

REVIEW ESSAY

Yvonne Muthien, Meshack Khosa and Bernard Mugubane (eds.) (2000), *Democracy and Governance Review: Mandela's Legacy, 1994–1999*, Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, pp. 382. Reviewed by Khabele Matlosa.*

The last decade has witnessed far-reaching global changes away from authoritarian towards democratic governance throughout the whole world (Huntington, 1991; Bratton and Van de Walle 1997; Olukoshi, 1998). It could be argued that the demise of the cold war in the early 1990s, which was marked in the main by the collapse of the ideological bipolarity on a global scale, precipitated this political transformation wherein centralized modes of governance are systematically being replaced by more pluralistic ones. The latter modes of governance are driven mainly by a global neo-liberal ideology of the western capitalist world. However, whether this political pluralism, or what other scholars would prefer to term political liberalization, is tantamount to real democratic governance still remains a moot point. Whereas some observers like Francis Fukuyama (1992) would argue strongly that liberal democracy is the most perfect form of democracy in today's world, others, like Claude Ake (1996) have provided a counter argument that African countries would do better by adopting developmental democracy or some form of social democracy rather than following in the footsteps of the west in terms of evolving a liberal democratic form of governance. The debate on democracy and governance which still rages today has enriched the discourse on the nature and role of state, state–civil society relations, elections and political participation in the whole continent.

It is within this backdrop that the book entitled *Democracy and Governance Review: Mandela's Legacy, 1994–1999*, provides an interesting input into this debate by situating the South African political transition of 1994 within the global political sea change which began with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany. It is worthwhile to situate the debate in this book

within the current global change at three main moments underlying change, which directly affected the South Africa situation before, during and after 1994:

- At the global level, the collapse of the cold war provided a conducive and fertile ground for a negotiated political settlement of the protracted South African conflict. This allowed the belligerent parties to show mutual interest to settle the conflict through a well-structured dialogue;
- At the regional level, the balance of power had begun to shift decisively in favour of the liberationist forces, mainly the African National Congress (ANC) following the defeat of the South African Defence Forces at the 1988 battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola which also triggered Namibia's independence of 1990; and
- At the national level, enormous pressure by the liberation movement, national mass democratic movement, trade unions and other popular forces which had coalesced into a formidable front against apartheid had taken its toll on the apartheid state machine, which was progressively losing its international strategic significance to the west in the context of a uni-polar world system; hence, the De Klerk regime had to open up apartheid doors for dialogue with the liberation movement towards a new political dispensation which heralded a government of national unity following the 1994 election and an ANC-dominated government after the 1999 election.

This brief background (provides) and (emphasizes) the significance of the contribution of *Governance and Democracy Review* to the broader discourse on democracy and governance on a global scale and South Africa's experience. The book further provides the reader with an informed narrative and description of the evolution of South Africa's young democracy in between the two elections of 1994 and 1999.

Comprising fourteen chapters, the book can be divided into the following broad thematic areas:

- Chapters that grapple with the theoretical, conceptual and historical/contemporary perspectives around democracy and governance in South Africa. These include those by Muthien, Khosa and Magubane (chapter 1), Magubane (chapter 2), Houston and Muthien (chapter 3) and Khosa whose chapter 10 combines conceptual and empirical methodologies of assessing the governance culture in South Africa Khosa's chapter 14 sums up the major arguments of the volume;
- The chapter that deals with issues of political accountability and bureaucratic reform through the case study of the Public Service Commission is presented by Muthien (chapter 4);
- Three chapters outline and discuss the process and problems of decentralization of power and authority in South Africa, focusing on

provincial and local government in general. These are Rapoo (in chapter 5), a case study of the Gauteng Province legislature (Maloka in chapter 6) and local government in the Northern Cape Province (Atkinson in chapter 7);

- Two chapters focus our attention on issues of social identity (particularly ethnicity and race) (Zegeye, Liebenberg and Houston in chapter 8) and the protection of rights of particular cultural, religious and linguistic communities (Khosa in chapter 9);
- Another cluster of chapters deals with issues of political participation, representation (Roefs and Liebenberg in chapter 11), profile of party support (Rule in chapter 12) and electoral geography (Rule in chapter 13) in the new democratic dispensation in South Africa.

From the above summation of the thematic areas covered in this volume, it is abundantly clear that the book covers quite a substantial ground in its assessment of the South African political transition and progress made during the Mandela era towards nurturing and consolidating democratic governance. The volume is a culmination of an empirical study commissioned by the Democracy and Governance Group of the Human Sciences Research Council in 1998 and completed in 2000. Although the authors do recognize the multivariate challenges that confront South Africa's fledgling democracy, they are unanimous that the post-apartheid state has made tremendous efforts in establishing, nurturing and consolidating democracy. This achievement is manifested in the following:

- A functioning multi-party parliamentary democracy anchored upon regular election and steered towards social democracy (as Good has also argued);
- A strong sense of constitutionalism and the rule of law supported by a plethora of key institutions that act as watchdogs upon the use and abuse of state power;
- Entrenched mechanisms for public accountability, transparency and sound administration, as well as free flow of information;
- Professionalization as against politicization of the public service based upon constitutional values, including impartiality, commitment to public service and fiscal accountability;
- Popular participation of the citizenry in the governance process through, among others, public hearings of parliamentary committees and public participation in policy making; and
- An integrated and highly developed economic infrastructure with considerable potential for economic prosperity.

Although on the whole, this volume raises very interesting, thought-provoking and in many ways path-breaking insights on the South African political transition since 1994, the authors tend to exercise a considerable amount of self-restraint and consequently are not critical enough about the state of democracy and governance

after the first two democratic elections of 1994 and 1999. The result is that, either by design or default, the political transition and its aftermath are presented uncritically and only minor hiccups are identified. For instance, if the nature and role of the post-apartheid state had been sufficiently analysed, the volume would have indicated that although the current state wields enormous political power, it is economically weak. As a result, the state is confronting powerful pressures emanating from globalization and the owners of the key means of production at home. Both the powerful global capitalist forces and the domestic white settler capital who are driving the neo-liberal ideology have played a role in the state's abandoning of the welfarist Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the adoption of the free market Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). This discussion would have been captured if this important volume had detailed the impact of globalization on South Africa democracy and governance. This should have been buttressed by an in-depth debate on the nature and role of the post-apartheid state. It is precisely as a result of the pressures of powerful global forces, in part, that we are able to understand the editors' observation in the concluding chapter that "the ANC government seems to have subjected itself to a global neo-liberal orthodoxy that constrains its transformative agenda" (p. 370). This suggests that even though democracy and governance are making tremendous progress on the political plane, economic governance is experiencing retrogression. This again is indirectly captured in the observation by Houston and Muthien that "the poor track record of GEAR in delivering on economic growth, job creation and social upliftment led to severe criticism by the ANC's alliance partners, COSATU and the SACP" (p. 55).

Secondly, an in-depth discussion of the security apparatus in the new democratic South Africa would have been extremely useful to help us grasp the new civil-military relations in a post-apartheid South Africa and their implications for the consolidation and nurturing of democratic governance.

Thirdly, while the chapters dealing with provincial and local government raise fairly interesting issues, they do not address the nature, position and role of traditional institutions of governance. This would have provided an interesting exposé of the bifurcation of governance in South Africa and the on-going cleavages and conflicts between the modern and traditional elite within the context of what Mahmood Mamdani terms the "bifurcated state" (1996). These cleavages were vividly manifested in the pre-1999 election environment in South Africa, which was marked by conflicts between central government and the chieftainship.

Another important feature of the South African political condition after apartheid is the phenomenon of a democratic dominant party system, which has also marked the political systems in Namibia and Botswana (Good, 1997; Friedman, 1999). It is in light of this feature that Rule makes the observation that "the 1999 election and a subsequent poll of public opinion indicate a slight strengthening of the ANC's dominance among the black electorate and a significant strengthening among the coloured electorate" (p. 331). According to Jackson and Jackson "a dominant party system" exists when a single party regularly wins almost every election, even

though opposition parties are allowed to function freely" (1997: 322). The dominant party system manifests itself in three main ways:

- electoral dominance for a prolonged period of time;
- dominance in the key institutions of the state; and
- dominance in the determination of the public policy agenda (Giliomee and Simkins, 1999).

In conclusion, the major challenges facing the democracy and governance project in South Africa, revolve around:

- building a strong developmental state;
- consolidation of a strong and vibrant civil society;
- steering economic governance towards a clear national agenda which addresses popular interests rather than pandering to the IMF/World Bank economic orthodoxy;
- consolidation of reconciliation, nation-building and sustainable peace-building;

building a national bourgeoisie through economic empowerment while at the same time redressing poverty among the African majority.

Democracy and Governance Review provides a very informative and thought-provoking exposé of the South African political landscape between 1994 and 1999. It surely will prove to be a valuable asset to political science students and keen observers of the South African political scene.

*Deputy Director, Research and Policy Studies, SAPES Trust, Harare, Zimbabwe.

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