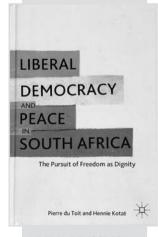## REVIEW

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Liberal Democracy and Peace in South Africa

This book is an overview of the attitudes towards democratic values – the authors use the term 'liberal values' – of both elites and the public in South Africa before and after formal apartheid. The authors based their analysis on survey research of public attitudes and values in South Africa over the 1981 to 2006 period, and an elite research survey covering the period 1990 to 2007.

For countries emerging from civil conflict, the spread and deepening of democratic values and attitudes are crucial to sustain post-conflict peace. The writers, Pierre du Toit and Hennie Kotze, based their analysis on the 'theory of liberal democratic peace' to argue that peace between states, and domestically within states and their societies, is attainable through the democratisation of their regimes. They argue that a "specific variant of liberal democracy" produces that peace dividend. This reviewer disagrees with this view and would argue that genuine quality democracy, no matter the variant, brings the peace dividend.

Two key aspects of democracy foster peace: one, the democratisation of ruling regimes – the democratic nature of both formal and informal institutions; and two, the democratisation of societies (the authors use the 'liberalisation' of societies) – the embeddedness of democratic norms, values and attitudes in the 'culture'. Both these key critical ingredients are necessary to deepen democracy in South Africa – and they appear to be under threat in South Africa.

What is clear is that persistent poverty, accompanied by growing inequality, is a key obstacle to deepening democracy. Furthermore in the South African case, inequality runs along racial lines – although since the end of apartheid in 1994 inequality has also increased between a small black rich elite and their majority black cousins.

The social environment for black South Africans under apartheid was hostile. Apartheid left black South Africans with massive 'existential insecurity': their culture was under attack; they were physically dislocated, being moved to the Bantustans or townships; they were deprived materially; they were deprived from equitable access to public goods such as education and healthcare; and apartheid broke interpersonal relationships, whether through migrant labour, or through insecurity that humiliation caused to individual dignity.

As du Toit and Kotze rightly argue, the effect of such 'dislocation' is the destruction of "familiar and trusted social benchmarks" that were there before colonialism and apartheid. (Of course the processes of industrialisation add to the process of 'dislocation' – whether cultural, individual or social. Combined, these reinforce 'existential insecurity'. This leaves a void – sometimes filled by religious, spiritual or cultural fundamentalism. Worse in post-apartheid South Africa, self-esteem, identity and individual value are increasingly measured by how much an individual possesses in material wealth.)

Democrats would want the void to be filled by new democratic values, mores and cultures – and by the best (most democratic) elements of cultural, religious and spiritual values. In the South African situation this 'existential insecurity' has generated 'illiberal attitudes' in the wider citizenry: violent crime, low levels of tolerance for differences, xenophobia, social conservatism, and so on.

Poor black South Africans expected, and still expect, that the predominantly black ANC government would undo institutionalised poverty in the post-1994 era. However, failure to deliver on promises by the ANC government meant that for the majority of poor black South Africans their material conditions remained virtually the same. Furthermore, for the black majority that remains stuck in poverty, the fact that 'their' government, who has 'won' against the former white apartheid governments, and the fact that they (blacks) have victoriously fought against the might of the apartheid government, yet remain stuck in poverty when 'their' government is in power, while the supposed political 'losers' (whites) still have competitive advantage, has the potential to deep resentments.

Some black South Africans resent formerly privileged whites doing well in the uneven post-apartheid playing field, where education, social capital, access to finance, (built-up under the apartheid era) matters.

One fault line in South Africa's politics is that unscrupulous politicians can use the 'existential insecurity' of black South Africans in the face of persisting inequality and poverty to mobilise against whites (the perceived material 'winners' of the post–apartheid era) and the newcomers (African immigrants).

Similarly, in the xenophobic violence against African foreigners, who are mostly better educated than their South African counterparts (and because they are not expecting government to deliver for them, and are thus more pro-actively looking for opportunities), raised the ire of poor African South Africans, who are competing for the same resources.

The persistence of the historical "build-up of inequities in material wealth" between black and white – as well as the persistence of racial "differences in abilities of citizens" to compete in the economic arena, will make it difficult to build an inclusive democracy in South Africa. One fault line in South Africa's politics is that unscrupulous politicians can use the 'existential insecurity' of black South Africans in the face of persisting inequality and poverty to mobilise against whites (the perceived material 'winners' of the post-apartheid era) and the newcomers (African immigrants).

Recently, in the spontaneous public protests which have often ended up in violence, local black communities, frustrated over indifference, corruption and mismanagement by their elected local municipal councilors (mostly ANC councilors, and the protesters mostly those who voted ANC), vented their anger against their elected political leaders. These ANC leaders represent those from the black majority who have through politics been able to become 'winners'. It can also be argued that black anger can also be seen in violent crimes – which contrary to popular media portrayal are more likely to happen to other blacks who appear to have become 'winners'. The best scenario for democracy, of course, would be for impoverished black South Africans to vent their anger in elections by not voting for the ANC government if it does not deliver – no matter their historical affinity with the party.

The authors put too much emphasis on what they call the dominance of the "African spirit-world belief system" among Africans, which they claim make many black South Africans to believe that misfortune, such as financial losses, unemployment, AIDS, and so on, is brought about by someone (else) or is the "result of great impersonal forces beyond the control of the individual or the community". They argue that the "African spirit-world belief system" has led to spiritual insecurity. Of course, it is a fact that some black South Africans do adhere to the "African spirit-world belief system". However, one needs to restate that apartheid was such a omnipotent destructive force that its legacy is still with us.

In addition, some dominant elements within the ANC government are steeped in the undemocratic political traditions of Stalinism, militarism and underground movements or, at least, have a very limited view of democracy, where those who win an election believe they can virtually do what they like. If these undemocratic elements are dominant, the democratising ability of ruling regimes may become blunt tools. Attacks on the Public Protector for uncovering corruption, the introduction of laws restricting the free flow of information, the statements by President Jacob Zuma that the judiciary is not 'bigger' than the ANC or government, are red flags. If the ruling regime – with the formal and informal institutions - is undemocratic itself, it spills into the broader society also, undermining the embeddedness of democratic norms, values and attitudes in 'culture' and society.

What, then, is to be done? Ultimately, by reducing poverty and inequality in South Africa – which will help in reducing the 'existential insecurity' of blacks, and make the black majority 'winners' also – is a core requirement of building a durable democracy in South Africa.

This is a thoroughly engaging book, and an important examination of whether democracy has been embedded in South Africa in both the ruling regime and the society.