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Introduction

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Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa, Volume 104,
2020, pp. iii-v (Article)

Published by Transformation

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/trn.2020.0027>

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Editorial

Introduction

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When the editorial board of *Transformation* allocated responsibility to editors for the three issues to be produced in 2020, we had little idea that we would be functioning under such extra-ordinary conditions, and pressures. The pandemic spread rapidly and by the end of March South Africa, like many countries, was under ‘lock-down’.¹ Covid-19 confirmed and further exposed the major social issues confronting South Africa. With responsibility for the last issue of the year (*Transformation* 104) we, therefore, considered an imaginative way to address what we were experiencing and observing, often with a combined sense of dismay and hope, in our country and elsewhere. We, the editors for this issue, presented a theme and process to the board, and agreement was reached. We provide below what then happened in order to locate the content in this focus issue.

First we discussed, asked for comment, and drafted a ‘call for participation’ that read largely as follows:

The editors of issue #104 of the journal *Transformation* ask you to suggest – briefly and accessibly – some radical, imaginative and challenging ways to address social/cultural, political and economic issues, graphically displayed and partly acknowledged in 2020. We have in mind issues experienced extremely unevenly, both before and during Covid-19, and undoubtedly into a ‘new normal’ that will for most unfortunately be a continuity of the ‘old normal’ – unless collective steps are taken against a repeat. We ask you to be clear about what you propose, and not only about what you oppose.

We are curious to see how you give voice to the founding ideas (in 1986) of the journal *Transformation*, then presented under a political ‘state of emergency’, imposed by the apartheid state. We had used the term *transformation* as name for the new journal to signify *fundamental* change – specifically with reference to ‘democracy’ and ‘socialism’ but imagined as ‘beyond apartheid’ in its systemic class and race complexity.

What were the obstacles standing in the way, in the mid-1980s, towards such a desired society, and who would, and should, be the agents for change?

Thirty-four years later, in the 2020 emergency, we ask what has been revealed of fundamental inequalities, at every level of the South African social formation and globally? We are asking for perspectives that go beyond the shallowness – the obvious – of much that has characterised interchange in the present state of emergency. We invite, as well, recognition of and confrontation with the ideas and approaches and interests that stand as twenty-first century, and global, obstacles in the way of informed analysis and post-Covid-19 activism. What social forces exist, towards what ends; what tools enhance understanding; what of the present has fundamental causal effect on major trends?

We want you to take the cacophony of facts and opinions circulated in increasing frenzy from January 2020, in hard, electronic and social media, as read. We cannot simply add to that volume of words, and expect anyone to read it, and be affected by it. Your informed reflections – through theory and clear argument, rather than just statement and description – must provide understanding and indicate directions that are as ‘as other as possible’ from what exists into what should exist.

...

This was followed by some guiding questions.

Submissions were carefully read by the editors responsible, evaluated against the guidelines we had set (including a word limit to allow wider conversation to take place); and then reviewed by two external evaluators. We had a tight timeline for this issue and we are very grateful at how authors responded to these. The reviewers for this issue both commented on the collection as providing ‘interesting, thoughtful pieces’ and an imaginative look ‘at how our thinking must change, and how it might already have done so in some ways’. These ten contributions are purposefully thought-provoking and generally written in an accessible style, but ‘show a seriousness based not just on passionately held beliefs but on data and theory for serious reflection on content and argument’ (reviewer comment). We, like the reviewers, found this a refreshing collection of ideas, which got us asking questions of ourselves, our society and our global connections. We have also, where appropriate, created ‘Addenda’ to a few of the articles: reviewer comments specific to the article, and brief author responses – the idea is, already, to initiate discussion, which we hope readers will take further.

This issue also includes another addition, namely Platform: In Theory. This initiative was discussed last year, when concerns were raised on the

slim theoretical engagement that seemed to characterise much research and publications in South Africa today. This certainly does not apply across the board, but it was agreed that *Transformation*, with its own history, should stimulate debate, and present articles that reflect employment of theoretical approaches.

We mentioned in *Transformation* 103 the enormous gap left by the death of one of the founding editors, who remained core to the journal, Bill Freund. Early next year we will carry a chapter from Bill's autobiography to coincide with its publication by Wits University Press.

We welcome articles, comment and debate, also with the issues raised here.

Note

1. See, for example, <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/south-africas-war-covid-19>.