

THE RAINBOW ALLIANCE: POPULIST LIMITATIONS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S 'GREEN' MOVEMENT

A Critique of J Cock and E Koch (eds) - *Going Green - People, politics and the environment in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press).

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Introduction

An old South African joke is that foreigners arriving at Jan Smuts airport should be advised 'Welcome to South Africa and step back 20 years'. The allusion to South Africa's 'backwardness' often carries a disclaimer. Despite the desire to be abreast of international trends, South Africa's problems are seen to be so complex and specific that ideas from 'overseas' are of limited use. *Going Green*, edited by Jacklyn Cock and Eddie Koch, exemplifies this ambiguity in South African responses to international developments. It is a testament to South African participation in the international effort against environmental degradation, but it also tacitly denies that relationship through its particular focus on local concerns.

The editors borrow the populist heritage of European 'green' movements as a means to identify with international concerns and to create a link with local political movements and struggles. The content of the book highlights this perspective. There are 17 articles by different authors - journalists, union officials, a doctor and a film maker, amongst others. The articles cover a broad spectrum of issues ranging from housing crises to atmospheric pollution, from the political facets of environmental problems to the chemical properties of gases. The book includes profiles of 10 South African 'environmental activists' who represent the social and political spectrum of South African society; from 'white' suburban women to 'black', male unionists. The message is clear; environmental problems should be the concern of all South Africans - it is a common struggle which must draw people from all walks of life into a 'Rainbow Alliance'.

The text and layout is designed to drive home the gravity of South Africa's environmental problems. Facts and opinions are presented clearly and succinctly. The layout incorporates photographs which complement the text, easy to read tables and apt phrases lifted from the text and presented in bold type in the

margins. The format betrays a journalist's editorial hand; clearly the book aims for a broad readership. All this is to good effect and is preceded by the editors' articles which set the tone. Cock emphasises the point that environmental issues are fundamentally political issues. Koch elaborates this theme by highlighting the human suffering that has occurred as a result of iniquitous political and industrial policies. In short, their articles serve as a rallying call for action - now.

Going Green then, is designed to get South Africans going. It is likely, however, to create some confusion about where the 'green' movement will take them. The book says there is a course to be followed but does not chart it clearly - there is no concluding chapter. Instead, there is faith in the power of popular activism with the articles providing a few necessary signposts in terms of the issues which South Africans need to address. The articles will be useful to readers who wish to pursue particular interests but contradictions within, and differences of opinion between various contributors could puzzle the reader trying to work out a direction.

Perhaps the editors felt that it was premature to define a direction in view of the need to highlight the problems of the here and now and to start the quest to resolve them. Nevertheless, a concluding chapter could have mapped the many and sometimes divergent paths in the contributors' articles. However, this would have raised broader issues that would bring into question the book's populist imperative. This is not to deny the value of this book at this time in South Africa but, rather, to assert that the populist perspective has limitations which need to be acknowledged.

Distinguishing the wood from the trees

The difficulties of describing South Africa's environmental problems are evident in the book. They are acknowledged, notably by the 10 activists who recount their personal frustrations in trying to make sense of the complex problems which they have been compelled to address. The articles indicate the reasons for these frustrations. The authors struggle with two related issues. The first, is how to illustrate the editors' dictum, 'Think global, act local' (Preface; and p17). The second, is how to develop an holistic perspective with which to analyse environmental problems, and to identify appropriate conservation strategies.

The effort is indicated in the considerable overlap in case material and argument. SASOL is used as an illustration in four articles. Pollution is discussed in 10 of the 17 articles. Community participation is advocated as a strategy in 11 articles. Occasional cross referencing guides the reader to other chapters which address the same or similar issues. Again, all this is to good effect in terms of emphasising the interconnectedness of political developments, economic condi-

tions and bio-physical phenomena.

However, demonstration of this interconnectedness proves to be problematic in the quest to develop an holistic perspective. Description of this interconnectedness inevitably includes causes and effects. Furthermore, human agency is inevitably an integral feature of analysis. Particular ideas and practices have contributed to degradation of human and natural resources and, obviously, human agency must be afforded a principal place if the possibility of resolving problems is to be considered. Yet the range, varying magnitude and complexity of the issues are difficult to express in a comprehensive way.

The book as a whole offers a relatively simplistic perspective on this difficulty. The principal role given to human agency serves primarily to emphasise the political and economic processes which contribute to environmental degradation in South Africa. This allows environmental issues to be linked to local political struggles. Accordingly, environmental problems can be seen as one dimension of these struggles and, hence, contained in a familiar context. This particular circumscription of environmental problems is a necessary strategy to put 'green' concerns on the local political agenda. Nonetheless, it sidesteps the challenge to develop a comprehensive understanding of environmental problems. It leads to the obvious assessment, repeated often in the book and sometimes more rhetorically than substantively (pp9-15), that apartheid is the cause of South Africa's environmental problems. It confuses by implying that resolution of South Africa's political and economic problems should precede resolution of environmental degradation, even though the book contains arguments to the effect that integrated strategies are necessary.

For example, Koch's discussion of conservation projects in KaNgwane (p23) reveals a contradiction between a statement by the former chief minister of this 'homeland' and his government's rural conservation strategy. The statement, 'we need to solve our socio-economic and political problems before people will be receptive to environmental issues', is at odds with description of the way the government has involved local communities in the creation and management of two nature reserves, and ensured that income from tourism is redistributed to these communities. 'Socio-economic problems' and 'environmental issues' are being resolved at the same time.

Furthermore, the attempt to circumscribe environmental issues is confounded by their complexity. This is demonstrated in the conflicting arguments of Crompton and Erwin (p89) and Clarke (pp149-50) on how to solve air pollution in Soweto. The former argue for electrification of Soweto following discussion on how to promote economic growth in a way that substitutes 'clean and safe' for 'dirty and dangerous' industry. Clarke's argument is more direct. He acknowledges extensive use of coal stoves by residents as a major cause of the pollution

but asserts that this does not justify electrification. His argument is summarised in the quote (p150): 'Stoves don't smoke. Its coal that smokes. So clean the coal...' His terms of reference are consumer oriented, being primarily the prevalence of coal stoves in Soweto and their greater versatility compared to electric stoves. Both arguments appear to be valid but they are neither comprehensive nor definitive. Numerous other factors and their interrelationships are not considered in detail (eg, 'enforced' crowding, the relative environmental costs of power plant emissions, mining, and processing to produce smokeless coal). In other words, the problem of pollution poses immediate political and economic considerations but also raises the more general, but equally complex question of energy conversion (see Gandar's useful discussion, pp97-108, on South Africa's dilemmas over use of coal and electricity).

The difficulty of circumscribing environmental problems is evident elsewhere in the book. For example, Ledger's argument (p235) to retain South Africa's many nature reserves are counterposed in a variety of ways by other contributors. His plea for these reserves, irrespective of their roots in the colonial and apartheid eras - that is, on the basis of the 'preservationist' approach to conservation - is countered by Cock's (pp1-2), Fig's (pp118-20) and AFRA's (pp223-27) arguments on the negative effects of this approach upon people who were removed to make way for the reserves. His argument (p235) of their value in terms of the income they generate through tourism is countered by Jacobsohn's unequivocal illustration (pp210-20) of the way tourism can contribute to both destruction of the fabric of society and environmental degradation. His use (p234; 235) of the positivist arguments in Huntley, Siegfried and Sunter's reportedly 'excellent' book (1989) is negated by Cock's (pp6-7) and Klugman's (pp68-70, 74-76) critique of that book's assumptions and conclusions.

Although the contrasts between various authors' arguments will be useful bases for debate, they also highlight the limitations of *Going Green*. The book demonstrates its grip on the 'act local' part of the 'Think global, act local' equation, but it struggles to clarify the relationship and to articulate an holistic perspective. This is unfortunate as the book contains enough, if largely hidden, evidence to illustrate both where the 'green' movement is coming from and where it is trying to go.

Going Green is a testament of belief in sustainable development. As is to be expected in a book of this nature, it contains an array of underlying premises to articulate that belief. However, these are rarely examined critically. As a result, what sustainable development means tends to be hidden in the confusion of different voices. The confusion begins in the Preface where the editors affirm the need for widespread debate to understand the concept:

Such debates - in which the notion of 'sustainable development'

must be central - need to be anchored in a mass environmental awareness (Preface).

They imply elsewhere in the Preface that environmental awareness is a process which is based on ('anchored in', perhaps?) the economic conditions of society. Accordingly, objective assessment of these conditions and political struggles to transform them will generate awareness of, and efforts to prevent environmental degradation. The argument seems to be classically marxist but subsequently, Cock tacitly questions a marxist perspective through her endorsement of 'green politics', primarily those of Europe, (p1, 4, 7, 9, 12) of which a central feature is criticism of marxist premises. Cock does not examine critically the reasons for these 'politics' but provides the link for Koch to convey one feature, namely the importance of popular activism.

That message is made explicit in subsequent articles which gives the collection a veneer of unity about sustainable development. However, this veneer obscures the book's ambiguous focus on sustainable development. Generally speaking, the book wavers between seeing sustainable development as an untested concept which needs to be explored, and taking it as a proven possibility such that the political and economic process to achieve it simply needs to be illustrated. On the one hand, many of the articles are not based directly on developments within the 'green' movements of Europe and America. Instead, they display a closer, though often undeclared, relationship to the philosophical principles of the World Conservation Strategy (WCS) of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (1980) which has been enthusiastically supported by liberal and capitalist agencies (eg. The World Wide Fund for Nature, the World Bank). Much of the book expresses, therefore, an effort to explore the logic of the WCS. On the other hand, despite sustainable development being the central concept of the WCS and the unifying phrase for international co-operation, and despite the obvious effort in the book to illustrate this concept, it is never clearly defined in the book (Ledger, p230, provides a summary of WCS thinking which informs this concept).

This tacit exclusion of the WCS proves to be the major limitation of *Going Green*. Since the WCS is generally left unstated, the contributors are unable to assess critically the concept of sustainable development, and to identify clearly points of convergence between the WCS, popular activism and marxist thought. In turn, the book is unable to put in context some of its central arguments such as the importance of community participation. In short, the WCS principles and specifically, their implications, must be addressed directly by South Africa's 'green' movement if it is to become a powerful force in the country.

The concept of sustainable development is informed by a number of principles of environmental management. These principles which WCS documents and

subsequent elaborations advocate, often explicitly, can be summarised as:

- 1) the need to pool resources (skills and means),
- 2) the need for collaboration,
- 3) the need to conduct ongoing research,
- 4) the need to educate (to change attitudes and practices),

(Hanks, 1986; Hopper, 1988; IUCN, 1980; IUCN, UNEP & WWF, 1991; Lebel & Kane, 1990).

These principles overlap. The need to pool resources and for collaboration stems from recognition of the scale and complexity of environmental problems. While maintenance of species diversity remains central to conservation, the WCS recognises that this will not be possible unless complex socio-economic issues, notably population growth, poverty and society's energy demands are addressed as well.² The WCS recognises that no single agency has the skills and means to address all these issues and thus, the need for people to pool resources and to collaborate in environmental research and management. Likewise, the range of issues to be addressed presumes a need for ongoing research. Sustainable development cannot be achieved unless we understand the interaction of humans with their environments and, therefore, the WCS directs attention to the dynamics of ecological processes which are both specific to particular localities and forever changing in form and content. Accordingly, research must be historically sensitive to identify changes and underlying patterns. Finally, the vision embodied in the concept of sustainable development presumes a need to educate. Attitudes and practices have to change if environmental degradation is to be prevented. These principles imply, as WCS adherents have recognised, a further principle of extensive participation by organisations and individuals. The rationale is that collaboration promotes integration of knowledge and skills. In turn, all participants gain a better understanding of the role of human practices in the environment and hence, better understanding of how and why they may need to change their attitudes and practices.

These principles are expressed frequently in the book but often in *passim*, sometimes tacitly and rarely in an integrated way. For example, Jacobsohn's discussion of the 'Purros project' in the Kaokoveld, provides the most comprehensive expression, ending with a list of her version of the principles (p222). In contrast, Lukey, Albertyn and Coetzee move directly from a general discussion of the 'waste problem' to endorsing the need for extensive participation to solve it. Similarly, the need for education and research is tacitly expressed by Gandar in his argument for a 'resource conscious society' (p108) and 'new perspectives on the relationship between energy, development and the environment' (p109).

This unevenness reveals the varying degrees to which the contributors have explored the logic of sustainable development. Felix's, Fig's and Jacobsohn's

articles are more consistent than the others, perhaps because they deal with specific, local problems and efforts to resolve them. Moreover, they are based on research which was sensitive to both local and broader dynamics and which was conducted in collaboration with others. Felix's article on 'an asbestos polluted community' acknowledges the contribution of community workers and other medical researchers. Fig's analysis of 'community struggles in Namaqualand' benefits from the co-operative efforts of residents and researchers from the University of Cape Town in the recent dispute over creation of a national park in the Richtersveld. Jacobsohn's article is based on long-standing ethnographic research in the Kaokoveld and association with conservationists who are exploring ways of implementing contemporary conservation principles (see Owen Smith and Jacobsohn, 1988). In spite of these syntheses, the theoretical implications of the WCS are rarely explored beyond the need for community/extensive participation. The result is that a number of contributors contradict themselves even while putting across valid points. In turn, this creates confusion about the origins and direction of South Africa's 'green movement'. In order to illustrate these points, I outline these implications and then discuss some of the contradictions.

Extensive participation means that all participants must be given the opportunity to construct a mutually agreed course of action, and this presumes a consensus of knowledge. This means recognition of a wealth of knowledge and expertise in populations which are affected by environmental degradation. Commitment to extensive participation involves, therefore, effort to tap this 'resource'. In most situations, there are readily identifiable agencies (eg, rate payers' associations, tribal authorities) but other agencies, which may not be apparent but whose contribution is critical, also need to be acknowledged. For instance, women are often ignored through bias towards men on account of the latter's *de jure* status in society and dominance of civic bodies (Jacobsohn, p218; see also Gandar, pp94-95, 105).

In other words, the logic is that the complex bio-physical and socio-economic features of ecological processes in a particular locality can be better understood if both acknowledged professionals (eg, scientists, planners) work together with other interested parties such as workers and residents. The latter can identify better than the former the environmental problems which they experience while the former have knowledge of broader concerns. The critical implication is that the traditional dependence on 'experts' to define and do research and to prescribe solutions is challenged. Instead, participants become involved in an exercise to re-think their particular understanding of problems, to educate each other and, collectively, to devise research and management strategies.

The outstanding implication is that the residents in a locality, who participate

in a conservation/development project, are ultimately the 'clients' of the external agencies. If attitudes and practices are to change, the affected population must be involved in project management. Therefore, external agencies (eg, sponsors, government departments, non-government organisations [NGOs]) must devolve management authority. In other words, these agencies have to emphasise their service role in order to build up locally-based research and management structures (see AFRA, pp224-27).

This perspective clearly has profound political ramifications. It is in this sense that Cock rightly argues that environmental issues are political issues. The perspective incorporates not only the aim to increase knowledge but also a political agenda; to establish democratic structures in order to develop both people's capabilities to change their methods of resource use and, individual and collective responsibility for the environment. But is this all that sustainable development means? *Going Green* suggests that it is given the emphasis on community/extensive participation as a basis for 'mass environmental awareness'. However, I believe, this is only a start to a complex process that is as yet little understood.

Sustainable development requires substantial re-organisation of environmental research and management structures. I make this distinction for analytical purposes as it seems that many of the articles emphasise the latter, in terms of community participation, at the expense of the former. The tendency is to presume the existence of community or, in view of the conflict in South Africa, to suggest that institution of a democratic process will achieve the participation that is desired. However, the logic of sustainable development is to create/recreate 'community' into forms that have an holistic view of environmental degradation. To date, proponents of sustainable development seem to have articulated this logic successfully at local levels of society. It is in process in the Kaokoveld and Richtersveld. It is evolving in the 'asbestos polluted community' discussed by Felix. It has been perceived by the Alexandra Civic Association, in its collaboration with PlanAct, an urban planning agency, and in its efforts to persuade the Sandton City Council to help resolve the township's environmental problems (Lawson, p49, 52). However, a quantum jump is required from the local to the national level, from democratic structures to critical understanding of the environment, in order to create 'community' with an holistic perspective. *Going Green* tends to avoid this challenge. Nonetheless, some articles raise the problem inadvertently and, therefore, are useful to highlight the questions which still need to be addressed.

Crompton and Erwin's article on 'Labour and the environment' illustrates the difficulties of defining sustainable development at the national level of society, in terms of placing it within a broader political and economic framework. They

outline a socialist perspective which includes argument for industrial democracy and an alliance between the 'reds' and the 'greens'. It is a somewhat confusing argument because of the particular way in which they base their arguments on a long-standing question, namely the relationship between society and nature ('environment', in their terms).³

Starting from the standpoint of workers' involvement in converting resources from one form to another, the authors question the way society is commonly seen to be separate from the environment. Human involvement in these processes, they assert, is usually described in terms of people 'work(ing) their environment' (p80) which implies a separation between society (its industrial structures in this case) and the environment (the resources which are extracted and transformed by these structures). In contrast, Crompton and Erwin argue that workers should be seen as an integral part of the environment - they 'work in the environment' (p80). This perspective, they argue, places workers in a better position to understand the interrelationships between economic practices, the transformation of resources and environmental degradation.

Their perspective is based on both a major implication of 'sustainable development' and a marxist theoretical principle. They are, therefore, on solid grounds to argue the socialist case. However, they erode this basis with their initial argument that workers 'work in the environment' rather than 'work the environment'. Firstly, it is confusing because it suggests a distinction which, from a marxist perspective, is false. The marxist principle is that humans are both an integral part of the nature (they 'work in the environment' as they are dependent on its constituent resources to survive) and they also transform nature (they 'work it') by means of technology. Secondly, their argument obscures this double relationship between society and nature which creates some ambiguities in their discussion.

They couch this double relationship in terms of the relationship to be developed between civil society and the state. On the one hand, civil society, in the form of civic organisations and trade unions, should focus its attention primarily on protecting human and natural resources; that is, to affirm society as an integral part of the environment. From this follows their discussion on industrial democracy. This is synthesised in the argument for workers to acquire 'the right to know, the right to act (and) the right to refuse unsafe work' (pp81-82) in order to constrain development of dangerous industries and work practices. On the other hand, the state should focus its attention on restructuring the economy (p79) to replace 'dirty and unsafe' industry with 'clean and safe' industry; that is to affirm society's capability to transform the environment and itself. From this follows their discussion with regard to the 'new' South Africa, that the state should lead economic development by 'redistribution of investment' (the restruc-

turing of industry) (p86). Crompton and Erwin express the double relationship between society and nature by advocating a role for the trade unions (COSATU) to participate in the state's efforts to restructure industry and by affirming the importance of a 'green' movement as part of civil society to counterbalance centralised state power (p90).

The problems of expressing the relationship in this way becomes evident in their argument for an alliance between the 'reds' and the 'greens'. The alliance which they advocate is actually an unequal one. The 'greens' are required to adopt a subordinate role to the trade unions. While the latter are granted a central role in transforming the environment and society, on the basis of COSATU's concern to engage in the process of restructuring industry (pp85-86), the former are expected only to protect the 'framework' created by the state and the unions (p90). It is not a convincing argument for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the different roles which are assigned to the unions and the 'green' movement expresses, ironically, Crompton's and Erwin's antipathy to the latter. They judge the 'greens' on the basis of a particular understanding of marxist thought about the double relationship between society and nature. In very general terms, the marxist perspective leans towards an anthropocentric, rather than an ecocentric, understanding of this relationship. This is to say the emphasis is on human capability to transform society and the environment, and hence, to address environmental problems from this standpoint. This perspective is set against the possibility of emphasising society's location within nature and the (ecocentric) implication that environmental problems must be addressed with regard to the limits nature imposes on society (see Benton, 1989; and Grundmann, 1991, for detailed discussion). The differential roles assigned to the unions and the 'greens' reflects the authors' suspicion about the latter's orientation towards an ecocentric perspective and its potential threat to socialist principles.⁴

Secondly, they ignore an inherent danger in their perspective. On the one hand, however valid their judgement of 'greens' as ecological fundamentalists, to assign them a specific and subordinate role curtails opportunities for the movement to develop in terms of recognising its ecocentric and populist limitations. On the other hand, their perspective sidelines the concept of sustainable development and its political implications. As was outlined earlier, the WCS principles which inform this concept encourage individual and collective engagement with the problem of understanding the relationship between society and nature. Equally, they encourage local and national action to transform society. Therefore, there is little likelihood that civil society will accept the constraints which the authors propose.

Crompton and Erwin's article can be summarised as a focus on environmental management. It illustrates the difficulty of re-organising the structures in a way

which expresses an holistic perspective on the relationship between society and nature. However, there is as yet no resolution of this question. Instead, local and national efforts to achieve sustainable development testify to a process of working towards such a perspective. Yet, there is a paradox in this quest which is illustrated in the divide between the 'reds' and the 'greens'; where and how to draw boundaries around interconnected processes amidst evidence which points to diversification of interests.

The same difficulty arises with the demand of sustainable development for re-organisation of environmental research. The quest is to integrate research in order to identify the interconnectedness of ecological processes and ultimately, to demonstrate how society and nature are intertwined. Built into this effort is the intent to change attitudes and practices. Yet, education in this manner is double-edged. On the one side, the effort is designed to stop activities which degrade the environment. On the other side, education broadens the scope for changing society, for diversifying practices and products and, hence, for further change to the environment.

Established research traditions are being challenged as a result of these implications. This is highlighted in the profiles on two environmental activists. Bureaucratic resistance to appropriate if not rigorous research is amply illustrated in Mufford's experiences with air pollution and associated health problems amongst residents of the Transvaal countryside (pp158-59). The challenge is illustrated in Taylor's profile which outlines her work with the anti-divisionist lobby. This lobby has evaluated its own shortcomings to the extent that it is now able to challenge medical science more rigorously than in the past. Articles in *Going Green* suggest the potential of collaborative research. Klugman's critique of Huntley, Siegfried, and Sunter's book (1989) demonstrates the narrow limits of positivism. White's article on South African environmental law (pp245-51) emphasises the need to change our ways of seeing and using existing laws. There are also questions which remain unanswered. While the book emphasises the need for more research, the questions of how it is to be carried out and what type of research is needed are posed and answered only in *passim*. One cannot expect detailed consideration in a book of this nature, but these questions do need to be addressed given the book's message and commitment to sustainable development.

For instance, collaborative research is an issue which needs to be clarified, particularly in South Africa. Public awareness of this type of research is increasing partly through the proliferation of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies. EIA studies are an attempt to implement the demand for collaborative research, but public faith in them can be misplaced. In South Africa, EIA studies often involve multi-disciplinary rather than integrated research and they

are limited to collaboration between acknowledged scientists and the sponsors. Furthermore, they are often designed on the basis of the country's Integrated Environmental Management policy (Council for the Environment, 1989) which retains a positivist theoretical perspective and which seeks to maintain existing management structures (Boersema and Huggins, 1991; Quinlan, 1991; Quinlan and Zingel, 1991). Therefore, for example, the EIA study on proposed titanium mining at St Lucia may not achieve its purpose despite the general potential of EIA studies to be useful means of achieving sustainable development.

In a different vein, the principle of extensive participation affirms the need to incorporate different research procedures (eg. participatory research) but certain realities need to be acknowledged. For example, collaborative research is often very time consuming and it stimulates an intense political process amongst the participants as they negotiate and work towards mutual construction of knowledge. Natural and social scientists are forced to ask different types of questions as they cross disciplinary boundaries. There is also a danger of attempts to constrain research in the name of democracy if the ultimate purpose of developing environmental awareness is forgotten in the political process.

The underlying but barely revealed issue in *Going Green* is that research must concern itself with process. Research needs to be designed to comprehend the dynamics of ecological relationships. Researchers need to recognise that such understanding will change society and nature. Understanding process and framing it in an holistic way is not easy as is testified in Klugman's and Cooper's contributions.

Klugman's article inadvertently raises the difficulty in terms of the concepts we use. Her critique of the 'overpopulation problem' emphasises process. Having illustrated the socio-economic processes which have stimulated a high growth rate in South Africa, she reaches the conclusion that improved access to, and distribution of resources is necessary to reduce the growth rate. Klugman effectively turns around the common argument for a balance between economic resources and population growth. However, in retaining this notion of balance, she retains a cumbersome concept which restricts perception of ecological dynamics. Equitable access to resources may not only lower population growth rates but also, in time, lead to reduction in population size and, as Klugman indicates (p77), to marked changes in its composition (eg. age and sex ratios) and in individuals' degree of control over their own lives. These changes will undoubtedly affect society and its use of resources but will a 'balance' be achieved? In other words, however phrased, this equation between population size or other social variables and natural resources is questionable. It promises to guide understanding of process but takes us round in a circle. We are brought back to the unresolved problem of the relationship between society and nature.

Cooper's article on land use in South Africa highlights the danger of foreclosing the challenge for research by simplifying the concept of sustainable development. His sensitivity to the political and economic contexts of soil erosion identifies many assumptions and practices which need to be re-considered. He also emphasises the point that the political question of land redistribution must incorporate considerations of both the suitability of land for particular products and agricultural methods. Nonetheless, while his critique is wide-ranging, he adopts a relatively narrow view on sustainable development;

The alternative is sustainable agriculture, which is based on the idea that farming should proceed in harmony with nature, using natural resources rather than exploiting them, and promoting natural conditions where possible (p190).

Given South Africa's relatively poor soil and climatic resources (p183), the possibility of achieving 'harmony with nature' is questionable. Cooper identifies general methods which can be used to achieve this harmony (eg, organic farming) but this is only a beginning to changing the way we see and resolve soil erosion. Farmers in ecologically-sensitive areas are likely to remain involved in a struggle *against* nature to extract products whatever methods they use. His concluding comments on possible diversification of methods, products and agricultural research (pp191-92) tacitly negate his ecocentric interpretation of sustainable agriculture but leave this issue in doubt. The challenge is to see if sustainable development is feasible shorn of its idealist projections.

To summarise, there is evident effort to redefine environmental research, but there is resistance as people grapple with established research traditions and, in their own minds, with ways of thinking about environmental issues. This does lead to contradictions within the arguments expressed in *Going Green*. Some are more notable than others. For instance, Cock notes that 'One of the greatest threats to the environment is war' and proceeds to outline valid empirical and analogous arguments to support this point (pp8-9). Yet, she ends her article with a quote from Albie Sachs who manages to convey environmental concern in terms of 'a battle', 'fighting', along with a final comment, 'There is a lot of healing to be done in South Africa...' (p17). Clearly, the 'green' movement has some way to go before finding the sustainable development path, if it does exist.

Conclusion

Initially, I was critical of *Going Green* for the absence of a concluding chapter or, at least, a summation of where the 'green' movement is going. Having traversed some of the indicated routes, I can understand why the editors might have been correct not to have attempted the exercise. *Going Green* establishes where South Africans are now but provides only a rough outline of the terrain to

be covered. Nonetheless, it is a start and this in itself makes it a useful book.

However, like all guides, *Going Green* tends to be two dimensional. General belief in sustainable development and efforts to illustrate it occur at the cost of critical evaluation. It cannot be circumscribed as easily as the editors suggest. It poses difficult questions on the relationship between society and nature that have yet to be resolved. The ecocentric view tends to predominate in the book but this may be as limited in vision as the view, which the book criticises, of society able to dominate and control nature without consequence. At worst, the ecocentric view is simply the opposite pole and ignores the reality of society's progress. At best, it defines limits to nature but ignores society's surprising ability to transcend these 'limits'. Nonetheless, *Going Green* holds back from advocating this vision. It acknowledges diversity of opinion and the need to investigate further. In this sense the emphasis on promoting a democratic process is valid but, once in motion, the challenge to redefine the relationship between society and nature will have just begun. Thinking globally, there are other societies which seem to be ahead of South Africa in understanding this challenge.

NOTES

1. Sustainable development was defined in the 1980 WCS document (IUCN, 1980:1) in terms of 'living resource conservation' as: '... the management of human use of the bio-spheres that it may yield the greatest benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations'. Of the numerous clarifications of this definition since then, Hopper (1988:166) provides a succinct version: 'The challenge is to ensure that development conserves... There is no development unless the environment is left with an enhanced, or at minimum, unimpaired capacity to sustain over time the new activities which intrude upon it'.
2. The WCS (Hanks, 1986) only identifies a set of problems, it does not explain them.
3. It is unfortunate that they insert the term 'environment' to address this question. It blurs the focus, for environment describes that which surrounds while nature at least directs attention to consideration of that which lies within.
4. The antagonism between worker and 'green' organisations is expressed in some of the profiles on environmental activists. For example, Humphrey Ndaba of the South African Chemical Workers' Union reportedly sees many environmental organisations as 'being engaged in moral societies while we (workers) are engaged in the hard issues. It will be a long time before those issues include the ozone layer or the black rhino...' (p93). In contrast, Chris Albertyn's (Chairperson of Earthlife) 'personal philosophy is "dark green" but the radical language of dark green is inclined to frighten off newcomers to the environmental movement...' (p18).

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