

# Welcome to the (Peoples') Republic of Bantustan

However unpalatable it may be, conquest is an enduring feature of being human. Groups conquer one another; there are victors and victims. People are killed, abused, adopted. Property is seized; cultures and languages merge or disappear. New hegemony appears, sometimes to prosper for centuries. Then new tensions emerge; the hegemon may be displaced, retreating to safer territory, or may be conquered, to be subject to a new hegemon. Against this perspective, contemporary South Africa is unexceptional. There has been conquest by external and internal forces; there has been admixture; there have been losses and gains. Nothing is fixed as the tide of humanity ebbs and flows across the land. The dynamics of these tides characterize our present impasse.

## Arrival of the Europeans

The history of these climes, as recorded in text, dates back, perhaps, a millennium. Detail is strongest from the time of the European incursions that followed the defeat and expulsion of the Moors from Spain. Their shipbuilding and navigational skills then enabled the Portuguese to tip-toe down the west coast of Africa, much as in prior centuries had the Gulf Arabs, traders in goods and people, down the east coast. At the cool temperate Cape the Europeans found a pleasing climate, but were unable to establish a beachhead for another century, from when on the Vereenigde Ost-Indische Compagnie (Dutch-East India Company) – the VoC, exercised its monopoly of violence for another century and a half. The tidal wave of VoC depredations, including the importation of African and Asian slaves, carved out a domain of some 570 000 km<sup>2</sup> out to Graaff-Reinet and the Fish River. Beyond this were numerous kingdoms of migratory and semi-settled pastoralists and hunter gatherers. The boundaries of their commons were in part fixed by natural obstacles.

Then enter Great Britain, newly victorious over Napoleon, that exercised direct rule for the next century, during which time she added further territory to the Kaap de Goede Hoop, up to the Orange River and along the east coast to the Tugela. Under such pressure, indigenous peoples were displaced, or entered into their own war campaigns, destabilizing an area out as far as today's Botswana and Zambia. Under such pressure, the 'Boers', they of Dutch and French and wider origins, undertook their own 'Westward Ho' conquests, founding their republics, independent of the Monarch. The discovery of diamonds and gold permanently altered the entire socio-political fabric, leading to race-based proletarianization, civil war, and expropriation, all cemented in Her Majesty's Act of Union of 1909.



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### Accommodation One

That Act defined the borders of the Union, centralized white power, and pushed the majority of the indigenous population out to the territorial margins, there to remain for virtually another century. A perverse Pareto principle decreed that 13% of the people would control 87% of the land. The tide of Anglo-European expansion, conducted by Bakgoa (Setswana: those spat out from the sea) signified the defeat of all tribes, Afrikaner and African alike. While the Union gave local political power to the Boer Generals, extraction of mineral wealth was secured in private and foreign hands, with steady dividend flows to London, New York, and Paris. Accommodation One served the economic interests of the Crown, with the defeated acting as labour brokers.

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To manage this huge extractive enterprise the new state developed and took ownership of the commanding heights of the economy. Tribal matters were dealt with by indirect rule, a system perfected in other lands before. These new structures amount to Accommodation One, strengthened with the 1948 ascent to power of the Afrikaner Nationalists, as the unexpected beneficiaries of the disruptions of World War 2. The War had demonstrated that

the African majority was a force to be reckoned with in the cities, on the farms, on the mines and in industry. Come the peace, the Nationalists exploited White fears of competition, and with an eye on European methods of ethnic cleansing, instituted formal apartheid as the mechanism to keep the majority 'op sy plek.' The apartheid state legitimized its rule via the fiction of separate development that included own political forms, a defined territory, own language channels on radio and then TV, and of course print and film media. The White state, with its ethnically defined Bantustans was maintained to 1994. The inevitable armed conflict was largely conducted through the proxy war in Angola alongside a low intensity civil war. Geopolitical changes, battlefield stalemate, a stagnant economy, and civil chaos ultimately forced the belligerents to reach an armistice.

## Accommodation Two

The resulting dispensation, Accommodation Two that emerged from the CoDeSA negotiations required the formerly exiled African National Congress (ANC) to play a deft hand. To reap the benefit of exile, the leadership had first to neutralize the United Democratic Front that had mobilized structures of civil society against the last-ditch attempts of the Nationalists to broaden their constituency through the 1983 Tri-Cameral Parliament. Secondly the ANC had to open its tent to the previously derided Bantustan leadership. CoDeSA thereby became a forum of parties with little in the way of a tested popular mandate. The inherent risk to the ANC was that the original problem of ethnic identity, held at bay through the 'three doctors pact' of 1947, might once again rear its head. To quote a 1992 remark of Nelson Mandela - 'you might think you are going to control the Bantustans; beware that they don't end up controlling you.'

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The immediate outcome of the armistice was majority rule, duly constrained by the 1996 Constitution. The new order was invoked in the harsh twilight of diamond and gold mining (that had peaked in the 1970s), and the new strictures of accession to the World Trade Organization. Under trying economic conditions, the labour broker baton was handed to the ANC. Whites could now sit back and enjoy their harvest of financial and social capital.

Accommodation Two was an unstable armistice, mediated and modulated by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Property rights were inviolate; freedom of movement a right; the previous white labour aristocracy was opened to all; the state monopoly of violence was curtailed; the economy globalized under deregulation. By design the Constitution did not deal with the two linked and fundamental issues. The first was economic exclusion from the core economy; the second was geographic exclusion from the core economy. The implicit assumption was that gradualism, coupled with elements of redress would contain the aspirations of the majority. The former Bantustans would hold back the tide that had apartheid dammed up behind their façade.

## Mbeki's Presidency

The principal architect of change over the two post-Cold War decades was Thabo Mbeki, who, much like Jan Christiaan Smuts, strode the international stage even as his hold on domestic power waned. Mbeki's watch included the shaping the instruments of redress, including labour and tenant rights, and measures to promote economic inclusion of the previously disadvantaged. His period in high office might be termed technocratic nationalism, in ways similar to what the Afrikaner Nationalists had invoked in 1948, but with considerable differences.

Similarities include the durability of institutionalized corruption, a feature of life going back to the days of the VoC, as derided in the aphorism 'Vergaan onder Corruptie' (died through corruption). Kruger's Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek was notable for its corruption by way of issuing concessions as a tax generating device, so well described in Wheatcroft's book *The Randlords*. Add to this toxic stew wartime profiteering, sanctions busting, financial Rand round-tripping, VAT fraud, and Bantustan money laundering. The outcome, King Report on Corporate

Governance notwithstanding, was a financial services sector of deft financiers, lawyers, auditors, consultants and accountants, of which more later.

This above stew comprises some of the legacy on which the Rainbow Nation was to be built, complete with its pot of gold, blended with the anger of exclusion and subjugation. Flavour with Africanism, and reduce with a large measure of Washington Consensus. Cover and simmer for twenty years.

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### **Turning of the tide**

So what has happened? For a start, the tide turned, with rural-urban migration encouraged by the unintended consequences of policy. Labour tenants and workers were forced out as tenant rights and minimum wage law was promulgated. Collapse of local government services added impetus to the tide that engulfed cities and towns, whose civic leaders struggled to cope. Where towns were inaccessible, squatter settlements sprang up

along trunk roads, each with their own political leadership and vested interests. Second the opportunity of controlling state assets now presented itself to the politically empowered elites, those in high office, in the bureaucracy, and trade union leadership. This process began on the Mandela-Mbeki watch during which a signal emanated that party loyalty would guarantee survival if one was caught with their hands in the pot of gold.

In quick succession the Land Bank was raided, the new Sector Education and Training Authorities became piggy banks, the mega corruption of the Arms Deal and its intermediaries unfolded, and the unions seized control of their cognate Ministries, first at national level and then into the provinces. Coupled with world-standard labour law, the ability of managers to manage their staff was eliminated. SADTU controls the education ministries; NEHAWU health, NUMSA trade and industry, NUM energy and mines, POPCRU the police and prisons, the MK veterans Defence and the State Security services. Vide the Volmink 'cash for jobs' report; vide the succession of fake intelligence reports used to eliminate rivals.

This institutionalized corruption manifests in the erosion of state capability. Over the twenty years the civil service has doubled in size, and its real level of remuneration has doubled, so that civil servant average pay is 50% above that of the private sector. The new labour aristocracy co-exists with the mass of the unemployed and unemployable, for whom their taxes provide welfare grants. These grants do nothing to ensure quality services in health and education, housing, transport and security.

### **State Capture**

State capture became the order of the day, well before the ascent to power of Jacob Zuma and the Premier League of the former Bantustan of the geographic periphery. This capture was facilitated by the weak state that is inherent in the design of the Constitution, and is exacerbated by the unwillingness or inability of the state to protect state assets or citizens. Here too the story goes back to the Mandela-Mbeki administration, if not earlier. In particular it was the De Klerk government that saw fit not to enforce the law against brandishing dangerous weapons in public. 'Traditional regalia' were exempt from stricture and still are.



Armed demonstration in peace time is an ongoing challenge to the state. It started with the trashing of city centres, campuses and hospitals, peaking with the mutinies of the JMPD (2008) and SANDF (2009). No-one was successfully prosecuted for those acts. It presents in the 2001 torching of Pretoria Station; in the ongoing blockade of highways and the torching of trucks; in the destruction of Metrorail on the Cape Flats; in the burning of Gugulethu fire station on 11 July 2018; in the theft of PetroSA oil reserves. Not one of these instances has seen a conviction. Instead the signal from the ruling party, the cases of Boesak and Yengeni alike, is that court process counts for nothing.

Under Jacob Gedleyekisa Zuma, the Bantustans gained the political ascendancy, aided and abetted by the deft financiers, lawyers, auditors, consultants and accountants of Sandton, Stellenbosch and Umhlanga. We really had a party. After all, up to 2014, the World Economic Forum ranked South Africa third alongside Hong Kong and Singapore for the strongest financial market development. Of course that ranking was self-assessed according to the duly moderated and validated WEF Executive Opinion Survey. It was always an oddity to observe such stellar performance alongside South Africa's dismal rank of 135 for health and primary education. Post Steinhoff, Eskom and Transnet, reality, but not humility, has forced those who provide subjective measures for the WEF survey to become somewhat chastened so that the financial market development rank has collapsed to rank 44. Ouch.

## Conclusion

So the arc of Bantustans captured the core of the state. Currently the ANC remains divided into 'modernisers' who try to use Accommodation Two to build a new developmental state that can tackle the deep structural constraints that prevent sustainable growth. They stand opposed against the neo-patrimonial traditionalists, ethno-nationalists, 'big men,' and Kings represented by the Premier League based on the way of doing things honed in Bophutatswana, Lebowa, Gazankulu, Venda, Qwa Qwa, Kwazulu, and Kangwane. Mandela's warning was prescient indeed.