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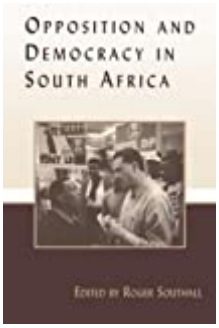

Roger Southall, ed. *Opposition and Democracy in South Africa.* London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2001. 296 pp. $62.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7146-8173-3.

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Opposition and Democracy in South Africa

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Very few scholarly works have been devoted to the opposition in post-apartheid South Africa. Since the African National Congress (ANC) won an overwhelming victory in the first democratic elections in 1994 and repeated the victory in 1999, the notion has developed of the ANC as a dominant party, which is unlikely to be displaced from power in an election in the near future. This issue will again receive close attention as the general election in 2004 draws near.

The ANC's dominance has over the years prompted a debate around two main issues: first, the nature of democracy under a dominant party system; and, second, the role of opposition parties–in particular, their potential to hold the government accountable and their likelihood to eventually defeat the ANC. An analysis of opposition politics in South Africa is therefore useful–not only in determining their role in South Africa's dominant party system, but also as a means of comparison to opposition politics in other dominant party systems. South Africa's democratic transition has been hailed as a successful example for transitions to democracy elsewhere. An important question centers on the quality of democracy that has evolved over the years and to what extent opposition politics have contributed to the nature of democracy within the overwhelming dominance of the ANC. An issue often contested is whether the continued dominance of the ANC will not transform democracy into an elective dictatorship, which of course has severe implications for democratic consolidation.

Opposition and Democracy in South Africa is a collection of sixteen essays presented at a conference and funded by the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation. In one way or another, each of the contributions addresses the above issues. Specific questions that are debated in most of the chapters are how the ANC should be opposed. A major attribute of the book, due to good editorial coordination, is therefore its definite focus on the issues of representation and accountability. Southall introduces the book with the contemporary debate on South Africa's democratic future and the central themes of representation, opposition and accountability. The role, legitimacy and capacity of the political opposition within the dominant party system is a key aspect of this debate. Particu-

lar attention is paid to the meaning of opposition and the various interpretations of their roles and strategies. The question is then posed as to how effective the opposition is in holding the ANC government accountable and under which conditions accountability can flourish in South Africa. In the last contribution ("Emergent Perspectives on Opposition in South Africa"), the editor successfully integrates the contributions into the different perspectives on the oppositions' role in South Africa.

After a formalistic discussion of parliamentary structures, Lia Nijzink in her contribution discourages confrontational opposition to the ANC. She argues that the new institutional framework, in the form of parliamentary committees and several forms of parliamentary questioning, provide ample opportunity to the opposition for holding the government accountable. Nijzink does, however, acknowledge that the "effectiveness of oversight or questioning should not be overestimated" (p. 65). Although Nijzink disputes the view that the domination of the ANC allows no meaningful scope for opposition in the new South African parliament, she does suggest that the governing party defines the parameters of opposition behavior (pp. 66-67).

In his contribution, Robert Schrire also supports the view that a "robust opposition" is not suitable to South Africa and will indeed have "catastrophic consequences" (p. 143) since it is likely to endanger democracy itself, not least because it is likely to encourage racial polarisation. Why? The dominant party, however, could be contained by the full range of vertical and horizontal restraints on state power, such as the independent judiciary, and various statutory bodies, such as the public protector and the auditor general. This view is also echoed by Nijzink (p. 59) and Sarakinsky (p. 158). One could, however, pose the question: what if the opposition manipulates these restraints, as has been the case in Zimbabwe over the past year? Sarakinsky, like Nijzink and Schrire, argues that opposition in the context of South Africa should not take an adversarial form. Instead, both the majority and minority parties can benefit by adopting a co-operative mode of political conduct. Hegel's political philosophy as well as the theory of rational choice (game theory) is used to support his argument. Both Schrire and Sarakinsky base their arguments on very little empirical evidence.

Although originating from different political perspectives, three other contributions–those of Giliomee, Myburg and Schlemmer; McKinley; and, Habib and Taylor–come up with "hard" interpretations of the ANC as a dominant party and as such pursue the line of robust, fearless and vocal opposition. Giliomee, Myburg and Schlemmer (from a conservative perspective) provide a well-grounded analysis of ways in which the ANC, for example, is accused of marginalising minorities; centralising power to close down dissent within the party; and, increasingly blurring the interests of the party and the state which further entrenches ANC dominance. The inevitable effect is that the opposition parties are being marginalised and becoming demotivated. From a radical perspective, McKinley argues that the ANC has since 1994 abandoned the more revolutionary aspects of its program, following the liberal democratic formula of institutionalising the combination of individual rights and capitalist market economics. The redistributionist Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), in order to mobilise support in 1994, was replaced by the neoliberal, pro-capitalist Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR). This was matched by the crushing of internal democracy and the Alliance is now subject to enforced unity, which prevents debate about ideological and strategic alternatives. Habib and Taylor's contribution concurs with this analysis. Their answer for countering this development is for the SACP and COSATU to break away from the Tripartite Alliance and form a working-class opposition. Webster, on the other hand, argues that labor (COSATU) has the ability to emerge as a "left pressure group" inside the Tripartite Alliance pushing for redistributive policies. The argument is based on the specificity and communality of South Africa's democratisation process with which many will agree. South Africa shares with other democracies a labor-backed government coming to power and implementing neo-liberal polices at variance with labour's historic goals. The specificity is the emergence of a large independent trade union movement.

In contrast to the conservative (Giliomee, Myburg and Schlemmer) and the radical versions (McKinley; Habib and Taylor) of the "dominant party thesis", Southall in his concluding article argues for the adoption of a "weak" version which is "more productive and multidimensional" (p. 280). He identifies certain factors that "balance" the centralising tendencies such as the desire to impose fiscal discipline upon the provinces and to curb corruption, and the recognition of rationality rather than race as a basis for voters' electoral choice. These factors need further investigation; for example, did the centralisation of power curb corruption in the provinces? He further argues that authoritarianism in the ANC is balanced by "examples of effective rebellion from below" (pp. 281-282) in that Mbeki was subjected to vocal attacks

on GEAR and that government ministers were subjected to open demonstrations of dissent. One could, however, ask whether all this resulted in any policy changes?

A particularly valuable contribution to the volume is the chapter by Louise Vincent who investigates the issue of opposition politics from the standpoint of women. Her conceptualisation of "women as opposition" challenges the conventional portrayal of opposition in party-based liberal-democratic terms. She argues that where male and female citizens have interests in common, they can act collectively along party lines. However, when interests conflict, the appropriate form of participation is adversarial. In addition, the parties whose interests are thought to conflict should be represented in the democratic institution in proportion to their numbers in the population. Vincent makes a strong case that women, for various reasons (see pp.73-74), do have their own interests and are best placed to articulate their own needs and concerns. Since the issue of representation is central within feminist debates, the arguments for the inclusion of women requires further elaboration. The perspectives of radical feminists such as S. Ruddick, J. Tronto and S. Sevenhuijsen –who are labelled moral feminists and who very broadly argue that women hold a different conceptualisation of power and adhere to a different system of morality to men (e.g the ethics of care notion) to men– would be relevant.[1]

In conclusion, what is evident from the various contributions is that there is little unanimity among the authors on how the opposition is best conceived or operationalised. The value of such divergent views lies in the fact that it not only stimulates debate, but also raises different issues. Although some of the contributions lack empirically grounded arguments, and not all are of the same standard, the merit of this collection lies in the fact that it brings together and reflects on many questions regarding the role of the opposition in South Africa.

Note

[1]. S. Ruddick, "The Rationality of Care" in *Women, Militarism and War: Essays in Politics, History and Social Theory*, ed. J. Elshtain and S. Tobias (Savage, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990); J. Tronto and B. Fischer, "Towards a Feminist Theory of Caring" in *Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives* ed. E. Abel and M. Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); J. Tronto, "Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgements," *Hypathia: A Journal for Feminist Philosophy*, 10:2 (1995); and, S. Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

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