

Alex Boraine – What’s Gone Wrong? On the Brink of a Failed State

Alex Boraine was one of the architects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and is a co-founder of the International Centre for Transitional Justice

Summary:

An in-depth political analysis of the state of South Africa’s democratic institutions, the book digs into South Africa’s history to understand its current malaise. The assessment finds a country headed by a ruling party that puts the needs of the party at the forefront of decision making. It takes into account the way the early post-apartheid administrations dealt with issues like the arms deal and HIV/AIDS and how that set the stage for the Zuma era – an era that has, thus far, been characterized by corruption, political incoherence and poor administration and whose roots are found in the process and policies of the ANC-in-exile. The conditions, however, seem to indicate fertile ground for the development of vigorous civil formations, similar to the conditions that led to the formation of the UDF.

In the author’s words:

On governance questions: *“It has become increasingly difficult to determine who is governing South Africa. Is it the executive (the president and his cabinet) or Luthuli House (the ANC secretary-general and his staff). The government or the party? What is the role of the tripartite alliance? How strong is the influence of the South African Communist Party and/or Cosatu? The meetings of the tripartite alliance are held in secret, so it is not possible to assess who has the last word.”*

On management failings: *“While the ANC can rightfully claim that it has made progress in providing services such as housing, clean water, electricity, infrastructure, and so on, there are many towns and villages and schools which lack basic services. This together with poor management and often corrupt leadership at local level, has led to an increase in delivery protests.”*

On tolerance and democracy: *“Does the intolerance reflected by the ANC in its style of government hark back to the same brand of intolerance in the ANC leadership in exile? It is certainly clear that the ANC today has contempt for opposition of any kind. Democracy, according to Zuma at least, means the dominance of the majority rather than the protection of minorities.”*

Max du Preez- A Rumour of Spring: South Africa after 20 years of Democracy

Max du Preez is a journalist and political analyst, the founder of South Africa's first Afrikaans anti-apartheid newspaper

Summary:

The book draws on the rich history of the ANC in exile and South Africa to explain how the country finds itself in the position it is today. The book covers the ways in which key issues such as land reform, policing, the judiciary, education and health have been dealt with and what has and hasn't been achieved – all underpinned by an underestimation of the ways apartheid and colonialism still impacts each. It provides additional detail to the rise of Jacob Zuma within the ANC and how his ascent to power mimics a riveting political drama – except it's a true story. It also examines how Zuma's role as the head of the ANC safeguarded him against prosecution as well as how his leadership and culture of political appointees has led to a civil service filled with people unable to perform. The book provides hope that the Constitution and independent Electoral Commission (among other key institutions) will be South Africa's saving grace and prevent the country from becoming a banana republic.

In the author's words:

On the legacy of colonialism and apartheid: "Only an arrogant fool (and I know a few) can be confident that his or her analysis of what is happening in our country and what it will lead to is correct. I am confident in stating only one thing as fact, and I think this should be understood before we examine the state of our nation twenty years on. We South Africans- the political parties, government, business, civil society- have hugely underestimated the real impact and legacy of colonialism and apartheid."

On exiles and governance: "Why are you surprised, he asked me, the comrades behaving in this way have a different understanding of democracy and accountability than those of us who came from the UDF and COSATU. They saw things differently in exile: leaders gave orders that needed to be executed without question. Leaders were never wrong. The will of leadership was the will of the people, my friend, he said, and I could hear the anger and frustration in his voice. "

On land: "No national issue elicits as much anger, fear and fiery confrontation as the ownership of land."

On what works to keep SA stable: "Our stability is rooted in our splendid Constitution and the fact that no one has tried to mess with it so far; in our strong institutions; our vibrant civil society; our free and independent media; our basically sound economy; our innovative business community; and our growing black middle class."

RW Johnson- How Long will South Africa Survive? The Looming Crisis

RW Johnson is an Emeritus Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, and an historian, political scientist and journalist.

Summary:

The book shares its title with Johnson's 1977 work, *How Long will South Africa Survive* – and the author argues, after more than twenty years of ANC rule, the question is apposite once again given the precariousness of the state and economy. The book draws a portrait of a state being operated through extensive webs of corruption. Johnson argues that what we see in the modern ANC is a structure resembling feudal kingdoms with strong tribal ties. The book laments the current crisis of “non-governance,” a product of the fact that the ANC is not currently and was never equipped to govern a democratic constitutional democracy. South Africa can choose to have an ANC or a modern industrial economy – it can't have both, Johnson writes. He insists that the problems South Africa faces are not as a result of racial divisions but are more aligned to tribal divisions within the ruling party. He suggests that South Africa's economic woes will eventually leave the country at the mercy of an IMF bailout.

In the author's words:

On South Africans' temperament: *“South Africans, more than any other people on earth, are prone to speculate about the future of their country. For it has always seemed to be a case of the irresistible force and the immovable object.”*

On repeating mistakes of the past: *“After 1994 South Africa entered into a euphoric era-which slowly turned sour. For all its promises that it had learnt its lessons while in exile in independent Africa, the ANC in fact repeated all the classic mistakes of such regimes. There was a lot of misgovernance, but perhaps even more than that there was simply no governance.”*

On maintaining party unity: *“The ANC made the assumption that it could operate as a governing and ideologically pure elite over and above the normality of South African capitalist society, but this failed at the first hurdle. Thereafter, things progressively fell apart, torn between warring egos and clans while the country stagnated. This was, however, unlikely to be where matters ended. The game had not yet all been played.”*

On South Africa's 'rescue' options: *“If South Africa desperately needs loans and wishes to avoid the IMF, BRICS is not really an alternative and, probably, nor is China.”*

Xolela Mangcu – *The Colour of our Future: Does Race Matter in Post-Apartheid South Africa?*

Xolela Mangcu is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Cape Town

Summary:

A collection of essays on the meaning of race in contemporary South Africa edited by Xolela Mangcu, *The Colour of our Future* captures the key questions affecting social cohesion in the post-94 era, not least the persistence of racialized identities. One of the main ideas put forward by Xolela Mangcu is that, as South Africans, we need to create new ways of thinking about race. The book provides diverse opinions on how race should be dealt with, ranging from those who call for new ways of defining South Africans to those who advocate for a truly post-racial society that abandons any notions of categorization. What emerges above all is a renewed emphasis on the value of a race-transcendent vision of South Africa's future that does not get stuck in the myriad negatives embodied in concepts such as non-racialism, non-sexism, anti-colonialism and anti-apartheid. The Editor advances the idea of Steve Biko's notion of a 'joint culture' which could be the scaffold on which this vision rests.

In the authors' words:

On the roots of racism: *"The point of this truncated history of racialism is to argue that the roots of racism run much deeper in the recesses of history- and the human mind – than the lack of scientific knowledge on the part of those who practice it."*

On resisting race as identity: *"Some people resist the idea that an identity as a member of a racialized group can or should be embraced as a positive identity. This view is often grounded in the idea that racial identities are imposed externally by others, generally for the purpose of oppressing or subordinating the groups thus classified – or, in the case of white people to provide unjust advantage to that group."*

On restoring a place in history: *"The only way we can restore our place in history us by assuming the role carved out for us by the earlier generation of Africans- the black interpreters who themselves had to deal with the shock of watching themselves being erased."*

On affirmative action: *"Given the intersection between race and social status inherited from the past, the colour of our future will remain distorted if this issue is not systematically addressed. Similarly, to the extent that erstwhile deliberate and legislated marginalization of black people continues to weigh on current generations, affirmative action in its various dimensions will remain a critical tool in building an equitable society."*

Prince Mashele – Fall of the ANC: What's Next?

Prince Mashele is an analyst on South African politics and Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study for Governance Innovation (GovInn), University of Pretoria.

Summary:

A targeted critique of the ANC as an organization, the authors trace what they argue is the decline of the ANC from 1994. Considerable attention is given to issues of corruption, political arrogance and factionalism. The authors are unsparing in their criticisms of the ANC government's failure to reduce inequality and bring the majority of South Africans into formalized work, in part they argue because the ANC itself was initially unprepared to govern on being elected to power in 1994 and in the subsequent two decades failed to reform itself into a modernizing body capable of effective governance. They suggest however that the ANC's undoing was sealed by the post-Polokwane split, which exacerbated nearly all negative trends in the party. In their minds, what comes next after the store of liberation credit runs dry and the ANC brand no longer resonates with the public is unclear, though it imagines South Africa's opposition parties making significant gains – perhaps not till 2019 however.

In the authors' words:

On the ANC's current woes: 'On the basis of the current state of politics in South Africa – of corruption, factionalism, the use of politics as a means of accumulation, all of which are abundant in the ANC – we have come to the conclusion that, if the party does not make a serious U-turn, it will ruin itself, and our country at the same time.'

On history: "By over-blowing the trumpet of history, the ANC wants contemporary South Africa to remain trapped in history....If South Africans allow the ANC to let memory speak louder than prophecy, they must know that they are robbing themselves of what democracy is all about: the constant contemplation of a better future, not a better past."

On leadership: "Leaders should be able to create a space where trust and understanding can be nurtured, as well as to build, through dialogue, enduring bridges towards a shared destiny. We should not narrow our focus in search of leadership only within political parties... a new breed of leaders need to take the country forward, and that could help nurture and restore integrity in our political system and society."

John Matisonn – God, Spies and Lies: Finding South Africa's future through its past

John Matisonn is a longtime political and foreign correspondent, as well as one of the pioneers of South Africa's free broadcasting environment.

Summary:

The book is a comprehensive insider's account focusing on controversial twists and turns mainly around South African media from the apartheid years to the present. It brings together narratives of South Africa's early black media and the lengths taken to crush their publications, as well as the ways the apartheid regime attempted to preserve its political and economic hegemony, not least through co-opting high profile media such as the former editor of the Sunday Times. The book also brings to light the myriad ways business, journalism and politics intertwine and impact society. The final chapters dissect the ways South Africa's new leaders flirt dangerously with the habits of the apartheid nationalists, much to the detriment of nation building and the democratic project.

In the author's words:

On a nation divided: "21 years after democracy, South Africans are angry. Failing to address the country's pressing problems, not least its 26 percent official and 36 percent unofficial unemployment rate, South Africa greeted its coming-of-age birthday a divided nation, its colours anything but rainbow."

On censorship: "Censorship has two effects, one obvious and the other obscure. What is obvious is that you know you are being misled, and you have seen through the deception. But the second effect is subtle: the influence on your thinking starts to work because you don't know what you don't know. You haven't heard the other side. The trouble is, neither does the propagandist, who ends up as much of a victim as his target, the citizenry."

On troubled institutions: "By the time Zuma became president in 2009, the institutions set up to enable the information economy were substantially dysfunctional. Zuma made it worse. In five years of cabinet shuffles, the department of communications has five ministries, each appointment disrupting the work with personnel changes and different priorities. South Africa does not have a strong stable and expert civil service. Each new high-level appointment causes disruption for months, even years."

Christine Qunta – Why we are not a Nation

Christine Qunta is an attorney, author and experienced board member and participant in numerous policy and legislative reforms.

Summary:

Christine Qunta takes a multi-faceted approach in seeking to puncture several assumptions about South Africa as a 'nation'. In a series of short essays, the author draws on her own experience running a legal practice and excavates a considerable body of African scholarship to paint a sobering portrait of South African society in 2016. She proposes a number of concrete recommendations to remedy the plight of the majority of South Africans and construct a viable sense of collective nationhood amongst all South Africans. Solutions centre around education, culture, accelerating affirmative actions and entrepreneurship development, and the establishment of a reparations fund to address the inequities of colonialism and apartheid.

In the author's words:

On lingering colonialism: *"The infrastructure of colonialism remains firmly in place; it is the single most important obstacle to constructing a genuine nationhood and the most potent predictor of massive socio-political upheaval."*

On social cohesion: *"South Africa is a disheveled society in which two groups of people with disparate goals share one geographical space. It is a country where forgiveness is overrated and justice underrated. For these reasons South Africans are perhaps as far from being a nation in 2016 as they were in 1994."*

On remaking South Africa: *"The most important first step in the remaking of South Africa – and, I believe, a precondition – is reparations. Without it, there is no possibility of moving forward. Reparations are neither a favour nor a gesture of goodwill. It is about justice."*

On the African middle class: *"We are a people in search of ourselves, with a fragile sense of self and seemingly unaware of our power. So we rage easily when insulted but respond to domination mostly with passiveness."*