

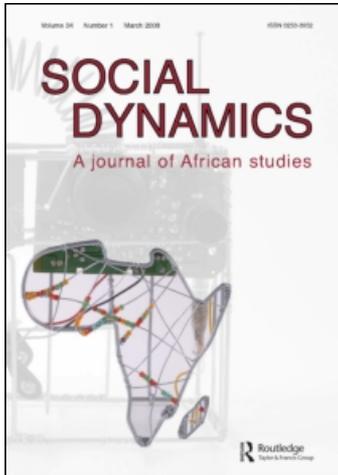
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### South Africa: conceptualising a politics of human-oriented development

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## South Africa: conceptualising a politics of human-oriented development

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This article reflects on what needs to be done for a human-oriented development agenda in South Africa? It investigates the broader structural political condition, especially the configuration of power, under which human-oriented development occurs. It does this by first analysing the diverse academic literature on democracy and development with a view to drawing out the political lessons from comparative development experiences. These are then applied to South Africa through an engagement with its academic, policy and organisational literature so as to determine how best to establish the political condition for a human-oriented development trajectory. Finally, the article concludes by both drawing together the various threads of the analysis and reflecting on the political implications of the succession dispute. Its overall conclusion is that not only is human-oriented development a product of a political process, but it also requires an intricate mix of representative and participatory democratic elements. This mix of representative and participatory democratic elements is meant to create a substantive uncertainty, which is the political foundation that generates the accountability between elites and their citizens so necessary for realising a human-oriented development agenda. The political programme recommended then challenges the perspectives of those who view participatory and representative democracy as distinct political systems. The perspective advanced here suggests that it is the intricate mix of participatory and representative elements that enhances the accountability of political elites to their citizens.

**Keywords:** development; politics; power; civil society; Tripartite Alliance

The first year of South Africa's second decade of democracy, witnessed the opening of a political drama whose outcome may define the future character of the society. This theatre around who was to succeed President Mbeki in the African National Congress (ANC), involved a formidable political cast, comprising not only the President of the Republic and Jacob Zuma, now President of the ruling party, but also almost every significant figure in South Africa's ruling political hierarchy. Moreover, the script was organised around the political contest between different sets of heroes and villains, themselves personified in the individual personalities of Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma. The distinguishing feature of this theatre was that its heroes and villains changed depending on who was doing the narrative.

In one version, South Africa's transition is presented in a positive light. It is a story of macro-economic stability, sustainable growth, low inflation, high productivity and demographic and racial transformation. South Africa is presented as the example of the modern African state, one responsibly taking its place in the world community of nations. The benefits of the democratic transition are seen to be broadly shared across the society (PCAS 2003). Where it has not been, it is suggested that it has less to do with the policies pursued, and far more to do with the

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structural dynamics of South African society (Mbeki 2003, 2004a, 2004b). The heroes in this story are Thabo Mbeki, Trevor Manuel, Tito Mboweni and the cadre of officials and technocrats that surround them. The villains are the populists located mainly in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ANC Youth League who surround Jacob Zuma and mislead what is in effect the rabble of largely young, uninformed, lumpen elements.

The second version presents South Africa's transition as having been derailed. Of course there is an acknowledgement of the positive features of this transition. Its peaceful character, the establishment of new democratic institutions and the racial transformation of the state are recognised as advances on South Africa's apartheid past. But the story is also cast as one of missed opportunities, the enrichment of the narrow few, the capture of the ANC by a new breed of politically connected businessmen and the marginalisation of the interests of poor urban and rural communities (COSATU 2006, SACP 2006a, 2006b). The heroes in this version are Jacob Zuma, Zwelinzima Vavi, Blade Nzimande and the groups of activists who are seen to courageously stand up to the imperial presidency and the comprador bourgeoisie that surrounds it. The villains are President Mbeki, his cabinet and the technocrats who operate so well in the unfeeling world of statistics and who are alienated from the lived realities of South Africa's poor and marginalised.

Both versions of the story have one common feature. They are organised around agency. The stories are about personalities and political advance is conceived as only being possible if one's band of heroes successfully ascend to high political office in the ANC and the state. These stories have very little to say about institutional constraints and structural conditions. Where there is a discussion of structural conditions, it is presented, often by the mainstream political and economic elites, as a 'no alternative' scenario with the intention of intellectually disarming critics.

Yet a structural analysis of the transition, one that emphasises configurations of power and how individual leaders' choices are constrained by the institutions they inhabit, need not strategically disarm political agencies interested in a more inclusive human-oriented development and need not disempower them. Such agencies do not have to conceive development as a product of individuals who occupy high office. They can, for instance, recognise that the evolution of South Africa's transition is conditioned by the structural configurations of power, and as a result a human-oriented development agenda is dependent on a political programme that prioritises engaging these structural conditions and trying to transform them to make a different set of socio-economic policies viable. How this can be theoretically conceptualised, and the elements comprising this political programme is then the substantive focus of this article?

This article therefore reflects on the issue of what needs to be done for a human-oriented development agenda in South Africa? It does not do this at the level of policies or personalities (UNDP 2003, Bhorat and Kanbur 2006). Neither does it focus on the social and institutional relationships, as do some recent studies on the development state (Freund 2006, Southall 2006). Instead, the article investigates the broader structural political condition, especially the configuration of power, under which human-oriented development occurs. It does this by first analysing the diverse academic literature on democracy and development with a view to drawing out the political lessons from comparative development experiences. These are then applied to South Africa through an engagement with its academic, policy and organisational literature so as to determine how best to establish the political condition for a human-oriented development trajectory. Finally, the article concludes by both drawing together the various threads of the analysis and reflecting on the political implications of the succession dispute.

### Democracy and development: some comparative reflections

A wealth of scholarship has been built up over the last decade on the South African transition. Much of it is ideologically driven and policy oriented (Bond 2000, Marais 2001, Alexander 2002, Desai 2002, Terreblanche 2002, Hirsch 2005), some of it is comparatively located (Mamdani 1996, Bratton and van de Walle 1997) and very little of it is sufficiently grounded in quantitative data (May 2000, Bhorat and Kanbur 2006, Seekings and Natrass 2006). While this body of academic work has enabled some understanding of the dynamics of the transition and its evolution, it does not adequately investigate the political conditions under which human-oriented development occurs. Instead it is focused either on legitimising or critiquing the present development trajectory and where alternatives are advanced, these are largely constructed at the level of policy. This, together with the fact that the leadership battle within the ANC is organised mainly around personalities, indicates that there is an excessive focus on agency and very little reflection on how institutional and structural location constrains agential behaviour and choice. Moreover, there is currently very little realistic thinking on how institutional and structural constraints can be transformed. This is a pity since there are a number of historical cases across the world where economic and political elites were prompted to undertake a human-oriented development trajectory. Does it not make sense then, to establish a research agenda on the politics of policy-making, with the express aim of trying to understand under what conditions elites can be made to behave in systemically beneficial ways?

There is of course a substantial body of literature that addresses this issue. And, despite their varied foci, there is a surprising amount of unanimity among them on the political conditions that prompt elites to behave in human-oriented and systemically beneficial ways. Three distinct sets of literature are relevant in this regard. First, is the literature that attempts to explain the rise of corporatism in diverse political contexts. Three schools of explanation have emerged: the 'historical continuity', the 'societal reflection' and the 'crisis response'. The historical continuity school predictably explains the rise of corporatist institutions by suggesting that they are a product of the diffusion throughout society of norms, values and traditions that emphasise hierarchy and obedience to authority (Wiarda 1981). The societal reflection school by contrast suggests they are a natural outcome of socially segmented societies (Rogowski and Wasserspring, summarised in Stepan 1978). The former struggles to explain the presence of corporatism in culturally diverse settings, while the latter is unable to account for the role of the state in creating the conditions of societal fragmentation (Stepan 1978). The crisis response school, which focuses on concrete political circumstances and the pressures generated by the conflicts among various social groups in society, is perhaps the most persuasive in accounting for the rise of corporatism in the modern world (Schmitter 1974, Stepan 1978, Maier 1984, Panitch 1986). Not only does this school make a persuasive case for understanding the rise of corporatism in the authoritarian parts of Latin America (Stepan 1978), but it also accounts for their development in the very different conditions of Western European social democracies (Maier 1984). In both contexts, the school explains the rise of corporatism through a focus on the vulnerability experienced by political elites as a result of the political mobilisation by social groups like workers and peasants, and the expansion of communism in the international and regional environments.

The second set of literature that enables an understanding of the conditions that prompt elites to behave in systemically beneficial ways is the literature on the development states of East and South-East Asia. Again, this literature has different orientations. Some have a policy bent and are mainly descriptive detailing the particular policies that generated the positive socio-economic outcomes in these development states.<sup>1</sup> Others tend to have a more institutional focus emphasising the embedded but relatively autonomous character of the state, which speaks to the structural linkages and social interactions between political and economic elites (Evans 1995).

But a description of policies, institutions and networks cannot explain why elite coalitions adopt national development agendas. Neither can they explain why international political elites would allow these development states to implement a series of policies that discriminate against foreign capital. Yet some of the explanation for this is evident in the development literature itself. Chalmers Johnson, for instance, explicitly accounts for the rise of the Japanese economic model by arguing that it was essentially a product of the cold war and the competitive relations between the USA and Soviet political elites (Johnson 1999).<sup>2</sup> Other more recent accounts speak of systemic vulnerability generated by specific political, security and financial conditions (Doner *et al.* 2005), and yet others highlight the role of social mobilisation and extra-institutional popular action in prompting these elite coalitions in the direction of broader developmental outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

The third set of literature relevant to this concern is that focusing on the consolidation of democracy. Returning to the classic elements of democracy, this literature highlights the necessity of competitive political systems for making political elites accountable to their citizens. Robert Dahl (1966) made the case for democratic oppositions three decades ago in his pioneering study entitled '*Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*'. Indeed, his central thesis has not been persuasively challenged since then. In fact, it has been supported and corroborated by a range of other studies that followed the publication of his comprehensive work (Epstein 1967, Barker 1971, Moore 1989, Huntington 1991, (Shapiro 1994, Jung and Shapiro 1995, Blondel 1997). Most recently, Dahl's thesis about the centrality of challenge and opposition for accountability in democratic systems has re-emerged in the work of Andreas Schedler. Schedler, following Dahl, argues that political uncertainty is the essence of democracy. He proceeds on the basis of this foundation to draw a distinction between what he terms institutional and substantive uncertainty (Schedler 2001). The former, which Schedler views as involving the rules of the game, is bad for democracy, whereas the latter, who relates to political elites being uncertain about their continuity in office, is really good for democracy. It is precisely this uncertainty, Schedler argues, that forces political elites to become responsive to the needs and wishes of citizens, and herein lies the benefits for a more equitably shared development trajectory.<sup>4</sup>

The three sets of literature, then, all suggest that a substantive uncertainty for political elites is positive for a more human-oriented development trajectory. Of course this uncertainty has to be conditional if it is to have developmental effects. It must occur within an overall context of commonality – a democratic constitution widely supported by the citizenry, for instance – if the uncertainty is not to produce instability and dictatorship. Moreover, the literature indicates that this beneficial substantive uncertainty is normally a product of two distinct political processes: social mobilisation and extra-institutional action, and elite contestation. Both political processes have the net effect of dispersing power in society. And, it is precisely this dispersal of power that enhances citizens' leverage over national political elites, and that of the latter over their international counterparts.

It needs to be noted that elite contestation which generates substantive uncertainty can of course occur at different levels. For much of the period between the end of World War II and the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989, this contestation occurred on the international plane between two relatively even matched superpowers. It was precisely because this uncertainty was generated on the international plane that it was possible for even authoritarian regimes like those in South-East Asia to embark on human-oriented development trajectories. After all, the resources mobilised for their development trajectories, the export orientation of these economies without their subjection to reciprocal trade flows, and their policy agendas including radical land reform and appropriations,<sup>5</sup> would not have been possible without the blessing of at least one of the superpowers (Johnson 1999). The erosion of the bipolar world, and the absence of a robust competition between two relatively equal sets of international elites, however, has circumscribed

the potential for human-oriented development outcomes to emerge from authoritarian political systems. This is because the absence of international elite contestation also eroded the leverage of national elite's vis-à-vis their international counterparts (Wade 1999).

Elite contestation, at least for the foreseeable future, can only be realised at the national level. In this sense, Amartya Sen (1999) is correct to argue that political freedom (read democracy) is necessary for economic growth and development. But the statement requires qualification because his insistence on the positive value of democracy to economic growth and development is founded, as was that of an earlier generation of philosophers, on it having an *instrumental and constructive value* – *instrumental* in the sense of 'enhancing the hearing the people get in expressing and supporting their claims' (Sen 1999, p. 5), and *constructive* in that it helps build a democratic culture of discussion, debate and the exchange of ideas (Sen 1999, p. 5). This presupposes, however, that these democracies always achieve their primary purpose, to diffuse power in society, and as a result enhance the leverage of citizens and thereby promote the accountability of state elites to their citizenry. But what if such diffusion of power does not take place and such accountability is not realised? After all, this is the essential conclusion of much of the later literature on the Third Wave of democratisation, lamenting the rise of the phenomenon of illiberal and delegative democracies, which as Guillermo O'Donnell (1993, 1994) maintained, are political systems in which representative political structures are weakened sufficiently to enable power to be centralised in and delegated to a leader and/or leadership.

Elite contestation can therefore not be assumed, but must rather be actively promoted in both new and established democracies. This is because such contestation is necessary, as is social mobilisation, for enhancing the leverage of citizens' vis-à-vis their political elites, and thereby promoting the substantive uncertainty that is so necessary for prompting these actors to embark on a human-oriented development trajectory. This strategic lesson goes against the grain of much of the democratisation literature on the Third Wave of transitions, which tended to urge political caution and socio-economic pragmatism instead of robust political engagement (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Huntington 1991).<sup>6</sup> But the lesson also goes against the strategic perspective of significant components of the liberation movement in South Africa who tend to emphasise unity or winning the heart and sole of the ANC (COSATU 2006, SACP 2006a, 2006b). This strategic perspective then leads to an emphasis on unity through the establishment of the Tripartite Alliance, and an excessive focus on the role of agency. The net effect is that an inordinate amount of time is spent on ensuring that the right candidates get into positions of influence in both the ruling party and the state. This strategic perspective also enables these stakeholders to ignore the necessity of a competitive political party system in this historical juncture for making political elites accountable to their citizens, and thereby creating the political condition for human-oriented development.

But how is this political condition to be created? What are the precise actions, behaviour, reforms and strategies that could generate the substantive uncertainty, which has been identified as so necessary in this historical juncture? This question is, then, addressed in the next section.

### **Structural reforms for a human-oriented development**

Even if the need for a substantive uncertainty is recognised, how is it to be generated in South Africa in this historical juncture? Of course the character of the contemporary international system is unlikely to assist in this regard. Not only are the impulses to substantive uncertainty severely weakened as a result of the erosion of the bipolar world, but the economic and technological transformation of the last two decades hitherto captured under the term 'globalisation', have also strengthened predictability through a concentration of power in favour of transnational capital and international financial agencies and to the disadvantage of national political elites and

marginalised social groups (Marglin and Schor 1992, Held and McGrew 2003). Neither is a revolution or a national revolt on the scale of that which occurred in South Africa in the 1980s or in Malaysia in 1969 on the cards for the foreseeable future. After all the ANC for now still commands overwhelming support in the country. The revolts that do spontaneously occur, although numerous, are sporadic, localised, largely oriented to accessing rights and do not constitute an immediate political challenge to national elites (Ballard *et al.* 2006b).

Substantive uncertainty has to be created within the framework of the democratic political system, which is not only an advance on Apartheid, but also the product of the endeavours of poor and working people. There is also a long tradition of thought in progressive and socialist circles on how to advance the interests of workers and the poor within democratic non-socialist contexts. The most recent scholarly conceptual exercise on South Africa in this regard was undertaken by John Saul who, following Boris Kagarlitsky (1990), essentially made the case for what he termed structural reform, that is reforms that have a snowballing effect and facilitate the emergence of other reforms, all of which collectively constitute a project of self-transformation. In addition, such reforms are, in Saul's words:

Rooted in popular initiatives in such a way as to leave a residue of further empowerment – in terms of growing enlightenment/class consciousness, in terms of organizational capacity – for the vast mass of the population, whom thus strengthen themselves for further struggles, further victories. (1991, p. 6)

But Saul then floundered when it came to specifying the reforms that had to be defined as structural. Caught up in the euphoria of the transition, and the rhetoric of intellectuals, progressive academics and union leaders, he proceeded to give credence to a whole slew of policies, both economic and other, that would by no stretch of the imagination be described as transformative (Desai and Habib 1994).

Nevertheless, Saul's conceptual departure point, structural reform, can be usefully harnessed to an understanding of how to advance a human-oriented development trajectory. For reforms to warrant the title 'structural' they must enhance the leverage of working and marginalised communities, diffuse power in favour of these social groups in society, and promote the substantive uncertainty of political elites.<sup>7</sup> What action, behaviour, policy reforms and strategies can advance this agenda? Of course these have to be determined in a contextually specific manner. They must emanate from a concrete analysis of a spatial context in a specific time. And for South Africa, in this historical period, five decisions, developments and/or reforms, can be identified as useful for increasing the leverage of poor and marginalised citizens, and thereby enhancing the substantive uncertainty of both national and global elites.

First, electoral reform would go a long way to enhancing citizens' leverage over political elites. Presently, the proportional electoral system enables the representation of a maximum number of political parties. This positive feature, however, is counterbalanced by a negative, the empowerment of the party leadership over rank and file legislative representatives. Given that electoral votes are cast for the party rather than individual candidates, and that the parliamentary list is largely determined by the party leadership, the accountability dynamic of legislative representatives to their constituencies is severely weakened. Indeed, the accountability is structured hierarchically to party leaders, which has the consequence of ensuring that individual legislative representatives are conditioned to act not with their conscience, but in line with party diktat (COSATU 2006).

These consequences have prompted a number of civic actors and political parties to call for an overhaul of the electoral system. Indeed, the Slabbert Commission appointed in May 2002 to investigate the issue recommended that the electoral system be changed to a Mix Member Proportional (MMP) System with 75% of legislative representatives elected from 69 multimember

constituencies, while the remainder would come from the party list to ensure overall proportionality as per the mandate of the constitution.<sup>8</sup> This recommendation reflected, according to the majority on the Slabbert Commission, a popular view that while the national-list PR system was fair and representative, it did not enable individual legislators to be accountable to the voters (Mattes and Southall 2004). The express purpose of the majority recommendation of the Slabbert Commission was to enhance the leverage of citizens over their representatives and contribute to a political system that generates a substantive uncertainty for its political elites. It should be noted that this majority view was contested by a minority report, which found in favour of the status quo, a recommendation that was ultimately accepted by the ANC government.

The second related but distinct development that can greatly contribute to this end is the establishment of a viable, competitive political system. At present, South Africa has all of the institutional characteristics of a robust democratic political order. Yet its political system cannot be interpreted as being competitive. This is because not only does the ANC overwhelmingly dominate in terms of electoral support, but it has also increased its margin of support in three consecutive national elections.<sup>9</sup> Even more important is the fact that the largest opposition parties are unable to seriously serve as competitors to the ruling party because their support base is largely constructed among minority racial groups. As a result, not only does a viable political system not exist, but it also has no prospects of emerging from the collection of parties that are currently represented in the national legislature (Habib and Taylor 2001).

The only way this competitive political system will be established is if the Tripartite Alliance were to fracture and COSATU and the SACP were to go it on their own. This is of course to ask quite a lot from individuals who have fought together throughout the dark years of apartheid. But it is essential if the dispersal of power and substantive uncertainty of political elites is to be realised. COSATU and the SACP, were they to go separate, would compete in the same electoral pool as the ANC. This means that they need not come into power to succeed in shifting the policy agenda to the left. Their mere presence and a respectable showing in the elections would force the ruling party to address the immediate concerns of the working and unemployed poor in order to compensate for the greater electoral competition on its left flank.

Two objections are often made when this idea of a break in the alliance is ever broached. First, it is feared that leaving the alliance would enable the upper classes, both black and white, to have free reign in determining the policy agenda of the ruling party (Marais 2001). This, however, is to make the assumption that policy influence only occurs through participation in internal forums. Yet as many studies would demonstrate, they can as easily be influenced by extra-institutional action and/or the external deployment of other forms of leverage by social actors within society (Zuern 2006, Ballard *et al.* 2006b). With regards to the latter, it is worthwhile noting that capital was able to influence the ANC's policy since 1996 without much substantive presence within the party itself (Habib and Padayachee 2000). Finally, as COSATU (2006) and the SACP (2006a, 2006b) themselves would recognise, the alliance with the ruling party has not prevented the slide to what they perceive as neo-liberalism.

Second, a break in the Tripartite Alliance is often objected to on the grounds that the overwhelming majority of workers and shop stewards would prefer the alliance to continue. This fact is not only articulated by the leadership of COSATU and the SACP, but by a group of scholars loosely associated with the Sociology of Work Programme (SWOP) in the University of Witwatersrand, who have demonstrated over three surveys in the last decade that more than two-thirds of COSATU's rank and file are supportive of the alliance (Buhlungu 2006). A mere resort to survey data, however, cannot replace analysis. Demonstrating that a majority of workers are supportive of the alliance does not address the issue of whether a break could strategically advance the agenda of the working and unemployed poor.<sup>10</sup> All it demonstrates is that the

subjective will for the alliance does not as yet exist. After all it is worthwhile noting that majorities have been known to support inappropriate or even incorrect strategic perspectives.<sup>11</sup>

Third, the erosion of the corporatist institutions and processes that have tended to proliferate in South Africa since the early 1990s would advance a politics that favours human-oriented development. This is probably treasonous to argue given the ideological orthodoxy that has developed in favour of corporatism in both the academy and the public sector (Maree 1993, Adler and Webster 1995, Webster and Adler 1999, COSATU 2006, Seekings and Nattrass 2006). But it would be worthwhile to bear in mind that corporatism facilitated social democracy in Western Europe in particular because of the Keynesian macroeconomic environment, itself a product of a particular configuration of power in the global order (Maier 1984, p. 49, Panitch 1986). Its use in a more neo-liberal economic climate is therefore unlikely to lead to the same outcome. Indeed, as Przeworski (1991) maintained, corporatist institutions can become mechanisms of cooptation in the present era, enforcing a predictability that detracts political elites from their accountability to their citizens.

The alternative of course need not involve a pristine non-engagement or a wish for revolutionary rupture as corporatist advocates often caricature it. Indeed, it may simply constitute the establishment of a pluralist labour system, similar to that existing in the USA, where participation and negotiations are not institutionalised and governed by formal political rules or by a broader public discourse that stressed the necessity of partnerships among conflicting social forces (Schmitter 1974). Rather the negotiations that do occur are simply the outcome of the everyday interplay and contested engagements of social actors in the economic and market arena. It would be useful to note of course that this pluralist labour system has precedence in South Africa; it existed in the 1980s and its reintroduction can only but compel the organised expressions of workers and the poor to focus on a politics of power in which collective organisation comprises its essential component.<sup>12</sup>

Related, but distinct from this is a forth development which involves the emergence of an independent, robust plural civil society. Already there has been much progress made in this regard. In two separate reflections on the issue, I have argued that civil society has not only been fundamentally transformed in the post-1994 era, but that sections of it are also having a dramatic systemic impact by contributing to a substantive uncertainty that is making elites, at least partially, more responsive to the concerns of poor and marginalised citizens. The first of these reflections entitled 'State-Civil Society Relations in Post-Apartheid South Africa', essentially demonstrated that political democratisation and economic liberalisation have essentially transformed an ostensibly homogenous, black progressive anti-apartheid civil society into one composed of at least three distinct blocs – non-governmental organisations (NGOs), survivalist agencies and social movements – all with very distinct relationships with the state. It concluded that:

Diverse roles and functions undertaken by (these) different elements of civil society, then, collectively create the adversarial and collaborative relationships, the push and pull effects, which sometimes assist and other times compels the state to meet its obligations and responsibilities to its citizenry. (Habib 2005, pp. 688–689)

The second more specific contribution, co-edited with Richard Ballard and Imraan Valodia, focused on post-apartheid social movements, maintaining that they 'contribute to the restoration of political plurality in the political system', facilitate 'the accountability of state elites to our citizenry' and 'contributed to the emergence of a political climate that prompted government's recent shift to a more state interventionist and expansive economic policy with a more welfarist orientation' (Ballard *et al.* 2006a). These developments then have the effect of what Jeremy Cronin recently termed enabling a popular agency, which is necessary for the dispersal

of power that at least makes possible the emergence of a more human-oriented development trajectory.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, a strategic foreign policy can be instrumental in establishing the political space and enhancing the capacities of national stakeholders, including its political elites, to pursue a human-oriented development. The literature review undertaken above of the political conditions under which elites become responsive to their citizens clearly indicates that a contested international environment defined by rivalry among global elites and great powers is positive for human-oriented development (Johnson 1999). Moreover, it suggests that resource endowments, such as mineral wealth, strategic location and even population size, can become a useful leverage for national political elites in their engagements with their foreign and global counterparts.<sup>14</sup> The application of these lessons to the South African case involves two elements. First, it requires South Africa to undertake the role of leadership in the continent, or in the words of some of the international relations literature, to play the role of benevolent hegemon that not only prioritises stability, democracy and economic development, but also the development of regional and continental common markets. These increases in market size can greatly enhance the leverage of national and continental politicians in their relations with other actors in the global economy, and can be particularly favourable for attracting foreign investment. Second, it would require prioritising multilateral institutions and endeavours and strategic alliances both among the South and between Northern and Southern countries in order to contain not only the unilateralism of the USA, but also that of big economic powers when they act in concert as often happens in global trade negotiations.<sup>15</sup>

Some of these roles are already being undertaken by South Africa. It has increasingly begun to play the role of regional and continental hegemon, even if this is done unevenly and sometimes reluctantly (Habib and Nthakeng 2006).<sup>16</sup> South Africa has also played an active role in multilateral institution building both at the continental and international levels (le Pere 1998, Schoeman 2003). Moreover, it has also begun to prioritise strategic alliances as in the case of the India, Brazil, South Africa partnership and in the Group of 20 (Flemes 2006), both of which were crucial in preventing, particularly in the trade negotiations in Cancun, an unfair trade deal being imposed on the countries of the South.<sup>17</sup>

Yet despite these successes, there are some significant weaknesses in some of South Africa's foreign policy engagements. First, it has to prioritise South-North strategic alliances, in addition to the South-South ones, if power is to be significantly dispersed in the global setting and development opportunities for the South are to be maximised. Second, some of South Africa's politicians have to learn to transcend their market fundamentalism so apparent in some of the documentation of NEPAD (Bond 2004), their refusal to regulate South African investment on the continent (Habib and Nthakeng 2006), and in the almost timid reforms undertaken at the level of the IMF and World Bank. It would be useful to note that the current success story of China is not one of simply its resort to the market, but also its pragmatism in manipulating the latter, through a fixed currency for instance, to suit its own ends (Breslin 2006). Third, South Africa's foreign policy practitioners and trade negotiators need to become bolder in their engagements. This would involve a greater willingness to involve itself in the politics of brinkmanship, as occurred in Cancun, and in engaging global civil society who could be far better engaged than at present to advance a human-oriented development agenda. Finally, none of this would be possible without more significant capacity being built both at the level of technical skills within state institutions, and the internalisation of these strategic perspectives among state personnel far beyond the narrow band that currently occupies the presidential and foreign policy apparatus (Alden and le Pere 2004). In any case, the five developments and/or reforms suggested above are not meant to be an exhaustive list. Many more may be conceived to be relevant. To earn the title of 'structural', however, all must be directed to dispersing power so as to make elites

substantively uncertain of their futures, a necessary political pre-condition for establishing the shift to a more human-oriented development trajectory.

## Conclusion

It would be worthwhile to note that the strategies and policies recommended suggest that not only human-oriented development is a product of a political process, but also that it requires an intricate mix of representative and participatory democratic elements. The first two strategic and policy reforms are intended to strengthen the representative character of the political system so as to promote a contestation between political elites. The second two speak to strengthening the participatory character of the political system, to facilitate what Steven Friedman (2005) has so often termed 'providing voice to the poor'. This mix of representative and participatory democratic elements is meant to create the substantive uncertainty, which is the political foundation that generates the accountability between elites and their citizens so necessary for realising a human-oriented development agenda. The political programme then challenges the perspectives of those who view participatory and representative democracy as distinct political systems. The perspective advanced here suggests that it is the intricate mix of participatory and representative elements that enhances the accountability of political elites to their citizens.

There is a precedent for this in South Africa's recent political history. Elsewhere I have argued that South Africa's economic and social policies have undergone a significant change since 2001. Senior government figures are no longer so enamoured with the market as they once were. Privatisation has been put on a backburner and is no longer mentioned with any regularity. There has been a steep rise in social expenditure as welfare grants have now been extended to cover almost 10 million people. State intervention is back in vogue and is reflected in both the driving of infrastructure spending through state owned enterprises and the establishment of equity and transformation targets in the industry charters. Finally, senior government's rhetoric has dramatically changed in recent years where there is now an emphasis on the need to correct for market failures, and poverty alleviation and even inequality reduction is now given as much emphasis as is growth (Habib 2004).

Two explanations have of course emerged for why this happened. The first advanced mainly by government ministers, policy technocrats and researchers associated with government suggests that the shift in policy was either part of an original long-term vision, or is at least a product of an incremental learning process where officials correct for earlier policy failures (Hirsch 2005). But it is hard to give much weight to this explanation. Not only is it founded on the earlier critiqued assumption that policy is merely an outcome of a rational process involving policy technocrats and state officials, but it also does not recognise that much of the rationale advanced in, and outcomes expected of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) did not materialise (Habib and Padayachee 2000).

The second explanation is far more persuasive. It explains the shift in policy as an outcome of the partial reconfiguration of power that occurred in the late 1990s. This reconfiguration resulted from three related but distinct factors. First, was the failure of GEAR both in terms of attracting foreign investment, and increasing employment and thereby alleviating poverty. Second, was the concomitant rise of social movements and community organisations and/or their more adversarial stance vis-à-vis state policies. This more independently aggressive posture affected organisations and collectives both within and outside the Tripartite Alliance (Ballard *et al.* 2006b). Finally, there was the partial shift in the ideological consensus at the global level most dramatically reflected in the critiques of previous insiders Joseph Stiglitz (2002) and Jeffrey Sachs (2005), both of whom began to criticise the structure of the international financial

institutions and their policy prescriptions. These developments facilitated the emergence of at least a partial substantive uncertainty of political elites at the national level, regularly reflected in the President's annual state of the nation addresses, and which prompted the shift in economic and social policies in the new millennium.

The role of substantive uncertainty in facilitating a more ideologically diverse public discourse and a reconsideration of policy is also evident in the succession crisis within the ANC. A number of public commentators have indicated that one of the positive consequences of the contestation between President Mbeki and his previous deputy and now President of the ANC, Jacob Zuma, has been the opening up of the policy discourse in particular on AIDS, the macro-economy, and Zimbabwe (Friedman 2006). Yet, as I argued in a panel debate with Aubrey Matshiqi and Steven Friedman at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), this openness is vulnerable and unlikely to be sustainable so long as it is premised on a contest between two leaders in the ruling party. For it to be truly sustainable, the uncertainty must be institutionalised within the political system as a whole.<sup>18</sup>

This is worth bearing in mind for even today the general policy shift, while significant, is by no means absolute or uncontested. Indeed, South Africa's existing policy architecture is currently very contradictory. There are significant sections of it that have a developmental, Keynesian and social democratic flavour, especially when it comes to welfare and infrastructure spending. Yet, it also has strong continuities with the GEAR framework, particularly reflected in the Reserve Bank and Treasury's rigid commitments to deficit and inflation targeting (Habib 2004).<sup>19</sup> As argued earlier, this contradiction will never be resolved by clever technocrats in rational conversation. It will be fundamentally determined by the configuration of power and how it evolves over the next few years.

This then is one of the principal lessons to be learnt from some of the comparative development experiences across the world. South Africa has had some policy shifts in recent years that have benefited poor and marginalised communities. But for these stakeholders' interests to be addressed more fully, and for the country's problems of poverty and inequality to be tackled more comprehensively, not only must the policy shift be sustainable, but the current contradictions in the policy architecture need to also be resolved. And this is not going to be merely done through rational conversation between policy technocrats. It will be ultimately resolved when power is dispersed and reconfigured in the social setting; political and economic elites are made substantively uncertain of their futures; accountability is thereby re-established between the latter and citizens; and policy as a result becomes responsive to the interests of the poor and marginalised. The vision of social citizenship enunciated by Marshall (1950) in his classic text of five decades ago, and which now underlies the scholarly works of most progressive academics, will only truly be realised when activists, public intellectuals and scholars transcend their ideological and political orthodoxies and begin to truly interrogate the politics of development in this historical era.

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### **Notes**

1. The structural adjustment literature of the World Bank, especially in the 1980s, was typical of this (see Nabudere 2006, p. 3). Also typical of this in South Africa is the economic liberal school identified by Southall (2006, pp. xxii–xxiv).

2. Yet others like Wade suggest that these experiences are unlikely to be repeated because the very specific historical and industrial conditions under which they were originally implemented no longer exist (see Wade 1999).
3. This is particularly obvious in the case of Malaysia where the 1969 revolt laid the foundation for the New Economic Policy explicitly targeted at Malays with the objective of getting them out of poverty (see Chin and Jomo 2000, Freund 2006).
4. There are some scholars who are critical of this perspective. Raymond Suttner, for instance, in response to some of the democratisation literature on dominant parties, accuses 'experts' stressing the necessity of elite contestation, as being 'dogmatic ... deeply conservative ... (and supporting) a specific version of democracy, that of formal, representative democracy without substantial social and economic transformation or significant popular involvement' (see Suttner 2004, pp. 756–757). The problem with this view of course is that it sets up a false divide between representative and participatory forms of democracy.
5. This is particularly worth noting given international political elites' hostile reactions to current radical land reform initiatives.
6. For some of these scholars like O'Donnell, it was then the recent memory of authoritarian rule, which prompted them to recommend political caution, lest the transition be disrupted. This caution, however, led to a set of political dynamics that facilitated the rise of illiberal or delegative democracies (see Habib and Padayachee 2000).
7. It is worthwhile noting that this perspective is similar to that articulated by the SACP. In part two of its controversial discussion document released by its Central Committee in May (2006), entitled 'Class struggles and the post-1994 state in South Africa', the SACP argues that 'if it is to have any prospect of addressing the dire legacy of colonial dispossession and apartheid oppression, a national democratic strategy has to be revolutionary, that is to say, it must systemically transform, class, racial and gendered power ...'. This is not new. For instance, the slogan adopted by the SACP at its 1995 strategy conference, 'Socialism is the future – build it now' reflects similar sentiments.
8. COSATU is in favour of the general recommendation, although it suggests that the proportion between constituency and party list be 65% and 35%, respectively (COSATU 2003, p. 7).
9. Its support is just shy of 70%, up between 66.36% and 62.65% in 1999 and 1964, respectively. Although critics sometimes qualify this point by noting that voter turnout in national elections has declined to 76%, down from 88% in 1999, this should not detract from the fact that the party has increasingly consolidated its electoral support in the country (HSRC 2006, p. 9).
10. This is the peculiar logic that has become common in this debate. See Southall and Wood (2003), COSATU (2003), and a number of the chapters in Buhlungu (2006).
11. Ultimately, Jeremy Cronin, Deputy General-Secretary of the SACP and Chairperson of the Transport portfolio in the national legislature, is probably correct to recognise that were the alliance to break, it would not do so neatly, but will probably fracture almost all of the constituent units (Cronin 2002). See also Southall 2003, Suttner 2006, Butler 2007). But then political and social advance is often a messy affair, and it is precisely the acrimony and broken relationships that give rise to the substantive uncertainty of elites, which is so necessary for a policy agenda that is responsive to the interests of working and poor communities. Is this likely to happen? Almost certainly, not in the short term. As indicated earlier, the political will among both the leadership and its supporters just does not currently exist for such a radical course of action. It may, however, in the future. The problem is whether COSATU and the SACP will at that point be sufficiently viable so as to constitute an alternative political pole of attraction.
12. COSATU has itself begun to reflect on the organisational lessons of its practice of the 1980s, although it is careful to acknowledge that this experience must not be romanticised (see COSATU 2006).
13. He suggested this at a seminar, hosted by the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) of the University of Cape Town on 18 October 2006, where he served as a discussant to a presentation I made on our co-edited book on social movements, *Voices of Protest*.
14. Note, for instance, how China has used population and therefore market size as a leverage to attract foreign investment.
15. Note, for instance, the coincidence of interests on agricultural subsidies that prevailed for so long between the USA and Europe in the World Trade negotiations.
16. There are of course scholars who dislike the term 'hegemon', preferring instead to describe South Africa as a pivotal state (see le Pere 1998, Adebajo and Landsberg 2003).
17. The negotiations ended in stalemate and generated enormous criticism of both the USA and Europe and increased pressure on them from domestic stakeholders to reconsider their positions.

18. Panel discussion on the theme, 'The Presidential Succession and the Tripartite Alliance', hosted by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Pretoria, 14 September 2006.
19. This contradiction has most recently reflected itself in a debate between Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) officials on the recommendations advanced by scholars and in particular Dani Rodrik, associated with Harvard University's Center for International Development, which was commissioned to investigate the constraints on South Africa's growth prospects. Rodrik's focus is on employment which he recommends be addressed through an expansion of the export-oriented tradable sector which often employs low skilled workers. This is to be done in part through the creation of a competitive exchange rate, which means that the Reserve Bank needs to go beyond its narrow inflation-targeting regime to incorporate tradable output and employment as criteria for its decision-making. This recommendation, it is reported, is heavily supported by DTI officials, and is simultaneously strongly opposed by the National Treasury, which insists on addressing the problems through a continued reliance on market measures such as a competitions policy (see Roderik 2006).

### Notes on contributor

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