Limits to liberation in Southern Africa: the unfinished business of democratic consolidation

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Abstract:
Former liberation movements in Southern Africa have become authoritarian and elitist governments who reward party loyalty and are hostile to ‘outsiders’. Is authoritarianism built into liberation structures? Is it inherited from colonial systems? Is liberal democracy inherently elitist? Popular support for the struggle was often based on mystification, coercion and the manipulation of internal contradictions; while in contrast, independence by negotiation has lead to multi-party democracies. This ground-breaking collection of essays on Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana and South Africa opens a long-awaited debate on these and other related issues. Edited by Namibian and former SWAPO member Henning Melber, currently Research Director of the Nordic Africa Institute in Sweden, its contributors include Kenneth Good, Ian Taylor, Francis Nyamnjoh, Amin Kamete, Suzanne Dansereau, Roger Southall, Martin Legassick, Raymond Suttner and Krista Johnson. The volume is compiled by the HSRC Democracy & Governance Research Programme in association with the Journal of Contemporary African Studies and the Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University.

Keywords:
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Implications for Democratic Consolidation in Africa. The inherent political problem in attempts to secure constitutional term limits is clear. Depending on the context, courts, parliaments, and popular referenda offer opportunities that can be exploited by presidents. The twelve countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that have witnessed successful term limit extensions demonstrate that the absence of an elite consensus on the inviolability of term limits renders constitutional and institutional safeguards futile. This means that structural conditions that result in a de facto balance of power among presidents, landmark judgments by the judiciary and groundbreaking investigations of the executive branch by the Office of the Public Protector speak to the resilience of the country's institutions. Still, spiraling corruption, attacks on independent bodies, and efforts to expand executive privilege under the presidency of Jacob Zuma are proving to be difficult tests. Keith Somerville, “From Liberation to Liability: The Record of National Liberation Movements in Southern Africa,” African Arguments, August 5, 2013. Christopher Clapham, “From Liberation Movement to Government: Past Legacies and the Challenge of Transition in Africa,” Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, January 2013. Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa. Limits to Liberation in Southern Africa: the unfinished business of democratic consolidation (review). Mbongeni Manqele. Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa. The contributors to this volume highlight political issues and processes in parts of Southern Africa since the end of white-minority and colonial rule. Most focus particular attention on the post-independence records of governance of the Namibian and Zimbabwean liberation movements. They tend to argue that, recast as political parties, ZANU PF and SWAPO have since independence sought an overwhelming if not monopoly predominance in both the political arena as well as within state and parastatal structures.