

Book Reviews

Southern Africa Post-Apartheid? The Search for Democratic Governance

Chris Landsberg and Shaun Mackay (eds.) 2004.

Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD). 205 pp.

*Reviewed by Karanja Mbugua
Senior Researcher at ACCORD*

The end of the Cold War ushered in the ascendancy of the neo-liberal ideology as the world's development paradigm. Characterised as the new world order by the then US President George H.W. Bush, neo-liberalism saw the collapse of one-party states in Africa, and consequently the adoption of multi-party democracy.

Key highlights of this wind of change in Southern Africa included the independence of Namibia in 1990, the defeat of hitherto ruling parties in the first multi-party elections in Zambia and Malawi in 1991 and 1992 respectively, and, more fundamentally, the demise of the apartheid state in South Africa in 1994 and the rise to power of the African National Congress (ANC), led by the legendary Nelson Mandela.

The book under review is a collection of papers reflecting on the situation in Southern Africa ten years after these momentous events. The book has grown out of a conference held in November 2003, but goes beyond the

conference theme and reflects on the broad issues of democracy and governance in Southern Africa.

The main reason for this is that though apartheid was confined to the borders of the Republic of South Africa, its impact was felt across the entire region. For, as it were, the apartheid state did not just destabilise South Africa's neighbours, but also the other countries of Southern Africa, which have a common history and geography and, thus, a common future.

Divided into four sections and thirteen chapters, the book is organised around several themes inherent in the democracy and governance discourse in Africa. These include the impact of the past legacy on the present, democracy as a concept and value system, political and social institutions, the nexus between politics, economics and development, as well as gender mainstreaming.

In the introduction, Chris Landsberg and Shaun Mackay provide an overview of the *theoretical framework* on which the analyses are premised. In addition to belabouring the importance of praxis-theory unity, they note that the decade under review saw numerous multi-party elections in Southern Africa, and successful peace processes in Angola and Mozambique.

This transition has not been smooth sailing, however, as most countries are characterised by weak states or weak institutions of governance, whilst some states are even sliding back to autocracy. A salient point, which no doubt will recur in other books if it has not already done so, is whether the end of political apartheid has translated into tangible economic benefits for the majority, or whether it has simply ushered in a black middle class whose socio-economic interests and political advantage obscure the poor. The question is whether South Africa has just moved from political apartheid to economic apartheid.

Section one has three chapters, all focusing on governance and democratisation in Southern Africa. Chapter 1 by Chris Landsberg reflects on developments in South Africa ten years after the end of apartheid. But the author extends his analyses to the region for two main reasons. First, the countries in the region share a common future, and, secondly, South Africa cannot avoid engaging them given its big-brotherly position. It is actually this position that has catapulted South Africa to prominent roles in regional institutions such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC)

and continental initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Union (AU).

Landsberg then gives a panoramic view of developments across the region, from Botswana through Angola and Zimbabwe to Swaziland, Mozambique, Malawi, Mauritius and Tanzania. Several issues arise. First, some countries have failed to align their electoral systems and political practices to the new realities of plural democratic culture. Second, fractious politics between and within political institutions has undermined the effectiveness of these institutions. And thirdly, though expected to exert peer pressure, leaders in regional bodies such as the SADC have tended to express solidarity with each other.

In chapter 2, Khabele Matlosa focuses on the challenges of transition. Aptly titled *Caught Between Transition and Democratic Consolidation: Dilemmas of Political Change in Southern Africa*, the chapter touches important theoretical issues around the concept and practice of democracy in Southern Africa. These include the form and design of political institutions, the linkage between the form and substance, the nexus between state delivery systems and market forces, and the reality of globalisation and its influence on nation-states.

Section 1 ends with an analysis of political institutions, that is, political parties and electoral systems, by Ed van Thijn and Roel von Meijjenfeldt. The writers raise three points. One, across the region the democratisation process is being driven by the ruling elite. In effect, this has led to the emergence of dominant ruling parties and weak, ineffective opposition parties. Yet, dominant parties are dangerous to the democratisation process for they undermine checks and balances among institutions of the state. Two, political parties lack internal democracy. This leads to entrenchment of personality cults around party leaders. And three, independent election management institutions are of crucial importance.

Section 2, also divided into three chapters, addresses the issues of power relations and gender mainstreaming. In chapter 4, Peter Vale situates the gender mainstreaming question within the overall power relations theory, and concludes that gender is not about biological differences but about the way the world has been constructed. Thus, the issue of gender rights must be seen in the broad context of resistance to oppression.

Chapter 5 by Nomboniso Gasa takes the cue from there and focuses on the implications of gender rights for democratisation. Noting the centrality of the overall political process in women's lives, the author contends that it is not possible to conceive gender issues outside the socio-political framework. For African women, therefore, the issue is the quest for balance between individual freedom and socio-political liberation.

Closing the section is Chapter 6, which is essentially a case study in which Debie Lebeau and Eunice Lipinge detail the role of women in Namibia's struggle for independence and subsequent struggles for gender rights. The writers assert that in Namibia the issue of gender mainstreaming has been institutionalised, with a fully-fledged ministry for women's affairs that does not only formulate gender programmes, but also co-ordinates gender activities in the country.

Section 3 of the book, which covers Chapters 7 to 10, is quite provocative, as it seeks to examine the challenges that have confronted liberation movements in their transition to political parties. In Chapter 7, Mwesiga Baregu explores the differences between political parties and liberation movements. These differences include *inter alia* the key goals, strategies and tactics, and operation methods. A critical theme running through the presentation is that refocusing a liberation movement from the goals of liberation to those of democratisation is a key challenge.

This challenge has bred two contradictory and competing forces in Southern Africa. On the one hand, there are the popular forces of consolidation, which seek to accomplish the goals of the liberation, and on the other hand, there are the minority but powerful forces of reversal, which seek to obstruct and frustrate the accomplishment of liberation goals.

In the next chapter, Raymond Suttner addresses the dilemmas of the past legacy, the transition to democracy, and the consolidation of democracy. These dilemmas arise from the dialectics of the various tendencies that exist within liberation movements seeking to transform themselves to political parties, and the perceptions of those driving the democratisation process. In a nutshell, the writer argues that the consolidating of democracy depends on how the ruling parties resolve these dilemmas.

The next chapters are closely related. Wiebe de Jager highlights the relevance of Information and Communication Technology to political parties and electoral

systems, whilst Francis Mako a analyses the problems of electoral systems and the problem of non-acceptance of election outcomes. The analysis suggests that it is imperative for the discourse about elections and electoral systems to go beyond periodic elections, universal suffrage, and the presence of institutional and legal frameworks, and to address deeper issues such as ownership of elections, confidence in electoral systems and the modes and procedures for verifying election results.

The book closes with section 4, which covers chapters 11 to 13. These chapters explore the nexus between economics and development, and the politics of land. Issues raised revolve around Africa's economic fragility, which is attributed to political instability. Other causes mentioned include power transfer problems, kleptocratic leadership, as well as the economic model inherited from the colonialists.

This section raises an interesting question, albeit implicitly: Is Africa underdeveloped because of political instability, or is political instability a consequence of economic underdevelopment? Which is the cause, and which is the effect? Several texts written years before the demise of apartheid have debated this question. Ten years after apartheid's end, scholars in Africa are still debating it.