

DISCUSSION PAPER 19

Michael Neocosmos, Raymond Suttner
and Ian Taylor

Political Cultures in Democratic South Africa

Compiled by Henning Melber

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Preface

During 2001, the Nordic Africa Institute established a research network on “Liberation and Democracy in Southern Africa” (LiDeSA). The Institute brought together a wide range of scholars from the Southern African region for an initial workshop in Cape Town, South Africa in December 2001. This “Indaba” was organised jointly with the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) at the University of Cape Town and served as a brainstorming event for the further topical focus of the research network.

The three papers presented and discussed in the South Africa session of the Indaba are included in this Discussion Paper in revised form. They reflect upon different but related aspects of the democratic transition in a post-apartheid South African context and illustrate some of the unresolved challenges and continuing contradictions. I wish to thank both the CCR, in particular Guy Lamb and Letitia Manter, as well as the contributors to this volume for their support and cooperation.

Henning Melber

Uppsala, June 2002

Democracy, Rights Discourse, National Healing and State Formation:

Theoretical Reflections on the Liberation Transition in Southern Africa

By Michael Neocosmos

In a discussion of liberation and democracy in Southern Africa in the current globalised phase of capitalism, we need to start from one point: namely that the history of liberation and democratisation in Southern Africa cannot be a history of anything but a history of social and political transformation. This point must be stressed because the writing of history by those who inherited power in Africa in the 1960s and beyond was undertaken along a series of reductions (Mamdani, 1991). Social history was reduced to political history; political history was reduced to party/movement history; for some, party history was even reduced to the history of a few well-known figures (heroes), if not to the biography of a single individual (the father of the nation). Clearly, while this approach is more difficult to follow in the present political climate, the tendency persists, and not only in South Africa, to see the post-apartheid/colonial transition in terms of the history of an organisation and its heroes. This does not mean that organisational histories are unwelcome: it means that even where these are undertaken they have to be approached in a critical manner, and certainly not to be seen as substitutes for an analysis of the immense variety of popular initiatives, often independent of any centralised party organisation. Political parties are not substitutes for people and social relations: at best they represent them more or less adequately. Moreover, they cannot be understood in a socio-political vacuum but only in a specific historical context.

If we are to avoid a series of reductions, then how do we write this history or try to analyse the liberation process, especially its link, or the lack thereof, to democracy? Clearly some critical analysis of organisations is imperative, but I strongly believe that such histories, to be successful, need to be approached through the lens of popular democracy, as it is to this that, arguably, the majority of the people of the region aspire. From such a perspective, understanding organisations and institutions, especially (but not exclusively) those that consider themselves vanguards or leaders (i.e., primarily political parties and “movements”), is about understanding states and the process of state formation. Moreover, it is about understanding state institutions and state formation **in relation to** society, as state rule only exists in such a relationship. The rest of my outline will amplify and concretise these points.

1. FORMS OF DEMOCRACY

Perhaps the point to start is the different kinds of democracy that grew out of what were, in most cases, socially very disparate anti-colonial/apartheid movements. This development was perhaps most clearly apparent in the 1980s in South Africa when popular grassroots conceptions of democracy (“people’s power”) were developed in clear distinction to liberal democracy, and within the ambit of the Freedom Charter. Similar conceptions were also present among Zimbabwean peasants involved in the Second Chimurenga (see the work of, *inter alia*, Norma Kriger) as well as in Mozambique.

So the outcome in Africa is that various forms of democracy were on offer — liberal democracy, one-partyism (often argued to be more democratic than liberal democracy, see Nyerere), as well as multi-partyism. It is crucial to recognise this. The fact that popular forms of democracy did not eventually exercise total influence does not mean that there was no alternative to the dominant outcome, or that this alternative did not exercise some influence on the outcome. This alternative was one that, by and large, stressed the transformation of social relations of power (social-political transformation) and did not restrict itself to directing its interest towards transforming legislation, electoral systems, formal democratic processes and the racial composition of the state bureaucracy (state-political transformation).

The second point under this rubric is the important fact that there was little debate on the character of democracy within the public sphere, especially among the organisations about to inherit state power. In South Africa, democracy was discussed within the practice of the United Democratic Front, but not sufficiently developed and debated: it hardly featured in the publications of the African National Congress (the practice of so-called “democratic centralism” can be argued to have been an obstacle to debate, as it remains). The debate in and around most liberation movements between right, centre and left positions was more concerned with the issue of capitalism versus socialism than with authoritarianism versus democracy; it was more concerned with different economic relations (modes of production) than with political relations (modes of rule). When democracy was briefly debated (as in the civil society debate in South Africa, see Neocosmos, 1999b), the liberal version of democracy was equated with democracy *tout court*, quite simply ignoring the experience of the 1980s. As a result, what dominated at independence/liberation was the slogan made famous by Nkrumah: we have achieved political independence now we need to ensure economic independence. In other words, the issue of democracy was at best reduced by state discourse to formal liberal democracy and displaced in South Africa (and increasingly elsewhere) in favour of state-led and/or capital-led economic transformation (“development”). Thus, while practical alternatives to liberal democracy had been developing, at the level of discourse there was little debate between different conceptions of democracy and there were few institutions outside political parties where such debates could be pursued.

2. NATION BUILDING

Thus, particularly in those Southern African countries where independence took place in the 1970s (Mozambique, Zimbabwe), the central issue of state formation and legitimacy revolved around economic development. Development was to provide national unity, and democracy was to be a secondary issue. In the 1990s, given the change in the global context, development could no longer constitute the mechanism through which a state (and ruling class) hegemonic project could be realised. As a result, difficulty in ensuring the legitimacy of the state (and ruling class accumulation) ensued, and legitimacy could no longer be achieved on the basis of one overriding state project, so that nation building and legitimacy had to be realised in a different manner: human rights discourse and economic liberalism became the new basis for doing so. Rights discourse reduced democratisation to changing legislation and to the introduction of formal democratic procedures. Changes took place at the level of institutions, but not at the level of society. As a result, little room has been provided for popular grievances to be expressed outside these institutional channels, and especially outside the party, which is taken (in liberal fashion) as the main link between the state and political society and the people. A problem, however, arises insofar as individualistic Western human rights discourse (*pace* the fashionable Kymlicka (1995)) has major difficulties in addressing collective rights and is quite incapable of confronting **social** grievances. These have generally been expressed in Africa under the rubric of what was known as the “national question”, and included those grievances concerning land redistribution, greater equality, poverty alleviation, jobs and other entitlements that have been central to the struggles for liberation and emancipation in which the masses played a determining role. At the level of ruling class accumulation, this process now takes place on the market as well as through the state (the two operating in tandem), and not via the state alone, as was the case when a state-driven development process was the sole form of national legitimation in Africa during the period of Keynesianism/Fordism.

In South Africa the issue of reconciliation was central to the process of state formation, as can be seen in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process. This process was one of a number of processes through which a discourse on rights became dominant. Richard Wilson (2001) shows precisely that this process was one of state formation through the development of a hegemonic human rights discourse. Conceptions of justice through retribution, which he sees as prevalent in townships, were dismissed by a state project in favour of reconciliation between elites: “rights talk was indeterminate enough to suit the programs of both the NP and the ANC, who came together to form a power-sharing arrangement” (Wilson, 2001:6).

Given the crucially important issue of national reconciliation to democratic state formation, is this or was this possible in other ways? Can Western individualist conceptions of justice be supplemented by other more communitarian and collective conceptions in order to allow for greater community participation and popular democracy? Currently, this is a major personal research project for me. What can be briefly pointed out is that traditional African conceptions of justice often allow for

different conceptions not only of justice, but also of national/community healing, as they frequently combine non-individualistic conceptions of law with restitutive notions of justice that involve the whole community in some form of transformation and redress. The main point at this stage is that one of the problems with the TRC was that it arguably did little to undermine a culture of impunity among the elite and little to provide a critique of the apartheid state, as it did not fundamentally examine the **systematic** — as opposed to accidental or temporary — deployment of state violence against communities, in addition to individuals. Neither, it seems, could it address the issue of collective perpetration, and thus establish collective guilt and redress.

3. NATIONAL IDENTITY AND EXCLUSION

Nation building in South Africa has also developed in ways that have opposed nationals and foreigners — those entitled to rights versus those who cannot access them or who are denied them. The construction of a national identity in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent has involved processes of exclusion as well as processes of inclusion and “bringing together”. This process of national-identity formation “from above” excluded in particular those from the Southern African region who, it had been said, had also built the country and its industry through various phases of migration. This process of exclusion is most noticeable in the state vocabulary of “illegal immigrant” used by both politicians and the media. This discourse, complemented by repressive “fortress South Africa” conceptions and practices emanating (but it must be stressed not exclusively) from the Ministry of Home Affairs, has provided the context for the rampant xenophobia in the country, including physical attacks on foreigners (see Macdonald, 2000 for one of the best reviews of the evidence, as well as the work emanating from the Southern African Migration project at Queen’s University, Canada). The following statement illustrates the point:

There are very few countries in the world which would extend human rights to non-citizens [said Lockey] ... Lockey also accepts the law —considered unconstitutional by many lawyers — which permits suspected illegal aliens to be detained without trial for 30 days. What else can we do? he asks. (ANC MP Desmond Lockey, Chairman, Parliamentary Portofolio Committee on Home Affairs, cited

Mail and Guardian, vol.12, no 23, 7-13 June 1996)

Such statements are not exceptional. They are complemented by the activity of various state institutions that regularly participate in exercises of “rounding up” illegal aliens, thus implicitly (if not explicitly) encouraging citizens to do the same (*Mail and Guardian*, 29 October 2001). Legislation proposed by the Ministry of Home Affairs calls upon citizens (justified by an ideology of “community participation”) to support it in the “detection, apprehension and deportation” of undocumented migrants (*Business Day*, 29 October 2001). One can easily imagine what the effect of this will be on xenophobia, which will then no doubt be roundly condemned by the country’s

leaders. It should be plain that one of the conditions for xenophobic conceptions and practices is precisely the manner in which the state is interpellating its citizens. I have argued elsewhere (Neocosmos, 1999a) that this was not the only way in which national identity was created in South Africa. In the popular liberation movement within the country in the 1980s, a national identity was forged “from below” in a manner involving all kinds of people and stressing the democratic, participatory and political (rather than administrative) nature of the process. As a commentary on the current state-led process of national identity construction in South Africa, I can do no better than to refer to the remarks made by Franz Fanon in the 1960s, but as fresh today as they were when they were first uttered:

The native bourgeoisie which comes to power uses its class aggressiveness to corner the positions formerly kept for foreigners ... It waves aloft the notion of the nationalization and Africanization of the ruling classes. The fact is that such action will become more and more tinged by racism ... the working class of the towns, the masses of the unemployed, the small artisans and craftsmen for their part line up behind this nationalist attitude; but in all justice let it be said, they only follow in the steps of their bourgeoisie. If the national bourgeoisie goes into competition with the Europeans, the artisans and craftsmen start a fight against non-national Africans. From nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism (Fanon, 1969: 125).

Unless South Africans begin to analyse this process seriously and understand the role that state discourse and practice plays within it, the result will continue to be the reproduction of racism in new forms within the country, an outcome that will make a mockery of any form of African nationalism, and particularly of an “African Renaissance”.

4. HOW DOES THE STATE RULE? HOW IS THIS RULE LEGITIMISED?

This question is central to any discussion of democracy or the lack of it in Africa today. Briefly, it can be maintained that state formation takes place through the process of delimiting a state domain of politics (political society) in which the state determines who are its genuine interlocutors and who are not. It is thus within this “public sphere” that attempts are made to define the parameters of the discourse within which the legitimacy of the state can be secured. Thus, despite the fact that the state attempts to secure its legitimacy in relation to society as a whole, “official discourse” within this sphere lays down the limits of inclusion and exclusion in public debate and thus defines the discursive terrain within which legitimacy is achieved. Discourses or practices that may be seen by the state (accurately or not) to threaten its legitimacy are excluded from the state domain of politics and are de-legitimised in the eyes of the state. These discourses and practices may, however, be legitimate in the eyes of society, or very significant sections thereof. There may, therefore, be an ongoing struggle over establishing the legitimacy of different forms of politics in the eyes of the state and those of the people. It is in this way that a

ruling class attempts to establish its hegemony. The process is both ideological and political.

In South Africa, the post-apartheid state attempts to secure its legitimacy around a state-defined consensus centring on liberalism (economic and political), human rights discourse and a nationalist discourse (e.g., overcoming poverty among the previously disadvantaged racial groups, equalising access to economic resources between races, economic leadership in Africa, etc.). Two broad sets of contradictions have emerged from this process. The first is an attribute of liberalism in general, the second is a characteristic of liberalism in an African historical setting.

As noted above, a rights discourse has developed as part of a liberal relationship between state and people. Concurrently, a neo-liberal economic discourse has presented the solution to poverty as a particular kind of technical intervention by both capital and the state. The former discourse relegates questions of political entitlements to the juridical sphere of the state, where claims to rights can be settled by an apparently impartial and technical juridical system. The latter relegates other political entitlements to an economic or managerial field where they are exclusively reduced to objects of state policy, again devised by apparently impartial experts. In either case, these issues are removed from an arena or domain of legitimate independent political intervention (and often even contestation) by society itself, and placed within the confines of a state-controlled domain where they are systematically “technicised” and thus made out to be politically neutral and to be handled exclusively by apolitical experts. They are thus de-politicised in form while still remaining highly political in content. The exclusion of society from making decisions on these frankly political issues is justified on the grounds of lack of expertise and knowledge (in South Africa, a “consultation” process is often ritualised, but has little democratic content). This has the effect of further restricting not only information but also democratic interventions themselves.

Similar discursive procedures are followed with regard to other political processes. For example, the state discourse on rape and other forms of violence (e.g., xenophobia) relegates these issues to the criminal justice system; the discourse on AIDS reduces the question to the sphere of medical science (although it has recently been forced into the public sphere in South Africa). As a direct result of this process of de-politicisation, the issues of concern to society — *inter alia* gender, generational and ethnic oppression; the difficulties of household economic reproduction; and the politics of “tradition” and “belonging” — are not critically addressed. At the same time, other fundamentally political questions around which democratic struggles could be mobilised are ignored and considered beyond the realms of legitimate political discourse — beyond a state-imposed consensus.

While this process is common to all forms of liberal and authoritarian rule, there is another problem which comes to fruition only in an African historical setting, where the social grievances which fuelled the national liberation struggle, such as access to land, jobs, greater social equality among classes, races and genders, seem incapable of redress. As noted already, the “pure” free market and individualistic liberalism so globally fashionable today and dominant in South Africa, are incapable

of addressing these issues of social justice. Current events in Zimbabwe are a clear indication of this, where the popular demand for land cannot be addressed in terms of Western liberal discourses, and is thus easily manipulated by a power hungry elite waving the nationalist flag, so that the nationalist authoritarian utterances of corrupt leaders actually (and sadly) resonate among the people. In South Africa, the contradictions between liberalism and the national question can be seen in the furore surrounding the recent attack on the liberal press, which was accused of racism by the Human Rights Commission; in the way the oppressive regime in Harare is not forthrightly criticised for its human rights violations; and also in the way the state has addressed the AIDS issue, which has consisted of a (failed) attempt to develop a policy appropriate to African conditions.

This contradiction is also most apparent in the so-called *New Africa Initiative* (or NEPAD), which is quite evidently a neo-liberal economic programme being touted as a recovery programme for African economies (Taylor, 2001). While clearly such neo-liberal policies can only open up Africa to even greater plunder by Western (and South African) capital, and to greater authoritarianism, as the state imposes them regardless of the popular will, NEPAD is clothed in nationalist garb. While the programme is doomed to failure precisely because all the evidence points to the fact that it is (neo-) liberalism that keeps Africa in chains, it serves a useful short-term ideological function: it keeps the (regionally powerful) South African state in tune with global hegemonic discourse and with the Western powers, while the nationalist gloss resonates at home. Elsewhere on the continent, people are less sanguine and less liable to be fooled by the pseudo-nationalist rhetoric of an "African Renaissance", as they have experienced neo-colonialism for much longer and view (White) South African capital's economic ambitions in African economies with justified suspicion and cynicism. A genuine African Renaissance cannot be driven by South African capital or [FDI?? Author: Meaning unclear] by other multinationals, and it must be understood that such a recovery programme has to be founded on popular social forces to have any chance of success. A prerequisite for this must be the development of genuinely representative states and genuinely democratic relations between states and society, for these popular forces in Africa have never been allowed to make any state "their own", simply because, since the colonial period, states have regularly been, or have gradually become, more or less coercive impositions on them. Such impositions have been ones in which the West, in alliance with local elites, has played the dominant role. NEPAD seems to propose little that is new in this regard (see, e.g., Melber, 2001).

However, politics do not only exist within a more or less narrow state domain. They exist throughout society: in the workplace, in the home, in the community, in neighbourhoods. The social is the political, to paraphrase the feminist slogan of the 1970s. It is here that popular political discourses and practices are forged. Many of these popular discourses may contest aspects of the issues sketched above and, as a result, have been dismissed by the state in South Africa as the work of "ultra-leftist" tendencies, or as "economism", when expressed by trade unions. This simply amounts to an attempt by the state to de-legitimise and thus to silence these discourses, to

assert that these discourses and practices exist beyond the state consensus, beyond the state-legitimised domain of politics. This response suggests that popular-democratic prescriptions for the state, which take place within a subaltern domain of politics and which are constantly alive with the possibility of alternatives (more or less clearly demarcated and articulated), are beyond the realm of legitimate politics. In South Africa, such popular-democratic prescriptions have recently included township struggles against arbitrary and high electricity bills (Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee); against corruption in government; against criminalisation; against the state's lack of action over the AIDS crisis. They have also included trade union protests and strikes against neo-liberal economic policies, wage levels and working conditions. However, to marginalise and to silence these discourses as attacks on the state or "the movement" (movement=party=state), is to run the danger of excluding *genuinely democratic* prescriptions on the state. To do so is to overlook the existence (and crucially the re-invigorating character) of popular democratic and democratising politics outside the state consensus. This response amounts to a fear of popular contestation and debate and to an illegitimate narrowing of the state domain of politics through the exercise of state power.

It can be argued, using concepts developed by Lazarus (1996), that in South Africa elements of a Stalinist mode of politics are reconciled with little difficulty within an overall nationalist discourse with a parliamentary mode of politics to provide a unique consensual mode of state rule, the dominant characteristic of which is fundamentally authoritarian rather than democratic, precisely because of the exclusion and marginalisation of popular democratic discourses and prescriptions. Whether attempting to operate within a discourse of rights or within one of tradition, popular politics outside the narrowly defined state consensus seem precisely to constitute a major source of democratic prescriptions for the state. Whether such subaltern politics eventually succeed in challenging the hegemony of state politics is something to be left to the future. However, to dismiss such politics and to exclude them from the legitimate realm of political practice and debate is to restrict the expression of genuine grievances and democratic entitlements. *Inter alia*, this approach contains the inherent danger not only of unjustifiably curtailing (if not always fully suppressing) the democratic expression of genuine popular grievances, but also of ensuring that the rabble-rousing antics of power hungry and corrupt politicians will distort these grievances in order to use them for their own opportunistic ends.

5. CONCLUSION

For me, part of the problem in coming to an understanding of issues concerning liberation and democracy in Southern Africa is a theoretical one, in particular the dominance of a liberal conception of politics that is also adhered to by many forms of Marxism. This is fundamentally a conception wherein politics is reduced to the state and to its narrow domain of politics. Politics is said to take place "over there"

in a realm populated by professional politicians and bureaucrats and not “over here” in daily life. One of the major discoveries of feminism (later elaborated by writers such as Foucault) was the idea that political power (state power) suffused society “in capillary fashion”, with the result that politics is everywhere. If this is the case, then we need to understand that liberal conceptions such as “political society”, “the public sphere”, and, of course, the public/private distinction are obstacles to understanding as well as to the development of an emancipatory democracy. There is a realm of politics beyond the state. A recognition of this fact means recognition of the possibility that democratic alternatives to authoritarian liberalism may also be found beyond the state domain, not ready-made to be sure, but with a truly democratic content, as it is within this realm that the majority resist oppression. Evidently, politics within a subaltern domain can be authoritarian and reactionary politics as much as they may contain the seeds of liberatory politics, but without allowing the expression of the democratic components of these politics, without allowing the expression of popular grievances against the state itself, it is impossible to speak of democracy, let alone to move forward to a truly emancipatory future, whether in South Africa or in the continent as a whole.

In order to provide an “enabling environment” for this process, it seems that, as a minimal requirement, institutions are needed that are not state controlled (as in various forms of corporatism) and whose purpose would be to provide for a dialogue between popular organisations and the state. National assemblies may be able to fulfil this role, but it is clear that political parties, as currently constituted, cannot, as they are centralist, hierarchical, state-bureaucratic organisations. Such proposed institutions would have the function not only of developing a new popular democratic social contract, but also of ensuring that it is adhered to and developed over time. They would also require that civil society is not simply “vibrant”, but a realm where citizenship in its full political and participatory meaning is allowed and encouraged to flourish. I should perhaps make clear that I am not saying that the solution to the evident crisis of the state in Africa is a ready-made “popular democracy”, whatever that may mean. It would seem that without deepening the practice of popular democracy, it will remain an abstract slogan. In any case the issue is not one of (yet again) changing formal democratic procedures from above, but one of allowing the politically marginalised a voice. Without this, there can be no serious debate with the state and no way forward. The alternative, in the present climate, is too ghastly to contemplate, as, in the absence of the capacity to express their grievances and in the absence of dialogue, people will resort to following “rabble rousers” (of whom there is no shortage in South Africa, as elsewhere), mindless violence and to witch-hunting the weak (the “others”). In this period of globalisation, there is only one answer to people’s despair and to growing militarism, and this is a consistent move towards a genuinely emancipatory democracy.

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Culture(s) of the African National Congress of South Africa:

Exile and Prison Experiences¹

By Raymond Suttner

When the ANC was unbanned in 1990, a number of ideological and organisational strands that had broadly and in varying ways considered themselves part of the liberation movement came together as members. By “broadly”, I refer particularly to affiliates of the United Democratic Front (UDF), which themselves comprised a variety of strands. (Seekings, Lodge and Nasson, van Kessel) In these organizations, it was common to hear coded references to the ANC and indications of affiliation to what was referred to as the Congress tradition or “Congress”. In addition, there were others who may not have been part of the UDF but wanted to join the ANC once it became legal. Just over a year after its unbanning, half a million people were signed up². (Rantete, 12–15)

There were problems with the post-1990 integration of these various elements, since different organisations that now were “one” had distinct styles of work and historical experiences that informed their practice. The onset of negotiations took many activists by surprise. These could not be conducted with the degree of openness to which many were accustomed. While this may have been reasonable, it created a degree of suspicion.

But these tensions were outweighed by the overall euphoria surrounding the unbanning. Also, the atmosphere of continuing state harassment of the organisation demanded unity and, consequently, the complexity of combining the component parts may not have been given adequate weight. In an effort to stress unity in the face of state attempts to undermine the ANC, commonality was stressed, often at the expense of difference. It became common to hear such phrases as there is “one ANC”. This was at once true and also inadequate in capturing the diverse elements that went to make up the organisation.

ANC – ONE ORGANISATION COMPRISING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Any attempt to understand the ANC must not rely only on the experiences of those who were formally members prior to and after 1990, for many, many others saw

¹ My thanks to SIDA and the Nordic Africa Institute for funding the research of which this paper represents “work in progress”. I am also grateful to the Centre for Policy Studies in Johannesburg for providing me with a very hospitable and supportive research environment. Shireen Hassim, Michael Neocosmos and Krista Johnson have provided valuable comments that have helped to improve the structure and arguments of this paper. Naturally, I bear responsibility for the final product.

² It is not clear how many were actually paid up. That was more strictly considered in later years.

themselves as, or were in a broad sense acting on behalf of the ANC. That they were not members did not mean they made no contribution to its character. This sense of ownership of the ANC by a wide range of people is well captured by Joseph Faniso Mati, in his discussion about organising in Port Elizabeth in the 1950s:

... Most of our people supported our views. When I asked a person to join the organization – even if the person had no money for a membership card of the ANC – that one would say: “Oh, my child, who is not a member of the ANC? We are all members of the ANC!” (Mati in Coetzee *et al.*, 35).

Chief Albert Luthuli speaks of himself standing in a similar relationship to the ANC in the 1940s:

... I was then, as many people are now, a part of Congress in all but the technical sense. To me, as much as to its enrolled members, the ANC was “the watchdog of the African people” (Luthuli, 89).

It is only possible to understand some of the mass activities of the 1980s by virtue of the survival of traditions of support for the ANC or for what it was believed the ANC represented, traditions that persisted to varying degrees and in varying forms in different places and in different times. The bearers of these traditions may have been old grannies in isolated townships or ANC activists banished to remote villages. (Frederickse, 157). At other times it was newly released political prisoners. (e.g., Mati at 53ff, Seekings 2000, regarding the influence of the late Joe Gqabi)

In addition, members of any organisation come to it not only with distinct political experiences that may have preceded their joining, but also often with religious beliefs and the observance of various traditional and other practices and rituals. There has been little discussion of how these belief systems interact and overlap, and what belief systems inform which decisions or actions for various people within the ANC.

It is important to appreciate the different components of the ANC in their own right, since they all represent distinct understandings of what it means to be in the organisation. Different experiences are likely to inform different conceptions of democracy within the ANC and in the society at large. And unless one understands these different cultural experiences, distinct and multiple identities within a common identity, it will not be possible to understand the character of some of the differences and tensions that have emerged and may still emerge.

It is also important to understand the different components because they represent distinct practices and expectations of what it means to be an ANC member and what different people hope to derive from such membership. (cf., Ottaway, 1993, chap. 3). It may also define what is meant by the description of the ANC as a “broad church” and what may be included or excluded from that concept at different times and under different conditions.

We can identify distinct overall characteristics attaching to various phases of the organisation’s history, features whose relevance to this study lies in the extent to which they are an enduring part of the organisational character, or at least appear to be well established within the contemporary ANC. It is necessary for this emphasis

because the focus in this study is on the present, though that can only be understood as part of a broader, complex history.

The identification of organisational culture is controversial. To take one simple example, were the expectations and practices of an ANC member recruited in the dark days of the 1960s or 1970s the same as that of a person recruited in 1994 or afterwards? And can one always say that the expectations of a person recruited in the difficult times, understandings of what it means to be part of the ANC, remain the same today? What are the expectations in this period when membership of the ANC may mean more in the way of benefits for some and next to nothing in the way of experiencing repression?

What is the current composition of ANC membership? What proportion were members prior to 1990 or before 1994 (the year the ANC first won democratic elections)? Have those who joined since 1994 gone through an induction process similar to that which members underwent prior to unbanning? Do the expectations of newly recruited members differ substantially or in a limited way from those of longer standing? Does the organisation attract quite different types of people in different phases of its history, and if so, what consequences does this have for the character of the organisation?

When various members of the New National Party or former members of the apartheid security forces join the ANC, what do they look forward to, compared with what activists of the pre-1990 period envisaged? In the case of many, they move to hold high office in the ANC as MPs or MPLs. It is not clear whether or not they are expected to undergo any process of induction or whether there is any attempt to assess how they relate their new loyalty to the ANC to their previous commitment to destroy the organisation and its members.³ To what extent are these questions answered by considering whether the ANC is in transition from being a liberation movement to a conventional political party? If this is a fruitful area of enquiry, what phase of that transition has been reached and with what consequences for conceptions of membership?

When ANC members, including sections of its leadership, become part of a new emerging bourgeoisie, how does this impact on their understanding of membership of the organisation, their expectations and responsibilities? How does the emergence of substantial members of a black bourgeoisie impact on the character of the organisation, which still depicts itself as representing primarily the poorest of the poor?

But throughout all of these phases in the organisation's history, there have also been elements of continuity, evoked expressly though selectively by leaders referring to those events and leaders who preceded them. What is continuing in these traditions and what is new? What has disappeared and what continues to survive and why? On what basis are people designated as heroes and what social purpose does it serve within ANC culture? (cf., Kriger, 1995 for Zimbabwe)

³ Although Ben Turok has interviewed three NNP MPs who joined the ANC, it does not appear from the interview that these people have undergone any process of induction. Their own account stresses continuity between their role in the NNP (as self-described dissidents) and joining the ANC. That tells us little about the depth of their understanding of the ANC, though this understanding may be acquired on the basis of activities not disclosed in the interview. See Turok (2002).

RELEVANCE TO THE UNFOLDING TRAJECTORY
OF SOUTH AFRICAN DEMOCRACY

The different experiences, expectations and practices that make up the ANC may have significance for the type of democracy that unfolds in South Africa in the future. I am referring to these as “cultures”, by which I mean the broad sets of beliefs, ideas and practices shared by groups of people.⁴ It is culture(s) in the plural because reference is made to a variety of phases and experiences in the organisation, none of which has supplanted or totally displaced all others. Which cultural influence becomes dominant may well have consequences for the conceptions and practice of democracy in South African society as a whole. This is because, amongst other effects, some types of experiences in the liberation movement may tend towards greater popular involvement than others, greater internal democracy or more or less centralisation.

I am not wedded to the word “culture” insofar as it may be that as this research progresses, other words like “tradition” or “character” will be more appropriate in describing the phenomenon that the project aims to understand. This paper represents early work in progress. It outlines two aspects of the cultural experiences that are particularly influential in the development and present character of the ANC –that of exile/Umkhonto we Sizwe and the prison experience, in particular that on Robben Island. But these are in themselves limited studies of the areas concerned, since some of the views advanced here may be modified when the field is covered more thoroughly.

EXILE AND UMKHONTO WE SIZWE (MK)

With the banning of the ANC and other organisations and the turn to armed struggle, military and security considerations clearly came to overlay much of what was done. Secrecy as opposed to open discussion became dominant. What was made public tended to be official statements, and what diversity there may have been tended to be concealed behind the face of unity presented to the public.

It is not clear what the full impact of this was on the culture of democracy that had been developing in the period immediately before the banning of the ANC. The 1950s had seen the transformation of the ANC into a mass organisation and the development of campaigns that enhanced democracy, non-racialism and, to a limited extent, non-sexism. (Lodge, 1983; Suttner and Cronin). Did conditions of exile, underground and armed struggle mean these traditions were snuffed out? My impression is that the answer will be quite varied and dependent on where people were placed and what type of work they did. Also what new forms of cultural expression did the conditions of exile give rise to, what impact have they had and how enduring have these proved to be?

⁴This is not the place for a comprehensive discussion of culture on which I realise there is a substantial literature. I merely present a working definition. cf., e.g., Williams (1981 and 1983) and Kuper (1999).

The experience of exile in London was quite different from that in Angola, Zambia, Tanzania, Lesotho or Botswana and the type of activities that people engaged in differed in the various centres, creating different norms and styles of work, and distinct relationships between members of the organisation. For example, a person engaged in intelligence or security work would be more disposed towards secrecy than someone promoting the ANC in public meetings or newspaper articles in London. But even in London, many people who “ran” underground operatives within the country, had to operate in a “cloak and dagger” fashion. (cf. Suttner, 2001, chaps. 2–3). These could not be democratic operations, since the conditions of work required conspiratorial methods and a hierarchical structure, whereby one section of the organisation (based outside) communicated what had to be done (inside the country)⁵.

Certainly considerations of security made it difficult to hold open debate on many issues or to do so a lot of the time or in a lot of situations. The ANC of the 1960s was fighting for survival after the reversals it had suffered. It confronted an enemy that was killing people in detention and would soon show it was not afraid to cross borders in order to chase after them. It was an enemy that was also able to infiltrate its agents into MK camps, where food was sometimes poisoned.

That this atmosphere was not always conducive to openness does not mean that debate was excluded. It was constrained by these conditions, but it may be that the Morogoro consultative conference of 1969 and the Kabwe conference of 1985 resulted from debates, arguments and complaints among the membership. (Shubin, 84ff regarding Morogoro, Williams regarding Kabwe, 29)

It may well be that the level, character and intensity of debate depended on the type of work that individuals were doing, whether they were in the military or not, though it would be a mistake to conclude that military discipline and structures necessarily precluded political discussion and debate. While military structures had to operate as disciplined forces, there appears to have been widespread political discussion in some situations in the camps, especially in political education courses. Famous teachers like the late Professor Jack Simons conducted some of these. (Sparg *et al.*, 2001). Possibly also, the relative inactivity of ANC military cadres for much of the period of exile was conducive to such discussion.

Exile was a vast and complex phenomenon extending over three decades and embracing a variety of experiences. In this paper I refer to only three elements, that of the first MK recruits of the early 1960s, the generation of 1976, and some of the bureaucratic consequences of running a huge organisation in exile. Finally, I return in this section to the question of survival of traditional belief systems that sometimes informed practices in MK.

⁵This relationship of external “handlers” and underground activists inside the country was not uniform. The late Chris Hani, when a member of national leadership, made various incursions into the country as an underground operative, starting in 1974. Operation Vula, initiated in the late 1980s was an attempt to bridge the gap between the external and internal organisation, with members of the national executive among those who entered the country.

THE FIRST MK RECRUITS

These people (whom I suspect were almost entirely men⁶) were products of the 1950s and early 1960s. Many had been active in the ANC of the 1950s or started to be active at the time of its banning. Many received training in the Soviet Union, others in China. Some lived for long periods in the Soviet Union and in various parts of Africa. The impact of their early experience in the ANC as well as all of these external experiences on their ways of thinking needs to be examined. To what extent and how did the differences in political culture of the countries where they were based impact on practices within the ANC and the organisational conceptions of the members concerned? What influence did these veterans come to have in the organisation as a whole? After limited activity by some of these in the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns, what was their role in the organisation in subsequent years, particularly as they grew older? To what extent did they remain in the military and with what role and with what impact? Did their status as veterans confer any special authority on them?

GENERATION OF 1976

These youngsters left the country after the Soweto uprising. It is common to record that most of them “chose” to join the ANC. What would be interesting to investigate is exactly what considerations led to this choice. In what sense was it a political decision, based on relatively sophisticated understanding and to what extent was it opting for the organisation that seemed better organised, in particular more likely to ensure subsistence of such individuals while outside the country?

Many writers have suggested that this group of youngsters was relatively unpoliticised, that many believed they were the first to take on the apartheid regime, and that they had “no politics”. (Bernstein, 1994, xvii, Thandi Modise in Curnow, 2000, 36–7). Thus Hilda Bernstein writes:

Each wave brought out its own type of people. Those who left in the late fifties and early sixties were mainly adult, often middle-aged, and highly political, with a history of engaging in public political struggle. Those of the seventies, and specifically of the huge exile wave after 1976, were overwhelmingly young, largely male; and though fired with political passion, they were often without real ideology or political programmes. They were of a generation who had been cut off from access to information about their own country, their own history, and from political theory and the history of struggle. The “elders” who might have passed on this knowledge were either themselves in exile, or on Robben Island or Pretoria Central prison. Or perhaps keeping discreetly quiet. “Mandela” was a remote name, used by some parents as a warning of what happens to those who follow the path of resistance to law and authority. The 1976 Soweto rebels came out with no history in their heads. They believed themselves to be the first revolutionaries, the first to confront the apartheid state; and their anger was often without political objective. They learned the history of their country only when they had left it — the long story of struggle, oppression and resistance. (xvii–xviii)

⁶It did change later, with the recruitment of a number of women into MK.

This may well be exaggerated in that the ANC did live on in the minds of very many people, even where it did not have an extensive organised presence. Nevertheless, it is likely that much of the political development of these youngsters became the responsibility of the ANC, mainly in MK training and various political education classes.

What was the character of this induction into the ANC? To what extent were these youngsters imbued with a critical understanding of politics, as appears to have been the objective in the political education classes of Jack Simons (*Sparg et al.*)? To what extent was it primarily a politics of hierarchy where “the line” was conveyed from top to bottom and more or less compulsorily communicated? The answer to this question is of course important in considering its implications for democratic development today and in the future. If it was primarily a politics of hierarchy, it is more likely that what the leadership says is what is believed and that dissent and even healthy discussion may be discouraged.

But all of this needs to be located within a historical framework, the global climate of the time. Where young people were sent for training in former Socialist countries, they usually went through courses in the brand of Marxism-Leninism, then the official ideology of these countries. This has probably had considerable impact on the mode of analysis adopted by the students concerned and the concepts of state and transition that have informed the organisation. Also, as mentioned in regard to the earliest exiles, later ones were also exposed to the modes of government and social orders of a variety of countries that acted as their hosts. What impact did this have on their ways of viewing politics?

It also needs to be asked how concepts of collective leadership interfaced with different concepts of African culture and styles of leadership. Perhaps this is most apparent when considering the leadership approach of Nelson Mandela, (Mandela, 1994, 20–1) but it would be interesting to consider this matter in relation to President O.R. Tambo and more generally within the ANC.⁷

In this regard, we need to interrogate the African character of the ANC in another sense — how different or similar was it to other liberation movements. In particular, the experiences of ZANU and ZAPU of Zimbabwe, MPLA of Angola, FRELIMO of Mozambique, SWAPO of Namibia and PAIGC of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde need to be considered. There would also be some value in comparing ANC with liberation movements beyond the continent, including those of India and Palestine.

THE ANC BUREAUCRACY

While not formally constituted as a government, the ANC in exile exercised many of the functions of a state in relation to its members. In many ways, the relationship between the executive and membership had characteristics of dependency rather than active membership.

⁷ Luli Callinicos is preparing a major biography of Tambo that does try to uncover these issues.

In order to carry out the extensive welfare, military, educational, political and other tasks, an extensive bureaucracy was developed. Many members of the ANC in exile were primarily formed in this environment and had very little experience of political activity within the country. (Lodge, 1983, 1988; Ottaway *op cit.*). Professor Marina Ottaway writes (at 45–6):

The exiled ANC consisted of an informal government — the National Executive Committee — a military wing in the form of Umkhonto we Sizwe, and a bureaucracy manning the various departments. In Zambia and Tanzania, the ANC's bureaucracy ran farms, schools, and workshops; and in Angola, Umkhonto ran training camps. The Congress had diplomatic offices in London and representatives in many capitals around the world. What the external organisation did not have on a significant scale was a membership, that is, people belonging to the ANC and supporting its political goals but not directly working for it or being supported by it. Many ANC members in exile, particularly those in African countries, depended on the organisation for their survival. They were employees of a government bureaucracy, personnel of an army, or clients of a welfare state, not members of a political party.

Related to the welfare functions of the organisation is the question of what determined “career paths” in the organisation? Who got scholarships to which countries and how? On what basis was this decided? Who or what structures were able to access what facilities and how were these dispensed? To what extent did ANC bureaucratic networks establish patron/client relationships, and if so, have these relationships continued into the present, and with what consequences?

To what extent was membership of the SACP a path to these opportunities, as well as a “route to greatness” within the organisation during the exile period? (Suttner, 2002)

Part of the bureaucracy was ANC security. It is now acknowledged that there were substantial abuses by some ANC security personnel. Has this matter been fully aired? Have all the perpetrators been brought to book and all those wrongly abused or arrested had this acknowledged? It is important that there not be a residue of bitterness because some matters are still being concealed or not fully aired, for all of this has implications for the building of a human rights culture today.

MK AND COMBINATION OF BELIEF SYSTEMS

In joining the ANC and receiving advanced military training and political education, many people acquired skills that were never open to them inside the country. They had access to ideas and scientific skills that were generally the preserve of whites. But very often these new skills and beliefs coexisted with a variety of cosmologies and belief systems that preceded these members' involvement in the ANC.

How people related to the different activities of the organisation may have been mediated by how they interpreted and related to their own cultural experiences prior to joining the ANC-belief systems that re-surfaced at distinct times. In more

than one interview I have found the question of access to healers to assist in military activities or reduce prison sentences has arisen.⁸

This is illustrated in relation to MK by General Sandi Sijake, who did reconnaissance in the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns. Before his MK group left the country, they met with Elias Motsoaledi, veteran ANC and Communist Party member, who later became a Rivonia trialist. He describes Motsoaledi's preparations for the safety of their journey:

From there he would take a broom and put some medication inside a bucket so that the combi would not be apprehended. Comrade Motsoaledi was one of the great communist leaders, but at the same time he still believed in his medicine.

It was a bucket with some water. He would dip in a broom, a special medical broom, spray and put in, dip in and sprinkle around, dip in, sprinkle around saying whatever words people say to ensure that bad luck does not befall us. That was the basic thing he did with our combi before heading for Zeerust. (Sijake interview).

These beliefs would arise at other times. In 1967 Sijake and others were in a camp near Morogoro in Tanzania. When there was talk of their returning home, "people started to look around for traditional healers around there. There was a local chap, one of the Tanzanians, who was said to be able to treat a person and once treated a bullet would turn into water. A number of people, because they did not have money, they had clothing from the Soviet Union, would trade some of their clothing for this medicine that would change a bullet into water". (ibid).⁹

But the question of medication arose again when the group met up with ZAPU comrades in Zambia:

At a broader level, when we met with the Zimbabweans we had this problem that they insisted that before going into Zimbabwe they needed to be strengthened with medication ... while in Zambia. And also when they arrived home they would need to go to a traditional healer ... This would be someone who, when you arrive, you report to, report that "I have come back, I have returned home" ...

Before we arrived [in Zambia] we didn't want this. Most of us dismissed this as rubbish. Then the leadership including OR [Tambo] and JB Marks said: "Look guys you are the ones who said you want to go home and you want to explore the route through Zimbabwe. To go through Zimbabwe we believe it is better for you to go through with people who are in the Zimbabwean liberation army ... you go through together with these people. This is their tradition. If you are to go with them you have to respect their tradition. Otherwise there is no way you can have a working relationship with them ...

As a result we then had to go through this whole process ... You find one evening they make a fire, they prepare some food in front of one of the tents. There will be a string and a pot here with food without salt corn in a small pot, the size of a meatball without corn bread, salt, piece of meat without salt and then some Mqombothi¹⁰. When you come there is this buy with a *big* tummy, *African personality*. Also this medicine in a

⁸ The smuggling in of medicine to reduce prison sentences in an MK trial is dealt with in the interview with Sobizana Mngqikana.

⁹ This is, of course, a fairly common phenomenon: e.g., in the Maji Maji war against German occupation of Tanganyika, a medicine was claimed to turn bullets into water – maji (meaning water). For similar experiences and beliefs found in his campaign in the Congo, see Che Guevara (2001).

¹⁰ A traditional brew made for ceremonial purposes and celebration.

bowl with water, he dips a broom and sprinkles you with this broom and then you jump, you walk over the string, and once you walk over, there is an incision here [points to chest] then he applies some medicine, then you get a piece of corn ball bread like and a piece of meat and go under a specific big tree, with a specific name which is said usually, it is good for ancestors. In the old days they used to sit under that type of a tree. There is a lot of Mqombothi, then you are ready to cross. (ibid)

With the Sipolilo group “where we lost a lot of people”, it was necessary to consult with a Shona healer on the Zimbabwean side:

You have to find a strong traditional healer in the village and then report “I have arrived!” and be strengthened as a person who has just arrived.

So the issue of medication was in relation to the two stages. There was a question of individuals who believed in their individual rights, felt they needed to be strengthened in order to go into battle or in order to go through the process of finding a way home. And also this organisational one. This other one was an organisational one, done through ZAPU and ANC agreed. It was formal, unlike if I just take my coat and approach a traditional healer and swop it for medicine. Two different levels. [ibid]

What these examples illustrate is not the displacement of science by pre-scientific belief systems, but the coexistence of more than one belief system. The resort to healers in order to strengthen the combatants does not seem to have been regarded as a substitute for the deployment of firepower in the manner in which they had been trained. This is not the same as individuals relying solely on the power of medicine, but supplementing what they had learnt in formal military training with what they regarded as an important additional source of strength.

PRISON EXPERIENCE(S)

The prison experience has had a very definite impact on the culture(s) of the ANC. Although prisoners were held in a variety of different prisons, it is the impact of Robben Island that undoubtedly had a decisive impact on the political development of large numbers of people inside the prison and, after release, on those with whom former prisoners interacted. The number of white male prisoners and white and black female sentenced prisoners was always relatively small. The Robben Island experience was, in contrast, one that impacted in the case of the ANC on over 1,000 people.¹¹ This is not to deny that prisoners from the other prisons sometimes had great influence after their release. But purely for quantitative reasons we are dealing with quite different phenomena.

But what may need further attention is the arrest of thousands of people during the states of emergency of the 1980s. Political education did take place in some of these detention centres. What was its character? How enduring was its influence?

¹¹ Indres Naidoo refers to there being some 800 ANC prisoners within a year or two of his arrival. It seems reasonable to calculate that over the period up till 1990 the number of those housed must have been somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000. Fran Buntman (personal communication, 3 May 2002) says that there were a minimum of 1,000 ANC prisoners between 1963 and 1990.

A very great number of young people received much of their political education about the ANC on Robben Island. (Sisulu, 162, Joseph Faniso Mati in Coetzee *et al.*) Some people first learnt to read and write on the island or acquired advanced education and became seasoned political thinkers or analysts there. Mati says: “Fortunately, when we got to Robben Island [in the early 1960s] we found that the ANC was already organised. There were group leaders and a structure”. (Coetzee *et al.*, 38)

“People must study”, the ANC would repeatedly say. If you got a matric, you had to teach others how to read and write, had to teach those who were attempting standard six or the junior certificate. Every person on the Island knew that he had an obligation to teach others. Later on when we managed to get study rights the teaching was more formal, but initially we specifically tried to help those who couldn’t read or write. (*ibid.*, at 45. See also interview with Monde Colin Mkunqwana, in Coetzee *et al.*, at 87)

So, back in the cells by late afternoon, we would eat our food and after a while some people would wash, others would be chatting, others would rest. In order to avoid a situation of people simply hanging around, the leaders decided that we must get busy in studies and in other forms of activity. These study periods were taken seriously. We appointed study officers from among ourselves ... Several things took place during this period but the ANC Disciplinary Committee (DC) concentrated on encouraging and enforcing two things in particular: studies and political discussions. (*ibid.*, at 45)

The DC, Mati explains, was not elected, it was appointed.

We did not know who appointed the DC and we did not know who exactly were its members. But the important thing was that the people knew very well that there was a DC. Members of the DC were appointed in each section. When I became a member, somebody just told me: “You are now a DC member”.¹²

Then he explained to me how to behave and what I should do as a member. The main function of the DC was to see to it that there were political discussions. In prison the food of the politician is discussion; political discussion. Nobody [i.e. no ANC person, for the other organisations generally had separate political discussions-RS] should be excluded and nobody should be allowed to loiter in the yard ... (*ibid.*)

“But the one activity that dominated our stay on the Island”, Mati says,

... was the political discussions. No-one who spent time on the Island can say that he hadn’t been strengthened politically. It was as if we couldn’t get enough. They discussed politics at lunch hour in the quarry, they discussed politics in the evening. They read a lot about politics in books and magazines. Most of the formal discussions were organised by the ANC structures over weekends. On Saturday afternoons there were discussions in each cell.

... Ours were serious discussions — no applauding, no clapping of hands. It was a serious affair — organised by the political committee for when we were locked up in the cells ... (at 49–50)

Walter Sisulu, in response to Nelson Mandela’s reference to him as the greatest living historian of the ANC and of the struggle, describes how he understood political education on the island:

¹² This is confirmed by Babenia at 132, where he says that the “‘DC’ was appointed by a senior ANC comrade.”

When we settled down in Robben Island, we did two important things. We had to create machinery for — to operate as ANC. We also had to create machinery for all prisoners, not necessarily the ANC alone, for discipline and all. And in that situation where we had already created machinery of the ANC, one of my tasks was to educate people about the history of the ANC and that is what I did.

How did you do it? Where did you do it?

We were working at the quarry. Now we worked there as groups. So those of us who were taking particular classes would group together, work together. Then a lecture takes place there while we are working. (Sisulu, 162–3.)

Michael Dingake adds:

When I arrived in the single cells section, ANC members were discussing the history of the ANC. Needless to say we had no written guides, but Comrade Walter Sisulu, who led these discussions, was a walking history of the organisation. Comrade Walter's memory was phenomenal. Not only did he remember events, and the names associated with them, but also the circumstances under which they occurred. (at 214)¹³

But this was all strictly illegal and carried out in secret. Harry Gwala, himself famous as a teacher on the Island, commented:

[P]olitical education did not depend on the harshness of the authorities. It was a matter of do or die. It was underground work. We were subjected to underground work before we went to prison. Prison was a continuation of that, so we had no problem with the restriction imposed on us [in prison]. (Buntman, 1996, at 106)

The Island was decisive in the political education of the young generation of 1976, consolidating their understanding of the history of resistance and in many cases, converting many of these to the ANC. Daniel Montsisi, a leader of the 1976 rising in Soweto, records:

The Island was a political education for me. Firstly, we developed a deep comradeship through discussion with the older leaders, and a deep respect. Before I went to the Island my understanding of the Freedom Charter was not thorough. There I had the time to look back at history ... It was like putting together pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which had been missing all along. We delved into our history. We discovered that we young people were not the first to take up the fight against apartheid, but a new part of a developing process. (Johnson, 107)

In order to ensure maximum benefit of political education, it was necessary to tackle illiteracy. Buntman writes:

Academic education was also valued for its contribution to the community as a whole. Islanders sought to increase the educational standards of all prisoners, and formal and informal education was conducted across organisational lines. One of the key areas of this effort was the attempt to ensure that no man left the Island without being able to read and write if he came there illiterate. (1996, at 112).

According to former PAC prisoner, Dikgang Moseneke, "In a matter of three to four years we had actually wiped out illiteracy on Robben Island. Completely. Everyone could read and write, at least in his mother tongue ... " (ibid)

¹³Some of the ideas of the leadership were reduced to writing. See, e.g., the articles printed in Mac Maharaj (2001) and Govan Mbeki (1991).

According to Gwala, literacy was needed in order to conduct the political theory classes that he and Stephen Dlamini started on the Island. Gwala explained that people who were illiterate could not understand the abstract concepts they were teaching and using. "So we organized ... literacy education". (Buntman, 1996, 112–13)

The programmes of political education on the Island were not conceived purely as means of keeping prisoners occupied and avoiding idleness, though that may have been a factor, since idleness could lead to demoralisation. There was, more importantly, a very self-conscious motivation, a sense of duty to prepare prisoners to play a significant political role after release. Fran Buntman writes:

[T]he inmates on Robben Island had always regarded it as their duty to produce capable activists who would eventually go back into their communities. The youth of '76 represented the future of the movements and the liberation struggle. These were the future activists, leaders, and soldiers, and so their recruitment was a necessity. Recruitment was, of course, a starting point for the critical process of training activists, teaching them organisational histories, ideologies and strategies, and preparing them for their political obligations and mandates upon release ... (Buntman, 2001, 156. See also at 168, 170)

In consequence, time spent on the Island appeared to have been a way of crystallising thinking and developing common positions on various issues. For that reason the entry of Island graduates into UDF organisations in the 1980s usually connoted the arrival of people who were seen as having much political maturity, and able to advance non-sectarian and unifying positions. This may not always have been the case, and sometimes these comrades were at the centre of division. But my impression is that the overall experience brought by many who became active in the UDF was one that was valued.

Certainly there was an element of romanticism attached to being in prison. It carried considerable authority, feeding into the hierarchical character of ANC and especially underground. There was often an assumption that activists in the 1980s could not rely on their own judgment, but needed to buttress this with appeal to a higher authority. Insofar as the ANC official leadership in exile was not easily accessible (although many people listened to Radio Freedom broadcast from Lusaka), the next best thing may have been to consult with a prison veteran.

Many of these older comrades had experience of underground that proved useful when the UDF faced intense repression. (Lodge and Nasson, 95). Former Islanders also played an important role in building the ANC underground and MK structures in various parts of the country. (Buntman, 1996, at 134). In addition, Islanders helped bridge inter-generational gaps, in a way that would impact on the struggle outside:

The Islanders' resistance also fulfilled another function, of facilitating cross-generational communication between different age-sets of activists who were thrown into prison. At times relationships could be tense, especially in the post-1976 period, but generally the prisoners worked to understand each other and build their organisations from the perspective of different generations. This meant, *inter alia*, that former prisoners leaving the Island to resume activism would carry with them the knowledge and insights of

multiple periods of struggle, as well as the ideology and histories of the outlawed organizations. (Buntman, 1996, at 135)

Was the hegemonic experience carried by top leaders like Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu – the conception of the ANC of the 1950s? If so, what precisely do we understand that to be? Insofar as Nelson Mandela’s leadership on the island was contested by people like Harry Gwala and Govan Mbeki, what were the implications of this challenge?¹⁴ To what extent do the hegemonic influence of the island and the counter-hegemonic positions hold sway in the organisation today?

Against pure emphases on class struggle and the working class, people like Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela argued for the unity of the organisation and its character as a “broad church”. This was really their central teaching.¹⁵ Obviously in prison as well as outside, this unity can be both a positive phenomenon — necessary to maintain an organisation’s existence — and a negative one, constraining (albeit not always forbidding) alternative tendencies. It may be that throughout the ANC’s existence it has battled to deal with this tension between different tendencies, challenging and periodically changing the basis of the organisation’s unity.

Mati’s reference to how he was appointed to the DC is interesting, demonstrating how top down, command-style cultures were not only found within military structures, but may have suffused activities of the organisation in a number of arenas. (See also Buntman, 1996, at 121.) It may be, however, that this was necessitated by security considerations, given that such structures and political education would not have been allowed by the authorities.

SURVIVAL OF RITUALS AND TRADITIONS IN PRISON

The prison experience was a total world. It was intended to be self-sufficient, providing all the necessities of life. However limited the prison authorities notion of “necessities” may have been, there was little that could be obtained or accessed from outside of that world. But some ANC prisoners wanted and expected to perform some traditional rituals while on the Island. In particular, many of the young prisoners who arrived on the Island after the 1976 risings wanted to be initiated. Mati says:

... We realised that most of these youngsters were to stay in prison for a long time and that circumcision was necessary for them. It was all done clandestinely. We did not know when it would happen and the ANC pretended as if they did not know about it. There were no celebrations afterwards and we would only discover it that following day when we were going to play soccer and found that most of the youngsters were not there.

They had been circumcised by [Johnson Malcomess] Mgabela — in small groups together.¹⁶ They would stay in the cell the following day or two — no water, their

¹⁴ There is a brief reference to these tensions in Buntman, 1996, at 125, quoting Andre Odendaal.

¹⁵ This is partly based on personal experience while in the leadership of the ANC and interacting with Mandela and Sisulu, and partly from what I have heard from others about their role inside and outside prison.

¹⁶ Mgabela appears to have been the same person mentioned in the interview with Sobizana Mngqikana as smuggling in medicine in order to reduce sentences in an East London MK trial.

wounds being dressed by Mgabela, sometimes suffering from severe pain. All of this was done with the connivance of the person in charge of the hospital. (Coetzee *et al.*, at 52)

Mgabela describes his role:

When I first came to work in the hospital, I felt happy. I wanted for quite some time to work there, because I was an *Ingcibi* when I was outside. An *Ingcibi* is the person who performs circumcision — cuts the boys, dressed their wounds, helps them to become men. Long before I started to work in the hospital one boy came to me. He knew that I did that work outside and he wanted me to circumcise him. But I was afraid that if they discovered that I did it, they would put me away for an extra two or three years. After this boy, other youngsters also approached me: “We are getting old here inside. And there are still more years because we are doing fifteen, seventeen, eighteen or twenty years. When we go home, we will be old and this thing must be done”. (Coetzee *et al.*, at 70)

... In the meantime, some of the boys among us continued to demand: “You must cut us!” They even said: “You refuse to help!” I started to realise that these boys of the Western Cape, Transkei, Border and the Eastern Cape had a better chance now. And they would be old when they were released. After all, Schoeman [the head of the hospital] was not too negative and the prison chiefs took no steps after Fourie had left. [A white warder who had asked Mgabela to circumcise him, only to have it discovered by the authorities]. So the next year I started to circumcise. It was April/May 1974 that I started, right up until July and then I stopped. Then I started again in December. So many! Do you know how many altogether? Three hundred and sixty one — total number!

You see, after 1976 all these schoolboys were arrested; they were flocking to the Island. They all said they wanted to go and be circumcised by me. By now they were openly asking for it. They even mentioned to the head of the jail, Mr. Hattingh, that they needed circumcision. His reply was: “Look we can send you to the hospital!” “No! No!”. Later on, we accepted that the prison authorities would look the other way. They pulled up their shoulders and said that nobody should come and tell them that somebody else had cut him. (at 71)

Circumcision of PAC and Black Consciousness youth sometimes paved the way for their recruitment to ANC:

I circumcised even a few PAC boys — although the leader of the PAC did not like this idea and told the young PAC men: “This communist wants to circumcise you and after he has cut you he will organise you and will make you an ANC”. The young PAC members did not like this interference and replied: “You can’t tell us what to do with our bodies!” But the PAC leader was right. We did recruit many young PAC supporters as well as members of the Black Consciousness Movement. After circumcision we would be sympathetic and ask: “How do you feel?” They saw that the ANC had helped them and they became members of the ANC. (ibid)

More work will need to be done in order to understand precisely what this demand for initiation meant, whether the observance of traditional rituals was something emanating mainly from people coming from certain parts of the country, in particular rural areas and especially the Eastern Cape. What did the resort to such rituals mean? Is it to be interpreted purely as continuation of a traditional practice, without which manhood could not be attained? Or did observance of these rituals also connote elements of resistance?

If the authorities turned a blind eye to the practice, why was this the case? What was the precise attitude of the ANC towards initiation practices?

If initiation was demanded by youth on the Island, it seems likely that youth in the MK camps would also have wanted to observe this practice. Was provision made for such initiation, and what did it signify? Although I have not done interviews on the question, I have also heard that initiation did take place in some prisons while large numbers of people were detained during the states of emergency during the 1980s.

CONCLUSION

This paper represents early attempts to try to extract qualities that may be said to represent cultural traits of the African National Congress today. All that has been written here is tentative, because sources still need to be consulted and interviews conducted that may well modify many of the assumptions with which I am currently working.

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Neo-liberalism and Democracy: The Role of Intellectuals in South Africa's “Democratic Transition”

By Ian Taylor

In the current epoch of an increasingly integrated —“globalised”— world, the global capitalist order is undergoing a profound reconfiguration and transformation. Neo-liberalism has emerged as the hegemonic political and economic project, aiming to “expand the scope for capital accumulation through privatisation, and replac[e] collective welfare by entrepreneurship and individualism as the legitimating values of liberal democracy” (Leys and Panitch, 1998: 20). In short, “neo-liberalism has become the predominant ideology legitimating the privatisation of the state-controlled economy and the substitution of the market for the social provision of basic welfare” (Overbeek and Van der Pijl, 1993: 1). This has profound implications for state governments in the South where:

... the more dependent countries become dependant on the goodwill of investors, the more ruthless must governments be in favouring the already privileged minority who have sizeable assets. Their interests are always the same: low inflation, stable external value of their currency, and minimum taxation of their investment income ... [Yet the] financial short-circuit between different countries forces them into a competition to lower taxes, to reduce public expenditure, and to renounce the aim of social equality (Martin and Schumann, 1997: 61).

This has obviously intense implications for nations like South Africa that have deplorable structural inequalities.

THE INCONSISTENCIES OF NEO-LIBERALISM AND THE OSTENSIBLE “ANSWER”: POLYARCHY

Neo-liberalism stimulates deep contradictions, for a project based on liberalisation, privatisation and representing the dislocating effects of globalisation has little chance of becoming hegemonic. Indeed, a hegemonic project in the Gramscian sense needs a politics of support as well as a politics of power. Deploying the term used by Robert Dahl (1971), this consensual element in the neo-liberal project is “polyarchy”. Polyarchy is a political system in which an elite actually governs, with popular involvement in democracy being restricted to periodic elections. This definition was developed in post-war academic circles in the United States and built upon the elite theories of Mosca and Pareto (Robinson, 2000: 309). That democracy is an essentially contested concept, with varying and competing definitions, is obscured by the apparent consensus (certainly within policy-making circles) as to what constitutes

“democracy”. In its contemporary milieu, however, it might be advanced that polyarchical forms of democracy are not about promoting democratic input into the everyday life of citizens, but rather have become a useful mechanism to soothe social and political pressures that are created by the neo-liberal order, thereby creating a state of “low intensity democracy” (Gills, Rocamora, Richard Wilson, 1993).

Such an analysis echoes the assertion that “the construction of a corporate-dominant order ... require[s] the neutralisation of social forces precipitating persistent and effective questioning of the established order” (Harrod, 1997: 108). By its very nature, polyarchy dissipates the energies of those marginalised by the ongoing order into parliamentary procedures that, in themselves, are acted out by political fractions whose power and prestige are dependent on the polyarchical model. In short, polyarchy expresses “not the fulfilment of democratic aspirations, but their deflection, containment, and limitation” (Good, 1997: 253). Furthermore, polyarchy is based on a separation of the economic from the political, ignoring the reality that “the so-called economic realm is inseparable from its political and ideological effects” (Burawoy, 1985: 63). This so-called “institutional separation of society into an economic and political sphere” forms what Karl Polanyi called the “economistic fallacy”, whereby this separation of spheres is assumed to be common to all societies regardless of their historical context (Polanyi, 1957: 71).

This separation is not only not “natural”, but is also a myth. The effect of this rhetorical construct, however, is to obscure power relations inherent in any economic dispensation: in a capitalist society it serves to maintain economic power in the hands of the dominant classes, following Milton Friedman’s advice that “political power is ... more difficult to decentralise ... If economic power is kept in separate hands from political power, it can serve as a check and a counter to political power” (Friedman, 1962: 15 and 16). This is absolutely necessary to prevent the realisation of real democracy, i.e., the democratisation of economic power. As Friedrich Hayek noted with alarm, notions of what real democracy was “has made it possible to [arrive] at a conception of democracy according to which this is a form of government where the will of the majority of the people on any particular matter is unlimited” (Hayek, 1973: 1). Such a scenario had to be prevented! The dominant conceptualisation of democracy that has emerged avoids such economic democratisation and rather concentrates on issues relating to procedural matters pertaining to periodic elections of elites. This is certainly dominant within the burgeoning literature on “democratisation” in the South (see for example, Diamond, Linz, and Lipset, 1988; Di Palma, 1990; and Huntingdon, 1991).

In contrast to conceptualisations of popular democracy, theorisations of this kind consciously divorce “economics” from “politics”. In this abstraction, the former responds only to the logic of “the market”, whilst the latter is restricted in its role of permitting that logic to proceed without obstruction (Neufeld, 1999: 4). By doing so, the polyarchical process limits itself to the “purely political”, consciously excluding any qualitative degree of socio-economic redistribution. Indeed, one of the more recent (and celebrated) accounts of “democratisation” in Africa, explicitly proclaims that the authors’ “understanding of democracy refers to a set of political procedures

[and] we dissociate it from rule for the people, which implies substantively, a distributive socio-economic order” (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997: 12). This limited understanding of democracy, however, serves to provide protection and confidence to the established elites in countries undergoing transition from authoritarian rule. Such a process, as we shall see, played itself out during the transition in South Africa. Before discussing this, however, we first will briefly examine why promoting polyarchy is now an integral part of the North’s relationship with the developing world.

PROMOTING POLYARCHY: A NEW MEANS OF CONTROL?

The crisis of authoritarian rule that developed throughout the South during the 1970s and 1980s (and South Africa was but one example) and the “struggles for popular democracy around the world [were] profound threats to the privileges of US-led Northern elites and their junior counterparts in the South” (Robinson, 1995: 649). This threat was headed off and resolved through transitions to polyarchies. Whilst dictatorships began to crumble and “a general crisis of elite rule began to develop in the South ... the ‘elective affinity’ between authoritarianism and [capitalist] domination unravelled [and] ‘democracy promotion’ substituted ‘national security’” in the language of the West and its relations with the South (Robinson, 1996: 16). This process was exacerbated by the decline of the state-socialist economies, which meant that coercive intervention to stem the “Communist threat” of popular action (conceptualised in South Africa as the “*rooi gevaar*” or “red danger”) could no longer be mobilised as legitimising motives to restore or maintain the status quo.

Hence, what occurred in these contentious transitions was an attempt to reconstruct hegemony via a reformulation of the mode of political rule: from the overtly coercive (such as apartheid) to a more consensual-based order, viz. polyarchy. The result was the pre-emption of fundamental changes that may have arisen through any popular alternative to polyarchy, and instead the preservation of the extant economic structures. Co-option of the democratisation movement into the structures of polyarchical democracy performed this task. Such an arrangement is the political counterpart to neo-liberalism, with the “visible hand of the voter” working alongside the mythical metaphysical “market”. In this view, there were two aspects of a socialisation process that occurred around the transition: one, which is discussed in this paper, revolved around crafting what was the “accepted” definition of democracy. The second was the equally successful weaning of the ANC off broadly redistributive economic goals, to a more conservative — indeed neo-liberal — economic programme, as exemplified in the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR). Although the two processes were intimately entwined, the second aspect will not be discussed in this paper (on this, see Williams and Taylor, 2000). With its ingredients of elite-pacting, historic compromises and provision for the co-option of majorities, polyarchy is better equipped than any other system to legitimise the political authority of dominant groups and to achieve (temporary)

political stability. Accepting this, we may turn to look specifically at the promotion of polyarchy within the South African transition context.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN TRANSITION

The specifics of the negotiation process that led to the demise of the political aspects of the apartheid state have been dealt with in detail elsewhere and need not be covered in depth here (see for example Friedman, 1993; Sparks, 1994; Waldmeir, 1997; Bond, 2000; and Taylor, 2001). However, critical analyses have been lacking of why the post-apartheid dispensation was so obviously a replication of Western-style parliamentary democracy and not some alternative model. It is as if the Westminster model was the only option. Clearly it was not, but why it became viewed as such is an intriguing part of the wider South African transition.

Integral to this closure of debate was the role of the “change industry” within civil society during the transition, and how it helped shape the discourse around which the African National Congress’s policies were formulated (Swilling, 1992). The importance of this change industry, as we shall see, was “that the consensus forged by these experts over the identification [and solution] of problems shapes the way that interests of states are defined” (Mittelman, 1997: 255). By acting thus, and in the absence of any strong alternative, the business-aligned “change industry” contributed to the marginalisation of any counter-hegemonic impulses during the transition, particularly *vis-à-vis* political arrangements under the new dispensation.

This was essential for the elite classes, as the mass uprisings against the apartheid state during the 1980s were predicated at the grassroots level around a form of democracy that posed a threat to the ongoing capitalist order (Friedman, 1987). Among the popular liberation movements, capitalism and the parliamentary type of government were viewed as aggregate aspects of the apartheid system. As a United Democratic Front statement (cited by Lodge, 1994) made clear:

Not only are we opposed to the present parliament because we are excluded, but because parliamentary type of representation in itself represents a limited and narrow idea of democracy. The rudimentary organs of people’s power that have begun to emerge in South Africa ... represent in many ways the beginnings of the kind of democracy we are striving for.

In short, “techniques and organs of people’s power had begun to emerge, and the new democracy stressed in particular the accountability of leaders to the rank-and-file” (Good, 1997: 256). As a result of such aspirations, a means by which such struggles could be undermined and privileged interests defended was imperative for the elites in South Africa. Talking of the South African transition, one analyst observed that “local groups that [ould] marshal formidable global allies to contest the definition and uses of democratic institutions impose[d] ... boundaries” within which the discourse on what constituted “democracy” was defined, discussed and promoted (Koelble, 1999: 10). These parameters were defined as the “middle ground”, and space was opened up for various contenders to negotiate themselves *within* this

framework — a framework that was predicated upon variants of liberal democracy as the “common sense” model upon which a post-apartheid dispensation was to be based (Du Toit, 1990: 72). In short, a “dictatorship of the transitariat” negotiated a future historic compromise within the confining remit of a particular discourse *vis-à-vis* democracy (Munslow and FitzGerald, 1997).

Yet we must avoid the reductionist tendency to see this process simply as a manufactured conspiracy. The process is more accurately a complex convergence of interests between the established political elites, domestic and transnational capital and crucially, aspiring elites espousing — initially perhaps — an alternative vision of the country. This convergence of interests, a convergence that was in part crafted by technical interventions within civil society (see below) ultimately served to thwart the demands and aspirations of the popular classes. In the context of South Africa, we can point to the existence of the “nationalist element within the ANC, arguably dominant, who increasingly found common cause with those proponents of Western-type democracy” and who aimed to join the already existing elite classes (Ginsburg, 1996: 96). A brief examination of this fraction helps contextualise the argument advanced.

THE ASPIRING ELITES OF THE ANC

The ANC has always been a broad church. Nelson Mandela himself admitted that the ANC was “united solely by [its] determination to oppose racial oppression” and that it was “the only thing that unites us ... there is no question of ideology as far as the odysseys of the ANC is concerned, because any question approaching ideology would split the organisation from top to bottom” (quoted in Sparks, 1991: 12). This was reflected within the organisation by two broad fractions — socialist and Africanist — who have historically struggled for supremacy, though the long years of exile tended to camouflage the degree to which this was the case.

In the modern era, the Africanist element originally centred around the original ANC Youth League and the figures of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo. Thabo Mbeki, Donald Mkhwanazi, Peter Mokaba and Joel Netshitenzhe, although from different generations, stand out as prominent younger members of this fraction. These figures and the segment they come from have always been somewhat uneasy with the ANC-South African Communist Party nexus — based on an aversion to the socialist implications that such an alliance implies. From a class analysis, the Africanist element within the liberation forces represented a nascent congregation who saw themselves as heirs apparent to a new post-apartheid Black bourgeoisie. “The cause of an aspirant Black elite, and a discomfort with socialism and the ‘undue left-wing influence’ of non-Africans are the hallmarks of this tendency” within the ANC (Blade Nzimande and Jeremy Cronin in *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 10 October 1997). Typically, a prominent Africanist, Minister of Public Services and Administration Zola Skweyiya, asserted that “the ANC shouldn’t shy away from Blacks becoming capitalist. The only question is — how do we

achieve it? ", (*Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 15 December 1995) whilst Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry Phumzile Mlambo-Nguka has stated that Black businessmen should not be shy to say that they wanted to become "filthy rich" (quoted in Adam, Slabbert and Moodley, 1997: 201).

This elite within the ANC is wary of any radical restructuring of South African society, and instead has pinned its aspirations on developing an indigenous bourgeoisie alongside and in partnership with the existing patterns of societal structures that have developed within the country, whilst at the same time capturing nominal political power (Taylor and Vale, 2000). A bigger slice of the cake and not a new cake altogether is the main goal of this fraction, dressed up as it is in rhetorical calls to arms centring on "empowerment" and the promotion of Africanism. It was from this fraction that the "constitutionalist/electoralist" position came during the transition, which argued that the ANC's transformative task — as part of the national democratic revolution — would culminate in a constitution and an election. The slogan of an ANC regional conference in 1992, "Elections — The Last Step to Freedom", typified this attitude (*New Nation*, 18-24 June 1993). Such a scenario admirably suited the local managerial classes, giving the current political and economic dispensation a legitimacy (through the admission into its managerial ranks of Blacks) that could never be sustained under apartheid.

At the global structural level, the same process of legitimisation is apparent and the incorporation of an additional Black South African fraction has given the ongoing global order greater legitimacy — witness Thabo Mbeki's ready acceptance into the hallowed corridors of global power, even whilst advancing a (decidedly neo-liberal) vision for Africa (see Taylor and Nel, 2002). This, in combination with a political elite who accept the basic tenets of neo-liberalism, is the perfect scenario for the continuation of the status quo in South Africa. As one analysis rhetorically asked:

From the point of view of sophisticated business, what better government could be in power to deal with militant unions and the impossible tasks of satisfying an impoverished half of the population than a liberation movement under a moderate charismatic leader with universal legitimacy, yet also bound to work within the parameters of the economically feasible? (quoted in Adam, Slabbert and Moodley, 1997: 201).

The impulses behind this process are particularly strong, given that these emergent new recruits come from as high a profile nation state as South Africa, which still possesses widespread international goodwill. Yet this fraction, and the contradictions that they engendered within the liberation movement, was long masked by the alliance between that organisation and the SACP. This has become more open now that the move to a polyarchical arrangement has acted to bolster the position of those political elites who enjoy the status and trappings of power through involvement in the current post-apartheid dispensation. Their activities have shifted away from democratic intercourse with their constituencies and further and further towards identification and solidarity with the ongoing order (Taylor and Vale, 2000). In South Africa, where proportional representation has been introduced, this is particularly pronounced, because the members of South Africa's parliament represent no constituencies and are selected along party lines. This "almost pure form of the list

proportional representation electoral system has failed to encourage any links between the electorate and its political leaders" (*Mail and Guardian*, 5-11 March 1999). Furthermore, it has also given massive leverage to the elites within the parties to select, deploy and/or re-deploy the politicians who ostensibly represent the South African people. The constitutional ban on crossing the floor of the house further acts to "lock-in" the parliamentarians, enforces party discipline and prevents any maverick displays of independent thinking from the party line (see Good, 1997).

THE "CHANGE INDUSTRY" IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN TRANSITION

Within South Africa, the promotion of polyarchy (very often alongside economic neo-liberalism) was undertaken by a bewildering variety of actors that we have been loosely termed the "change industry" and who, despite various differences among themselves, formed an identifiable "transitariat" (see Taylor, 2001). These were identified by Swilling as, among others, the "Van Zyl Slabberts, the IDASAs, the Five Freedoms Forum etc.". As he goes on to say, "there [were] a phenomenal number of workshops, seminars, discussions, conferences, talks rights across the country in boardrooms, in industrial relations seminars, in local-level negotiations, in universities, all over the place. Basically, it [was] a winning hearts-and-minds campaign". This campaign was funded by local capitalist interests and "a massive amount of American money being pumped into IDASA and other organisations". Swilling correctly summarised this process as "critically important for creating and socialising people" (Swilling, 1992: 43-4).

Such an analysis of the South African situation correlates with the assertion that "specialists, operating out of policy groups, foundations, think-tanks, university research institutes, and government agencies, bring long-range political considerations and issues concerning social stability to the attention of the dominant classes and their inner core in the corporate community" (Robinson, 1996: 27). By doing so, such activities constitute "the crucial mediating link between agency and structure in the development of policy and the construction of hegemony" (*ibid.*). By acting within the realm of civil society, these activities took place in the territory where hegemony is contested and (eventually) achieved, for "in times of crisis the institutions of civil society remain as the primary site of the cohesion of new political forces that may create a new order" (Murphy, 1994: 31).

The purpose of this "change industry" then was "not to suppress but to penetrate and conquer civil society"; i.e., various political groupings, the mass media, civic organisations and so forth, and from within them, harmonise secondary classes and national groups into a particular social order (Robinson, 1996: 29). Not that civil society becomes a monolithic entity pursuing one common goal, but we can say that by promoting a strong civil society amenable to polyarchy, local actors and representatives of the productive sector, such as business associations, will be strengthened. This understanding tends to undermine the naïve belief that civil society

is in itself a “good thing” that mechanically enhances democracy. Instead, such a scenario can actually strengthen the position of the economic/political elites whilst providing a useful façade of legitimacy in the form of “civil society”. As one analyst wrote on the West’s tactic of strengthening civil society in Africa:

Assisting [elements within civil society] will lead to better economic decisions as well as strengthen governance: letting a hundred flowers bloom on the capitalist side of the civil society will help establish the rule and norms enabling societies to run themselves along the lines required by capital. (Moore, 1996: 140)

By doing so, the “limits of the possible” were defined in a negative fashion. As we have suggested, such a task in the South African context, where the mass media was overwhelmingly sympathetic to the hegemonic project, as were many political groupings (including significant fractions within the ANC), was conducted by a range of actors. “This task [was], of course, not taken on directly by the regime itself. It [was] left to a range of commentators and political actors, some of whom cynically or sincerely present themselves as ‘friends of the ANC’” (Molapo, 1991: 15). These “commentators and political actors” were essentially organic intellectuals — not simply cliques pursuing individual concerns, but representatives of a particular group or historic bloc generated by the sphere of production (Bieler, 1996: 4).

To achieve hegemony, a class must obtain intellectual and moral leadership by fashioning the ideological conditions for its construction. This role is fulfilled by a technical intervention within civil society by such intellectuals, invariably working within the remit of advocacy-type “think tanks”. Such think tanks have seen a massive growth in their activity in recent years. A recent interview with Philip Truluck, executive vice-president of the Heritage Foundation, on think tanks as “advocates of change” is worth quoting to get some flavour of how these think tanks perceive themselves:

Think tanks have become much more important to policy-making in the last two or three decades ... Today a whole world of ideas is coming from the think tank community. Two years ago *The Economist* noted the growth of think tanks and their increasing influence ... Today it’s difficult to think of an issue ... that hasn’t in some way been formed or shaped or developed in the think tank community ... We ... spend as much money on marketing our ideas as we do on research ... As far as we are concerned, finishing a research project just kicks off a whole new level of activity. *Our aim is to change public policy* — not merely comment on it ... [emphasis added] When we publish a paper ... we identify movers and shakers on that issue. If you’re one of them, our papers ... will be hand-delivered to you — and someone will try and arrange a meeting with you to talk about the issue and present our arguments ... We never produce a paper that doesn’t have recommendations in it (“Think Tanks as Advocates of Change”).

These think tanks and other actors theorise on the optimal environment for any future social order and propose policies as to how this may be achieved. In South Africa, “futuristic forecasts about where the ‘new’ South Africa might be heading” sprang up from this cadre of intellectuals and “scenario planning became a veritable cottage industry” (Murray, 1994: 21). This activity sought to negotiate between the material conditions of South Africa within the global economy and the aspirations of particular target actors. These organic intellectuals, therefore, operated to facilitate

“consensus” on the fundamentals surrounding the organisational principles of a given society and served to guide perceptions of “reality”.

In the context of South Africa, “big business ... launched an exemplary campaign of persuasion and education to hoist its conceptions of reality and change to pre-eminence” (Murray Hofmeyr, South African Breweries and Johannesburg Consolidated Investments chairperson, quoted in *The Star*, 30 June 1990). Members of the business community were quite conscious of this and promoted their “willingness to become agents of change” (ibid.). Indeed, the National Economic Forum created the Business Election Fund to specifically “educate people about what democracy means”. Operating with a budget of about R50 million, the Fund “apart from conventional media advertising” spent money “on billboards, Black taxis, literature distribution through community organisations, travelling road shows and human resources” donated to the Independent Electoral Commission (*Financial Mail*, 29 April 1994: 21). As we shall see below, by doing so the ideological conditions and the fit between power, ideas and institutions for the construction of hegemony were established (Gill and Law, 1989: 488). Such activities need not stem from a restricted intellectual base — indeed diversity is important as a self-legitimising device and “narrow orthodoxy or exclusiveness would be a self-defeating criterion”. Thus the ideas within the ranks of the organic intellectuals’ activators “reach the outer boundaries of what might be ultimately acceptable” (Cox, 1979: 260). In many respects, it is the quantity of advice and the message that is given within a particular remit from a particular epistemic community that counts, as well as the negative shaping of what is *not* possible. This was understood during the South African transition, where representatives of the ANC lamented that the “liberation movement ... receiv[ed] a barrage of patronising and unsolicited advice” (Molapo, 1991: 14). Space precludes an exhaustive account of this in the South African context, but the example of IDASA is sufficient to give us a broad picture of the activities and persuasions of one prominent component of the “change industry”.

IDASA

One of the most active groups within the change industry and one that struggled at diverse levels in pushing particular views in South Africa (coinciding with the project of neo-liberalism and polyarchy), was the *Institute for a Democratic Alternative South Africa* (later *Institute for Democracy in South Africa*), or IDASA. This organisation was founded in 1987 by Frederik van Zyl Slabbert and Alex Boraine, both of the corporate-funded Progressive Federal Party (an organisation that “bore the Oppenheimer imprint from the start”) (Pallister, Stewart and Lepper, 1998: 89). This fraction within White politics had long represented essentially two strands. One was the compassionate face of liberalism, militating against racial oppression, symbolised in the persons of Alex Boraine, Helen Suzman and bodies such as the Black Sash (though of course Alex Boraine was a former labour consultant to Anglo-American, whilst Helen Suzman was a close friend of, and received sustained financing

from, Harry Oppenheimer). The other strand, however, tended to support the interests of capital (hence the substantial funding from big business) and can be seen in the persons and institutions of Zac de Beer and Tony Leon of the Democratic Party and John Kane-Berman of the South African Institute of Race Relations. This process reflected a playing out of processes at a global level: as the neo-liberal counter-revolution began to spread outwards from the core into the semi-periphery, “increasingly [South African] liberalism came to be identified with individual rights and the ideology of the free market”, a tendency encouraged by corporate interests (Allister Sparks in *The Star*, 15 June 1994).

This process was mirrored in IDASA’s own history as the organisation grew from a liberal body facilitating constructive dialogue between opposing poles within South Africa (and without, as in the 1987 Dakar meeting between the ANC and Afrikaner intellectuals) to that of an institution increasingly pushing an essentially neo-liberal agenda. For sure, the organisation was funded by a large coterie of agents that we may view as part of a wider epistemic community, in the terms already discussed. By 1998, IDASA was receiving funds from and collaborating with, in the form of conferences and seminars (among other activities): the American embassy; BP South Africa; the European Union; the Ford Foundation; the Johannesburg Chamber of Industries; Kelloggs; the Rockefeller Foundation; Shell South Africa; Unilever; Lonhro Management; SA Breweries; the Standard Bank Foundation; and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (*IDASA Funders* <http://www.idasa.org.za/funders.htm>).

By funding IDASA, such elements were following the suggestion of Robert Charlick, a “Senior Governance Expert” of the World Bank, that aid agencies should strengthen “the advocacy and analytic capabilities of non-governmental organisations ... associated with production” (Charlick, 1992: 16). Certainly, USAID’s own “description of services” for its interventions in Africa includes technical and advisory services in areas such as “macro-economic, fiscal, and monetary policy ... public-sector-private-sector roles; and international trade and finance” (USAID, 1995). USAID itself had been extremely active in the former socialist states “educat[ing] the public about the issues that will shape their well-being, such as how market-driven economies and democratic governance function effectively and efficiently to everyone’s benefit” (according to USAID’s representative in Hungary) (Cornell, 1996). Within South Africa, USAID and other Washington-based agencies sent nearly \$530 million between 1986 and 1994 to a range of South African and American NGOs, with “funding in the political development arena expanding swiftly after 1992” and concentrating on voter education, democracy promotion and “good governance” programmes (Institute for Policy Studies and the Inter-hemispheric Resource Centre, 1997).

Returning to IDASA, its most prominent member — Frederick van Zyl Slabbert — had long been an advocate of “elite consensus” and the desirability of “closed door” negotiations to solve South Africa’s problems. Such tactics explicitly aimed to avoid involving the wider population, who may have questioned the desire of Slabbert — and those who bankrolled him — to head off any threats to the ongoing

economic dispensation within the country. Whilst an alternative viewpoint could portray the view that Slabbert *et al.* contributed, via their push for elite compact, as lessening conflict and avoiding an ethnic civil war, such tactics nonetheless do correspond to the Gramscian notion of the “passive revolution”. This is when, in times of crisis, the national bourgeoisie is too weak to (re-)establish hegemony in the sense of an ideological compact between itself and the popular masses. An “organic crisis” then ensues. The process of re-organisation is then framed as a “revolution” without a “revolution”, a process of change presided over and directed by established elites in alliance with aspiring elites, but not the masses. Such “modifications are ... introduced into the country’s economic structure ... to develop the productive forces under the direction of the traditional ruling classes” (Gramsci, 1971: 119–20). As Simon (1991: 26) asserts, and this can be applied to the South African transition, “social reforms which have been demanded by the opposing forces may be carried out, but in such a way as to disorganise these forces and damp down any popular struggles”. A central feature of this is what Gramsci (borrowing from Croce) called *trasformiso*, whereby “the actual or potential leaders of potential groups or subordinate classes are incorporated into elite networks, a practice that can be regarded as a ... tool to prevent the formation of counter-hegemony” (Abrahamsen, 1997: 149). As a result, opposition programmes join together with conservative ones until there is no longer any significant difference in essence between the former “alternative:” and the status quo (barring superficial re-orderings). *Trasformiso*, or preserving the central tenets of the status quo, is promoted by worried elites at both the domestic and international levels, suggesting an interaction between state power and capital to secure their position when under threat from “alternative” forces. As a prominent advocate of polyarchy within South Africa, Slabbert confirms this thesis. One report characterised him as “above all the political creature of Big Business. He was helped into politics by Big Business, sustained in it, supported and sponsored by Big Business” (Ken Owen cited in Sampson, 1987: 301). Slabbert’s later incarnation as regional facilitator of George Soros’s Open Society Foundation and his chairmanship of Adcorp Holdings (market capitalisation of R560 million) tends to support this assessment. Slabbert himself later admitted that “the ‘victory’ of liberal democracy and capitalism ... was essentially an ideological victory about the ‘best’ way to be democratic and bring about economic development” (Adam, Slabbert and Moodley, 1997: 188). Defending capitalism whilst pushing polyarchy is an integrated tactic of those favourable to the ongoing hegemonic order, as “promoting polyarchy and promoting neo-liberal restructuring [is] a singular process” (Robinson, 1996: 55).

Tellingly, IDASA was one of the organisations favoured by funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an American government-funded institute that was active in shaping the political and economic debate and in diverting popular struggles in countries as diverse as Haiti, Nicaragua and the Philippines (see Agee, 1992). This organisation “has financed, advised and supported in many ways political parties, election campaigns, union, student groups, book publishers,

newspapers, other media ... and in general organisations and individuals which are pro-capitalist and anti-socialist” (Blum

“The National Endowment for Democracy (NED)”, no date). Its intervention in South Africa in supporting, among others, IDASA, was “an integral part of the US government’s attempts to propagandise the benefits of ‘free enterprise’” (McKinley, 1997: 92). Its objectives in South Africa can be summarised as promoting three main aims:

- i. to identify and support an emergent Black bourgeoisie who could be incorporated into a post-apartheid hegemonic bloc
- ii. to develop a national network of “moderate” Black community leaders who could compete with “radicals”
- iii. to cultivate a Black bourgeoisie among small and mid-level enterprises that would identify themselves as having a stake in a stable capitalist dispensation, develop their economic power, and crucially, view the White fraction of South African capital as class allies and leaders (Robinson, 1996: 382).

Slabbert’s initiative in establishing *Khula* — a pioneering Black empowerment company — is a vivid example of this process. The company was set up in partnership with leading elements within the aspiring Black bourgeoisie with links to the liberation movement. For example, Mzi Khumalo, a former political prisoner who spent thirteen years on Robben Island, was a leading partner. Khumalo typified the pro-capitalist views and outright materialism of a certain wing of the ANC, confessing that “everyone else on [Robben] Island wanted to be a politician. I wanted to be a stinking rich businessman” (*Siyaya!* issue 2, 1998: 34). The greatest desire of the fraction that Khumalo represents is indeed to become part of a reconstructed hegemonic bloc. Slabbert’s initiative served to help facilitate this and give direction and example to others following in *Khula*’s wake.

Returning to the NED, recipients of its largesse were almost all moderate and conservative groups in contention with the ANC and its liberation allies. For example, funds were disbursed to Inkatha-linked fronts or the reactionary South African Black Taxi Association. At the same time, as we have said, NED provided funding to IDASA in return for its fulfilling its role as an ensemble of organic intellectuals promoting the hegemonic discourse. In tandem with a wide variety of other funding agencies, IDASA fulfilled this role in a variety of ways — holding a medley of conferences on themes such as “responsible democracy” (in Cape Town, 1990), the promotion of “realistic” economic policies (e.g., in Constance, Germany in 1991), and establishing a “training centre for democracy” in Johannesburg in 1992 (Boraine, 1994: 210–11). Accordingly, “IDASA ... focused less on the main actors in politics, such as the government, than on ... support groups and opinion-makers, in order to force them towards a more democratic approach”. This was because Slabbert and Boraine viewed the popular aspirations of the majority as being totally misconceived “about the content and character of the notion of ‘democracy’” (Kotzé and Greyling, 1994: 181), a view promoted at the Cape Town conference where speakers “expressed ... fears should state power be transferred to those holding notions of popular

democracy” and that “the road to democracy [was] definitely not to be found in a transfer of state power to the representatives of the people” (Du Toit, 1991: 25). A position paper on the “myths of majoritarianism”, which advocated a dispensation capable of blocking “any faction ... from pursuing policies inimicable to the interest of the country” later made this posture quite clear — though curiously who defined the “national interest” was left open (Mattes, 1992: 5). Frequently, this approach was cast as protecting the “minorities” (i.e., those who had materially benefited from apartheid) from the “tyranny of the majority”. As one observer noted,

[A] conception of democracy had to be articulated which fulfilled two interrelated functions: it had to offer protection to “minorities”, whilst also forestalling the majoritarian system favoured by the ANC ... [T]he importance of “minorities” and of the protection of their rights [as well as structures against the “myths of majoritarianism”] was weaved into the very substance of democracy in order to foreclose its radically egalitarian thrust. (Norval, 1996: 279)

This being so, the role of IDASA and other such groups served to “educate” and socialise important elements of society into such an understanding of democracy, and at the same time help construct the economic “limits of the possible”. One critical observer on “democracy promotion” and “education” projects noted that:

[D]emocracy promotion policies have been based on one form of democracy, presented as if it is the only form. This is not presented as a moral choice, nor is it treated as if it is a claim about what democracy consists of. Instead, it is presented as a given, beyond debate ... Not only this, but the model is one of low-intensity democracy, a model that happens to suit [capitalist] economic interests far more than would any rival democratic model that involved more extensive notions of what democracy means. (Smith, 2000: 80)

One can see this graphically, for example, in the conference that was held in 1993 in partnership with the Aspen Institute. According to reports, “the conference’s common thread was that SA’s best objective would be growth and employment creation through international trade”; that a post-apartheid Pretoria must “show SA to be an attractive base for multi-nationals”; and that “instant gratification is neither possible nor wise” (*Business Day*, 3 May 1993). The Aspen Institute itself claims to “enhance the quality of leadership through informed dialogue about the timeless ideas and values of the world’s great cultures” and “aims to define issues”, “propose agendas” and “develop policy options” (“Aspen Institute”, <http://www.aspeninst.org>). Following Gramsci, defining issues and dressing them up as “common sense” — “timeless ideas” — is an integral part of the construction of hegemony and the emasculation of alternative viewpoints.

This process was to continue post-1994, only now advocacy for social change (within a particular order) was largely abandoned, confirming the observation that “economic development compatible with the ‘free market’ rather than social organisation for social change becomes the dominant item on the funding agenda” once the immediate crisis is over (Petras, 1998: 47). Indeed, this strategy can be identified as continuing to construct constituencies and exert influence within civil society on a long-term basis as part of a project to build up a hegemonic social order

in South Africa. Only by doing so will the historic bloc that is currently in formation be consolidated. Thus, the dissemination of ideology in favour of the neo-liberal project has continued unabated in the post-apartheid era. In this period, IDASA has continued to propagate the idea that keeping the people away from the real levers of power, i.e., the economy, is a “good thing”. The opening issue of its glossy magazine *Siyaya!* demanded that “power over the economy [be invested] in non-elected bodies” in order to “insulate total public spending and deficit levels from public pressure”. Furthermore, following the Gramscian notion regarding the emasculation of alternative voices, the government should consider “bringing potential critics and opponents on board [as this] could lower the probability of policy reversal” (Gelb and Bethlehem, 1998: 16 and 17). IDASA’s advice further reveals the role the organisation plays and played as an organic intellectual grouping furthering polyarchy and neo-liberalism. The call for a detachment of economic policy-making from democratic input indeed closely shadows a line of thinking within the hegemonic discourse — a point highlighted by an elite economist who claimed that South Africa was “too democratic for the economy’s good” (Jac Laubscher, group economist at Gensec Asset Management, quoted in *Cape Times*, 30 October 1998).

Previously, Slabbert had frequently intervened in the transition period to define the “limits of the possible” and promote “the consensus”. For example, in his book *The Quest for Democracy: South African in Transition*, Slabbert claimed that a hegemonic consensus existed at the elite level around two principles, namely “contingent consent” and “bounded uncertainty”, i.e., liberal democracy and constitutionality. The purpose of his book was to establish the “rules of the game” and then assert that negotiations must be left to the elites of the National Party and the ANC and its partners. The reasoning behind such a position was made clear by Slabbert himself when he suggested that “one of the most daunting challenges facing [a future interim government] is to protect the new political space created by negotiations from being used to contest the historical imbalances that precipitated negotiations in the first place” (Slabbert, 1992: 90). Now, if what “precipitated negotiations” were the gross social, economic and political “historical imbalances” that apartheid exacerbated/created, Slabbert is clearly advocating the defence and isolation of the “new political space” (occupied by both the old and new elite) from the influence of the masses. In short, Slabbert was pushing an extremely elitist agenda, ensuring “status quo policies with a little redistribution here and there, but no attack upon the fundamental contradictions and constraints in the society” (Cheru, 1992: 33).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Democracy promotion of a particular type has taken place within the wider context of an increasingly integrated world economy where the ongoing hegemonic ideology — neo-liberalism — demands a profound harmonisation and deepening of fiscal and political policies across the globe. The move in supporting “democracy” in the South instead of outright authoritarianism is of profound importance, and such an

analysis tends to somewhat undermine the celebratory rhetoric that surrounds the democratic transitions that Africa encountered as the bi-polar world came to an end. This is not to say that in many cases a move to polyarchy represented a considerable advance of the popular masses — the end of the apartheid regime is but one glaring example of this progress. But in South Africa, as in Africa generally, the democratic transition has focused on:

the notion of holding of free and fair elections rather than on the broader political, cultural and institutional transformation connected with a process of democratisation. There is no doubt that holding free and fair elections is an important element in a transition to democracy. But as an isolated event the election should only be the tip of the democratic iceberg. If it is not closely connected with deeper rooted changes, it does not mean very much. (Sorensen, 2000: 298)

Yet within South Africa, the anti-apartheid struggle was often mobilised around a deconstruction of the existing political and economic architecture that supported the minority regime. A broader vision of inclusive popular democracy was hence articulated as an alternative organising principle for any new dispensation. Such visions, however, threatened to subvert the role and position of the South African elite and their privilege and power. An intense campaign to “educate” and re-direct this movement was embarked upon by the elite and organic intellectuals within South African civil society, as the elite-pacting of the transition got under way. The case of IDASA in this process is illuminating for our analysis, for this institution was one of the higher profile elements of the “change industry” and enjoyed considerable prestige and media presence as a trusted “honest” broker. However, using the more critical analysis that we have crafted, IDASA can be seen in a very different light, and one that contradicts the usual version of events in the historiography of the South African transition. Indeed, far from simply being a disinterested promoter of common sense “universal standards”, IDASA was — and continues to — promote a very particular type of democracy that cannot be divorced from the wider social and economic organisation of South African society and from the context of a globalised world (Taylor, 2001). Paradoxically, IDASA’s — and other members of the “change industry’s” — role in helping shape the terms of the debate carries with it contradictions inherent in the polyarchical system, which mean that the future is not as closed as may appear. This is because:

by its very nature, [polyarchy] is designed to prevent any interference with the workings of the free market, including state redistributive policies ... which could counterbalance the tendency in capitalism toward a concentration of income and productive resources. The neo-liberal model therefore generates the seeds of social instability and conditions propitious to the breakdown of polyarchy. (Robinson, 1996: 382)

Though it is true that large numbers from the ranks of the popular movements have been recruited “into a web of institutional relations, systems and practices tailored to serve the interests of ... the capitalist class”, and that this has “curtail[ed] the ANC’s ability to redistribute opportunity, infra-structural resources, access to production activity and institutional power in favour of the popular classes”, (Marais, 1998: 96) this actuality is not an event but an ongoing process. Those who favour a

more progressive programme must seek out the space created by the contradictions in neo-liberalism to advance a concrete counter-hegemonic agenda (Robinson, 1996: 382). It is only by doing this that the possibility will arise for the hopes of the majority of South Africa's people to be potentially satisfied.

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