Article

Transformation of political parties in Africa today

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> So fundamental are political parties to the operation of modern politics that their role and significance are often taken for granted. As political machines organised to win elections and wield government power, parties came into existence only in the early nineteenth century. Now, however, they are virtually ubiquitous. The only parts of the world in which they do not exist are those where they are suppressed by dictatorship or military rule. Quite simply, the political party is the major organising principle of modern politics. Whether they are the great tools of democracy or sources of tyranny and repression, political parties are the vital link between the state and civil society, between the institutions of government and the groups and interests that cooperate within society. Nevertheless, parties and party systems have increasingly come under attack… (Heywood 2002:73)

When one considers the problems of Africa today and the prospects for realising and consolidating democracy, it is by no means obvious that the question of political parties should be high on the agenda for consideration. Certainly, the centrality attributed to political parties in the quotation from Heywood is not easily applicable to Africa, with or without the qualification made for periods of military rule.

The situation some 30 or 40 years ago would not have been the same because many political parties, or congresses, had been crucially involved in the process of achieving and consolidating independence, or still enjoyed legitimacy. In addition, many of the adverse economic conditions in the world at large that have affected African exports especially harshly, had not yet started to bear their full impact, although the problem was always there. That was also a period when a particular model of the African political party was in vogue, a party depicted as representing the nation as a whole. This

was exemplified by slogans like 'CPP is Ghana, Ghana is CPP', CPP being the Convention People's Party. Or, later, 'SWAPO is the nation, the nation is SWAPO', this being the South West African People's Organisation of Namibia. In Kenya one had 'Kenya African National Union *ni mama na baba*', meaning KANU is the mother and father of the nation.[1] And a slogan to be found on a wall in South Africa declares 'ANC is the People!' (African National Congress/Mayibuye 1994). The problems with this model were not always evident, partly because the leaders of many of the parties propounding these views were then popular in their countries and enjoyed prestige on the continent.

The National Liberation Movement (NLM) 'model'

Many of the political parties that came to rule African states were originally constituted as liberation movements. It will be argued that this predisposed them towards a particular type of politics, self-conception and relationship with other organisations and the people or nation as a whole. It is a model of organisation that is now in crisis. Many of the assumptions of the colonial and immediate post-colonial period, which held them together, are no more.

The reasons for the rise of nationalist movements and their unifying quest in Africa were intimately connected to the overlordship of colonial authorities. As that experience has receded in the public consciousness, the reasons for unity behind a national liberation movement have had less resonance. But generalised references to the crisis in the national liberation model in existing literature remain insufficiently specified, partly because the nature of NLMs, as such, has not been adequately theorised. While important writers like Fanon and Cabral have intervened on questions, tendencies and strategies of NLMs, this has not been to characterise what a NLM is or the range of features it may possess (Fanon 1963, Cabral 1979).

But this lack of specificity in references to the concept 'national liberation movement' may also be because there is a *great deal of variety within the set of organisations that fall under the heading NLM*, variations not adequately accounted for in some of the literature. From this failure to note or adequately consider the consequence of the variations, there is sometimes a tendency to point to alleged inevitability in their trajectory and their inherent or invariable characteristics.

Considerable variety under the label NLM

The phrase 'national liberation movement' encompasses a range of organisations on every continent, with a variety of ideological orientations

ranging from the Communist- led movements through a number of versions of nationalism influenced or uninfluenced by Marxism or other forms of socialism. Some of these are well-established and mature organisations, existing from the early years of this century, as in the case of the ANC. Some were formed only a decade or so before attaining independence. Some have passed through a variety of phases of open organised politics while others, from their earliest stage, were forced to work underground and then embarked on armed resistance. Some organisations, therefore, had little experience of open organised activity and have seen participation in a liberation movement as a primarily secretive or military activity. There is no inherent or inevitable strategic or tactical path, for the route adopted in struggling for liberation has been mainly determined by the context in which the resistance movement arose. This context has been primarily framed by the nature of the specific colonial power.

Likewise, the social base of these movements has varied, some having for most of their existence a small, primarily elitist base and leadership; others a more working class or peasant membership, generally with an elite leadership. Ideologically, these movements have been united by anti-colonialism or anti-imperialism and in some cases adopted radical postures of a variety of kinds.

Some have engaged in popular struggle, that is, mass activity and organisation, others have primarily related to institutional structures as negotiators or petitioners. Some of these NLMs have developed extensive organisational structures; many have not and have had a fairly loose relationship between leaders and followers.

Some, during the pre-independence period, have related to or been in alliance with social movements. In other cases, there have been few social movements other than the liberation movement itself, assuming it is legitimate to characterise a liberation movement as a species of social movement (Younis 2000:22). The tendency in the pre-liberation period has been for liberation movements to encourage activities of other social movements since their activity has tended to supplement the pressure that the NLM has exerted on the colonial authority.

The extent of diversity in the character of NLMs does not preclude speaking of a model. There are elements in common as well as significant differentiation. These must be identified since the commonalities and the differences qualify the potential trajectory of these movements. They indicate what factors, if brought into play or more forcefully brought into

play, can impact on the outcome of contestation over the democratic (or undemocratic) character of these movements. Far from outcomes being inevitable, it will be argued that they are by no means settled in many cases, and possibly not settled anywhere.

NLMs driven by an inexorable anti-democratic logic?

Roger Southall, in a significant and wide-ranging contribution, includes consideration of national liberation movements, though he presents a somewhat rigid and teleological notion of their character. In particular, he argues that there is an inherent and inevitable anti-democratic and authoritarian trajectory. Under the heading 'Liberation *against* democracy?' he writes:

> [A] developing crisis of democracy in southern Africa is characterised by an increasingly explicit clash between an authoritarian culture of national liberation and participatory democracy… (Southall 2003:30)

> [T]he logic of national liberation struggle itself … appears reluctant (or unable) to engage with democracy, whose own logic it had subsumed. Or, in other words, once having attained national independence, the inexorable logic of national liberation seems to be to suppress rather than to liberate democracy. (Southall 2003:31)

The 'authoritarian logic of the phenomenon came to greater fruition', Southall argues, in the Southern African states where colonial and apartheid resistance was strong and 'much greater determination was involved (not least in the form of *armed struggle*)'. The authoritarian logic becomes 'wholly dominant' where there is no struggle for hegemony. This, he contends, is the situation in Zimbabwe, as opposed to South Africa and to a lesser extent in Namibia (Southall 2003:32, italics in the original).

His argument is that an inherent tendency towards authoritarianism may be mitigated but is nevertheless inherent in the assumptions and character of these organisations. The argument in the present contribution acknowledges that elements of the NLM model, or what is broadly held in common among a variety of such movements, may become antagonistic to democracy. But the emphasis on the NLM as 'the nation' coexists with the NLM also being the bearer of democracy, the organisation providing the first opportunity to vote. Obviously cynics would say that it is often the last opportunity to vote, *but that democratic component is also part of the model of the NLM* and this is clearly seen in the South African conception of a national democratic revolution (NDR).

The main problem with Southall's formulation is that the notion of inexorable logic seems to override the notion of contestation, indicated by his limited references to hegemonic battles. Even where some tendencies are not contested at the moment, or openly contested within a ruling party, that is not to say they are uncontested in some less visible form, or that they will not be contested some time in the future. Politics in an environment unfavourable to democratic contestation often means these are semi-underground or manifested in other, less obvious modes.

Most NLMs comprise a variety of tendencies and cannot be assumed to simply succumb to an authoritarian logic. They are more likely to struggle over the organisation's direction as well as the relationship that the organisation, prior to and after attaining power, has with other organisations outside its camp. That may well be the case with the ANC today.

None of this is to deny the existence of tendencies in the NLM model that present dangers, conditional as they may be. Some of these are discussed below.

The NLM model and pluralism

Mona Younis defines national liberation movements in relation to their character as specific types of social movements:

> National liberation movements are social movements in amplified form: the disaffected (those compelled to act) are virtually entire 'nations', using not merely extra-institutional means but anti-institutional action for a political objective that is nothing short of the elimination of the existing state. The convergence of multiple movements of workers, peasants, women, students, professionals and others produce this collective action on a grand scale. The clarity of the collective grievance renders the convergence of disparate class forces possible, generally over several generations: freedom from domination by a population that sets itself apart on the basis of national identification. Conquest in the name of one nation stimulates an unprecedented convergence of classes within the other… (2000:22)

This definition, which has much to offer, also suggests why the NLM model tends to endanger pluralism. The notion of a NLM as *representing the nation* tends to lead to the treatment of other organisations as ancillary to that effort, or as temporary contributors to this national effort where they 'stand in' for an absent NLM or occupy terrain that will ultimately be occupied or fully occupied by the NLM itself. Once that happens the role of these other organisations is to exit from the stage of history, as happened

in the case of the UDF in South Africa, though admittedly through its own volition (Suttner 2003).

In line with this emphasis, the early years of African independence saw widespread clampdowns on organisations established on a regional or ethnic basis. There was a tendency in independent African states to see organisation outside the umbrella of the NLM as divisive and even aiding enemies of national unity. And in many situations this was the case, with connections between external forces and regional parties, especially in a country like Congo/Zaire.

Moreover, in the name of building unity, various ethnic movements were suppressed and a variety of complex forms and identities in which people saw themselves were not allowed to find expression in the political arena. There was an overriding conception of the nation, embodied by the NLM/ruling party. That was the atmosphere within which most NLMs were formed, whether they attained power through negotiations, arms or peaceful hand-over.

Similar processes developed over time in the ANC. Pixley ka Isaka Seme, on the eve of the organisation's formation, advanced a counter-conception of the nation to that of the Union of South Africa. His version referred to a 'native union', a notion that at first embodied only African men (Seme 1972). Over the decades that followed, this conception of the nation was widened, but what is significant for our discussion is that the ANC presented itself as the bearer of a potential nationhood, realisable once apartheid was removed. Like FRELIMO, the ANC spent decades in an atmosphere intolerant of regionalism and ethnic difference; this, in addition to its absorbing Marxist-Leninist notions, led the ANC to converge with the NLM model, which stresses the need for a centralised, coordinating party.

National liberation movements also claimed, and received recognition as, the sole and authentic representative of particular peoples. There was some reason for this claim in the context of resisting apartheid and colonialism and colonial rulers' denying the vote. But what did this status signify after liberation when most NLMs won ensuing elections? The danger is that now some may have treated these elections as constituting a formal confirmation of what had already been earned, and seen themselves as already enjoying a right of representation that had been permanently conferred.

This quality of being the nation that was ascribed to or claimed by the parties that led countries to independence, became one of the bases on

which one-party states were advanced and opposition parties systematically suppressed. It also became one of the reasons why national liberation movements turned ruling parties were reluctant to consider exiting from government, as in contemporary Zimbabwe.

Characteristics of the process through which achievement of liberation was envisaged – the fixation on transfer of power

Another feature that may characterise liberation movements is their conception of power and transition. It is a model partly influenced by Marxism-Leninism, but may exist without that influence. It sees acquisition of power as *the* decisive and sometimes final moment when liberation is achieved. As Nkrumah put it, 'Seek ye first the political kingdom, and all else will follow'. The various liberation movements, pursuing armed struggle or peaceful handovers, all focused on a moment when power would be transferred. After this transfer a variety of things were to become possible, among them transformation and a better life.

This 'transfer of power' model has weaknesses. In the first place, power is only conceived of as a thing to be transferred from one set of people, holders of power, to another. More realistically, power should be viewed as a set of relations that need to be transformed (Poulantzas 2000:256-7). This is clear when one considers that upon having attained power, new governments have found themselves tied into a whole range of complex relationships with a variety of centres of power that need to be transformed, challenged or counteracted in order to ensure that democracy is consolidated and transformative goals achieved (Abrahamsen 2000:xiv). The second weakness is that all activities performed by various organisations prior to that moment tend to be viewed instrumentally, as contributing to or delaying the arrival of that moment of decisive rupture with what has been. These activities are not seen as having value in themselves but rather see the importance of these organisations and activities as transitory and even coming to an abrupt end at the moment of 'transfer'.

Writers like Mamdani and Neocosmos have argued that there is a tendency for the victory of liberation movements to signal the defeat of popular movements. Their argument is based on the conversion of popular nationalism, which they see as manifested primarily through social movements, into 'state nationalism', which arises when the NLM becomes the ruling party and controls the state. Neocosmos argues that this is happening in South Africa (Mamdani 1990; Neocosmos 1998).

The parties of independence prove unsustainable as governments

Over the decades that followed independence, many of these political parties were overthrown by military coups, sometimes followed by further coups, returns to civilian rule and again reversions to military rule, especially so in the case of Nigeria. Sometimes the original political parties of independence have remained on the political stage but changed fundamentally. Some of the imagery of the earlier stages of liberation may be used but the values are quite different. Thus, the run-up to the Ghanaian election of 1996 saw Jerry Rawlings and his wife cast 'as the embodiment of Nkrumah and his wife' (Sandbrook 2000:118).

In other cases, the original political parties have been displaced electorally, but the forms that new political coalitions have taken have generally been unstable and short-lived, created mainly to remove the leadership of the independence period. The alternative to the discredited political parties has, unfortunately, also tended to acquire similar disrepute as in the case of the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) of Frederick Chiluba in Zambia (Tordoff 2002:134 and Chapter 5 generally. But for a different situation in Ghana, see Sandbrook's argument 2000:117ff).

The extent to which opposition parties or movements can escape the ignominy of the parties they replace is qualified by the tendency for many of these new governments to include disaffected elements from the previous ruling party. This is currently the case in Kenya, where a number of former president Daniel arap Moi's previously close associates are part of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government. Whether these ministers are up to the task of opening up democratic politics remains to be seen. On the other hand, the absorption of some former government leaders is a necessary stabilising factor in some cases, helping to consolidate democratic development by virtue of the enduring support they may still command.

But party formation based on this type of limited political agreement or expediency rather than on values and principles often means that substantive political and economic transformation issues take a back seat. The displacement of one type of presidentialism has often led to its replacement by a similar form of presidential centralisation. Parties of this type have also tended to have very loose membership systems and organisational structures, or have been a coalition of disparate groups. They have often been uneasily united behind a president they hope will be in a position to dispense various rewards.

Many of the parties of independence were mass organisations and much

of what they achieved was through mass involvement that went beyond political parties *(*Mamdani 1990; Neocosmos 1998; Southall 2003). On attaining power, however, the masses were demobilised and even the membership of the parties came to play less and less a role in the decision-making processes of the party, and in the country's politics in general.

Furthermore, the problems of government requires expertise and there was, from early on, a tendency to centralise decisions, first in the cabinet without much party input, and later in the presidency. The presidency tended in many of these countries to cede questions of policy to so-called experts. The consequence was that the political party, as the engine for reconstruction, was displaced by the presidency, which again ceded these decisions to non-political experts (Tordoff 2002:120ff), something that is replicated in many ways by the interventions of international agencies.

In some ways the functions of the political party as engine has been collapsed into the state. Instead of the political party transforming the state, the practices and modalities of state functioning have transformed the character of the political party or the revolution it had in mind (Tordoff 2002:115).

End of the Cold War: opening democratic possibilities?

The end of the Cold War created new openings for the establishment of democracy on the continent (Olukoshi 1998:15). Cold-War rivalry had often meant that one or other superpower would unqualifiedly support certain allied states in Africa, irrespective of their record in regard to democracy. With the end of the Cold War, there were 'less pressing geo-political reasons for obstructing domestic pressures for political reform and almost unconditionally propping up unaccountable "client" regimes on the African continent' (Olukoshi 1998:15).

The now unchallenged West looked afresh at the problems of Africa, leading to the application of various conditionalities different to those of the Cold War. These included demands for certain democratic rights to be respected, free elections to be held and a clamping down on state spending. The restriction of state spending was said to be part of curbing corruption and patronage, but it also entailed limits on social expenditure. There is no doubt that the new conditions created a measure of space for democratic campaigning and the emergence of various democratic movements and organisations. But the way that opening was used had limitations and created fresh problems:

- A particular model of democracy, favouring a specific and limited conception of representative democracy, curbed popular participation.
- Erected multi-partyism, as the be-all and end-all of democracy, limited its range and quality and tended to rely on formal conceptions of democracy.
- The 'wave' inaugurated by the end of the Cold War put the questions arising from democracy within the context of a series of conditionalities, some of which led to a qualification of the operation of democratic rule; that is, they made leaders more accountable to donors than to their people (Olukoshi 1998:19; Sandbrook 2000:95). It also meant the key element of a government's power, its control over the budget, was no longer in its hands but subject to the conditions of donors and lenders. The dissatisfaction this has provoked may, in fact, endanger the consolidation of democracy (Abrahamsen 2000).

These new conditions of the late 1980s and 1990s saw a 'wave' of democratic transitions, the collapse of many military governments or the transformation of military rulers into elected rulers, noted in *The New Plan for Africa's Development* (NEPAD 2001: paragraph 44). The 'wave' was of varying impact, in terms of the quality of the democracy inaugurated and its development and sustainability, but it was nevertheless an opening, a break with an authoritarian past.

Irrespective of the quality of the democracy, it has not proved to be sustainable and has not changed the basic weaknesses of the party system. Many military rulers and former leaders of one-party states proved adept at surviving the demands of multi-partyism and reinventing themselves as elected leaders of multi-party democracies. At the same time, where there was 'regime change', the conditions under which new parties or coalitions of groupings came to power has not created the social forces, or array of powers, that can break the thrall of the dominant type of politics. It continues to exclude meaningful popular participation but also, in most cases, retains the distribution of spoils as a fundamental basis of African politics (Allen 1995:301-20; Sandbrook 2000:95).

In summary, the problems deriving from this post-independence history as a whole, including the post-Cold War period, have tended to be:

- The lack of democracy (or democracy having a quality that is very imperfect) and the continued emergence of regimes characterised by spoils and patronage. In the absence of mobilised membership of parties

and other organisations, it is easier for spoils politics to take root as the mode for gaining and entrenching power, leading to developed systems of patronage that take precedence over other relationships, such as loyalty to a party or even the constitution of a country. Furthermore, since the command and distribution of resources is dependent on political power, *any force attempting to challenge this, needs to develop its own resource base*.

- This is connected to political instability, a sense that there is nothing in the character of any specific government or party's rule that should make the people or institutions like the military want it to endure. This relates partly to the way in which many governments have come to power, in doubtful elections or during economic crisis, social distress, and the like. The absence of strong organisations of civil society also makes military intervention an option less likely to encounter serious resistance (Abrahamsen 2000).

- Few African states are on a sustainable growth path, and where there is growth there is still an absence of development transforming people's lives in any substantial and positive way. Moreover, in many states there have been recent internal and sometimes external wars and some endure to this day.

- De-ideologisation and, connected to this, personalisation of politics or political rule in the presidency, which goes along with overall centralisation. Who can say what ideas distinguished the presidency of Chiluba in Zambia? There is little debate, if any, inside political parties and in the society at large on public issues, a fact that cannot be separated from the overall discrediting of political parties and cynicism about the political process.

- The conditionalities imposed by donor countries, and conceptions of good governance, have often stressed steps against corruption and the control of unauthorised distribution of state resources. One of the resultant impacts has been to create something of a crisis in the spoils system, and make increasingly unstable the basis on which governance has rested for some time. Desirable as it is to remove that foundation, it needs to be supplemented with means to supply a state resource base that can meet the general welfare needs that are dealt with in a very partisan way through patronage. Structural adjustment programmes that set limits on welfare spending exacerbate this problem.

Part of a wider crisis in the world at large

Insofar as we identify this as a crisis of political parties it is a crisis not found in Africa alone. It is, however, more acute on this continent because the resources available to provide alternatives are not present as they are in Europe. Despite this, 'political parties are in decline or crisis all over the world. This is not to suggest that the reasons for crisis are the same in better-established party systems, but many of the symptoms are similar. There is increasing electoral apathy, and low voter participation, and strong evidence that citizens are increasingly disenchanted with their political systems ...' (Faulks 1999:143).

   Hague and Harrop write:

> The question for early in the twenty-first century is whether we are witnessing a 'crisis of parties' and the export to the rest of the democratic world of the American format of weak, decentralised organisations. Old-style communist parties have virtually disappeared, social democratic parties are no longer fired by ideology, politicians increasingly communicate with electors through television, party membership is falling (and ageing), voters' loyalties are weakening and party income increasingly depends on state subsidies rather than members' subscriptions. No longer do parties seem to be energetic agents of society, seeking to bend the state towards their members' interests... (2001:168)

Many political parties that started with high membership participation now no longer have this and, in many cases, actively discourage it and seek centralisation in the leadership, as in Blair's 'remaking' of the British Labour Party. The average member of most political parties plays little role in the formulation of policies and even senior members may find their role diminished. The leader tends to take policy decisions without internal democratic procedures and involvement. The Oxford academic, Ross McKibbin, while believing there 'was always a plausible argument for intervention in Iraq', sees dangers in the way in which the views of the Parliamentary Labour Party in Britain were simply overridden:

> Were the Parliamentary Labour Party able to exercise any real oversight of the government it would almost certainly have been much harder for Blair. Throughout the last six years backbenchers have repeatedly found themselves driven by the whips into supporting policies they had no part in framing, and have been further hobbled by the belief many of them have that they owe their seats to the Prime Minister... (2003:4)

The development of the media has tended to lead many politicians to appeal

over the heads of their membership to the public at large. There is a positive element in this in that any political party in power must relate not only to their membership but also to the nation as a whole. But the primary link between leadership and membership is tending to be severed through practising media politics.

No easy solution, but rich heritage

Having pointed to all these negative factors, it is important, as a corrective, to note that throughout all the dark years of military rule and other forms of suppression of democracy in Africa, there has remained a powerful tradition of democracy, manifested in various types of popular movements in numerous countries and also in a democratic intellectual tradition.[2] There is not an absence of thinking and democratic aspirations on the continent. That is part of what must be built on.

But the road towards democratisation, including transformation of political parties, is not something that can be mapped out here, in a programmatic sense of how it can be achieved against the obstacles presently in place. That is dependent on the specific conditions of distinct countries.

What is addressed, instead, are two potential paradigms of democracy that represent broad alternatives. One is an acknowledged aspiration or practice in many countries of the world, and the other may entail a deeper and broader concept of democracy that some would consider utopian but has been put into partial practice at certain times in certain countries. This outline will be developed with a view to examining its implications for political parties, what type of transformation or creation of what type of parties is required under each paradigm. It will also ask what relationships, or types of relationships, with party members and other members of society, and other organisations outside of the party, need to – or may – be developed.

It will be argued that each paradigm represents a potential trajectory, more or less radical in its implications for the type of democracy and transformation that is developed. It will also represent something in terms of popular involvement. None of this is irrelevant to current debate. The NEPAD founding document states, among the factors indicating a 'new political will of African leaders', that 'democracy and state legitimacy have been redefined to include accountable government, a culture of human rights and popular participation as central elements' (2001:paragraph 43).

Undisclosed premises in such statements need to be unpacked to establish what these terms may or may not mean. After that, implications of this discussion for South Africa will be considered.

Paradigm One: 'good governance'

The first paradigm broadly coincides with prevailing notions of 'good governance' and refers basically to representative democracy, the holding of fair elections with regularity, within stipulated periods. Nowadays these elections ought to be validated by an independent electoral commission. All must vote, there must be no vote-rigging, voter intimidation or buying of votes. This provides an overall atmosphere of legitimacy over government and the process of governance. The NEPAD foundation document refers to these qualities as:

> [G]lobal standards of democracy, which core components include political pluralism, allowing for the existence of several political parties and workers' unions, fair, open, free and democratic elections periodically organised to enable the populace [to] choose their leaders freely. (2001:see paragraph 79)

The constitutionalist road is buttressed by a variety of institutions aimed to avoid corruption and other ills, such as independent courts, policing and prosecuting authorities, ombudspersons or public protectors, and a variety of other entrenched mechanisms aimed at monitoring compliance with constitutional rule (NEPAD 2001:see paragraph 83).

Under this system, a specific type of party tends to evolve. Membership is sometimes very large but once there have been elections, the elected leaders are on centre stage and the membership and the masses in general are expected to step back. The leadership is then charged with ensuring delivery. The masses vote and wait to see whether their dreams are realised through the government providing a better life, or whether they are condemned to disappointment. In either case, their role is passive.

In the process of government there is a tendency towards centralisation, first in the party itself, but then in the government and especially in the cabinet and the leader. The overall tendency in Africa is towards presidentialism, more or less benign, with the displacement of all other institutions, party or government (as seen above in the case of the British Labour Party). The input and importance of the party and its membership is in general downgraded. It is not expected to do a great deal in between elections, though it tends to be resuscitated at election time, ideally, since it sometimes does not survive this passivity very well. As in Western

countries, with the development of a variety of types of media, there is also a tendency to rely on these to communicate rather than through party structures.

Such systems tend to be very centralised and internal debate limited, and bureaucratism in general, including in the party, tends to grow. All this feeds into the process of de-ideologisation, where goals and policies are supposedly accepted by all in the fold, and only questioned by those who have 'suspect' motives. This problem is compounded by the conditionalities of structural adjustment programmes. Thus, Sandbrook writes of '"issueless politics" in which competing parties differ very little on policy; and the secret and top-down process by which foreigners negotiate conditional agreements on policy and institutional reforms' (Sandbrook 2000:95).

Policy decision tends to be in the hands of 'experts' and without inputs from the party. William Tordoff shows how this was the case decades ago in Algeria (2002:114), as it was in the development of South Africa's Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macroeconomic policy in the mid-1990s.

In this model, the party and government tend to have a suspicious attitude to formations outside their own hegemony. Notions of pluralism, insofar as they are nowadays part of political discourse, tend to be restricted to multiparty democracy. On the evidence thus far, the reference to pluralism in the NEPAD document (paragraph 79, quoted above), is likely to have this restricted meaning.

This is not to say that multiparty democracy is unimportant. It is, in fact, crucial in light of the apparent collapse of the national liberation model. Multiparty democracy means that no ruling party can represent the nation as a whole. There are distinct interests that need other forms of representation, by opposition parties and other types of organisation, depending on the interests or identities seeking outlets. This means all citizens are provided with a formal vehicle for their political expression. But it is also an important factor in promoting legitimisation and consolidation of democracy.

The prospects for viable multiparty systems are inauspicious at the moment. All parties face difficulties but new opposition parties more so. In Ghana, where there is a tradition of two-party contestation not found in many other states, Sandbrook nevertheless notes:

> Financial weakness translated into meagre or non-existent formal party organisation. None of the opposition parties in 1995 maintained offices in all the regions or most of the districts. At the grassroots, these parties

were represented, if at all, by volunteers in makeshift offices or private homes. Only the governing NDC [National Democratic Congress] had offices in all ten regions and in over 90 per cent of the constituencies... Even the governing NDC, however, exhibited organisational problems, in this case springing from the party's origins as a vehicle built around its leader... (2000:119)

Participatory democracy tends to have some place in some systems as a form of corporatism, where representatives of certain sectors, like labour, may interact with government over certain issues or within certain forums, as in the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) in South Africa.

Paradigm Two: combining representative and popular democracy

This paradigm may not be found anywhere in the world today, though it is not necessarily utopian. It acknowledges the historic gain of achieving representative democracy after authoritarian rule or apartheid or colonial rule, but it seeks more. It is oriented to deepening democracy inside and outside the party by broadening its scope and the range of participating actors. The party is not conceived purely or primarily as an electoral machine but continuously in action in regard to elections and other activities, within party structures but also in relation to other organisations.

This model envisages moving beyond representative democracy through institutionalising participatory democracy by providing for organs of civil society and various representative bodies outside of government to interact with policy-makers. It encourages or at least does not discourage the development of direct democracy or organs of popular power. This notion of popular action is possibly included in some of the formulations of NEPAD, for example, when appealing to the peoples of Africa: 'The present initiative is an expression of the commitment of Africa's leaders to translate the deep popular will into action' (2001:see paragraph 53).

By popular or direct power, or popular democracy, one is speaking about something protected by the constitution but outside of constitutional structures. It refers to popular, self-empowering action by ordinary people. They may act as branches of a political party; they may act quite outside that party. They may fall under the hegemony of that party; they may fall outside that hegemony and may be in opposition to it. Examples of such popular power or direct self-empowerment can be found in South Africa of the 1980s, in the experience of the UDF (United Democratic Front) and other popular

organs of the time (Neocosmos 1998; Morobe 1987; Good 2002; Suttner 2003).

The question of popular power is part of addressing the question of sustaining or consolidating democracy. While various checks and balances and constitutional watchdogs are crucial components, popular involvement in politics is also an important way of ensuring that democracy does not go off track. Insofar as there is mass involvement, it is harder for spoils politics and patronage to take root or it is easier to break their hold. If patronage depends on a personal, though unequal relationship, active mass involvement reduces this to a more limited range of actors. Continuous mass involvement in politics means that the process of delivery is 'owned' and driven by the people. Through participatory democracy they may agitate for resources, help identify sites for reconstruction programmes, or be part of the process of their maintenance.

In this second model, party relations to civil society and social movements tend to be different from the first model, wherein the party usually seeks a monopoly or resists interacting constructively with organisations outside of its sway. This model encourages that social movements be formed on the basis of a variety of interests, some of which cannot be adequately embraced through a political party. While members of a political party may be hegemonic in a social movement, this model also recognises the right of independent or oppositional social movements to play a role in realising democracy. Indeed, their playing that role may be one of the conditions for consolidating a sustainable democracy.

'Playing a role' is an intentionally ambiguous statement. On the one hand defending that right is part of pluralism. But the extent to which such movements help to consolidate democracy depends on what they do. There is a recent trend in South Africa where social movements have emerged whose degree of popular support may be variable or hard to assess or test, but which address important questions of concern to the public, such as rent, electricity, water and HIV/AIDS. At the same time, some of these movements engage in semi-insurrectionary activities. On the other hand, a tendency on the part of the NLM model to see itself as best able to represent all or most issues of concern to the public is not conducive to ensuring that all of these groups engage in a manner that helps to consolidate democracy.

A related question that arises is what is the status of this 'popular democracy paradigm', in the sense of asking whether it is intended for the whole of society, or only applicable to particular political parties? The

identity of certain political parties is tied purely to representative democracy and some would definitely not be attracted to direct democracy or popular power. They may well interact on the terrain of participatory democracy, insofar as that may entail engagement within constitutional structures or forums established for various interest groups to interact with government and other sectors of society, but that is different from activities outside of the constitutional order. That is not to say that popular power is unconstitutional (as indicated, it is constitutionally protected) but rather that these are structures that emanate in response to specific problems from below.

Furthermore, in this discussion, the concept of popular democracy is not purely directed at political parties, for direct democracy may well have application or primary application outside of political parties or organisations. That was the case with street committees and other organs of popular power in South Africa in the 1980s, and is still the case in communities that have organised such structures or maintained them after 1994.

As regards institutionalisation in this model, one is speaking of both representative and participatory democracy; the latter distinguished in my definition by the fact that it relates to constitutional organs or corporatist relations. Direct democracy, while enjoying constitutional protection, does not necessarily entail any form of institutionalisation, though it may relate to state organs for specific purposes, raising issues, supporting or opposing what government does.

Each concept of democracy implies a specific trajectory

These paradigms are different in the conceptions they entail but also in what their outcomes may be, the trajectory they imply, the potential results in terms of the type of democracy that may be instituted, and the character of transformation that may be realised. One's choice of paradigm must be influenced by how thoroughgoing or limited a transformation or democratic participation one wants to see. The second paradigm is a more radical model of democracy than the first, but not necessarily in terms of socio-economic transformation. There is no reason why it should necessarily lead to socialism. But if socialism were to be the outcome in either model (for both are compatible with versions of socialism), the first would produce a state-led, possibly more command-style socialism, while the second would be part of popular democratic empowerment, and represent both democracy and socialism 'from below'.

The question of gender equality is affirmed in the NEPAD document but it is by no means clear that there is a common understanding of what this might entail in terms of democratic transition and consolidation (Suttner 2001:9). In most parts of Africa there have either been very limited efforts to empower women to be active participants in politics or else active discouragement. In the second model it may be that women's empowerment is more easily realised in that the encouragement of social movements could include women's organisations (but for difficulties in ensuring viability of women's organisations, see Hassim 2003).

Implications for South Africa – the operation of the national liberation model, pluralism and the place of opposition parties

This contribution has sought to problematise notions of democracy and governance prevalent in some of the literature concerning Africa, and in documents like that of NEPAD. It has re-emphasised much that may be obvious, including that democracy has many meanings and that some are more conducive to popular participation than others. This problematisation is necessary, however, to understand the role and type of political parties required to effect one or other democratic and social trajectory.

But what are the prospects for realisation of these paradigms, especially the second? Insofar as there is democracy in Africa, it tends to conform to the first model. Certainly the prospects for popular involvement of the type outlined in the second model are not strong. Sudden re-emergence of democratic openings does not mean popular movements can easily occupy these.

The development of popular movements requires long-term, painstaking building of structures. It is only in South Africa in recent times, as far as I am aware, that development of popular movements of a variety of kinds has been on a substantial scale. The period since 1994 has, however, seen many of these organisations demobilised as well as lesser involvement of ordinary members of the ruling organisation, the ANC. This, it has been argued, is a continental trend (Mamdani 1990; Neocosmos 1998). There is not an absence of popular movements in other countries, but the tendency in recent times has been for these to have limited goals, for example, preventing Chiluba from serving a third term of office in Zambia, and not to endure beyond realisation of these objectives.

In writing this paper, the focus has been on Africa in general. But the issues discussed may raise important questions for South Africa. If the

'national liberation model' is in crisis in Africa, is this true of South Africa and if so what are the consequences? Furthermore, what is the quality of the democracy being inaugurated, given that it too is being overseen by a ruling organisation within the NLM tradition?

ANC 'representing the nation'

The national liberation model may not be in crisis for the ANC as a political organisation. Its viability may still relate to a reaction against a particular type of politics, often described as 'normalisation', or establishing a 'normal' political party where elections are everything and the organisation's popular character is nothing. While that may not be in crisis and remains part of the ANC's official self-characterisation, the notion is under stress. The ANC, in becoming the dominant force in government, now enters into modes and processes of operation that require different modalities from previous roles and relationships with its membership. And there are certainly people within and outside the ANC who would like this stress to be resolved through a break with the national liberation past, a shedding of its 'nostalgia'. The outcome cannot be predicted; it depends on factors within and outside the ANC.

But the relevance of the question whether the national liberation model is in crisis relates also to politics beyond the ANC and its membership. This is because the model depicts the national liberation movement as 'the nation', or as 'the nation in the process of becoming'. Earlier, the ANC, like other liberation movements, sought the status of the sole and authentic representative of the people of South Africa. Various international organisations accorded it such status, though generally to the Pan Africanist Congress as well.

Since 1994 the ANC has secured overwhelming electoral support. But here is where the dangers of the national liberation model may arise. The ANC, and for that matter no political party or organisation, can ever be equated with the nation, no matter how popular it may be or what electoral success it attains. There are interests within the nation that require representation outside of the national liberation movement model. The consolidation of democracy in South Africa is not the task of the ANC as majority party/organisation alone.

Pluralism and viability and strength of opposition parties

Beyond the need to recognise the right of existence and operation of social

movements, a substantial role in ensuring sustainability and legitimacy of democracy may relate to the existence and viability of opposition parties as vehicles for some people to express themselves politically. The Democratic Alliance (DA), currently the strongest opposition party, does provide an outlet for some people. They may make ambiguous statements about 'fighting back', capable of racist interpretations, but they remain a choice for many who might otherwise not be absorbed in the political system. That some new members are relatively right-wing is healthy in the sense that it is better they are voting DA rather than engaging in illegal resistance.

For similar reasons, in the nineteenth-century Cape, certain liberals advocated enfranchisement of black people, especially Coloureds, as a safeguard against warfare. William Porter, the attorney-general, once said: 'Now, for myself, I do not hesitate to say that I would rather meet the Hottentot at the hustings, voting for his representative, than the Hottentot in the wilds with his gun upon his shoulder' (Simons and Simons 1969:23). That goes for all the current opposition parties. *They provide a voice for segments of the citizenry that the ANC cannot be,* and that contributes to stability and the consolidation of democratic rule. Paradoxically, then, the consolidation of the democratic state for whose creation the ANC claims main responsibility, depends also on the viable existence of its opponents, no matter how repugnant the ANC may consider them.

But a body of theory has emerged related to 'consolidation of democracy' that impacts on these questions, demanding more than free and fair elections and multi-partyism, before it can be said that democracy has been consolidated (Huntington 1991; Horowitz 1991; Jung and Shapiro 1995). In applying their theories to South Africa, some of these writers have pointed to the 'necessity' of the ANC converting from a liberation movement to a political party, as if that transition amounts to a law of history (Jung and Shapiro 1995). This is necessary for 'normalisation' and is seen as part of the process of readying the state for the type of politics that, in the view of these theorists, constitutes democracy. The word democracy is equated with one version of the term, restricted to the representative paradigm.

A related concern is that the ANC is seen as representing a 'dominant party' with the unlikelihood of the 'circulation of elites', ie its defeat by any opposition party for the foreseeable future (Huntington 1991:267; Jung and Shapiro 1995; Giliomee and Simkins 1999; Southall 2003a:68). The weakness of the opposition, though not related to significant electoral irregularity, is seen as a basis for withholding accreditation of the South African transition

as a democracy that has been consolidated. Thus, Jung and Shapiro, though they write mainly of the period of the transitional constitution (1994-96) say there is a lack of a 'a system of opposition institutions that any healthy democracy requires' (1995:270; see also Giliomee and Simkins 1999: Introduction). Habib and Taylor, despite having quite different recommendations to these writers, also broadly accept the necessity of a strong opposition for democratic consolidation (2001).

Jung and Shapiro argue, more broadly, that:

> […] a functioning political opposition is essential to democracy. Although the notion of a loyal opposition finds its origins in monarchical rather than democratic politics, democratic systems rely on institutionalised oppositions, and it is doubtful that any regime could long survive as minimally democratic without them. If democratic politics is seen as requiring at a minimum that there be turnover of power among elites, then there must be sites for counter elites to form and campaign as potential alternative governments.

If there is not the possibility of an opposition being perceived as a 'realistic alternative to the government of the day' then the likelihood of turnover is diminished, and crises for the government are correspondingly more likely to become crises for the democratic regime (1995:272). Using a similar paradigm, Southall, under the heading 'The decline of opposition', writes of this absence of a powerful opposition signifying the hollowness of South African democracy' (2003a:68).

The combination of these factors, the continued existence of the ANC as a national liberation movement and the unlikelihood of a turnover of ruling organisation/party, is said to impede accountability and preclude the type of monitoring that is possible where an opposition is strong. Only then would it be possible to expose what a corrupt government may wish to hide and prevent the conflation of the ruling political organisation/party with the state (Jung and Shapiro 1995:272-3; Giliomee and Simkins 1999).

The requirements of a short-term potential 'circulation of elites' has no scientific basis as the exclusive or primary test for democratic consolidation. In particular, one can point in South Africa to the extensive constitutional machinery in support of democracy, much of it in advance of that found in countries from which many of the theorists emerge. In this regard, mention can be made among others of the Constitutional Court, the Public Protector, the Human Rights Commission and the Commission on Gender Equality, the Chapter 9 institutions of the South African constitution (Cachalia 2003. But for the opposite conclusions see Giliomee and Simkins 1999:xvii). In addition,

one has in South Africa, a 'public sphere' where citizens and organised civil society can express a diversity of opinions, indicating another important variable influencing the strength of democracy. The importance of this space is illustrated by the impact of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), organised around treatment of HIV/AIDS.

Let us be clear that the value sought is the preservation of democracy, the defence of constitutional rights so long denied under apartheid, the body of universal human rights, which are found in international instruments and enshrined in South Africa's constitution. For consolidation, there must be the establishment of 'rules of the game', which everyone abides by. This means trust in these institutions, and it appears that the current political order is providing a basis for trust in these institutions to develop. This is manifested in an important way in the willingness of the government to abide by decisions of the courts, even where these have been very inconvenient.

There is no doubt that not all of the constitutional institutions have worked perfectly. Sometimes decisions have been ineffectual and may have evaded what many see as critical issues. In some cases efficacy is impaired by budgetary conditions, or the place in government where the institution is located, and a variety of other factors. But most of these institutions, and particularly the Constitutional Court, have made a major contribution towards the consolidation of democracy in South Africa. It is doubtful whether any political party in opposition could have gone nearly so far in achieving this consolidation, precisely because opposition is not the same as professional scrutiny by bodies charged with specific constitutional tasks.

None of these points is aimed at denying the importance of a powerful opposition. But there are specific historical factors to which many authors seem curiously blind, factors that make the rise of a powerful opposition party unlikely at this moment, though by no means precluding its rise some time in the future. Apart from the PAC and sections of the newly formed Independent Democrats, most parties were either opposed to the creation of the contemporary democratic order, associated with apartheid, or had a very ambiguous relationship to the creation of democracy. Others were closely associated with extensive violence perpetrated in collusion with the apartheid regime in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Cachalia 2003).

These are undoubtedly factors that limit the appeal these parties have for an electorate that is overwhelmingly black and African, who remember

apartheid and who see the ANC as the bearer of democracy and liberation. There is no escaping that history, and no doubt that whatever mistakes the ANC may have made it will enjoy some patience and tolerance from the electorate because of what they have done before liberation and are doing now. Whatever the unevenness of delivery, a great many people believe their lives have changed fundamentally and accept that other changes will take time to be adequately implemented. This is not to suggest that elections are a 'racial or ethnic census', as some authors have claimed, with black people, mainly Africans, voting for the ANC and whites for the opposition (eg Giliomee and Simkins 1999:xviii,346). The IFP also derives almost all its support from Africans but it has a history that sets limits on the extent of its potential support.

Habib and Taylor have suggested that because of the importance of viable multi-party democracy and a potential change of ruling party, one needs to look elsewhere for the emergence of a credible opposition. They argue that electoral polls indicate overt dissatisfaction that could be the basis for a 'viable opposition'. It cannot be provided, however, by existing parties hamstrung by their inability 'to think outside of a racial prism' (2001:216,217). They see the possibility of a left-wing party formed mainly from COSATU and the SACP, which could challenge the ANC by voicing the real concerns of the poorest of the poor. They respond to critics who point to majority support for the tripartite alliance among COSATU members by saying that 'progressive scholars should not make a fetish of the majority viewpoint'(2001:221). Majorities may be wrong, they say.

That may be what some progressive scholars see from their vantage point. But at this moment, neither the SACP nor COSATU seems likely to heed this advice and leave the ANC in large numbers. In fact, many branch chairs and other officials of the ANC come from these organisations so that the ANC, despite some pronouncements against its alliance partners (ANC 2001; Moleketi and Jele 2002), also fears the electoral consequences of a split. That is the situation now but it does not mean it will remain that way forever.

Conclusion

The notion that democratic consolidation is dependent on the defeat of an incumbent government in some foreseeable future is a dogma, in that it chooses to select certain aspects of democratic life as the only test for sustainable democracy. Whether democracy is consolidated depends also on the extension and deepening of democracy, the involvement of people in

politics during and between elections, the viability of participatory democracy and the existence of autonomous organisations of civil society and organs of direct democracy.

This involvement in self-empowering organs of direct and participatory democracy is important not only as a manifestation of pluralism, but also as extending the range of meanings given to democracy and to the opening clause of the Freedom Charter, which reads 'The People Shall Govern!' One of the reasons why coups were so regular a feature in the early decades of independent Africa is that ordinary people were demobilised and felt no stake in the political system. It is important to create vehicles for popular participation going much wider than periodic voting. That is one of the most powerful ways of consolidating democracy in the broadest sense.

Beyond this, if consolidation refers partly to the public seeing themselves as stakeholders, socio-economic transformation is an important way of developing that sense. The extent to which excluded and marginalised sections of the population have their concerns addressed also impacts substantially on the sustainability of democracy. Undoubtedly, unemployment and inequalities are part of the wider obstacles that need to be confronted in maintaining this democratic order.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Caroline Kihato for providing me with this Kenyan slogan.
2. See the numerous publications produced by CODESRIA, SAPES, Nordic Africa Institute and other bodies. See discussion in Olukoshi (1998) and for democratic traditions in Nigeria, see Gasa (2000).

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