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South Africa's Promotion of "Democracy" and "Stability" in Southern Africa: Good Governance or Good for Business?

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The resurgence of interest in ("new") regionalism has been a recent relatively recent phenomenon in International Relations/International Political Economy.¹ It is in part a response to the two-tiered process which is currently reconfiguring the global order: "globalisation" (in all its multi-faceted forms) on the one hand; and the growth in regionalisation and ostensible co-operation, centred around regionalist projects, on the other.² Because this "new regionalism" has emerged in the ongoing era of "globalisation" and the wholesale restructuring of the capitalist system, any coherent analysis of such impulses must be contextualised within a framework that has moved away from state-based ontologies. Indeed, cognisance must be made of phenomena such as the restructuring of the global division of labour, the formation of a nascent transnational historic bloc, and the ongoing hegemony -- on a global scale -- of neo-liberalism as both an economic *and* political project.

According to one recent analysis, 'globalisation...seem[s] to presage a reconfiguration of

¹ See Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne (eds.) *Regionalism and World Order* London: Macmillan, 1996; Jean Grugel and Wil Hout (eds.) *Regionalism Across the North-South Divide: State Strategies and Globalisation* London: Routledge, 1999; and Björn Hettne, Andras Inotai and Osvaldo Sunkel *Studies in the New Regionalism, vols. I-V* London: Macmillan, 1999-2000.

² In the "New Regionalism" approach, "regionalism" generally refers to the ideology behind the reconfiguration of spatial regions – the impulses behind a regional order. Such tenets may (or may not) be bound to the wider normative global order. It is the ideology of (normally) a particular geographical space, and is generally associated with a programme and strategy/agenda. "Regionalisation" denotes the empirical movement that (may) lead to the creation of models of connection, co-operation, integration and harmonisation within a particular geographical range. It is quite feasible for a regionalist project or ideology to be advanced, without any concomitant regionalisation process – or *vice versa*. See Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum 'The New Regionalist Approach', *Politeia*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1998, p. 9.

the South...and to pave the way for a reconstitution of a new international order in which some of the larger, more advanced states, the semi-periphery, those with an already established productive base, play a key role'.³ It is suggested that such a reconfiguration in the developing world (however uneven this may be in practice) is spearheaded by elites in dominant states, who attempt to push for greater integration and stronger regional networks along clearly defined lines by which their position in the global political economy may be emboldened, particularly as the regionalist project that is promoted invariably fits with the "requirements" of international capital: liberalisation, de-regulation, an emasculatation of labour and "good governance".

This last ingredient is worthy of note, for it forms the rhetorical foundation of South Africa's current regional policy. As we have suggested, in the South it is most likely that it is the dominant state within a particular region that tends to drive the regionalist project. We need not rehearse the well-known fact that South Africa is by far the dominant state in southern Africa.⁴ This dominance is historical and specific attempts to lessen such structural imbalance by the peripheral states in the region -- in the form of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) -- failed miserably, though it did perhaps foster a sense of regionalism that has outlasted *apartheid*.

In the post-*apartheid* era, Pretoria's elites have been particularly occupied with promoting a rejuvenation of the region (institutionalised now as the Southern African Development Community -- SADC), whilst at the same time pressing for an economic and political transformation. Although initially reluctant to be seen as the dominating hegemon, anti-interventionist reluctance has been largely replaced by a more activist engagement, and South Africa has now taken on the characteristics of a 'regional driver of [an] emerging market'.⁵ In doing so, the need for "good governance" and "democracy" alongside the discourse of "growth" and (to a lesser extent) development -- all linked to the need to

³ Jean Grugel and Wil Hout 'Regions, Regionalism and the South' in Jean Grugel and Wil Hout (eds.), 1999, 6.

⁴ See Fred Ahwireng-Obeng and Patrick McGowan 'Partner or Hegemon? South Africa in Africa', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1998.

develop closer regional co-operation, leading to greater integration -- is frequently invoked. This is invariably wrapped up within the rhetoric of what has become President Thabo Mbeki's motif, "African Renaissance" where there is an explicit connection between governance and growth, all within 'the context and framework of the world economy'.⁶

This agenda has been cast as an attempt to integrate the region closer together and increase southern Africa's drawing power *vis-à-vis* international capital. In short, South Africa's regional efforts 'may be regarded as a strategy to lure investment and trade opportunities, suggesting as it does that Africa is a worthwhile economic prospect'.⁷ Already, 'we're getting to the point now where it's hard to say which of the *Fortune 500* companies are *not* here', as the United States economic counsellor in Pretoria asserted.⁸ This courting of transnational capital, Mbeki asserts, means that 'South Africa ha[s] the potential in terms of its economy, in terms of its politics, and so on, to strike out on this new African path [the Renaissance]' -- leading by example and exhortation as it were.⁹

Indeed, an implicit part of this regionalist project is to bind the region together under South African leadership.¹⁰ This "integration" is likely to mean a greater penetration of South African capital as in the main, the markets in southern Africa are small and varied, being largely non-complimentary and susceptible to the provision of manufactured goods from the most industrialised state in the region, whilst they primarily export primary products for consumption and/or processing. On the ground this has meant an activist approach to the promotion of corporate South Africa's penetration of the region, in tandem with international capital. South African mining corporations have expanded into

⁵ *Cape Times* (Cape Town) July 5, 1999.

⁶ 'Statement by Deputy President Mbeki at the African Renaissance Conference', Johannesburg, September 28, 1998.

⁷ Patrick Bulger 'Mbeki -- Africa's Prophet of Boom', <http://aftrade.co.za/article3.html>

⁸ Quoted in *New York Times* (New York), April 22, 1995.

⁹ 'Thabo Mbeki: Destiny's Man at the Dawn of a New Africa', *Sunday Independent* (Johannesburg), July 13, 1997.

¹⁰ This usage of the region to promote specifically South African interests has already been commented upon -- see Evan Scott Lieberman 'Organisational Cloaking in Southern Africa', *Transformation*, no. 34, 1997.

Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo; South African breweries have bought up local breweries and bottling plants in Zambia and Zimbabwe; Spoornet (the rail parastatal in South Africa) is renovating lines in Tanzania; Shoprite Checkers has opened up supermarkets throughout the region; and virtually every shop in the region seems stocked with South African produce.

Mbeki himself has asserted the importance of South Africa's 'business sector, which has a critical role in continuing the African Renaissance into the 21st Century, capable of both acting on its own and in partnership with international investors'.¹¹ This promotion of capital as an active agent in reconstituting the region reflects the reconfiguration of power between government, business and labour, where 'globalisation...appear[s] to give corporate South Africa added leverage over its rival social partners in the tug-of-war over the terms of the domestic renewal'.¹²

One cannot fully comprehend this phenomena without recognising that the ANC government has acceded to the dominant neo-liberalist agenda -- perhaps most graphically illustrated when the government ditched the popular neo-Keynesian-tinged Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) for the neo-liberalist Growth, Employment and Reconstruction plan (GEAR) -- a self-imposed structural adjustment project.¹³ This has meant the effective abandonment of any interrogation of the unequal terms of international trade -- for instance, questioning why balance of payments deficits must be reduced in the South, whilst surplus accounts in the North face no such pressure to equalise trading regimes. Instead, a policy based on "maximum engagement" with transnational and domestically-based capital as the corporate vehicles to promote growth is pursued.

¹¹ Thabo Mbeki 'Address by Executive Deputy President Thabo Mbeki to Corporate Council on Attracting Capital to Africa's Summit', Chantilly, Virginia, April 19-22, 1997.

¹² Francis Kornegay and Chris Landsberg 'Phaphama iAfrika!: The African Renaissance and Corporate South Africa', *African Security Review*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1998, p. 6.

¹³ See Hein Marais *South Africa: Limits to Change: The Political Economy of Transformation* Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1999.

Whilst Mbeki has taunted his critics ‘to call [him] a Thatcherite’,¹⁴ an ongoing process of class formation has been taking place whereby an emergent Black bourgeoisie is joining the ranks of the established (White) elites, to form a nascent historical bloc. This fraction is largely outwardly-oriented and derivative of money capital and hence is fast developing and re-developing its international linkages post-sanctions. This process inexorably draws the South African elite into the wider transnational elite. This actuality, and how such a process relates to Pretoria’s regional policies and the rhetoric of “good governance” and “democracy”, is the theme of this paper.

Globalisation and neo-liberalism

Capitalism is more and more ordered around and within an architecture of supranational organisations, suggesting a ‘transnational process of consensus formation among the official caretakers of the global economy...generat[ing] guidelines that are transmitted into the policy-making channels of national governments and big corporations’.¹⁵ These organisations include: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation, acting as disciplinary agents to compel states to erect and then defend the environment necessary for untrammelled capital accumulation to occur.¹⁶

These ostensibly “purely economic” institutions form a ‘G-7 nexus’ with political forces in governments and with the private sector.¹⁷ This last element, in the form of transnational corporations dominate an increasing share of the global sphere of production, exploit the biosphere’s resources, profit massively from mankind’s labour, and benefit from the current neo-liberalist denial of ethical considerations *vis-à-vis* economic policies.¹⁸ This

¹⁴ *Business Times* (Johannesburg), June 16, 1996.

¹⁵ Robert Cox ‘Global Restructuring: Making Sense of the Changing International Political Economy’ in Stubbs, Richard and Underhill, Geoffrey (eds.) *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994, p. 49.

¹⁶ Stephen Gill ‘Globalization, Market Civilization and Disciplinary Neo-liberalism’, *Millennium*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1995.

¹⁷ Stephen Gill ‘Structural Change and Global Political Economy: Globalising Elites in the Emerging World Order’ in Yoshikazu Sakamoto (ed.) *Global Transformation: Challenges to the State System* Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1994.

¹⁸ Cristovam Buarque *The End of Economics? Ethics and the Disorder of Progress* London: Zed Books, 1993.

scenario in turn is facilitated by elites within the state administrations who, at the capitalist core and in tacit alliance with elites based in the international financial institutions and transnational corporations, form an ‘Atlantic ruling class’.¹⁹ To these fractions may be added internationally-oriented merchants and the global mass media, who ‘manufacture consent’ on behalf of the neo-liberalist project.²⁰ This global elite then is comprised of transnational executives and their affiliates; globalising state bureaucrats; capitalist-inspired politicians and professionals; and consumerist elites.²¹

Such a phenomenon of transnational class formation has spread from the North to the South, linking an emergent fraction of Southern-based elites with their Northern counterparts at the core of a concentric circle of social, economic and political power.²² Those within this nascent global historic bloc increasingly possess a considerable degree of class consciousness, and view their interests as being outwardly linked to the wider transnational sphere, rather than being beholden to the “domestic” milieu.

This process of separating the elites from simply territorially-located class power -- however uneven this may be -- has entailed a ‘subordination of domestic economies to the perceived exigencies of a global economy. States willy nilly [have now] become more effectively accountable to a nebeuse personified as the global economy’.²³ We can suggest that in a globalising world a separation can increasingly be made between the “state” -- the loci of the transnationalised elite classes’ power -- and the “nation-state”, a more traditional concept of spatial and politico-economic integrity.²⁴

These elites, both in the North and the South, actively construct the domestic and external political, bureaucratic, and constitutional frameworks that permit the operation of the

¹⁹ Kees van der Pijl *The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class* London: Verso, 1984.

²⁰ Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky *Manufacturing Consent* New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.

²¹ Leslie Sklair ‘Social Movements and Global Capitalism’, *Sociology*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1995, p. 503.

²² Ankie Hoogvelt *Globalization and the Post-Colonial World: The New Political Economy of Development* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

²³ Robert Cox ‘Global Perestroika’ in Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch (eds.) *The Socialist Register, 1992* London: Merlin Press, 1992, p. 27.

²⁴ William Robinson ‘Globalization, the World System, and “Democracy Promotion” in US Foreign

global capitalist order, fostering what may be dubbed the “Americanisation” of business practices.²⁵ The meeting points for this elite nexus takes place through unofficial and/or non-state forums like the Trilateral Commission, the Bilderberg Conference, the World Economic Forum, and the International Chamber of Commerce; and through official bodies like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the IMF, and the G-7. ‘These shape the discourse within which policies are defined, the terms and concepts that circumscribe what can be thought and done [and] also tighten the transnational networks that link policy-making from country to country’.²⁶

This overall process is conducted by a ‘powerful phalanx of social forces...arrayed...behind the agenda of intensified market-led globalisation’ who seek to actively promote the post-Keynesian counter-revolution.²⁷ For sure, capitalism does not simply happen, and the assertion of neo-liberalism as the hegemonic discourse similarly has not just occurred. ‘It is a social system that has [had] to struggle to create and reproduce its hegemonic order globally, and to do this large numbers of local, national, international and global organisations [were] established’ to promote the new organising norms.²⁸ This has involved the effective imposition of ‘a uniform conception of the world on an increasingly transnational society’.²⁹

As we have suggested, the agents of this increasingly integrated global economy are a new transnational elite.³⁰ This elite currently inhabits the positions of power where decisions *vis-à-vis* global governance are made. Such an elite is composed of the proprietors and managers of the transnational corporations; the bureaucrats, cadres, and technicians who

Policy’, *Theory and Society*, vol. 25, no. 5, 1996, p. 618.

²⁵ Saskia Sassen *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization* Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, p. 19.

²⁶ Robert Cox in Richard Stubbs and Geoffrey Underhill (eds.), 1994, p. 49.

²⁷ Mark Rupert ‘Contesting Hegemony: Americanism and Far-Right Ideologies of Globalization’ in Kurt Burch and Robert Denmark (eds.) *Constituting International Political Economy* Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1997, p. 117.

²⁸ Leslie Sklair ‘Social Movements for Global Capitalism: The Transnational Capitalist Class in Action’, *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1997, pp. 514-515.

²⁹ Otto Holman ‘Transnational Class Strategy and the New Europe’, *International Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1992, p. 13.

³⁰ Kees van der Pijl *Transnational Classes and International Relations* London: Routledge, 1998.

execute the policies of the international financial institutions; and the elites located in the nation state administrations.³¹ The power of this transnational elite class has been dramatically strengthened as global integration has accelerated in the contemporary period. Indeed, there has been a wholesale shift in the balance of forces between classes within each national state, with the outwardly-linked transnational elite in each state enjoying unprecedented power. It is accurate to assert that at present, it is to this transnational elite and their locally situated representatives with their specific interests (frequently postured as the “national interest”) that the administrations of nation states respond to, with all the wider contradictions that this engenders.

This transnational elite has sought to bring into being the environment most advantageous to the unimpeded operation of capitalism on a global scale. In pushing this vision, they have been engaged in a veritable “transnational agenda” which seeks to establish specific economic and political ingredients right across the globe.³² Economically, this is termed “neo-liberalism”, a particular paradigm which aims to establish the appropriate setting for the lightning-quick mobility and unfettered operation of capital, but which has critically been referred to as ‘an owner’s revolt against the class and international compromises of corporate liberalism’.³³ The “structural adjustment programmes” which have been imposed upon the South (and Africa in particular) from the 1980s onwards are an integral part of this agenda, aiming to establish “macro-economic stabilisation” for the movement of transnational capital, and performing an important *political* function by legitimating international capital’s position within state boundaries.³⁴ Since ‘capitalism encompasses the entire globe, its architects require a universal vision, a picture of a globally conceived society, to join classes in different countries...[in order] to institutionalise global capital accumulation by setting general rules of behaviour and disseminating a developmentalist

³¹ William Robinson ‘Neo-liberalism, the Global Elite and the Guatemalan Transition: A Critical Macro-structural Analysis’, paper presented at seminar on ‘Guatemalan Development and Democratization: Pro-active Responses to Globalization’, Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, March 26-28, 1998, p. 1.

³² See William Robinson *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, U.S. Intervention, and Hegemony* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996a; and ‘Globalization: Nine Theses of Our Epoch’, *Race and Class*, vol. 38, no. 2, 1996b.

³³ Kees van der Pijl, 1998, p. 130

³⁴ Ray Bush and Morris Szeftel ‘Commentary: “Globalization” and the Regulation of Africa’, *Review of*

ideology to facilitate the process'.³⁵ Pretoria's regionalist project recognises this, asserting that the 'countries of the southern African region can achieve their full potential only through...the harmonisation of trade practices'.³⁶ This harmonisation is within the remit of the neo-liberalism and is cognisant of the ostensible need in the era of globalisation, to compete for investment. In essence, this means that spatial territories have had to increasingly (re-)structure themselves as "competition states", attracting capital whilst competing with rival territories for investment.³⁷ To do so requires an almost complete break from any redistributive aspirations regarding social equity, and instead concentrate on a specific notion of what constitutes "good governance". This has obviously intense implications for nations in Africa with deplorable structural inequalities.

The contradictions of neo-liberalism and the apparent "good governance solution"

Such a scenario stimulates deep contradictions, for a project based on liberalisation, privatisation and representing the dislocating effects of globalisation has little chance of becoming hegemonic. Indeed, a hegemonic project in the Gramscian sense needs a 'politics of support' as well as a 'politics of power', however mighty transnational capital and its class allies may be.³⁸ This consensual element in the neo-liberalist project is "polyarchy".³⁹ This refers to a system by which an elite group rules and where popular involvement in decision-making is limited to periodic leadership choices *via* carefully managed elections, organised by contending elites.

Polyarchy aims to soothe the social and political pressures that are created by the

African Political Economy, no. 76, 1998, p. 176.

³⁵ James Mittelman and Mustapha Kamal Pasha *Out From Underdevelopment Revisited: Changing Global Structures and the Remaking of World Order* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p. 51.

³⁶ Department of Foreign Affairs *Draft Discussion Document on a Framework for Co-operation with the Countries in the Southern African Region*, Pretoria: Department of Foreign Affairs, Occasional Paper no. 1/96, p. 1.

³⁷ Philip Cerny 'Paradoxes of the Competition State: The Dynamics of Political Globalization', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1997.

³⁸ Andrew Gamble *The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism* London: Macmillan, 1988, pp. 208-41.

³⁹ Deploying the term used in Robert Dahl *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971. Dahl does not argue that polyarchy is the ideal system, rather that it is the only "realistic" model workable in modern societies.

transnational elite-based neo-liberal order and create a state of ‘low intensity democracy’.⁴⁰ Such an analysis echoes the assertion that ‘the construction of a corporate-dominant order...require[s] the neutralisation of social forces precipitating persistent and effective questioning of the established order’.⁴¹ By its very nature, polyarchy dissipates the energies of those marginalised by the ongoing order into parliamentary procedures that in themselves are acted out by political fractions whose power and prestige are dependant on the polyarchical model. In short, polyarchy expresses ‘not the fulfilment of democratic aspirations, but their deflection, containment, and limitation’.⁴² Indeed, the promotion of polyarchy has ‘been instrumental in some cases (*e.g.* Zambia) in disempowering the poor by introducing the multiparty mantra as a new political panacea, while it [has] entrenched a new, rather exclusive elite in reality’.⁴³

Furthermore, polyarchy is based on a separation of the economic from the political, ignoring the reality that there can be no cleavage between the so-called economic sphere and its (inter-linked) political and ideological consequences. Yet, such a conceptualisation is currently dominant -- certainly within the burgeoning literature on “democratisation” in the South.⁴⁴

In contrast to conceptualisations of popular democracy,⁴⁵ theorisations of this kind consciously divorce “economics” from “politics” (at a time when neo-liberalist impulses

⁴⁰ Barry Gills, Joel Rocamora, and Richard Wilson *Low Intensity Democracy: Political Power in the New World Order* London: Pluto Press, 1993.

⁴¹ Jeffrey Harrod ‘Social Forces and International Political Economy: Joining the Two IRs’ in Stephen Gill and James Mittelman (eds.) *Innovation and Transformation in International Studies* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 108.

⁴² Kenneth Good ‘Development and Democracies: Liberal Versus Popular’, *Africa Insight*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1997, p. 253.

⁴³ Ian Liebenberg ‘The African Renaissance: Myth, Vital Lie, or Mobilising Tool?’, *African Security Review*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1998, p. 5.

⁴⁴ For a broadly representative sample of work of this ilk, see for example the four volumes edited by Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset *Democracy in Developing Countries* Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1988; Giuseppe Di Palma *To Craft Democracies* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; and Samuel Huntington *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

⁴⁵ See for example Carole Pateman *Participation and Democratic Theory* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970; and Carol Gould *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Co-operation in Politics, Economy and Society* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

push for a greater inter-penetration of the two), for in this abstraction, the former responds only to the logic of “the market”, whilst the latter is restricted in its role of permitting that logic to proceed without obstruction.⁴⁶ This limited understanding of democracy however serves to provide protection and confidence to the established elites in countries undergoing transition from authoritarian rule. As one analysis puts it:

The assertion that the majority of African governments are now democratic is premised on contentious notions of democracy with external origins. Apart from this, the assertion has no empirical basis. It is true that multiparty elections are now common in Africa, but this truth does not describe a fundamental development. The change is strategic, not substantive. Multiparty elections have not led to new power relations in Africa. Just look at Zambia and Malawi since the fall of Kenneth Kaunda and the late Kamuzu Banda.⁴⁷

Such a process has been actively supported by the new South African government in its intercourse with the region, where the promotion of good governance *i.e.* “democracy” and “transparency” has gone hand-in-hand with a deepening penetration of neighbouring economies by South African-based externally-oriented capital *and* transnational capital. Indeed, much of the impulse behind such moves views the region as a possible market, waiting to devour foreign consumer goods and soak up overseas investment. This has been pictured as presenting substantial opportunities to Pretoria, as long as “political stability” and good governance is achieved in the region. As one commentator remarked:

[D]ecades of destabilisation by the *apartheid* government, helped along by corruption and mismanagement...has left the continent in the role of consumers rather than producers.

How do we capitalise on this? The answer has to be political stability. For Africa to be our growth market, we need to drive a shift in mindset: “No” to corruption, despotism and mindless militarism and “Yes” to fiscal discipline, balanced budgets and low inflation.⁴⁸

In such formulations, the call to end corruption and mismanagement (a welcome call by

⁴⁶ Mark Neufeld ‘Globalization: Five Theses’, paper presented at the conference ‘Globalization and Problems of Development’, Havana, Cuba, January, 1999, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Moyo ‘The African Renaissance: A Critical Assessment’, *Southern African Political and Economic Monthly*, vol. 11, no. 7, 1998, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Kanthan Pillay ‘Pillay’s Perspective’, *Cape Times* (Cape Town) June 28, 1999.

any standards) is explicitly linked with the dogmas of the hegemonic discourse: discipline in fiscal spending. Other notions of governance such as social justice are not even brought into the frame in this orthodox “common sense” notion of what constitutes good governance. This orthodox view is however, currently being promoted by Pretoria’s elites as part of their push for a reconfiguration of the region -- a push which serves specific fractions of capital within and without South Africa..

Returning to the “new wave of democratisation”, though many of the states in the region underwent “democratisation” before the end of *apartheid* (though much of these historic moments coincided with the South African transition), these projects have largely been short-lived and/or containing what can only be regarded as a democratic façade *i.e.* polyarchy. One need only think of the type of transitions that have occurred in states such as Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia to acknowledge that little has changed for the average person (for whom this analysis is concerned for).

What has occurred in these contentious transitions has been an attempt by dominant fractions -- with the overt support of their Northern counterparts for sure -- to reconstruct hegemony *via* a reformulation of the mode of political rule: from the overtly coercive -- *apartheid*, Banda and Kaunda -- to a more consensually-based order *viz.* polyarchy. The result was to pre-empt fundamental changes that may have arisen through any popular alternative to polyarchy, and instead preserve the extant economic structures dominated by the transnational elites. Co-option of the democratisation movement into the structures of polyarchical democracy performed this task, dressed up as it is within the rhetoric of good governance and democracy. Such an arrangement is the political counterpart to neo-liberalism, with the “visible hand of the voter” working alongside the mythical meta-physical “market”.

In an epoch of deepening global capitalism, economic harmonisation on a world scale is prevented by dictatorships and overtly authoritarian systems, because such arrangements stand in direct contrast to the ‘institutional certainties of democracy’, preferred by

investors.⁴⁹ Undemocratic regimes are also perceived as contributing to instability, having ‘disproportionate impacts on the climate for regional co-operation and integration’, whereas good governance creates the ‘conditions...for the private sector to function as the engine of growth’.⁵⁰ Furthermore, with the decline in the utility of sheer coercion (though as Gramsci asserts, the ‘armour of coercion’ is always held in reserve), authoritarian regimes are no longer “acceptable” to international society. Nor can they be openly propped up *à la* a Mobutu Sese Seko with cynical references to the Cold War milieu.

In addition, in the context of neo-liberalism whereby the state is “rolled back”, traditional forms of social control need to be re-invented and consent secured *alongside* coercion. This consensual mechanism of social control is part and parcel of the neo-liberal economic project, adding crucial legitimacy *via* polyarchic political systems and good governance to a specific economic model that cannot be achieved under authoritarian regimes. With a US-centred transnational hegemony characterising the international political economy, ‘support for [“good governance”] efforts in Africa is part of a global strategy to promote “Western” values and institutionalise political regimes that are likely to be non-belligerent and generally positive towards the realisation of the [neo-] liberal paradigm’.⁵¹

Thus with its ingredients of elite-pacting, historic compromises and provision for the co-option of majorities, more than any other system polyarchy, as part of a project entitled “good governance”, is better equipped to legitimise the political authority of dominant groups and to achieve the political stability necessary for capitalism to operate. In the context of our study, with the South African elite increasingly representing a fraction of the transnational elite, the promotion by Pretoria of good governance and democracy must be contextualised within the framework of which we have sketched. Accepting this, we may turn to specifically looking at the promotion of good governance and democracy by South Africa as part of the ongoing regionalist project in southern Africa.

⁴⁹ Thomas Koelble *The Global Economy and Democracy in South Africa* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999, p. 46.

⁵⁰ USAID ‘Initiative for Southern Africa’, <http://www.info.usaid.gov/pubs/cp98/afr/zz-isa.htm>

⁵¹ Goran Hyden ‘Foreign Aid and Democratisation in Africa’, *Africa Insight*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1997, p. 236.

The “African Renaissance”, good governance and the regionalist project

As we have mentioned, President Mbeki’s motif has been the “African Renaissance”. This theme has been associated with Mbeki from the days when he was Deputy President, and has been inextricably coupled with notions of good governance, democracy, liberalised economies, and regional integration -- all linked as one “package” which South Africa has sought to promote within the region. It is Mbeki, and those around him, who have been most closely associated with the push within South Africa to accede to the common sense “realities” of globalisation -- much to the chagrin of the ANC’s Leftist constituency and its tripartite allies in the Government of National Unity (the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party).

Mbeki has also been at the forefront of developing strong links with the dominant powers in the world order: he has been instrumental in establishing a close relationship with Washington *via* the US-South Africa Bilateral Commission, and has been a regular participant at transnational meeting points such as the World Economic Forum and the Partnership Africa conferences, where he has sought to court international capital to the region on the premise that the SADC is ‘involved in negotiations to transform the sub-continent into a free trade area [to] further enhance the attractiveness of the region as an investment destination’.⁵²

This activist approach has been bound up with Pretoria’s demand upon the regional elites that they restructure their economies and domestic polities to make their own territories more attractive to “international investment” and bring the region closer together as a more uniformed (and larger) market. This in itself has been privileged around the notion of a struggle for authentic liberation, based upon “open markets”, “good governance” and a particular regionalist vision. A lengthy quotation from Mbeki provides a flavour of this discourse:

⁵² Thabo Mbeki ‘The African Renaissance: Opportunities and Challenges for Asia’, address at a luncheon hosted by the Hong Kong Centre of the Asian Society and the South African Business Forum, Hong Kong, April 17, 1998, in Thabo Mbeki, 1998, p. 229.

What is it that makes up [Africa's] genuine liberation?

The first of these is that we must bring to an end the practices as a result of which many throughout the world have the view that as Africans we are incapable of establishing and maintaining systems of good governance...

Like others throughout the world, we too are engaged in the struggle to give real meaning to such concepts as transparency and accountability in governance...

Our history demands that we do everything in our power to...encourage all other countries on our continent to move in the same direction...

Accordingly...many on our continent has introduced new economic policies which seek to create conditions that are attractive to both domestic and foreign investors, encourage the growth of the private sector, reduce the participation of the state in the ownership of the economy, and in other ways seek to build modern economies.

Simultaneously, we are also working to overcome the disadvantages created by small markets represented by the relatively small numbers of people in many of our nation states. Regional economic associations have therefore been formed aimed at achieving regional economic integration.⁵³

This regionalist project postures southern Africa as on the threshold of economic growth, if only the familiar ingredients of the globalisation discourse were set in place. This conception 'posits Africa as an expanding and prosperous market...in which South African capital is destined to play a special role through the development of trade, strategic partnerships and the like'.⁵⁴ Indeed, the strategic partnership between the government in Pretoria, South African-based corporations *and* transnational capital is integral to the regionalist project being advanced by fractions within the South African elite. Post-*apartheid*, Pretoria has been enthusiastic in its projection of itself as a "bridge" between the developed world and the South across a whole range of issues, and reconfiguring the region within the globalising remit is no exception. Hence, Mbeki has been quite explicit in his promotion of the country as an *entrée* for international capital wishing to penetrate southern Africa, telling Hong Kong businessmen that they 'will find in...South Africa...a bridge to access much of the rest of the African continent'.⁵⁵

⁵³ Thabo Mbeki 'The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World', address at the United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan, April 9, 1998, in Thabo Mbeki, 1998, p. 247.

⁵⁴ Peter Vale and Sipho Maseko 'South Africa and the African Renaissance', *International Affairs*, vol. 74, no. 2, April 1998, P. 279.

⁵⁵ Thabo Mbeki 'The African Renaissance: Opportunities and Challenges for Asia', in Thabo Mbeki, 1998, p. 230.

Yet, though South Africa's "vision" of a renaissance in southern Africa (indeed, the wider continent) is predicated upon a neo-liberalist understanding of how growth and modernisation may be achieved, this project cannot be achieved whilst state administrations within the region remain "unattractive" to South African and international capital, based as they are in many cases upon authoritarian and personalised rule. The façade of "democracy" (polyarchy) and the "rule of law", with constitutional guarantees protecting property rights and investors from arbitrary interference by the state is deemed necessary as a precursor to any sustainable regionalist "renaissance" project. A commentary by an organic intellectual closely linked with big business in South Africa has made this quite explicit:

[T]he renaissance is about making African economies competitive in a global context – *about making the continent safe to do business...*[emphasis added]
Good governance, which lies at the heart of the African Renaissance vision, will thus have to encompass the implementation of sound policies. These include the liberalising of trade and privatisation of industry, the closing of the technological gap, the creation of an efficient state sector, the control of corruption and the installation of checks and balances on executive power. The involvement by the private sector will have to be encouraged through deregulation and privatisation.⁵⁶

At this point a caveat is in order: we are not suggesting that corruption, misuse of the state and incompetence is desirable; nor are we defending anti-democratic regimes. This is not the point. Curbs on such behaviour are *of course* an advancement for the peoples of the region. The ability to hold the threat of a non-renewable mandate over an administration may also lessen patent undemocratic behaviour. Yet, polyarchy as opposed to popular democracy, tends to encourage elite competition and a future predicated on winning the next round of elections. Addressing structural inequalities within a society, a long and open-ended process, fades from the agenda when democracy is reduced to periodic elections, and good governance becomes defined as a readiness to open up one's markets. As Claude Ake argued, if we 'neglect to problematise governance in democracies, we opt for a minimalist governance performance and a very shallow

⁵⁶ Greg Mills 'SA Foreign Policy After Mandela: A Policy for the Unemployed?', paper presented at the South African Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg, May 27, 1999, p. 12.

democratic performance'.⁵⁷

Hence, what is under investigation is not whether democracy (however defined) is better than autocratic despotism (of course it is), but the way that a *particular* form of democracy is promoted as an integral part of the regional project by elite fractions within the dominant state, to make the region more attractive to “investors” and by doing so, advance the position of transnational capital. Ultimately, this process aims to restructure the region and by doing so, incorporate it more and more into the international political economy along the lines demanded by the hegemonic discourse of neo-liberalism.

This being said, it has increasingly become apparent that South Africa sees itself as the agent-on-the-ground for such a reconfiguration of the region, driven by the imperatives of Pretoria’s own neo-liberal GEAR programme and the acceptance by leading fractions within the historic bloc of the hegemonic discourse. Barely an opportunity is missed to extol the necessity to accede to the rigours of good governance and democracy. For example, when President Frederick Chiluba disenfranchised former president, Kenneth Kaunda in late 1997, Pretoria appealed to him based on ‘the commitment of the members of the Southern African Development Community to the promotion and maintenance of democracy, good governance and human rights’. This was intimately connected to how foreign opinion may perceive such actions -- Kaunda’s detention was seen as ‘not serv[ing] to foster confidence in the kind of free political activity to which [we are committed] as states of this region’, and appealed to a speedy resolution ‘in the interest of political stability and good governance in Zambia and in our region’.⁵⁸ Thus not only was intercession a repaying of debts accrued by the ANC to Kaunda during the struggle period, it was also linked to the desire to project a favourable “image” of the region to outsiders. Such appeals to good governance is coupled with the belief that only by attracting international capital may economic growth be achieved.

⁵⁷ Claude Ake ‘How Misconceptions Devalue Democracy’, *Southern African Political and Economic Monthly*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1996.

⁵⁸ ‘Statement by President Nelson Mandela Following the Arrest of Former President of Zambia, Dr Kenneth Kaunda’, issued by the Office of the President, Pretoria, December 26, 1997.

This is frequently invoked as a starting point for a reconfiguration -- a “renaissance” -- of southern Africa. As Mbeki told an audience in Japan: ‘already, a significant number of countries have shown relatively high rates of growth as a direct consequence of changes in economic policies and, of course, the achievement of stability within our countries as a result of the establishment of democratic systems of government’.⁵⁹ This “selling” of southern Africa overseas has been a particular feature of Pretoria’s foreign policy, cast as it is, within the dominant meta-narrative.

In attempting to reconfigure the region and attract capital, South Africa has not only been promoting the idea of the African Renaissance, it has also been calling for a redefinition of the role of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and SADC as disciplinary organisations to safeguard regional “security”. Of particular note in this regard, is the SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security, formed in 1996. Tensions over whether it has the Organ should be a separate body parallel to SADC – opposed by South Africa – or that it should operate under a separate chair (*i.e.* Robert Mugabe) and be largely informal – the Zimbabwean view, indicate that there is at present no real consensus on how this Organ should operate. Such confusion, particularly when one of the protagonists is Mugabe – a figure largely regarded with disdain in South Africa, has led to calls within the country to take a firmer hand in running any SADC “security” apparatus.

Indeed, one South African newspaper has argued that the organ should be brought under ‘SA’s discipline’ so that ‘military intervention is directed at advancing democracy’. ‘In pursuing this end’, the report suggests, Pretoria ‘must contemplate the range of economic measures [its] regional dominance presents’.⁶⁰ In other words, South Africa should exploit its overbearing dominance of southern Africa to advance a particular agenda in the region. The aim seemingly promoted by Pretoria is to establish mechanisms to interfere in the internal affairs of member states in the event of a breakdown in governance. Not only is

⁵⁹ Thabo Mbeki ‘The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World’, address at the United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan, April 9, 1998, in Thabo Mbeki, 1998, p. 248.

⁶⁰ ‘SADC’s Future Rests on SA’s Discipline’, Sunday Independent (Johannesburg), October 12, 1998.

this a major break from past practice where criticism of/involvement in the domestic affairs of a member country was off limits, it also suggests a determined effort to reconstitute the effectiveness of the SADC, along lines favoured by the elites from the dominant state in the region.

Whilst such developments hold within them certain positive attributes, they are also potentially problematic, particularly if the dominant discourse regarding governance and democracy is used as a litmus test to decide intervention. Indeed, efforts to have intervention sanctioned at both the continental and regional level may simply reify the position of existing elites and contribute to ongoing social inequalities. As one critical perspective frames it:

Concepts such as “human rights”, “democracy” and “peace” are not ideologically neutral. “Human rights” tend to be reduced to political rights at the expense of equally important rights -- namely, social and economic rights.

...In the West “democracy”, as we all know by now, is used interchangeably with multi-partyism, while this concept should properly also refer to such crucial factors like popular participation in politics as well as the transparency of political institutions and the accountability of politicians.

...It is for such reasons that we should think carefully about introducing something which could be used tomorrow against [popular] movements in Africa.⁶¹

This danger is particularly so when the elites driving the regionalist project perceive “investor confidence” and attractiveness to international capital as perhaps the overriding factor in driving the growth of the region, and not social, political and economic empowerment for the popular classes. Hence “stabilising” regimes may (will?) achieve precedence before a more broader concept of what constitutes good governance, acting to enhance the societal positions of existing elites and thwarting popular demands for social justice.

Indeed, at the very heart of such criticism lies an engagement with the notion of what *is* good governance and democracy. According to the hegemonic discourse (a discourse that

⁶¹ Eddy Maloka ‘African Renaissance: Reactionary?’, *African Communist*, no. 147, Third Quarter, 1997, pp. 41-41.

is being advanced as the regional project in southern Africa), this is coupled with polyarchy and “open markets”. Mbeki himself explicitly has argued for ‘a more global approach which ties together both good governance and development’, whilst asserting that ‘democracy will lead to development’.⁶² He has gone on to say, speaking in effect as the regional driver, that ‘as a region, we remain firmly committed to the objectives of democracy, peace, stability [and] high and sustained growth’.⁶³

Yet, a more inclusive definition argues that good governance ‘should be measured against the access that the public or citizenry has to the levers of economic power, strategy and distribution of wealth, as well as to the design of growth’.⁶⁴ This economic democratisation currently lies buried beneath the dominant rhetoric surrounding notions of good governance, democracy and regionalism.

Conclusion

The promotion of a particular type of democracy -- polyarchy -- represents a fundamental shift in the tactics of the Northern-based elite classes and their junior subordinates in the South on how to advance conditions favourable to the existing global accumulation regime and reconfigure the political order. Such a shift has taken place within the wider context of an increasingly integrated world economy where the ongoing hegemonic ideology -- neo-liberalism -- demands a profound harmonisation and deepening of fiscal and political policies across the globe in order to facilitate the mobility of capital demanded by the transnational elite in their search for profit and capital aggregation. The ongoing regional project in southern Africa, based as it is on dominant notions of good governance and democracy, must be seen in this context, and helps explain why the United States’ representative to SADC views the regional grouping as ‘the “best game going” in the advancement of democracy, economic development, capital flows and other issues’.⁶⁵

⁶² Thabo Mbeki at second Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD II), cited by *South African Press Agency*, Tokyo, October 20, 1998.

⁶³ *Cape Times* (Cape Town), July 5, 1999.

⁶⁴ Ian Liebenberg, 1998, p. 5.

This is not to say that the impulses currently energising the region towards liberalisation and common sense assumptions *vis-à-vis* good governance and democracy, albeit distracted by the conflicts in Angola and the Congo, are simply top-down pressures exerted by “big brother” south of the Limpopo, acting as an agent of transnational capital. Such reductionism would be absurd. The push for a reconfiguration of the economic and political order in the region is driven by a multiplicity of actors, not least the various elite fractions within each discrete state who hope to benefit from a region more closely integrated into the global economy -- or at least not suffer greater marginalisation and a further erosion of their status.

However, we suggest that such “democratic” impulses and calls for good governance -- encouraged for sure by the dominant state (in tandem with other external actors) represents a fundamental attempt to make the region more attractive to international capital, at the expense of real development. It is this agenda that drives the regionalist project in southern Africa, even if at critical junctures it seems to coincide with the aspirations of other less powerful social actors.

This understanding leads to an ultimately pessimistic assessment for the region, for despite the calls for good governance and democracy, contradictions inherent in the polyarchical system mean that the future is not as closed as it may appear at first glance. This is because:

By its very nature, [polyarchy] is designed to prevent any interference with the workings of the free market, including state redistributive policies...which could counterbalance the tendency in capitalism toward a concentration of income and productive resources. The neo-liberal model therefore generates the seeds of social instability and conditions propitious to the breakdown of polyarchy.⁶⁶

Furthermore, as we have suggested, the regionalist project current in southern Africa is elite-driven, its main promoters are leading fractions from the dominant state, and the regionalist agenda is predicated upon “growth”. Yet, as Ben Turok asserts, ‘the pursuit of

⁶⁵ *Times of Zambia* (Lusaka), October 17, 1998.

⁶⁶ William Robinson, 1996a, p. 344.

economic growth without the simultaneous pursuit of development will lead to a dead end'.⁶⁷

Unless the call for good governance is re-negotiated to include not only a more regionally-based agenda, but one which is more inclusive of forms of popular democracy (with greater concentration on notions such as social justice and equity), the push for a reconstitution of the region based on the principles we have outlined above holds within it inherent contradictions which cannot but contribute to a further erosion of the everyday lives of southern African communities.

Indeed, 'regional integration must...go beyond trade agreements because cross-border natural resources, environment, health, social and cultural relations are equally important for sustainable development and stability'.⁶⁸ Only once such issues are placed on the agenda, alongside a more progressive understanding of what good governance should entail, will any regional project in southern Africa serve the interests all of its people. As the sole Zimbabwean opposition MP, Margaret Dongo, asserts:

In the building of democracy it must be borne in mind that it is not simply about "winning rights and liberties from an oppressive regime", but also about "winning the individuals from themselves" to be citizens in a democratic polity. This task involves building democracy at both the subjective and objective levels -- subjective with regard to culture and ideas, objective with regard to material conditions and social positions in society.⁶⁹

Whether such progressive ingredients can be filtered in to a re-constituted regionalism, in an epoch where harmonising tendencies tend to act against such popular aspirations, and where regional co-operation and integration are predicated upon elite-driven concepts of what constitutes "good governance" and "democracy", will be the greatest challenge for any people-driven agenda in southern Africa.

⁶⁷ Quoted in *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg), July 2-8, 1999.

⁶⁸ 'Many Tough Choices Ahead for SA', *Sunday Independent* (Johannesburg), March 29, 1999.

⁶⁹ Margaret Dongo 'Establishing Democracy in Southern Africa' in Greg Mills (ed.) *Southern Africa into the Next Millennium* Johannesburg: SAIAA, 1998, p. 34.