Introduction

Henning Melber

During 2001, the Nordic Africa Institute (previously the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies) initiated a research project around the theme "Liberation and Democracy in Southern Africa".[1] A network of scholars from mainly southern Africa was involved and a first consultative workshop was convened in December 2001 in collaboration with the Centre for Conflict Resolution in Cape Town.[2] This provided a platform for an initial conceptualisation of the issues which led, in turn, to a second gathering in Namibia in July 2002. With a focus on "(Re-)Conceptualising Democracy and Liberation in Southern Africa", it was held in collaboration with the Namibia Institute for Democracy and the Legal Assistance Centre as local civil society agencies.[3]

Most of the contributions to this volume are revised versions of papers originally given at the Namibian meeting.[4] They highlight political issues and processes in parts of southern Africa since the end of white-minority and/or colonial rule. Particular but not exclusive attention is paid to the post-independence records of governance of the Namibian and Zimbabwean liberation movements. Re-cast as political parties, they have since taking power in their respective domains sought to gain predominance in both the political arena, as well as within most, if not all, state and parastatal structures. In these two areas they have largely prevailed while also securing a power of definition in the political arena through the shaping or manipulation of public political discourse to suit their ends.

This brings us to the core focus of this volume, namely, the contradiction represented by the fact that the Namibian and Zimbabwean liberation movements which spearheaded mass popular struggles for liberation from colonial rule have, in power, developed into authoritarian and, to varying degrees, corrupt ruling regimes. By contrast, countries like Botswana and Lesotho which attained independence by negotiation and without mass

mobilisation bear all the features of being multi-party democracies. Why this is so is a concern of the contributors to this volume. Why, some of its authors enquire, have the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in power not displayed a consistent commitment to democratic principles and/or practices? In particular, they examine why these movements have deviated from their originally-declared democratic aims as well as largely abandoning their once-sacrosanct goal of socio-economic transformation aimed at reducing inherited imbalances in the distribution of wealth.

In examining these issues, the contributors probed beyond the myths and legends which have long surrounded southern Africa's liberation movements to take on board the fact that while these organisations were waging war on systems of institutionalised injustice, they did not themselves always display a sensitivity to human rights issues and democratic values. Nor did it prevent them from falling prey to authoritarian patterns of rule and undemocratic (as well as sometimes violent) practices towards real or imagined dissidents within their ranks.

Time and new data has also revealed that even the popular support for the struggle expressed by local groups was at times based more on coercion and the manipulation of internal contradictions among the colonised than on genuine resistance to the colonial state. Norma Kriger (1992) argues as much in reference to Zimbabwe while Lauren Dobell (1998) and Colin Leys and John Saul (1995) have exposed the level and degree of SWAPO's internal repression during its exile years. Some of these anti-democratic tendencies are detectable of late in South Africa. A recent study suggests a high degree of political intolerance among South Africans who, it seems, dislike political enemies a great deal and perceive them as threatening. As a result, the combination of dislike and threat "is a powerful source of political intolerance" (Gibson and Gouws 2003:71).

An argument presented in this volume is that the political change which has occurred in those southern African societies shaped by settler colonialism, can be characterised as a transition from controlled change to changed control. What this means is that a new political elite has ascended the commanding heights and, employing selective narratives and memories relating to their liberation wars, has constructed or invented a new set of traditions to establish an exclusive post-colonial legitimacy under the sole authority of one particular

agency of social forces (see Kriger 1995 and Werbner 1998b for Zimbabwe; Melber 2003a for Namibia). Mystification of the liberators has played an essential role in this fabrication. As Werbner (1998a: 2) has noted: "The critique of power in contemporary Africa calls for a theoretically informed anthropology of memory and the making of political subjectivities. The need is to rethink our understanding of the force of memory, its official and unofficial forms, its moves between the personal and the social in post-colonial transformation".

What these elites have also done is develop militant notions of inclusion or exclusion as key factors in shaping their post-colonial national identities. Early post-independence notions of national reconciliation and slogans like "unity in diversity" have given way to a politically-correct identity form defined by those in power along narrow "we-they" or "with-us-against-us" lines. Simultaneously, the boundaries between party and government have been blurred and replaced by a growing equation of party and government. Opposition or dissent has come increasingly to be considered as hostile and the dissenter sometimes branded an "enemy of the people". In a recent University of Amsterdam doctoral thesis on the violent campaign waged by the Mugabe government on Matabeleland in the immediate years after independence, K.P. Yap (2001: 312–13) argued that:

> whilst power relations [in Zimbabwe] had changed, perceptions of power had not changed. The layers of understanding regarding power relations, framed by socialisation and memory, continued to operate. … actors had changed, however, the way in which the new actors executed power in relation to opposition had not, as their mental framework remained in the colonial setting. Patterns from colonial rule of "citizens" ruling the "subjects" were repeated and reproduced.

Coinciding with this tendency towards autocratic rule and the subordination of the state to the party, a reward system of social and material favours in return for loyalty has emerged. Self-enrichment by way of a system of rent-or sinecure-capitalism has become the order of the day. The term "national interest" has been appropriated and now means solely what the post-colonial ruling elite decides it means. It is used "to justify all kinds of authoritarian practice" while the term "anti-national" or "unpatriotic" is applied to any group that resists the power of the ruling elite of the day (Harrison 2001: 391).

These selective mechanisms for the exercise and retention of post-independence power are not too dissimilar from the commandist notions that operated during the days of the liberation struggle in exile. As one South African political commentator noted: "Many of my former comrades have become loyal to a party rather than to principles of justice. (…) Unfortunately it is true that those who have been oppressed make the worst democrats. There are recurring patterns in the behaviour of liberation parties – when they come to power they uphold the most undemocratic practices". (Kadalie 2001; see also Kadalie 2002). Another put it this way: "It is interesting to see who still carries their own briefcase. These are people I've known for years when we were in the field. Some of them are still great but some of them have become very pompous. When you have a car and a driver and you're travelling first class, some people change" (Younge 2001).

Simultaneous to the above, outside of the inner sanctum of the political arena and within civil society, critical voices have emerged, including even those of some who played roles as active supporters of the liberation struggle, and others who followed it, with great sympathy. A new and sharper debate has emerged, one which deals increasingly with the post-colonial content of liberation, questions the validity of the concept of solidarity based on a shared past, and calls for the end of the cultivation of "heroic narratives" (Harrison 2001; Kössler and Melber 2002). The much-celebrated attainment of formal independence is no longer unreservedly equated with liberation, and neither with the creation of lasting democracy. Now, closer scrutiny is paid to both the inherited and self-developed structural legacies which have imposed limits to the realising of real social and economic alternatives in the post-colonial era.

One of these involves a growing recognition that armed liberation struggles operating along military lines in conditions of clandestinity were not suitable breeding grounds for establishing democratic systems of governance post-independence and that the forms of resistance employed in the struggle were themselves organised on hierarchical and authoritarian lines. In this sense, then, the new societies carried within them essential elements of the old system. Thus it should come as no surprise that aspects of the colonial system have reproduced themselves in the struggle for its abolition and subsequently, in the concepts of governance applied in post-colonial conditions.

There is a parallel here to de Tocqueville's celebrated retrospective on the shortcomings of the French Revolution. It reflected the frustration provoked

by the restoration of old power structures under Louis Napoleon after his *coup d'etat* in 1851 and provides relevant insights to our southern African cases.[5] De Tocqueville argued that the French revolutionaries in the process of implementing the structures of the new system retained the mentalities, habits, even the ideas, of the old state even while seeking to destroy it. And they built on the rubble of the old state to establish the foundation of the new society. To understand the revolution and its achievement, he concluded, one has to forget about the current society and instead interrogate the buried one. His conclusion was that the early freedom of the revolution had been replaced by another form of repression. Revolutionaries in the process of securing, establishing and consolidating their power bases had sacrificed the declared ideals and substantive issues they were fighting for in the name of revolution.

This, however, is a process not confined to the spheres of conscious and deliberate effort. It is also a result of particular socialisation processes. In a recent journal article, Abrahamsen (2003) has suggested that the recognition of the relationship between power, discourse and political institutions and practices has much to contribute to the study of African politics. She argues that "postcolonial approaches illustrate the inadequacy of the conventional binary opposition between domination and resistance, and show how resistance cannot be idealized as pure opposition to the order it opposes, but operates instead inside a structure of power that it both challenges and helps to sustain" (209). She suggests that these internalised dispositions carry a price and contribute to a perpetuation of structures beyond the abolition of the very system which produced them. Hence, she suggests that the seizure of state power and control over means of production does not secure a solution, since a "change of economic and political structures of domination and inequality requires a parallel and profound change of their epistemological and psychological underpinnings and effects" (ibid.).

It is in this context that the essays in this volume reflect on the state of the democratisation process in post-colonial southern Africa. In his introductory overview, political scientist Kenneth Good argues that the predominant party systems in southern Africa through the 1990s produced a high degree of non-accountability of political elites who were bent mainly on the retention of their power. This has developed to the point where he argues that it is well nigh impossible to control their lust for never-ending power. "Singularly and collectively, the ruling elites of southern Africa have shown that their chief

concerns are with self-interest and retention of power, and constitutionalism counts for little".

Echoing this theme, Amin Kamete maps out developments in urban governance and electoral democracy in Zimbabwe's capital city, Harare. He tracks the developments which have lead to ZANU's loss of legitimacy and support among the majority of the urban population in the capital. He then looks at efforts by the government to win back that constituency and how, having failed, it has systematically set about disenfranchising the urban electorate. This he describes as a deliberate perversion of the democratic process and one designed to frustrate the proper expression of the electorate's will.

Complementing that case, Suzanne Dansereau examines the role of the Zimbabwean labour movement in its resistance to the Mugabe government's policies. She traces how the movement frustrated in its objectives developed a party political arm in order to compete for power. She questions the degree to which the Zimbabwean government can claim legitimacy in a situation where the working class has switched sides and now forms the backbone of organised opposition.

In contrast to the Zimbabwean cases where the post-independence era has been characterised by a high degree of contestation between contending forces, accompanied by severe levels of repression, Ian Taylor looks at the Botswana Democratic Party's (BDP) single-party domination within a constitutional framework of politics in Botswana. He argues that it is the policies pursued since independence by the BDP which have fostered an enabling role for the state in promoting socio-economic development and which have earned it thereby a high degree of legitimacy. They have, he argues, disbursed benefits to wide portions of the citizenry. Nonetheless, Taylor notes, they have also generated profound inequalities and vast differences in life chances within the social formation and provoked some disillusionment with the much-vaunted "Botswana miracle".

Not as thematically remote as it might look at first sight, Francis Nyamnjoh emphasises the importance of a comparative approach towards re-conceptualising democracy and liberation in southern Africa. He offers an analysis which recognises traditional, un-elected chiefs as agents of change and the institution of chieftaincy as dynamic within a process of negotiation and conviviality between "tradition" and "modernity". He argues that in an

ongoing process of power brokerage, traditions in southern Africa are being modernised and modernities traditionalised. The dichotomy between "citizen" and "subject" is hence a matter of negotiation and implies changing identities depending on the situation.

Roger Southall locates his case study of Lesotho within an analysis of two competing paradigms of legitimacy in southern Africa. One is the paradigm of liberation which, he argues, is predominant. It is authoritarian in nature, prioritises the past over the present, glorifies the ruling party and justifies its present excesses in terms of its heroic past. The other is that of democracy which stresses the right to rule by reference to the rulers having secured a mandate from the people "in cleanly fought … popular elections". Southall details the long, messy and sometimes bloody struggle to achieve the domination of the democratic model over the liberation paradigm, the latter represented by the Basotho Congress Party (BCP) and its armed offshoot, the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA). This latter, while having its origins in the unlawful denial of power to the BCP after it won the 1970 general election, allowed itself to become a surrogate force in the apartheid regime's counter-revolutionary war machine which sought so bloodily in the 1980s to frustrate the attainment of democracy in South Africa.

In his chapter on Namibia, Melber demystifies the post-colonial consolidation of the socio-political system in Namibia and argues that, as a process, it has only translated controlled change into changed control. Basing its legitimacy on its liberation past, SWAPO as an agency for post-colonial emancipation and development has, according to Melber, displayed an increasingly authoritarian tendency while spawning a new elite which offers less in the way of meaningful socio-economic transformation than the colonised majority was led to expect.

Martin Legassick's chapter looks at the impact of the armed struggle, and particularly at certain decisions taken by the ANC in relation to the tactics and strategy for the conduct of that struggle, on the democratisation process in South Africa. In Legassick's view, the transition in South Africa has been a revolution aborted. It has not produced true national and social liberation in the form of a democracy reflective of "working class power … the precondition for socialism". What it has generated, instead, is a bourgeois democracy implementing neo-liberal policies akin to those advocated by major international financial institutions. This betrayal by the ANC of the working class was not, Legassick argues, a self-conscious strategy but one forced upon

the ANC which, given its lack of an armed mass base, had no choice but to opt for a negotiated settlement within a capitalist framework. This lack of choice, in turn, stemmed from flawed strategic decisions adopted in the 1960s and early 1970s which resulted in the ANC not opting for a form of guerrilla warfare which would have led to "the taking of state power by the masses".

Raymond Suttner's chapter is in a somewhat similar vein in that he focuses on some largely hidden practices, traditions and cultures (including belief systems) of the ANC in exile and their impact on the current character of the party and its degree of political mobilisation. He shows how different internal and exile backgrounds and experiences informed the attitudes and expectations of the membership which in turn, shaped the character of the movement. These experiences produced political cultures which were not in sync with one another, generating conflicts and tensions which have been played out in the post-1994 era. The predominance of one tradition over the other has, Suttner argues, shaped the nature of the democratisation process in the country since 1994.

In the concluding chapter to the volume, Krista Johnson takes this argument forward and specifically traces the influence of vanguardism within the South African liberation movement in general, and the ANC in particular. She demonstrates that despite its radical ideological posturing and its rhetoric of popular democracy and people-driven transformation, the actions of the ANC leadership and the forms of representation and participation within in the party make it little different from elitist, liberal political parties elsewhere. She argues that the challenge remains to transform the basis of state/society relations by conceptualising new forms of political organisation.

As the sub-title to this volume suggests, there remains much in the way of unfinished business in regard to consolidating democracy in post-colonial southern Africa. This applies not only to the political process but also to our analytic understanding of the dynamics of the process. These essays represent a start with a grappling of the issues. The recognition that the model of liberation democracy as developed in Namibia and Zimbabwe is inherently elitist and potentially authoritarian is a significant step forward in the debate. The debate needs to go on and be further developed. Other southern African cases, most particularly Mozambique, need to be scrutinised and brought into the analysis while a critical eye needs to be kept on South Africa as it completes its first decade of democratic rule. Are the seeds of democratic decay set to germinate

or is the democratic tradition of South Africa's civil society sufficiently resilient to overcome the authoritarian tendencies in the liberation paradigm of commandism favoured by some in the leadership of the ANC? There is still much work for the scholarly community concerned with these issues to undertake.

Notes

1   See for a first result in the initial stages of conceptualisation Melber and Saunders 2001. More details on the project can be obtained from the Institute's web site (www.nai.uu.se).

2   See for a summary the conference report in *News from the Nordic Africa Institute*, no. 2/2002. Most presentations to the workshop were published in various Discussion Papers (Davids et.al. 2002, Neocosmos et.al. 2002).

3   For a conference report see *News from the Nordic Africa Institute*, no. 3/2002.

4   An exception was the earlier publication of an unabridged paper (Legassick 2002), which in a considerably shorter version is included here again. The papers presented on Namibia have been edited as part of a separate book volume, published in English and German versions (Melber 2003b).

5   Roland Apsel made me aware of the inspiring comparative aspect through his reference to an article by the psychoanalyst Erdheim (1991). See on Tocqueville's political philosophy Siedentop (1994).

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