurdles that still lay ahead.

The conference was viewed as part of the ongoing effort to review the progress and difficulties faced by the liberation movement in South Africa and Namibia. The papers and panels covered many important topics that relate to various aspects of southern Africa. The conference proved to be a milestone and a significant step in clarifying many empirical and theoretical issues on the nature of white minority rule, its relation to imperialism, and the prospect for the liberation movement.

#### THE ORIGIN OF WHITE MINORITY RULE

To understand the current conjuncture requires first of all a clear understanding both of its origin and its nature. Accordingly the first issue to be addressed was the roots of the South African political economy and of the background to the formation of the Union as a white minority state. The origins of white minority rule, as will be obvious from reading the various contributions, attracted the attention of almost all the participants at the conference. White minority rule itself was seen as a beneficiary and guardian of imperialism and a peculiar kind of state that emerged after conquest and which excludes almost seventy-five percent of the indigenous peoples. The twin foundations of white minority rule are national oppression underwritten by racism, and class oppression rooted in the very origins of settler colonialism. With the conquest and plunder of the indigenous peoples, the enslavement and peonage of the slaves from Malaya, Mauritius, and elsewhere, and the indenture of "coolies" from India, racial and national oppression have been at the heart of class formation and the struggle for social emancipation in South Africa.

#### TO WHOM DOES SOUTH AFRICA BELONG?

In spite of the wars of conquest and dispossession and the attempts by the apartheid state to rob people of their citizenship rights in the land of their birth, Magubane argues, South Africa belongs to blacks, not because they are the numerical majority but because they constitute its

labor force. The roots of apartheid's political economy, Magubane shows, goes back in history to the establishment of the Cape Colony, which pursued a dual policy of conquest and dispossession. The Khoisan and other indigenous peoples, having been deprived of their means of subsistence, were either completely destroyed or reduced to an indigent class forced to work for the Dutch East India Company and the wine farmers. With the advent of British colonialism the juggernaut of settler colonialism continued its conquest and devastation and became even more inextricably intertwined with the extension of capitalist property relations.

Capitalism, which in its classical expression rested on free labor and had no meaning apart from it, in South Africa conquered, enslaved, and indeed reinforced servile labor on an unprecedented scale. The general consensus in the conference was that to understand the nature of the settler society in its relations with the indigenous peoples, including all those who are considered "non-white," there was need to identify the motive force to its political economy—that is, how it developed and what form the process of capital accumulation took. Magubane's paper periodizes and lays bare the fundamental laws of motion of the process of capital accumulation in South Africa. He shows how, subject to the most severe restrictions, the incorporation and exploitation of black labor laid the basis for accumulation in each phase that the settler economy passed through.

As Africans lost their lands, they were spared the fate of American Indians and indigenous peoples in other settler colonies because their labor power was considered critical. In the meantime political machinery was put in place based on experience in divorcing labor from its means of subsistence that had been used in the metropolitan countries. Marx's study of the colonial problems had given him additional background material for examining important aspects of the capitalist mode of production. He came to the conclusion that colonial policy was a reflection of the most disgusting and bloodthirsty aspects of the capitalist system. About British rule in India, Marx wrote:

The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked.<sup>1</sup>

This seems an apt description of what happened in South Africa as African people were conquered and incorporated within the orbit of the British empire. White settlers in South Africa "employed all the existing machinery of despotism to squeeze from [African] people the

utmost might of contribution, the last dregs of their labor."<sup>2</sup> As in India, so largely in South Africa, all senior posts in the colonial administration, the judiciary, and the army—a vast parasitic tumor—were filled by the British, and this emphasized the deprived state of the conquered Africans.

What happened to the Africans in South Africa is not some new and unique thing. Karl Marx, elsewhere in his writing, explains that

A conquering people divides the land among the conquerors, establishing thereby a certain division and form of landed property and determining the character of production, or it turns the conquered people into slaves and thus makes slave labour the basis of production. . . . Or legislation perpetuates land ownership in large families or distributes labour as a hereditary privilege and thus fixes it in castes.<sup>3</sup>

And just before the turn of the nineteenth century, J.A. Hobson, looking back at the history of the colonization movement, commented:

Whenever superior races settle on lands where lower races can be profitably used for manual labour in agriculture, mining and domestic work, the latter do not tend to die out, but to form a servile class. This is the case, not only in tropical countries where white men cannot form real colonies, working and rearing families with safety and efficiency, and where hard manual work, if done at all, must be done by "coloured men", but even in countries where white men can settle, as in part of South Africa and of the southern portion of the United States.<sup>4</sup>

In every phase of settler capitalist development, from its emergence to its monopoly phase, race and class have been inextricably and inseparably intertwined. Primitive accumulation involved internal national conquest and dispossession of the African peoples. The creation and consolidation of cheap labor necessitated the repudiation of bourgeois democratic principle, that is, the denial of franchise rights to the majority of the people.

And today not only does the race factor continue to play a dominant role at the level of the relations of production, but also the very survival of the ruling class—its continued monopolistic hold on the land, mines and other means of production—

depends upon maintaining and even reinforcing the mechanisms which guarantee White race political control and domination.<sup>5</sup>

The question of who South Africa belongs to can be answered by raising two other questions: How did it become a "white man's" country? and What will genuine freedom imply in South Africa? There is an inseparable link in South Africa between the past and present and between national liberation and social emancipation. The dialectical process of conquest and dispossession necessarily implies a strategy which must lead to the revolutionary overthrow of the existing ruling class, and the complete dismantling and replacement of the white minority state apparatus.<sup>6</sup>

The historical study of institutionalized racial oppression reveals that it is inherent in the social, economic, political, and military structures of minority rule. Although today apartheid is regarded throughout the world, first and foremost, as a system of scandalously arbitrary rule, one of its major objectives is to secure white dominance, that is, retain South Africa as a "white man's" country and provide South African capitalists and their imperialist allies with resources and cheap labor.

White minority rule is an oppressive system which, systematically and simultaneously, exploits and oppresses blacks regardless of their status. Magubane examines the methods whereby the Dutch and British colonists imposed a racial hierarchy on the indigenous peoples. They also examine the implication of the role of British finance capital in fostering a cheap labor policy. This cheap labor policy intertwined and meshed with a racist ideology whose history is well known. The policies of Sir Alfred Milner, Cecil John Rhodes, and Social Darwinists reveal the scope of human intentionality—e.g., a systematic patterning of economic disadvantages which set black workers apart from their white counter parts.

#### RACE, CLASS, AND ETHNICITY

No question is therefore more central to the liberation movement in South Africa than that of racism and racial oppression. The reality of the qualitatively different conditions of life between blacks and whites that flow from the division of society based on "race" are well known. As a result, an understanding of the relationship between race and class in South Africa and the political implications of the struggle against class and racial oppression has long exercised the minds of scholars and politicians. Most of the contributors focus on the triple

question of race, class, and ethnicity. As they point out, the study of race, class, and ethnicity has in many ways been the most theoretically confusing. The essentialist view of race and class adopted by liberal writers and by left writers is criticized by Magubane.

Any study of race, class, and ethnicity faces a key dilemma of the social sciences: how to reconcile a diachronic and a synchronic perspective. As Perry Anderson has pointed out, the reconciliation of history and sociology is easy enough in principle, but extremely hard in practice. "It will be remembered," he writes,

that deSaussure defined a diachronic order as one in which each 'moment' can be only understood in terms of all those which have preceded it: thus, in a bridge game, the meaning of a trick depends on all the tricks before it and cannot be understood without knowledge of them. In contrast, a synchronic order is one in which the meaning of every moment is visible in the present: it is co-existent with the relationship of all existing data to each other. . . . It is clear that any society has both these dimensions; it is at once a structure which can only be understood in terms of the inter-relationship of its parts, and a *process* which can only be understood in terms of the cumulative weight of its past. The difficult thing is to synthesize the two aspects in an actual study.<sup>7</sup>

Just as there is no abstract class society unrelated to its specific historical origins, so there is no capitalist society whose classes conform to the model Marx described in *Capital*. In our view an analysis of class, race, and ethnic relations in South Africa needs to grasp the historical particularity of that society. What is the significance, for instance, in South Africa of the division of the so-called "non-whites" into "Coloureds," Indians, and Africans, and the further subdivision of the Africans into ethnic and/or "tribal" entities? That is, the theoretical challenge becomes one of grasping other social questions, especially the age-old desire of the white minority to keep the oppressed fragmented and/or to divide—and—rule.

There is plenty of historical evidence indicating that the white settlers have always been haunted by the spectre of unity among those they exploit. In South Africa the particularity of the political division of the society along racial, class, and ethnic lines is to keep the oppressed hostile to each other. The obverse side of black fragmentation is the building of a white united front. Therefore the ideology of white supremacy serves first to create a white power bloc and second to

identify the interests of their power bloc, including the white working class, with the interests of the capitalist class. The white workers are protected from experiencing the worst burdens of capitalist exploitation. Martin Legassick writes that

The economic rule of the apartheid system (and its permutations) is to sustain cheap black labour. Simultaneously the apartheid system operates politically and ideologically to sustain "white unity" and divisions among the black oppressed. The stress placed by the ruling class on the preservation of "white identity" and "white minority interests" represents their need to maintain the coherence of the state machine—as the means of enforcing the cheap labour system.<sup>8</sup>

Racial dominance forms a basis for interclass solidarity within the dominant groups. The racial privilege enjoyed by the white workers at the expense of the black workers ties them politically and ideologically to the bourgeoisie on the basis of kith and kin, and provides one of the most stubborn features in the South African working class.

To explain the white united front, Magubane has resurrected Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy, showing through the history and particularities of South Africa how the labor aristocracy became part of the white united front. Briefly, Lenin, it will be remembered, asked and answered the question that is often confused by those adopting an essentialist view of class: the nature of relations between workers of the dominant and subordinate groups in a situation like South Africa. Lenin asked and answered the key question on the race/class dialectic in social formations, which are structured on the basis of white supremacy, as follows:

Is the actual condition of the workers in the oppressor and in the oppressed nations the same, from the standpoint of the national question?

No, it is not the same.

1. *Economically*, the difference is that sections of the working class in the oppressor nations receive the crumbs from the *super profits* the bourgeoisie of these nations obtained by extra exploitation of the workers of the oppressed nations. Besides, the economic statistics show that there a *larger* percentage of the workers become "straw bosses" than is the case in the oppressed nations. A *larger* percentage rise to the labour *aristocracy*. This is a fact. *To a certain degree* the workers of the oppressor nations are



partners of their own bourgeoisie in plundering the workers (and the mass of the population) of the oppressed nations.

2. *Politically*, the difference is that, compared with the workers of the oppressed nations, they occupy a privileged position in many spheres of political life.

3. *Ideologically*, or spiritually, the difference is that they are taught, at school and in life, disdain and contempt of all the workers of the oppressed nations. . . . Thus *all along the line* there are differences in the objective world that is independent of the will and consciousness of individuals [emphases added].<sup>9</sup>

There is the subtle rub: white workers are bribed effectively by their ruling class. Lenin was not the first to understand the corrupting influence of the doctrine of white supremacy. With great sorrow and regret, DuBois wrote about white workers in the United States: "Were they not lordly Whites and should they not share in the spoils of rape? High wages in the United States and England might be skillfully manipulated results of slavery in Africa and of peonage in Asia."<sup>10</sup>

#### THE NATURE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN STATE

The previous discussion has partly preempted our consideration of the state; nevertheless we must look at the nature of the white settler state more closely. The current upsurge in the struggle for freedom in South Africa and the murderous response of the army and the police has raised anew the question of the nature and character of the white minority state. The destruction of the organs of support which the white minority state relied upon within the black community has all but paralyzed the authority of the regime. The flight of the black policemen from their homes in townships, the rejection and defeat of the community council system, the inability of the state to collect rent, the emergence of the street committees—all point to the paralysis of a part of the administrative machinery of the state. This development challenges whatever legitimacy the regime had.

The only way in which white minority rule can be "maintained" is through the use of emergency powers of the state. On June 12, 1986, the Botha regime declared a state of emergency covering the whole country. The decree is described by *Newsweek* (June 23, 1986) as

. . . a classic example of Afrikaner logic—effectively giving ruthlessness the force of law. The order is a turgid, technically worded cover for giving the government power to arrest anyone