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DEMOCRACY



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A PLACE FOR CIVICS IN A LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC POLITY?
CONTEMPORARY CIVIC DISCOURSE ON DEMOCRACY AND REPRESENTATION

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AFRICANA

Introduction

As the constitutional transition in South Africa moves to a close, the radical urban civics which arose in the 1980s to destroy apartheid, find themselves in a central but unenviably precarious position. The anomalies entailed in ending a racial dictatorship have stamped a peculiar identity onto these residents' associations. Unelected by testable procedures, and with only rudimentary mechanisms of consultation, civics have entered the transitionary process as 'the sole and legitimate representatives of the community'. Until the ballots of all-inclusive local and metropolitan elections have been counted, community organisations will share the running of the transitionary government with the apartheid functionaries which they sought to destroy.[1]

I say that the new status of the civics is a symptom of an anomaly, for they have earned this status, not through a process of formal representation, but by virtue of organising those who were denied the opportunity to be represented at all. As such, the civics are well aware that they are only conferred the status of "representative of the community" in order to have this status taken away. Once a local government is elected, civics will take their place outside of the sphere of representation in the much-acclaimed civil society of the new South Africa.

In this context, the question "what are the civics?" is no existential indulgence. To travel the path from organ of resistance, to quasi-local government, to voluntary association in the space of four years is the stuff of an identity crisis. It unearths what is always a very fragile and difficult question: what is representation, and more particularly, what does it entail at the institutional level?

What makes this question even more complex is that the civic movement has never been entirely sure that it wants a liberal democracy at all. The notion that traditional institutions of representation are inadequate and that grassroots organs of resistance are the embryos of popular government was heard far and wide during the course of the 1980s. To state then, as unproblematically as I did, the notion that civics qua "representatives of the community" is purely and simply a transitional anomaly, is to deny the ambiguities at stake when considered from the vantage point of the historical forces which have shaped the identities of civics. The peculiarly ambitious role vis a vis representation which civics have conferred upon themselves, renders the unproblematic utilisation of the oppositions "state/civil society" and "statutory body/voluntary association" a little atrophied. The historical ambitions of the civics blur this divide.

The task of this paper is to explore the Atteridgeville-

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[1] See Collinge, 1993 for a detailed description of what is entailed in the "pre-interim" phase of local government.

Saulsville Residents' Association's (ASRO) perception of this divide. In other words, I wish to examine ASRO's conception of itself qua representative of residents under a liberal democracy. [2] Yet before doing so, I wish to set out what I believe is at stake in this investigation through the use of an anecdote.

The End of History or the beginning of democracy

Few have been so brazen as to believe that the demise of stalinism in Eastern Europe and the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa herald the beginning of The End of History. Still fewer have been so confident as to declare themselves protagonists in this quasi-religious revelation.

Yet this is precisely the identity which the National Party leadership conferred upon itself and the historical process when it announced the inauguration of South Africa's constitutional transition. If the NP is to be believed, the culmination of the Cold War has reduced the substance of politics to an insipid and banal debate over technicalities, for the burning controversies over good government and distributive justice have been laid to rest by the overwhelming logic of the historical process.

"Reality is visible to anyone with the ability to open their eyes and look around",[3] declared Gerrit Viljoen. Since, de Klerk tells us, "the great debate about economic systems and over forms of government - which dominated global politics for the ninety years of this century - is now over. Following the collapse of communism, it has become clear that there is really only one broad formula for economic and political success." He continues, without seeming to intend the irony, that "it is no longer possible to shop around [!] and to pick and choose economic systems according to our ideological predilections." The only conceivable economic system "rests on free markets, private ownership, individual initiative".[4]

As if to drive home the point that he speaks for rationality and nature, and for not contrivance and fabrication, de Klerk informs us that this "expansion of freedom is the natural course for mankind... It has not been devised by this or that philosopher or political scientist. It is inherent in human nature and human society."[5] Yet still further, in case we are not impressed by what is inherent and natural, de Klerk registers the work of a divine hand in the political process. "I believe", says de Klerk,

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[2] I will not tell you much about the organisation's history and its campaigns. Nor will I deal with what is probably the most burning, and certainly the most spoken of dilemma facing the civic movement: the question of technical capacity and finance at a time when the civic movement gears itself toward representing residents in the reconstruction of their townships. Rather, the object of this paper is simply the evolution of a discourse. Yet, to the extent that this discourse defines the identity of the civic and demarcates the contours of its practice, it is deeply implicated in all of its practical concerns.

[3] Gerrit Viljoen, 10 May 1990, speech to Parliament, Cape Town, translated from the Afrikaans.

[4] FW de Klerk, 16 September 1992, Pretoria Press Club.

[5] FW de Klerk, 23 February 1990, address to the 13th annual conference of Frankel, Kruger and Vinderine INC., Cape Town.

"that God is the master of the fortunes of peoples and nations and that the current events in Eastern Europe and the entire world are not coincidental."[6]

In sum, the revelatory closure of the Cold War has rendered the exigencies of economy and government "obvious to any child"[7]. The inevitability of our righteous future consists of a market economy in combination with parliamentary representation.

On the one hand, there is a very obvious sense in which the National Party is talking nonsense, and the authors of the statements I have quoted are well aware of that. As van Zyl Slabbert has flippantly remarked, the overconfidence which de Klerk exuded as he announced the transition resembles that of a "small boy whistling casually as he walks past a cemetery in the dusk" (Slabbert, 1992:7, translated from the Afrikaans). At the simplest level, the N.P. had begun an irrevocable process of enfranchising its historical enemies, and this must surely bring with it the ultimate risk of being effaced from the political map. Indeed, the N.P.'s insistence on inscribing a place for itself in the future state, first through the proposition of a veto, and then through the argument for party consociationalism, is itself testimony to the dynamic and animated, rather than insipid and banal, power struggle which resides in defining the very contours of representative democracy; namely, the struggle to determine who exactly "The People" are and in what configuration they are to be represented.

But there is a much more profound sense in which the birth of representative democracy in South Africa is not, or at least shouldn't be, the beginning of the End of History. To see why this is so one need only invert the meanings attributed to the end of the Cold War in the references cited above. For in this era there is no longer any reason for black South Africans to see their struggle within the terms of an atrophied duality between bureaucratic dictatorship on the one hand, and an imperialist enemy on the other. The fall of Stalinism comes at a time when democratic citizenship need no longer entail the casting of an empty vote and no more. In contrast to the times of Marx and of Lenin, the logic of the contemporary representative state is forced to heed the voices of social movements in spheres previously designated to lie beyond the grasp of the political. The workplace, collective consumption, gender and sexuality have all been reshaped by that pole of a power struggle which demands equality and liberty. Indeed, the space for contestation has become so much wider and indeterminate that the father of classical American pluralism, Robert A. Dahl, has recently remarked that "there is no reason to believe that the defence of liberty necessarily entails a defence of capitalism as we know it" (Dahl, 1990:112).

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[6] ibid

[7] G. Viljoen, 13 February 1990, Parliament.

But this potential of the representative state to become a deeply contested one is, of course, only a potential. Even if the representative state is forced to engage with the struggles created by a myriad of new voices, there is no guarantee that these struggles and these voices need always or ever emerge. And this is where I finally arrive at the crux of this paper's research.

The irony of beginning a paper on ASRO with the N.P. fantasizing its hopes about representative democracy, is not simply that they are the mirror of the civic movement's fears. That much is predictable. More pertinent are the dangers that lie in the civic movement really sharing with the N.P. its conception of representative democracy. For the history which shaped the civic movement places it in a rather sceptical relation to representative democracy. The danger exists that, instead of opening the spaces that they create for radical politics, the civics will see in the structures of representative democracy the same sterility and emptiness which de Klerk hopes to celebrate. Beckoning elements of its history rather than its possible future, there is every chance that civics will attempt to skirt the logic of the new order and to imprint on it the fantasy of a homogenous community, attached organically to its leadership, and articulating a single, transparent and indomitable political will.

Pallo Jordan (1990) has expressed fears that the survival of such a political imaginary will place South Africa in danger of being controlled by a Stalinist bureaucracy. I think that the opposite is the case. If the civic movement attempts to skirt the logic of the new order it will simply be defeated by it. Township residents will find themselves either rubber stamping or impotently protesting against developmental projects which will shape their lives in spite of their political activism. The irony is that the N.P.'s truncated view of representative democracy and market economies will begin to resemble reality in far closer fashion than the N.P. itself really believed it would.

In starting this paper by indicating the outline of its conclusions, I have baldly invoked normative assumptions which the reader cannot be expected to take at face value. I have also interpreted the thoughts of the ASRO leaders I have interviewed in a manner with which they would probably take issue. It goes without saying that a task of this paper is now to fill in these gaps. At the theoretical level I must define what is entailed in the notion of <u>representative</u>, as opposed to <u>direct</u>, democracy. Moreover, I must defend the argument that, whatever forms it has taken historically, and with whatever forms of economic organisation it has cohabited, it is the logic of representative democracy which harbours the potential of creating political forces which are truly participatory and transformative in character. At the empirical level I must illustrate why the civic leaders I interviewed hover between working with these potentialities on the one hand, and pining after a nostalgic vision of a monolithic, direct democracy which will not find a home after the transition.

Most important of all, this paper must not lapse into a polemic against the civic or into a quasi-policy document. Although highly interpretive in nature, the task of this paper is to trace the evolution of an organisation's discourse over the last decade. As such, it must allow the civic leaders to speak as much as possible and must clearly demarcate the line at which the civic stops speaking and I start. In this way, the paper's normative and analytic interpretations will be left bare, and its conclusions open to as wide a degree of discrepancy as possible.

The Ambiguities of the National Democratic Revolution

Before examining the discourse of ASRO itself it is appropriate to explore whether there has indeed ever been a challenge to representative democracy embodied in the identity of the South African liberation movement. This detour is neither superfluous nor an attempt to put the words of others into mouths of the civic leaders I interviewed. I hope that by the end of this paper it will become clear that the social-theoretical ambiguities which have nourished and shaped the liberation struggle are deeply implicated in the civic's vision of its own future. In addition, I will use this section to specify as clearly as possible the line separating representative from direct democracy. Since this distinction in the linchpin of my mode of investigation, I would do well to define it before using it to interpret.

It is well known that the notion of National Democratic Revolution (NDR) was conceived in the structures of the Cominform as a socialist strategy for colonial countries. It is equally well known that in the South African context, National Democratic strategy was first conceived under the banner of marxism-leninism in the South African Communist Party's (SACP) 1962 programme.[8] In 1969, the concept was adopted by the ANC itself, albeit it rather hesitantly.[9] As the official strategy of the Congress tradition, the term was heard far and wide inside the country during the uprisings of the mid 1980s. By the time the constitutional transition began in 1990, the notion of NDR was deeply ensconced in the identities of the United Democratic Front, and of Cosatu.

The fact that NDR was conceived under the banner of marxism-leninism, is in itself no proof of its theoretical character. Neil Kinnock once called himself a socialist, but nobody is obligated to believe him. Moreover, such "proof" becomes even more incoherent once the implication of NDR's hegemonization by the Congress tradition becomes apparent. For, by the mid 1980s, the currency of NDR had spread far beyond the confines of the South African communist tradition. And of course, its irradiation through the ranks of black opposition has meant that its meaning has become increasingly diffuse and indeterminate.

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[8] See SACP. 1960.

[9] See ANC. 1980.

Nevertheless, and if only as a point of departure, I wish to begin this discussion of NDR from within the prism of the identity conferred upon it by its own original architects; that of marxism-leninism.

I opened this paper by attributing to statements of the National Party the belief that the End of History was nigh. If this attribution to the NP was a little careless and frivolous, it is certainly neither in relation to historical materialism and the notion of democracy which ensues from it. The vitriolic rejections of representative democracy littered across the texts of the marxist-leninist canon are squarely buttressed by a distinctive theory of history. According to the latter, historical society is moving tendentiously towards its own annulment; the telos of history consists in an eternity in which society is rendered entirely transparent to itself. The state withers away, and with it, the entire edifice of "the political" as a distinct sphere of social relations. What is left is a homogenous entity which, as "a single body" regulates its own existence.

Moreover, the narrative continues, if history is moving tendentiously toward its own closure, its movement has also created an agent imbued with the task of instituting this closure. By virtue of its position in the capitalist relations of production, the proletariat "lives in the truth" (Althusser, 1990:66), so to speak. The working class is epistemologically privileged in that it is the agent which heralds the institution of a final transparency. And it is politically privileged in that its will and its interests promise to confer upon humanity its universal destiny. What is required at the brink of the End of History is the construction of a configuration of institutions which will facilitate the realization of proletarian will by destroying that of its enemies.

Stated in this way, the reader may well lambast this rendition as atrophied, sterile, and ultimately erroneous. Yet claims to greater sophistication, nuance and complexity are belied by the theory of democracy which accompanies this conception of history. Perhaps most illuminating in this regard is Lenin's pronouncement on the utility of universal suffrage:

> Universal suffrage is the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state. The petty-bourgeois democrats ... expect just this "more" from universal suffrage. They themselves share, and instil into the minds of the people, the false notion that universal suffrage "in the present-day state" is really capable of revealing the will of the majority of the working people and of securing its realization. Lenin, 1975:319-20) emphases added)

Embodied in this statement is the notion that, if taken seriously, pluralist democracy is not only useless but obfuscatory. When armed with a knowledge of history, the necessary trajectory of its movement and the identity of its universal agent, the ritual of determining people's identities through a procedural competition is rendered nonsensical. For representative elections can only gauge the maturation of a will already known to historical materialism. The function of democracy cannot possibly consist in empirically testing who

political agents are, but rather, in developing the institutions which will best realize and express what they are necessarily destined to become. The interests of the proletariat are inscribed in the meaning of history and thus need not and should not require determination through a party-political competition.

Thus while the role of suffrage in representative democracy is to determine the will of the electorate, its role in proletarian democracy, on the contrary, is simply to regulate the expression of an already-constituted and transparent political will. Universal suffrage is to be employed to "serve the people ... as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for workmen and managers in his business" (Marx, 1979:221). Thus, an analogy is drawn between the individual capitalist who selects "the right man" for "the right job" and the mechanism of universal suffrage in the context of elections under proletarian democracy.

And what are the tasks of these "right places" in proletarian administration? "Democracy is quite needless to the proletariat if it is not at once used as a means to further measures directly attacking private property..." (Engels, 1976:253). In other words, democracy (qua proletarian administration) is "quite needless" barring its function as an instrument of a single, homogenous and pre-given political will.

To what extent does the SACP's theory of NDR replicate this conception of history and democracy. At first glance, it seems to do so with the fidelity and care of an acolyte. "The only solution to contemporary global crises", avers the SACP, "lies with the deepening and consolidation of the main historical tendency of our epoch; the transition from capitalism to socialism" (SACP, 1989:4). Moreover, the SACP is clear about who the agent of this "main historical tendency" is to be: "social and global problems can only be solved on the basis of the working class whose objective social position makes it central in this regard" (ibid:11). In order to reiterate the point, the SACP informs us that the political history of the African continent is not exempt from the laws of history in general. The "revolutionary process in Africa", contends the SACP, will only reach fruition if the African proletariat "is conscious of its historic mission and is organized to promote and pursue its immediate and long-term interests under the guidance of marxism-leninism" (ibid:14).

Yet, to the classical repertoire of concepts concerning proletarian universality, the South African theory of NDR adds a rider. The specificity of South African capitalism, aver the theorists of NDR, issues in its intrinsic dependence upon a political relation of racial domination. "In our country ... race and class are two sides of the same coin." (ibid:42)

It is from this characterization of the relation between capitalism and racial domination in South Africa that the fundamental postulates of NDR qua strategy of democratization arise, marking an initial deviation from the "two-stage"

conception of the path to communism. Firstly, if capitalism in South Africa is dependent, in its very constitution, upon racial oppression, then the struggle against racial domination is ipso facto anti-capitalist in character. Moreover, and following this same logic, the political identity of the entity which seizes power from the apartheid regime, is, qua oppressed nation, ipso facto anti-capitalist. "There can be no fundamental liberation without full economic emancipation" (ibid:36) avers the SACP. "Each class is riven by racial divisions and the fate of different classes, within each racial group, is tied to the maintenance or destruction of racial domination." In other words, "the objective fate of the black middle sections is linked much more with that of black workers than with their equivalent across the colour line" (Slovo, 1976:126).

The upshot is that South African capitalism's special features dictate that "the national democratic state is the indispensable basis for the advance to socialism" (SACP, 1989:33-4). And since the prize of the National Democratic Revolution will have been to tear from South African capitalism its life blood, ie racial domination, the national democratic state is ipso facto a transitionary state of affairs, an "extra stage" so to speak (Hudson, 1988), in the marxist-leninist theory of history, inserted between the transition from capitalism to socialism.

Stated in this way, NDR's allegiance to marxism-leninism is - national democratic rider and all - palpable. The classical telos, together with its identification of the universal agent of history par excellence, is happily retained by the proponents of NDR.

Yet in this context, what are we to make of the following?

> The foundation of the national democratic state will be popular representative institutions of government based on one-person, one-vote, universal and direct adult franchise without regard to race, sex or property and other discriminatory qualifications... The state will guarantee the basic freedoms and rights of all citizens, such as freedoms of speech and thought, of the press and of organisation, of movement, of conscience and religion and full trade union rights for workers including the right to strike. (SACP, 1989:34)

These lines are highly ambiguous. If the principles of political expression and representation cited above constitute mechanisms which ensure that the will of the working class majority shines through, then indeed, they are the political forms of a stage in a teleological process. However, it is not at all certain that this is what is meant. The theoretical architects of the national democratic state do not specify the functions of its political forms and principles. Could we not justifiably interpret these lines rather differently? Could we not say that the combination of universal suffrage and "basic freedoms and rights of all citizens" implies that the national democratic state is defined by a reluctant allusion to its own indeterminacy? In other words, could these rights and freedoms and these procedures not signify that at the very moment the popular sovereign expresses its will it is "dissolved into a numerical element..., a statistic" (Lefort, 1988:230), thus attesting to an ultimate recognition that it is indeterminable?

In other words, the theory of NDR is left stranded between two competing conceptions of democracy; the first, a pluralist representative democracy and the second, a platform on which history's privileged agent (here the oppressed nation) is to destroy the raison d'etre of political contestation in any form.

Let us recast this same tension in another context. What is the political status of the national democratic forces pitted against apartheid in the 1980s? According to the contours of the tension I have just outlined, national democratic discourse offers two conflicting answers. The one is that the practice of resistance has engendered a political will which renders pluralist and representative democracy obsolete. It is within the rubric of this logic that the grassroots institutions forged in struggle are inscribed with lofty and universal ambitions. For they are charged with a symbolic weight which far surpasses their identity as organs of resistance. Instead, they are instruments which can and must outlive the apartheid order for they constitute the site at which the always-already present political interests of the oppressed have become visible and expressive. As such, they are nothing less than embryos of government:

> Not only are we opposed to the present parliament because we are excluded, but because parliamentary-type representation in itself represents a limited and narrow idea of democracy... The rudimentary organs of people's power that have begun to emerge in South Africa ... represent in many ways the beginning of the kind of democracy that we are striving for (UDF discussion document, cited in Horowitz, 1990:21-2, original emphases).

Yet the second answer to the question which emerges from national democratic discourse is a good deal less comfortable with the notion that the practice of resistance forged a political will which was always-already present in the logic of South African history. As such it is less comfortable with the notion that what will replace apartheid are organs of governance which efface pluralist contestation from the exercise of power. And in this sense, the second answer ipso facto defends a conception of representative democracy.

In what sense does it do this? If democracy resides in the governance of "the will of the people", and yet if the real identity of this will is never fixed, but rather, is always a site of contestation, then the "will of the people" can never express itself directly, but can only exist as a conflict between competing representations as to its true character. In other words, what is implicated in the notion of representivity is that political allegiances are not inscribed a priori in the nature of society, but are the contingent outcome of a contest.

And if this is so then the organs of resistance which united those excluded from the democratic process cannot double up as future organs of government. On the contrary, democracy in South Africa must inaugurate itself by questioning this very unity, in the form of institutions which insist that popular sovereignty can only express itself through a never-ending process of contestation over allegiances.

ASRO in the 1980s: no crystal ball

So much for this theoretical dilemma in the SACP. To what extent, if any, does it inform the identity of the civic movement in the 1980s?

At first glance it is perhaps obvious that civic culture during the 1980s was deeply anti-pluralist in character. Aside from the fact that the majority of civics were formally aligned to a single political tradition (charterism), the structural character of civics assumed homogeneity as a necessary condition of political action. While decentralised into area and sometimes street committees for the purposes of deeper participation, administrative capability and, after 1985, as a tactic to buttress against state harassment, the overwhelming logic of the political process envisaged a Rousseauian mass assembly of residents producing a single political voice.

Conservative detractors have mooted this point as ultimate testimony to the anti-democratic identity of the civic movement. Yet in the context of both the absence of representative democracy, and the brutal attacks directed at those who dared to fight dictatorship, the notion that structures of resistance could have, or indeed, should have, opened themselves to procedural pluralism, is a little ridiculous. Instead of bald pronouncements vis a vis the inefficacy of Rousseauian democracy, the historicity of civic identity should be probed.

I can think of three possible identities which civics could have conferred upon themselves during the course of the 1980s. The first is an entirely political-instrumental conception; civics are vehicles through which the local structures of apartheid are to be destroyed. Or, what amounts to the same thing, civics are "shock troops" of the liberation struggle.

Within this position there is, of course, scope for enormous tactical variation. In his opening address to the Kabwe conference in 1985, Oliver Tambo spoke of civics shaping residents into an insurrectionary formation, to be conjoined with military forces in a violent onslaught against the regime (ANC, 1985:10). In contrast, one of the ASRO leaders I interviewed envisaged civics bringing a fully-constituted apartheid state to the negotiating table through continuous campaigns of civil disobedience.

Tactically, these conceptions are gulfs apart, but I bring them under one category for the purposes of this discussion. For what is common to them is the notion that the creation of a homogenous and unified body politic, articulated through structures of mass democracy, is simply a conjunctural phenomenon. The community constitutes itself into a single political will, only by virtue of an external enemy which defines it as such. The longevity of civics qua "sole and legitimate representatives of the people" is entirely contingent on the continued existence of the apartheid regime.

In other words, what is expressed through the voice of the civic is not a transparent and universal will per excellence, but a

will deeply aware of the historicity and parochiality of its conditions of enunciation. In this sense, the political mythology engendered by organisation is decisively inorganic in the nature of its self-construed horizons. These horizons are confined within the contours of apartheid and no more. Forms of social and political expression to replace apartheid are in no way implied by or embodied in the contours of contemporary township organisation. This latter acquires its intelligibility, only within the political imaginary of racial dictatorship.[10]

The second position is that organs of township resistance double up as organs of government, progressively encroaching on the terrain of state sovereignty at the local level. At the level of representation, the local government is boycotted, and residents, qua democratic sovereign, converge instead in the structures of the civic. The civic also encroaches upon administrative functions, skirting official law enforcement for instance, and replacing it with structures of popular justice.[11]

In so far as this second position can be read as embodying the logic of the first, it does not contradict it. The establishment of alternative representative and administrative forums marks a refusal to be registered in the state's discourse on democracy and representation. In this sense, there is no reason why the alternative structures which arose to punctuate the illegitimacy of officialdom should not equally be construed as oppositional entities whose efficacy simply resides in the continued existence of the apartheid state. In other words, the civic qua representative, and people's courts qua organs of justice are only so in the absence of and the struggle for democracy.

The third position, in contrast, does not see the emergence of a homogenous and unitary voice as historicised by the existence of an enemy, which will disagregate with the destruction of that enemy. On the contrary, it posits this homogenous will as a universal and transcendental potentially whose full constitution is denied by the existence of the enemy. In this conception, organs of resistance assume a double identity. At the one pole of this identity, their raison d'etre is the destruction of apartheid. Yet, at the other pole, their task is to outlive and replace apartheid structures. The Rousseauian notion of a people assembling to express a single and irrepressible voice is not historicised by apartheid, but universalised by its own

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[10] A variant of this position is lucidly articulated by Khehla Shubane: "Colonially dominated peoples are left no choice but to gravitate together in liberation movements and oppose their oppression... [But] the movement itself must accept that it arose as a result of specific historical circumstances and that once these change the liberation movement-style of politics must be allowed to lapse as well" (Shubane, 1992:37-8). He goes on to advocate that the liberation movement disagregate into a plurality of political parties and voluntary associations (ibid:38-9).

[11] It has been argued that popular justice under the aegis of the civics had little or no political ambition. Rather, it was forged "by simple necessity" due to the gaps left by hopelessly inadequate policing under apartheid. Indeed, the argument continues, institutions of informal township justice far preceded the birth the civic movement under a deeply conservative leadership. Yet, as Mayekiso (1993) argues, while it may be true that the emergence of people's courts bore testimony to the inadequacy of apartheid policing, the notion that it can be separated from the impulse to destroy apartheid in the mid 1980s is ridiculous.

transcendental invincibility. In this sense, the organisational forms of the present are the governmental forms of the future.[12]

Which of these three positions did the ASRO leadership adopt during the 1980s? Both Seekings (1993) and Swilling (1994) have warned us against attributing grandiose claims to local civic structures. Civics, they tell us, were more preoccupied with the mechanics of organisation-building than with universal questions of national democracy. I will discuss later whether this sort of path of enquiry is a wise one at all. For the moment however, let us say that at first glance this sentiment seems absolutely correct:

> When ASRO was launched at the end of 1983 we never dreamt that the end of apartheid was a little more than six years down the line. So we never really gave a thought to how we would govern. Would the civic become a new local government? Really, during the 1980s that question was so abstract that nobody bothered to ask it. It was quite meaningless (respondent 2).[13]

And another ASRO leader:

> Our energy was focused entirely on getting rid of the regime. And when we focused elsewhere it was on how to prevent the regime from getting rid of us. The thing about being in the midst of a life-and-death war is that you cannot possibly see past it... We united the community to throw off the yoke of apartheid. What the community would look like after democracy was an academic question. The situation did not allow us to address it (respondent 1).

I probed the activists I interviewed a little further. In the mid-1980s a Marx-Lenin reading group was established amongst the civic leadership. Did activists not learn something from the notion of dual power - that organs of resistance would, after the revolution, be transformed into soviets which would replace parliamentary representation, and herald the birth of a new democracy?

> Reading Marx and Lenin served an extremely important educative function for us, but not in the sense you are talking about. Yes, we read about soviet democracy and about the Paris Commune, but, as I was saying, in our situation these questions were academic. What we really got out of Marx and especially Lenin was the art of leadership in struggle. You have to read the conjuncture very carefully on a day to day level. What is the mood of the people? Where are the problems in our constituency? How strong is the enemy? What is its greatest point of weakness? These are the questions which our reading brought to our attention. It showed us that leadership is a very difficult art, that with bad leaders the struggle is lost (respondent 1).

While most civic leaders articulated the belief that the future was unsighted from the vantage-point of the 1980s, what was abundantly clear in activists minds was the identity of the civic as an organ of the liberation struggle:

> Why did we form residents' associations in opposition to the formation of BLAs (Black Local Authorities)? You must understand that, first and foremost, we identified ourselves with a national movement to destroy apartheid. Some of our people ... were involved in the impending formation of the United Democratic Front. And together with others across the country we recognised black local government as the weak link in the apartheid chain. So attacking the BLAs was a crucial part of destroying apartheid. In positioning ourselves

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[12] At least two texts which come very close to this position are Sisulu, 1991 and Mayekiso, 1992.

[13] Perhaps now is an appropriate time for a brief word on methodology. The data-base of the this paper consists of four interviews: two with the founding chairperson and vice chairperson of ASRO, and two with the present general secretary and chairperson. All four respondents have been active members of the civic from its inception until the present. I have referenced them as respondents 1 to 4 in no identifiable order.

> as an alternative the SLAs we were making the point that they were corrupt dummy structures, that we would not stop fighting until we have real democratic administration (respondent 2).

And another activist:

> After the so-called reforms of 1982 it became clear to us that the dilemmas of residents were going to highlight the atrocities of apartheid much more visibly than before. The African ghettos were now legislatively considered economies unto themselves. Yet our people's labour and purchasing power was integral to the social product of metropolitan economies. And after coming home from making these metropolitan economies what they were, residents found that they were to fund their own ghettos. The SLAs were to be given taxation powers as if they controlled an economic island. And as the new legislation came through, so the beer halls were privatized. The only source of income left to the SLAs was rent. So even in advance, we knew very well that rents were going to spiral and spiral. With these new reforms, we would have been irresponsible not provoke a response from residents. The SLAs were the most glaring and painful moment of the apartheid monstrosity. In this sense it was the weak link in the chain. It made life unbearable (respondent 4).

Thinking back to the three possible civic identities with which this section of the paper began, it seems quite clear that the ASRO leadership steered clear of the third viz. that the civic was a rudimentary organ of government. The leadership was deeply aware that residents were united under the rubric of a single political project only by virtue of their common exclusion from representation. In this sense, the structure of the political process under the rubric of the civic was inscribed with a tactical and historicised function. Beyond the prism of the apartheid imaginary, it had little or no meaning.

Yet this statement must be tempered by the meanings inscribed in the second category of civic identity; that of a representative which encroaches upon the arenas of state sovereignty. While the future may indeed have been unsighted from the trenches of resistance, the exercise of establishing counter and quasi state functions was surely imbued with a significance beyond the confines of tactical initiative:

> If we are talking simply about tactics, then of course, the goal is that the whole community abstain from rent payments
> until the day that apartheid rents do not exist. But as important is the process through which residents arrive at saying: "We will not fund your dummy structures with our wages" (respondent 3).

And examining the significance of this process a little further:

> The very existence of these rents is the product of people having no decision-making power over their own lives. So therefore the exercise of the rent boycott must begin to build precisely what is lacking: participatory democracy. This is why we decentralised into area committees. Obviously the whole community cannot make a meaningful decision by assembling in one forum without prior discussion. So our structures had to reach into every street. Nothing of significance could be allowed to occur without everyone feeling: "This was my decision". Our structures would have been hollow if we had simply borrowed some ideas from a group of left-wing intellectuals. The process had to express the fact that everyone has the knowledge to run their own lives (respondent 4).

This logic extended to the exercise of administrative functions as well:

> The amazing thing about people's courts is that ordinary people began to realize that the sophisticated language of lawyers spoke of what they already knew. People know right from wrong. They just never realised that institutions could be forged around what they know: their institutions. Obviously murder cases were handed over to the police. But in domestic disputes and crime we were incredibly successful. At times the police asked us to solve cases. Once the district surgeon wrote sent a letter congratulating us on our role in lowering the crime rate (respondent 4).

And perhaps most important of all:

> In this sense, I suppose that our experience did create some rudimentary principles for the future. After the experience of people's education, I don't think our people will ever accept their schools being run without the involvement of PTSAs. And why should democracy stop at the education of our children? We thought, why can't people also be involved in the delivery, not just reception, of health care, for instance? Those we heady days. Looking back, perhaps we were too ambitious. But some solid principles were built, and we would have wasted something precious if we lost sight of them (respondent 4).

At this level, the practices generated by establishing an array of institutions outside the ambit of the regime certainly bore the mark of an alternative. Yet it must be stressed that in the minds of activists this "alternative" never crystallized into the idea of a specific institutional formation. Rather, what the experience of opposition generated was "rudimentary principles".

What did these principles specify? Essentially, a deepening of the political; the notion that an array of social relations previously designated to lie either in the incontestable sphere of the private, or in the equally incontestable sphere of unilateral administrative action, were to be redefined and reshaped by the demand for participation. In other words, what was already rejected by the civic was the notion that the political consists of a narrow and localized space above society, which citizens can only access by crossing a ballot. Instead the discourses of equality and participation must imprint themselves ubiquitously across the social through various forms of citizen action. In this sense, the practices of civic organisation certainly spoke to the future; but only cryptically.

For, stated at the level of rudimentary principle, this notion of the "ubiquity of the political" presents a truncated story. Its real import only emerges once it is conferred meaning by its attachment to specific institutional and philosophical forms. In illustration, the classical marxism spoken of earlier is perhaps best defined by its illumination of the ubiquity of the political. What was previously designated to be the work of a rational market was unveiled by marxism as an arena shaped by power and coercion. Yet this illumination was articulated to a vision of history which saw a universal solution in the dictatorship of a particular group of social agents. In contrast, the work of Robert Dahl which I quoted earlier, envisages the irradiation of the democratic principle through opening more and more avenues to an indeterminate, unpredictable pluralist contestation in increasingly numerous spheres of life.

In this sense, the political principles generated by civic activity remained open-ended. Certainly at the level of the leadership's explicit thinking, the articulation of principles to an institutional configuration of political expression remained indeterminate. This was essentially, "an academic question".

Into the 1990s - the mass meeting and the ballot

At this point however, a certain inconsistency in the civic leaders' perceptions of the organisation's function and identity

becomes apparent. In what follows it will become clear that the articulation of principle to a vision of a specific political process with visible contours, was not quite as open-ended and indeterminate as the words of the civic leadership imply. For in discussing the place of the civic after the transition, an image of representation and participation which very obviously bears the imprint of politics in the 1980s, emerges from the discourse of ASRO leaders.

What I am registering then, seems to be an anomaly. In the references above, the civic leadership was vociferous in rejecting any universal or transcendental claims to its identity. Instead, it adamantly insisted on its historical inscription into the political logic of apartheid; so much so in fact, that it insisted on the opacity of the future. And yet, in the very same interviews, a clearly contoured vision of the future, based largely on the shape of organisation in the past, is articulated.

Later in this paper, I will attempt to explore why a vision remained concealed and unspoken in discussing the 1980s, and yet, in discussing the 1990s, emerged in a manner which illustrates abundantly that it was always-already present. Indeed, I think that if it is possible to get to grips with the logic of such silences and omissions, something of the nature of political transition is revealed. And in this sense, the conditions of emergence of "the new" become more intelligible. For the moment however, let us explore the nature of this vision.

The civic leaders began to articulate the raison d'etre of the continued existence of the civic after apartheid with what has become, over the last few years, a very familiar rhetoric:

> There must be a strong and vibrant civil society, for this is the variable that will ensure the success of democracy in South Africa's political equation. We must not repeat mistakes made elsewhere where everything was collapsed into one people's movement... Those in government must be pitted against civil society to ensure that authoritarian tendencies do not slip into this democratic experiment of ours (respondent 4).

And further:

> Civics must survive the transition because the incoming government must hear the voice of the people very loudly. Democracy will mean nothing in real terms without the continued struggles of popular movements (respondent 2).

All that can be gleaned so far is that "the voice of the people" is to echo at its truest and most formidable outside of the formal structures of sovereignty: or at very least, that a condition of the representivity of the formal structures of sovereignty, resides in the presence of a voice outside of their ambit. This is an important point which we will later deal with at length, but let us note for the moment that in itself it does not tell us very much. What is at stake and yet is thus far unsaid, is, of course, the political status of "the voice of the people" and the institutional configuration which befits it.

This issue is perhaps most fittingly introduced by the manner in which the ASRO leadership responded to challenges to its

representivity as it began to negotiate the terms of rent and service charges at the beginning of the transition:

> At the beginning of the rent/electricity process, ASRO was viewed as the sole and authentic representative of the community. That seems like language from a long time ago. But of course, it was true. No one else was brave enough. We were arrested and detained under the emergency: there was a time when you had to be very courageous to represent the community, and this was respected... Ours was a liberation platform, not a just a rent platform. And it was on this platform that we won the hearts of the people (respondent 2).

Yet with the inauguration of the transition:

> ... it suddenly became very easy to be a representative of the community. A range of formations that were previously very quiet started mushrooming. We never had any problems taking our positions in negotiations back to the community through area committees and mass meetings. But AZAPO, the PAC and the Ministers Fraternity of Atteridgeville suggested that because of ASRO's fraternal relationship with the tripartite alliance, we were sectarian. They said we needed non-sectarian representation. We should either distance ourselves from the activities of the alliance, or each liberation movement should have a civic. When it got to the stage of suggesting sending several delegations to the negotiations, we said, "Niks, that isn't going to happen." So, we all bandied together in one delegation and tried to come to one position. But quite frankly, it just made the process messy and complicated.

What emerges in ASRO discourse then with the advent of varying claims to representivity is a bifurcation of political leadership into the "authentic" and the "unauthentic". Moreover, the gauge of authenticity is established by a backward glance into 1980s; those who led the community to the destruction of apartheid have earned the authority to represent the community in the transition. In contrast, the ambitions of those who wish to lay leadership claims only now, once the transition has already started, are cast as the work of an artifice; claims to representivity have "suddenly become easy". They need no longer be buttressed by an authentic connection to the community's political will.

Yet significantly the logic of this belief extends past the transition and into the future. All four interviewees insisted that, after the transition, Atteridgeville-Saulsville residents remain organised under one civic, and that latter retain the structure that characterised it in the 1980s viz. area committees, a general council and an executive. Moreover, all four interviewees advocated that the civic leadership bifurcate itself into those who run for local government and those who remain behind to staff the "organ of civil society".

Why should the civic leaders of the 1980s occupy the local government of the 1990s? Because "those who sacrificed where others compromised must run the new local government" (respondent 3). Moreover, if civic leadership of the 1980s does occupy a significant place in local government, "tensions between government and the people won't really be a problem because they [ex-civic local government councillors] will be able to get out there with the civic to explain to the community what is going on" (respondent 3).

Once again then, what emerges is the notion of a single voice resonating from the community, but only insofar as the latter is represented by its authentic leadership - which in turn is gauged

by looking back to the moment when the community constituted itself qua political entity; ie, in the struggles which marked the birth and growing hegemonic position of ASRO.

Yet if the civic leadership can indeed initiate a seamless process of representation by occupying the new local government, why the need for a voice outside of local government; ie, what then is the raison d'etre of the continued existence of the civic? I will cite two reasons given to me by the civic leadership:

> After apartheid, municipalities and metropolitan areas will of course be non-racial. And the people who participate in local government will come from various political strands. Moreover, local government will probably reflect a continuation of the power-sharing arrangement at the national level. This national unity government is good and necessary because it forces all players to abandon point-scoring and get on with the lowest common denominator of reconstruction. But it may also produce authoritarian tendencies. This is why those in government must be pitted against civil society (respondent 4).

And the second reason:

> Those in government will be torn between a range of different forces. The World Bank is a very powerful institution, and the local government may find it too compelling to resist their arguments. So, there is the possibility that local government won't always deliver. Therefore the civic must still be out there to mobilize the people, to march against the local government. But first we must exhaust all channels; a democratic government will obviously provide important channels which the apartheid government closed off (respondent 1).

In short, the logic of local government, both in its constitution, and in its tasks, mitigates against any assurance that the political will of the community be hegemonic there. Thus, the raison d'etre of the civic consists in demarcating an institutional space outside of local government in which the community's will is best expressed, and from which it can "pit itself against local government", if necessary. However, let me say again, at the risk of unnecessary repetitiveness, that this "political will of the community" is nothing if not attached to its organic leadership:

> Why must some of the leadership stay behind in the civic? Because if we all went to local government opportunists would come in and hijack the civic... It would no longer represent the community (respondent 3).

In what forms will the people, organised in the structures of the civic, make their voice heard to the local government? All four interviewees spoke of a myriad of different forms. But one in particular has stuck in my mind. I hope that I do not valorise its significance unjustifiably, but perhaps the reader can judge this through the course of the argument.

I asked all four interviewees to envisage a scenario in which the World Bank initiates a housing scheme in Atteridgeville, and begins to negotiate the terms of its implementation with the local government. What relationship between the Bank, the local government and the civic should arise from such a development project? In what way should the local government consult those affected by it? The following was muted by one interviewee and endorsed by all the others.

> The cornerstone of this process is thorough consultation. So, for instance, I would argue that the local government, in conjunction with the civic, call a mass meeting of all

residents, and that we take our direction from there (respondent 3).

Should the decisions of this mass meeting have binding power over the local government, or is it simply an information and education forum?

> Well, obviously it won't have formal decision-making power; it will be a consultative forum. But even so, it will carry too much weight and legitimacy for the local government to ignore its authority. For instance - we get a proposal from the World Bank. We take it to a mass meeting. There, we get some direction - a sense of what the people on the ground think of this proposal. Then we go back to our workshops to see if what the people want is feasible. If it isn't, then we must go back to another mass meeting and explain why. If we can't explain why, then we obviously lose legitimacy, and the people begin to organise protest against this particular housing scheme (respondent 3).

Let us say at the outset that the relationship envisaged here is not a consultative one between a formal representative authority and a voluntary association of civil society. Rather, it represents a tussle between two competing conceptions of democracy.

On the one hand, the institutional logic of the local government expresses the sovereignty of the people, only by implicitly acknowledging that it will never appear in a fully-constituted form. In other words, the party-pluralistic structure of the local government ipso facto insists that the sovereignty of its constituency only emerges in so far as it is contested; the "will of the people" expresses itself through competing claims to representivity. The community is represented only by virtue of competing claims about its identity and its will.

In other words, the logic expressed here is that of the representative democracy which I spoke of earlier. The very notion that democracy must be "representative" rather than "direct", is grounded in a fundamental uncertainty; political wills cannot appear on the political stage in their naked and transparent positivity. On the contrary, they only appear at all in so far as they are the object of competing claims; in so far as they are the object of a myriad of representations. This is why, in contradistinction to direct democracy, representative democracy insists that government constitutes itself, not simply by deferring its authority to its constituency, but by doing so under the rubric of a pluralistic conflict. The underlying assumption is the impossibility of the emergence of a single and inviolable will.

Yet mooted by the leaders of the civic is a vision in which the representative government submits itself to the authority of a forum with an entirely different symbolic efficacy. Here, the people assemble in a single body, and, in the spirit of ancient Greek democracy, collectively produce a single will. In other words, at the moment that the local government submits to the authority of community meeting which issues a single voice, it sacrifices the efficacy of its own logic; a logic which insists that mandates only emerge from a pluralist dynamic of competing claims.

It is in this sense that at the heart of the civic leadership's conception of "real participation and power" is the notion that

representative democracy must not simply be supplemented by other forms, but that at crucial moments, its logic must be effaced by other logics. The raison d'etre of party pluralism can and must be effaced at the moment a homogenous will emerges to make it redundant. At such times, the local government need not refer to the mandate it received from the counting of ballots, but instead, to the mandate of an assembly in which the will of the people expresses itself directly, with no mediation.

This is why I said much earlier that the civic finds itself tempted to skirt the logic of the new order, and to imprint on it the functions of another. There is a sense in which the civic has universalised the logic of representation which evolved under the leadership of ASRO during the 1980s, extended its efficacy beyond the function it served under apartheid, and heralded it as the a cornerstone of the democracy of the new order.

Unicity, participation and democracy

Yet to observe that the ASRO leadership has envisaged an uncomfortable cohabitation of two conflicting conceptions of democracy, is of course not in itself a critique. Nor is it a critique to point out that the civic wishes to transport the democratic culture it developed under apartheid into the future. What is stake is the scope for "real participation and power" offered by the prospect of all residents being represented by a single body.

Certainly, the idea of a "vibrant civil society" mooted by the civic leaders is motivated by the conviction that, in and of themselves, representative democratic institutions narrow, or even mutilate, the scope for widespread participation in the impending process of reconstruction. As one interviewee put it:

> Yes, the World Bank and the IMF will come. But their work must be done with the recipients as full participants. A cornerstone of success will be full involvement, not just consultation... Participation is the only cornerstone of the success in South Africa's political equation... Whatever legislative and executive measures are introduced, the guiding principle must be the full involvement of the people (respondent 4).

Stated in this manner such a statement is surely laudable. The notion that citizens hand over their futures to regional and national parliaments on the brink of democracy is indeed a sure way of leaving vast tracts of society untouched by the democratic experience. That citizen formations emerge from the social relations in which their lives are shaped is surely a sine qua non of igniting a transformative process. That the powers of state and finance find themselves confronted by participatory demands in every sphere of their activity is surely desirable.

Yet the notion that what must emerge from this process of throwing social relations open to question is a single voice, transmitting a single will, is surely perplexing. Khehla Shubane and Pumla Madiba (1992) have expressed doubt that a single residents' association can reflect and represent the diversity of interests and demands which constitute township life. Yet surely more ominous is the necessary inverse; that a myriad of

demands voiced from various social relations will never find institutional expression.

Indeed, it seems that ASRO is victim to the very concerns it expresses about the limits of representative democracy. If a fiction of parliament is its notion that an entire society is embodied in one sovereign forum, surely the notion that a single structure embodies an entire township echoes the fantasy. The "will of the community" which emerges from such a political landscape, surely masks the relations of power entailed in producing a single voice across a myriad of social relations. For the gradations which separate those residents who participate, and those who don't, which separate those versed in political discourse, and those who aren't, will be rendered invisible by the institutional necessity of homogeneity. The insistence on homogeneity will surely surreptitiously silence as much as it voices.

What is threatened is precisely the "deepening of the political" discussed earlier. I posited at the beginning of this paper that democracy in the representative state potentially ramifies well beyond the ballot box, that the emergence of organised movements from an increasing plurality of social relations can rise to challenge the unilateral initiatives of market capital and state administration. I also posited later on that ASRO articulated a similar "deepening of the political" in its vision of a culture of organised participation of citizens in collective consumption, justice, and various other arenas.

Yet surely this gesture towards an expanding politicization is all but annulled by the form in which the civic insists that it occurs. For the insistence that democratization arrives in the form of unicity, rather than diversity, invites a process in which the politicization of a myriad of social relations is buried and forgotten under the voicing of others.

Of course, there is no <u>necessary</u> reason why, for instance, the demands of squatters for formal shelter should be severed from the demands of tenants for home ownership. But just as important, there is no <u>a priori</u> reason why these two demands should co-exist in an organic unity. If two such demands are to cohabit a single political project, surely this must be the <u>contingent</u> outcome of a tactical arrangement which recognises the integrity of both, and thus can be broken at any such time that one or the other is threatened. To dissolve both into the notion of "the voice of the people" is potentially to lose sight of the specificity of either, and of the specificity of the social relations from which they emerge.

Yet the civic insists that "because the very idea of land invasions was conceived in the MDM, the struggles of squatters cannot be separated from the struggles of other residents" (respondent 2). The notion emerges once again that the unity formed under the logic of a liberation struggle is an organic and timeless unity ... in so far as it is welded together by the "correct" political leadership.

Implicit in the civic's vision of the future is that if civil society emerges in the form of political pluralism and antagonism, ie, if it sheds the character conferred upon politics under apartheid, its efficacy will somehow be effaced.

Tactics, localism and political mythology

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this investigation of ASRO consists in the silent and unregistered manner in which the civic's vision of democracy emerged. Earlier, I went to great lengths to illustrate that the civic's vision of itself mutated according to the time-span of which it spoke. Vis a vis the 1980s, the interviewees spoke of the civic in terms of temporary and historically contingent horizons; the civic was only intelligible as an organ of resistance - inscribed in its identity was the absence of democracy in South Africa rather than the embodiment of democracy in the future. Indeed, from the vantage point of an organ of resistance, the future, ie the contours of democracy, was unsightable.

And yet, in speaking of the 1990s, it is clear that something very different is at stake. Here, the structures, culture and leadership of resistance have welded the community into a substantive unity. Moreover, this unity is assigned a cardinal political importance; it is to carve out an independent institutional form, outside of the structures of formal sovereignty, in order to watch and, where necessary, intervene against the latter. It is almost as if the unity forged under resistance is said to embody the pristine epicentre of democracy; its purest and most crucial ingredient.

I wish to conclude by attempting to investigate the logic of this seeming anomaly. On what grounds are we to understand this unregistered, unacknowledged impulse to preserve, at all costs, the legacy of a practice developed under apartheid? This task requires invoking a subject I alluded to in the introduction to this paper; political mythology.

Earlier I referenced Mark Swilling warning against attributing any grandiose ideological motives to local civic organisation. "The fact that local civics shared the 'national democratic' langauge of the UDF", Swilling argues, "does not mean that this language defined every aspect of organisational activity. In fact, civics ... tended to spend far more time dealing with local grievances in terms that differed from locality to locality and were often specific to local circumstances and culture". And so he concludes that "the practice of myth making [should not] mask the nuances of what really happened" (Swilling, 1994:5,9 emphasis added).

Precisely what Swilling is referring to remains allusive, but what seems to emerge is the notion that the "true" character of political action is somehow obfuscated by the stories which are told about it. If we cast these stories from our field of vision, ie, if we remove the "mask" of myth making, we find ourselves in full view of "what really happened". Obscured

behind myths exists the pristine reality of "the local", "specificity" and "the parochial".

This idea that political reality presents itself with greater integrity once the myths that cluster around it are removed, requires some examination. Ironically, I think that the notion of a duality between myth and action is itself obfuscatory, since it robs us of the capacity to appreciate the character of political transition. In contrast to Swilling, I wish to posit that myth is constitutive of political action, in so far as the latter is entirely meaningless - and therefore impossible - outside of the narratives which those who partake in it construct.

For instance, the practice of boycotting rent, or, for that matter, of staging a march on the local authority, is only intelligible in so far as those who embark on the action have a certain "history", "community" and "enemy". In what sense are these notions myths? Precisely in the sense that they reside only in the historicity of the actions which they define. At the level of political identity, this "history", "community" and "enemy" did not exist prior to, and might not exist after, the era of the rent boycott. In this sense, an era is only intelligible as an era, by virtue of the myths which mark out its contours.

And it is precisely because these era-making myths are the very myths which constitute "who we are" (qua political actors), that political transformation - from dictatorship to democracy, for instance - can never simply be thought at the level of tactics; can never simply be thought at the level of a rational actor who somehow stands outside of history and its myths, and charts out the future to the dictates of a pure volition.

To make the same point in different words, the project of fundamentally altering political practice takes on a magnitude and complexity which defies any notion of a seamless and cogent progression. For entailed in the alteration of practice is the gradual effacement of "histories", "communities" and "enemies" and their gradual replacement with a new logic of mythical construction.

It is in this sense that the politics of epochal change is perhaps counter-intuitive, that it is often characterised by periods of violence associated with the blurring of meaning. For between the loss of particular markers of certainty and the emergence of new ones "there exists something very close to Hobbes' state of nature. Obviously, changes would be speedier if one social order is simply substituted by others. But transitions are never like that... You create a no-man's land in which everyone's identity is very much in the balance" (Laclau, 1993:70).

And it is in this same sense that the seeming anomaly of a civic writing its future while simultaneously claiming its incapacity to write it, becomes intelligible. For, to argue that "the

future is unsightable" is perhaps to argue that there is no way to make it intelligible without gesturing towards the markers of the present, which is precisely what the civic has done.

In this context, the process of unbundling a liberation movement into the inauguration of a pluralist culture is indeed a momentous one. This is not to argue that the transition from dictatorship to democracy need take place behind the backs of political leadership. Nor is it to argue that the beginning of the new need necessarily be warped and stunted by the confused and stubborn dogma of the ghost of the old. Yet to ask the civic to shed its history in one fell swoop, and to envisage another in the same motion, is to fall prisoner to the illusion that such transformations can simply be willed by a tactical impulse.

In other words, the first possible civic identity which I muted some time earlier - that of a simple instrument of a historicised and temporary process - is perhaps never really a viable definition of any political practice. To the extent that such practices embody myths which constitute a reality, they cannot simply be effaced by a tactical mutation.

But if this is so, what then is entailed in the institutional transformation characteristic of transitions? What is the logic of the process of unbundling a liberation movement? I wish to explore this question through the prism of one particular interview which I conducted. Indeed, if I were to end this paper without separating out this interview from the others, I would have presented my research in a stilted and inaccurate form. For although it arrives at the same conclusions as the other interviews vis a vis a single civic taking Atteridgeville residents into the future, it is also marked by a deep sensitivity to what is entailed, at the level of mythological and organisational practice, in epochal change.

Let us begin at the point where I ask whether the assumption of homogeneity inscribed in the notion of a single civic is not a problem for democracy. The response comes in the form of two answers:

> Yes, it is a problem. But I must immediately qualify this statement. The authorities and other conservatives have always had problems with this. But for us it has been a foolproof way of coming to a position on where the people are. You must understand that our structure has been an obvious choice. We were denied access to any "normal" channels of communication. The newspapers, state television, every capital-driven source of information was pitted against us. So in turn we had to pit ourselves against capital-driven communication. Street committees, area committees, mass meetings, were not simply our only alternative. They were an attack against those communication forms which decided to be our enemies. They were an alternative in a political sense (respondent 4).

And the second part of the response:

> However, having said that, we are now moving from a situation of a liberation movement, which <u>inna facto</u> tends to bring people together - so there can only be one position. But once we move into the arena of party politics, the question arises whether you are going to have one civic organisation for one area, or many civics aligning themselves to various political parties. <u>But in the short term there cannot be great differences in the area of reconstruction and development. This is precisely why, for the moment, there must be one civic with the same structure as before</u>.(respondent 4, emphasis added)

But why can there be no great differences in the area of

reconstruction and development, and more pertinently, why is an organisational form of the past fitted to play a role in the present?

> The task confronting us now is to turn residents into participants of the new democratic order. But you must understand that there is no ready-made culture waiting to turn our people into participants. On the contrary, main-stream culture is still pitted against us. Finding a home in the new order will require great struggles. And we have nothing to fight these struggles barring the fabric we painstakingly built up over the years. This is why I say that the yeast of educating the people to be participants and not protesters will be the civic movement. And this is why I say that the structure of the civic and its means of communication and organisation, while not to be raised to the level of principle, are the appropriate means available to us at this time in history (respondent 4).

And in conclusion:

> Blacks are still united by a common exclusion. Only when this exclusion has been overcome will the basis for a single civic be in question. I'd say that the day our people participate through more sophisticated channels of communication, the day we begin to take subscriptions from residents, that is the day the civic may dovetail into various political formations. I can't say that this makes me happy. It will bring serious problems. But it is probably correct (respondent 4).

I would personally disagree with much of what has been said. I think that Julian Baskin's (1993) recent proposition that the days of a single structure representing the developmental interests of an entire community is an exhausted and unworkable fiction, is deeply compelling. Yet, while such disagreements might be important, something else is at stake here. Perhaps it would be a little stilted to call it the unusualness and counter-intuitiveness of a dual recognition. But let us explore this notion anyhow.

On the hand, and in stark contrast to the other three interviews, there is a deep recognition of the historicity of the political culture forged under ASRO's leadership in the 1980s. What is extirpated is the fantasy that ASRO's leadership has forged so organic a unity, that it can spiral into a timeless, ever-present window on a single, pristine, political will. In other words, the discourse of this interview skirts being seduced by the seeming timelessness of political myths, and instead registers their provisional and temporary status.

And as soon as this character of political mythology is registered, the space is open to conceive of civil society, not as the privileged place of a transhistorical will, but as a site whose raison d'etre is a constant contest over political identities and allegiances. In other words, what is registered in this interview, is the reality that embodied in epochal change is ultimately a process which effaces the political practice of the old; in this instance, an effacement of the unicity of a liberation struggle, and its replacement with the political competition of democratization.

Yet the second pole of recognition registers the difficult complexity of this transition. Democracy does not arrive tailor-made, as if it somehow always existed outside of society, and was just waiting to come down to refurnish the political landscape. Rather, the new is built out of the material of the old, precisely because this is the only place from which the new can

possibly be produced. Like the liberation movement itself, democratic practice will emerge at the interface of existing relations of power.

In this sense, the interview places a paradoxical task on the civic's shoulders. Its function is to usher in the conditions of its own dissolution. It's goal is to forge from its practice an entirely new practice, and thus to create its own obsolescence.

Notably, little is spoken about the future. What will the political landscape look like after the death of a single civic? This question is never tackled with any seriousness. But perhaps only those who are convinced of the efficacy of direct democracy can genuinely attempt to answer this question and be convinced that they have attained a degree of accuracy. For unless the political wills of the future are already inscribed in the past, the contours of a future culture of pluralism can surely not be mapped out in advance. To do so would be an attempt predict the character of a symbolic environment which is yet to emerge. The least that can be done in the present though, is to ensure that what emerges with the new are the conditions of possibility for the deepening of the political, for the transformation of the new representative state into a deeply contested one.

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