There is a tendency amongst sections of the left to romanticise the most recent receding phase of democracy in South Africa and replace it with a later one and consign it to the category of those that have failed expectations. This has happened, among others, with, Vietnam, Cuba, Guinea-Bissau, and Zimbabwe. Some analysts have even proposed that as certain countries have drifted into various forms of authoritarianism and other abuses, various forms of authoritarianism and other abuses have been followed by a return to democracy, indicating certain prescripions that need to be followed if democracy is to fail. This is part of a literature on the concept of democratic transition and consolidation.

These criticisms and advice need to be located within the context of the conditions under which South African democracy, indicating certain prescripions that need to be followed if democracy is to fail. This is part of a literature on the concept of democratic transition and consolidation.

The quality of South African democracy

Raymond Suttner

The above is a very broad sketch, which is not so much a critique of the democratic process as placing an insuperable barrier to South African democracy. This context in which such theories have been developed has been a variant of the panic that gripped many whites at the time of the first elections when one could not buy products like long life milk in supermarkets, because of the anticipations that majority rule would provoke. The 2004 panic is based on the supposed danger of the electoral strength of the ANC. That the ANC faces electoral op- ponents that have no chance of winning elections in the foreseeable future is seen as placing an insuperable barrier to South Africa becoming a consolidated democ­ racy. To pass this test, there should be a potential 'circulation of elites' in the fore­ seeable future.

This paradigm derives from US political science and has infiltrated South African scholarship and the media. In reality, a dogma­ nistic statement is posed as a scientific test of democratic consolidation. It takes little account of the historical reasoning behind mysteri­ ous, ambiguous and thus sees the organisation as representa­ tion of government. It has affected its relation­ ships with its allies SAPC and COSATU, who have often been on a collision course with the ANC as government. The relationship is no longer closely connected to democratic prescrip­ tions but in many situations, it may be that of SAPC and COSATU relating as petitioners or in­ terest groups towards the ANC as govern­ ment. In some situations, the government will place more weight on other interest groups, whose displeasure may im­ pact more seriously on credit ratings and other factors.

The above is a very broad sketch, which leaves out many factors. One final point that is important is the atmosphere engendered in the country which has affected the constitution and the constitution that now govern South Africa. Democracy has cre­ ated an atmosphere that is infusing itself into the thinking of many people who have never previously have thought seriously about gender equality or never envisaged non-ra­ cialism and democracy. Even in deep rural areas people are talking about a new con­ stitution. There is contestation, but also broad consensus.

Notes


The Quality of South African Democracy
The CODESRIA Gender Series acknowledges the need to challenge the masculinities underpinning the structures of repression that target women. The series aims to keep alive and nourish African social science research with insightful research and debates that challenge conventional wisdom, structures and ideologies that are narrowly informed by caricatures of gender realities. It strives to showcase the best in African gender research and provide a platform for the emergence of new talents to flower.

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Volume 1 brings together essays by some of the leading names on gender studies in Africa, as a major contribution to these concerns. Situation themselves variously in relation to claims and counter claims on the universalisms and particularisms in African feminism and gender studies, the authors debate the relative (de-)merits of Eurocentrism, African epistemologies and cultures, colonial legacies, postcolonial realities, and current dilemmas and challenges in understanding and articulating African feminism and gender research.

Practiced and budding scholars should find this a fascinating read.

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**Gender, Economies and Entitlements in Africa**

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This theoretically sophisticated and empirically grounded book draws extensively on feminist methodologies to discuss gender, economies and entitlements in Africa. It deals critically with a broad range of themes that highlight the structural insecurities, stereotypes, injustices and inequalities that women are often victims of, despite their significant contributions to household and national economies throughout Africa. Among the issues covered are: gender relations in the family, formal education and health, gender and accessibility to resources; women's experiences of citizenship; sex identities and sex work; and globalization, trade and gender. The book captures how, despite phenomenal structural constraints, women as economic agents have refused to celebrate victimhood.

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**Gender Activism and Studies in Africa**

CODESRIA Gender Series Volume 3

This book celebrates the successes in African struggles for gender equality and draws attention to the challenges facing the edification of gender studies, women’s rights and entitlements. It brings together contributions by seasoned gender specialists who draw empirical evidence from several African countries – Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Mozambique, Tanzania and South Africa – to critically discuss various experiences in setting up gender and women’s studies programmes, feminist and gender activism, gender identities, social protest, gender and culture in indigenous films, continuities and discontinuities in conceptions of gender, same-sex relationships, customary laws, and gendered discourse patterns. Readers will find great merit in the focus on challenges, achievements and future perspectives in the crystallisation of gender activism and studies in Africa.

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**Gender, Literature and Religion in Africa**

CODESRIA Gender Series Volume 4

Studies in literature and religion are particularly vulnerable to accusations of subjectivity and bias, because by their very nature they deal with subjectivities and people’s perceptions of their own identity. In the past, on the basis of a patriarchal worldview, literature and religion were seen as value-free and neutral, and a gendered perspective was not taken into account. Today: an increasing amount of research is revealing the gendered fault-lines in works of fiction and in religious beliefs.

This volume showcases the diversity and depth of research that is currently taking place on the African continent in this field. The specifically African gendered experience is brought to the fore, through the critical discussion of proverbs, oral histories, resistance, and male dominance. Gender, Literature and Religion in Africa highlights continuing gender bias, often at the level of the sub-culture.

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