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THE GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE OF A SUCCESSFUL  
TRANSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

If ever there was a ridiculous title for an after dinner talk - this must be it. Why did I agree to talk about it? I was tricked.

The temptation to draw on my experience as a failed politician and to talk out the time without addressing the problem, is almost irresistible. You may have noticed that I had started doing so already.

The philosophical response to this dilemma is to go into a deconstructive mode and to conceptually strip each word of the

title of every conceivable layer of meaning, in the hope that a candle of commonsense may flicker its light on the problem. My experience has usually been that deconstruction compounds obscurity rather than confounds it, and its a cure for insomnia.

I am going to resist both the political and philosophical temptation because of one word in the title which engages me and challenges me to test both your patience and indulgence. It is the word "successful". It has a nice, clear normative ring to it. One cannot declare something a success without exposing some value preferences and even an ideological disposition or two. So, I suppose what I am going to do is to speculate on what would constitute a successful transition for South Africa, and then further speculate, very briefly, on its significance for the world at large. By "world at large" I mean any part of the world that I think may be interested in what is happening here. Whether they still are by the time we have had a successful transition is of course another matter, keeping in mind that it is not only South Africa experiencing transition.

#### A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

South Africa is moving away from white minority domination towards an uncertain democratic outcome. This kind of domination typified most colonial societies and yet South Africa's transition is not a typically colonial one. It has far more in common with some of the current transitions in Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America where an incumbent authoritarian government actively participates in the transition and its

supporters continue to be part of post transitional society after the government loses power. If for no other reason than this, these other parts of the world may have an interest in a successful transition here, as we certainly have in any possible one's there. Over the last few days we have been given a great deal of useful advice on lessons learnt from other countries grappling with the economic difficulties of transition.

Comparative research literature shows that different outcomes are possible to transition - not all of them end up in consolidated democracies. Often one form of domination is substituted for another one, or there may be a temporal stabilisation short of democracy as would be the case of a Government of National Unity which may be democratically elected but without a final democratic constitution in terms of which a government could function.

Politically speaking, a successful transition in South Africa must eventually end in a consolidated democracy. By this, I mean a democratic constitution in which the values of contingent consent and bounded uncertainty are entrenched. Contingent consent refers to the situation where parties, or a party, that wins an election does not abuse victory to deny others the opportunity to win next time, and those who lost accept the right of those who win to take binding decisions over society until next time. Bounded uncertainty means that political arbitrariness is bounded by removing certain fundamental human values - freedom of speech, association, movement, etc. - from

the capricious will of a majority or minority and entrenching them in a constitution with a justiciable Bill of Rights presided over by an independent judiciary. A consolidated democracy cannot only depend on a democratic constitution. There has to be a number of supporting institutions, e.g. a competitive and free media, a transparent and accountable civil service where the values of contingent consent and bounded uncertainty can find regular and practical expression.

My preference for representative democracy as a defining part of a consolidated democracy does not exclude or prevent participatory or assembly democracy from being part of it, but the structures and procedures of representative democracy are a precondition for these other forms of democratic participation to function effectively, otherwise all kinds of political pathologies begin to parade under the banner of democracy.

The dominant mode of political transition in South Africa is negotiation combined with limited mass action. Let me say immediately, there are very few if any compelling historical examples where exclusively mass driven transitions have ended in consolidated democracies. There is no inherent reason why negotiations and mass action should be incompatible, although more often than not, in practice, there is an uneasy tension between them, particularly if those who feel strongly about the one are not the same people who feel strongly about the other. In the South African context, given our colonial past, it is highly unlikely that if mass action dominates transition, we will

experience a successful transition towards a consolidated democracy. More probably, we will vacillate between various kinds of authoritarian repression.

It is important to keep in mind that a successful transition in South Africa is not only about achieving political/constitutional legitimacy. There are at least three other equally important problems that have to be negotiated for a successful transition. These are stability, growth and redistribution.

Stability is inadequately referred to as the maintenance of law and order. In fact, it is far more than effective policing and the administration of justice. To a large extent it depends on how a people and communities voluntarily participate or do not in maintaining societal order. At the risk of oversimplification, one could say that there is an inverse relation between coercion and consent in society - the more you have of the one, the less you have of the other. South Africa is presently groping its way, away from repressive stability. The outcome is not necessarily consensual stability. In fact, there may be new forms of arbitrary repression, even chaos and anarchy before and if, we experience consensual stability. That is why it is absolutely proper that violence and new forms of civilian control over the security forces should be at the top of the negotiation agenda. To have a successful transition towards consensual stability means amongst other things - non-controversial, i.e. generally acceptable civilian control over the security forces, (obviously the absence of any private

militia), an effective and transparent civil service where the administration of justice and effective policing has the demonstrable and voluntary support of communities. In fact, without such consensual stability a politically legitimate constitution has no hope of sustaining itself.

Problems of growth and redistribution are generic ingredients of the problem of human development. In fact, human development, i.e. the demonstrable improvement in the material and spiritual quality of life of the majority of citizens of society, depends on the correct balance between growth and redistribution. What this is, is what you have been discussing for the last few days. You have done so with a wealth of experience and knowledge from which I have benefitted greatly.

I have no intention of adding my ha'penny's worth to your insights, save to say two things : Growth and redistribution have to be negotiated, just as stability and legitimacy have to, and they are even more important for a successful transition. Being present at the debate on the World Bank and the IMF was a bit like observing a reluctant mating dance between ideological gate keepers. I found it strangely encouraging. In South Africa, we are going to have to sacrifice dogmatism for tolerance if we hope to have anything resembling a successful transition to growth and redistribution.

Secondly, it is a peculiar characteristic of South Africa's transition that it has to address problems of stability,

legitimacy, growth and redistribution concurrently. Our colonial past that haunts our current transition does not allow us the option of the authoritarian growth path, followed by some of the Pacific Rim countries. Members of the business fraternity get all misty eyed at this possibility, but it is not for us. In other words, it seems quite impossible that an authoritarian minority will be given the opportunity to - suspend problems of legitimacy and redistribution; go for growth under repressive stability; then buy off some of the political discontent by limited redistributive policies in education, housing and health, whilst waiting for the size of the middle class to fatten up sufficiently to crowd out the poor, unemployed and dispossessed and then gently drift toward civilian and democratic politics. South Africa used its authoritarian springtime to go for Apartheid, not growth and redistribution, and precisely because of that, compounded problems of stability, legitimacy, growth and redistribution. That is why the success of our transition also depends on how we cope with these problems at the same time. This is a tall order indeed, for there is no self-evident or inherent relationship between democratisation and development. Perhaps one can at least say there can be some development without democracy, but no democracy can sustain itself for very long without development.

There is another critically important area for a successful transition. It may be fashionable to say that a vigorous and autonomous civil society is a precondition for a sustainable democracy, but it nevertheless remains true. For me this has a

particular relevance at the level of local/metropolitan level negotiations. For the past 2 1/2 years I have been privileged to be part of intense negotiations on the future relationship between Johannesburg and Soweto; Roodepoort and Dobsonville; Sandton and Alexandra. How they can integrate, administer and live together. More than any other level, I believe the success of South Africa's transition will be measured here. This is the critical point of delivery for services such as water, sewerage, electricity, refuse removal. These are so-called municipal services, but communities are also the delivery points for national services such as housing, education and health. We on the MC are at a critical stage in our negotiations where most parties are trying to find a formula to break the culture of boycotting the payment for local services. These services are on the point of collapse and there are not more inter-governmental transfers available to pay for them. The State has run out of cash. Breaking the culture of boycott will mean that people in Soweto, Dobsonville, Diepmeadow will again begin to take possession of their communities, to own them and begin to build them up, poor and impoverished as they are. No national negotiations can succeed without this kind of stability at the local level. No education, housing, health restructuring can take off if communities are not ready, willing and able to support them. We have to find a formula to break down the culture of boycott within a matter of weeks otherwise the vast majority of people in the Central Witwatersrand area face the prospect of complete collapse of services. This will have a decisively detrimental impact on negotiations at a national

level. The beginning of an autonomous and vigorous civil society is when communities begin to take charge of their own environment, live with it and change it. This is perhaps the greatest challenge to our successful transition given the ravages of Apartheid and repressive rule.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

The manner in which I have elaborated on a successful transition in South Africa, should make it blindingly obvious that the significance of it all will be absolutely breathtaking to anybody with the smallest bit of intelligence and capacity for appreciation. I should stop right there and not say another word.

But I suspect, you expect me to speculate on what a post-Apartheid South Africa could mean for the region and even the continent. This has been done many times and I do not have much new to add. I do believe some African countries and, perhaps, even European ones, have wildly extravagant hopes for what a post-Apartheid South Africa could mean for the region and even Africa - "powerhouse" and "breadbasket" are the kind of metaphors that come to mind. A post-Apartheid South Africa need not be one that has experienced successful transition and until it has achieved this to some reasonable extent, South Africa is going to be an importer, not an exporter of aid, and therefore a

competitor with other African countries in this regard.

Of course, there is no doubt that a successful transition in South Africa will hold very important lessons for other countries experiencing racial and ethnic outbidding, hostility and prejudice. Also for those with strong social and economic cleavages and inequalities. But, these are very obvious things to say.

If one reads intellectual prophets like Paul Kennedy : "Into the 21st Century", William Rees Mogg : "The Great Reckoning" and lyrical "end of history" romantic, Fukuyama, it is quite clear that many of the depressing global trends which they identify as we run out of time on the 20th Century are present, in generous measure in South Africa itself : 1st vs 3rd World divide; or wealthy vs poor; North vs South; uneven technological development, zero and rapid population growth, easy access to arms and instruments of destruction, ideological fundamentalism, expensive peace and cheap violence. And so on. A successful transition in South Africa means that we have found ways of overcoming these trends. A world at large would be wise to stop, look and learn from us.

However, and in conclusion, to be brutally frank, I am not all that exercised about the significance of our successful transition for the world at large. For us here, it will be simply bloody marvellous.

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