
Introduction: Southern Africa: Frameworks for Thinking

Percy Selwyn¹

All of us necessarily have a parochial view of the world; we see it through the distorting medium of our own concerns. Since concerns differ, we find it difficult to recognise other people's world-pictures. But in spite of this, many with widely different – indeed opposing – world views are united in finding Southern Africa of central interest. Why is this?

First, there are material concerns. Southern Africa is a major source of certain important materials (gold, diamonds, chrome, platinum and uranium). There is a natural concern that supplies should not be interrupted. There are substantial investments – both from Europe and America – in the region, and there is also concern with the maintenance of markets.

Secondly, there are what might be described as geo-political interests. Western politicians and publicists see the area in terms of Soviet expansionism. Public statements of South African leaders are along similar lines, although it is not clear how far such statements are genuinely believed and how far they are intended as a diversion from other issues. Others [eg Johnson 1977] point to the activities of western powers (the United States and France in particular) in the region. Some of the African countries are concerned with the expansionist policies – political and economic – of the Republic of South Africa. But, whatever the interpretation, there is widespread concern that the region may be the setting for conflicts which could well take on a world dimension.

Lastly there are what might be called ideological and moral issues. There are those who are centrally aware of the extreme and institutionalised inequalities in the region – and in particular the racial inequalities inside South Africa itself.

As a reflection of these powerful, if conflicting, interests, Southern Africa enjoys widespread, if confusing, publicity in the world press.

The Institute of Development Studies has also had a substantial research interest in the region (see p. 77). In this number of the *Bulletin*, we draw

attention to some of our concerns. We have not attempted to compete with the journalistic, sharply contemporary, treatment of these issues to be found in the periodical press. Our approach is both more analytic and longer-term – although this should not detract from its interest. Indeed, standing back from the strictly contemporary is essential to understanding.

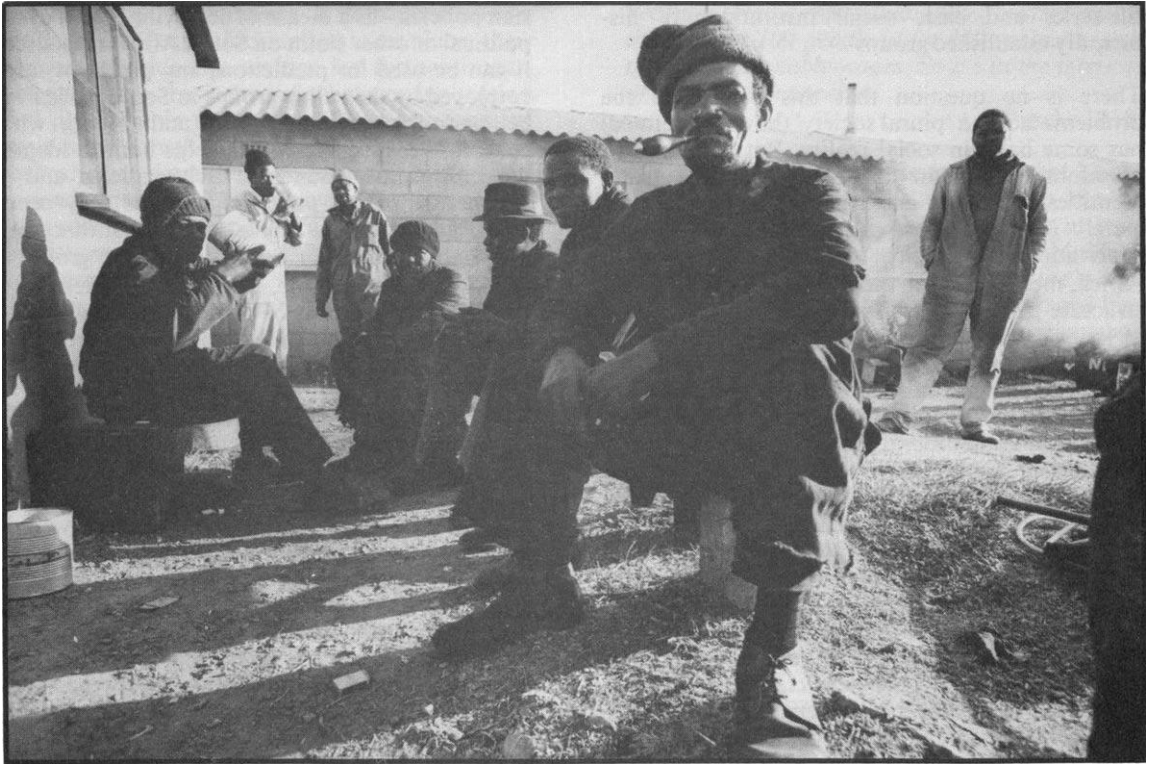
This issue of the *Bulletin*, then, illustrates some of our concerns in the region. It makes no claim to be representative; moreover, it represents no common view. As with the world at large, assumptions and approaches within the Institute vary widely. But more than anything else, there is no common model, no agreed framework for thinking about South Africa.

As I have emphasised, we see the world through the distorting medium of our own concerns. These concerns may be individual, or those of our social class, ethnic group, or nation, or other grouping. Indeed, social reality is so complex that we need some framework for thinking about it. We would all accept the impossibility of considering any social situation without some underlying – even if hardly conscious – model. We need a mental framework in order to make sense of the confusion of the real world, to make predictions, and as a guide to effective action. Such models are not neutral. Just as different people or groups have conflicting interests and concerns, so they will not necessarily find any particular model of equal utility. Since any model involves some simplification of reality, some principle of selection, there is a wide range of possible frameworks for thinking about any social problem. And the range of concerns about Southern Africa – both within and outside the region – has given rise to a confusion of models.

Some of these models may indeed be dismissed as fraudulent. Just as the performer of the three-card trick succeeds by making his victim see things in a certain way, so some of the commonly purveyed models for Southern Africa appear to be intended less as a framework for understanding or prediction than as a means of influencing thought.

The principal fraudulent model is that of 'separate development'. Blacks and whites are so clearly part

¹ I am grateful for comments from Charles Cooper and Reg Green on an earlier draft, but they are in no way responsible for the present version.



Migrant worker hostel – Soweto, South Africa

of the same system and (as [Butler, Rotberg and Adams 1977] point out) the separate 'nationalities' involved are so much the artificial creation of the South African Government, as to cast doubt on the sincerity of those who propound the model. If (like some of the Afrikaner leaders of the 1940s and 1950s) white advocates of separate development were to dispense with black labour, and white workers were to do all the dirty, unpleasant and badly paid jobs in the 'white' economy, it would at least be possible to take the concept seriously. In the event, it is difficult to look on 'separate development' as more than an attempt to conceal social reality.

At the other extreme, there are mental frameworks which are prevalent but not openly acknowledged. I suspect that the model which is most widely held – consciously or unconsciously – by the white community is that summed up with typical irony in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Huck has told a farmer's wife in the deep south that a cylinder-head has blown out on a steam-boat. She comments:

'Good gracious! anybody hurt?'

'No Killed a nigger.'

'Well, it's lucky because sometimes people do get hurt . . .'

That blacks are not 'people' is fundamental in white South Africa. This does not of course distinguish white South Africans from Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Arabs and Jews in Palestine, Brahmins and Harijans in India, Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi, Brazilians and Amerindians in the Amazon, Europeans and Aborigines in Australia or Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. But an appreciation of the fact is essential to an understanding of the working of the South African system.

But Afrikaner academics have produced more 'respectable' models. One such, which is both classificatory and normative, is that of the 'plural society'. (See for example [Rhodie 1978].) According to this model, South Africa should be seen as an example of societies consisting of more than one ethnic, cultural or religious group, where group identity may be supposed to be more powerful than national identity. The question raised by this model is how such groups can best live together in a common society; what political, administrative or constitutional arrangements will best ensure both human rights for the individual and what Rhodie describes as rights 'related to the survival and preservation of the cultural identities,

life-styles and basic social institutions of historically established groups'.

There is no question that this picture of the problems facing a 'plural society' (however defined) has some basis in social reality. But it raises two questions. First, how far are Rhoadie's 'cultural identities, life-styles and basic social institutions' merely a reflection of situations of privilege or deprivation? If we look at white life-styles in South Africa, these surely are the mirror-image of a social structure permitting whites to maintain a standard of living which is astonishingly high, not only by South African but by world standards. Again, the 'life-style' of a Mosotho farmer, who is compelled to spend much of his life working in the South African mines in order to be able to subsist, clearly reflects his relative deprivation in the Southern African system. Secondly, the model ignores the way in which life-styles and cultures have been and continue to be moulded by the development of South African industrial capitalism. Half a century ago, the Afrikaners were a mainly rural community, with rural attitudes and rurally based institutions. Today the Afrikaners are predominantly urban; there is a new class of Afrikaner capitalist; there has been increasing social differentiation inside the Afrikaner community. Similarly, industrialisation has brought a growing community of urban blacks, whose links with their 'historic' societies have become increasingly tenuous (except in so far as the South African authorities compel them to maintain – or even invent – such links). It has helped create a small black bourgeoisie, but has very severely limited its potential for growth.

Thus the 'plural society' model, when applied in a normative sense to the specific circumstances of Southern Africa, has more to offer the privileged than the unprivileged. By taking cultural differences as absolutes, and ignoring their social and economic bases, it helps to maintain the *status quo*. Indeed, preserving the 'culture and life-style' of the white communities looks very much like preserving their positions of privilege – if indeed the two are not identical.

The obverse of the 'plural societies' model is the view, widespread among blacks, that the essence of the Southern African system is the monopolistic access to and control over resources in the region by the whites, and their determination to maintain this monopoly. This model has many strengths. It helps to explain much in South Africa which is inexplicable on any other assumption. It is a not unreasonable explanation of South African Bantu-

stan policies – as a means of depriving blacks of any political or other claim on South African resources. It can be used for prediction; any policy or tactic employed by the ruling groups in South Africa will be centrally concerned with maintaining white control over resources. This helps both to identify the constraints bounding such policies and to interpret apparent policy changes as they occur. Thus, although some degree of 'token' advancement may be foreseeable for certain privileged groups of blacks (as, for example, proposed by Wiehahn) it will be more a means of buying a few black allies than any genuine opening up of access to resources for blacks as a group.

At the same time, it clearly has its inadequacies. It ignores the changing structure of the Southern African economy and the dynamics of South African capitalism. Thus it does not take into account the possibility that there may well be differences of interest inside the white community itself – between 'international' and national capitalists, between the mining industry (with its historic dependence on cheap migrant labour) and manufacturing industry (which has seen advantages in a settled black labour force) or between highly paid white workers and many employers who would prefer a non-rationally organised labour force.

A variant of this model is the view that the South African system can be understood only in the context of Afrikaner nationalism – or as Maasdorp argues, as the result of Afrikaners' determination that they should never again be ruled by others. Since the immediate threat to this position would be from blacks, this would involve racial segregation and the exclusion of blacks from any political rights. Since historically the Afrikaners have been dependent on international and local English speaking capitalists, this also involved the Afrikaner-controlled state machine in building up national – and in particular Afrikaner – capitalism.

In contrast to these essentially racial or communal models, there are frameworks which appear to ignore – or at least accord little importance to – the ethnic elements in South African society. Here I will refer to only two such models – general development models and some of the Marxist models.

Several types of development model have been applied to South Africa. They have in common the view that the Southern African system can best be understood in the context of the problems facing 'developing' countries in general. A composite view might run roughly as follows. In any developing country, there are certain leading sectors (eg

manufacturing, or mining). It is in these sectors that the bulk of capital formation takes place; their surpluses provide the savings for further investment; they are the centre of whatever innovation takes place within the society. Their development involves the growth of inequality – mainly between those who are directly involved in this sector, and those who are not. This is inevitable; the modern sector can provide employment for only a fraction of those wishing to enter it. This creates tensions and pressures within the society which are contained in different ways in different countries. One of the main problems faced in such systems is that of internal migration. People move from places where possible rewards are few (eg regions of traditional agriculture) to places where there are possibilities of entering the modern sector.

In such a situation, governments have to decide what to do about migration. They can adopt a *laissez-faire* approach. This creates both mass unemployment and other social problems in the urban areas, as well as a drain on manpower and enterprise in the rural subsistence areas. Alternatively, they can attempt to control the movement. Such controls (or even forcible repatriation to rural areas) may be exercised by either capitalist or socialist governments – by South Africa, Senegal and the Philippines, as well as by China, USSR, Kampuchea and Vietnam. Restrictions on urbanisation may be associated with positive policies to improve conditions in the areas of emigration.

A further feature of the general development model is that it may also cover the spatial elements in development. Spatial inequalities can be understood in the context of a centre/periphery model, whereby both growth at the centre and decay at the periphery are self-reinforcing [Board, Davis and Fair 1970]. Such models imply that the appropriate comparisons with South Africa are such countries as Mexico and Brazil, which have experienced rapid industrial growth over the past decade, and have equally faced problems of urban unemployment, shanty towns and backward peripheries. One might charitably suppose that Dr Connie Mulder had such a model in mind when he replied to the question how he would morally defend influx control:

by protecting black people from being exploited by employers. If there were no influx control you would get for every 100 vacancies in established urban areas 300 to 400 people competing for these jobs and employers would negotiate rock-bottom wages. In the meantime, somebody has to provide houses for these people and education and health facilities, who's got to pay for it? It

becomes totally impossible. Influx control means that you let 100 people in for 100 vacancies and they get reasonable wages. So it's in the interests of the blacks themselves . . .

[Starcke 1978]

Apart from the interesting assumption that blacks who do not come into the urban areas require neither education nor health facilities (or at least that somebody else will pay for them) Dr Mulder's statement brings out the central flaw in the model as applied in South Africa – that is, the racial bias of South African policies. After all, the urban white population of South Africa increased by 88 per cent in the quarter century between 1946 and 1970, while the rural white population fell by 24 per cent. There was, however, no question of applying influx controls, the labour bureau system and all the other restrictions on urban employment to the whites. Unemployment among urban whites is indeed negligible, but this merely reflects the advantages in access to the job market which present arrangements accord them. Not the least of these advantages is that government expenditure per head on education is some 15 times greater for whites than for blacks. Thus the inequalities implied by this particular model of development have taken a special racial form in Southern Africa.

Just as the general development models understate the racial element in the South African system, so do some of the Marxist models. Here the emphasis is on the working of the capitalist system – both nationally and internationally. Forty years ago, the view of the (then legal) Communist Party of South Africa was that the South African system was essentially one of class struggle, of the exploitation of black and white workers by (mainly international) capitalists. On this interpretation, the conflicts between black and white workers met the needs of the capitalists by diverting the attention of both blacks and whites into racial conflict rather than class struggle. The appropriate policy was the cooperation of black and white workers against exploitation, and for a socialist non-racial South Africa.

At the time, this model had a certain plausibility, although subsequent events showed it to be a complete disaster as a guide to action. It is paralleled by the failure of the Populists in the American South during the years after Reconstruction. They too tried to forge an alliance between poor whites and poor blacks. Tom Watson, a leading southern white Populist, said to blacks and whites:

you are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of

financial despotism which enslaves you both . . . the coloured tenant . . . is in the same boat with the white tenant, the coloured labourer with the white labourer . . . the accident of colour can make no difference in the interests of farmers, croppers and labourers.

[Woodward 1965: ch II]

Both the Populists and the South African Communists appear to have believed that class interest would (or could) surmount racial divisions. I do not know how many members of the (now illegal) Communist Party of South Africa would still subscribe to these views. Contemporary Marxist studies in South Africa appear to have abandoned this line, although I find some ambiguity in their attitude to the racial issue. Their main emphasis is on the working of capitalism in South Africa, the nature of class formations, and in particular the role of migrant labour. (See for example *Review of African Political Economy*, no 7 and [Adler 1977].) In particular, they draw from Marx's discussion of the industrial reserve army created by capitalism, and, as Marx argues, a condition of the capitalist mode of production [see *Capital*, vol 1 ch 25 section 3].

The Marxist model gives rise to many difficulties. If Marxist analysis is in terms of classes and the class struggle, what, in South African terms, is a class? Indeed, Fisher, in her very interesting contribution to the Adler collection of papers, goes so far as to argue that white workers and black workers are different classes. This is so because they think of themselves as different classes – that is, class is defined in terms of consciousness, rather than in relation to the forces of production. This view (which does not differ greatly from that of Talcott Parsons, below) seems to reverse earlier emphases of Marxist writing on South Africa. Again, problems arise because of the very different interests of, say, international mining companies and South African urban industrial capitalists.

It would be unfair to generalise about the very wide range of views and emphases in the Marxist literature; it is apparent that there is a lively continuing debate. But, however unjust this may be, I find some of the discussion both excessively abstract and remote from any possible action. Indeed, it is difficult to see what threat much of this writing could possibly pose to the existing power structure. The Marxist models do however raise two central issues in ways of looking at South Africa – the role of the state, and the role of capitalism.

If, as many Marxists would argue, the state is the instrument of the capitalist class, we would expect those elements in present state policies which are inconsistent with the further development of the capitalist mode of production to disappear in time. Indeed, it has been argued that capitalism has a potentially 'progressive' role to play in so far as job reservation, access control and all the other features of South African labour policy are incompatible with what Adam Smith called 'the free circulation of labour from one employment to another'. This is a view expressed by many South African white liberals.

The argument can, of course, be put the other way round. The development of the capitalist mode of production has relied, historically, on the existence of labour reserves, and if the actual wage rate in the modern capitalist sector is kept below subsistence levels through the provision of some part of subsistence in the traditional economy, then it will be in the interests of capitalism to maintain the status quo. In other words, it is just as possible to argue that capitalism will play a conservative role as that it will play a 'progressive' role in future social development.

In all this, there is a hidden assumption. Can we assume a purely instrumental role for the state? Is it not possible that the state has a dynamic of its own? The interests of the capitalist mode of production may act as a *constraint* on the range of action open to any South African Government; but will they completely determine state policy? Should we not allow for the possibility that the state will respond, not only to capitalist interests, but also to the perceived interests of the white community, who are in effective control of the state machine? Again, is it possible that capitalism determines the *form* rather than the *fact* of social inequality?

This is to argue the inadequacy of any model which concentrates exclusively on one element in the South African situation – whether it be capitalism, white supremacy or the international context. We need an eclectic frame of thinking for an understanding of the complexities of South African society. But there may be common ground between at least some of these models. Thus, in practice, interpretation in terms of class structures and in racial terms may not differ widely. As Talcott Parsons [in Rhodie 1978] points out:

. . . the two bases of diffuse solidarity, namely ethnicity and class, have (in South Africa) come to be amalgamated in one aspect of cleavage, namely the white upper, to use the Marxist symbolism, capitalist class, and the black lower

'working class'. This does not fit exactly, but it has developed to a very sharp degree of accentuation.

This identity, according to Parsons, is the special feature of the South African form of capitalism as compared with, say, American capitalism. A central question, then, is how far the present power structure will be able or willing to defuse the implied combination of racial and class conflict which, to an outsider, seems the inevitable outcome of present policies.

At this point I should make my own position clear. As someone who loves South Africa but hates the South African system, who does not view with pleasure the prospect of civil war in South Africa but who recognises that the time could come when the actions of the present ruling groups leave those desiring reform with little alternative to violent action, whose sympathies are with those whom the present system excludes but who harbours no illusions that poor, black people are necessarily any more virtuous than rich, white ones, or would inevitably behave any better if they were in power (although it would be difficult for them to behave worse) – as someone with these apparently inconsistent views, I find a framework roughly on the following lines of most assistance in illuminating contemporary Southern African society:

- a) the central issue in Southern Africa is that of inequality. The most obvious form of this inequality in South Africa itself is in terms of colour, but there are other inequalities – of access to and control over resources, of location, and of relative political power;
- b) there is no simple explanation of present inequalities, whether in terms of colour, the workings of national or international capitalism, or the operation of centre/periphery systems. All these interact, and each leaves its mark on the nature of inequality;
- c) equally, inequalities would persist if only one of these elements were present. Racial discrimination, capitalism and regional disparities all have their own dynamic; each is adaptable to a variety of circumstances. 'Socialist' systems can (and do) co-exist with discrimination against particular ethnic groups and the continuation and strengthening of regional disparities; capitalism involves inequality, whether racial or other; regional development policies are not inconsistent with other forms of inequality.
- d) but the most urgent issue – because most insulting to human dignity – is inequality based on racial origin – at least in those countries still

ruled by racially separate minorities. If a programme for the immediate elimination of all forms of inequality is not practicable, those concerned with inequality in these countries will give first priority to issues of racial inequality;

- e) in doing so, they need not assume that national or international capitalism is necessarily an ally or an enemy. Capitalism is a highly adaptable system. The concern of the capitalist is to make profits and accumulate capital. This can be done successfully in a variety of social systems. We need only observe powerful international capitalist groups subsidising opposing parties in past internal conflicts in Zimbabwe.
- f) it should not be assumed that the South African state is the instrument of national or international capitalism. Nor should the power, toughness or persistence of the existing state machine, or its ability to operate in a variety of guises, be underestimated. And it is reasonable to assume that this power, toughness and persistence will be employed very centrally for the maintenance of white status and power.

This framework is both eclectic and pragmatic. As will be apparent from this number of the *Bulletin*, it is not necessarily shared by our contributors, who clearly do not have any common model. The two papers on South Africa, by Maasdorp and Ward, do not question the capitalist structure of South African society. They implicitly accept a standard 'development' model not very different from that which I have described above. What I find interesting about their papers is that both conclude that the stated aims of South African regional policy are impossible of realisation. Their conclusions seem to me all the more powerful because of the conventional model underlying their thinking. But I must admit to reservations about Ward's approach. Although his concluding paragraph would lead to a different conclusion, much of his paper appears to imply that 'planning' for the benefit of the poor is (or could be) a meaningful process in the Ciskei – that is to say, within a total social and political context which makes such planning at best irrelevant and at worst a deliberate attempt to divert attention from the realities of power. Clearly Ward's concern is to see what could be done within the existing political context to improve the conditions of the mass of the people in the Ciskei. This is an aim which many of us would share. But anyone concerned to improve the lot of the poor should consider how far any specific measure he proposes is likely to strengthen those very structures which exclude the poor from access to material resources and political influence. Not to do so is to fall into the trap laid by the South African Government.

Of the papers concerned with the Southern African region outside South Africa, only one – that by Parson – is centrally concerned with the working of regional and international capitalism. One of the virtues of his paper is that it draws our attention to the fact that inequality between black and white is not the only kind of inequality within the region. But it seems to me paradoxical that the policy suggestions emerging from his analysis are very similar to those in Lipton's study of Botswana, although their implicit models are totally different.

The papers by Colclough on regional labour issues, by Harvey on Botswana monetary policy, and by Green on the potential for regional cooperation, are more concerned with the possibilities for countries in the region to diminish their dependence on South Africa than with the working of capitalism in Southern Africa. They assume that the countries of the region will continue to have a variety of social structures, more or less closely involved in the international capitalist system. What, on this assumption, is the room for manoeuvre in the Southern African periphery? All three conclude that there is an agenda for action – whether in the areas of monetary policy, labour policy or regional cooperation. Outcomes are not completely determined, either by the forces of international capitalism or by the power of the South African state and economy.

The papers by Green and Kiljunen on Namibia and by Riddell on Zimbabwe draw attention to the implicit models of the national liberation movements. In both countries, movements which originated as reactions against the white monopoly of access to resources have necessarily broadened their thinking. In Namibia, SWAPO has been compelled to develop a complex model which takes account of both racial and social inequalities. In Zimbabwe, the situation is less clear; the national movement operated on no unified model. But in both countries the fact of liberation struggle has militated against the adoption of single-factor models – whether of simple black-white opposition or of the struggle against national or international capitalism.

There is an interesting contrast between the papers by Green and Riddell, on the one hand, and that by Kiljunen on the other. Green and Riddell are concerned with immediate, indeed urgent, issues of public policy, whereas Kiljunen is concerned with statements. I have been glad to include Kiljunen's contribution because the information on SWAPO's ideological position and its evolution is interesting, and provides a useful complement to Green's more

policy-oriented approach. But all of us would recognise the need to go beyond statements. Liberation movements have of necessity to recruit support from a variety of sources, internal and international. Their public statements reflect this need. We need not assume that they are insincere. But a successful liberation movement may well find itself in situations to which its previous rhetoric provides inadequate answers, and subject to pressures for greater 'pragmatism' or greater 'purism'. Kiljunen argues that the mere fact of armed struggle makes it likely that present statements will be embodied in future policy. This is a question which invites further study. In addition to a description of SWAPO's ideological evolution, we need an analysis of the forces likely to operate in an independent Namibia and their probable impact on public policy. Kiljunen makes us aware of the rhetoric; but we also need a broadly analytical view of probable policy outcomes.

We had hoped to include an article on the development of health policy in Mozambique. The provision of health services is an important example both of degrees of inequality in society – as between urban and rural areas, regions, classes or ethnic groups – and of alternative frameworks for thinking. In developing countries with largely rural and deprived populations, we would expect socialist governments to allocate resources to meet the urgent health needs of the mass of the people. This involves giving priority to the wide dispersion of low-cost promotive, preventive and curative services rather than concentrating attention on expensive hospitals, which centralise resources on curative care in the urban areas. Since independence in 1975, Mozambique has achieved a reputation for its policy of primary health care. However, the recent dismissal of the Minister of Health makes the interpretation of this past health policy, as well as predictions about possible future developments, somewhat problematic. Mozambique's health policy is presumably under review; it therefore seemed inappropriate to write on the subject since any article would have to be largely speculative.

Finally, we come to Gay's paper on the migration of women from Lesotho. I find her contribution the most compelling in this collection. Her implicit model is again different from that of the other contributors, since it adds a new dimension to inequality – that between men and women within a total context of deprivation. But the main difference between Gay and most other strands of thinking about Southern Africa is that we find ourselves in a world of people rather than of

abstractions. We see people who are struggling to survive in a hostile society. White South Africa denies that blacks are people; it takes thinking such as this to bring us back to reality.

References

- Adler, T. (ed), 1977, *Perspectives on South Africa*, South African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand
- Board, C., R. J. Davies and T. J. D. Fair, 1970, 'The Structure of the South African space economy: an integrated approach', *Regional Studies*, vol 4 no 3
- Butler, Jeffrey, Robert I. Rotberg and John Adams, 1977, *The Black Homelands of South Africa*, University of California Press
- Johnson, R. W., 1977, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?*, Macmillan
- Lipton, M., 1978 and 1979, *Employment and Labour Use in Botswana*, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, Gaborone
- Review of African Political Economy*, no 7, Sept/Dec 1976
- Rhodie, Nic (ed), 1978, *Intergroup Accommodation in Plural Societies*, Macmillan
- Starcke, Anna, 1978, *Survival*, Tafelberg, Cape Town
- Woodward, C. Vann, 1975, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, Oxford University Press.