The book by Adrian Guelke, professor of comparative politics in the School of Politics and International Studies at Queen's University of Belfast, is the first in a series, "Rethinking World Politics," edited by Professor Michael Cox of the London School of Economics. The book consists of eleven chapters in which the author traces racial policy in South Africa from its origin to what the author calls the "unexpected transition to majority rule" and in which he also discusses the nature of that policy and the reasons for "apartheid's demise."

The very word "rethinking" (applied these days to almost everything—from "Communism" to "the Rise of Islam" and from "U.S. Hegemony" to the "Asian Economic Miracle") allows authors of this series to look critically at existing views of major world developments. Guelke applies this approach as well, but only to a rather limited extent. For example, Guelke follows most Western (and "old" South African) academics who claim that "the manner of South Africa's democratization through a negotiated settlement represented a triumph for liberalism," though he admits, ironically, that "liberals themselves had much less influence in the new political dispensation than their radical counterparts, many of whom had a place in the ANC" (pp. xii-xiv).

Some sections of the book seem not much more than a mere synopsis: Guelke painstakingly analyzes various works on South Africa by academics or journalists and extensively quotes from them, but rarely expresses his own opinion. Moreover, some of the quotations, left by Guelke without any comments, look a bit odd. Thus, he quotes from the book on the preliminary talks between the ANC representatives and members of "the Afrikaner elite" by Robert Harvey, who underlines that the South African "miracle"—a political settlement—"was not achieved out of the blue," but "through heroic and drawn-out struggle of South African blacks, aided by a few liberal whites" (p. 169). Yet such comments ignore the well-documented aid to the liberation movement from white radicals, who were not so few in number and who were, in the main, communists, not liberals.

To be fair, when Guelke does express his own opinion, it often is convincing and quite original. For example, he draws the attention of readers to the "legal and constitutional continuity between the old order and the new" in South Africa, when "the institutions of apartheid voted themselves out of existence by enacting the interim constitution" (p. xvi), though of course this has been preceded by lengthy talks and in reality that Constitution was far from what "the institutions of apartheid" wanted it to be. Guelke is right when he criticizes a myth "that South Africa’s political development has primarily been a product of the country’s isolation" (p. xvi) and notes that R. W. Johnson, in his *How Long Will South Africa Survive* (1977), "equated South Africa and its white establishment with apartheid" (p. 128).

Nevertheless, some statements of Guelke seem rather strange, especially for those who were involved in the liberation struggle, or at least in support of it. Thus he terms "a new puzzle" the need "to explain the sudden demise of apartheid" (p. xiv), while that demise was rather overdue and too long awaited. The same sort of criticism may be applied to Guelke’s claim that "by the late 1980s ... nobody expected the collapse of the National Party government" (p. 152).

Guelke devotes a chapter of his book to a discussion of the nature of South African racial policy. He
claims here that “from the formation of the Union of South Africa to the eve of the country’s first democratic election ... South Africa was governed under a political system modeled on Westminster” (p. 22). Yet this was hardly so after 1984, when under a new constitution a tri-cameral parliament and a post of executive president were created. He refers to Hermann Giliomee’s criticism of the book by Kader and Louise Asmal and Ronald Suresh Roberts.[2] who compared “Nats with Nazis” and cites Giliomee’s view that “the resolutions in the United Nations General Assembly labelling apartheid a crime against humanity were bound with the Cold War, reflecting politicking by the Soviet bloc and had not been supported by the West” (p. 31). Unfortunately here Guelke does not express his opinion on this very wrong statement (surely his silence does not mean consent?). In fact, these resolutions reflected not Soviet “politicising” but the position of the majority of United Nations members, first and foremost of the African and other non-aligned countries.

Guelke refers (pp. 17-18) to the New Oxford English Dictionary definition of February 1991 as “the terminal date of apartheid” since in that month F. W. De Klerk announced the intention to repeal the “legislative pillars of apartheid”—the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act and the Natives’ Land Act, though Guelke thinks the end of apartheid was spelled out a year earlier, when Nelson Mandela was released. However, it seems that Guelke, like many other writers on this subject, “forgets” that the main “legislative pillar,” the apartheid constitution, remained in force until April 1994.

Guelke correctly characterizes De Klerk as “the most conservative of the candidates” who contested the leadership of the National Party in 1989 (p. 155), but he hardly explains De Klerk’s subsequent move, so to say, to the left or at least to the center of Nationalist Party politics. Guelke prefers to quote various writers who contradict each other and he completes this chapter with a rather dubious phrase about “the surprising emergence of the ANC as the dominant force in the country at the end of transition” (p. 165).

Another fault of the author in my opinion is that he concentrates his attention on the policy of the South African government at the expense of the activities of the liberation forces. To give just one example: in compiling his “Brief Chronology” Guelke chooses to include (and rightly so) the August 1991 agreement between the government and the ANC (the Pretoria Minute), as a result of which the “ANC suspends all armed actions;” but he does not include the date of the beginning of such armed actions (16 December 1961) in this chronology, lending it some imbalance. Guelke fittingly writes that the reaction to the killing of South African Communist Party General Secretary Chris Hani “provided a powerful spur to the negotiations” (p. 183), yet he fails to appreciate the importance of the earlier mass action campaign launched by the ANC.

Guelke expresses rather controversial views when he goes beyond the Southern African region. He may be right when he questions the appropriateness of the very term “Third World” after the end of the Cold War, but this is hardly so when he claims that “with the end of apartheid, it was possible to question whether any basis for Third World solidarity still existed” (p. 14). Whatever term is used to describe that part of the world beyond “a golden billion,” such solidarity in fact was vividly expressed at Cancun and Doha. More so, since Guelke himself concedes that “global disparities of wealth and power made it possible to argue that the struggle against imperialism was not over after all, especially in the economic sphere” (p. 14) and he goes on to quote several persons—from President Thabo Mbeki to Mbeki’s radical critic Patrick Bond—who employ the concept of “global apartheid” to highlight these disparities (p. 15). In the reviewer’s opinion, the author’s claim that President Carter took a “strong stand against apartheid” (p. 135) is hardly justified, but Guelke is surely right to say that “during the early 1980s [under Reagan] there was virtually an American carte blanche for the South African government to lay its neighbours to waste” (p. 140).

The last chapter on the “World Wide Anti-Apartheid Movement” is devoted mostly to the relevant actions in the West and practically ignores other parts of the world. Moreover, earlier in the book Guelke claims that “in the Western societies ... the campaign against apartheid was conducted within limits that generally ruled out support for those seeking to bring about the overthrow of the system through violent means.” He refers (p. 7) to the characterization by the New Oxford English Dictionary of the violence directed at the overthrow of white rule as “terrorism.” However, most of the participants of the broad international anti-apartheid movement (with the exception of some organizations, like Amnesty International) did support the armed struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa.

There are also some minor factual mistakes. Guelke claims that fifteen African countries became independent in 1960 (p. 100) instead of sixteen (seventeen after the
breakdown of the Federation of Mali), and that "Three different African nationalist movements launched guerilla warfare against Portuguese rule in Angola in the first half of the 1960s" (p. 124), whereas the third organisation, UNITA, was founded only in 1966. All this critique notwithstanding, Guelke’s book is, no doubt, a valuable contribution to the study of the South Africa’s modern history and especially, of its historiography.

Notes


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