

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