

Steven Freidman, *Power in Action: Democracy, Citizenship and Social Justice*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2018, 271pp.

Professor Steven Freidman's book on the challenges facing South Africa's democracy comes at a time when the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) just hosted the highly contested national elections since 1994. Again, the book comes at a period where cut-throat power struggle politics of coalition governments at local government level are at their peak. The momentum and growth of opposition parties after 25 years of democracy in South Africa signal the growth and maturing of the 'Rainbow Nation' democracy. Opposition parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) are in an expedition to influence the African National Congress (ANC) led government to amend or review the South African Constitution of 1996; aimed at addressing the triple-headed monster (unemployment, income inequality and poverty). This book is also released at a time when troubled African states such as Sudan and Zimbabwe had undergone *coup d'état* and violent national protests over democracy upliftment. This premise rightly coincides with Freidman's contention that authoritative leaders particularly in Africa deploy democracy to win elections but they are unable to ostensibly operate within democratic norms (pp vii-ix). This reflection can be well aligned to the assertion of Kenyan public intellectual, legal expert and scholar, Professor *Patrick Lumumba* "*democracy is a competition of ideas, sustained by the constant dialogue where the minority have their say and the majority have their way.*"

Power in Action is published by Wits University Press, a relatively well-known publisher of democracy scholarship in South Africa. Freidman's book is a compilation of chapters deliberating on issues ranging from (the problematic terming of democratic consolidation, the topical dispute of who should be included in a democratic community, contradictions between good governance and popular sovereignty, democracy as an endorsement against Islamic fundamentalism and communism, to minimalist notions of the unconventional task in testing if elections are 'free' and 'fair' and the debate on the requirements for political systems to be dubbed democratic).

This book contains thought-provoking arguments that are highly recommended for policy crafters and scholars who seek in-depth insight about democracy. Freidman speaks truth to power regarding the tailored popular sovereignty rules by the minority in democratic societies to peddle their interests (pp 21-41; p 197). He speaks from a Eurocentric angle as various examples and scholarly debates throughout the book emanate from the Western scholar's observation on democracy. As a result, non-Western scholarship was overlooked, thus, the reviewer believes it created a conceptual fog on how African scholars

view and purport democracy. The concerted effort of the definitions of democracy provided in this book gives an overall impression that 'African' scholars are largely not active-participants in democracy scholarship. Researchers such as Dahl, Morlino, Diamond and Tilly, *inter alia*, rigorously use Eurocentric lens to give their overall construal on democracy. To this end, Afrocentric thinkers' contributions towards the definition of egalitarianism in Africa in this book are almost non-existent. However, to some extent, chapter four diluted the Northern scholar's dependence as various arguments on human rights and popular sovereignty in Africa were from African voices/scholars (pp 80-98).

Max Weber and Lipset claim that "modern democracy in its clearest forms can only occur under unique conditions of capitalist industrialisation." Lipset further claims non-Western or Third-World countries' democracy flourish when there is rapid economic growth and thus industrial development creates a conducive environment for democracy to thrive (pp 49-68). Flowing from the aforementioned notions, the reviewer asserts that democracy is a system to westernise the world to advance the economic system of capitalism. In Africa, democracy is vandalising African norms, values and culture as myelinated (black) Africans are becoming an audience floating in the midst of a system managed by elites (Western forces) in conglomeration with 'clever blacks'. Learning from Morgan Cassady's reflection on constructing a book review, "review the book in front of you, not the book you wish the author had written. Do not criticise it for something it was never intended to be". However, during the reading of this book, I was keen on reading the historical African form of governance or democracy equally known as *Ubuntu* in South Africa, which unfortunately was not mentioned. Contextually, the scholarly contributions on the inseparable marriage between democracy and capitalism throughout *Power in Action* were sensitively debated, which highlights the ongoing crude attempts to conceal the devastating economic cleavages created by corporate capitalism in South Africa and Africa at large.

Drawing lessons from an African proverb "criticism on its own sake is not wisdom." Freidman's book is profound in substance. This is because it locates the fundamental challenges haunting South Africa's democracy on issues such as incorporating the poor to decision-making, social justice, equality before the law and alliances (pp 101-190). The challenges are multi-vectored as explained by Freidman. Thus, they require amicable solutions such as developing strategies which will establish conditions where citizens can freely agree to the rules of popular sovereignty, and they can influence power-holders on laws and policy implementation (pp 197-208). This book has a high-quality academic writing style and limited grammatical errors. With its strong narration on democracy in general and South Africa's democracy in particular, this book deserves its rightful place in every library and bookshelves across the country, continentally and internationally. The book suits all audiences that wish to study democracy, social justice and citizenship in detail.

In teaching and learning, Freidman's book can be used as the linkage between Northern democracies with the South. Lastly, *Power in Action* is highly recommended for fields such as Political Science, History, Sociology, Public Administration, Local Government and Developmental studies.

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