

From Revolution to Rights in South Africa

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Critics of liberalism in Europe and North America argue that a stress on 'rights talk' and identity politics has led to fragmentation, individualisation and depoliticisation. But are these developments really signs of 'the end of politics'? In the post-colonial, post-apartheid, neo-liberal new South Africa poor and marginalised citizens continue to struggle for land, housing and health care. They must respond to uncertainty and radical contingencies on a daily basis. This requires multiple strategies, an engaged, practised citizenship, one that links the daily struggle to well organised mobilisation around claiming rights. Robins argues for the continued importance of NGOs, social movements and other 'civil society' actors in creating new forms of citizenship and democracy. He goes beyond the sanitised prescriptions of 'good governance' so often touted by development agencies. Instead he argues for a complex, hybrid and ambiguous relationship between civil society and the state, where new negotiations around citizenship emerge. Steven L. Robins is Professor of Social Anthropology in the University of Stellenbosch and editor of Limits to Liberation after Apartheid (James Currey). Southern Africa (South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland): University of KwaZulu-Natal Press (PB)

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