

BEYOND THE ELECTORAL TRIUMPHALISM: REFLECTIONS ON LESOTHO'S COALITION GOVERNMENT AND CHALLENGES

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1. Introduction: The 2012 election results

Among the 18 political parties which contested Lesotho's 26 May 2012 National Assembly elections, the All Basotho Convention (ABC) led by Thomas Motsoahae Thabane, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), by Mothetjoa Metsing and the Basotho National Party (BNP) under Thesele 'Maseribane's leadership fortuitously, yet neither unconstitutionally nor surprisingly, won governmental power and thus jointly rule the country as aptly a *triumvirate*. Until the actual voting day there was nothing discernibly common between any of these political parties. Indeed, they had squared up against each other as mutually hostile entities frantically trying to maximise their individual chances of winning the elections. Section 87(2) of the Constitution of Lesotho reads: "The King shall appoint as Prime Minister the member of the National Assembly who appears to the Council of State to be the leader of the political party or coalition of political parties that will command the support of the majority of the members of the National Assembly". With 30, 26 and five seats respectively in the National Assembly, the ABC, LCD, and BNP achieved the required absolute majority by one seat to claim governmental power. This development ended the one-party dominance that had been for decades a feature of Lesotho's democracy. Catapulted to state power by an overwhelming majority vote in previous elections, then ruling LCD was an unrestrained force.

It used its parliamentary majority to forestall debates on important national issues and passed bills as law before they had been properly scrutinised by its opposition counterparts (Makoa 2005: 69).

The LCD lost governmental power in a bizarre fashion to a third of its splinter parties since being formed 15 years ago, the Democratic Congress (DC). Its erstwhile leader and then Prime Minister Mosisili, together with the majority of LCD members of parliament (MPs) resigned from the party and formed, inside the house of parliament in February 2012, the DC, which immediately took over the administration of the country as the ruling party. The LCD had similarly been formed in June 1997 to the chagrin of the opposition by the late Ntsu Mokhehle, then prime minister and leader of the then ruling Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), who continued to rule until 1998 under the banner of his newly formed LCD.

Together, the ABC, LCD and BNP captured 61 of the total 120 parliamentary seats, a minimum required to form government. After the elections results had been announced the ABC, LCD and BNP triumvirate presented itself as a coalition. The newly formed DC led by the former Prime Minister Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili had won only 47 parliamentary seats. A coalition with the small political parties remaining outside the ABC, LCD and BNP partnership would yield only 59 parliamentary seats. Able to muster the number, the ABC, LCD and BNP thus coalesced into a bloc in accordance with the provisions of Section 87(2) of the constitution and claimed the governmental power that had clearly eluded the DC.

The three parties are in coalition of a type variously dubbed office-driven, office seeking or office-oriented, that is, the one that "is motivated by the quest for office", (Kadima 2006: 5) rather than by a convergence in parties' ideologies or policies — the payoffs, spoils or benefits being cabinet positions. The quest for office and state power was clearly the key motivation and a bond that holds the formation together. Not only have cabinet positions been shared among these parties but also some of the government ministries have been subdivided and parceled into separate ministerial units ostensibly to increase their number so as to meet the individual demands of the members of the triumvirate. The combined number of the coalition government's cabinet ministers and deputy ministers is a whopping 30, a far cry from the previous administration's 23 and thus a greater budgetary burden for a nation that is buffeted by grinding poverty.

Thomas Motsoahae Thabane, the leader of the ABC as the biggest of the three parties, assumed the position of prime minister. Like the DC, Thabane's ABC is a splinter organisation from the then Mosisili-led LCD. It was formed in September 2006 by Thabane and other LCD MPs barely four months before the 2007 general elections.

Mosisili's DC had emerged from the May 2012 elections as the single biggest political party with 47 parliamentary seats — not enough to form government. It had tried unsuccessfully to forge a coalition government with among others the LCD. Unsuccessful in this endeavour, the DC handed over government to Thabane without concealing electoral defeat. Mosisile signaled that he doubted or questioned the legitimacy of the coalition administration when addressing DC members at organised political rallies in different parts of the country. Thabane had humbly accepted his appointment as prime minister without triumphalism in his inaugural speech on 8 June, 2012. In contrast, the DC leader accused the LCD from which he had resigned barely three months before the elections of embracing the nationalists (meaning the BNP), calling this a betrayal of the late Ntsu Mokhehle's Congress Movement and a renunciation of its creed and ideals — Lesotho for Basotho, popular participation, self-reliance, non-racialism, and egalitarianism. Ironically, however, under Mosisili's leadership the LCD had entered ahead of the 2007 general elections an alliance with the National Independent Party (NIP), an ultra-rightwing anti-communist BNP splinter, in order to secure majority parliamentary seats to ease the law-making process in the National Assembly.

The Congress Movement referred to by Mosisili was founded and woven in 1952 by Mokhehle into what was originally called the Basutoland African Congress (BAC), renamed a few years later the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) of which the LCD is the biggest splinter organisation. The nationalists are on the other hand members or sympathisers of the BNP that was founded and led by the late Leabua Jonathan in 1959 who ruled the country for 20 years between 1966 and 1986. The Thabane-led coalition government has so far treated Mosisili as a minor irritant that can be ignored. Barring hard line DC members, the Basotho nation as a whole has likewise dismissed the DC leader's claims as baseless if preposterous. Rivalry between the nationalists and the congress people is seen by some analysts as a structural problem, (Weisfelder 1967: 6) with a long history: a nation segmented and stratified into structurally or ideologically op-

posed classes — varied strands of the poor or downtrodden and of the relatively privileged rich who are averse to change since they would lose the benefits accruing from the existing socio-economic system. These idealised classes are supposedly represented and led respectively by the BCP and the BNP (Strom 1978: 72). Whatever the controversy surrounding this view, rivalry between these parties intensified after 1970 as the BNP denied governmental power to the BCP despite the latter's victory at that year's abortive polls. The BCP had between 1974 and 1985 resorted to armed struggle geared at overthrowing the BNP regime, but succeeding only in destabilising the country and precipitating a military *coup* on 20 January 1986 that ousted Leabua Jonathan.

The ABC, LCD and BNP triumvirate faces formidable development and governance challenges, as publicly acknowledged by the prime minister in his inaugural speech on 8 June 2012. This article reflects on these challenges and what it will take to overcome them.

2. Background setting and context: An overview

Nineteen years since returning to constitutional rule in April 1993, both the international and local observers declared the voting in May 2012 as the most peaceful and transparent of all post-independence elections. This was a third general election held by the country under the compensatory mixed-member proportional (MMP) electoral model, introduced in 2002 to ensure that allocation of parliamentary seats to political parties reflects and is based on the parties' performance relative to the total number of votes cast. In addition, Lesotho adopted the MMP model in order to deepen participation in governance process, thereby minimising electoral disputes that, in the past, degenerated into bloody conflicts. The bloodiest of such conflicts greeted the outcome of the 1998 elections, as some of the losing political parties, which included the BNP, not just rejected the elections results but closed government offices, disarmed the police, shut down government and business operations, intimidated the workers and business owners through the imposition of a forced stay-away, impounded and commandeered government vehicles, and staged weeks-long protests at the Royal Palace Gate in Maseru; while armed army rebels aligned themselves with the opposition protesters (US Department of State 2002). This brought Maseru to a standstill, paralysed the government and evoked a South-

ern African Development Community (SADC) sanctioned military intervention by South Africa and Botswana (cf Makoa 2004).

The proponents of the MMP model had assumed that it would transform "Lesotho's political culture away from adversarial and towards consensual politics"; (Matlosa 2008: 22). The argument was that, without a stake in the system, denied through the winner-takes-all (WTA) electoral model, the opposition would always seek to destabilise the government (cf Makoa 2005a and 2005b). Matlosa (1999: 180) had a few years earlier scathingly criticised the erstwhile WTA or first-past-the-post (FPTP) model used by the country prior to 2002, for giving "unfair advantage to the dominant party". In Kapa's (2008: 341) formulation, that model "unduly punished the losers by denying them parliamentary representation, thereby fanning and exacerbating post-elections political instability and elections-related conflict". More precisely, the model offered no space for minority representation. Lijphart (2000: 2) discovered, as he studied electoral reforms in 27 democracies, that "(t)he purpose of introduction of PR in many countries was to achieve greater proportionality and representation". But the ruling LCD "had not really bought into the ideal of a more consensual political style and consensus-oriented parliamentary system ... government/party leadership continually tried to hamper and annoy opposition parties and MPs elected to compensatory seats" (Elklit 2008: 13).

However, the advent of the MMP system may have just heralded a shift in focus or opened a new side of political conflict in Lesotho rather than being a cure for it. The subsequent elections in 2007, for instance, witnessed a wrangling over the allocation of proportional representation (PR) parliamentary seats by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) (Makoa 2009: 91). With full backing by the LCD government, the commission dismissed the opposition's demand that the allocation of PR be reconsidered. The problem was thus still unresolved as the country held the 2012 elections the results of which provided opportunity for political parties with representatives in parliament to govern as a coalition. Admittedly, the matter has been rendered obsolete by the elections outcome and accession to state power by the ABC and BNP, the main complainants about the PR seats allocation. But it is as yet unclear whether by being in the ruling coalition signals that the LCD has changed and is now committed to the principle of consensual and inclusive political system.

The foregoing notwithstanding, Lesotho's civil society and political

parties celebrated and dubbed the MMP model as a fair and rational way of ensuring greater participation in governance. For an opposition of small parties, dwarfed and overwhelmed by the LCD's preponderance, and devoid of capacity to compete in elections to win a single electoral constituency, there was no better proposition. Hence the model so easily gained acceptance among political party leaders. It enhanced the prospects for winning a seat in parliament. Indeed, "politicians ... advocate some system which they believe will give their respective parties the best chance in future elections" (Dummett 1997: viii). The MMP model offered a ray of hope to political parties that losing elections does not necessarily exclude them completely from parliamentary representation. Yet the MMP model has not engendered and fostered the ideal of constitutionalism, or respect of and adherence to the basic values set out in the constitution — a "body of fundamental principles according to which a nation, state or body politic is constituted and governed" (Devenish 1998: 34-35). There is still no consensus among the Lesotho political parties, organised social formations and individuals as to the functions, objectives and operationalisation of the national constitution, including on the enforcement of constitution-related claims.

The ABC, LCD and the BNP together won 38 of the 80 constituency plus 23 of the 40 PR parliamentary seats, thus emerging as a triumvirate claiming governmental power. Under the erstwhile FPTP or WTA electoral system, Mosisili would alone with the 41 constituencies that he won in the last elections form government and perhaps, as usual, pack the Senate or Upper House of Parliament with his clients and supporters thus perpetuating the neo-patrimonial politics that characterised his 15-year rule. The 11 appointive senators are now those supporting the ruling triumvirate, which retained the previous cronyism or neo-patrimonialism ostensibly for use in mobilising popular support. In such systems, the "central elite captures resource ... and redistributes them to individuals and groups on the basis of political allegiance" (Sandbrook 2000: 17). This has been the practice over the years among Lesotho's political elites, that is, they might have won state power incumbency through elections but have had to use patronage gifts and promises of benefits to prospective supporters to sustain their rule, yet in doing so incubating and reproducing corruption and related sleaze.

Although the decision to form a coalition government was quick and snappy, it took the three parties more than a week to assemble

the cabinet or government, suggesting that this involved hard bargaining among them. There is no doubt that the key issues in such bargaining would not have excluded the sharing of the victory spoils by the triumvirate. The bloated government of 30 cabinet ministers and deputy ministers as constituted does not suggest otherwise. Yet this raises the possibility that formulating national policies which might address the challenges and/or problems facing the country will be the subject of protracted if inconclusive negotiations, and even be a site of conflict or a fallout that may wreck the partnership. In fact, the potential for a fall-out among the coalition partners seems greater than that which unites them.

3. Challenges and prospects

The coalition government faces monumental development and governance challenges, which were highlighted by Prime Minister Thabane in his inaugural speech. These include corruption, cronyism and/or neo-patrimonialism, unemployment, poverty, looming famine and malnutrition, HIV/AIDS prevalence, and personal insecurity. Arguably, only if the coalition government is a cohesive, disciplined and effective force, answerable to a single authority, can it develop policies that address these challenges. Delivery of such a government is indeed a challenge. The Achilles heel of this coalition government is its assemblage of disparate forces with diverse goals, visions and political skills. Cohesion, discipline, unity and effectiveness are not as yet apparent. A lack of cohesion, discipline, effectiveness and unity among the coalescing parties can be a drag on development policy formulation and implementation. Lesotho's political history is marked by recurrent conflict with contending political parties that have been and are deeply adversarial towards and mutually distrustful of one another.

Until February 2012, the key protagonists in Lesotho's political contentions were the LCD, ABC and BNP. There are few differences in their ideological orientations, yet there is a history of mutual antagonism. The ABC and the LCD perceive themselves as the bastions of the congress movement, both Mokhehle's doctrinaire disciples and bulwarks against the supposedly anti-democratic nationalists or the BNP; purveyors of his political ideals of freedom and popular participation. The LCD has since supplanting the BCP in 1997 posed as the only victim of the BNP's post-1970 repression. It has not forgiven the BNP

for denying Mokhehle state power by suspending the national constitution (cf Makoa 1995) incarcerating of the BCP leadership and the persecution of that party's members during 1970 to 1986. The LCD also believes that the BNP was complicit in actions that destabilised the BCP and LCD governments between 1993 and 1998, encouraging King Letsie III to overthrow the BCP government in August 1994. The BNP had led an anti-government protest march to the Royal Palace in August 1994, petitioning the king to dismiss the BCP regime, and the king obliged. The BNP rejected the outcome of the 1998 elections which had been won by the LCD and instigated violent anti-government protests that witnessed the burning and looting of business enterprises in Maseru, Mafeteng and Mohale's Hoek, and deaths of scores people.

Likewise, the nationalists (the BNP) perceive themselves as Leabua Jonathan's disciples that are ideologically different from and incompatible with their congress counterparts. The BNP is a force they use in competing for state power and defending their socio-political values, whilst also supposedly serving a repository of Basotho traditions, countervailing force to the congress seeking to anchor modernity to the Basotho tradition and culture for it is through this that Basotho can preserve their culture, national identity and unity (Strom 1978: 72). For the nationalists, chieftainship must continue to be part of the modern system of government. The BNP was during its rule under attack by the BCP's *apartheid* South Africa backed guerilla movement styled the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA), which killed and maimed scores of BNP members, including a cabinet minister in Jonathan's government (Bardill and Cobbe 1985: 134). The LLA launched sporadic attacks until January 1986 when the army intervened. The coalition government should not be guided by this legacy. The fight against corruption will require the leaders not to pander to their constituencies or to be influenced by their parties' parochial outlooks, narrow particularistic interests and their past history.

There is another important hurdle. Until February 2012 when Mosisili and the majority of LCD members of parliament (MPs) left it to form the DC, the LCD had run a corrupt unaccountable government in which the ABC leader and the current LCD leader were cabinet ministers until September 2006 and October 2011 respectively. The LCD regime of that time also abetted the seizure of or facilitated, tolerated and turned a blind eye to the looting of state property by cabinet ministers and the top public servants who sold themselves at

paltry prices of R4 000 and R2 000 luxury cars and Land Cruisers allocated for their use in official and personal business in August 2006. This raises doubts concerning the willingness by the coalition government to fight corruption.

There is no love lost between the ABC and the LCD, the former having split from the latter in September 2006 amid intra-party factional fights over leadership and the benefits attached. Until it split, the LCD derided in its elections rallies the ABC as a pack of disguised nationalists who would persecute the people if elected. Further poisoning its relations with the former was the LCD government's mass arrest and torture of ABC cadres in June 2007 on suspicion that these had attacked cabinet ministers' bodyguards and robbed them of their duty weapons. Some of the victims sought refuge in South Africa, while one of the activists was shot dead by the soldiers. Moreover, the LCD dominated (2007-2012) parliament denied the ABC official opposition status to which it was entitled as the second biggest party. Again, the coalition partners have to shed off this legacy if they are to inspire citizens' confidence and trust in the government. However, in a country where this is part of a relentless indoctrination of party members, this will not be easy. The lack of accountability, intra-party democracy and transparency define the political parties, including the governing triumvirate (Makoa 2010: 23).

The coalition government took over the administration of a country, which is not able without international assistance to support its population; a country with no national business class of note that would drive development. It has instead a huge informal sector of underemployed people or 'the active poor' plus a parasitic kleptocracy living of government favours but not enough to give it the stability and financial muscle to enable it to evolve into an autonomous bourgeoisie. Such a class of indigenes would grow and stabilise the country's economy while lessening Lesotho's dependence on foreign investors, or complement the latter as a source of investible capital.

4. Conclusion

The coalition government has to be an alternative to the Mosisili government if it is to justify its claim to state power. This requires unity of purpose and vision, and discipline and political skill, which in turn requires that it is connected to the masses not just the elite. Its policies

and decisions must be informed by the reality on the ground; the reality as the people's experience not theories and assumptions about them. It must listen to the people's views. It must distinguish between party functionaries views and those of the nation, without ignoring the former. The coalition government must boldly address corruption. This will set it apart from the previous regime and restore citizens' confidence in government. Rooting out nepotism and patrimonialism should be a priority. It is one of the steps in the fight against poverty and inequality. Other steps are investment in education and skills development as pillars of prosperity and self-reliance. But managing the coalition will always be a challenge, and principle must override sentiment and political party preferences.

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