



THE ZUMA WATERSHED: FROM POST- APARTHEID TO POST-COLONIAL POLITICS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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It is common cause that the rise of Jacob Zuma in South African politics signals change; what is contested is the nature and extent of that change. For example, Zuma's champions in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Communist Party (SACP) describe his rise as a victory over the authoritarian Thabo Mbeki and his neo-liberal '1996 class project' (Craven 2008). Many detractors, including some on the political left as well as the right, see Zuma as heralding an African populism which shields patronage behind popular bigotry.

As well as disagreeing on whether Zuma's colours are truly red or black, there is significant disagreement as to whether Zuma's ascent will herald a 'tsunami' of change, washing away apartheid's legacy, or more of an 'eddy' in the current of capitalist development in South Africa. Hence, within the SACP are both those who see Zuma as the 'vehicle of sweeping change' and those who just 'hope and pray' that Zuma will support left policies (Pillay 2008). Similarly, amongst those who see Zuma's ascent in terms of elite rivalries some fear a corrupt and incompetent patrimonialist, while others see a wily but personable pragmatist keen to keep business confidence (Economist 25 September 2008).

Who then, is the real Jacob Zuma, and what interests does he really represent? What will his leadership mean for the future of governance in South Africa, especially as regards its democratic consolidation, economic growth and development? These are the questions which occupy the authors of this special edition of Representation. I now survey some of the answers before interpreting the directional pull of their collective weight; the sum of which suggests we stand at the beginning of a new and more familiar era of postcolonial politics in South Africa.

Who is Zuma and What Interest Group and Political Project Does He Represent?

The edition begins with two articles which offer strong historical accounts of both the African National Congress (ANC) and Zuma. These are by Raymond Suttner, a long-time ANC activist and leader, and Tom Lodge, probably the foremost academic scholar of the ANC. While there is much fascinating detail here about Zuma and his relationship with the party, and Thabo Mbeki more specifically, the larger debate really centres on the extent to which Zuma's rise is really a story about left frustrations with Thabo Mbeki's policies or elite network frustrations at exclusion from Thabo Mbeki's patronage, or some combination of both.

Most of the contributors acknowledge multiple influences in the 'coalition of the aggrieved' that rallied behind Zuma, but place different emphases in the primary dynamic at play. Thus Piper and Matisonn as well as Hamilton and Viegi explain Zuma's ascent more in terms of the left's policy agenda, while others, especially Suttner, emphasises more the role of patronage politics. Of particular note here are insights into the changing profile of rank- and-file party

members due to an influx of unemployed young people who rallied behind Zuma, an insight most prominently articulated by Lodge. This raises further questions around the precise extent of this demographic change and its connections to frequently cited popular frustrations at government's conservative spending. Could it be that Mbeki and the so-called '1996-project' inadvertently created its own gravediggers?

Why the Conflict with Mbeki, and What Does this Tell Us About the ANC?

Many of the articles offer a characterisation of the conflict between Zuma and Mbeki, several of which offer insights not only into the personalities and styles of operating, but also into the culture of the ANC as an organisation and its future prospects. There are remarkable convergences in the views of many of the contributors. Examples include Mbeki's exclusive and centralised style of governance, the emergence of a rivalry between the two after 2000, and attempts by both sides to use the issue of the arms deal to their favour.

Interestingly, almost all see the new Zuma-led ANC operating much more in terms of personality-based politics into the future, with lower levels of organisational discipline and consideration of protocol. The contributors also tend to agree that, in the short term, the ascent of Zuma should not affect the party too negatively, but that it opens questions about longer-term prospects for the first time in its history. Suttner, for example, holds that the ascent of Zuma represents the most decisive break from ANC tradition and a fundamental crisis for the party. All share some sense of the beginning of the end for the ANC's easy dominance in South African politics.

Alongside these broad strokes of consensus are many fascinating insights into the history of the ANC, including Suttner's account of centralist practice that clearly predate Mbeki, as well as Mbeki's own patronage-based style of operation. Add to this Lodge's characterisation of the tradition of elite bargaining to avoid open competition for elections. Another interesting insight concerns the SACP's launching of a Communist Youth League to contest to the ANC and especially the ANC Youth League, and how a new generation of activists were able to secure enough branch positions to overturn the centralisation of party governance that occurred under Mbeki. As noted above, this idea of a changing demographic in ANC membership and a close analysis of the campaign to contest the ANC from within stand out as fascinating avenues for further research.

Why the Formation of the Congress of the People? What is the Nature of the Party, and What Does This Mean for Party Politics in South Africa?

All of the contributors agree that the Congress of the People (COPE) offers something qualitatively new as an opposition political party precisely because it is born of the ANC, and enjoys similar liberation and governance credentials. Southall points out the irony of this turn of events as most expected the left to leave the ANC, not the right. There is also agreement that the launch of COPE should produce greater party pluralism in South Africa, an outcome which most feel is good democracy, although many raise concerns about the heightened political intolerance and violence that may well come with greater competition. In this regard Piper and Matisonn make the novel claim that the factionalism in the ANC facilitated a form of elite alternation that was not possible through formal elections, yet reflected a broader popular will. Further, the formation of COPE takes the pressure off ANC internal pluralism into the

future as the main source of elite alternation. Once again, they suggest, South African democracy has got lucky.

As regards COPE's prospects, most of the contributors feel that the party's short-term prospects are much worse than its longer-term potential. Southall points out that if the alliance at the heart of the Zuma-led ANC proves to be unstable, which it could well be, then COPE offers a meaningful alternative for defectors. Indeed it seems to me that one of Zuma's key challenges will be balancing the left and right leadership in his cabinet so as to ensure, on the one hand, not to alienate his more radical branch support and, on the other, so as not to scare off his financial backers who now have another credible party to join, and which is more explicitly orientated around business interests.

Where the contributors tend to disagree is on the extent to which the Zuma-led ANC and COPE represent different ideologies, interest groups or constituencies. Suttner suggests that the divide between the parties is not ideological. Lodge is non-committal, but certainly questions the idea that the Zuma-led ANC has been captured by the left. Consistent with their account of ANC factionalism, Piper and Matisonn see divergent class projects as key to informing the ANC-COPE split and future party directions, and very similar sentiments are expressed by Hamilton and Viegi. Indeed, the latter see COPE as holding the promise of renewing the implicit contract between representatives of the economic power and political power disrupted by Zuma's ascent.

What Does Zuma's Rise Mean for Future Governance of South Africa?

Despite the different interpretations of Zuma's ascent to power, there is a significant degree of consensus that the future of governance in South Africa will be more open, competitive, probably more disorganised and certainly more complex as a result. There remains significant difference over whether a Zuma-led government will increase tendencies towards Africanist populism, as suggested by Vincent, and more patronage politics, as held by Suttner. Hamilton and Viegi see the greater distance between political and economic elites opening the way for more venal patrimonialism and corruption.

Others like Butler as well as Southall see competition as a counter-weight to this, at least to some extent. Piper and Matisonn are a little more optimistic holding that the Zuma-led ANC represents the revived influence of the alliance, and this should enhance the voice of at least some marginalised groups in the heart of governance. Generally though, most see greater competition as leading to more short-termism in governance, a growing role for ethnicity, the greater exclusion of minorities and a generally less well co-ordinated and managed system. In sum, as suggested above South African politics looks likely to resemble more closely the more complicated and messy nature of postcolonial politics elsewhere in the world as the apartheid isomorphism of race and class begins to unravel in complex ways.

What Does Zuma's Rise Mean for the Dominant Party Debate?

One of the more remarkable conclusions of the contributors is that the formation of COPE represents the beginning of the end of the era of ANC dominance of South African politics and, by implication, the beginning of the end of the dominant party syndrome as the key feature of South African politics. Some like Suttner and Southall question whether the claim of one-party dominance was not overstated to begin with, for reasons including ANC internal

pluralism and the lack of control over key sectors of social power. Most however, do not question the validity of the dominant party characterisation—until now that is.

Butler in particular focuses on this debate, making the case that the consequences of one-party dominance were not all negative. The ANC was able to contain political violence, especially in KwaZulu-Natal, embrace a long-term planning view, especially with regards to macro-economic policy and affirm a politics and practice reasonably inclusive of minorities. On the other hand, it did regard itself as the only legitimate representative of the people, and dismissed criticism as illegitimate, often confusing party and state structures, and particular with national interests. However, if the consequences of one-party dominance were mixed, then so are the consequences of greater plurality. Hence the concerns with greater violence, more identity based politics and exclusion, and more short-term thinking in governance.

We may well stand at a watershed in party politics in South Africa, with a future of much greater party competition, but this will also be a future of greater uncertainty and unpredictability, with its attendant costs for governance.

What About the Future of South Africa's Political Institutions?

Again, the edition reveals a remarkable consensus in that the contributors feel that state institutions will come under more pressure rather than enjoy more support into the future. For example, Hamilton and Viegi expect the Zuma-led ANC to challenge key aspects of the constitution. A recurring theme across many contributions is the growing significance of personalities in political life, with the associated practices, the negative epitome of which are Julius Malema's calls to place Jacob Zuma before the institutions of justice. Indeed, as Southall notes, even COPE's calls for electoral reform tend to reflect party interest rather than principle. Drawing on the example of Lesotho, the only African country to employ a multi-member constituency system, Southall points to the importance of political culture for the democratic functioning of a constituency-based electoral system. He also points out that COPE's proposed reforms to the Presidency would alter the balance between parliamentarism and presidential in the South African political system in a way which would inadvertently enhance the conditions for populist personality-based Presidential rule.

What Does All this Mean for Democratic Consolidation?

As summarised by Mattes (2002), the literature on democratic consolidation identifies three variables as key to the successful consolidation of a new democracy. These are (i) stable democratic political institutions, (ii) economic growth that also reduces inequality, and (iii) a supportive political culture.

As regards political institutions, it has already been noted that although South Africa has a largely positive history in terms of the constitution, courts and elections, there have been problems with a weak parliament and otherwise negligible contribution of other state institutions other than the independent electoral commission. The ascent of Zuma is likely to have further mixed outcomes. On the one hand, almost all the contributors agree that the formation of COPE is good for party pluralism, but otherwise is likely to put more pressure on the independent and effective operation of political institutions, both indirectly through greater levels of intolerance and violence and directly through undermining the operation of the legal system when powerful political leaders are threatened.

As regards economic issues, only Hamilton and Viegi address this issue in any thoroughgoing way, but their conclusion is similarly pessimistic. They hold that since around 1996 South Africa has pursued a regime of fiscal discipline under Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, which looked to (i) generate independence from domestic (white) big business and (ii) avoid dependency through debt on international markets. Inadvertently however, South Africa has become more dependent on international markets through the ratings systems for investment. This is lower than it probably ought to be due to the international perception that local capital is not reliably incorporated into governance. Further, the election of Zuma has made things worse by breaking the implicit agreement between domestic capital and political leadership, and this will negatively affect South African credit risk status into the future. This has negative consequences for growth and therefore for democratic consolidation.

Lastly, as regards political culture, the assessment is again mixed, but mostly negative. On the positive side Lodge suggests that party branches have reclaimed some power in the ANC, Butler and Southall expect more openness and competition in the political system and Piper and Matisonn see some historically marginalised groups securing better access to government. On the negative side, most see competition bringing more intolerance and a degree of violence. Most powerfully though, Vincent sees the rise of Zuma redeeming an Africanist populism, typical of post-colonial contexts, which legitimates an oppressive conformism by portraying social ills as the result of moral, rather than institutional, failure. This leads to a 'moral panic' where those who fail to conform to this constructed model of proper Africanness, in this case homosexuals, 'deviant' women or ethnic minorities, are branded as 'folk devils'. The political danger of this politics of culture is the legitimacy it confers on the populist patriarch to undo individual rights. In this sense then, the rise of Zuma represents the rise of an anti-rights populism that threatens the conditions of democracy in South Africa.

From Post-Apartheid to Post-Colonial Politics

The rise of Zuma suggests a watershed in South African politics. The ANC is confronted with the beginning of the end of its easy dominance; competitive party politics seem reinvigorated; state institutions face greater challenges of maintaining their independent and effective power; and economic prosperity and democratic culture are rendered more vulnerable. The future appears less certain than at any point since 1994 to the extent that, really for the first time, it is longer inevitable that the centre will hold and that things will not fall apart. Yet in some ways the uncertainties of South African politics are comparatively familiar. Simply put, Zuma's rise represents, at the political level, underlying socio-economic and cultural changes that lead the country to more closely resemble other post-colonial countries.

For most its history, South African politics has been understood in terms of the isomorphic structuring effects of race and class such that under apartheid racial identity determined one's political, economic and social standing in a clear, simple and terrible hierarchy. Post-apartheid politics, correspondingly, has been about undoing this hierarchy and replacing it with a system formally framed by human rights and democracy.

This process has been a fraught one, but not without its successes. As noted above, these include the South African constitution, the containment of the political violence of the

negotiation years, the existence of a vigorous free press and independent judiciary, and most of all, the holding of four sets of free and fair national, provincial and local elections. Economically the country has enjoyed reasonable positive growth since 1996, and even reported a slow but steady drop in the official unemployment rate.

But precisely how has this changed the apartheid legacy? Perhaps the simplest answer to this question lies in the shifting terminology used by former President Thabo Mbeki. In 1998 Mbeki characterised South Africa as a country of 'two nations', one wealthy and white, one poor and black. Ten years later Mbeki was taking of South Africa as a country of 'two economies', one multi-racial and gainfully employed, one poor and marginalised from the formal sector. As implied by this contrast, one of the changes of post-apartheid politics is that race no longer simply determines economic status in South Africa.

It is important here not to concede too much, as post-apartheid deracialisation has been asymmetrical. Our 'two economies' are not random for racial identity. Rather, the story is one of inclusion of historically marginalised races in the first economy, but the lingering marginalisation of the black majority in the second. Notably, similar patterns are evident in respect of access to key social goods whether health, education or housing. Putting it simply, one could say that the middle classes enjoy decent public goods, usually through private or semi-private delivery, and the majority (working class and poor) rely on an underperforming state sector. Hence the middle classes and above, including government officials, parliamentarians and cabinet ministers, go to private hospitals and schools, employ private security and own their own cars. The working classes and poor go to public hospitals and schools, rely on policy for security and travel on busses and taxis.

The 'two economies' distinction thus suggests at least two divergent experiences of citizenship. But there is more to South African political and social life than these sets of binaries—at least that is what the rise of Zuma suggests when the contributions in the edition are considered in the round. Hence, what is interesting about the rise of Zuma is not just that it appears to threaten some of the achievements of post-apartheid politics, but rather that it draws attention to forms of social change over and above the asymmetrical de-linking of apartheid relations of race and class.

What also is beginning to emerge are new expressions of identity politics alongside race, including ethnic, xenophobic and gender struggles; new expressions of traditionalist culture against individual rights, especially of women; a powerful revivification of religion in the public realm, and especially the independent African churches; all paradoxically alongside a greater internationalisation of South African economic and political life.

Hence no one could identify with a narrative about Zuma that did not refer to some notion of Zulu traditionalism, and its manifestation in ANC and South African politics. Nor would Zuma make sense without some account of gender relations. Last and not least is the growing significance of religion, and especially the Independent African churches, in South African public life, as manifest in Jacob Zuma's ordainment at the Full Gospel Church in Durban. To return to the metaphor above, there are more colours in the Zuma picture than just red or black.

Many scholars of South African politics seem to work with a simple linear model informed by western experience in their thinking about South Africa, its democracy and development. However, Zuma's rise suggests we need to review both assumptions about linear progress and, more importantly, the western experience. As simple dichotomies of race and class give way to complex new relations of inclusion and exclusion; and new forms of identity politics emerge alongside hybrid religions and normativised nationalisms, South Africa looks more and more like other postcolonial contexts. Consider Michael Chapman's characterisation (2008: 25):

Let me then delineate the postcolony. It is racially diverse; heterogeneous in language, culture and religion. It is characterised by sharp economic and educational disparities. It is susceptible to disease and crime. Its civil institutions are fragile. Its literacy and literary life are uneven. Hard won, liberation-movement freedoms can be at odds with the former liberation movement that is now the ruling party. The Big Man syndrome can signal compromised leaders. The 'people' are often at the rough edge of service delivery ... The hardships of poverty, of urban dislocation, of the problematic mingling of tradition and the now, in a pluralising modernity, all lend content and intent to rituals of succour, solidarity, survival and salvation.

Perhaps we should not be surprised. Mamdani (1996) has long made the point that apartheid was a variation on an underlying colonial theme, and 15 years on, the unravel-ling of apartheid has begun to expose this deeper thread. Further, the widely touted globalisation of the market imposes on developing countries similar conditions of economic existence, as does the choice to continue special relationships born of the colonial era, and initiate new south-south, regional and continental relations. There are historical trends and contemporary logics which underpin the postcolonial condition.

To my mind then, the rise of Zuma is thus about more than just red versus black, or a tsunami versus an eddy. It is a watershed in the history of the ANC, for competitive party politics, and possible for South Africa's state institutions. Perhaps more importantly though, and regardless of precisely which reading one imposes on Zuma's identity, interests and his implications, his rise represents a watershed in that the exceptionalism and simplicity of apartheid, and correspondingly, post-apartheid politics. In its stead we find a paradoxically more familiar, widespread, complex and unpredictable genre of the post-colonial. The future looks more colourful, competitive and complex; it is also more common and less certain.

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