

Kenneth Good, Realizing Democracy in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 1997) ISBN 07983 0133 3, 163 pages.

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Kenneth Good has written extensively on various aspects of political change in Southern Africa especially Botswana. His latest, contribution, 'Realising Democracy,' is a fascinating and unprecedented expose of the hidden face of Botswana's world-acclaimed democracy which he aptly dubs 'authoritarian liberalism'. He ably juxtaposes Botswana's authoritarian liberalism to Namibia's 'citizen-based democracy' and South Africa's evolving participatory democracy through a refreshing comparative analysis. His conclusion is that Botswana's political system is not so democratic as the world has been made to believe. Botswana's liberal democracy is more formal than real and revolves mainly around a distorted multiparty system with "regularized, free and fair elections" (p. 1). Good identifies the following disturbing aspects of Botswana's liberal democracy:

- (a) Political hegemony of the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) which has ruled the country since independence giving rise to what can be described as one party rule behind the facade of political pluralism.
- (b) Enormous and extensive powers of the President who "is, not directly elected by the people but is chosen from among the members of Parliament" (p. 2) which extend to dictatorial control over the Executive, Legislature, Judiciary, the security establishment and the bureaucracy. This tendency has had features of one-man rule which stifles the democratic principles of checks and balances accountability, transparency and collective responsibility. The powers of the country's president are further buttressed by his being the President of the ruling party at the same time. This dual President regularly dispenses patronage among his party lieutenants through porks-barrel politics.

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- (c) Asphyxiating state control of information aimed at restricting public opinion and freedom of speech on vital policy issues. The relevant examples cited in Good's book are (i) the state suppression of the independent press; (ii) the immigrant and citizenship law; (iii) corruption scandals in high echelons of the state; (iv) national security issues especially the construction of the US\$600 million US - backed military base known as the Thebe Phatswa project.
- (d) Unlimited satism in the context of constricted rights and heightening poverty which are the main pillars upon which Botswana's liberal authoritarianism is firmly anchored. Suppression of trade unionism, state repression of public protests, suppression of women's rights and overt discrimination against the San (Basarwa) are some of the features of the ugly face of Botswana's democracy.

Good aptly concludes that:

the irresponsible elite and low levels of popular participation have complemented and reinforced each other; not for nothing has the state restricted trade union development for years. The government opposes public discussion on matters of crucial concern, and ineffective representative bodies fail to impose accountability on the leadership. The impositions of the state and limited popular participation closely cohere-liberal democracy has been hollow in Botswana due to both (p. 143).

- (e) Extensive use of patronage and exploitation of state resources by the ruling BDP during elections to perpetually reproduce itself as the ruling party. This explains, in part why despite its acclaimed multipartyism, Botswana has been ruled by only one party since its independence in 1966.

The above features of Botswana's political system point, in an unequivocal way, to the limitations of its democratic content. Botswana's system is, therefore subtly founded and sustained upon authoritarianism. Good observes that:

Botswana almost classically exemplifies the insufficiencies and limitations of the liberal democratic model: the reliance upon national wealth (characterized by rising per capita incomes) and regular free-and-fair multiparty elections,

as the necessary and sufficient constituents of democracy. Authoritarianism, unethical practice, and non-accountability readily occur where those alone are relied upon (p. 145).

Good, therefore, has debunked the widely held mythology of Botswana as "the shining light of democracy." This stark reality is brought into sharp relief through an interesting comparison of Botswana's democracy with newly merging democratic regimes in Namibian and South Africa. Namibia gained its independence in March 1990, nearly three decades after Botswana's self-rule. Unlike in the case of Botswana, Namibia's independence was the culmination of a protracted armed struggle led by Sam Nujoma's South West Africa people's organisation (SWAPO). The broad political mobilisation of society had clearly laid a firm ground for a citizen-based democracy in the post-independence dispensation. Besides, Namibia's independence, unlike Botswana's, coincided with the Post Cold War world-wide clamour for democratic revival and the concomitant collapse of dictatorial one party/one man rule in the African-continent. So it was that Namibia's political system would be "firmly anchored in the values and practices of a citizen-based democracy" (p. 67) and clearly "its features contrasted sharply with the system in Botswana and reveal the elitist, formalists nature of the latter in a clearer light" (p. 67). A few elements of this system are worth considering.

- (a) the Namibian people are accorded constitutionally entrenched rights. This practice encourages people's participation in governance and public policy determination. Their direct participation in the political process is not restricted to voting only as is the case in Botswana. Unlike in Botswana, the minimum voting age in Namibia is 18 years. As Good argues:

Political activity is not understood merely in the sense of the casting of a vote once every five years. It has instead a far more comprehensive and meaningful character. All citizens are acknowledged to have the right to "participate in peaceful political activity intended to influence the composition and policies of the Government; to form or join political parties. And to take part in the conduct of public affairs, both directly, and through freely chosen representatives (p. 68).

- (b) Workers' rights are not only ensured, but the state actively encourages formation of independent trade unions and promotes "fair employment practices" (p. 68).
- (c) Powers of the President and the executive are limited by those of the legislature and the judiciary; a situation that augurs well for a healthy process of checks and balances. Contrary to Botswana's authoritarian liberalism, in Namibia "Parliament possesses some notable controls over the executive" (p. 69).
- (d) While in Botswana, the President is chosen from among elected members of parliament and has an unlimited tenure of offices, in Namibia the "President is elected by direct universal suffrage and requires not merely a simple majority but 50 per cent or more of the votes cast. Tenure in office is limited to 'not more than two terms' (p. 70). This system checks against Presidential absolutism that is the hallmark of Botswana's authoritarian liberalism.
- (e) There are clear constitutional provisions that aim at weeding out Ministerial corruption and ensuring ethical government. Good states that "cabinet Code of Conduct which forbids Ministers from taking up any other paid employment reinforces these constitutional safeguards. There are no similar provisions against elite corruption in Botswana" (p. 70).
- (f) Botswana's West minister first-past-the-post electoral system contrasts sharply with Namibia's system of proportional representation. The latter is more democratic than the former in "interlinking closely and directly the seats won by a party to the votes cast for it by the electorate; the danger that exists in Botswana, or say, Britain, of a party with a minority of votes gaining a majority of seats, or of a small party being denied the same relative representation as a large one is avoided" (p. 73). This of course does not discount some of the inherent deficiencies of the proportional representation system itself such as lack of direct link between parliamentarians and the electorate which in turn erodes accountability. Parliamentarians tend to become "representatives not of the voters but of the party machine. This

inhibits their ability to perform the central task of legislators of ensuring the accountability and openness of the executive" (p. 73).

- (g) Unlike in Botswana, public criticism of the government and its policies "takes place on a significant scale" in Namibia. The atmosphere of tolerance is much more vibrant in contrast to Botswana where information is tightly controlled and manipulated to serve class interests of the ruling elite.

Good then concludes that:

Namibia thus possesses a number of outstanding political characteristics. There is a directly elected, limited and accountable executive. Mechanisms exist for the achievement of ethical government, especially in the prohibition on the outside earnings of and conflicts of interest by Ministers and in an independent Ombudsman working in cooperation with parliament. And there is a burgeoning citizen-based democracy founded upon broadly defined and constitutionally enforced socio-economic rights, where individuals and groups are capable of challenging the silence and secretiveness of the governing elite (p. 75).

South Africa's new-found democracy exhibits more similar features to Namibia's and in like manner contrasts quite considerably with Botswana's. Since the first non-racial and open election of April 1994, the South African political landscape has been marked by deliberate changes towards participatory democracy which clearly has strong features of the Namibian system. Good asserts that:

Movements towards open and ethical governments were clearly evident and high levels of popular participation, focused on goals of justice and equality, were one of the strongest factors that had brought an end to apartheid. The direction of change was from harsh authoritarianism towards accountable and ethically based systems... Though firmly enplaced new democratic institutions were few such dynamics in themselves distinguished South Africa strongly from all but Namibia on the continent (p. 77).

Barring the tendency towards the predominance of the ANC in the South African politics, at a scale higher than that of SWAPO in Namibia but less than that of the BDP in Botswana, the South African system is much more accountable, open, transparent and participatory. The South African

participatory democracy which tends more towards social democracy than liberal democracy has been given an added boost by the well-organised and highly active civil society especially the trade union movement. These non-state actors act as a countervailing force to easy temptations by the governing elite towards statism and abuse of state power. Good lucidly observes that:

injustice was overcome in large part through the great strength of civil society in South Africa but a newly accountable, open and ethical government will not be maintained without it. The ANC the spearhead of the liberation movement cannot be relied on alone to do this (p. 113).

Non-governmental organisations do not only have to exist, but they need to get actively involved in governance and public policy making if the vibrancy and sustainability of democracy is to be ensured. While they should avoid political cooptation by the state, they do not have to be anti-state for the sake of it. Balancing the pendulum of state-NGO relations is one of the complex challenges confronting the new-found democracy in South Africa. This is so because most of the NGOs were in close alliance with the ruling ANC during the liberation struggle. The major trade union federation COSATU still maintain its formal alliance with the ruling party. Good cautions against political cooptation of civil society organisation as follows:

Workers were not organised by the ANC in the 1970s and 1980s, but trends towards state hegemony now exist in the country. While trade unions may gain on some issues from close alliance with the state, it is at considerable potential cost; not only of their autonomy, but also of jeopardy to that of civil society as a whole... Civic associations can avoid the mistakes made elsewhere in Africa, if they engage critically with government and strive to regain their countervailing power (p. 114).

It is encouraging to note that COSATU, despite its tactical alliance with the ANC, is still able to criticise and take decisive action against those policies deemed to disadvantage workers. An interesting case in point is the controversial macro-economic policy frameworks of the ANC styled Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) and the Basic Economic Conditions of Employment. COSATU organised a massive strike action against this policy initiative in June 1997 and another series of strikes is planned for August 1997 are the following demands:

- (i) a forty-hour working week;
- (ii) six months maternity leave of which four months shall be taken with full pay.

This is a positive development for the consolidation and sustenance of South Africa's fledgling democracy. It is worth noting that such a trend is happening on very low scale in Namibia, while it is totally non-existent in Botswana. "Realising Democracy" is an interesting and thought-provoking piece of work. It is definitely a must for students of Southern African politics. It is well-researched. It is written in simple prose and therefore very easy to comprehend even by the uninitiated in this field. The logic of argumentation is so clear and systematic that it almost reads like a novel. It however, has some weaknesses which readers should be careful of.

- (i) In any case to emphasise Botswana's liberal democracy as a reason for this imbalance is a contradiction in terms for the central thesis of the book debunks that mythology hence the author dubs Botswana's political system authoritarian liberalism. The author's reasoning is as weak as the other one that "least attention is devoted to Namibia, not for its lack of interest or importance, but because it is the smallest of the three with, regrettably, the smallest amount of analytical literature on its contemporary history: (p. ix). Two possible explanations for this flaw in the book are that:
 - the author probably had insufficient time and/or resources for this research;
 - the author mistakenly allowed his vast knowledge of the political economy of Botswana to occupy centre-stage during research and write-up at the expense of Namibia and South Africa.
- (ii) The last chapter entitled "Realizing Popular Democracy" is far less than satisfactory in both form and content. Its form should have been that of a clear focus to Botswana, Namibia and South Africa as the key case studies of the book. Its present form is unnecessarily too general. Its content should have been to tease out the comparisons, and contrasts of the three countries already identified in the earlier chapters in order to put the spotlight and more substance on the comparisons and

contrasts of the political systems in these three countries. As this is not done the book technically lacks a conclusion.

Apart from these two flaws, "Realizing Democracy" is one of the few bold statements that graphically describe the ups and downs of democracy in Southern Africa after the demise of cold war and apartheid. It will surely stimulate a lively debate in Southern Africa in general and in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa specifically.

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