The South Africa Collection

No.6: Response to 'South Africa Without Apartheid' by Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley

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In this response paper, the sharp sociological, social, economic and ideological analyses of the authors are taken to a new level as the psychological roots of the social dynamics are exposed. Alternative strategies for catalysing change in conflicted complex systems are explored and the importance of access to the core symbolic levels of ideology (racial, political and religious) is stressed.

Response to:
'South Africa Without Apartheid'
by Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley

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In their Introduction the authors indicate that the book:

> "... addresses three fundamental questions: How has the morally reprehensible apartheid order in South Africa survived so long? What will bring about its demise and how will it vanish? What kind of society, state, and racial relations can be expected beyond apartheid?" [p.1]

The strength of this book lies in the breadth and scope of its analysis of the status quo, its survey of the different trends and tensions, splits, divisions and interactive policy relations within the present political, social and economic matrix of the province. This intense study of the presenting topology of the here and now is clearly based upon historical analysis and awareness of the patterns which have led through a prolonged process of social evolution over time. The historic treatment, although not overtly represented in the structure of the book, is continuously present as a further dimension of the analysis.

However, there are other fundamental questions which are not addressed, perhaps the most important of which concerns the psychodynamic processes which generate the particular topology at any point in time. It is not sufficient simply to refer to ideology or religion, or belief systems, as if they were some kind of instinctive datum of the human species. The addition of psychosocial analysis to the study would render it much more powerful, both in its diagnosis and in its prescriptive potential.

In contrast to 'The Kairos Document' and certain radical and revolutionary posturing, the authors look for an evolutionary process of reform with continuity, rather than a convulsive, catastrophic process of revolution and possible resurrection. In this they face the fundamental agenda of enabling significant social change under conditions of very high stress, low resource and rapid time pressure. It is precisely these conditions in which the psychodynamics of the situation become predominantly important and in which the more superficial layers of socio-political and economic analysis, while necessary, are not in themselves sufficient.

> "We unashamedly confess a reformist bias: the minimization of suffering here and now seems to us a worthy goal even though it may occur at the expense of a more noble dream; to postpone small-scale reform in the hope that present misery will accelerate a more fundamental transformation to us smacks not only of cynicism but of immorality. Indeed it is true that apartheid cannot be reformed but must be eradicated. Yet this dismantling of a political system does not necessarily require the destruction of a society. It is an illusion that the alternative can only emerge from the ashes. If this were so , it would hardly be worth the price." [p.8]

The application of catastrophe theory to social change, and the understanding of conversion reactions in social systems placed under massive pressure would be useful tools at this point.

Just as social monitoring within the culture of a prison can give indications of the imminence of social breakdown, so monitoring of the kind of incidents which occurred at Sharpeville and again in Langa, Soweto et al, can be used to indicate how close to the discontinuity on the catastrophe surface a particular society has come. As negative feedback loops in the system shift the presenting equilibrium nearer to its point of disequilibrium, little shifts over the edge occur at key points, for instance:

> "On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the infamous Sharpeville incident of 21 March 1960, South African police, without provocation or warning, killed twenty unarmed Black marchers at Langa township in the Eastern Cape. Most were shot in the back. The outnumbered contingent of White and Black police with two armoured vehicles felt that the Blacks, on their way to a funeral, would threaten the White township.
>
> The repetition of this crudest form of state violence against politicized youngsters and workers threatened by recession after two and a half decades of anti-apartheid opposition suggests that little has changed in the repression by a minority regime. The rulers command the guns, and the subordinates are left with no alternatives but to submit or perish." [p.9]

While a certain amount of pressure in a system is a prerequisite for precipitating social change, undue pressure allows the flooding of psychotic anxiety and paranoid imagery and the unstable escalation of chaos and brief psychotic episodes within the system. At this point the polarities in fact idealise and entrench into more and more sharply defined conflict, which heads towards a win/lose or lose/lose scenario, rather than a negotiated win/win outcome.

The authors are clearly aware of the formative role of symbolism and construct reification in generating the group consensus which then legitimised the Afrikaner regime.

> "Afrikaner nationalism achieved its goal of securing control of the South African state through an initial skilful use of the group's symbolic resources rather than by use of any material advantages. Ethnic entrepreneurs manipulated language and religion and manufactured historical myth until a relatively strong sense of unity was forged. After this gradual, cumbersome process of identity formation under the influence of a few professionals and clerics, in the 1920s and 1930s the movement laid economic foundations for a prosperous ethnic bourgeoisie." [p.44]

I suggest that it is the reified symbolic structures of the Afrikaner ideology which now require careful reanalysis and resolution if a deconstruction of apartheid is to be successful, rather than simply an armed conflict between ideologically secure camps. My own understanding of the psychodynamics involved would indicate that this kind of programme of analytic deconstruction, symbolic reinterpretation and a dynamic withdrawing of the paranoid projection mechanisms which elevate the construct in the first place, offers an extremely powerful point of intervention into the otherwise fixated and conflicted system. That suggestion is undergirded by the authors' further statement:

> "Ethnic entrepreneurs used religion, in addition to language, as a crucial tool for mobilization [D.T. Moodie, The Rise of Afrikanerdom; Andre du Toit and Hermann Gilomee, Afrikaner Political Thought, 1780-1850]. Without the predicants of the Calvinist churches to give impetus to the ethnic movement, Afrikaner nationalism would be inconceivable." [p.49]

Although the religious dynamics do not appear to be very powerful in the equilibrium of apartheid as it is at the moment, any attempt to lift the web, as it were, will reveal the religious roots of the dynamic, and the critique of religion is the sine qua none of social criticism in this context, even though that critique may itself require an analysis of the

psychodynamic core of Christianity and the other main world religions, and a new and more profound understanding of the systemic psychosis which such ideological constructs and symbolic structures represent.

> "In the absence of an unconstrained political leadership, it remains for Black clergy to articulate Black grievances authentically. But this 'clerictocracy' becomes divisive as soon as these leaders focus on their religion. The worldwide Islamic revival, and some Hindu factions, for example, fragment the Indian community, which had been much more united in a secularized political front. Divided religious, even more than linguistic, ethnicity ultimately serves to fracture rather than bond." [p.50]

The socio-historical dynamics of religion are quite clear, in that it establishes very sharp in-group/out-group boundaries, with reified paranoid projection and intense systemic splitting. The process is backed by the depersonalisation of the out-group and the raising of ideological assumptions to the realm of absolute truth, which brooks no possible questioning, and therefore fixates the system. While the authors are quite aware of the effects of this process, which is quite fundamental to the dynamics of the South African social system itself, they do not appear to have penetrated the psychodynamic core which gives rise to the phenomena of religious structures in the first place. As such their analysis lacks access to the causal parameters which set up the dynamics of the social system in question. In effect, their analysis is a subsystem analysis, requiring a widening of level to take in the total system and thereby incorporate the causal parameters that generate sub-system behaviour.

The role of the symbolic in mobilising unconscious emotive group energy around particular goals is well illustrated in the paragraph:

> "The discourse among Afrikaner nationalists is best summarized in party posters at the October 1985 by-elections. The National Party (NP) poster said, 'Don't shoot. Think'; the HNP reversed it to proclaim, 'Shoot. Don't think'. The CP leaders Treurnicht suggested that the security forces should be 'unleashed'. He portrayed half-hearted repression as the cause of continued unrest. Another poster with a young blond girl admonished: 'Don't repeat Rhodesia for her sake', equating majority rule with child molesting." [p.61]

The more extreme ideologically and religiously motivated group requires the decephalisation of its constituency. If action can be based upon hypothalamic triggering of pituitary gland adrenal release, then the moderating influence of rational critique can be outlawed. Mobilisation for acute fight/flight and paranoid posturing is again reinforced by fears of rape and sexual retaliation, which resonates deeply with the repressed guilt of historic Afrikaner miscegenation. The sexual and primal roots of the psychodynamics of the core Afrikaner ideology demand incisive analysis and clear public communication as a prerequisite of deconstruction and de- energising of the polarisation process.

The limitation of the authors' analysis is indicated by their comments:

> "The South African conflict does not concern the eradication of prejudice and fear; this will always exist among mobilized competitors. How the conflicting claims and perceptions can be channelled into mutually acceptable compromises remains the fundamental issue of successful constitution-making." [p.7lf.]

One of the assumptive parameters of the study does appear to be that changes in the fundamental psychodynamic structures of society are impossible. The scenarios of intervention and conflict resolution therefore represent some way of redistributing the pain

and generating a more or less stable set of compromise negotiations. There is some grammatical unevenness within this passage and it is difficult to make any real sense out of the phrase "the South African conflict does not concern the eradication of prejudice and fear". Perhaps it makes more sense if you say that the authors believe that "resolution of the South African conflict does not depend upon the eradication of prejudice and fear". However the grammatical lacuna seems to indicate preoccupation, or disruption by some kind of associated material around this area. My own sense is that the conflict is intensified by the perseveration of prejudice and fear and in so far as the feedback loops within the present situation enhance and polarise and intensify prejudice and fear, just so far does the conflict move to a more and more intransigent and fixated position. Intervention, therefore, within the structures of prejudice and fear and the paranoid psychodynamics at an individual and social level on which they are based, is precisely a very powerful point of intervention, and I would argue a necessary prerequisite for conflict resolution. The authors are clearly aware of the danger of the opposite tendency, namely the increased prejudice and fear leading to chaoticisation and total anarchic paranoia, fragmentation and social collapse:

> "Making South Africa 'ungovernable' in order to facilitate liberation risks having a post-apartheid society that also will be ungovernable, as a result of irreparable damage done to the country' s economy. " [p. 89]

Intensification of the revolutionary struggle, leading to a catastrophic discontinuity and period of costly reconstruction is probably the most dysfunctional way of achieving the desired goal of social change. However the achievement of significant social change in an evolutionary capacity, sustaining win/win options for all parties and maximising the resource base of the system, requires the twin initiatives of deconstruction of the conflicted constraint dynamics, whilst sustaining high levels of motivation in the desired direction.

The authors recognise the dysfunctionality of increased polarisation, even though it is the policy apparently being adopted by Black theology and 'The Kairos Document'.

> "The more each side defines the other as evil and engages in what Allan Boesak has called 'holy rage', the less politics works." [p.109]

If the process of idealisation is pushed to its absolute, in which the in-group perceives the out-group as some reification of Satanic evil, the conflict to the death appears to be the only way of resolving the situation, other than a deconstruction of the paranoid ideology.

The issue of legitimation is quite central here, and the authors note:

> "Only if the dominant group suffers from the illegitimacy of its racial domination will a consequential legitimation crisis arise. Herein lies the simultaneous vulnerability and strength of the present South African system." [p.l42]

The Achilles heel of any ideological system is the reified construct of its legitimating ideology. An intervention consisting of a very clear and incisive analysis of the construct serves to generate a legitimacy crisis, which again is a precondition for significant change. Without such intervention the dynamic conservatism of the religious ideology, while not obvious until significant change is actually attempted, emerges with immense power as soon as the change initiative is attempted. So where cultural and religious constructs coincide with racial group boundaries we have an intense collusional paradigm sustaining the equilibrium of the status quo at all costs.

> "Societies where racial divisions coincide with cultural differences are unlikely to eradicate racial divisions. Differences in religion or language reinforce visibility. Cultural heritage maintenance then becomes at the same time a perpetuation of racial group cognition. In South Africa, however - fortunately - races and cultures overlap greatly. Most people in the urban sector speak one of the official languages, the major Christian churches have members of more than one racial group, and the educated of all racial groups share a common cultural outlook and aspirations. This allows class divisions that cut across racial boundaries. [p.l97f.]

The attempt to generate new bonded, ideologically uniform, in-groups as a way of overthrowing the dominant Afrikaner ideology actually destroys one of the strong points of the South African situation, namely that religious and racial boundaries do in fact overlap. In that sense the South African situation is seen to be a fossilised, or outdated, racist and religious fragmentation, passing through a slow but sure legitimation crisis, towards an emergent inter-racial class structure. However, if the underlying dynamics of paranoid projection and boundary fragmentation are not annealed in the long term, we will find the class warfare structure that emerges in the secularised de-racialised state to be quite as incisive and divisive as the present racial boundaries within the religiously undergirded state. Construct conversion would move the splitting from racial lines to class lines. The intensity would still remain.

There is indeed a common Christian culture across the racial boundaries, but the common Christian dynamics of reified boundary construct, scapegoating, denial of negativities, displacement, projection, do not necessarily constitute a resource in the situation, in spite of the authors' comment to the contrary:

> "When popular spokespersons for the oppressed affirm the common Christianity of the oppressors, they cannot be seen as a dehumanized personal enemy to be eliminated with callous ruthlessness - as happens in religious violence from Belfast to Lebanon, India, and Sri Lanka. The racial outsider remains simultaneously a Christian insider who must be enlightened, cajoled, or even threatened but who cannot be destroyed." [p·198]

The bankruptcy of the Westernised Christian model leads some people to seek a more primitive and universal religious construct. Regression, however, is no way forward into the future. It is impossible to turn the clock back to the pre-Christian, African culture, romanticised into some kind of uniform socially cohesive pattern. On the contrary we have to push through the constraints of the Christian construct, unpicking it as we go, moving with courage into the more vulnerable, less defended, realities of deconstructed post-Christian humanism.

> "The hope is expressed that African religion could substitute for the ideological hold that Christianity has acquired over the African mind. Ancestor worship, Mphahele hoped, could assist Blacks to 'snap out of the trance into which we were thrown by Western education' [E. Mphahele, cited in Ursula Barnett, A Vision of Order, p.256]. In fact, however, a fundamentalist religious dynasty has successfully synthesized traditional beliefs and colonial Christianity into a far more enduring brand of status quo support than the unfulfilled promise of mainstream Christian equality has ever been." [p.202]

Social systems under stress tend to revert to more fundamentalist and more deeply defended structures, in order to contain the anxieties being released in the face of threatened restructuring and change.

Analysis, deconstruction and education go hand in hand.

> "And a precondition for serious deracialization must be a massive public reeducation effort, primarily of Whites in the civil service. Their ideological confusion, vested interests, and anxiety about the future block fundamental progress. ...
>
> "If the nature of the post-apartheid society could be convincingly clarified, apocalyptic fantasies and illusions would give way to realistic hope. A justified belief in a secure future can in itself free energies submerged by a stubborn determination merely to hold out." [p.209f.]

As Eliot Jaques so sharply pointed out, the viability of a social system depends upon the mechanisms used to contain psychotic anxiety and in so far as the primitive paranoid-schizoid defences of splitting, denial, projection, reification, symbolisation, dissociation, scapegoating and so forth are the norm, just so far is that social system dysfunctionally resistant to realistic social change. Not only group boundaries, between the inside and the outside, but also temporal boundaries between the present and the future are invested with the most intense levels of anxiety, leading to paranoia, not only about invasion from without but of confrontation with a future which appears to be too terrible to contemplate. We have to recognise that much of the emotional energy vested in structures and ideologies emanates from these primitive levels of anxiety defence and from the psychotic anxieties pent up behind them. Annealing of the underlying levels of primal anxiety, the deconstruction of the individual and social defences, and annealing of the concomitant splits within the social topology, enable the system to respond much more flexibly and realistically during the process of transition.

The primal mythology of heaven and hell, paradise lost, paradise regained and all the other symbols of the corporate foetal unconscious, reified into the religious and ideological construct, which then undergirds the totalitarian state are poignantly expressed in the paragraph:

> "It has been said that the dreams of paradise are the seeds of totalitarianism. Milan Kundera has warned about glorifying the alternative utopia: 'People like to say: Revolution is beautiful, it is only the terror arising from it which is evil. But this is not true. The evil is already present in the beautiful, hell is already contained in the dream of paradise and if we wish to understand the essence of hell we must examine the essence of the paradise from which it originated. It is extremely easy to condemn gulags, but to reject the totalitarian poesy which leads to the gulag by way of paradise is as difficult as ever' [Milan Kundera, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting (New York: Penguin, 1981, p.234)". [p.213]

Although African nationalism is not itself idealist in this sense, the profound strength of the underlying idealising drives and defences should not be underestimated. Rhetorical and charismatic attempts to mobilise mass emotion, using the symbols of paradise and the fear of hell emerge in this meta-stable context all too easily.

If intervention at the level of the psychodynamic roots of the construct is an essential prerequisite for the enabling of significant social change in the system, then in geography and institution there is also need to intervene at the symbolic core. So that the interpretation of the symbolism of the Voortrekker monument and dynamic intervention within the key universities and the heartland of the Dutch reformed theology are indicated as important points for critical interface. Fascinatingly the authors describe Stellenbosch as

> "the academic cradle of the tribe" [p.252]

Perhaps we have to go back behind the cradle to the womb, or even to the preconceptions if we are to understand the tribal structures of apartheid.

David Wasdell,
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