Olukoshi, O.A. (ed). (1998). *Politics of Opposition in Contemporary Africa.* **Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.**

Reviewed by Jephias Mapuva

This book is made up of eight chapters all deliberating on the theme of oppositional politics on the African continent. Themes that have been prevalent in the book to include economic crises with the African continent, multipartyism, oppositional political parties and their quest for power, contestation over political space, the rise of opposition political parties to power, the dilemmas of directed democracy, political opposition and transitions, as well as the establishment of multiparty democracy within former despotic regimes.

Consequently, the topics which the book deliberates on rendered it an exploratory disposition of the interface between governments in the African countries and prevailing opposition political parties as they attempt to "…establish an effective presence under extremely difficult circumstances" (Olukoshi, 1998:6). The authors of the various chapters comprising the book collectively tackled an interesting (but daring) mix of issues, ranging from a critique of multiparty and oppositional politics on the backdrop of the continent's economic decline as they attempt to assess the impact of efforts made by opposition political parties to establish their presence in their fight for the creation of democratic institutions and structures, which since the dawn of political independence in many African countries, has been taking a nose-dive.

The authors also collectively bemoan the worsening demise of democratic institutions on the African continent as African rulers, in different countries, gradually develop a tendency to craft restrictive laws, which inhibit civil liberties within their respective countries. This has culminated in the need for political transformation as vibrant opposition political parties emerge, either as offshoots of the liberation movements or as new formations. The contributors to the book draw the readers' attention to the myriad of internal organizational and leadership problems that have continued to weaken oppositional politics as ruling elites through spanners in the work of opposition political parties and their respective leaders through devious machinations and the use of "agents provocateurs" (Olukoshi, 1998:6). The book also brings to the fore the role of the civil society in the democratization process as they buttress the efforts of opposition political parties to strengthen democratic institutions. However, logistical problems that face the civil society and oppositional politics have been cited in the book as emanating from:

 "…*the poor interface between the oppositional elements in political society and pro-democratic activists in civil society, and the consequences of this failure to sustain and consolidate the links between civil society-based pressures for reform and opposition political party bids for change*"(Olukoshi,1998:7)

Cases that have been used in the book to support the theoretical framework presented in the book on the challenges encountered by oppositional politics in their attempt to strengthen democratic institutions in collaboration with civil society were drawn from countries, such as Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, some of which have experienced turbulence political upheavals in recent years.

While each country has experienced unique features and structures, but in most cases issues of ethnicity, religious clashes, and regionalism have been cited as having been presented the most prevalent challenges for democratic institutions in the respective countries. The deliberations given by the various contributors to the book have helped to bring to the fore the broad reflection of the diversity and richness with which African politics discourses have been regarded by Afro-centric scholars as they explicitly capture the state of the debate within the African continent's political future. Through debates about challenges of democracy, oppositional politics, and the role of civil society within the democratic discourse, readers will find such engagements fruitful and engaging.

Reviewed by Jephias Mapuva
African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy [ACCEDE]
School of Government
University of the Western Cape-South Africa