SOUTH AFRICA IN THE NINETIES

Editors
D. J. van Vuuren
N. E. Wiehahn
N. J. Rhoodie
M. Wiechers

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FORCES OF PARALLEL NATIONALISM

The core debate in South Africa revolves around the fact that we have two major forces of potential conflict -- black and white (predominantly Afrikaner) nationalism. These forces of nationalism are deeply rooted in the historical development of South Africa. The problem centres on the question whether there can be forces of parallel and equally forceful nationalisms that can survive side by side in one country if any one or both such forces rejects compromise in the interests of forging a new nation sustained by a common nationalism and whether such a nation can be forged by constitutional accommodation alone. Just as the ANC could not be ignored on the basis of the argument that it represented a substantive constituency, what would be the result of being unable to accommodate a substantive constituency at the other end of the scale?

Even if aspects of this nationalism border on fanaticism, it would be folly to underestimate its potential to sustain political instability. The conventional notion that right-wing resistance stems solely from white fear of losing privilege and power could be deluding.

The Anglo Boer War was not founded in fear. The recent phenomenon of people like Barend Strydom who shot blacks indiscriminately in pursuit of a queer political philosophy, or the existence of organizations from the Kappiekommando and AWB to the Wit Wolwe, could not simply be dismissed and ignored, extremist as they are, for to do so would not eliminate the problem. They enjoy the sympathy of a much wider core. If the phenomenon is one of nationalism gone haywire, then it has to be allowed a process of redefinition and rechannelling in order to isolate the extremists from the white nationalists. The government has for some time recognized the validity of the cause of black nationalists. A reciprocal recognition is no less demanding. The problem of how to denationalize

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conflicting nationalisms will therefore have to be addressed contemporaneously with the host of other problems which face South Africans, who share a long history of conflicting development.

INSTITUTIONALIZING THE PROCESS

Since existing constitutional structures do not reflect the current political reality and the existing political system is incapable of accommodating evolutionary demands as well as revolutionary challenges, constitutional development through a process of incremental amendments to the constitution have to be abandoned in favour of an acceptable institutional framework to which the debate is transferred. The initiative for such a process cannot be exclusive or unilateral any longer but has to be incorporative. The sooner a meeting point between the rapidly radicalizing factors in the political milieu is found, the greater the prospects of arriving at a centre of gravity which could maximize the positive potential between the polarities in order to eradicate the negative actions of the past. What has to be achieved are levels of equality of compromise.

In the process of institutionalizing the polarities in the political spectrum of South Africa, the partitionists should not be excluded simply on the basis of the argument that the majority of whites have expressed their rejection of partition as an option. The presence of these divergent viewpoints in such an overarching body serves to facilitate moderates finding greater common ground in dealing with realities instead of being confined to fixed and limited political standpoints. Furthermore, the consequences of an inability to accommodate any force should be determined by the institutionalized process itself. In that way, if such forces could not be accommodated or eliminated, at least they would be contained.

CONSTITUENCY FORCES

History has repeatedly demonstrated that constitutional change that is not the product of proper negotiation is not likely to endure. A constitution produced in the wake of a successful revolution in the South African context could accordingly be just as fatally unilateral as one devised by a forum that excluded major constituency forces.

What are constituency forces? There is no simple answer to or definition of this vexed question. To avoid any negative connotations, a constituency force in our context cannot be that component of society which has exercised privilege and power on the basis of a racial identity. For years the government ignored the reality of the ANC despite the argument that no lasting solution could be found by excluding an organization which was a major constituency force in the country. Likewise, the British underestimated the will and determination of the

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Boers who in the last century had already become an indigenous constituency force that could simply not be ridden roughshod.

Mugabe's quest for a one-party state in Zimbabwe, for example, is based less on the desire to impinge on democracy than on feeling insecure about being able to contain the instability that results from the clash of the divergent constituency forces which also exist in Zimbabwe. 'I cannot see the multi-party system thriving in Africa today. It may do so in time but only after a lot of upheavals.' His main contention against the existence of 'other political parties' was that they 'were often based on tribal affiliations'. In his view one-party systems regulate the competition for posts within the central committee and parliament so that tribalism does not dominate. Arguing in support of Mugabe's contention, a Zimbabwean columnist of the *Financial Gazette*, using the word 'unipartism' to describe the one-party system, states: 'Above all, unipartism ends the inherent factional feuds and fights that inevitably result from multipartism. There is also the fact that African opposition parties are almost always tribal parties.'

Mugabe's solution may be arguable but his recognition of the phenomenon of multiparty systems being capable of transforming themselves into instruments of componental political cleavages needs to be seriously addressed in political debate.

The phenomenon is not confined to Africa, however, and the solution in my view does not lie in substituting multipartism for unipartism but in identifying, recognizing and accommodating the existence and drive of substantive constituency forces.

The Ibos in Nigeria, the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, the Sikhs and Muslims of India, the Tamils of Sri Lanka and a host of other constituency forces in Lebanon, Cyprus, Malaysia, Senegal, Belgium, America, the Soviet Union and in many other countries across the globe are all indicative of the fact that the world is still grappling to find answers to the vexed issue of accommodating divergent constituency forces sharing a common country. South Africa is no exception and even if race was not the common denominator of exclusion, the problem would still be present. The conflict in Natal is already painfully forcing a recognition of this phenomenon.

Conventional mechanisms such as bills of rights have not succeeded in accommodating the political aspirations of minor, or numerically inferior, constituency forces. They have failed to meet a basic criterion of total citizenship, namely in providing a sense of security and wellbeing. Proof of this proposition lies in the fact that partition would not otherwise be seen as a viable option to millions around the globe. The true partitionist ideal is ultimately an expression of insecurity by a constituency force to power sharing as a mechanism for unifying political diversity.

The unification of political diversity must in the final analysis be expressed in a shared or common set of groundrules regulating the political processes of a society.

The diversity referred to is not the diversity of race or ethnicity, even though there might be a large measure of overlapping, but a diversity of what is termed constituency forces.

Constituency forces are really components of a society that can muster themselves into political forces which enjoy a formidable constituency backing. Major coalescences could easily vie for power on the basis of this emotive backing, as a result of which minor coalescences, when they do not perceive themselves as being capable of becoming a meaningful part of the political process because the groundrules of that society militate against their meaningful involvement in the political system of the country, then agitate. This could be expressed either passively as in the case of the campaign for black civil rights under Martin Luther King in America, or militantly, as do the Sikhs in the Punjab, and the Tamils of Sri Lanka, to achieve what they perceive to be a fair share of the political system, alternatively to opt for territorial partition.

Constituency forces in a society are forces whose inherent coalescence is not explained by political criteria alone. They are identified by the existence of historical cleavages in society which are bonded, *inter alia*, by factors such as ethnicity, culture, religion, language, regionality or value norms and which are able to muster themselves into bases of political power on the basis of one or more of these factors.

It is a fact that voting patterns are influenced by these factors. For that reason in the narrow democracy of whites no English-speaking white South Africans stood a fair change of being prime minister or president. Even parties backed by English-speaking voters avoided choosing English-speaking persons as leaders of such parties and Colin Eglin became leader of the Progressive Federal Party only at a time when that party was no longer a serious contender for power through the electoral process.

The classical idea of a democracy being a government of the people, by the people and for the people is in itself a sound idea. The idea, after all, was developed to avoid the usurpation of power by any clique which would result in instability and conflict in societies.

One method of giving political expression to the idea is to use the mechanism of determining by simple majoritarianism what the will of a people is. But history and experience have shown that this mechanism works well in societies where there are broadly uniform constituency forces, not in societies with divergent constituency forces. The challenge of our age is therefore to find a mechanism which gives political expression to the basic idea of democracy in societies with cross-constituency forces.

South Africa is the focal point of this challenge. If we find the mechanism, it could serve as a useful model to a host of heterogeneous societies around the globe. If we do not, South Africa too will join the league of those troubled nations.

If one accepts that there are divergent constituency forces in South Africa, does a constitution acceptable to say 90 per cent of blacks but not

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to 90 per cent of whites assuming such a division of constituency forces (for argument's sake) pass the test of legitimacy even though it would not pass the test of acceptance by a simple majority of South Africans? The argument that constitutions can only endure if they are legitimate is negated in heterogeneous societies where constitutions have passed the test of conventional legitimacy (where legitimacy is determined in terms of simple majoritarianism) but have nevertheless failed to endure. In such cases it would be incorrect simply to deduce that even legitimate constitutions do not endure. Rather, the problem might lie in the narrow definition of legitimacy. Are such constitutions then democratic in the broad sense of the word?

India's constitution is legitimate by narrow definition, yet not so to the majority of the Sikhs in the Punjab or the Muslims in Kashmir.

In South Africa the government previously attempted unsuccessfully to negotiate a new constitution by bypassing the ANC, and the response of even the non-ANC aligned organizations was that you could not exclude the ANC, on the grounds that that organization enjoyed a substantive constituency. Peace could not be achieved by ignoring this force. The same is true in the converse. In my view the very concept of negotiations implies the acknowledgement of an existence of divergent constituency forces. The simple majoritarianism mechanism is therefore incompatible with the concept 'negotiations'. There is thus an implied denial of the existence of constituency forces by the ANC in its demand for a conventional constituent assembly to frame a new constitution. A simple majoritarian constituent assembly once again does not accommodate the multi-constituency force phenomenon and is not an agency of negotiation but of expression of the 'dominant' force. The ANC's acceptance of negotiations therefore seems to contradict its condition for negotiations. In the recognition by the ANC of 'white nationalists' is also implied recognition of the existence of a constituency force. The selection of the first ANC delegation which met the government, for instance, did not meet the criteria of non-racialism or merit. The ANC opted rather for regional and ethnic balance, thereby contradicting its own policy platform. The difficulty with this approach to an 'alliance of constituency forces' is that the balance is arbitrary and dependent on the magnanimity of some organ within the party. The PAC condemns the ANC approach as tokenism, arguing that if a sports team were elected similarly, it would be a multinational side. The weakness in this undefined 'Mugabe' formula for inclusion lies in the fact that individuals would become heavily accountable to and even dependent upon agents within organizations rather than constituencies. To what extent is Joshua Nkomo's inclusion in the Mugabe cabinet a product of a democratic or constitutional process and to what extent is it the product of a paternalistic dilemma?

Those who argue for a transfer of total power to the (simple) majority are therefore logically correct in their demand if the standard for democracy is determined by the test of ordinary majoritarianism.

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Those who accept that a constitution should be the product of negotiations also by implication accept the necessity of sharing power between constituency forces. In the negotiation frame, legitimacy would imply not only majoritarianism but also the recognition and accommodation of society's componental diversity. Lack of legitimacy in the eyes of a component would be as likely to draw the criticism of the suppression or domination of a constituency force and is as unlikely to produce peace and stability as the present minority-rule constitution. Negotiations in the South African context therefore imply the recognition of the concept of overall or broad majoritarianism, as distinct from simple or ordinary majoritarianism.

Just as 'minority rule' implies a disfavoured majority, does not majority rule conversely imply the existence of a distinct and politically unassimilated minority, even if not specifically disfavoured? In fact, unless voting patterns could be shown to ignore constituency forces, majority rule, given the demographic reality of South Africa, could in that sense well be incompatible with the notion of non-racial rule. The presence in government of individuals from different components of society whose inclusion depends on the magnanimity of the majoritarian component rather than through the expression of a 'raceless' political process is basically tokenistic, as in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, and not inherently non-racial. Furthermore, the majoritarian component, by its sheer ability to fashion the rules of the game, would tender to engender a perception of permanent deprivation.

Non-racialism, unfortunately, will have to traverse the evolutionary path of multiracialism before it becomes a homogeneous reality. Like the concept of liberty, equality and fraternity, it is relative, and exists more as an ideal than a reality. Its attainment is dependent upon society first erasing the threshold of an electorally raceless zone!

In order to determine whether the simple majority test is appropriate or even applicable in our context, a few questions involving everyday political terminology highlight the logical consequences of such terminology. If power is to be seized, will it be seized by a component which will gain it from another component that stands to lose it, and will the componental challenge result in instability and violence? (I draw a distinction between a component in society as against a mere clique, which is not a constituency force.)

If one uses negotiations in its ordinary and bilateral sense, can one then 'negotiate' a transfer of power? Or do negotiations not imply sharing in a give and take manner? If power is to be transferred, from whom to whom? Can there be a transfer without battle, victor, vanquished, and ultimately coercive enforcement again? Surely power is not understood to be shared as between individuals but between a diversity of constituency forces in a given society. In a homegeneous society, power is not shared, it is expressed.

If, on the other hand, power is to be shared in order to break the vicious cycle, then between whom? Does not the demand for simple majori-

tarianism in a unitary state revolve around the question of whether the Westminster model of democracy is as likely to result in a transfer of power from one constituency force to another? Conversely, is not a rejection of the demand in the current context premised not necessarily on a refusal to share power but a refusal to hand over power? Consequently, might not democracy in one set of circumstances (the United Kingdom) amount to domination in another (Malaysia)? Is the very claim to democracy, if made exclusively on the basis of a model which ensures a substitution of one form of power concentration by another, not a term of respectable expedience in what is essentially a struggle for power rather than a quest for sharing?

Experience elsewhere in the world has to date not demonstrated opposition in the Westminster idiom to be an acceptable mechanism for satisfying the aspirations of constituency forces. Therefore in divided societies where political policy is not the critical factor upon which electoral judgement is based, government in such societies has to be founded on a different norm. For it to be a government of the people, it has to be a representative of society as a whole and not confined to being the product of an uncritical winning formula.

One method by which power might be shared on a 'non-racial' basis is to accept the premise that constituency forces find expression in electoral processes through, in Mugabe's terminology, 'tribal affiliations'. Instead of opposing this tendency, it might be prudent to channel it positively by making provision for its political expression. A model that could assure a role for substantive political parties (or constituency forces which express themselves as such) in the legislative and decision-making structures would be through a process of constitutional (as against political) coalitions. The constitutional coalition formula is predetermined by negotiation and in such a way that it would tend to nurture a culture of interdependence and alliance rather than result in reinforcing 'tribal affiliation'. The objective of collective government of the elected representativity is thereby achieved.

CONCLUSION

If South Africans want to preserve the integrity of a single constitution in a common country and wish to avoid secessionist and destabilizing tendencies in the future, they will have to accept the premise that the notion of parallel nationalisms is not a fiction but a historical reality and the divergency of constituency forces is ranged even in ideological terms from radical Marxism to unbridled capitalism in a society whose roots are to be found in three of the world's major continents. It follows then that a future constitutional system in South Africa, if it is to endure, will have to reflect the circumstance, and accommodate the disparate nature, of our society. Whilst the closing decade of this century will determine finally

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the course of the struggle for political rights, the beginning of the next century is likely to be involved in the struggle for the forging of a single nationhood.

The challenge thus facing the country in the final analysis is to achieve a constitution which will enjoy the common loyalty of all the people of South Africa. The objective is therefore to achieve a political system in which the constitution acquires legitimacy in the broad sense, failing which democracy and therefore stability will still elude us.

NOTES

1 The term 'reform' in this chapter is used in the specific context of the government's initiative aimed at what it referred to as 'broadening the base of democracy'.
2 The term blacks is used here to refer to so-called coloureds, Africans and Indians. The term Africans refers to the indigenous African population.