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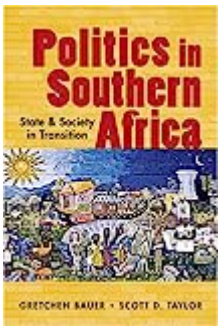

Gretchen Bauer, Scott D. Taylor. *Politics in Southern Africa: State and Society in Southern Africa.* Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005. 403 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58826-332-2; $26.50 (paper), ISBN 978-1-58826-308-7.

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Presidentialism, Predominance and Democratization in Southern Africa

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This book begins by distinguishing itself from the "afropessimist literature" and the associated notions of "endemic corruption and neopatrimonialism." It suggests that the evidence for these failings, and for others such as the weakness and incapacity of the state, is problematic and, in any case, confined largely to West Africa. It asserts that southern Africa is both a distinct and a different region. As such, it "warrants systematic treatment" for Bauer and Taylor, first because of what they call a long and "a common colonial and early postcolonial history" (p. 3). Neglecting the variations between Dutch, German, Portuguese and British domination, they stress the fact that five regional countries experienced armed liberation struggles, and that the same five were later marked by a "rhetorical commitment to socialism." Regional uniqueness lies second in "the presence of large white settler populations." These were "a key feature" of many of settler populations, though they existed or operated, in the view of Bauer and Taylor, as "societies" (p. 12) and "populations" (p. 4), rather than as settler colonial political systems. The editors recognize correctly that this "white presence improved the development prospects for the region," and in Zimbabwe and South Africa in particular this worked "to provide a strong infrastructure and relatively sophisticated international economies" (p. 4). Third, the peoples of the region are "interrelated to a significant degree." The first inhabitants were the "Khoisan," whose descendants live on in Botswana and Namibia, and face acute problems, noted by the authors in regard to the former country in just one paragraph (p. 103). Successive waves of Bantu migrants displaced the indigenous San, and a "regionwide migrant labor system" followed later. Liberation struggles also "fostered interconnectedness." Fourth, democracy is present in the region today, though the authors recognize that actual reality "varies widely." Additionally, the region is "unique" in Africa in that no country has been the "victim of a military coup" (p. 6). This will come as news in Lesotho, and as a large abstraction from the realities of protracted civil war in Mozambique and Angola. Finally, the authors note that the economies of the region are "among the strongest

on the continent" (p. 7), although this important point might have been better expressed as the fact that South Africa has the strongest, diversified capitalist economy in Africa, that Zimbabwe was next until the Mugabe-led plunge of the late 1990s onwards, and that the region is outstanding today for possessing three upper-middle-income countries, South Africa, Botswana and Mauritius.

The last section of the introduction is "Theory and Southern Africa," where the authors distinguish their approach from structuralist theories that over-rely on material capacity, and also from ideas of the preeminent role of a Great Man, even though such leaders exist prominently from Angola to Zimbabwe. They utilize "an eclectic theoretical approach" in order to "illuminate the tension between agent-based and structural explanations in Africa." The authors "draw on the theoretical literatures that privilege structure, state, and individual agents" (p. 11).

Eight country case studies are presented, which include Zambia and Malawi, because they were the first in the region to gain independence, and also, oddly, because their subsequent political and economic trajectories "mirror closely those of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa" not those of the region (p. 12). This contradicts their reasons for excluding Tanzania from coverage, because it is connected closer to east Africa. Mauritius, however, is excluded too, although it is the country with the highest per capita GDP in the region, and it is the only established liberal democracy, with three changes of government achieved through the ballot box. Mauritius is the outstanding model of a functioning liberal democracy in Africa-wide terms. In pertinent contrast, Botswana, which they praise in orthodox terms for its "stable multiparty democracy" has seen no change of government over forty years, and its opposition parties struggle to compete fairly with the ruling party. There are in addition chapters on the AIDS crisis, women and politics, and international relations, and a conclusion, characteristically titled "Meeting Challenges." The latter term appears, in fact, as one of the keywords in the text, along with an apparent synonym, "contending with the contradictions."

The country case study chapters are organized in largely similar fashion, in terms of the historical origins of the state, society and development, the organization of the state, representation and participation, fundamentals of the political economy, and finally "challenges for the twenty-first century." The results tend to meld reasonable comment with the uncritical. Taking Angola as an example, we learn that "there is a clear relationship between abundant natural resources and armed conflicts," and that the utilization of abundant oil revenues for economic diversification "has not happened" and, further, that this wealth was used instead "to subsidize the lifestyle of a small elite" (p. 151). We are also told that in the 1990s a "highly centralized presidential system" was created, where power was "increasingly personalized" in and around Jose Eduardo dos Santos (p. 155). But Bauer and Taylor fail to confront the twin issues of rampant corruption and presidentialism; they describe the work of Christian Messiant in just this area as "cynical" (p. 162); and when considering the near absence of elections in the country, they do so under the strange heading "not yet a tradition" (p. 159). Their conclusion is that "Angola faces enormous development challenges," but "if these can be surmounted … the people may yet have a chance" (p. 165). How this might be actualized, given the power of the ruling elite and the impoverishment of the vast majority, is unconsidered.

The chapter on Botswana similarly mixes intentions with actualities and outcomes. The country is even more dependent on diamonds than Angola is on oil, but the authors mention simply that diversification is "sought," as is foreign investment (p. 82), although outside of the dominant mining sector, foreign direct investment is conspicuously absent. They mention too that "income disparities remain great" and, along with poverty and unemployment, they threaten the country's future (p. 83). But the stark indices of inequalities presented annually by the UN Development Program are not examined, and what they tell us about the overall political economy of the African Miracle is of necessity ignored too.

The Founding Father of Botswana, Seretse Khama, we are told, "cultivated relations with commercial farmers" in the transition to independence, but the key point was that the future President was the biggest local cattle-owner in the country. He personified the exceptional characteristics of Botswana, the symbiosis that long exists between economic and political power. President Khama and his successor Ketumile Masire literally had a stake in the country. Bauer and Taylor correctly see that the executive "completely dominates the country's National Assembly" (p. 88), but fail to note the untrammeled strength of presidentialism, and how it is supported by the dual institution of ruling party predominance. Botswana's rulers did not need to resort to "the kind of divisive constitutional maneuvers" seen in Namibia, Zambia and Malawi (p. 89), precisely because of their untrammeled power and because key decisions

on succession, within an unelected presidency, were in their hands alone. The political stability of the country rests on the same undemocratic foundations.

The authors go on to claim "it has never been alleged that elections in Botswana have been anything but free and fair" (p. 99). This begs questions about the adequacy of the authors' readings. Elections are free in the sense of open to competition, but not fair in underlying realities in that the ruling party enjoys immense advantages by reason of its incumbency, with a weak and divided opposition conspicuously lacking. Civil society is considered over three pages, and its exceptional weakness is seen as relative to the absence of industrialization and bureaucratic domination. But its weakness is also related to the presidentialism and ruling party predominance characterizing Botswana's very limited form of liberal, electoral democracy.

The Zimbabwe chapter offers a similar admixture of the relevant and the rather commonplace. At the time of independence, the country inherited from settler colonialism a "solid industrial infrastructure, an experienced commercial agriculture sector, and an internationally competitive mining industry" (p. 197). They might have added that the economy was diversified and integrated to a significant degree at the national level. They differentiate between the constitutionalism which existed through the 1980s, and the fact that, as they put it, the country was "never entirely democratic" (p. 169). If one recalls Mugabe's use of military force against the people of Matabeleland, beginning in the early 1980s, the use of the qualifier here seems unnecessary. They note too how trade unions and a burgeoning civil society emerged in the late-1990s, and how the country's first potentially strong opposition party followed, to confront the predominant party and state system. They present too a useful chronology of the crisis beginning from the uncontested presidential elections of March 1996. The rapidity of the decay and collapse is correctly recognized (p. 171).

Wishing to avoid a stress on the factor of personal rule, the authors insist that "it is unwise to locate all Zimbabwe's problems in the person of Mugabe" (p. 201). While this view has some truth, it also tends to abstract this from the realities of dictatorship and indeed tyranny–if not all Zimbabwe's problems are the results of the decisions made by the president, then surely most are. They note elsewhere, correctly, that the regional presidents have "openly or tacitly lent support to Mugabe's misrule," and to his "ever-increasing authoritarianism" (p. 356). Their concluding observations point directly to the enormity of his actions. "The once enviable promise of Zimbabwe has now been eroded almost completely" in "little more than half a decade" (p. 202).

Their conclusion notes that "the concentration of executive power" is an important regional characteristic, and that "fairly centralized presidential systems" exist in most countries. Parliaments, moreover, "tend to be weak and non-assertive" and ruling parties have manipulated the electoral process "to varying degrees" (p. 355). More simply, perhaps, the twin institutional/structural characteristics of southern Africa are presidentialism and predominant parties. Presidentialism exists to an egregious extent in Angola and Zimbabwe, and exists glaringly in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Mauritius is the outstanding exception to this rule. Extremes of kleptocracy accompany extreme presidentialism in Angola. The authors claim that they "demonstrate that civil society is vibrant" in the region (p. 355), but vibrancy truly exists within the advanced capitalist economy of South Africa. The third regional characteristic that this reviewer would wish to emphasize is democratization. This was vividly displayed in South Africa throughout the 1980s, but its promise exists again in the new social formations that have appeared in recent years, in their numbers, their strengths and, not least, their determination to check and counter-balance ruling elites. Democratization impulses exist in less structured forms in Zambia, Botswana, Namibia and, against great odds, in Zimbabwe too. Bauer and Taylor offer a useful survey of the region, though their judgments may be faulted in places.