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Democratic Transition and Consolidation in South Africa: The Advice of 'the Experts'

A vast literature has appeared over the last two decades on democratic transition and subsequently on democratic consolidation. Sometimes both of these phrases are embraced under the word 'democratization'. The literature initially related to case studies of Eastern European and Latin American transitions from 'authoritarian' to 'democratic' rule. Subsequently other 'waves' of democratization, in particular in Africa, have been identified. Unfortunately there have been 'flaws' identified by these experts. In particular, while the transition to 'democracy', equated with multi-party elections, has occurred, in many cases, there has been reversion to one or other form of 'authoritarian' rule (Huntington, 1991). Indeed, many of the transitions in Africa have been reversed or have seen military regimes transform themselves into political parties. Electoral laws which favour them and conditions which make it difficult for opposition parties to generate resources (Sandbrook, 2000: 119), have often secured continuation of quasi-military rule.

The question is how to ensure not only that there is democracy, but also that it is sustainable. That is unobjectionable if it means ensuring there is no reversion to previous authoritarian rule, that democratic rights are protected and that freedom of political activity will be defended. But the current advisers have other concerns and criteria for assessment that are open to question. In their application to South Africa, various 'problems' have been identified. These include the failure of the African National Congress (ANC) to adapt completely to 'normal' politics and remain a liberation movement. (Jung and Shapiro, 1995: 268ff.).[1]

Another feature of the South African situation that has caused eyebrows to rise among the specialists is the character of the ANC as what is called a 'dominant party' and the unlikelihood for the foreseeable future of

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a 'circulation of elites', i.e. its defeat by any opposition party (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 (1994–6), say there is a lack of a 'a system of opposition institutions that any healthy democracy requires' (Jung and Shapiro, 1995: 270; see also Giliomee and Simkins, 1999: Introduction). Habib and Taylor (2001), despite having quite different solutions to these writers, also accept the broad position of the essential nature of a strong opposition for democratic consolidation.

Jung and Shapiro say, 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 counterelites to form and campaign as potential alternative governments. (Jung and Shapiro, 1995: 272)

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 (Jung and Shapiro, 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' (Southall, 2003a: 68).

The combination of these factors, the continued existence of the ANC as a national liberation movement (NLM) and the unlikelihood of a turnover of ruling organization/party, is said to impede accountability and preclude the type of monitoring that is possible where an opposition is strong (Jung and Shapiro, 1995: 272–3; Giliomee and Simkins, 1999: Introduction). Also, NLMs, as such, are said to have certain inherent features that make them inimical towards transparency and other values necessary for democratic consolidation (Southall, 2003b).

Science or Dogmatism?

Unfortunately much of this literature is in fact very dogmatic, not only current discussions but also the earlier theories on transition from authoritarian rule. Based on specific case studies, some theorists sought to erect from

what they saw as successful transitions, universal rules, which ought to be followed by those who want to achieve democracy (e.g. Huntington, 1991; Horowitz, 1991).

In reality, the notions of democracy and the character of the transitions envisaged could not be value neutral, and are based on deeply conservative ideas. In particular, the end product is meant to be a specific version of democracy, that of formal, representative democracy without substantial social and economic transformation or significant popular involvement. To avert the danger of these limitations being transcended, it was important that deals be struck by elites who would agree on common objectives. This would limit the outcome to what was reasonable or likely to be 'successful'. This would not be possible unless the process also avoided mass activity, that is, involvement of those who might wish to see substantial transformations that would fundamentally change their lives.

It was therefore essential to have, on the one side, an authoritarian government able to satisfy its constituency that the transition would not threaten fundamental features of their privileged existence and on the other a partner who, while trying to ensure elements of democratic change, also agreed on the limitations. The partner would ensure that the transition did not go beyond the bounds necessary to ensure 'success', thus containing or marginalizing the more radical elements among their leadership and followers (Jung and Shapiro, 1995).

The first reason why this literature is dogmatic is that it does not problematize democracy and equates it with a particular notion of the term (see especially Huntington, 1991; Horowitz, 1991). That is not opened to discussion, and as we know, has been incorporated in notions of 'good governance', which are now treated as conditions for international funding. Flowing from a limited range of case studies, general theories of transition to democracy, meaning this particular conception of democracy, are developed. Deviations from this script are seen as predestining certain transitions to failure while conformity is likely to ensure 'success'.

Some transitions have not conformed precisely to the rules but nevertheless enjoy substantial accreditation in the world at large and, as in the case of South Africa, cannot easily be dismissed by virtue of the 'flawed' manner in which they were achieved. But this is where the same body of theorists achieve a new lease of life, as theorists of democratic consolidation sometimes cynically referred to as 'consolidology' (Beetham, 2000). In this new situation they point to the dangers of South African democratic consolidation not being sustained by virtue of the dominant character of the ANC and the lack of an opposition capable of ousting the organization from power in the foreseeable future (see Giliomee and Simkins, 1999: Introduction). This is in breach of a fundamental rule derived from the theory of 'successful consolidation' (Huntington, 1991: Jung and Shapiro, 1995: 293).

The statement is of course totally dogmatic in that it chooses to select certain aspects of democratic life as the only test for democratic consolidation. In reality there are a number of features in the South African situation, which may in fact provide far greater protection of democratic rights and contribute far more towards consolidation than the existence of strong opposition. In particular, one can point to the extensive constitutional machinery in support of democracy, much of it in advance of that found in countries from which many of these theorists emerge. In this regard, it is worth mentioning, among others, 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 (see Cachalia, 2003. For exactly the opposite conclusions, see Giliomee and Simkins, 1999: Introduction, xvii).

In addition, one has in South Africa, a 'public sphere' where citizens and organized 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 that the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), organized around treatment of HIV/AIDS, has made.[2]

Dogmatism Regarding 'Inevitable' Transition of a Liberation Movement to a Political Party

This literature is also dogmatic in its understanding of 'normal' politics. The implicit assumption is that engaging in struggle is abnormal and that NLMs are characteristically vehicles of 'struggle politics'. This is depicted as representing an immature phase of human development, compared with 'normal politics' that is found in most of Western Europe and the USA. That immature politics must be put behind the NLMs in favour of conventional politics. The predominant western model is treated as the normative model. This means the masses are hardly involved, electorates are generally apathetic and apolitical and politics is mainly the concern of professional politicians. The electorate is left in peace between elections and resuscitated every four or five years when an election takes place.

NLMs often do not conform to this model although it is a mistake to see these movements as uniform. In reality many NLMs act very much like political parties in Western Europe and it is also true that some political parties have a popular character very different from that of the 'normal' model of politics. In this regard, the Brazilian PT (Party of Labour) is an example, as were social democratic parties in many countries in the earlier phases of their existence.

NLMs do not meet the model of 'normal politics' because they often insist on the continuous involvement of their followers or 'the masses', on

their being involved in driving the processes of change. For many of the specialists this evokes notions of the 'tyranny of the majority' or 'mob rule', while many of the NLMs instead see this as an expression of democratic activity.

Another reason why NLMs are seen as immature forms of political organization, representing an earlier phase of political evolution, is that they often or for some phases of their existence tend to be much broader than conventional political parties. There are some problems in this purported 'national' character of NLMs, to which I return, but there is nothing inherently inimical to democratic consolidation in broadness, nor in that broadness allowing a variety of cross-memberships. In particular, the dual membership of the South African Communist Party (SACP) members, to which some object, is something that is part of the history of the ANC, though possibly fairly unique to South Africa.[3] It may not last forever, but it is not clear that this is inherently antagonistic to consolidation of democracy. It is only if one resorts to theories about inevitable control by Communist parties of other organizations again necessarily leading to dictatorships that this can have any credence.

Another dogma is the suggestion not only that the transition from NLM to political party is necessary and desirable but that it is inevitable or that it has already happened in South Africa (see Jung and Shapiro, 1995: 285, 300–1). The inevitability is said to lie partly in the qualities attributed to political parties as opposed to NLMs. In contrast to the undemocratic, secretive and closed nature of NLMs, political parties are said to be inherently democratic, open and accountable. This is of course a fiction and we only need look at Tony Blair's involving Britain in war, without the consent of his own caucus, to know that both democratic and undemocratic practices may well be found in political parties (McKibbin, 2003).

Equally, NLMs are not inevitably secretive and closed. How much openness and debate one finds, depends partly on the location of personnel, whether in militarized or civilian situations, but even in military situations, according to interviewees, there was considerable debate.[4] That is obviously not the same as impacting on decision-making, but it is nevertheless an important qualification of the stereotype that is found in some of the literature.

There is no law of history that predestines liberation movements to become political parties. There may be a variety of reasons why a particular movement wishes to remain a NLM and *what we need to assess is not what form of organization is adopted, but what quality of democracy ensues.* We need to measure this against an openly stated notion of what we understand by democracy.

That means that democracy itself must be problematized, and part of the argument of this article is that achievement of representative democracy is a

crucial gain for any people. But it is not the only version of democracy and may well coexist with both participatory and direct democracy. In South Africa we have had experience of these and this article argues for their desirability (Neocosmos, 1998; Suttner, 2005).

But there needs first to be a closer look at the NLM model, partly because it has some problematic features, but also because there are problems with the way some scholars have discussed it, attributing certain inherent qualities that are said to lead NLMs in an inevitable direction. This article relates the discussion of the importance of viable opposition parties to the broader question of pluralism. It concludes by referring briefly to the model of democracy that, I contend, needs consolidation in South Africa and how best it may be achieved (treated more fully in Suttner, 2004a).

The NLM 'Model'

Many of the political parties that came to rule African states were originally constituted as liberation movements. Some 30 or 40 years ago many of these liberation movements that have become political parties or that remained liberation movements were crucially involved in the process of achieving independence. They then enjoyed considerable 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 NLM or 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 of Ghana. Or later 'SWAPO is the Nation, the Nation is SWAPO', SWAPO being the South West African People's Organization of Namibia. In Kenya one had 'Kenya African National Union Ni Mama Na Baba', meaning KANU is the mother and father of the nation.[5] And a slogan to be found on a wall in South Africa declares 'ANC is the Nation'. 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 own countries and enjoyed prestige on the continent.

This NLM model predisposed these parties or liberation movements towards a particular type of politics, self-conception and relationship with other organizations and the people or nation as a whole. It is a model of organization now in crisis. Many of the assumptions of the colonial and immediate postcolonial period, which held the organizations and countries 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 NLM have less resonance.

But generalized references to the crisis in the NLM in existing literature remain insufficiently specified, partly because the nature of NLMs, as such, has not been adequately theorized. While important writers like Fanon and Cabral have intervened on questions, tendencies and strategies of NLMs this has not been to characterize 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 organizations that fall under the heading NLM*, variations that are not adequately accounted for in some of the literature. From this failure to note or adequately consider the consequence of variation, there is sometimes a tendency to point to alleged inevitability in their trajectory and inherent or invariable characteristics.

Considerable Variety under the Label 'NLM'

The phrase 'national liberation movement' encompasses a range of organizations 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.

The origins of liberation movements and political parties in Africa are very different from that of Europe and the US (see Salih [2003: 1ff.] on parties; Tordoff [2002] and Hodgkin [1956, 1961] on liberation movements and parties). Some of these are well-established and mature organizations, 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 organized politics, while others were from their earliest stage forced to work underground and then embarked on armed resistance. Some therefore had little experience of open organized activity and have seen participation in a liberation movement as 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 has arisen.

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 organization, others have primarily related to institutional structures as negotiators or petitioners. Some NLMs have developed extensive organizational structures; many have not and have had a fairly loose relationship between leaders and followers. In some or possibly most cases, the identity of the movement has been closely related to the character of the leader.

Some have during the pre-independence period 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 characterize 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 this 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 factors making for 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 organizations. Far from outcomes being inevitable, it is by no means settled in many cases, and possibly not finally settled anywhere.

NLMs Driven by an Inexorable Anti-Democratic Logic?

In a significant and wide-ranging contribution on democracy in Africa, Roger Southall includes consideration of NLMs, 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:

> . . . the 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, 2003b: 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*)' (Southall, 2003b: 32; emphasis in the original).

The argument is that an inherent tendency towards authoritarianism may be mitigated, but is nevertheless inherent in the assumptions and character of these organizations. The argument in the present contribution, in contrast, 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 organization providing the first opportunity to vote. Obviously cynics would point to that often being the last opportunity. *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.[6] It should not be forgotten that whatever the later outcomes, *it was the liberation movements that brought democracy to Africa.* Colonialism was an inherently undemocratic system and it was the liberation struggles that ensured people voted for the first time. What ensued afterwards is a separate question and whether it was inevitable or is irreversible needs more than assertion but argument.

The main problem with Southall's formulation is that the notion of inexorable logic seems to override the reality 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 or organization, 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 likely to struggle over the organization's direction as well as the relationship that the organization, prior to and after attaining power, has with other organizations 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 these may be.

The NLM Model and Pluralism

Mona Younis defines NLMs 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.[7] 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. (Younis, 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 organizations as ancillary to that effort or as temporary contributors to this national effort, where they 'stand in' for an absent NLM or occupy terrain which will ultimately be partly occupied or fully occupied by the NLM itself. Once that happens the role of these other organizations is to exit from the stage of history (as happened in the case of the United Democratic Front [UDF] in South Africa, admittedly through its own volition – see Suttner, 2005; Neocosmos, 1998; Mamdani, 1990).

In line with this emphasis, the early years of African independence saw widespread clampdowns on organizations established on a regional or ethnic basis. There was a tendency in independent African states to see organization 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, separatist parties, especially in a country like Congo/Zaire.

Also, 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 outlets in the political arena. This may have found classic expression in Samora Machel, independent Mozambique's first president's statement that 'for the nation to live, the tribe must die!' 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 handover.

Similar processes developed over time in the ANC. Pixley ka Isaka Seme, on the eve of the formation of the ANC, advanced a counter-conception of the nation to that of the Union of South Africa. His version referred to a 'native union', a nation 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, realizable once apartheid was removed.

The ANC as a liberation movement, and allied organizations like the Mozambican Liberation Front (FRELIMO), spent decades in an atmosphere of intolerance of regionalism and ethnic difference on the African continent,

as well as absorbing Marxist–Leninist notions, which converged with the NLM model in stressing the need for a centralizing, coordinating party.

National liberation movements engaged in wars of liberation also claimed and often received recognition as the sole and authentic representative of particular peoples. There was reason for this 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?[8] The danger is that 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 NLMs, turned ruling parties, were reluctant to consider exiting from government, as in contemporary Zimbabwe. This does represent a tendency, but whether a tendency is irreversible or realizable depends on the capacity for contestation, which varies in different countries and situations.

The NLM Model and Representing the Nation as a Whole

The NLM model may be in crisis in the continent, as the basis on which most political parties were formed at the time of independence and their popular support has eroded. But the model may not be in crisis for the ANC as a political organization. Its viability may still relate to a reaction against a particular type of politics, 'normalization' or establishing a 'normal' political party, where elections are everything and the organization's popular character is nothing. While that may remain part of the ANC's official self-characterization, the notion is under stress. The ANC, in becoming the dominant force in government, has entered into processes of operation that require different modalities from its previous roles and relationships to its membership. And there are certainly people within and (not only) outside the ANC who would like this stress to be resolved through a break with the national liberation past, shedding this 'nostalgia'. The outcome cannot be predicted. It depends on a variety of factors within and outside the ANC, what strength may be commanded by one or other trend or can potentially manifest itself organizationally.

But the relevance of the question whether the NLM model is in crisis relates, as elsewhere, also to politics beyond the ANC and its membership. This is because the model depicts the NLM as 'the nation', or as 'the nation in the process of becoming'.

Having attained representative democracy since 1994 the ANC has secured overwhelming electoral support and is predicted, at the time of writing, to be likely to retain or increase that support in the 2004 election. But here is where the dangers of the NLM model may arise. It does not arise from the fears of the proponents of the 'dominant party' model that dominance is in itself incompatible with democracy, but because of notions deriving from the NLM model: in particular, its purporting to embody the nation as a whole.

The ANC and for that matter no political party or organization can ever be equated with the nation, no matter how popular it may be. There are interests within the nation that require representation outside the national liberation movement. The consolidation of democracy in South Africa is not the task of the ANC as majority party alone.

This is not merely a question of multi-party democracy but relates to wider issues. The ANC (and the NLM in general) is a recent convert to pluralism in South Africa. This aversion to pluralism is not a product of exile, but was found very much among activists in the UDF in the 1980s (see, for example, Cherry, 2000). It should be recalled that arguments for pluralism in South Africa were generally propounded by people resisting majority rule. In this context, those associated with the NLM tended to see pluralism representing an attempt to dilute the impact of democracy. Many people remain uncomfortable with the concept or do not wish to probe its full dimensions, in particular the legitimacy of organizations formed outside the ANC's sway.

But it is essential for the consolidation of democracy that pluralism be embraced in both the narrow constitutional and electoral sense of multi-party democracy and also in encouraging the formation of a variety of independent organizations representing a range of social interests – outside the ANC.

Some of these organizations, like COSATU, may be allied to the ANC. Others may be independent or hostile. That is their right and it is essential for democratic development and consolidation that people be free to relate to organizations that advance their interests in whatever manner suits them best. Obviously this must be within the constitution and some of the newly formed organizations, while exercising the right to occupy the 'public sphere' have not always abided by the law.[9] This may be related to many of these social movements denying the significance of representative democracy. In fact, one of these activists has said 'We don't want the fucking vote!' (quoted in Sachs, 2003).

Pluralism and Viability and Strength of Opposition Parties

Beyond the need to recognize the right of existence and operation of social movements, a substantial role in ensuring sustainability and legitimacy of

that 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.[10] They may make ambiguous statements about 'fighting back' open to racist interpretations. But they nevertheless remain a choice for many people who might otherwise not be absorbed in the political system. That some new members are from a right-wing background is healthy in the sense that it is better that they are voting DA rather than engaging in illegal resistance.

For similar reasons, in the 19th-century Cape, certain liberals advocated enfranchisement of black people, especially Coloureds,[11] 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[12] at the hustings, voting for his representative than the Hottentot in the wilds with his gun upon his shoulder' (quoted in Simons and Simons, 1983: 23).

That goes for all the current opposition parties. They provide a voice for segments of the citizenry, which 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 the 'consolidation of democracy' theorists ask for more than this, that there be a potential in the foreseeable future, of an 'alternation of elites' and only then, it is claimed, would the opposition be of sufficient strength to be able to expose what a corrupt government may wish to hide, and have the power to prevent the conflation of political organization/party and state and similar abuses (Jung and Shapiro, 1995; Giliomee and Simkins, 1999: Introduction).

This requirement has no scientific basis as a test for democratic consolidation, for it may be, as indicated, that some of the constitutional mechanisms in place currently provide a far sounder basis for monitoring abuse and ensuring accountable government than an opposition with some potential to become ruling party (see Cachalia, 2003).

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 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, for a variety of reasons. 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 where the institution is located and a variety of other factors. But, nevertheless, 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 are 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 Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) and sections of the newly formed Independent Democrats,[13] 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, like the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), led by Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, were closely associated with extensive violence perpetrated in collusion with the apartheid regime in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Cachalia [2003] on the DA).

These are undoubtedly factors that limit the appeal these parties have for an electorate, which is overwhelmingly black, and African, who remember apartheid very well and who see the ANC as the bearer of democracy and liberation from apartheid. There is no escaping from that history and no doubt that whatever mistakes the ANC may have made, they 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 definitely 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 (e.g. 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, however, be provided by existing parties which are hamstrung by their inability 'to think outside of a racial prism'

(Habib and Taylor, 2001: 216, 217). They see the possibility of a left-wing party formed mainly from COSATU and the SACP, which could challenge the ANC through 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' (Habib and Taylor, 2001: 221).

Majorities may be wrong, they say. They may, it is feared, not yet have the insight of Habib and Taylor into the failure of the alliance to realize their aspirations. They need to appreciate that they may be destined to be the core element on which a new opposition is formed at some point in time.

That may be what some scholars see from where they are located. 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 organizations so that the ANC itself, 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, though it does not mean that it will remain that way forever.

Conclusion

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 organizations of civil society, organs of direct democracy. They may relate to the state but may simply be organs of self-empowerment in relation to issues that matter to people, organized in street committees and similar structures. This was a common phenomenon in the 1980s but exists unevenly in the present period, partly because of the ANC's ambiguity over pluralism and that some of its members sense that involvement in social movements would be construed as 'disloyal'.

This involvement in self-empowering organs of direct and participatory democracy is important not only as a manifestation of pluralism, but as extending the range of meanings given to democracy and to the opening clause of the Freedom Charter which reads, 'The People Shall Govern!' (on the Charter, see Suttner and Cronin, 1986). One of the reasons why coups were so regular a feature in the early decades of independent Africa is that ordinary people were demobilized 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 the most powerful way of consolidating democracy in the broadest sense.

Beyond this, if consolidation refers partly to the public seeing themselves

as stakeholders, socioeconomic transformation is an important way of developing that sense. The extent to which excluded and marginalized sections of the population have their concerns addressed also impacts substantially on the sustainability of democracy. Undoubtedly, current unemployment and inequalities are part of the wider obstacles that need to be confronted in the process of maintaining this democratic order.

Notes

I am indebted to Caroline Kihato for useful comments on an earlier draft, though responsibility for the final product remains mine alone.

1 The ANC was formed in 1912, as the South African Native National Congress, two years after the establishment of the Union of South Africa, which united the former British colonies and Boer republics. The ANC is the oldest liberation movement on the continent, though Mahatma Gandhi established the Indian Congress in South Africa earlier. The ANC is currently the dominant force in post-apartheid South African politics.
2 The TAC has effectively used the rights enshrined in the constitution to challenge government programmes and won important legal victories, showing that a rights-based approach is a viable basis for mobilizing and organizing under the conditions inaugurated by democratic rule.
3 Currently the ANC, SACP and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) form what is called the tripartite alliance. The alliance between the ANC and SACP was especially strong during the period of the ANC's illegality, from 1960 to 1990. The Communist Party had been illegal from 1950 and had already reconstituted itself as an underground organization from 1953 (see Suttner, 2004b).
4 Interview with Pallo Jordan, Cape Town, February 2003.
5 I am grateful to Caroline Kihato for providing this reference.
6 The term 'national democratic revolution' is derived partly from Soviet influence on the ANC and its allies and refers to the type of intermediary 'revolution' between capitalism and socialism that was envisaged by the defeat of apartheid. It is sufficiently broad to carry different meanings for different tendencies within the liberation movement, differences that were more submerged during the period of struggle against apartheid. They are leading to open differences within the ANC and within the tripartite alliance in the current period.
7 Interestingly, Roger Southall, in a different contribution, suggests that the ANC never intended replacing the apartheid state (Southall, 2001: 8). That is a strange reading of ANC strategy and tactics from the 1960s until the late 1980s. The well-known slogan 'Make Apartheid Unworkable, Make South Africa Ungovernable!' was developed and widely broadcast on the ANC's illegal radio station, Radio Freedom, as part of an insurrectionary process to overthrow the then South African state. In fact, ungovernability was achieved in many areas, with

government officials, especially in the more vulnerable townships, fleeing and abandoning many government institutions in this period.

8 Some liberation movements like FRELIMO and MPLA (the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) did not initially hold elections.

9 While some of the 'new social movements' in South Africa are the bearers of real grievances relating to failure of the state to deliver basic services or cut offs of such services, on occasion they appear to relate to the authorities in an insurrectionary manner. The trashing of the private home of the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, Amos Masondo, was a case in point. Masondo had not refused to meet the groups concerned. The home that they trashed was not in a 'swank' suburb of Johannesburg as one approving Internet leftist suggests, but in a lower-range Kensington suburb (see Nowicki, 2003).

10 The DA derives from the Progressive Party, a breakaway from the United Party in the 1950s. Smuts had led the United Party until electoral defeat to the apartheid National Party in 1948. It then drifted steadily rightwards. The Progressive Party was formed to provide a limited liberal outlet, calling for a qualified franchise, based on educational and property qualifications. Over the years that followed it lost and then later increased its support. The increase appears to be related to its adopting positions more amenable to conservative white South Africans. The present DA has now drawn into its ranks many disaffected former members of the National Party and adopts many positions with appeal to those who resent majority rule.

11 In South Africa, the term 'Coloureds' refers to people of mixed race. Its usage is controversial, with some people referring to themselves as so-called Coloureds or using the term in lower case.

12 The term 'Hottentot', now treated as derogatory, refers to Khoi people, among the earliest inhabitants of South Africa, who first encountered white colonists. They are one of the streams from which the Coloured people derive.

13 The PAC was formed as a breakaway from the ANC under the dynamic leadership of Robert Sobukwe in 1958. While its early days appeared to promise a considerable following, this was not sustained during the period of illegality and exile and currently the organization enjoys only 1 percent support in the legislature. A former PAC leader, Patricia de Lille, heads the Independent Democrats and in that sense has some links with an anti-apartheid past.

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