



NAVARRA CENTER  
FOR **INTERNATIONAL**  
**DEVELOPMENT**

# LIBERATION MOVEMENTS IN POWER: PARTY AND STATE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

---

BOOK AUTHOR: ROGER SOUTHALL

**BOOK REVIEW**  
**DAVID SOLER CRESPO**

**C**olonialism in Africa was characterized by foreign powers invading and taking control of one country until independence movements arose after the Second World War and former colonial powers flew away. However, Southern African countries had achieved independence beforehand but faced a different type of colonial rule, one from the inside: settler colonialism. Ian Smith declared independence from United Kingdom in 1965, South Africa became fully sovereign from the UK even before, in 1931 and Namibia, formerly a German colony, was occupied by neighbor South Africa since 1920.

However, those countries suffered for decades an imposed white-minority regime from the inside. It is not strange to understand the nascent of liberation movements with nationalist views which fought to free their nations from racist, unfair and minority rule. Nevertheless, once all countries achieved freedom —being South Africa the last one to do so when it got rid of apartheid in 1994— those who ruled and imposed segregation had nowhere else to go. Contrary to foreign colonial rule, those whites ruling in South Africa were South African citizens, and hence a balance had to be achieved to fit all in the society. This was even more important when taking into account the state of affairs: the black population was disadvantaged due to racial rules against a settled white minority which occupied all levels at public institutions, controlled the economy and was experienced at business and state management.

Against those odds and with the considerable challenge of establishing justice, equality and democracy came to power liberation movements formed mainly by rebel leaders with no experience in government. If they were to succeed, they had to collaborate with those who oppressed them beforehand.

This book introduces the nature and context in which three liberation movements —ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe, SWAPO in Namibia and the ANC in South Africa— were born and came into power to give a detailed judgment of their work in government. Southall deeps into describing the evolution of liberation movements from their start to current days and evaluates their career on different topics and sectors, which can be broadly grouped into three major categories: democracy, economy, society.

On the first category, the three countries analyzed have paired differently. Whilst Zimbabwe ranks as one of the worst authoritarian rules in the world, Namibia and South Africa had achieved and maintained the best indices

of democracy in Africa. Southall explains that liberation culture confuses a majority rule with political democracy. The identification of “the people” with liberation movements has given rise to a sentiment of legitimacy rule, which is then used to signal opposition parties as anti-nationalist, invaders and evil forces.

Therefore, the priority for liberation movements is to establish electoral dominance to rule at their own will, turning the party into electoral machines destined at forging those majorities. In this aim is where SWAPO and the ANC have succeeded, gaining the citizens’ trust and being able to repeat victory at elections with free and fair competition. On the other side is ZANU-PF, which has rejected its loss of popular support and has maintained its authority through violence and coercion. The author, however, wonders how the ANC and SWAPO would react in similar circumstances, suggesting that their liberation

## **“EVEN GOD EXPECTS US TO RULE THIS COUNTRY”, JACOB ZUMA, EX PRESIDENT**

culture could lead them to a ZANU-PF path if that were to happen rather than democratically accepting their defeat. This is hinted by words such as those from former South Africa president Jacob Zuma, who in 2008 said: “Even God expects us to rule this country... It is even blessed in Heaven. That is why we will rule until Jesus comes back”. The diffusion of party and state is expressed in those lines, with profound consequences on democracy and the economy as liberation movements capture the state and use its resources for party purposes.

On the economic side, there’s been a similar path. All three liberation movements defended their will for socialism and total revolution, but the collapse of the Soviet Union together with the deep-rooted capitalism that underpinned their economies made them reconsider their position and accept the free market and collaboration with businesses. Their focus turned into ‘deracializing’ the economy, by which they promoted black economic empowerment (BEE) laws that increased the percentage of black workers and middle-level managers. However, this caused two main drawbacks: companies remained in white hands, and those benefiting from BEE remained close to a selected elite of politically-well connected citizens, which enforced a culture of corruption amidst ‘tenderpreneurship’, which Southall calls to the allocation of state tenders to businesses well linked with those at the top of liberation parties. This business-state corrupt relations functioned well in Namibia and South Africa, al-



**MANDELA,  
FIRST SOUTH  
AFRICAN POST-  
APARTHEID  
PRESIDENT**

though the limits to this system are being seen in the last few years when growth has stalled. On the other hand, ZANU-PF's power strangled businesses, and radical land reform ended up collapsing the economy with the final decision to bury the Zimbabwean dollar and adopt the U.S. dollar as official currency. Despite all difficulties to embrace a socialist agenda, liberation elites have accommodated to a system in which access to income and the middle-class is closely linked with access to the state and where large conglomerates have been benefited in contrast to small businesses. In South Africa, this has caused that apartheid-era unemployment rates above 25% have prevailed and that the country lists as the most unequal in the world by income, with a 63.0 Gini coefficient.

Furthermore, the author dives into how ZANU-PF, SWAPO and ANC have sought to extend their dominance over society

through control of trade unions, civil society and the media. In this sense, Southall remarks that civil society plays a crucial role in constraining the political machines of liberation movements. A strong constitutional rule such as that in South Africa or Namibia has helped to uphold essential freedoms such as judiciary and media independence away from political manipulation, being these key actors to expose and account for corrupt practices in government.

Southall resonates the work of renown figures such as Booysen, Cheeseman, Fanon, Herbst, Melber and Van der Walt in this book. He analyses the trajectories of the liberation movements in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa from their birth until today. With deep care and preciseness, the author exposes the constraints, limits, and expectations that liberation movements faced when reaching government and backs them against their achievements, virtues, and sins.

Southalls aims this for readers with at least some knowledge on what are liberation parties and their trajectories and who are interested in taking a step further into their nature and development. It can be therefore a good read for doctoral students on politics, economy or sociology in Southern Africa, researchers interested in the development of democracy in the region. However, this book is not for the general public or those interested in having a relaxed and comfortable read

on Nelson Mandela's figure and his party, for example.

Yet, this book is not enough to have a full picture of the trajectories of the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa, as it avoids FRELIMO in Mozambique, Chama Cha Mapinduzi in Tanzania and MPLA in Angola. Notwithstanding, the depth and detail tackled in this book would have been impossible, unless it turned into an encyclopedia-length book, if all six countries had been included. However, a full comparison of the similarities and differences in the trajectories of the six different liberation movements cannot be achieved through this book.

Liberation Movements in Power: Party and State in Southern Africa is a great book to look beyond the surface and stereotypes surrounding the post-white minority rule development of countries in Southern Africa as it shows an understanding of the historical, socio-economic context in which ZANU-PF, SWAPO and the ANC have played.

# AUTHOR

## EMERITUS PROFESSOR AT WITS UNIVERSITY

**Roger Southall** is an Emeritus Professor in Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand. He was previously Distinguished Research Fellow at the Human Sciences Research Council (2001-2007) and Professor of Political Studies at Rhodes University (1989-2001). Before that he worked in universities in Uganda, Lesotho, Canada, and the UK. He is the author of four books: South Africa's Transkei: The Political Economy of an 'Independent' Bantustan (1983), Imperialism or Solidarity? International Labour and South African Trade Unions (1995), Liberation Movements in Power: Party and State in Southern Africa (2013) and The New Black Middle Class in South Africa (2016). He has also published extensively on African politics, political economy and labour in leading academic journals, as well as contributing chapters to numerous books. He receives research funding from the National Research Foundation. ●