

history. Rotberg brings back a welcome attention to the role of political agency with a lively narrative flair.

Response to Evan Lieberman's Review of *Overcoming the Oppressors: White and Black in Southern Africa*

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— Robert I. Rotberg

I am immensely thankful to Lieberman for an excellent and well-crafted review of my book and agree that institutions are immensely important. But they hardly existed in Botswana before Sir Seretse Khama decided to create an African nation very different from those dominant throughout the continent in the 1960s and 1970s. He (not structure or sets of contingencies) determinedly rejected the so-called Afro-Socialist models that had been advanced by Presidents Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, and Kenneth Kaunda of neighboring Zambia. He did so because those then popular models—popular both among ruling Africans and American and British academics—were accomplishing too little. Khama saw through the pretensions of those developmental models. He understood how meretricious they were and said so. He also decried the falsity of the single-party state (run by party central committees) that had eliminated meaningful political participation (a bedrock of democracy) in those states, Kenya, and many others.

As his successor wrote, “Seretse was a democrat, through and through.” But in order to transform an impoverished, oft-neglected, peripheral outpost of the British empire into a prosperous modern entity, Khama had to establish a new political culture capable of inculcating democratic values among his people. As in Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore, that meant helping his followers to understand that corruption could not be tolerated if a democratic political culture and respect for the public interest were the desired goals.

Botswana could have emerged as just another weak, poorly governed, African dependency—even with its eventual gem diamond wealth. Before Khama it had the *khotla*, a method of airing disputes in village conclaves, and it had the powerful influence of the Congregational Church. Further, it was a little less ethnically conflicted than other countries, but no more homogenous than Somalia. But only human agency transformed a backwater into a state that managed its resources well, was accountable and transparent in its dealings, and established very solid institutions.

Khama socialized his constituents. He instructed and extolled. (Lee used knuckle-rapping coercion to the same ends; President Paul Kagame is even more ruthless). Khama, in my view, kept his eye firmly on prize, thus benefiting his people and their public interest in a way that

no other African leader of his liberation generation managed. That is why Botswana grew at 7% a year throughout the latter years of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century. No other mainland African nation even came close. Eschewing corruption and cutting sensible deals with De Beers Ltd. over diamonds also propelled Botswana forward.

After observing Africa closely for decades, I began to realize that leadership for good was a critical variable. I watched President Kaunda make a number of unforced errors, one after the other, leaving Zambia's people poorer and more deprived than they might have been under a different leader. I lamented President Nyerere's equally unfortunate policy mistakes. None of these issues were driven by structure, by contingency, or by leftover institutional insufficiencies. Tanzania's present poverty and Zambia's slow recovery from earlier design failures reflects human agency deviations, not structural issues that were overwhelming.

Leadership is essential everywhere. But in those parts of the globe where institutions are well-established, human agency at the top makes less of a key difference than it does in Africa. Heads of government have much more power in Africa than in Scandinavia, for instance. In Africa, as we see in many countries today, presidents and prime ministers can do immense damage (e.g., Abiy Ahmed in Ethiopia, Jacob Zuma in South Africa), evading institutional constraints. But leaders of integrity and purpose (Nelson Mandela, Seretse Khama, Ketumile Masire, Festus Mogae, and perhaps Zambia's Hakainde Hichilema) can uplift their peoples and produce prosperity and human progress. Leadership integrity makes the difference.

Until We have Won Our Liberty: South Africa After

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Despite massive and repeated bouts of corruption and kleptocracy, despite frequent large-scale citizen protests against service delivery failures, despite the clear collapse of its schools, and despite the state's inability to generate sufficient steady supplies of electricity, Evan Lieberman argues counter-intuitively and persuasively that South Africa's post-apartheid independence has been a surprising and greatly under-appreciated success.

Lieberman notes the enormous extent to which even the most questionable governments of national, provincial, and local South Africa have been subject to open criticism—how free expression and free assembly are alive and well. At the local level, where parts of Lieberman's book are situated, and nationally, South Africans of all

colors and political affiliations have freely made their criticisms known. Elections, national and local, have not noticeably been rigged (as they are routinely in Zimbabwe and other African, Asian, and European countries) despite the steady erosion of popular support for the long ruling African National Congress (ANC) of Nelson Mandela.

In next year's national election, odds are that the ANC will obtain fewer than 50% of the parliamentary seats; its rivals, especially the Democratic Alliance and the Economic Freedom Fighters, may together win more seats. In other words, as Lieberman says, democratic practices are routine in South Africa and political contestation is robust. "My own conclusion," he offers, "is that the first quarter of a century of South African democracy serves as a positive model ... for other divided societies" (p. 68).

Just as Lieberman intones numerous times, South Africa remains a stronger democracy than most local commentators (Black and white) and most foreign experts credit. Lieberman calls the result of South Africa's liberation from white rule a surprising triumph. South Africa is more just, more awash in human dignity (his word), *Ubuntu* (humanness and respect for humanity) prevails. According to Lieberman, other comparable places have done far less well.

South Africa is wildly corrupt, its politicians greedy, with sticky fingers. It ranks as the hundred-and-eighth most corrupt country, along with Bulgaria and Senegal, according to the Corruption Perceptions Index's ranking of 180 countries (2022). That certainly means that more than 100 other places are more corrupt, but Lieberman asserts that, comparatively, South Africa's corruption is not "extreme," correlated with GDP levels. South Africa, he says, "upholds higher integrity than most" (p. 163).

Lieberman's examination of the country we both love may be criticized for its remarkably well articulated Pollyannaish quality. But the real question, never truly addressed in this otherwise admirable study, is why do so many poor and well off African South Africans feel put upon and let down? They anticipated a post-apartheid dividend. They rejoiced in Mandela's quest to create a rainbow nation that could function in harmony (as it has); they rejoiced further in Mandela's mantle of global heroism and his almost singlehanded transformation of South Africa (and themselves) from global pariah to key global actor.

Beginning their independence period as followers of Mandela and believers in a democracy that would redistribute wealth—not quite a chicken in every pot, but nearly so—South Africa's inability to make good on the promises of a post-apartheid nirvana has sorely tried its expectant population. That is why Lieberman's declaration of "success" is both accurate if the comparison is to the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, and so on, but not if it is a comparison of what South Africa *could* have achieved to what it has *actually* achieved. Nor does today's South Africa compare

well across many human and civic dimensions to the outcomes of its smaller neighbor Botswana.

South Africans cannot truly appreciate why their schools are so inadequate, why they can't draw water from boreholes easily, and why there is power only intermittently. They naturally blame it—as they should—on failures of governance and failures of leadership. They also know, and bemoan, the fact that their elected officials (at all levels) steal. The fact that politicians purloin elsewhere—even in the United States—makes little difference.

"The government has accomplished *nothing*," residents of Mogale City told the author in 2019 (p. 170). Yet, says Lieberman, "South Africa has chalked up some extraordinary accomplishments in terms of improving the material well-being of its citizens, especially the most vulnerable." Indeed, it has performed "remarkably," especially in light of the country's history of apartheid. The author enumerates the vast quantities of houses that several South African governments have provided for its poorer citizens—2.8 million in total. That means that 21% percent more South Africans in 2019 lived in "formal" housing than in 1995 (p. 171). Lieberman shows what that social accomplishment has meant in and around Mogale City, especially in at least one remarkable self-organized community.

Such results are less demonstrable in schooling. Whereas secondary school enrollments for Africans have increased substantially, and many more Africans (women included) finish primary school and attend secondary school than they did so during the dreadful apartheid years and after, they are not passing the critical high school graduation at rates more dramatically than in decades past (even after scoring methods shifted). Too many, therefore, lack high school certificates and must rely on the informal sector for jobs. Most distressing of all, according to standard international tests, low numbers of 12- and 13-year-old pupils can barely read at grade level and their math scores are sub-standard. Most of the deficits in schooling attainment reflect the loss of trained teachers, many of whom are now better paid functionaries in commerce or the civil service. Officials acknowledge how instruction has not kept pace with population growth and the requirements of industry.

This book says too little about leadership. Botswana is the wealthiest country per capita on the African mainland and the only country that has been a democracy continually since its independence in 1966. Those results are a tribute to the political culture implanted in Botswana by its founding president (Sir Seretse Khama) and his collaborator and immediate successor (Sir Ketumile Masire). Mandela equally inspired his compatriots but failed to stay long enough in office to establish a sustainable political culture of integrity. His successors squandered the lessons of Mandela's presidency; Thabo Mbeki opened the

floodgates to corruption in 2001 and Jacob Zuma turned the flood into a tsunami of malfeasance and sleaze.

Leadership is critical everywhere. The fundamental story of South Africa, and of the ANC, is whether it can reestablish a sense of leadership for good and whether its citizens will appreciate the extent to which President Cyril Ramaphosa will be able to steer the ship of South Africa through merciless seas toward shores of effective reconstruction. Lieberman's book touches only indirectly on leadership and alludes only generally to governance. But he does examine several aspects of South Africa's political structure that are often overlooked by other observers and researchers.

Proportional representation and its contribution to South Africa's mature development is one: "I am largely convinced," he writes, "that proportional representation was the best system for South Africa in order to keep all organized interests vested in democratic politics" (pp. 108-109). Lieberman deftly explains the theory behind proportional representation—about how it incentivizes parties over individuals and how doing so provides coherent control of political direction, especially at the beginning of a new government—as in the newly free South Africa. He also makes evident that, as in Europe and Israel, PR permits splintering (if the percentage thresholds are too low) and warns against the potential proliferation of tiny parties built around a dominant individual (as often seen in Italy and Israel). Sometimes the resulting confused coalitions can hardly solve pressing governing needs.

But that is the least of South Africa's problems, especially in relation to PR. In fact, that political party executives and executive committees in South Africa arbitrarily rank parliamentary and local government candidates in order (Mandela on top, Thabo Mbeki next, and so on), members in parliament have little independence. The executive (and the central committee of the ANC) makes every decision and, ordinarily, members have to obey. Being a maverick or thinking and voting independently carries enormous risk. Unfortunately, Lieberman says too little about political participation under PR and of how—despite an immensely liberal constitution—South African interests have been sorely overlooked structurally by the failure of members of parliament to be connected to or responsive to any constituents at all.

Lieberman smartly shows the ideological origins of that constitution; his intellectual history of it is a major, if brief, contribution to an understanding of modern South Africa. He references not only the well-known Freedom Charter of 1955, but also "An African Bill of Rights" of 1923, the African Atlantic Charter of 1943, and the importance constitutionally of the oft-overlooked contents of Mandela's famous speech in Rivonia in 1964. These ideological foundations gave birth to a less ambiguous constitution

than that of the United States (though its writers drew inspiration from our Bill of Rights).

Lieberman notes the importance of Fort Hare University College in educating Mandela, Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, innumerable other freedom-struggle South Africans, and Seretse Khama. But it did not school Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda or Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere (p. 86). Kaunda never went beyond the equivalent of tenth grade in Zambia; Nyerere attended Uganda's Makerere University College and the University of Edinburgh. The book's index is also incomplete.

Such critiques aside, Lieberman's engaging and conversationally written book mixes perceptive political analysis with data from participant observation and focus groups at the micro level. In this welcome sense, it combines scholarship neatly with the best kind of reportage.

Response to Robert I. Rotberg's Review of *Until We Have Won Our Liberty: South Africa After Apartheid*

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— Evan Lieberman 

I am grateful to Robert Rotberg for his review of *Until We Have Won Our Liberty: South Africa After Apartheid*. Both of our books examine what came after white rule in Southern Africa and seek broader lessons for politics. We both celebrate many post-apartheid triumphs as well as travails, including low economic growth, unemployment, crime, and poor education. And yet Rotberg's review highlights our very different theoretical and empirical perspectives concerning how to describe governance and development outcomes, and the relative influence of institutions versus individuals.

For example, Rotberg chooses to see South Africa from the vantage of Botswana. He says that Botswana's economic performance and bureaucratic professionalism is a model of what South Africa *could* have been. I see only limited value in that comparison: Botswana is a country of less than three million people (South Africa is almost 60 million), almost entirely homogeneous, with no modern history of conflict, and faced nothing akin to apartheid government or a violent reconfiguration of the state.

Relative to scores of other African and upper-middle income countries, on a variety of dimensions, I find that South Africa is more frequently a leader than a laggard. Moreover, a different neighbor—Zimbabwe—provides a more illuminating comparison. Zimbabwe was once beset with its own version of white settler rule, which also ended as a product of political struggle. In the 1990s, many white South Africans predicted that with Black government, their country would "go the way of Zimbabwe," in terms of kleptocracy, tyrannical rule, cessation of the rule of law, and currency collapse. While acknowledging substantial