



Book Review

Hussein Solomon (ed.)

Against All Odds: Opposition Political Parties in Southern Africa

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This volume edited by Hussein Solomon brings to the fore the vibrant intellectual work of a new generation of scholars in the southern part of Africa. The fact that the authors come from different countries helps in making a comparative analysis of the roles opposition political parties play elsewhere in the region and what lessons could be learnt from each country's case study. It is an important contribution to the understanding of opposition political parties in southern Africa and how they battle to become strong.

The countries analysed in this volume include the following: Botswana Lesotho; Mauritius; Mozambique; Namibia; South Africa; Swaziland; Zambia and Zimbabwe. Although the political situation in all the above mentioned countries, the authors argue that to a certain extent there are some similarities in as far as the operation of the opposition political parties is concerned. This provides the reader with an understanding of not only the broad challenges but opportunities confronting the political opposition in Southern Africa. The authors use both political and historical lenses to tell the stories about the problems experienced by the opposition parties in Southern Africa. The diversity of historical and political expression by the authors is apparent because a number of examples are given to indicate the challenges experienced by the opposition political parties in the region.

The volume explores some of the important functions of opposition political parties. In the main, the authors grapple with the following questions: Do opposition political parties play meaningful roles in southern African countries? Can democracy prevail without the existence of strong opposition parties? What is the changing nature of opposition parties within the wider African political and economic context? What is the influence of personalities in the survival of opposition parties in the region?

This fascinating volume is divided into ten chapters written by 14 scholars from the different countries in the region. Hussein Solomon gives a conceptual overview of opposition political parties in Southern Africa. In this chapter, he briefly examines the challenges experienced by these parties and further meticulously highlights the role opposition political parties should be playing in attempts to deepen and strengthen democracy in the region. This thirteen-paged

chapter serves as an introduction and briefly introduces the works of other scholars in this volume.

In chapter two, Balefi Tsie examines the importance of opposition political parties in Botswana and why there is no strong opposition to the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BNP) since March 1965. Tsie acknowledges that to a certain extent there was an influence of South African politics on the development of political parties in Botswana. This influence led to the formation of the Bechuanaland Peoples Party which failed to unsettle the BNP. The Botswana National Front also failed to do so. Tsie makes an interesting observation that Botswana's opposition parties never resort to violent actions even if they are aware of the cheating taking place during the elections. This is due to the patriotic nature of those parties.

Chapter three is about Lesotho. Francis Mako a argues that opposition political parties are weak in Lesotho because of the lack of funds. In his analysis, he contends that such parties are also weakened by the fact that personalities take the centre stage rather the aspirations of the parties. The lack of influence over policy and law-making makes the Lesotho opposition parties to be weak.

In the fourth chapter, Sheila Bunwaree argues that the influence of the parliamentary opposition in Mauritius remains weak because of the country's electoral system, the funding system and weak voter education. For example, Mauritius does not have any term limits regarding the mandates of parliamentarians and that there is very little direct engagement of civil society with the parliament. Turning to the mobilization of the labour force might bring positive results for the opposition parties in Mauritius.

Fivejoao Pereira, Sandra Manuel and Carlos Shenga jointly agree in chapter five that Mozambique opposition parties endure the problem of personalities. Other weaknesses of opposition political parties include having weak bureaucratic organization; lack of human resources; lack of trust from the citizens; and weak formal links with the citizens. These scholars argue that for these parties to survive and play a significant role in national politics, it is necessary for them to build solid internal structures and vibrant branches, mobilize members, and increase collection of membership fees.

In chapter six, Andre Du Pisani and Bill Lindeke examine opposition political parties in Namibia. Both authors agree that the South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO) appears to be a powerful ruling party. Mushrooming opposition parties in Namibia have failed to unsettle it. Despite the open and democratic environment that Namibia provides, opposition political parties remain weak. The author highlights the funding of SWAPO by big businesses in the country (in order to access lucrative contracts from the ruling party) as a major reason for this weakness. Another reason is the fact that in Namibia there is a widely held view that the opposition parties pursue sectional and personal interests. This, according to the authors, has negative consequences for such parties.

Dirk Kotze, in chapter seven, starts by portraying the historical background of the political parties in opposition in South Africa since the pre-election period of April 1994. According to the author, in the current (2010) political situation in South Africa, the African National Congress

(ANC) as the ruling party regards the opposition as legitimate representatives of broader society, but reduces them to spokespersons of minority and sector interests. Opposition parties in South Africa are normally assessed in terms of how many parties exist, how strong they are and what are their prospects for defeating the ANC? Less attention is paid to the quality of opposition parties.

In chapter eight both Petros Magagula and Zwelibanzi Masilela examine the controversial state of Swaziland politics. The controversy is around the rule by a monarch wielding political power. This allows traditional rule to occupy the central stage in the country's politics. Whilst opposition political parties cannot legally operate with a ban on political campaigning, such parties do exist and operate. Pressure is mounting on the traditional authority in Swaziland whereby the citizens are demanding a political transformation.

Chapter nine on Zambia portrays the interesting state of the country's political landscape. Jotham Momba argues that, in the main, opposition political parties are suppressed by the police in Zambia. Police harassment is evident against opposition parties' members. This is done to protect the 'legitimacy' of the ruling Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD). Apart from police harassment, the media has also been a critical factor in undermining opposition parties and became mouthpieces for the ruling party. Momba argues that whilst the country's laws allow the formation of opposition parties, the operational atmosphere is not conducive. The political atmosphere determines the nature of opposition parties in Zambia.

In chapter ten, John Makumbe gives an analysis of the Zimbabwean situation with a focus on the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). He argues that the advent of the MDC made a huge challenge to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) by criticizing its socio-economic and political policies. In reality the MDC, despite being repressed by the ZANU-PF government assumed the role of being a political watchdog. It demanded transparency and accountability in governance by the ruling ZANU-PF. The leaders of the ruling party went out of their way to starve the opposition party of funding whilst at the same time building patronage networks for their own party, using state resources. This situation was not only unique to Zimbabwe, but it has also happened in almost all southern Africa countries.

This book is written in such a manner that it opens up many areas for further research and concluding notes at the end of each chapter throw more light on the text. The authors deliver readable, penetrating arguments of opposition political parties in Southern Africa.