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The South African government, co-optive power and ideological hegemony

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In South Africa's new democracy two trends are becoming apparent: political centralisation and the weakening of agents of political accountability. The article argues, first, that these trends are the result of the South African government's use of two forms of co-optive power, namely institutional centralisation and dispositional centralisation. Secondly, contending that these trends are merely the fruits of deeper roots, the article seeks to identify these roots by "digging deeper". Primary documents emanating from South Africa's ruling party, the ANC, have been studied to understand these trends. It is concluded that the current centralisation results from a deliberate striving towards ideological hegemony.

Die Suid-Afrikaanse regering, koöpterende mag en ideologiese hegemonie

Binne Suid-Afrika se nuwe demokrasie is daar twee tendense wat duidelik opval: politieke sentralisering en die verswakking van agente vir politieke verantwoordelikheid. Hierdie artikel betoog, eerstens, dat die tendense die gevolg is van die Suid-Afrikaanse regering se gebruik van twee tipes koöpterende mag, naamlik institusionele sentralisering en disposisionele sentralisering. Tweedens argumenteer die artikel dat hierdie neigings die resultate is van dieperliggende oorsake en probeer dit om daardie oorsake te identifiseer. Primêre dokumente van die regerende party, die ANC, is ontleed om die bestaande neigings beter te verstaan. Die gevolgtrekking is dat die huidige bewyse van sentralisasie die uitvloeisel is van 'n doelbewuste strewe na ideologiese hegemonie.

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Analysts have highlighted evidence of a centralising tendency in the South African government, some pointing to the restructured presidency, others to South Africa's dominant party system and yet others to the increasingly ineffective competition from opposition parties.[1] Chothia & Jacobs (2002: 159) sound the warning as they point to "Mbeki's three C's: centralise, co-ordinate and control". Other analysts have investigated the relationship between the state and civil society, noting that the government appears to be constraining the operating space of civil society organisations as agents of accountability or so-called "watch-dogs" (Habib 2003; Johnson 2002). That these trends are evident is not disputed. A cause for concern, however, is the apparent surprise with which they are addressed and the concomitant calls on government to curb these trends, as they may prove detrimental to South Africa's democracy. This article asserts that the evidence of these centralising trends is not primarily the result of "Mbekism"[2] or the culmination of haphazard policies and events, but rather planned steps towards the fulfilment of the African National Congress's aims and objectives as embodied in the call for a National Democratic Revolution (NDR), and thus the incarnation of its ideology.

It appears that the government, through its policies and legislation, acknowledges and encourages the ethnic and cultural plurality of its citizens, as long as these differences are not used to contend with it. The ANC-led government considers itself to be the only leader of the people, by virtue of democratic elections, and thus the only legitimate voice representing the views of the people. In addition, it appears to be attempting to create unity via centralisation and to be promoting conformity, as evidenced in the centralisation of the governmental structure and, in particular, in the increasing control exerted by the presidency. Plurality as demonstrated in and expressed through political parties and the multiplicity of civil society organisations is being restrained, in an attempt to institutionalise the role of civil society organisations and to delegitimise the voice of political society.

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1   Cf Butler 2000, Chothia & Jacobs 2002, Friedman 1999, Galvin & Habib 2003, Giliomee *et al* 2001, Mattes 2002 and Southall 2003.
2   Cf Ryklief (2002), alluding to the predominance of Mbeki and his supposedly neoliberal ideology, which pervades the ANC. She refers to this as "Mbekism".

Since this study argues that South Africa is engaged in a deliberate process of centralising power, the concept of power will be addressed as a theoretical foundation. An explanation for co-optive power, in particular, will be given. Secondly, the article will investigate the changes that have taken place in South Africa's governmental structure as evidence of institutional centralisation. Thirdly, the roles of civil society and political society will be assessed to establish the extent to which they serve as instruments of democracy and agents of accountability. The current relationships between the state and society will then be analysed as examples of dispositional centralisation. Finally, excerpts from ANC documents will be used to show that this centralisation is the manifestation of deliberate plans and strategies emanating from the ideology of the ANC.

1. Theoretical foundations: power

1.1 The changing resources and faces of power

In politics the concept of power is usually conceived as a relationship — the ability of actor A to get actor B to do or not do something. Joseph Nye (1997: 51) defines power as "the ability to achieve one's purposes". Heywood (2002: 11) recognises that there are many faces of power, listing three: power as decision-making, power as agenda-setting and power as thought control. Concerning this third face of power, Steven Lukes's (1974) understanding of power is: the ability to influence another by shaping what s/he thinks, wants and needs. This power is exercised through propaganda or the impact of ideology. In basic terms, ideology is a set of ideas that forms the foundation of political organisation: it determines what the "good life" should look like and how it can be achieved.

Nye (2003: 57) distinguishes between hard power and soft power. Hard power rests on the ability to use the inducements ("carrots") and the threats ("sticks") of economic and military force to make others follow one's will. In contrast, co-optive power is a less direct method of exercising power; it is the ability to get what one wants by attracting and persuading others to adopt one's objectives and values. Holsti (1995: 126-7) similarly identifies what he refers to as "structural power", which acknowledges that social relationships take place within a particular context of position, authority and tradition. Those who have structural power have the ability to determine the rules of the game and set its

standards. Although Holsti and Nye use these distinctions mainly to investigate power in international relations and, in particular, foreign policy, their terms can be equally instructive in the study of politics.

The major resources of co-optive power include having the means to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences of others, by making one's objectives attractive and determining the discourse or the framework of the debate (Nye 2003: 57) or, as in Lukes's third phase of power, through the impact of ideology. As Muchie (2004: 7) notes, "[d]iscourse has an intrinsic power to frame, set parameters, suggest agenda[s], help select policy options", thus serving as an important tool for those who are in a position to manufacture, name and control it. They are able, by means of rhetoric, to determine the "us" and the "them". And thus, by the promotion of an ideology as the "right" and "only" way, they can effectively alienate and discredit critical elements.

It is becoming increasingly important to recognise soft power, as actors and institutions are moving away from the use of overt hard power toward its subtler and less identifiable counterpart. This article identifies two forms of soft or co-optive power: institutional centralisation and dispositional centralisation. Institutional centralisation ensures that decision-making and policy-making are centrally co-ordinated from where the "rules of the game", and thus ideologies, emanate. Dispositional centralisation is achieved by undermining alternative views, by setting the discourse and defining the functions that institutions other than the state can fulfil. It is essentially the determining of the rules of the game based on an agreed ideology and the silencing of opposition or alternatives to those "rules".

1.2 "Party-dominant" systems

Attaining and maintaining party dominance provides a platform for the exercise of soft power in a democratic system. In turn, soft power provides the necessary means to maintain dominance. According to Friedman (1999: 99) a party-dominant system is a democracy in which regular elections take place; opposition parties are free to organise and express themselves, and civil liberties, for the most part, are respected. What distinguishes these from other democracies is the monopoly of power by one party. The party wins its position through democratic elections; its dominance cannot be attained by force or deceit. Maurice Duverger

(Friedman 1999: 100) defines such dominance as "a question of influence rather than strength". Since the dominant party holds power within a democracy, its dominance is not a given, but must be continually maintained. Methods used to ensure dominance include (Friedman 1999: 101):

- delegitimising the opposition;
- relying on and emphasising "kinship" contacts between the citizens and government, for example by continually highlighting a shared past;
- the monopoly or near-monopoly of the public policy agenda, and
- the creation or perpetuation of an enemy to unite against, whether that enemy is real or not.

A party-dominant system would fit what Southall (2003: 74-5) describes as "low intensity" democracy (the road he believes South Africa has taken). This implies that the formal requirements for democracy are met, but "under conditions of decreasing competition and declining popular participation", with dissent and critical thought being steadily overwhelmed by the processes of centralisation. Friedman (1999: 116) similarly recognises that in order to ensure control, a dominant party will need to dominate the formal polity as well as civil society.

Heywood (2002: 263) highlights common consequences of the party-dominant system:

- The erosion of the distinction between the state and the ruling political party. With the continuation of the same party in power a "process of politicisation" occurs as state officials and institutions adopt the ideological and political priorities of the ruling party.
- Due to a lack of "fear of the ballot" the dominant party may begin to display complacency and arrogance, and possibly corruption.
- This system is also often characterised by weak and ineffective opposition, especially where the dominant party feels no obligation to take their criticism into account.

The relevance of these theoretical understandings of power will now be assessed in the South African context.

1.3 South African government: soft power and party dominance

With its wide support base, due to its history as the victorious liberation movement, the initial dominance of the South African government system by the ANC was a given. Gaining an overwhelming majority in the

1999 and 2004 elections has confirmed this. Academic commentators, including Giliomee *et al* (2001), have applied the concept of "party dominance" to South Africa, while Southall (2005) cautions that although there is evidence of a dominant-party system, the ANC's dominance is limited by constitutional counterweights, by its inability to impose itself on society and by evidence of vigorous internal debate. Thus, Southall (2005: 64) argues for a "weak" version of the dominant system. Nevertheless, in the very nature of a democratic system, party dominance — whether strong or weak — requires maintenance and strategy without the use of the force or fraud evidenced in autocracies and dictatorships. In other words, hard power is not an option for the ANC-led government; it depends on instruments of soft power.

Two manifestations of soft power emanate from and within the South African government: institutional centralisation and dispositional centralisation. The methods used to ensure party dominance, as identified by Friedman (1999), are evident in these two processes. This is apparent in governmental structure, in the strengthening of centralised control by an expanded presidential office. The latter is less obvious, but is evident when the power of discourse is unravelled. It will be shown that the political space of South Africa's political and civil society is being contended and severely retrained by means of discourse.

2. Institutional centralisation: the state apparatus

Galvin & Habib (2003: 865) point out:

> [A]lthough the new South African government has adopted a range of policies that promote decentralisation, competing tendencies toward centralisation have become increasingly evident.

The process of decentralisation was initially accepted by the ANC at the conclusion of constitutional negotiations (Niksic 2004). The ANC was pressurised into conceding on its pledge to unitary government by accommodating the interests of minority groups and it thus accepted a more federalised form of government. For example, during the Multi-Party Negotiating Forum in 1993, greater levels of authority and responsibility for lower levels of government were agreed to. A system of proportional representation was also approved. Yet, in spite of the rhetorical assurances of decentralisation in policy papers and legislation,

centripetal tendencies are undermining the implementation of these policies (Galvin & Habib 2003: 866).

There are four possible explanations for this centralising tendency and the move towards a more unitary system. First, the apartheid system was based on a federal (albeit warped) and supposedly decentralised form of government, thus there is an understandable aversion to a federal system. This also explains why, although our system of government has a federal form, it is never referred to as such by the government. Secondly, although national leaders may make eloquent statements in praise of decentralisation, in reality they tend to perceive it as undermining their capacity to administer development and to control its processes and resources. They consider centralisation to be conducive to improved co-ordination. Thirdly, there is a growing global tendency towards centralisation, a wave that South Africa appears determined to ride. And finally, President Thabo Mbeki and many others in the ANC leadership have been trained in the radical Leninist school of thought, which gives pre-eminence to the role of the "vanguard party" (Johnson 2002: 222), thereby under-pinning their understanding of a hierarchical relationship between rulers and ruled. This last point will recur in the last section, as it relates to the ideology underlying the ANC government's policies and actions.

2.1 Restructuring the government

During President Nelson Mandela's term of office, a Presidential Review Commission was set up to consider the functions and structure of the presidential office. It insisted that the Presidency should form the core of the system of governance, emphasising that the centralisation of power was a growing trend among world governments. The report reasoned that the purpose of centralisation was to enable heads of governments to exert a strong co-ordinating influence towards the achievement of election promises. One of the report's recommendations was to merge the Offices of the President and the Deputy President, because their over-lapping support structures and functions were excessively costly. The outcome is interesting: whereas the staff complement of the former Offices of the President and the Deputy President was 296, the restructured Presidency has a staff complement of approximately 341 (The Presidency 2000/2001: 3-7).

In June 1997, the executive government (the Cabinet) approved the establishment of an important new unit in the President's office: the Co-ordination and Implementation Unit (CIU). This unit was designed to "equip government with the strategic planning and management capacity it required" (Davis 1999: 6). It then evolved into the Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Service (PCAS). When asked during an interview with the *Financial Mail* what the CIU was, President Mbeki answered:

> It's an economic, a socio-economic co-ordinating unit. There has been a difficulty in the separation of departments, with each doing its own thing. When people think about foreign affairs, they normally think of the Department of Foreign Affairs. But Trade and Industry is in foreign affairs, Finance is in foreign affairs, Defence is in foreign affairs, Safety and Security [is] in foreign affairs — a whole number of departments. You could have a situation where each one is pulling in different directions. So you need a co-ordinating unit, particularly with regard to economic questions. It is a unit of co-ordination (Chothia & Jacobs 2002: 149).

The Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Service, consisting of five units, vets new policy and drafts legislation for tabling at Cabinet meetings. The units are accountable to no legislative body and it is mandatory for the ministries to refer all new policy documents and draft legislation to the Presidency for examination by the PCAS. The five units (namely: economic sector, inter-governmental co-ordination, social sector, criminal justice system, and international relations) are headed by chief directors who are at least as powerful as cabinet ministers, but with a salient difference: whereas the latter are accountable to Parliament, the chief directors are not. They are accountable to President Mbeki alone. The likely result is that decisions will be made behind the scenes by the PCAS, while the ministers may be reduced to managers and marketers of the new policies (Chothia & Jacobs 2002: 151-3).

Further changes resulting from the reorganisation of the Presidency include the alteration of the relationship between the various levels of government; as the centre is strengthened, so the provinces and local governments are weakened. Of course, whether the provincial governments could ever have been truly autonomous is questionable, with 95% of their funding emanating from the national government and their budget being determined by the national Ministry of Finance. Nevertheless, the powers of the national government have been further extended at the provincial and local levels, as a central committee has replaced

provincial and local branches, nominating candidates for provincial premierships and local mayoralties (Mattes 2002: 25).

On the one hand the evidence of centralisation appears to indicate the intention of the Government to improve the co-ordination of its programmes, but it also raises the question of whether the Cabinet ministries and the provincial and local governments are being sidelined. The restructuring has raised much concern, with the central question being posed by Chothia & Jacobs (2002: 150): "How much of the restructuring is about improved co-ordination, and how much about power?" The concern is real, regardless of whether the intentions are benign; such centralisation paves the way for the possibility of an imperial government. With the process of consolidation the roles of all but a few within the governmental apparatus have been reduced to those of managers, marketers and implementers of policies handed down by the highest echelons of government.

2.2 The electoral system and the legislature

The electoral system of proportional representation (PR), used since 1994, has been widely assumed to have been positive for nation-building as smaller ethnic, regional and minority parties have gained representation in Parliament. This inclusivity stands in stark contrast to the exclusivity of the previous system of white minority rule and has made the legislature, with its low cut-off threshold, one of the most representative in the world. However, Mattes (2002: 24) points out that despite the apparently high degree of representation, the system "has created no direct link between legislators and voters". There is an accountability deficit, as the electorate is no longer represented in constituencies. The closed party list system means that voters have no choice of candidates but simply vote for a party. This has two significant consequences; firstly, party officials have enormous control over political recruitment and, as Giliomee *et al* (2001: 170) argue, the system allows "the party leadership to place loyalists in key positions". Secondly, since Members of Parliament (MPs) are dependent on their political party for their position and not on the electorate, they are less likely to represent public opinions which go against the party line.

Besides the issue of accountability, representativeness has also come into question with the passing of the Constitution Amendment Act, 2003 (Act 2 of 2003) which permits floor-crossing. The ANC's initial

opposition to crossing the floor shifted when the then New National Party (NNP) left the Democratic Alliance coalition to enter into talks with the ANC. The timing of the change in legislation exhibited "naked political opportunism" (Mattes 2002: 26). The Act allows elected representatives to change their political affiliation without losing their seats at national, provincial and local levels. The requirements for this floor-crossing legislation include:

- The defector must be a member of the national, provincial or local government legislature.
- The defection must represent not less than 10% of the total number of seats held by the party from which the defector is leaving.

The seat held by the defector is thenceforth considered to belong to the party to which it is defecting, meaning that proportional representation in terms of the initial allocation of seats (as determined by the number of votes) is distorted. In addition, the 10% threshold protects larger parties, as many more representatives are needed before defection can occur. Thus the floor-crossing legislation has become a further mechanism in the strengthening of the ANC.

The foregoing discusison serves to provide evidence of institutional centralisation in the executive and the legislature, and across all three levels of government — national, provincial and local.

3. Agents of accountability

There are two primary spheres from which democratic accountability for constraining the power of the state can emanate: political society and civil society. It is noted at the outset that to recognise the need for agents of accountability is not to assert that such agents are above the state; rather, there is agreement with Johnson (2002: 223) that civil society cannot be assumed to be "positive, homogenous, and coherent" and that the state is necessarily "inherently authoritarian and bureaucratic". It is acknowledged that all institutions, whether they be states, civil society organisations or political parties, are guided and controlled by individuals capable of mismanagement, corruption and self-interested pursuits — hence the need for autonomous political operating space for agents of accountability.

3.1 Civil society

Civil society is an umbrella term referring to groupings of actors whose exact identities are debatable. In a broad understanding of the term, civil society comprises a multiplicity of groups, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unions, churches, the media, research institutions and think-tanks, women's groups, environmental groups and human rights organisations. The contention over exactly what roles civil society is expected to play is evident in its numerous and diverging definitions. In Ikelegbe's (2001: 2-3) words:

> A central hypothesis of the civil society paradigm is that it is the force for societal resistance to state excesses and the centerpiece organizationally, materially and ideologically of the social movements and protests for reform and change.

This definition is largely derived from the understanding of civil society as developed by thinkers such as John Locke and Adam Ferguson: that of a counteractive force to the centralising tendencies of the state.

On the other hand, Muchie (2004: 7) questions the validity of the above definition by strongly arguing that the strength of civil society and the state is not to be found in an adversarial relationship, but instead in partnerships and co-operative arrangements. Habib (2003: 228) takes the middle ground in recognising the plurality of civil society's social and political agendas, which in turn will be reflected in the relations between the state and society. By implication, it is only natural that some of these relationships will be characterised by co-operation, and others by conflict. Habib & Kotze (2002: 3) proceed to define civil society as "the organised expression of various interests and values operating in the triangular space between family, state and the market". Civil society organisations (CSOs) therefore derive their legitimacy from their ability "to bring new issues [onto] the public agenda, provide information, act independently from government and business interests and from their closeness to the people on the ground" (Naidoo & Finn Heinrich 2000: 7).

This final definition provides a more accurate description of civil society and its diverse functions, one of which may be maintaining state accountability. Civil society celebrates plurality and diversity and this is considered to be a healthy state of affairs.

3.2 Political society

Along with elections, the presence of a vibrant and viable political society in the form of political parties has become the second yardstick of the health of a democracy. The existence of political parties is not a sufficient measure of democracy, but it is a necessary indication thereof. It is again acknowledged that political parties may become tools of tyranny and repression, especially where the party system moves to a one-party state; the need for strong opposition parties hence, to counter such a progression. For the purposes of this article a political party will be defined as "a group of people that is organised for the purpose of winning government" (Heywood 2002: 248), ideally by electoral means.

4. Dispositional centralisation

4.1 Silencing civil society

Civil society is an avenue for articulating the concerns and issues of a diverse population. In rhetoric the plurality of civil society is acknowledged by South African politicians and government officials, yet there is an expectation of a "single homogenous set of relations between the state and civil society" (Habib 2003: 239). In an ANC (1998) discussion paper, *The State, Property Relations and Social Transformation*, it is asserted that: "[I]deally, a developmental state and civil society should co-exist in a broad *partnership* of nation-building, reconstruction and development" [my emphasis, NdJ]. While it is agreed that civil society need not be in opposition to the state, what is paramount and should not be negotiable is that it maintains its autonomy *vis-à-vis* the state. With South Africa's promotion of partnerships between the state and civil society, in which the state sets the policy and determines the objectives, civil society is reduced to a mere implementer of state policy. The lines of separation thus become indistinct and blurred. The development of more formal and regulated relations between civil society and the state may subvert the character of civil society and compromise its role in enhancing democracy, especially if the operating space for adversarial relationships between the state and civil society is not recognised.

President Mbeki clearly finds fault with the counter-hegemonic role of civil society.[2] His reaction, to be found in the ANC discussion document *The State and Social Transformation*, which he drafted in 1996 as Deputy President, is instructive:

>]T]he democratic movement must resist the liberal concept of 'less government', which, while being presented as a philosophical approach towards the state in general, is in fact, aimed specifically at the weakening of the democratic state. The purpose of this offensive is precisely to deny the people the possibility to use the collective strength and means concentrated in the democratic state to bring about the transformation of society (ANC 1996).

The former President, Nelson Mandela, had earlier been disapproving of civil society organisations that sought to adopt the role of critical overseer of the ANC government and that served as channels for grassroot grievances (Johnson 2002: 231). At the National Civil Society Conference of April 2001 he is quoted as saying:

> We cannot approach the subject of civil society from the point of view that government represents an inherent negative force in society and that civil society is needed to curb government. Such an approach runs the risk of projecting civil society as adjunct to the organised political opposition.
>
> We cannot in the long term afford a situation where the majority of the population perceives civil society as something oppositional to their needs, wishes and interests because it is seen to instinctively oppose the government they voted into office (Mandela 2001).

At the same conference Mandela (2001) asserted that the challenge to society:

> ... is how various organs of civil society can co-operate to advance overall national goals of transformation [...] and trust that these efforts at cooperative partnerships will bear fruit for our society [...] In that manner we can ensure that the energies of civil society are harnessed for [...] progress and unity rather than for division and dissipation of efforts.

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2   Not all within the ANC are in agreement regarding this understanding of civil society. An ANC MP, Ben Turok, is quoted as having said at an IDASA workshop in 2003: "Civil society is needed because it acts as a check on power. One thing we must never have is an ANC one-party state, and a vibrant civil society will help to prevent this."

In *The State and Social Transformation* describes the state as "the only vehicle which possesses the capacity to act as the leader of the people in their struggle to establish a truly democratic state" (ANC 1996: 1). The document goes on to point out "the importance of community-based and non-governmental organisations in the system of governance of the democratic state" (ANC 1996: 6). Thus, civil society must fit in with and advance the national goals as set by the state. As Muchie (2004: 4) poignantly points out: "It matters how the concept [of civil society] is appropriated and for whom and by whom." In terms of the relations between civil society and the state, it appears that the state is assigned the role of knowledge producer, policy developer, decision-maker and writer of the agenda for social transformation, while civil society should merely support the government through the mobilisation and implementation of its directives. Thus, according to the government, civil society has no function except to pursue the goals set by the state. It should be noted, though, that — in contrast to the call for a single, homogenous role for civil society — civil society organisations in South Africa are vibrant and diverse. This is evidenced, *inter alia*, in the commentary of the outspoken *Mail & Guardian* newspaper; the numerous protests of the very active trade union, COSATU, and the Treatment Action Campaign's unremitting pressure on the government to provide antiretroviral treatment.

President Mbeki's understanding of civil society is perhaps reflected in Muchie's (2004: 2) work, where partnership between the state and civil society is advocated as the necessary requirement for "con-structing social cohesion". Muchie's advocacy of this unitary role for civil society may be understood as a reaction to the branding of African states as "failed" states, while civil society is put on a pedestal and credited with the ability to ensure democracy. An analysis of his arguments may help to understand the South African government's expectations of civil society. Muchie uses three main arguments to bolster his case against a conflictual or accountability-type relationship between the state and society relationship, upholding a state-society partnership which is co-operative. He claims that the shift of donor funding from the state to civil society affirms his argument that "donors arrogate the power of controlling the discourse and rhetoric for promotion of the NGOs and the demotion of the State" (Muchie 2004: 6). A second argument advanced by Muchie

(2004: 6) is that the African state has been further eroded by the defection of civil servants to the supposedly more lucrative civil society sector. Thirdly, he claims that "the state retreat has been yoked with the revival of free-market ideology and civil society" (Muchie 2004: 7).

All of this is instructive in understanding African states' suspicions of civil society and would be an understandable cause for greater regulation, except that it does not hold true for the South African context. One must acknowledge that civil society is certainly not always "civil", as demonstrated by the vigilantism of groups like People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD); the perception that it is a panacea for the country's social problems is equally misguided. Moreover, South Africa cannot be categorised as a failed state; in fact, it has been highly praised for its over twelve successful years of democracy.

Regarding the movement of funding from the state to civil society, a different phenomenon has appeared in South Africa. In the 1970s and 1980s, at a time of conflictual apartheid politics, a plethora of initiatives and organisations arose in opposition to the state, and it was these civil society organisations that many donors funded (Hearn 2000). But at the time of the 1994 elections there was a significant shift of "democracy assistance" or aid towards the state, with the aim of strengthening government structures. For example, Denmark described its assistance programme to South Africa as "targeted towards facilitating the transition from an authoritarian minority rule to a democratic system of government" (Hearn 2000: 820). Instead, CSOs began to feel the financial pressure as "foreign donors redirected their funding away from CSOs to the state" (Habib 2003: 234). Even in those situations where donors such as the European Union were committed to funding both government and civil society, most of the funds were to be administered by government-controlled agencies like the National Development Agency (Fioramonti 2004).

Secondly, it was in fact civil society that suffered most from the "brain drain" as many institutional and movement leaders from the anti-apartheid struggle moved into government positions at the time of the 1994 regime change (Habib & Taylor 1999). Thirdly, there is a misconception that liberalisation or the introduction of the free market necessarily leads to the retreat of the state. A study by Dan Rodrik (2000: 232) indicates a "positive correlation between a nation's openness to trade and

the amount of its spending on social programmes". Rodrik affirms that his results are not confined to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, but that developing countries exhibit similar patterns. Thus there are two seemingly contradictory trends: "the growth of trade and the growth of government" (Rodrik 2000: 230). In South Africa an additional reason for the decline in the number of CSOs can been attributed to the ANC government reclaiming its role as a service provider (Fioramonti 2004).

In light of the above it is difficult to understand the government's aversion to the possibility of a plurality of roles being fulfilled by civil society, including that of a force for accountability. Civil society is not a threat to the state; indeed, from the above discussion it is clear that the opposite is in fact true. In any normal healthy relationship there will be a certain amount of conflict and disagreement. To negate this as a possibility is to promote an unhealthy relationship where one party must inevitably have its goals and values suppressed and subverted to those of the other. Such conflictual engagement, often entered into with a desire for the best possible solution, is the positive result of allowing oneself to be accountable to another. The problem may lie with the term "counter-hegemonic function", as it has immediate negative connotations. An alternative could be: state accountability, with some CSOs playing the role of keeping the state accountable to its promises and to ensuring a democratic South Africa.

The South African government describes its domestic policy as one that is people-centred. In February 2004, during his State of the Nation Address, Mbeki (2004) quoted Nelson Mandela's affirmation of his commitment to the statement:

> The government I have the honour to lead and I dare say the masses who elected us to serve in this role are inspired by the single vision of creating a people-centred society.

If this is so, the government should be celebrating the plurality of voices that CSOs represent, as they maintain a check on government, preventing it from taking its citizens for granted, and creating the possibility of a people-centred and people-driven country.

4.2 Political parties

The ANC's National General Council Report from its meeting of 11-15 July 2000 provides an indication of the party's attitude towards other political parties. It reads: "While the elections demonstrated a *reduction in support for the forces opposed to transformation ..."* [my emphasis, NdJ] (ANC 2000). By implication, opposition parties are "forces opposed to transformation" and the ANC considers itself, as previously quoted, as the only legitimate leader of the transformation. At the 51st National Conference of the ANC Mbeki (2002) stated:

> The Democratic Party/Democratic Alliance has continued to position itself as the most determined opponent of our movement and our perspective [on] the fundamental transformation of our country. In the period since our last National Conference, the DP/DA has indeed done everything it could to oppose our transformation effort.

Therefore, if one is critical of the ANC-led government or its officials, one will be branded as being disloyal to South Africa and the future of the country. This is especially evident when even the erstwhile party of apartheid sings the same tune. On 7 August 2004 the New National Party's leader, Martthinus van Schalkwyk, announced that he would be joining the ANC and called on membership to join him. One of the party's members went on to tell other members that they would have to decide whether to "help build South Africa or criticise from the sidelines" (Msomi & Ndlangisa 2004: 1). Again, this implies that those who do not join the ranks of the ANC-led government are not helping to build South Africa. President Mbeki's address at the 51st National Congress of the ANC in 2002 reiterates this point: "From its foundation, the African National Congress has served as the parliament of our people and an agent of unity of the African people". Thus, there appears to be political space only for the ANC as the "unifier" of the people within parliament and government.

5. The ANC ideology and the national democratic revolution

Recognising manifestations of centralisation is not where the academic inquiry should stop. The "why" needs to be addressed. Why is there evidence of institutional and dispositional centralisation? Some argue that

it is a result of the technocratic tendencies of the leadership, namely President Thabo Mbeki. However, I would argue that the pervasiveness of centralisation is too great to attribute the ability of one man; the answer is rather to be found within the worldview or ideology of the ANC. The unitary role assigned to civil society organisations, the increased centralisation of the government and the silencing of oppositional voices is the tip of the iceberg. What needs to be ascertained is the foundation on which this iceberg rests. The Consolidated Report on Sectoral Strategies of the ANC General Council of 2005 asserts that in the context of a unipolar world, dominated by capitalism, "the ANC needs to *engage and assert its worldview, values and character*" [my emphasis, NdJ] (ANC 2005). The consequences of the assertion of this worldview are more understandable when the following questions are addressed: What is the worldview of the ANC? How does this worldview translate into how the ANC sees itself? What objectives does it seek to attain? And how does it intend to do so?

A worldview or ideology refers to an interpretative framework, the values and beliefs which determine overall policies and actions. The ANC's worldview is to be found in its core documents and policy statements. In 2005, at the National General Council, the ANC once again affirmed its ideological orientation as "a disciplined force of the *left*" [my emphasis, NdJ]. The ANC clearly sees itself "as a movement that organises and leads the people in the task of social transformation" (ANC 1999).

The ANC considers itself to be a movement. In the report of the ANC National General Council of 2000, President Mbeki is quoted as stating: "As an agent of change, the ANC needs to discharge its responsibilities, both as a *movement* for national liberation and [as] a governing party …." [my emphasis, NdJ] (ANC 2000). The Consolidated Report on Sectoral Strategies of the ANC General Council of 2005 asserts the need to strengthen the ANC "as a movement that leads society in social transformation". Thus the ANC considers itself to be a movement, the leader in the attainment of social transformation and the only leader of the people. Its claims of position and power fit within Leninist vanguardism. This is where the party provides ideological leadership for the masses, aimed at the attainment of their revolutionary destiny. Johnson (2002: 233) rightly cautions:

> The result of this vanguardist approach that privileges co-ordinated and centralised leadership over decentralised mass action is a governing strategy that — despite the continued official rhetoric of participatory democracy and people-driven development — systematically limits the public spaces for people to participate outside the highly regulated and institutionalised settings defined by the state.

Besides the implications of vanguardism the ANC's reference to itself as a movement also demands scrutiny. Heywood (2002: 284) defines a social movement as a "particular form of collective behaviour in which the motive to act springs largely from the attitudes and aspirations of members". They typically focus on a single issue and tend to emerge from society to challenge and change the political establishment. The ANC, during apartheid, was a liberation movement, a society challenging a repressive and undemocratic system. In 2005, eleven years after South Africa's democratic elections, the ANC still maintained this title, the implications of which include the blurring of the distinguishing line between government and society, thereby encroaching upon the political space and autonomy of society in general, and civil society in particular. Secondly, if the movement is of and for the people, why would the people oppose it? Thus, opposition would necessarily translate into being non-transformative. Thirdly, there are implications relating to accountability. To whom, or what institution, is a movement accountable? Unlike a political party accountable to its electorate and a government accountable to its citizens at large, a movement has no accountability counterpart, especially if it is also the government.

The ANC, as a movement, aims to achieve a National Democratic Revolution (NDR). The strategic objective of the movement is:

> The creation of a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society. This in essence means the liberation of Africans in particular and black people in general from political and economic bondage. It means uplifting the quality of life of all South Africans, especially the poor, the majority of whom are African and female (ANC 1998).

In 1996 Joel Netshitenzhe stated that the NDR is a "process of struggle that seeks the transfer of power to the people ... When we talk of power we mean political, social and economic control". The change will "come about as a result of consistent effort on our [the ANC's] part, which will entail a complex ideological, political and organisational struggle" (Mbeki 2002). The creation of a democratic society is a neces-

sary and noble task. But the rhetoric and the actions appear far removed from one another, especially when the fulfilment of the revolution means a transfer of power to one political party through the silencing of alternative voices and the imposition of ideological hegemony. It is an elitist approach, which assumes that the ANC speaks on behalf of society and that society is not capable of articulating its own voice through civil and political society.

In his address at the 51st National Conference of the ANC (2002), President Mbeki argued:

> [T]he objective of reconstruction and development cannot be achieved unless the ANC and the rest of the progressive movement are *strong and united* around the realisation of clear policy objectives which actually result in reconstruction and development [my emphasis, NdJ].

Accordingly, the NDR will be realised in the first place through "[t]he application of the principles of *democratic centralisation*" [my emphasis, NdJ] (ANC 2000), by "strengthening the hold of the democratic government on state power, and transforming the state machinery to serve the cause of social change" (ANC 1999) — read: institutional centralisation.

Secondly, the NDR is to be achieved through its Cadre Development and Deployment Strategy (1999) in the attainment of ideological hegemony. The term "cadre" denotes party members trained and disciplined in the ideology of the party who are "expected to exhibit a high level [of] political commitment and doctrinal discipline" (Heywood 2002: 249). A feature of the cadre party is a reliance on a political elite to offer ideological leadership to the masses. The aforementioned ANC policy document asserts under the heading 'Winning hegemony' that the "responsibility of cadres (those located within the state) …[is] to use whatever power they have to ensure that transformation policies are accepted and implemented". The policy document also calls for

> deployment of cadres for effective intervention on all fronts, including the governmental, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary, with proper co-ordination amongst all these levels, to ensure that we act as one movement, united around a common policy and bound by a common programme of action (ANC 1999).

"Parliamentary" here implies political society and "extra-parliamentary" civil society, thus the ANC intends to be influenced and penetrated by its ideology for all spheres of political and civil society. At the ANC's

recent National General Council meeting of 2005 it again reasserted the importance of the "ideological struggle and cadre development", with the relevant commission recommending the necessity of paying "close attention to issues pertaining to the socialisation of new generations in institutions such as the family, schools and higher education institutions". Thus, this ideological hegemony is to include the political socialisation of all South African citizens in the worldview of the ANC — read: dispositional centralisation.

Thus, institutional and dispositional centralisations are manifestations of the fulfilment of the ANC's National Democratic Revolution. To ask the ANC to restrict its power and to refrain from infiltrating all spheres of the state and society would thus be experienced as tantamount to requesting it not to fulfil its aims and objectives as stated in its policy and discussion documents.

6.   Conclusion

An increasing intolerance of dissention and alternative views is apparent in South Africa's fledgling democracy. In addition, the enactment of processes to centralise government structures and social discourse is closing existing avenues for autonomous and independent thought. The ANC argues for a unified approach to the National Democratic Revolution, thereby justifying the need for institutional and dispositional centralisation. The ANC government, as a party and a movement, is clearly using the "tools" of soft power through the pervasion of ideological hegemony. In true vanguard style, the space for independent, critical thought is diminishing as the ANC asserts itself as the leader and voice of the people. Dare one contend with such a revolution?

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