

her work a balanced introduction to gender discourses in South African urban context.

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**The New Black Middle Class in South Africa** by ROGER SOUTHALL

Oxford: James Currey, Pp. 317.

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In this pioneering work on South Africa's black middle class, Roger Southall argues that the black middle class' role in establishing a South African democracy has been seriously understated (p. xviii). The initial focus of the book is on a conceptualisation of the middle class within the two major traditions (Marx and Weber) of class analyses, and an argument is presented for the differentiation of the middle class. In opposition to some political commentators who argue that there is no direct link between politics and class, Southall claims that the middle class is intrinsic to democracy and remains hugely influential.

The history of the black South African middle class, covering the segregation and apartheid eras between 1910 and 1994, is provided in Chapter 2. Most likely due to an absence of relevant literature and data, this chapter skims over selected aspects of the black middle class within the political context of resistance, to colonialism and apartheid.

In Chapter 3 the post-apartheid black middle class is profiled. The inclusion of a section on the spatiality of this class would have been very useful in understanding the geographic parameters (in terms of time and space) of this class. After providing a critique of the consumption and production approaches in understanding the black middle class, Southall suggests a move away from hard data and asks that we query the relationship between class and power.

It is within the broader context of the ANC government's strategy to 'capture state power' that Southall's empirical analyses in the subsequent chapters illustrate how the ANC has through deployment (e.g. by capturing the state-owned entities) deliberately engineered the black middle class, offering voluntary retirement packages to white public officials, and introducing equity employment legislation (particularly enforced in the public sector). In this regard, Southall claims that black economic empowerment (BEE) has, despite being disputed and limited, played a crucial role in developing a black corporate elite.

In Chapter 6 the focus falls on the position of the black middle class in the workplace, illustrating the different middle class layers. Most importantly, it highlights that the number of black professionals remain small and that they are largely dependent on securing state contracts for maintaining their lifestyles. Southall argues that the ANC 'has become the means to access state power and resources' and that 'state power offers the opportunity for private accumulation' (p. 160).

In Chapter 7 the attention turns to how the lifestyles of the black middle class reflect their newly found wealth. Framed within the local political context, the

argument is made that the black middle class will prove to be politically progressive and will eventually contribute to political diversity.

The book concludes with an afterword in which the country's black middle class is placed within an African context. Southall acknowledges that 'there is far too much about the black middle class that is difficult to pin down, to finish the book with judgements that are "conclusive"' (p. 224).

The book provides a solid foundation – particularly for scholars of sociology, geography, public affairs and political science – for further in-depth analysis of the black middle class. It fills a void in South African post-apartheid literature on social transformation over the past two decades that have mainly focused on the marginalised and poor classes, and to a lesser extent on the wealthy classes. It is highly recommended for those with an interest in transformation of the South African society through a historical, social, political and economic lens.

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