

## Book Reviews

Roger Southall (2013), *Liberation Movements in Power: Party & State in Southern Africa*, Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey; Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, ISBN 9781847010667, 400 pp.

Over the last 30 years or so, the debate on liberation movements in power has come to follow a real-life trajectory that has basically gone from rather high hopes on the part of sympathizers and supporters around the world to deep disappointment and dismay at the actual performance that dashed such “high promise”, as John Saul once remarked of FRELIMO of Mozambique. Here, Roger Southall takes an in-depth, comparative look at the performances of the ANC in South Africa, of ZANU in Zimbabwe, and of SWAPO in Namibia. All three countries have been deeply shaped by settler colonialism, in different shapes and guises. In each case, though to different degrees, the liberation struggle had a military component, but ended in a transition compromise that forestalled the sweeping socio-economic upheavals once envisaged by at least parts of the liberation movements, and served as springboards for the dominant organizations within these movements to transform themselves into ruling parties. In addition, these parties have so far not been dislodged from the seats of power they came to occupy with the attainment of majority rule and independence. In contradistinction to their lusophone neighbours, Angola and Mozambique, the three countries under study did not experience civil war after the termination of minority regimes.

After briefly reviewing approaches to account for the socio-political trajectories of the three countries, Southall, without flatly rejecting it, finds unsatisfactory the concept of the dominant party-state and a “Fanonesque explanation” of the emergence of a new bourgeoisie which “sold out” the revolution (11). Rather, he favours as his primary approach the perspective of the “party machine”, which he traces back to the classical starting point, Robert Michels. Besides revealing the dynamics of the organizational apparatus, such an approach makes it possible to address the rhetorical and conceptual conflation of the ruling party with the nation.

Southall’s analysis proceeds in ten comparative chapters. He traces the profiles of the three parties from the different forms settler colonialism has taken in each country, which have partially also conditioned the diverse experiences that have shaped the outlook of the organizations. Whereas the ANC managed to accommodate a wide range of diverse

currents, both ZANU's and SWAPO's complexions were narrower. This was partly due to the role of rival groups, but also to ZANU's reliance on its rural base regions. Both ZANU and SWAPO were also influenced by migrant workers' experiences in South Africa, and thus by the ANC as by far the oldest of the three organizations. In all three cases, the struggle took on a military form, although to different degrees. In particular, in the case of Namibia, the military struggle tends to obliterate the manifold social movements inside the country. This vision is also reflected in Southall's account. An important commonality is addressed with the politics of exile, which in particular "reinforced the 'exclusive nationalism' approach" (61). This implied a monopoly on representing the nation, and also ruthless repression of oppositional strands in the case of the ANC and SWAPO, while factional struggles within ZANU took on a violent form, at least at important turning points.

Eventual victory proved "contradictory" in all three cases (65), but Southall points to some often overlooked differences. Thus, the Lancaster House agreement that paved the way to Zimbabwean independence not only entrenched property relations – as was the case in all three transitions – but, with the adoption of the Westminster model, also ensured the ascendancy of parliament over the constitution. In both Namibia and South Africa, on the other hand, the constitution is much more entrenched by the provision of an independent judiciary, including the review of legislation by constitutional courts. In Southall's view, this facilitated the concentration of power in Mugabe in the Zimbabwean case, while effectively blocking similarly extreme tendencies in the other two cases. Still, across the three cases, and as demonstrated subsequently, majority rule took precedence over political democracy. Importantly, the advent to power also entailed revisions in the images of history projected by the three parties. This refers in particular to the claim of engrained solidarity between former liberation movements now in power, which obliterated serious tensions and confrontations during the struggle years but today bolsters regional politics that shield regimes under duress, in particular the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe. Another important issue concerns, obviously, economic policy, which was predicated on a retreat from socialist transformation in all three countries, although in Zimbabwe ZANU still keeps up the relevant rhetoric. Generally, this engendered the task of combining "cooperative relations with capital while securing structural concessions from capital to bring about some degree of structural economic reform in favour of greater equity" (96). As Southall shows several times over, such a notion of equity was and remains predicated much less on the framing of "class" than on ethnicity

or even “race” – a distinction that goes a long way also to explaining problematic developments not only in Zimbabwe, but in the two other countries as well. Southall details this in a later chapter that provides a critical analysis of Black Economic Empowerment initiatives. At the same time, he follows up throughout on the issue of cooperative relations with capital that took on a particular hue, given the agenda of racial, rather than class, equity.

Electoral politics and, in particular, institutional arrangements for elections, are discussed in a separate chapter. As in other respects, Zimbabwe stands out for its comparative lack of checks and balances, and for its early and progressing erosion of independent institutions to guarantee a level playing field. Elections are special times for party machines, which are well oiled by the spoils of power, including control of the audiovisual media. Party finances are also dealt with by Southall in a separate chapter. Only in the case of ZANU does Southall note legal restrictions that hem in the opposition, and also the use of violence during elections. Successive election victories have secured control of the state, which is important with respect to not only implementing the party’s policies, but also fundamentally changing the state apparatus. The triple impact of the practice of “deploying” party cadres to all and sundry state appointments stands out here. On the one hand, deployment is a means by which to convert a hostile state apparatus into one that is prepared to cooperate with the majority rule government, and party members within the apparatus ensure its loyalty; on the other hand, deployment serves as an effective spoils system. Southall also points to an important difference between the practice of “deployment” in Southern Africa and a similar one in China, when he mentions that there, tenure of appointees is predicated on performance, while in the African cases it is clearly not. In this way, the quality of state apparatuses is seriously at risk. Issues such as dangers to the independence of the judiciary, and also large-scale corruption cases including, in particular, the infamous arms deal in South Africa, are closely related to this practice.

Under the continuous predominance of one party, various sectors of civil society take on added importance. As Southall shows, this is reflected in South Africa in COSATU’s ambivalent role within the Triple Alliance, in SWAPO’s hold on the union federation NUNW – although this has been repeatedly challenged – and, in the case of Zimbabwe, in the confrontational attitude of the ZANU government towards a resurgent trade union movement that became one mainstay of the MDC, and thus a serious challenge to ZANU’s control of the state. Whereas in South Africa “new social movements” (186) have also challenged the

ANC at various points, Southall sees no such tendency in Namibia, whereas similar activity in Zimbabwe can be linked to the emergence of the MDC, and accordingly was heavily curtailed. Another intersection between the state and “society” is rural governance, where Southall notes the resurgence of traditional leadership, which went along with a co-option by the state, rendering chiefs, particularly in Zimbabwe, as willing mainstays of ZANU control in rural areas. In South Africa, this tendency towards an alliance between the ANC and traditional leaders has resulted in legal initiatives that form serious hazards to human rights enshrined in the constitution.

Looking at the class dynamics engendered by the trends Southall has disclosed, he reverts to Fanon’s (and Amílcar Cabral’s) claims and expectations about a colonized middle class that, after the end of colonialism, would muster the will to act against its own class interests only under very specific circumstances. Such a possibility has been foreclosed further by the compromise arrangements which engendered “party-state bourgeoisies” and “alliances with established white capital” (275). References to revolutionary rhetoric sound hollow at best under such circumstances, where “there is an inherent tendency for the liberation movement to become a mafia” (276) – and this has already been consummated in Zimbabwe.

Against this backdrop stands the closing chapter, which gives a bleak review of Jacob Zuma’s presidency in South Africa. Southall views this period as the final exhaustion of liberation nationalism. The perspectives appear anything but clear, and a reference to the massacre at Marikana in August 2012 does not warrant optimism – nor does the observation that South Africans often actively resist in concrete situations and social crises, but so far have consistently voted the ANC back into power. The party may face factional fragmentation in the future, as well as confrontation with COSATU, and Southall speculates that SWAPO may follow suit, given the intimate connections between the organizations. His expectation that in Zimbabwe the MDC would consolidate its position was frustrated in the election of July 2013.

While this only proves how precarious such predictions always are, even when made by informed observers, this book is an important achievement in particular for its synthetic vision and persuasive overall argument. One may see imbalances, since Southall seems at some points to grope for an explanation of the Zimbabwean disaster, and at others to become entangled in South African intrigues. Namibia seems to be shoved onto the backburner for certain stretches, and here one also finds a number of inaccuracies, including an incorrect date for the official

beginning of armed struggle. Finally, I cannot suppress what may appear as a somewhat German query. The whole complex of the “nation” is hardly explored conceptually, and given its pervasive importance and ideologically charged content, one wonders whether such a foray might not have been beneficial. Related to this, a stronger engagement with the foundations of the “national democratic revolution” concept, whose roots in the Comintern are mentioned by Southall, could have furthered understanding in terms of, for instance, the ANC’s trust in a capitalist dynamic to develop the economy, which, given its claim to control the “commanding heights”, resounds intriguingly with Lenin’s New Economic Policy of the early 1920s. This might be usefully confronted with the Chinese experience, which also references a “national democratic revolution”. However, these last remarks admittedly point to a further line of inquiry, and thus underline that this is a timely, if politically disheartening, yet stimulating contribution. This is the case not least because of one of the central merits of this work, which is seeing South Africa in a decidedly regional context.

- Reinhart Kößler