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'Democracy of a Special Type'?

Persistent world-class inequality

- By Gregory Ruiters, Guest Editor

Professor and Chair in Citizenship and Democracy in the Economic and Management Sciences Faculty at the University of the Western Cape

Source: Flickr

Introduction

In the late 1980s, amid widespread fears of a racial civil war and black majority rule, the ANC played a central role in crafting a new South Africa by inviting whites and blacks to reconcile in order to build a new, caring, single national and non-racial republic. The vision was about "the construction of common nationhood" arising "from the *abolition of disparities* in the quality of life among South Africans … and geographic inequalities we all inherited from the past" (Mbeki quoted in Seekings, 2008). Democracy has to be more than casting a ballot but is defined by the aspiration to produce a better and more equal, integrated society as well as meaningful, effective and broad participation by the majority of citizens. As Ranciere (quoted in May, 2008) put it, the essential driving force of democracy is active equality. Democracy means social levelling and reduced inequality so that the majority of citizens see and experience each other as political and social equals within a defined political community.

This Special Issue on 30 Years of Democracy in South Africa provides an opportunity to reflect on this vision, where we are now, and how we got here, as well as how to extract ourselves from the deepening and largely *inherited* contradictions as well as the self-imposed choices for failure since 1994. This Special Issue is less focused on the short-term political manoeuvres but rather more on fundamental shaping processes which might add to understanding the current conjuncture centred on the apparent final dethronement of the ANC as the majority party and the celebration of a new "era" of centrist coalition politics.

World-class corporate corruption and the elite's choice of obscene inequality

As Seeraj Mohamed in this issue argues "over the last 30 years, governments and the large corporations have chosen *inequality*. Moreover, the government and most elite policy think tanks fail to appreciate just how extreme South Africa's inequality and unemployment are compared to almost anywhere else in the world." Mohamed warns that changing the parties in Parliament without understanding the structures and paths of the unequal financial economic development since 1990 is bound to lead to failure.

By 1990, the ANC's key leaders believed it had "won over" capital and that, as Arrighi *et al.* (2010: 432) put it "it could mobilize capital's support to launch the economy onto a growth track that would enable it to meet its socio-economic pledges." However, as they go on to argue, "by 'betting' on capital to solve the crisis, it forfeited the kind of investments in the welfare of the population (housing, public transport, health and, above all, mass lower and higher education) that … may well be the most essential, though by no means sufficient, condition of renewed economic expansion" (Arrighi *et al.*, 2010: 435).

Yet voters with lowered expectations still trusted the ANC. The 1999 election saw a voter turnout of 86% of registered voters and the ANC won 10,6 million of the 17,6 million votes.

By 2024, the ANC faced radically different prospects. Its popular base might still be black and working class but it is now deeply and irrevocably fragmented with the rightwing Cope split, the EFF left split, and now the MK split. The moderate ANC under

Ramapahosa did not change the trajectory and has presided over a country that now stands at the apex of global inequality with a very wealthy minority, still largely white. As Mohamed in this issue shows, the democracy that millions fought for and many died for has become liberation for highly mobile financial capital. "Since 1994, the large corporations that have dominated the markets of the economy have increased operations and shifted capital abroad. They have financialised and not allocated capital towards manufacturing." Most new jobs are low-skilled and precarious leaving South Africa ill-prepared for new skills required by the fourth industrial revolution. We have a mass of black people effectively imprisoned in dangerous and collapsing townships and failing education and health services that reinforce inferiority, low skills and racial identities.

Patrick Bond provides a valuable reminder that we should not allow the noise of the mainstream media and political parties to blind us to the facts; he shows that corporate crime of both the traditional South African white monopoly capital and Western multinational corporations – both sometimes termed 'WMC' – needs to be factored into our understanding of the crisis. He reminds us of the limits to black capitalist class formation in the post-apartheid economy. which in turn creates a dependency on accumulation via the state.

Sibusisiwe Sibeko points to the oft-ignored centrality of female labour in households in economics and the role of women in the economy and social reproduction of the labour force. Almost 40% of South African households depend on and are headed by single women. Unpaid women's work which makes up 75% of household labour has been ignored in orthodox economics.

Viviene Taylor focuses on the gap between policy intentions and implementation and the ongoing administrative hurdles facing the poor who seek access to state services and grants. "The reality for many people who live in situations of intolerable conditions and deprivation is that political democracy post-1994, has not yet resulted in significant changes or improvements in their daily lives." The evidence shows that income for some poor households has declined in real terms since then. A third of households, consisting of 18 million people, are estimated to live in poverty, and 54% of the poorest are children.

A deepening political and ethical crisis of the ANC, the state and hope

Drawing on in-depth interviews with socialist UDF activists, Robert Van Niekerk powerfully explores the political dynamics of disempowerment and demobilisation that enable elite capture. Van Niekerk argues that by 1994 the "[I]nstitutions of the state were already being re-purposed for private accumulation by 'deployed' cadres of the ANC". He goes on to argue that the ANC destroyed the "self-belief in the diverse ranks of the impoverished in their capacity to effect change in their community through civics, youth and worker organisations and action committees was lost with the closure of the UDF in 1991" and instead the ANC replaced civic democracy with "undemocratic centralist parliamentary party politics".

How did the ANC, once rooted in hundreds of mass organisations and the UDF, lose its vision and inner vitality and internal democratic practices among its allies?

Longstanding ANC parliamentarian and SACP member Yunus Carrim shared his high and low moments in a recent frank interview (see Moira Levy in this issue). Echoing

many other authors in this volume he notes that: “The reason Parliament has declined is because the ANC has declined as a whole. The one reinforces the other. You see increasing corruption, distance from the masses, the mismanagement of resources.” He confirms that since 2007 there have been deep divisions that have paralysed the party.

Shepi Mati’s contribution to the Special Issue is a semi-biographical reflection that is deeply personal and political. He supports the dictum that “politics is far too important to be left to the politicians” and we all need to take responsibility for both our partial victories and dismal defeats. In particular, like many socialists in the UDF and ANC, he laments the almost complete capitulation among many in the ANC to the lure of the market. Mati warns: “Today we are told privatisation is the panacea to all our social ills and the market is like God. The elite has moved to the suburbs and left the townships behind … The ‘now it’s our time to eat’ brigade, driven by the zeal of a market on steroids – *uvulazibhuqe* – have descended like vultures on their prey of SOEs [State Owned Enterprises] and are already gouging the carcass”.

The eating started in 1994 and by 2005 five members of the ANC’s National Executive Committee (NEC) had a combined wealth of R1,5-billion in shareholdings alone.[1] ANC multi-millionaires who “bought in” rather than sold out sit on boards of powerful corporations and foundations and have contributed to the ANC’s fragmentation into competitive mafias and factions. Let us recall that the ANC is the oldest liberation movement in Africa that stood for political freedom and political equality with a non-racial unitary South Africa (see Carrim quoted in Levy in this issue). It refused to be typecast into neat ideological categories although many argue it was social democratic in orientation.

‘Your vote means *fokol*’

Why is the majority refusing to be represented by not voting (“your vote means *fokol*”) and who are these non-voters? Have the contradictions of South Africa become so deep that they can only be resolved on the streets rather than through the ballot box? Is it a choice between the ballot or the bullet or do some people occupy both positions? Does anyone trust representatives who earn massive salaries and do not live like the people they claim to represent? Can the parliamentary system and parties like the ANC and DA or “democracy” contain the explosive social contradictions that threaten to tear the country apart? The ANC and DA, as many have observed, have done little to change the social geography of South Africa (see Roland Ngam in this volume) and the contradictions are expressed in taxi wars, blocked highways, load reduction for black townships while the elite are ensconced in leafy suburbs in their own social reproduction systems (private schools, private security, private hospitals and gated estates (Mahkubu and Ruiters, 2020).

Democracies such as South Africa and the USA fail when captured by the wealthy and when governments reflect the perceived wishes of “investors” or more crudely when a few rich individuals provide core funding for political parties. Democracies also fail or cease to have value when parties and the government cater to the desires of the middle class and impose additional hardship on segments of the population previously excluded spatially and economically, thus exacerbating inequality. While most parties appeal to the notion of “national or public interests”, this is a notion that is notoriously

hard to define especially in highly polarised and divided societies.

As Ngam (in this issue) powerfully documents, key issues like land ownership, wealth gaps and geographical apartheid starkly point to an unsolved national question. The ANC faces a stark choice: solve these contradictions or die!

South African rulers need to change the trajectory and economic model. They embraced a wholehearted integration into the neoliberal global economic system even before this was required by international capital.

None of the challenges (the social question, the land question and the national question) posed in the South Africa transition have been adequately addressed. The majority of the white population refuses to see the need for deeper changes. Paradoxically, this minority has benefitted more economically than blacks have from the demise of apartheid (*The Economist*, 2013). Elites have turned disasters into opportunities to further lessen the dependence of the state and have effectively opted out: they created a private security industry to protect themselves when the police failed; they installed personal power systems in response to Eskom outages and have in fact created a parallel society with new forms of social separateness.

South Africans are building their own private cities to barricade themselves against rampant unemployment and endemic crime. The multi billion Rand developments are complete with their own hospitals, schools, road works, and sanitation services, and they come at a time when Africa's most developed economy faces years of power cuts and stalling growth (*The Star*, 24 April, 2015).

In South Africa, only 18% of black African workers occupied skilled jobs in 2014 while four out of five white people were in the top 20% income bracket (*Business Tech,* 18 September, 2014). Out of a total of 46,800 high net-worth persons in South Africa in 2014, 32,100 were white, representing 69% (while whites only made up 8% of the population) (cited in *Business Tech,* 12 March, 2015). Top management positions remain a white domain, with only 13% held by black African people.[2]

The system of social grants, fee-free schools (that are mostly dysfunctional) and free basic municipal services (6kl of water – a refugee standard) which draws on constitutional socio-economic rights (defined as only basic needs) do not remotely realise the citizenship ideals of social equality and social solidarity (See Viviene Taylor in this issue).

Waarna toe nou? The new struggle ...

The election has surfaced the latent which now has become manifest. 2024 confirmed that the "people" are not voting. Despite the IEC and influential commentators' celebration of the 2024 election, it showed the lowest voter turnout since 1994.

Some groups still see value in the electoral process. This shows the elections are still an important moment for movement building (see article and inputs from Abahlali Basejondolo and My Vote Counts in this issue). The EFF is seen as a progressive force that could be conditionally supported in elections.

The fallout of the ANC's electoral dethronement is likely to play out in the next few years in complex ways. One possibility is further decline as Government of National Unity (GNU) partners force the ANC rightward. The MK party, to the extent that it can maintain organisational coherence, might benefit further. Still powerful and well-heeled

ANC leaders and stalwarts who back Ramaphosa, such as Cheryl Carolus, Sipho Pityana, Kgalema Motlanthe, Snuki Zikalala and Trevor Manuel (who left the ANC ten years ago) and is head of Old Mutual have come out strongly in favour of the DA-ANC partnership.

On the other hand, Heribert Adam (2023), who celebrated the coming demise of the ANC and the birth of coalition-era politics in the ANC-DA format, argues that the DA (seen as the party of big business) will have to persuade the super-rich (black and white) to make real compromises and accept inheritance taxes.

Whether the wealthy can ever take a long-term view is debatable. Insulated behind securitised gated estates, the wealthy have created a sense of hyper-Europeanness in Africa and have revolted against publicness: “the ultra-rich property owners in South Africa have turned to ‘whole-life’ homes – places in which they can live, work and play never having to set foot into the ‘real world’” (Fourie, 2021).

Democracy is fundamentally about the kind of society we wish to live in and how the material and social foundations of that society and the resources of the country are shaped and controlled. Democracy as popular rule can be construed as much more than individual liberty, being represented, and voting but as a way of life and community built on class and social solidarity and majoritarian democracy centred on the prioritisation of the impoverished. The coming GNU does not create or encourage mass participatory democracy but bargaining at the summit between elite and class conciliation rather than class struggle and dissensus (see Held, 1987). It is not about elite consensus between competing elites as pluralists and corporatist thinkers maintain but rather about fighting a hegemonic majority working class consensus for a new society. The socialist left also has space to contest for a new liberation struggle, solidarity and hope in a new politics based on grassroots movements, social solidarity and new ethical anti-capitalist ecological foundations (see Ari Sitas in this issue). **NA93**

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ENDNOTES

1 See *Sunday Times's* "Rich List" at https://mg.co.za/article/2006-08-06-anc-to-rein-in-its-fat-cats/

2 See https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201507/15-cee-annual-report-2015.pdf

Nostalgia as a weapon ...

... and also a way to bring back the dream

- By Ari Sitas

Ari Sitas is the Acting Director of the Institute of African Alternatives (IFAA). He is also Emeritus Professor and former head of the Department of Sociology, University of Cape Town, and a writer, dramatist and poet.

Instead of focusing on the elections and the implications of the polling outcome, ARI SITAS suggests we channel our pre-occupation with the past and our recent spate of commemorations of political and economic milestones into revisiting the 'dream' and restoring a commitment to hope.

The last two years have been all about political nostalgias in South Africa. They were marked by serious commemorative events that emphasised the "possible" that never was: 50 years since the Durban strikes, the spontaneous upsurge there of a black working-class; 40 years since the launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF), the unprecedented popular-democratic movement that challenged apartheid to its core. That was 2023.

2024 brought its own momentum: 30 years since the first real democratic election that ushered Mandela into the country's stewardship and the ANC into state power; 20 years since the ANC trounced Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha to take over the civil war-wracked KwaZulu-Natal and lastly ten years since Zuma's large majority which instead of reversing neo-liberal protocols as promised, introduced a rapid focus on kleptomania.

So here we are in 2024: the labour movement stands divided and battered, unsure of how to wrest livelihoods off a rampant plutocracy, white and black. The remnants of the UDF leadership were making serious noise against opportunities lost but without any movement to under-girth its voice; the more explicit leftward bemoaning the fact that 30 years of democracy has failed to deal with poverty, unemployment and inequality; those that struggled to establish a culture of peace and reconciliation in KwaZulu-Natal facing the callous re-emergence of social violence and murderous politics; those who backed the ascendance of Jacob Zuma, believing in his talk of a decisive state, finding themselves on a margin or trying to stop the looting, in support of Cyril Ramaphosa's "caring capitalism" drive.

I write this as an opinion piece, slightly biased towards KwaZulu-Natal where my experience was more vivid and at close encounters.

For those outside these waves of nostalgia opinion is divided: the ANC will sink as against those who argue that the ANC should sink.

This sinking talk I think is the wrong pre-occupation. The depleted ANC will win enough votes and it will inherit the institutional mess it has created. What is the correct pre-occupation is that in amidst the sobbing and gnashing that the nostalgia has generated, there is a clear re-commitment to hope and to the "dream".

Take the labour movement's relics: there is a serious re-valuation of its failures and achievements. Yes, the trade unions during their social movement days were celebrated as an exemplar of working-class politics and grassroots democracy everywhere. With little prompting the trade union movement chose a path of "strategic unionism": to participate in the ANC and South African Communist Party's (SACP's) Tripartite Alliance and help shape government policy towards social justice and redistribution. But hardly had it helped finish the design of a Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) when it was stumped through the ANC-spawned market-friendly and trickle-down Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) policy. It was often reduced into an electoral prop for the ruling party, it introduced some of the most suspect business unionism practices, its leadership in many instances lost touch with its democratic base, it sided with Jacob Zuma in the attempt to stop Thabo Mbeki's "pragmatic" capitalism (fiscal state with a mix between austerity and developmental stimuli).

By 2012 divisions within its ranks became palpable. Then the Marikana killings happened and the fragmentation of the trade union movement became real. There were then two large federations – the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Saftu).[1] Both have been unable to deal with the rise of casualisation, precarity and informality; unable to stem the tide of de-industrialisation and the loss of blue-collar enclaves whilst winning over white collar ones. Both have been unable too, to deal with the large presence by now of migrant and refugee labour from the rest of the continent.

Yet, it is not sociologically prudent to ignore trade unions. Despite shocking levels of unemployment, there are still 10 million plus some thousands who are working. In a country of 60 million this is more than significant. That only 2.5 million belong to trade unions, down from the 3.9 three decades ago, is still quite a serious number.

In the commemorative gatherings shop-stewards raised four serious issues that came to my attention: firstly, that the perception of the "unemployed" as a distinct category is far-fetched, the unemployed belong to their households and they are being kept alive, less by the R350 grant a month from government that buys them bread for two weeks, but by their mothers, fathers and siblings in employment. Also, the informal workers if not IN their households, they do subsist in their neighbourhoods.

Secondly, women shop-stewards raised the issue of women-headed households and the strains they are experiencing. This is the most important sociological (and fastest growing) category in the country as 41% of all households are women-headed, raising issues around the connection between production, informal trade and reproduction.

Thirdly, more than half of workers have their main household in the countryside, which makes them active across urban and rural interconnections. These households are in customary areas where women are still struggling over land rights and against patriarchal control.

The fourth is that workers are outraged by the increase in the retail prices of basic needs-related goods during and beyond the Covid pandemic. They are convinced that the big retail companies have raised prices to maintain their profitability at the highest level possible and by implication have passed on the burden to the black majority.

Mobilisations are beginning to happen.

As for the remnants of the UDF, whose leaders in the main have done exceedingly well under the new dispensation, and therefore lack a popular base these days in the unfolding drama, have mostly acted on defending the democratic dispensation and the Constitution and threw their lot in anti-corruption initiatives.

Nevertheless, their high profile attracted a lot of media space. Some have admirably gone further and encouraged civil society initiatives and inter-faith cooperation. They have also moved on housing and transport issues and have mainly assisted existing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-profit organisations (NPOs) that are mostly run by their children's generation. What was really missed by all was the burst of creativity across the class and gender spectrum, from the Mpumalanga Arts Project to Ravan Press, from children's literature to worker plays, from Indian Delights to high art. The loss of cultural energy was noted everywhere.

Their nostalgia makes them re-articulate and narrate how hard it was in the past, how they all built the movement township door to township door in the most repressive of conditions. What they do not appreciate fully is the new youth dynamism that is e-network-based, but they understand that time has marched on and they have become “bit players” in a new social context. Most do find that the future is in the hands of their children, but what that future is remains difficult to fathom. They are divided between those who would like to help clean up the ANC as they do believe that the dream can be salvaged there, and those who would rather see a new dispensation.

Their long-term commitment to deepening democracy will be tested after the elections. Those of the Front who were more socialist or even communist in their dispositions found themselves either working through the SACP or with a variety of left groupings that almost succeeded in creating a new United Front in 2018 – but there has been little movement, unless a movement is confused with traffic moving on digital highways.

Yet many of them are at the heart of the current celebrations of the 30 years since the first democratic election. On the democratic breakthrough you can count adversity on two hands, but on the compromises that led to its possibility there is a serious retrospective critique.

There were always the “nay-sayers” anyway. Long-standing critics of the Congress tradition were plenty: the Unity Movement, the PAC stalwarts, the Black Consciousness thinkers have all exercised a sustained critique of the Congress’ Freedom Charter, the movement’s revolutionary vision, its class priorities, its non-racialism and its implicit Stalinism (which it supposedly inherited from the SACP). So, nothing the ANC did would be outside its critical focus. And as black intellectuals who were not dragged into leadership positions the day after the election and who were employed rapidly in the university system because of its lack of black academic staff, the social sciences and humanities have been hostile to the ANC, its alliance partners and government.

The 30 years of democracy celebrations had a mixed repertoire of achievements on display and as they occurred during an election year, so did the many grudges about Nelson Mandela’s rulership tended to proliferate: that he had “sold out” the revolution; that he abandoned the idea of nationalisation of the economy’s key points; that he was too harsh on Winnie Mandela; that he allowed GEAR to stump the RDP; that he chose the wrong replacement in Thabo Mbeki; that he only commandeered an elite transition; that the Rainbow Nation and Reconciliation were a sham. And as I argued before in a more scholarly way (Sitas, 2010), the pillars of the compromise would not hold for long, especially over the land question, the rule of chiefs in the customary areas, the co-determination model between government, capital and labour.

On the positive side, we have heard that Mandela oversaw and often managed a major transition away from the most powerful racial autocracy towards a society that was rights-driven and equity-seeking; that he endorsed radical equality between the sexes, faiths and languages, that he did away with the death penalty and dismantled the country’s nuclear arsenal; that his rulership endorsed compulsory education for all, free access to health for poor households and quite a fair taxation system.

The litmus test of “grudges” of course, was to be found in the most mutinous of

provinces: KwaZulu-Natal, already embroiled for five years in what was a civil war essentially between Zulu democrats and Zulu conservatives. A grudge was very obvious when, hardly two weeks after his release, Mandela ordered the 200,000 armed supporters, many from the war zones, to throw their guns into the sea and stop the carnage. The call for peace and reconciliation did not receive a very warm applause at home, but he and his surrounding leadership persisted. Could there have been another way? Could the system have been overthrown by arming the Congress-related defence committees and opting for a people's war?

... opinion is divided: the ANC will sink as against those who argue that the ANC should sink.

There was a strong faction in the ANC that believed in it, even though "Operation Vula" to arm the insurgency was foiled. What was arming by then the Comrades movement and their defence committees that Harry Gwala and his cohort set up in the Midlands was powerful, but the arms trickling in from the Transkei were too meek against the kind of firepower Inkatha's *Amabutho* and Third Force Askaris could muster. Gwala (celebrated now as a great hero) and Sifiso Nkabinde (who was later found or alleged to have been part of the "System") believed in armed insurgency. Yet the "eye for an eye", "torso for a torso" vision had the Midlands mostly under Comrades control, but caused devastation in Northern and Southern Natal and KwaZulu.

Durban had the more willing negotiators and peace-path scouts in the leadership who were in direct discord about the Midlands' mass-line. It was this polarisation that created the context for a third-way: enter Jacob Zuma as a peace-maker, a rooted traditionalist, supported by the SACP and Cosatu who could, from the Chairship of the ANC, neutralise the Royal House.

From what I recall, not all was well in the Congress movement leading up to that moment.

There was tension between the UDF and the trade union movement: the latter had never folded into the UDF but attacks on black working-class communities brought about cooperation between them and this cooperation was named the Mass Democratic Movement. Unlike other provinces there was no room in KwaZulu-Natal for the rise of the ugly head of sectarianism.

There were serious identity questions and tensions as well as the UDF was deemed to be orchestrated through an Indian cabal. Many in the ANC set to work to marginalise the individuals named as members of the cabal. There was even discord in the ranks of the Zulu Royal House, some Chiefs felt used and abused during the civil war, tensions that led to the creation of the Ingonyama Trust handing over half of the KwaZulu customary areas to the Trusteeship of the Royal House and the King.

There was discord articulated by the two rival women's movements — the Natal Organisation of Women and Inkatha Women's League, elements of whom wanted an end to the violence. There was also turbulence in the universities (the "Knowledge

Affair"[2] at Natal University that almost had it burnt down, and the explicitly anti-Congress COMSA insurgency[3] at the University of Durban-Westville.)

The shift from the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu) to a more Congress-aligned Cosatu spawned a backlash, an Inkatha-affiliated alternative, the United Workers' Union of South Africa (Uwusa), which was to then facilitate attacks on Cosatu-linked shop-stewards who were Inkatha members anyway. This violence and the formation of Uwusa were key strategic mistakes of Inkatha, as significant as the hostel violence that was unleashed by Inkatha-supported hostel-dwellers and Third Force operatives in Gauteng, because it targeted people who were part of the democratic union movement.

The national election that almost did not happen handed over the province to a victorious Inkatha. The invitation to Inkatha to be part of the Government of National Unity and the obvious reciprocity by Inkatha to involve the ANC in the KwaZulu-Natal cabinet, meant that the Mandela line of reconciliation brought an end to political violence. Also, the appointment of Jacob Zuma as the Minister of Economic Affairs in KwaZulu-Natal started the formation of his economic power-base.

Even though 30 years of democracy celebrations in KwaZulu-Natal were muted for other reasons, which will be visited below, the election is remembered as the end of a civil war that affected everything: kinship systems, clans, ethnic relations and communities. The publicity around togetherness and "growth" enunciated by Premier Nomusa Duma-Ncube in 2024 does not address the mutinous energies that I am about to describe.

It was 20 years since the ANC, after a decade of hard ideological and organising work, won the province of KwaZulu-Natal away from the Inkatha Freedom Party. By then, Jacob Zuma was re-deployed to the Presidency as President Thabo Mbeki's second in command.

On the ideological front, Sibusiso Ndebele, an ANC leader in the province, launched quite a formidable version of the African Renaissance, arguing that it was the only way to move the province beyond conflict. Inkatha and its constituencies were welcomed in these events and in the process re-defined Zulu-ness as the unfinished project of the Shakan revolution – a tradition that was about an endogenous modernity.

Furthermore, Ndebele worked hard on the inter-faith front to bridge Western and African Christianities, made sure that there was also a Workers' Parliament in the province and welcomed big capital projects. But if Ndebele was about the politics of reconciliation and identity in the province, the hard-nosed organisers of the ANC – Willies Mchunu and Zweli Mkhize – got down to grassroots work, almost trade union-style, and spread branch activity everywhere. They were helped by the 1999 Local Authorities' Reform[4] which made the way for the proliferation of branches everywhere possible and necessary.

During May 2004, the ANC gained more than 50% of the vote to become the leading party in the province.

In remembering that time, one enduring idea around the morality of moving beyond conflict was initiated in the movement's discussions. Some were formal, expressed through Pitika Ntuli's inspired Sankofa, some around Fatima Meer's impressive Institute

for Black Research, the Peace Programmes of the Phoenix Settlement Trust and the Diakonia inter-Faith Programmes. Others were informal, around Sibusiso Ndebele's initiatives that also involved National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) thinkers from Atlanta; reflections also initiated by Bennie Khoapa's Black Consciousness circles and prompts from African philosophers like the Malian Adama Samassekou who was then defining the language vision of the African Union. To simplify: it was a search for the distilling of a concept of "*ubuntu*" as a historically evolving morality that was open to difference, diversity and disagreement. And, a new Africanism that was to underpin the continent's development.

Yet politics is about power and often ideas are a sideshow. Matters shifted in the decade that followed, as the ANC consolidated its power in KwaZulu-Natal, Premier Ndebele's leadership was ended as Zweli Mkhize, riding on a strong wave against Thabo Mbeki's leadership, carried the contestation over into KwaZulu-Natal. But what the ANC gained in KZN was lost in the Western Cape, as an ascendant Democratic Alliance led by Helen Zille pushed Congress into a marginal corner.

It was precisely that wave that brought Jacob Zuma to power: backed by the ANC's Youth League led by Julius Malema, black businessmen disappointed by President Thabo Mbeki's networks and also movements and influential leaders that decried "AIDS denialism". Furthermore, the SACP, Cosatu and the South African National Civics Organisation (Sanco) completed the list. The ANC conference at Polokwane ushered in the new power bloc which promised a shift away from neo-liberal protocols, the introduction of a state-centric development path, the rapid introduction of anti-retroviral medication and a recovery plan from the 2008 meltdown.

Instead, it brought, since the ANC's decisive national victory in 2014, a kleptocracy led it seems by Zuma's advisers, the Guptas.

Yet it was also a time of serious reflection: did Zuma's ascendancy, instead of just stopping what the SACP called the "1996 Class Project", unleash another one? Could it be called the "2010 Class Project"? Is it a national or an ethnic power bloc? What is the link between it, if any, and the Taliban power bloc that routed the Ramaphosa-linked one, ironically labelled the Ankole after the cattle the president cherished? Although the slogan of Radical Economic Transformation binds them, are they both linked to the rise of the MK Party? Did the MK Party benefit from the lack of success of the Taliban bloc in gaining any headway in the ANC's national power structure? Will it sustain the obvious fact that it is not the real Umkhonto we Sizwe?

What is the way ahead for the Economic Freedom Fighters, a child of ANC discord and constant indecisions over land and wealth redistribution? Will its appeal to a younger generation of black South Africans be tempered by the rise of alternatives such as Rise Mzansi?

Regime change pandits and of course the Democratic Alliance had hoped that the ANC would sink to a 40% nadir, a hope that was trumpeted by the Brenthurst Foundation, whose powerful centre-right networks in the media world echoed such a hope. Such pandits turned Ramaphosa from a saviour to an indecisive, weak and uninspiring leader who had to go. Close to 4,000 ANC branches got going door to door,

alongside the SACP, which had already started on 1 May, spreading its leadership to all provinces and using their rallies and platforms as Vote ANC ones. The staggering fact remains: 42% of registered voters were not convinced to vote.

What I am getting at is that the two years of nostalgia-inducing gatherings have done among those who seriously participated in their "thinking" parts is that the vote is not the only answer: it is only a sustained movement of movements that prioritises the defence of democratic freedoms and pushes hard for livelihoods equity (combining class, race and gender issues) that will shape outcomes; also, a movement that struggles hard to absent and get rid of what blocks and stunts such freedoms.

The nine million under 13s on the road every day to one school or another, the million students in tertiary institutions, and the many in-between, all deserve a better "us".

Perhaps, a second wave liberation movement is a must, it might also be about the integrity of our ecosystems which is quietly building up.

There is also no doubt that an emphasis on self-expression and culture is at the heart of any new vision – not in its crass commercial sense but expression that questions, celebrates and pushes talent to its limits. It cannot only be about rugby and soccer, cricket and *amapiano*!

There is a new serious bifurcation on the way, clearly brought about by South Africa's daring to disturb the war and genocide against Palestinian people. And serious ructions because South Africa has taken its role in the African Union, BRICS and G20 seriously as a player and not a neo-colonial vassal.

It has to be a moral movement too, that is based on a progressive understanding of "*ubuntu*" – the Mandela period gave us the juridical backbone to facilitate the growth of such a movement and the right to dream. It is not bad that dreaming is on the rebound. Yet it is not the courts that will realise the dream.

The past 30 years have not been exactly glorious but that the past facilitated dreaming and possibility.

And now?

Even nostalgia is a kind of weapon. **NA93**

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Sitas, Ari. 2010. *The Mandela Decade*, Pretoria: Unisa Press.

ENDNOTES

1 There are other smaller ones, one of which, Solidarity, is white dominated and the Federation of Unions of South Africa (Fedusa) that organised professionals to start with, but emphasises an apolitical form of trade unionism.

2 Natal University was the first hitherto white university to open its doors to black students in 1988. By 1990 the issue of exclusions came up and Knowledge Mdlalose led the riot that ensued. According to some, it was all engineered by a "Third Force". But the issues were real. Knowledge subsequently disappeared, and is on the TRC list as a disappeared person.

3 COMSA was the combined Academic and Staff Association of the University of Durban Westville which took control of the institution through direct action, stoppages and challenges to authority.

4 Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution guaranteed the establishment of democratically elected local governments.

Persistent and obscene inequality

A post-apartheid policy choice

– By Seeraj Mohamed

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This article expresses his own views and not those of his employer.

How is one to understand the poor economic performance of the South African economy since the end of apartheid? SEERAJ MOHAMED argues that the post-apartheid government chose to adopt neoliberal economic policies rather than taking on a developmental state role. These policies opened the way for the large dominant corporations to pursue high short-term returns through misallocating capital from productive sectors towards speculation and "lazy" rent-seeking activities. In the process they denuded, deindustrialised and financialised the economy. Still today, the South African government (supported by elites of large corporations) ignores the lessons of history and pursues damaging neoliberal economic policies that impose an unprecedented degree of suffering on the majority of South Africans.

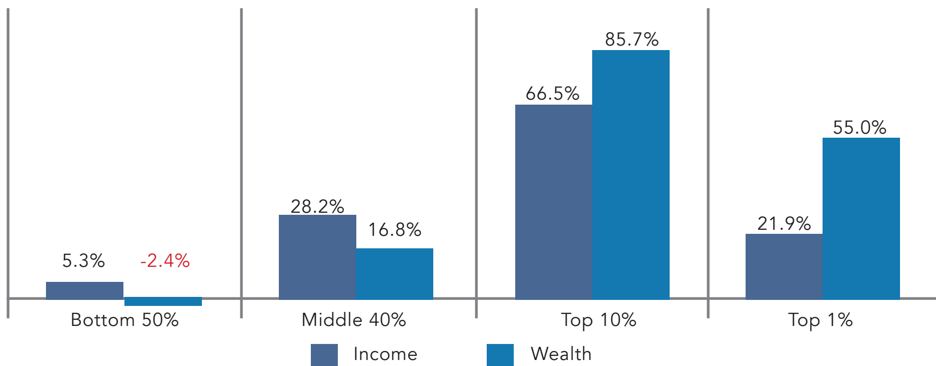
Introduction

The South African economy has performed very poorly since 1994, particularly with regard to the persistent extremely high levels of structural unemployment, poverty and inequality (UPI). But over the last 30 years, governments and the large corporations have made the choice for inequality. Moreover, the government and most elite policy thinktanks fail to appreciate just how extreme South Africa's inequality and unemployment is compared to almost anywhere else in the world. Such extreme inequalities undermine the social foundations of democracy. As the editors of the *SA Review 3* noted in 2013, amid a

> national tragedy of the inequality, poverty and unemployment [which had] triggered rising working-class discontent around the country, the ANC announced a 'second phase' of the 'national democratic revolution'. Ironically, the ANC post-Mangaung has resolved to preserve the core tenets of the minerals-energy-financial complex that defined racial capitalism – while at the same time ratcheting up the revolutionary rhetoric to keep the working class and marginalised onside. If the 'first phase' was a tragedy of the unmet expectations of the majority, is the 'second phase' likely to be a farce? (Southall *et al*., 2013)

Statistics South Africa's latest data on poverty in 2015 showed that 55% of the population lived below the official poverty line and that the Gini coefficient was 0.62. Racial and gender disparities remain extremely strong in South Africa. In the last quarter of 2023, unemployment among people classified African was 36.1% and for white people it was 8.5%. At the same time, unemployment for women was 34.4% and 30.1% for men. Figure 1 shows that the biggest portion of the population (half) have a negative position (they have more liabilities and debts than they do assets).

Figure 1: Income and wealth shares in South Africa, 2021

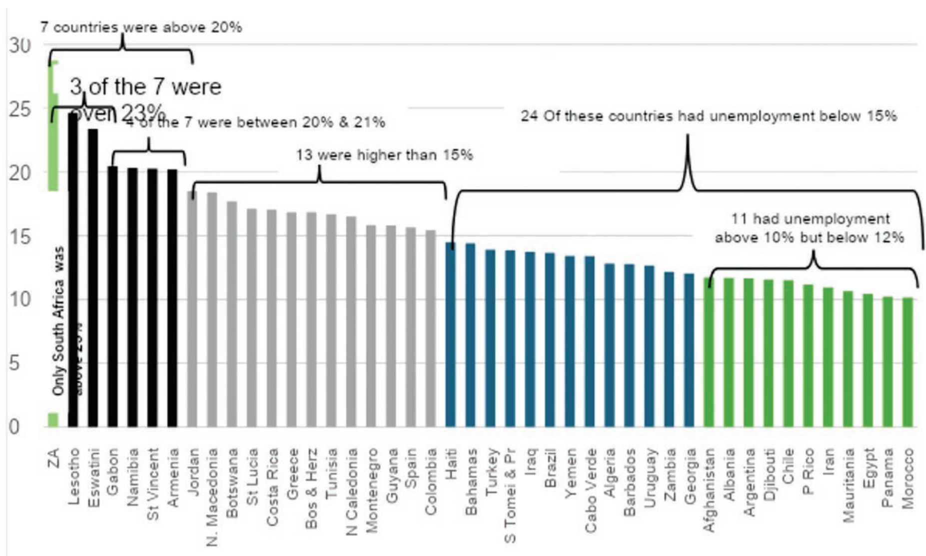


Source: Chancel *et al.* (2022)

We often hear that South Africa has the highest rates of inequality and unemployment in the world. Yet, what many South African policymakers do not comprehend is just how much of an outlier the country is compared to the other countries. In other words, they fail to understand the depth of the crisis which is considered abnormal anywhere else in the world. Therefore, their solutions do not work to solve the crisis. Instead, similar to the failure to act to alleviate the climate change crisis, policymakers seem willing to delay addressing the grave problem.

Gabriel Palma (2019, 23) classifies countries with a Palma ratio above four as having obscene inequality.[1] He calculated a Palma ratio for South Africa of over seven. There were only two other countries in the world with a Palma ratio above five in 2016 (Botswana at 5.9 and Namibia at 5.8).

Figure 2: Forty-four countries in the world with unemployment above 10% in 2020



Source: World Bank data source from Quantec

Figure 2 shows unemployment rates for the 44 countries that had unemployment above 10% in 2020. Twenty-four of the 44 countries had unemployment below 15% and 37 of the 44 had unemployment below 20%. Only South Africa had an unemployment rate over 25% (see extreme left of graph). The unemployment rate in South Africa in the first quarter of 2024 was around 32% (according to Stats SA, Quarterly Labour Force Survey). Unemployment and inequality are extremely damaging to societies, but South Africa's powerful institutions work together in perverse harmony to produce this obscene outcome. *The South African inequality machine works under the guise of democracy to make the wealthy even wealthier.* In 1993, the average per capita income for whites was ten times that of Africans, but by 2017 this had declined to six times (Shifa *et al.*, 2023).

Wikimedia Commons

Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) recognises the harmful effects of inequality. Their website's entry on inequality states, "While some inequality is inevitable in a market-based economic system as a result of differences in talent, effort, and luck, excessive inequality could erode social cohesion, lead to political polarization, and ultimately lower economic growth".[2] Palma's classification "obscene inequality" seems more apt for South Africa than the word "excessive".

Joseph Stiglitz, with reference to the US could well be speaking about post-apartheid South Africa when he says:

> Inequality is a choice, and by that I mean that it's not the inexorable result of economic forces, demand and supply, globalization. Some countries have shaped those forces and created a society with much lower levels of inequality than others. We've chosen, in effect, to create a society with this great divide between the rich and the poor, and increasingly over the last 30 years, a hollowing out of the middle.[3]

The choice that Stiglitz speaks about when governments and elites of large corporations choose inequality is of course neoliberalism. Stiglitz refers to rewriting of the rules, such as deregulating labour markets and weakening the power of workers, liberalisation of finance that has caused the financial sector to grow and to exploit the poor. He also refers to the government's *choice* not to effectively tax the rich. He harks back to

the "Golden Age" for developed countries after World War Two and says that if the rules were rewritten to change neoliberal policies, then there could be more equality and faster economic growth again. In Stiglitz (2024), he discusses how neoliberal economic ideology of unfettered markets has led to financial and inequality crises where a few people have amassed huge wealth while the incomes of most people have declined.

Neoliberalism, underpinned by financialisation in South Africa

In Fine and Mohamed (2023:22-23), we define neoliberalism as follows: "the transformation of the role of the state in the provision of welfare, social security, industrial development, the (de)regulation of trade, labour and finance and the reorientation of both domestic macroeconomic policies and global financial architectures". Moreover, we argue that "countries' structural economic transformation, including industrial development, should be analysed in light of the shift to the financialised phase of capitalism and its neoliberal practices, interests and ideologies".

Palma (2022: 27), in a discussion of neoliberalism and financialisation since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), defines financialisation as consisting of two aspects, one being the growth in size and dominance of the financial sector relative to the non-financial sector, and the other is the financialisation of non-financial corporations. Palma explains:

> The first relates to phenomenon such as the mounting power of the financial sector and its growing ability to capture policy, its ever-greater capacity to generate easy rents, and its increasing capacity to extract value generated by others. The second, meanwhile, relates to the switch of the composition of earnings in non-financial corporations from operating profits to financial rents, which – as Ricardo emphasised – is bound to have a negative impact on investment, technological absorption and productivity growth.

For Lazonick and O'Sullivan (2000:17) corporate governance in the US has shifted from "patient to impatient capital" where nonfinancial corporations, rather than "retain and reinvest" their profits in the capacity of labour and the capital stock of their subsidiaries, shift to an attitude of "downsize and distribute". Financialisation entails a focus of increasing returns to shareholders in the short-term. They are more likely to attempt to raise share prices through downsizing their workforce and buying back shares rather than to retain profits to reinvest in their workforce and subsidiary businesses. Crotty (2002) explains that companies are no longer treated as long-term businesses to nurture and grow but part of a portfolio of assets to be bought and sold to increase short-term returns for shareholders.

Palma (2022) makes the point that in developing and emerging economies (DEEs) the drive to financial liberalisation, the opening of capital accounts (for cross-border movement of capital) and financialisation was driven by domestic elites. He makes the point that in South Africa during the transition, similar to Chile after the 1973 coup,

the opening of capital markets was sacrosanct for the elites even at the cost of lower economic growth. He explains that:

> In Latin America and South Africa (Africa's honorary Latin American country), for example, no one pushed more for the full opening of the capital accounts than their rentier domestic elites seeking to generate a whole new source of easy rents – including acquiring the property right for capital flights.… In fact, this was a key component of South Africa's political settlement ending apartheid, even though the white elite did not have this right before. And they surely used it after the start of democracy! (2022:28).

He correctly points out that much of the Mandela government's approach to economic policy, particularly macroeconomic policy, had to be aligned with the corporate elites' demands for open capital markets. The opening of capital markets (liberating capital) meant that South Africa was forced to increase interest rates to try to keep domestic capital in the country. Higher interest rates, which are fatal for small business development, were required to attract capital from abroad, including inflows to replace the capital of those that shifted their primary listings abroad and through illicit capital flight.

Figure 3: Net foreign capital flows as percentages of GDP

Source: Authors' calculations on South African Reserve Bank data

The bulk of these capital inflows were volatile, destabilising short-term capital flows (hot money) and not foreign direct investment (FDI) (see figure 3). In fact, some of the periods when net FDI flows were positive occurred because of post-democracy offshore listings by South African corporations, where their domestic assets were reclassified as foreign-owned assets, and during financial crises. The domestic and international financiers and rentiers interested in harvesting easy rents on short-term capital flows would require South Africa to commit to low inflation to ensure that the real return on their financial assets within the country did not lose value. Financial assets make up the bulk of the assets of the top 0.1% in South Africa (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2021). Government rhetoric in favour of a smaller state and limiting the ability of government spending through austerity-minded fiscal policy would round off this neoliberal package.

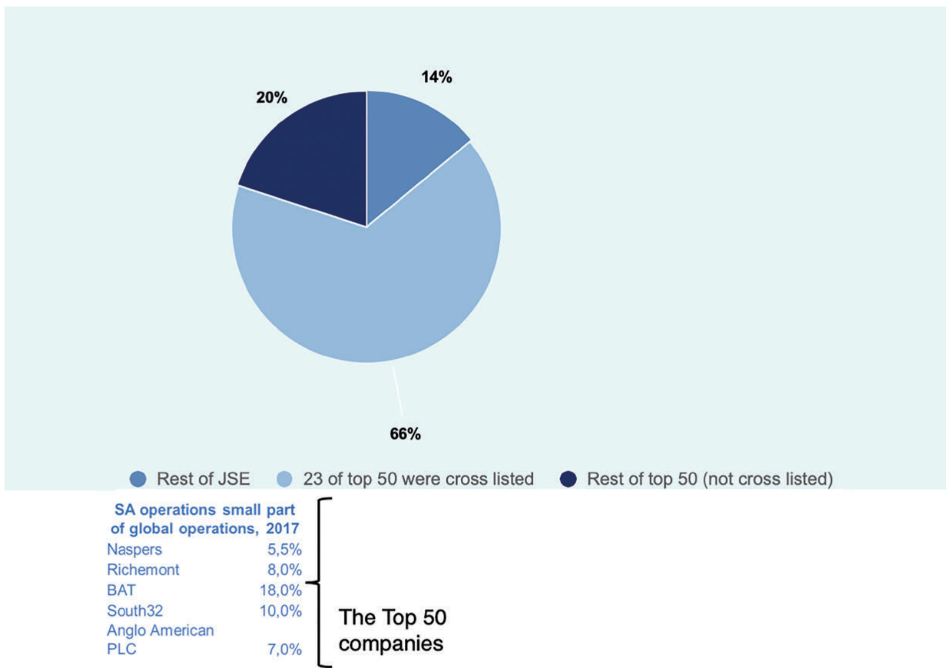
Unemployment and inequality are extremely damaging to societies, but South Africa's powerful institutions work together in perverse harmony to produce this obscene outcome.

This approach required that international finance become an arbiter over the definition of credible economic policy. It required Mandela's administration to show that the new government would be willing to stand up to 'populist' demands. This pressure from international finance at a time when legal and illicit flows had increased was possibly a motivation for the eradication of the Reconstruction and Development Plan office in the Presidency. The economic policy package adopted by the Government of National Unity (GNU) drew much on the (Derek) Keys Plan announced by the apartheid government in 1993, which was based on the government's neoclassical framework for growth, the Normative Economic Model. The overall economic package was eventually structured into the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR), which was introduced in 1996 and announced by the government to be non-negotiable.

The choice of the new democratic South African government to embrace neoliberalism was influenced by the elites of the large corporations during the transition. In Khan and Mohamed (2023), we argue that these corporate elites had become partners, empowered to develop market-oriented policies within the structures of PW Botha's total strategy. Business people, such as Derek Keys, were drawn from the large corporations into ministerial and senior government posts. The heads of large corporations, notably Harry Oppenheimer, spent much time convincing Mandela and the economics leadership of the ANC to implement neoliberal economic policies. Key economic ministries of the GNU were headed by a mix of these people from large corporations and the Nationalist Party (Khan and Mohamed, 2023).

The post-apartheid government with the ANC as the majority party had an electoral and historical mandate to address the many legacies of apartheid and transform society. They adopted the Reconstruction and Development Programme and later the National Development Plan and engaged in electrification, building schools and clinics and improving access to basic services, and equalising social grants. However, the neoliberal policy choices of the government have meant that the weight of neoliberalism in the domestic economy has overwhelmed the generally inadequate and self-defeating efforts of the government to address the legacy of apartheid.

Figure 4: JSE Top 50 & share of cross listed companies in top 50 in 2017



Source: Authors presentation of data in Bosiu *et al* (2017)

Neoliberal macroeconomic policies, including a high interest rate regime based on inflation targeting and austerity-minded fiscal policies, favoured financial rentiers and large corporations. These large corporations reduced their South African operations as a share of their overall operations (Bosiu *et al*., 2017) (see figure 4). They became increasingly financialised at the same time (see Mohamed, 2010, 2017). However, these policies hurt the real economy because they are associated with deindustrialisation and the increasing precariousness of employment for those who have been able to find and keep jobs.

At the same time, every sector of the South African economy has remained highly concentrated. The subsidiaries of the large corporations that restructured and listed offshore remain dominant. Mondliwa and Roberts (2019) explain that maintenance of long-term rights and regulatory access during the post-apartheid period explains why the subsidiaries of conglomerates that dominated the economy during the 1980s (and unbundled during the 1990s) continue to dominate most subsectors of the economy.

... in South Africa during the transition the opening of capital markets was sacrosanct for the elites even at the cost of lower economic growth.

A system of accumulation analyses of South Africa's economic problems

Fine (2019) and Fine and Mohamed (2023), argue the system of accumulation in South Africa has become a minerals-energy-finance complex (MEFC) to take account of the impact of financialisation globally. Accumulation within South Africa had been influenced by financialisation at a global level and within the domestic economy. The finance sector was an important part of the minerals-energy complex (MEC) that grew to support the development of the large corporations (Fine and Rustomjee, 1996). The highly concentrated character of the South African economy and the high level of concentration of wealth and inequality were shaped – not exclusively but very much so – by the MEC. By the 1980s, and during the transition from apartheid to democracy, a few large corporations controlled around 85% of the market capitalisation of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). In Mohamed (2020), I discuss the Anglo American Corporation (AAC), which had been a major force in shaping the MEC, a strong influence on the apartheid state and controlled around half of the market capitalisation of the JSE during the 1980s. During the 1990s, AAC and other large diversified conglomerates had embarked on a process of unbundling. Some moved their primary listings abroad and most of the other large corporations were cross-listed on other stock exchanges.

Palma (2022) describes what happens when large corporations of developing and emerging economies increase their integration into the global economy. They "are the ones leading the process of financialisation at home. They not only were the main agents engineering the domestic reforms that led to this new reality, but they are also the ones that have benefited most from it" (p.28).

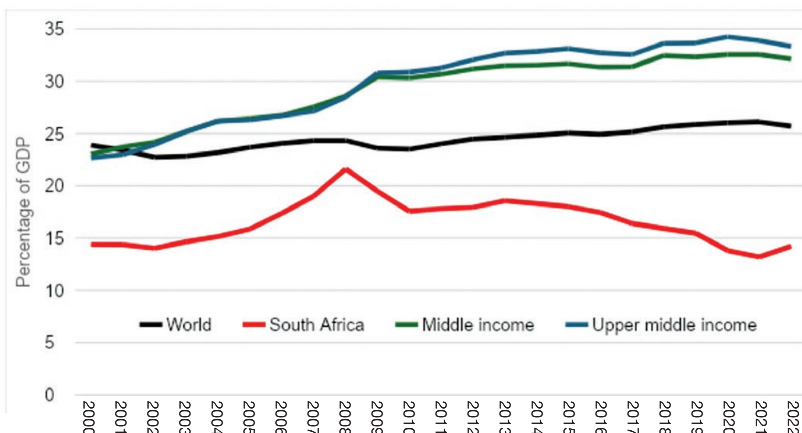
South Africa was not the only developing country to adopt neoliberal economic policies. But what has become clear from examining this process of neoliberalisation of countries that led to international financial subordination by DEEs, including South Africa, is that states became partners to the rent seeking activities of the large corporation (Alami *et al.*, 2021). The South African government gave up its ability to

adequately regulate and discipline the large dominant corporations and thus subjected themselves to the discipline of large corporations and credit ratings agencies.

For pragmatic and/or ideological reasons the government of South Africa chose not to pursue a developmental state path. The government supported financialisation through liberalising domestic financial markets and capital controls. They did not try to correct the misallocation of capital within the South African economy. They liberalised capital controls and chose not to make much effort to curb large-scale capital flight, both legal and illegal. In fact, the government provided two amnesties, in 2004 and 2010, to residents who held money abroad illegally (Ashman et al., 2011). The loss of political will to regulate and control finance seems to have reached such a low that South Africa was grey listed in 2023 by the global intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force for non-compliance with its recommendations against money laundering, terrorist financing and the financing of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In Mohamed (2017), I discuss the theoretical and empirical literature that shows that misallocation of capital because of financialisation is associated with lower levels of investment, particularly in productive economic sectors, and directs more money to speculation in financial and real estate markets.

Figure 5 shows that levels of accumulation in the South African economy have been low compared to global averages for the world, middle and lower middle-income countries. South Africa has not been able to achieve adequate investment levels of over 25% of GDP even during the period 2003 to 2008 when credit extension to the private sector increased by around 22% of GDP. During that period gross fixed capital formation (investment) by private enterprises increased by only 4% of GDP (Mohamed, 2017). It is also clear that most of the investment has gone into services sectors and not productive sectors of the economy. Zalk (2021:32-33) argues that claims that low corporate profits are the cause of low investment in South Africa are incorrect.

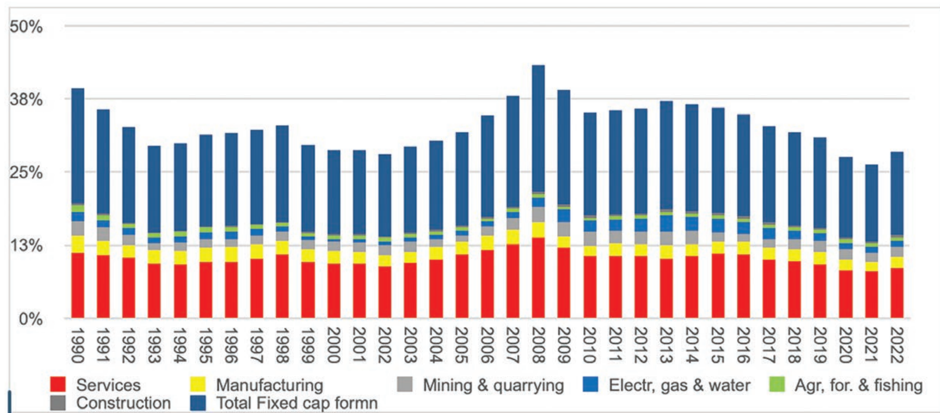
Figure 5: Gross fixed capital formation as a percentage of gross domestic product



Source: World Bank World Development Indicators

It is generally recognised that the manufacturing sector, particularly downstream value-added manufacturing subsectors with strong linkages to other economic sectors, remains the engine of industrial development and economic growth within an economy. While the manufacturing sector does not usually employ the largest share of people in an economy, the dynamism, size and variety of manufacturing activity in an economy has an important influence over the types of services subsectors and services sector jobs in an economy. A large productive sector will generally induce and support the growth of productive services sector businesses and jobs.

Figure 6: Gross fixed capital formation by sector as percentages of GDP



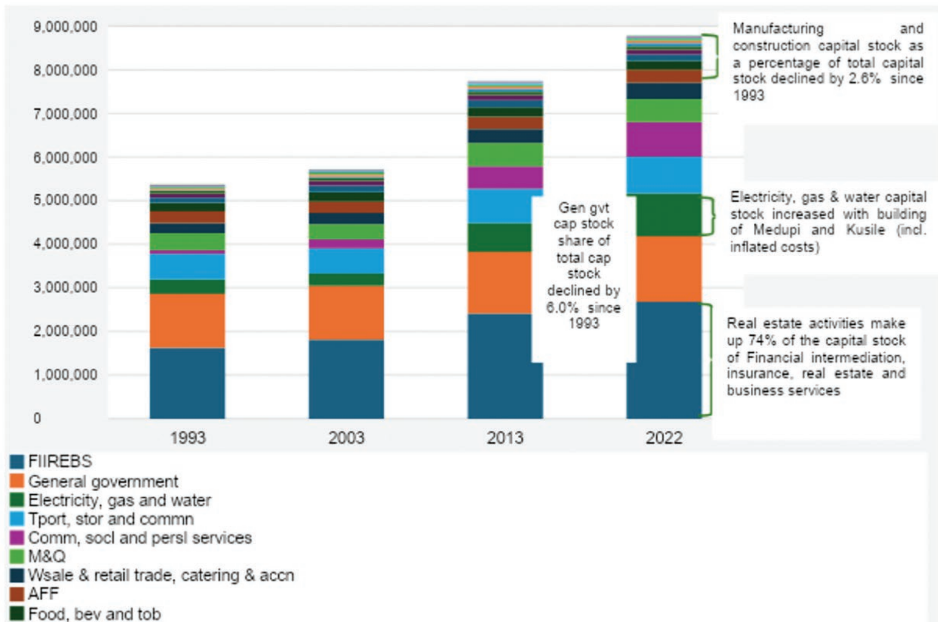
Source: Author's calculations on Quantec's South African Industry Indicators

The industrial structure that developed within the MEC system of accumulation in South Africa was relatively undiversified and consisted mostly of capital and energy intensive, low value-added processing activities with strong linkages to the mining sector. This situation has not changed but the share of manufacturing value added in GDP has shrunk while that of services has grown. Industrial and economic development is path dependent. The economic structure is shaped by investment and skills development (amongst other activities) over a long period. Since 1994, the large corporations that have dominated the markets of the economy have increased operations and shifted capital abroad. They have financialised and not allocated capital towards manufacturing.

According to Quantec's Industry Indicators, employment in manufacturing declined from about 1.8 million in 1993 to 1.4 million in 2022. Employment in services was seven million in 1993 and 11 million in 2022. The decline in manufacturing investment means that most services jobs are not in productive services sectors linked to manufacturing. A total of 78% of services jobs in 2022 were in three services subsectors, community, social and personal service (31%), wholesale and retail trade services (26%) and business services (21%). Most of these jobs, including business services, were outsourced cleaning

services and private security services, which have been growth industries and are generally precarious (informal, casualised and outsourced). Therefore, South Africa is not well placed to take advantage of possibilities for skills development and the application of the fourth industrial revolution and advances in artificial intelligence in the productive sectors of the economy.

Figure 7: Real levels of capital stock for all economic sectors (R millions, 2015=100)



Source: Quantec

Because economies are path dependent it is important to examine the changes in capital stock for different economic sectors. Changes in capital stock provide insight into the economic growth path and a sense of where future economic activity can occur. Figure 7 shows that the largest capital stock growth was in the finance, intermediation, insurance, real estate and business services sector (FIIREBS). While the financial services subsector's value-added contribution to GDP has grown and the business services subsector has had increased employment, most capital stock in the FIIREBS sector (around 73% in 1993 and 74% in 2022) was in real estate activities. Real estate and finance are two sectors where misallocation of capital in the economy towards speculation has grown as the economy has become financialised.

Clearly low levels of investment and low levels of capital stock indicate that manufacturing (the engine of economic growth) activity cannot increase much for a long while. The government will need more than industrial policy to grow manufacturing.

It will have to address market concentration and the allocation of capital by the large corporations, particularly those in the financial sector. Development finance will have to be greatly enhanced. At a macroeconomic policy level, the damaging impact of inflation targeting will have to be reconsidered because of its deleterious impact on investment and aggregate demand. Monetary policy dominance will have to be reversed and made to accommodate expansionary fiscal policy. Austerity mindsets will have to change and fiscal policy that adequately supports industrialisation and reduces household poverty to boost aggregate demand is required.

> ...neoliberalism in the domestic economy has overwhelmed the generally inadequate and self-defeating efforts of the government to address the legacy of apartheid.

In other words, the government will have to recognise that redistribution and a developmental role for the state is essential. An active government role in improving the wellbeing and increasing incomes for the majority of households will be crucial for productivity growth and to create the domestic demand and markets for manufactured goods and productive services. Without an inclusive developmental vision, the South African economy will continue to languish with the current high UPI and stagnant, near recession levels of economic growth.

Conclusion

The question addressed by this article is how to explain the poor economic performance of the South African economy since the end of apartheid. A central thesis of this article is that the economic failures of the post-apartheid government – by choosing to adopt neoliberal economic policies and not taking on a developmental state role – facilitated the large dominant corporations in denuding, deindustrialising and financialising the economy. As Palma (2022) discusses, neoliberalism has allowed the corporate elites to pursue high short-term returns through misallocating capital from productive sectors towards speculation and "lazy" rent-seeking activities.

It is important to understand that the South African government's neoliberal choices have led them not only to utilise but also to build capacity and support the hegemony of mainstream neoliberal and neoclassical economics in government, universities and thinktanks. It is not hyperbole to argue that the mainstream, orthodox neoclassical analytical and theoretical approach to understanding, policymaking and managing the South African economy has been an essential contributor to exacerbating the unemployment, poverty and inequality crises and other economic failures during the post-apartheid era. Neoclassical economics has been used to develop, support and justify neoliberal economic policies. The mainstream macroeconomics flawed perspective

is that governments cannot use macroeconomic policies to stimulate or promote economic growth. Monetarist theory warns that government attempts to stimulate and grow the economy will not lead to growth but will cause inflation. The new classical macroeconomics approach within the neoclassical theory is based on rational expectations where any attempts by the government to intervene in the economy will be ineffective because the government's actions would have been expected by rational agents whose response to these expectations would neutralise the government's interventions. These disproven approaches advocate removing macroeconomic policy choices from sovereign, democratically elected governments. They favour inflation targets, independent central banks and fiscal rules (in pursuit of government budget surpluses). Their fear is that governments will pursue inclusive economic policies, which the orthodox economists describe as populist, to address poverty and to stimulate the economy during times of crisis.

The South African government's macroeconomics policies have failed the economy since 1994. Their austerity mindset led to a policy of fiscal consolidation since 2012. This austerity has contributed to real GDP per capita declining since 2013 (to a level lower than it was in 2007). Notwithstanding these glaring failures, the National Treasury (NT) has led the government in arguing that macroeconomic policy is sound. They say that all that is required to improve economic growth are microeconomic, supply-side structural reforms. The solutions offered by the NT's 2019 document to promote economic growth in South Africa are:

- fixing network industries,
- reducing red tape,
- increasing labour market deregulation for flexibility;
- use of competition policy to increase competition, and
- a mention of industrial policy (without explaining how it would be implemented).

The government's definition of structural economic concerns has deliberately been interpreted in a narrow sense where the problems are identified as related to government actions and regulations, red tape and worker organisation. The government chooses to identify and blame problems in Eskom and Transnet, corruption and state capture for the poor performance of the economy. No doubt these problems have exacerbated the poor economic performance of the economy but these problems seem to be the consequences of the deeper structural problems that have crippled the economy since 1994.

The government's structural reforms are based on a simplistic calculus that actions within certain sectors and reducing red tape will cumulatively add several points to GDP growth over time. They do not aim to transform the structure of the economy but aim to improve conditions for business and to reduce their costs. In other words, the structural reforms – if surprisingly they were to work – are meant to improve business conditions and lower operating costs for existing financialised large corporations that dominate the highly concentrated South African economy. Their ahistorical orthodox economics that does not consider institutions and economic structure has led them to a solution for the South African economy that supports and further empowers the financialised, lazy,

rent-seeking large corporations. They do not seem to want to understand that growing unemployment, poor investment and derisory levels of accumulation of capital stock since the 1990s are strongly associated with the behaviour and choices of these large corporations. These policies clearly benefit the minority in society who actively defend, normalise and promote inequality. This ignorance contract is widely promoted by political parties and some scholars and is in part facilitated by the spatial insulation of elites in suburbs. It persists with the myth that South Africa is not in a deep crisis, that democracy and the state still work and that all we need to do is get back to a "capable" state of the kind we saw before 2008, create more precarious jobs and stabilise our party-system.

Palma (2022) reminds us that the international and domestic elites have fought for implementation of neoliberal economic policies and he says they "played a crucial role in transforming neoliberal ideology into a hegemonic paradigm". This neoliberal (and often violent) hegemonic transformation is associated with the 'Chicago Boys', which was a group of economists trained by Milton Friedman and others in the neoclassical economics department at the University of Chicago. The Chicago Boys took up positions in the governments of the Chilean military dictatorship and in other South American countries.

Unfortunately, almost 50 years since the Chilean coup and 40 years since the imposition of structural adjustment programmes, the South African government (supported by elites of large corporations) ignore the lessons of history and are still pursuing damaging neoliberal economic policies that impose an unprecedented degree of suffering on the majority of South Africans. NA93

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ENDNOTES

1. The Palma ratio measures inequality by dividing the income of the top 10 percentile by the income of the bottom 40%.
2. See https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/Inequality/introduction-to-inequality (accessed 25 April 2024).
3. See https://www.fordfoundation.org/news-and-stories/big-ideas/inequalityis/joseph-stiglitz-on-inequality-and-economic-growth/ (accessed 25 April 2024).

Corporate corruption of South African politics and economics

'Accumulation by dispossession' as a structural process, beyond 'state capture'

- By Patrick Bond

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South Africa's ranking in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index suggests the government is not as corrupt as public opinion suggests. In this article PATRICK BOND emphasises the need for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the problem and turns his attention to what he sees as the more pervasive threat posed by corporate corruption, underpinned as it is by its long history of colonial exploitation and dispossession.

Introduction: Narratives and silences

In South Africa, the typical analysis of corruption is limited to blaming individual political leaders or managers of state departments and parastatal corporations. Secondarily, citizens regularly complain about petty forms of graft by lower-level bureaucrats. How serious are such forms of graft? How might we understand the problem in deeper terms, in relation to South Africa's economic history? And how do not only state-society, but state-market-society forms of corruption operate? Indeed, how far does so-called 'state capture' extend beyond the usual suspects: syndicates such as the Gupta brothers who operated from 2008-17, or the Watson brothers' Bosasa state-outsourcing operation through the 2000s-2010s, or the Shaik brothers who, via late-1990s Arms Deals operations involving a French firm prone to bribery, first implicated Jacob Zuma as corrupt, to the extent he was fired as Thabo Mbeki's Deputy President in 2005?

Corruption Perception Index ranking of South Africa, 1996-2023 (least corrupt out of 180 states)

Source: https://tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/corruption-rank

It transpires that the South African state is relatively mediocre in the best-known Corruption Perception Index ranking of 180 countries' administrations (including politicians), compiled by Berlin-based Transparency International (TI). The TI (2024) Index measures "bribery; diversion of public funds; officials using their public office for private gain without facing consequences; ability of governments to contain corruption in the public sector; excessive red tape in the public sector which may increase opportunities for corruption; nepotistic appointments in the civil service; laws ensuring that public officials must disclose their finances and potential conflicts of interest; legal protection for people who report cases of bribery and corruption; state capture by narrow vested interests; access to information on public affairs/government activities."

South Africa's 2023 ranking is 83rd least corrupt or 97th most corrupt.

South African governance is by this measure far cleaner than is typically acknowledged by society. In 2023, polling by TI (2024) recorded 64% of the population "who thought corruption increased in the previous 12 months," with 18% of public service users acknowledging they "paid a bribe in the previous 12 months." This degree of state graft is certainly worse than in the mid-1990s, when just after apartheid ended South Africa's rank was 23rd least corrupt. The sharp 2021-23 degradation in rankings from 69th to 83rd least corrupt state probably reflected not only high-profile Covid-19 procurement fraud, but current president Cyril Ramaphosa's own recent scandal in which US dollars were illicitly hidden in a couch at one of his residences.

In SA, the typical analysis of corruption is limited to blaming individual political leaders or managers of state departments and parastatals.

But this article contends that if TI is correct, the South African state suffers a relatively minor level of such corruption, compared to the corporate economy's far deeper and more pervasive strain of capitalist "accumulation by dispossession". That term, signifying outright theft (instead of "accumulation by exploitation" through capital-labour relations at the point of production in the workplace), was coined by David Harvey (2003), based on a revival of the work of the first Marxist political economist writing about South Africa, Rosa Luxemburg. In 1913, her *Accumulation of Capital* included the observation that imperialism reflected capitalism periodically suffering overproduction crises, requiring expansion to new territories (what many term 'globalisation'), and in that process, increasing contact with the non-capitalist spheres of the world.

Luxemburg drew extensively on secondary sources: writings about how South Africa's earliest corporations were plying their trade, suffused with their desire and capacity to carry out systemic theft, dating to the Portuguese, Dutch and British colonialists. Capital's interactions with non-capitalist society and nature is the appropriate way to frame the worst tendencies of corporate graft, as described in the next section. To illustrate those interactions, at least four factors that are missing from mainstream economists' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measurements reveal aspects of accumulation by dispossession: migrant labour systems that amplify the importance of unpaid labour by women (who typically live in distant ex-Bantustans or even the wider Southern African region, in contrast to social reproduction within urban areas where super-exploitative relations are more difficult to sustain), and three aspects of environmental degradation: local pollution, global-scale greenhouse gas emissions and uncompensated depletion of non-renewable wealth (Bond, 2021).

Yet today, the private sector is usually mentioned as “corrupt” in narrow ways, for example according to Kenneth Brown, who was Treasury’s leading procurement officer until 2017, the average state contract entails illegitimate price mark-ups of 35-40% (Mkokeli, 2016). In addition, consciousness has recently been raised about *white* South Africa’s propensity to corporate financial fraud thanks to the March 2024 firearm suicide of Markus Jooste, the Stellenbosch-based chief executive who caused Steinhoff’s collapse (Wiener, 2024). Two other white tycoons appeared to have died through assisted suicides – Brett Kebble in 2005 and Gavin Watson in 2019 – after corruption charges became unavoidable. Jooste’s death occurred on the eve of long-overdue state prosecution for looting an international retail network, thanks to graft costing more than $15 billion. When discovered in late 2017, the firm’s crash stunned stock markets and resulted in liquidation six years later. Another bankruptcy that resulted from accounting fraud was KwaZulu-Natal sugar and real estate firm Tongaat Hulett. In 2019, chief executive Peter Staude and a half-dozen other officials – nearly all white – were exposed, and two subsequent revelations of graft included two dubious firms attempting a business rescue.

In February 2023, there was also the high-profile ‘grey listing’ of South Africa by the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a network associated with the main Western imperialist powers’ policing of the global economy (especially in the wake of the 2001 airplane hijacking that spurred greater scrutiny of radical Islamic financial circuits). The FATF (2023) revealed the systemic character of banking-sector crime in South Africa, as did, simultaneously, the *Al Jazeera* (2023) ‘Gold Mafia’ report (mainly about Zimbabwe but also implicating major Johannesburg banks whose staff facilitated the graft, namely Absa, Standard Bank and Sasfin).

Society’s suspicions about international finance were again confirmed during South Africa’s high-profile 2023-24 prosecution of local and foreign banks for currency manipulation (a decade late) (Wasserman, 2023). It was a rare moment for judicial action (Competition Tribunal, 2023), no matter the Competition Commission’s apparently flawed inclusion of too many banks, as pointed out by Judge Dennis Davis (2024) in a case still to be heard at the Constitutional Court (Bond, 2024a).

Tellingly, financial regulators from both Treasury and the Reserve Bank – the latter owned by the very banks engaged in prolific illegal acts – had not only denied currency manipulation (Phakathi, 2019) but also ignored FATF warnings dating from 2019 until late in 2022, when three new laws were hurriedly passed and regulatory procedures tightened – but to no avail, as the grey listing was still imposed. And after all, Treasury’s Financial Intelligence Centre had estimated in 2019 annual costs of illicit financial flows to the economy already ranged from 3% to 7% of GDP (Planting, 2019).

In an even broader context, beyond these high-profile cases, consider what is termed private sector “economic crime and fraud” – i.e. corporate corruption – by international consultancy PwC (2020), sponsor of a biannual survey during the 2010s. This category of capital accumulation, typically facilitated by governments turning a blind eye (or indeed even codifying systemic underpayment for natural resource extraction and pollution, is still too rarely mentioned in popular accounts of state capture. Corruption Watch (CW), for example, regularly ignores systemic exploitation and super-exploitation of labour

(i.e. meaning that the wage that is paid to workers is below their social cost of reproduction, especially in migrant labour systems reliant upon women's unpaid caregiving). CW never remarks upon the uncompensated depletion of non-renewable resources (especially minerals) or wanton pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Instead, CW's (2022:1-2) " [a]nalysis of Corruption Trends" merely reports that from its consumer complaints line, "in the private sector the most commonly found corruption types are fraud (56%) and maladministration (25%), which relates more to compliance," and that "[c]orruption straddles the public and private sectors and in the period under review, 62% and 25% of corruption cases are attributed to each respectively" – as if the broader system of South African capitalism's relations with the non-capitalist spheres is otherwise unobjectionable, not worthy of systemic treatment. Likewise a new project in mid-2024, "State Capture and Beyond," was launched by the Legal Resources Centre and Human Rights Media Trust, without mention of corporate and financial crimes or even of inadequate state regulation (*NewzroomAfrika*, 2024).

This category [corporate corruption] of capital accumulation ... is still too rarely mentioned in popular accounts of state capture.

Part of the problem is that nearly all incidents of private-sector corruption are typically understood as stemming from greedy *individuals* and small-scale syndicates, not as a systematic problem – accumulation by dispossession – that appears to have become much worse during the era of neoliberalism (given that other stages of South African capitalism included much stronger regulatory apparatuses and a different ethos, e.g. Afrikaners' 1930s-80s *Volskapitalisme)*.

Of course, there are many other micro incidents of dispossession that receive news coverage. For example, as the 2023 *Africa Organised Crime Index* pointed out, South Africa "has seen increased instances of kidnap for ransom and extortion that has halted billion-dollar construction projects. Moreover, in 2022, South Africa experienced a record number of mass shootings, all attributed to protection rackets in the liquor and nightlife industries" (Enact, 2023: 61; Dolly, 2019). The "construction mafia" has reportedly shaken down building firms in more than 180 projects (Irish-Qhobosheane, 2022).

But in search of broader analysis, there are only rare exceptions, e.g. when Hennie van Vuuren and Michael Marchant (2023:201) argue (based mainly on critique of military-oriented capitalists) that "[u]ntil grand corruption is understood as continuity, there is little hope of tackling it. In the form of state capture, the economic crime that today confronts the country primarily results from failure to dismantle the criminal networks that profited from apartheid. Not only have actors in these networks continued to profit, but they have undermined any attempts to hold them to account." In the same

volume, editors Mbongiseni Buthelezi and Peter Vale (2023: 8) correctly blame "*the continuity of a strain of capitalism* that characterised apartheid". So too do Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh (2023) and Ryan Brunette (2023) seek to identify segues not breaks between apartheid-era and post-apartheid capitalism. But these writers do not develop the idea in the direction it might logically proceed: the theory pioneered by Luxemburg and Harold Wolpe (1972) to describe the "articulations" of two modes of production, the capitalist and pre-capitalist, especially with the historical sensitivity that Ben Magubane (2001) brings to the race-class debate, so that capital accumulation by dispossession is better understood – and then better combatted (as discussed in the conclusion).

Strains of South African capitalist accumulation by dispossession

To reiterate, there is a widespread belief in society that South African private-sector economic activity is generally clean, and corruption is essentially state-centered, which often contributes to pressure for outsourcing, corporatisation, commercialisation and privatisation, especially as the state retreats from areas such as service provision and infrastructure (Ruiters & Bond, 2023). Yet dating to the earliest epoch of profit as the incentive structure for the South African economy, the opposite has been more true.

In *Accumulation of Capital*, Luxemburg included a chapter in which she explored the way South African mining houses utilised the power that capitalist enterprise wielded against pre-capitalist relations, and how multifaceted resistance emerged. As Luxemburg (1913) concluded, "[n]on-capitalist relations provide a fertile soil for capitalism; more strictly: capital feeds on the ruins of such relations, and although this non-capitalist milieu is indispensable for accumulation, the latter proceeds at the cost of this medium nevertheless, by eating it up." That era's anti-imperialist political economists and social commentators were already documenting super-exploitation, including Sol Plaatje, Olive Schreiner and John Hobson. But Luxemburg's theorisation – applying Marx's understanding of capitalist crisis (based on overproduction tendencies) to the first era of corporate-dominated but colonial-managed globalisation – provided indicators of the articulation of the two modes of production. These have illuminated micro-economic, social and environmental features of extreme uneven development, where race, gender and socio-ecological power relations are all abused for the sake of earning super-profits (Bond, 2021). Likewise, Samir Amin's long career did much the same, especially in his scathing assessments of how South African racial capitalism evolved from his first analysis in 1972 (when he termed South Africa 'imperialist'), through and beyond 1994 (Bond, 2023b). In his autobiography, published posthumously, Amin (2019, 178) charged the post-apartheid government with amplifying these tendencies: "Nothing has changed. South Africa's sub-imperialist role has been reinforced, still dominated as it is by the Anglo-American mining monopolies."

Shortly after Wolpe's (unacknowledged) rediscovery of Luxemburg's capitalist/non-capitalist surplus drain as the articulation of modes of production, the term racial capitalism emerged, in the same spirit but aimed at replacing the South African Communist Party's two-stagist framing known as "colonialism of a special type" (first end racism, *and then later end capitalism*). Studying multinational corporations during

the height of apartheid, Martin Legassick and David Hemson (1976) introduced the idea of racial capitalism to argue for a one-stage revolution overthrowing both apartheid and capitalism simultaneously.

South African governance is ... far cleaner than is typically acknowledged by society.

In contrast, Magubane (2001) put the South African history of *evolving* (not fixed) race-class relations into historical perspective, as he explored several waves of what is now called Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The era of slavery – and also indigenous people's social resistance – was initiated in 1488 at the hands of Portuguese explorers Bartolomeu Dias and Vasco da Gama, followed by the first durable FDI: the Dutch East India Company's Cape Town settler-colonialism in 1652 led by Jan van Riebeeck. His objective was not the enslavement of indigenous people, but their *extermination*, so he could squat the valuable agricultural-provisioning land for mercantile capitalists.

Diamonds were discovered in Kimberley in the 1870s and De Beers was consolidated by Cecil John Rhodes, who required a different kind of race-class power: coerced migrant labour. His racial capitalism was, hence, aimed at "civilising" the workers in inhuman hostels using hut taxes, as novelist Anthony Trollope approvingly remarked (Magubane, 2001). In 1886, the world's largest gold seam was found in what became Johannesburg, and the world's deepest digs were ultimately dominated by Ernest Oppenheimer's and New York banker JP Morgan's Anglo-American Corporation. In 1890, meanwhile, Rhodes' British South Africa Company won City of London backing and further FDI promises, to initiate "Cape to Cairo" sub-imperialism.

These diverse forms of accumulation by dispossession – between the capitalist and the non-capitalist spheres of life – had thus progressed, although remaining firmly within white power's grip, first, over the black body (slavery followed by indentured labour and migrant labour coercion); second, over land (settler colonialism); and third, over non-renewable natural resources (often termed "extractivism") and associated despoliation of the air, water and soil. The 20th century witnessed transnational capital stitching these strains of accumulation together as a systematic form of corporate plunder. Following the British troops' defeat of the Dutch-descendent Afrikaners in 1901 and the fusion of white voter interests against black South Africa, formal national status was granted in 1910. With the Land Act of 1913, extreme uneven geographical development was cemented along racial lines, a process endorsed by European colonial powers and the US, who required access to cheap gold, chrome and other metals and minerals.

The most succinct explanation drawing together class, race, gender and ecological degradation associated with South African racial capitalism, comes from the Chamber of Mines in this oft-quoted defence of super-exploitative migrant labour: "the mines are able to obtain unskilled labour at a rate less than ordinarily paid in industry … otherwise the subsidiary means of subsistence would disappear and the labourer would tend to become a permanent resident upon the Witwatersrand, with increased requirements"

(cited in Wolpe, 1972). From reliance upon coal-fired power, was a set of impressive backward-forward linkages that distorted South Africa ever since, under the rubric of "uneven and combined development" (Ashman, 2023; Baran, 2024).

While mining remained the central determinant of race-class relations, uneven *sectoral* development emerged in the 1930s-40s, when black manufacturing workers were hired to serve the booming import-substitution industrialisation process (resulting from the decline of trade due to the global Depression and World War Two). But instead of durable delinking from a chaotic global economy, the assimilation of South Africa as one of US imperialism's most reliable sub-imperial allies occurred in 1944 in the Bretton Woods Agreement. (At the time, nearly half the world's gold was to be found more than a kilometre deep underneath Johannesburg and a similar amount was underneath Fort Knox.) The two creditor states' agreement on the $35/ounce peg (until the Nixon Administration's 1971 default) confirmed a system of US monetary hegemony that remains to this day – in spite of ever more fruitless 'de-dollarisation' rhetoric from the BRICS+ network (Battista, 2023).

A group of scholars at Johns Hopkins University associated with Giovanni Arrighi identified various dialectical contradictions within the late 20th century system of accumulation by dispossession that caused apartheid's downfall (Arrighi *et al.,* 2010). But corporate profitability resumed with a new financially-liberated, neoliberal regime of accumulation (Bond & Malikane, 2019), e.g. with the historic wealth of the country disappearing to London and New York in 1999-2001 when Anglo American Corporation, De Beers, Old Mutual, SA Breweries, Sasol, Mondi, Investec, Didata and other firms established overseas stock market listings with Mandela-Mbeki's permission (Bond, 2014).

Comparative contemporary state and corporate graft

For those following Buthelezi and Vale (2023:8), a concern for "*the continuity of a strain of capitalism* that characterised apartheid" should lead to a richer assessment of how corruption became so ubiquitous in South Africa. When it comes to state graft, there are more detailed perspectives available than in TI's first-cut surveying. The NGO Corruption Risk (2023) complained, "[a] sound system of monitoring assets and conflict of interest of public officials would have avoided a scandal like the 2022 theft of a large amount of money hidden in the residence of President Cyril Ramaphosa" (Corruption Risk, 2023). Ramaphosa's most famous scandal, in 2012, was unveiled in the Farlam Commission: the main role in Lonmin's financial capital flight to Bermuda (Alternative Information and Development Centre, 2014). Questions have often been raised about his close connections to Glencore's Ivan Glasenberg, given that the world's largest commodity trader was fined $1.5 billion in 2022 for corrupting African states (15% of the company's pretax profit the year before), which as Tim Cohen (2022) pointed out, "is, in all honesty, a parking ticket" – and there was no investigation of Johannesburg-born Glasenberg's profitable role in South Africa.

But Glencore is the tip of the iceberg. As noted above, during the 2010s the PwC "economic crime and fraud" reports revealed that South Africa's corporations were considered worst in the world in general and – in the 2014 survey – also in the categories of money laundering, bribery and corruption, procurement fraud, asset misappropriation and cybercrime (Hosken, 2014). In the 2018 PwC survey, the runners-up were Kenya, France and Russia. In 2020, Indian corporations were considered most corrupt, and China tied for second with South Africa, closely followed by firms from Kenya, the US and UK (PwC, 2020).

PwC index of economic crime and fraud, 2020 and 2018

Top 10 countries reporting most economic crime

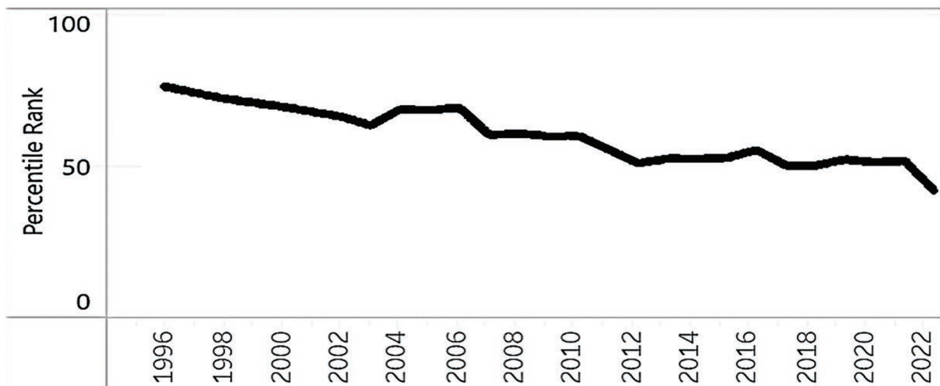
Q: Has your organisation experienced any fraud and/or economic crime within the last 24 months?

	2020	2018
India	69%	57%
China	60%	63%
South Africa	60%	77%
Kenya	58%	75%
United States	56%	53%
United Kingdom	56%	50%
Uganda	54%	66%
Mexico	53%	58%
France	53%	71%
Ireland	51%	49%

Source: https://www.pwc.co.za/en/press-room/global-economic-crime-and-fraud-survey-2020.html

A more balanced accounting is even attempted by the World Bank, Natural Resource Governance Institute and Brookings Institution (2024, citing Kaufmann *et al.*, 2010). Their "Control of Corruption" assessment "captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as 'capture' of the state by elites and private interests". From 1996-2022, South Africa's mean percentile rank fell from 76th to 45th with the most dramatic decline occurring between 2021-22.

South Africa's "Control of Corruption" ranking: percentile, 1996-2022



Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/CC.PER.RNK?locations=ZA

Help from Washington (!)

In spite of Washington and New York being two of the core managerial sites for corporate-led Western imperialism, the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) and other anti-graft legislation have been deployed against South African corporations. US officials have been far more aggressive than South African counterpart prosecutors in cases such as Hitachi's 2007 bribery of the ANC via its Chancellor House investment wing, which was successfully prosecuted under the FCPA in 2015 (insofar as the Tokyo firm paid a fine), and New York State's mid-2010s attack on some of the world's largest banks for currency manipulation involving the Rand.

The Hitachi incident not only adversely affected Eskom's Medupi and Kusile coal-fired power plants – leaving the economy without sufficient energy and hence destructive load-shedding for many years, as well as more than 50 megatonnes of additional CO_2 emissions (a tenth of the entire economy's greenhouse gas pollution) and thousands of deaths because former Eskom CEO Andre de Ruyter refused to install pollution-reduction scrubbers on Eskom's coal-fired power plants – but represented the country's single most damaging case of corporate corruption in simple monetary terms.

As de Ruyter (2023, 35) put it in his *Truth to Power* exposé, Medupi and Kusile "were way over budget, they weren't on schedule, and they performed well below their specifications, thereby failing all three project management tests. The project to add new

generation capacity was just a miserable failure." In part, de Ruyter blames "ANC deployees close to the [Eskom] board" who informed Chancellor House that the initial discussions with the successful bidder, Alstom, were not going well. It's fair to assume that this information was then also relayed, via Chancellor House, to top Hitachi officials. At a meeting at O.R. Tambo International Airport in September 2007, Klaus-Dieter Rennert, a senior executive at Hitachi Power Europe, urged Chancellor House chair Professor Taole Mokoena to apply pressure on Eskom to reopen the tender process. The chairperson of the Eskom board at that stage was Mohammed Valli Moosa.

'South Africa's sub-imperialist role has been reinforced, still dominated as it is by the Anglo-American mining monopolies.' – Samir Amin

The Hitachi contracts were won after a suspicious reconfiguration of the tender, which the firm then failed to properly provide and install, e.g. requiring 7,000 welding repairs. A *News24* investigation based on US Securities and Exchange Commission documents revealed in early 2023 that according to a Hitachi memo, Mokoena "has good connections within Eskom. Dr Mokoena is personal friends with Mr Valli Moosa (chairman) and Mr Tulane Gcabashe [sic] (CEO)." US prosecutors concluded that, according to *News24*, Hitachi was introduced to Chancellor House "and ultimately decided to work with them not for any technical expertise, labour force or infrastructure, but for the influence wielded by the companies" (Cowan, 2023).

A smoking-gun memo was found by US authorities: according to a Hitachi executive in a 2010 email, "[w]hen we adopted [Chancellor House] at the time of [Hitachi Power Africa's] establishment, we took ANC influence into consideration and still we believed it was a right decision" (England, 2015). As Eskom chair from 2005-08, Moosa was a key decision-maker. In 2015, *Mail & Guardian* reporters complained, "[f]or nearly a decade, the South African branch of Japanese giant Hitachi lied, obfuscated and denied. And other than a minor slap on the wrist for ANC stalwart Valli Moosa, neither Hitachi nor the ANC or its funding front Chancellor House suffered any repercussions" (De Wet and Mataboge, 2015).

South African society, environment and economy did suffer enormously, though, as breakdowns at the early units were prolific. Yet even after Hitachi paid $19 million to the *US government* as a fine in 2014, the 2018-22 Zondo Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Chipkin and Swilling (2018), Buthelezi and Vale (2023) and many other commentators forgot about this case, perhaps mistakenly assuming the corruption problem really only became severe once Zuma took office. The missing case of Hitachi and its facilitators – including Moosa, who in the early 2020s headed the Presidential Climate Commission and Mokoena who in 2023 was named South Africa's Health Ombud – remains an appalling gap.

Conclusion: Against corporate economic crime and plunder

The problems identified above are not only local in nature, but also reflect lack of will in hot money centres and global corporate headquarters.

But local conditions are dire, given how readily ANC leaders led by Ramaphosa have refused to follow Zondo Commission prosecution recommendations e.g. against ANC chairperson Gwede Mantashe for petty corruption by the Watson family's Bosasa outsourcing firm. Zondo and others had at least partially documented corruption by not only the Gupta brothers but also enablers of their and others' graft in major accounting, legal and consultancy firms (Thompson, 2020; Open Secrets, 2023; Thaker and Pillay, 2023). British Ambassador Robin Renwick's (2018, 1) book *How to Steal a Country* is a classic example of neglecting corporate-profiteering causality, asking all too innocently in its third paragraph, "[h]ow is it that internationally reputable companies such as KPMG, McKinsey, SAP and HSBC are so easily drawn into such a web of corruption?"

To be sure, civil society has often attacked corporate malfeasance (putting to death – by bankruptcy – the likes of Bell Pottinger and Cash Paymaster Services). And major firms are indeed occasionally capable of self-correcting. The clearest case was when software supplier EOH – set up by Israeli entrepreneur Asher Bohbot in 1998 – was cut off by Microsoft in 2019 due its by then blatant role in state capture, thus reducing the firm's share value by 99% from peak to trough (Gelb, 2023). (In 2021 EOH's remnants included new directors who sued Bohbot for R1.7 billion, but apparently had no success.)

There are both traditional South African white monopoly capital and Western multinational corporations – both sometimes termed 'WMC' – which take advantage of such procurement opportunities. But it is also important to acknowledge how, in the spirit of Frantz Fanon's (1961) *Wretched of the Earth* chapter on 'Pitfalls of National Consciousness,' limits to black capitalist class formation in the post-apartheid economy in turn create dependency on accumulation via the state. Together these corporate forces prevent a productive capitalism from emerging given the initial ease of simply serving as middle-man to *accumulation by dispossession*. **NA93**

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The de-mobilisation of Action Kommandant[1]

The United Democratic Front, popular democracy and the ANC

- By Robert Van Niekerk

Professor Robert Van Niekerk, who was a grassroots youth and student anti-apartheid activist in the United Democratic Front in the mid-1980s on the Cape Flats, is currently an academic at the Wits School of Governance with a scholarly focus on social policy, governance and inequality. He holds a BA (English) & BA Hons (Industrial Sociology) from the University of Cape Town, an MSc (Social Policy) from the London School of Economics and an MPhil and DPhil (Comparative Social Policy) from the University of Oxford.

When the ANC was unbanned it sought to demobilise grassroots democracy. In disbanding the United Democratic Front, the ANC turned its back on the insurgent non-racialism that had emerged in the 1980s, argues ROBERT VAN NIEKERK. It opted instead for a neo-liberal strategy of economic development and elitist democracy.[2]

The Zondo Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (2022) laid bare the evisceration of South African state capacity through unchecked plunder by apparatchiks (or cadres) in the ruling ANC and its collaborators in the private sector. This denouement can be traced to the early 1990s where the moral and political decay of the ANC became evident with the emblematic injunction by senior leaders of government such as the then deputy-minister Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka that "Black businessmen should not be shy to say they wanted to become 'filthy rich'" (*News24 Business*: 2005; Taylor, 2016: 35).

Institutions of the state were already by then being re-purposed for private accumulation by 'deployed' cadres of the ANC as evidenced in the 1998 arms deal debacle, for example. Some of the mechanics of such 'cadre deployment' were subsequently revealed in detail by the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture (2022).

The question we ask is to what extent did the concessions made by an ANC leadership during South Africa's negotiations establish a path dependency that significantly contributed to this unfolding catastrophe. Furthermore, what can be learnt 30 years into democracy about the demobilisation of the internal mass movement (the United Democratic Front [UDF] and the progressive trade union movement), which offered an alternative democratic politics of equity to the politics of elitism and enrichment of the post-1994 ANC leadership? The urgency of the need to understand this demobilisation and how profoundly this shaped the country's policy decisions leading to this dire situation is reflected in a World Bank report released in 2022 that confirmed that South Africa is still the most unequal of 164 countries measured.

The significance of the UDF and its progressive character lies in what Suttner (2004: 695) has described as its "pre-figurative democracy" with a discourse – even if often unevenly applied – of popular democracy or "people's power" involving the exercise of agency at a community level around civil, political and social rights (education, health, housing) and building a common society. The popular democratic mobilisation also comprised a grassroots alliance of non-racial, multi-class social forces in 600 organisations by 1988. Cohered around securing universal democracy but with a longer term programmatic commitment to implementing the Freedom Charter – at minimum a social democratic programme (Padayachee and Van Niekerk, 2019) – constituted a foundation for developing an organic, re-distributive and radical social democratic project from below.

The key contribution of the UDF until its disbanding was that it inculcated a self-belief in ordinary people, predominantly impoverished, that they could determine their own political and economic destiny through practices of direct democracy and community mobilisation. The complex politics of the UDF and Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) has been given attention (see Houston [1999]; Van Kessel [2000], Seekings [2000] and Suttner [2004]). It reveals – even if contradictorily – the appetite of members in the UDF for engagement on policy decisions that would fundamentally impact on their future lives. The UDF articulated a critique of the liberal parliamentary representation. For *New Era*, a Cape Town publication affiliated to the UDF, democracy

meant "the ability of the broad working masses to participate in and control all dimensions of their lives", not just "some liberal pluralistic debating society" (Cited in Good, 2014: 69).

As argued by Suttner, an influential education and training convenor of the UDF,

> there is no doubt that the popular power period gave people a sense and the practical lived reality of their own capacity to run their own lives, albeit on a small scale, in particular communities. This did not happen in all communities. Sometimes or often, for there is insufficient data to quantify, such successes coexisted with neighbouring communities failing to attempt, or attempts to build popular power collapsing for one or other reason. In the cases where there was success, this was often based on local structures like street committees, zone committees, area committees, which were not ANC or UDF structures or intended to be that. Where they operated successfully in some communities, they did not purge non-ANC or non-UDF people. They generally worked best and the principle on which they tended to operate in the successful cases was through being non-sectarian and not demanding that members of street committees, area committees or other organs of popular power should be members of UDF affiliates (Suttner, 2023).

UDF central leadership had a tenuous hold since its affiliates grew rapidly with hundreds of townships joining or simply declaring themselves as UDF. From the very beginning, Allan Boesak suggested "the UDF knew (and the ANC feared) that much action in the course of struggle was perforce going to be spontaneous, unplanned and uncontrolled" (Boesak, quoted in Good, 2014: 66).

This self-belief in the diverse ranks of the impoverished in their capacity to effect change in their community through civics, youth and worker organisations and action committees was lost with the closure of the UDF in 1991 and the rapid rise of the (un)democratically centralist parliamentary party politics of the unbanned ANC post-1991. The evidence suggests the ANC changed its class orientation from the oppressed to the mainly White ruling class whom it set out to appease. The ANC took a bet that such appeasement would lead to increased business confidence and investment by old order capital (Arrighi and Scully, 2010).

As argued by the third president of the Congress of South African Students (Cosas), Shepi Mati:

> The UDF really was an important forum to express kind of a multi-class interest of forces that were opposed to apartheid, that had everything to gain in the demise of apartheid. So, in that sense, it was this broad front. But in a second sense, it was also a platform to begin to shape the kind of society, or have a conversation about

> the kind of society, that South Africans wanted to live under. And in that respect, of course, the departure point for many of the organisations who were members of the UDF, was the Freedom Charter. There may well have been members of the UDF who, in time, got to appreciate the values of the Freedom Charter, but perhaps initially may not have. And then, of course, at any one time as a front, as a broad front, its strength lay in the strength of its constituent elements, and the working class was an important element in that – what later became Cosatu [Congress of South African Trade Unions] was kind of an important ally in that struggle. So, I think for me it kind of represented or embodied this cross-class mobilisation – the building of a new sort of solidarity that was already foreseen and expressed in the perspectives of the ANC, whether it is the Morogoro document or even the Freedom Charter itself expressed that. (Interview, 12 February 2022)

The achievement of meaningful, materially rooted non-racialism as opposed to a merely symbolic non-racialism also allowed for a nurturing and future emergence of a core social democratic objective: the financial de-segregation through universal provision by a democratic state of public goods such as health and education, utilised by all classes and social groups.

In the context of the mass, national struggle against apartheid laws and spearheaded by the youth and students there were also greater forms of subversive social mixing occurring across the group areas racial divide: in the Western Cape Black African youth were attending mass gatherings centred on student and consumer boycotts and joint organisational meetings in Coloured and Indian and White areas and vice versa under the umbrella of the UDF. The embryo of future community leaders of the society, they were forming social bonds based on radical political objectives and unevenly but steadily breaking down the racialised 'othering' that was at the core of segregation and apartheid, in the actual practice of joint struggles over shared community interests to decent housing, health and education.

In a similar vein, the late Johnny Issel, a UDF founder member, lead organiser, uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) activist and selfless comrade on the UDF socialist left observed:

> It is important to consider the values which underlined those selfless deeds during the eighties. We need to examine the values which inspired those comrades to reach such high levels of commitment. Since the coming of the nineties, things seem to change within our country.
>
> A new culture arrived with the nineties. It brought and legitimated the "market". And in a very short space of time it took control of practically every aspect of our lives. Though the market had been with us for a long time it remained condemned, the

> domain of decadent White society. And whereas some of us were quite sceptical about it at the beginning, we eventually succumbed.
>
> Today it regulates and controls all of our lives. It determines how we conduct our politics …. Our public appearances are carefully choreographed. These are the requirements of the market. It demands that we present ourselves as saleable commodities.
>
> As functionaries we are required to possess a certain measure of exchange value, like any other commodity for sale. And better if it is "packaged" in an Italian-designed suit and driven in a German-produced automobile … Some of us discover that we are not appropriately packaged. And we begin to doubt our own worth, our own self-worth. Others seem to find somewhat more expedient ways, albeit criminal ways, to appropriate what the market has to offer.
>
> In our market society everyone looks out for himself … Very different from the tenets held and forged during the camaraderie. Very different from the values that inspired the likes of Vuyisile Mini, or Mntuli ka Sezi, or Neil Aggett, or Anton Frans [Fransch]. (Issel, Interview, 2003)[3]

Mati recalls how membership of the ANC was reduced to rubber stamping decisions already being taken at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa), such as the ANC endorsing chieftaincies:

> There were people who had built democratic traditions inside the country: UDF, street committees, trade unions, Cosatu – they had built all those… And I think the regrouping [of the ANC] simply ignored it. … Our leadership is negotiating in Kempton Park…, so then we'll get a call that – … and I remember [the issue] was traditional leaders – what do we do with traditional leaders and so on. Then we have a meeting in [the local ANC branch] and we're sitting in [the] meeting and I think in that meeting Jack Simons was still explaining to us how they dealt with the traditional leaders and chiefs in Zambia.
>
> (But) for me, I always subscribe to that position of a ceremonial role for traditional leaders, definitely not a political role, because these people are not elected, they are not accountable to anybody, and democratic structures must take precedence over any of those things. Then … somebody comes late [to the branch meeting] … and says, "*haaibo*, comrade, you are still discussing this? The position has been taken. I was watching TV news, that's why I was late [for the branch meeting]," because our meetings were scheduled to coincide just before the television news. So now people were sitting to watch

> the news and then they come to the [branch] meeting, they already know that it is a waste of time, what we are going to be discussing. And for me, that's really the moment that I just felt that "No, there's something we're not doing right".

Leaders know best: Paternalism and the contempt for grassroots democracy

It was not only the corrosive market individualism described so well by Issel that became the ANC's disease of the 1990s but also a contempt for grassroots democracy and an arrogant derision of those who refused to "buy in". The ANC's exiled leadership elite were intent on establishing a different trajectory which was premised on an accommodation through de-racialisation of the racial capitalist order. This was not aimed at addressing class inequality but aimed at the more residual, liberal goal of 'poverty alleviation' and addressing Black exclusion from the commanding heights of the system of capitalism. Finding its apotheosis in the 'non-negotiable' adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic policy framework in 1996 (Padayachee & Sherbut, 2011: 627), the ANC elite was prepared to abandon the working class and ignore its worker-based allies. Echoing Issel, Ruiters (2020) argues:

> For Mbeki, fighting for racial justice was about 'growing the economy' while getting the 'poor' into 'normal participation in the economy' that would stop their 'dependency on grants'. In 2007, in his State of the Nation address, Mbeki reminded South Africans they must continuously focus on the task to ensure that as many of our people as possible graduate out of dependence on social grants and enter the labour market. ANC leaders have embraced their own 'market-civilizing mission' as the structure and language of the commodity and the logic of capital became deeply embedded in policy statements.[4]

As observed by Taylor (2016: 35), "GEAR itself might be described as reflecting and reinforcing the embourgeoisement of the ANC elites and their allies, the Black bourgeoisie, which has less and less disputes with the old [White] social order and a greater appetite to join it."

This furthermore represented an abandonment of:

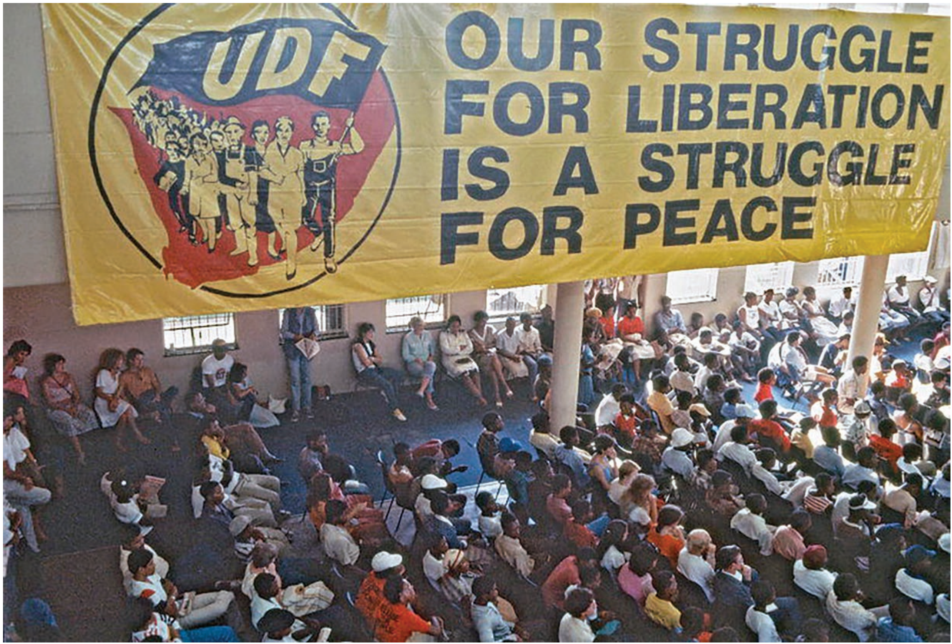
> … accountability and accompanying political selflessness, all key features of the progressive mass democratic movement in the struggle against apartheid. In other words that if there was a 'sell-out' it was of our grassroots, mass democratic political culture. (Padayachee and Van Niekerk, 2019: xiv)

Insurgent non-racialism versus a moribund four nations thesis

If the UDF could be characterised as pre-figuring a new, non-racial democratic polity with the economic and social liberation of the Black oppressed and exploited working-class at its core then it also opened radical possibilities for de-colonising and fundamentally transforming South African society. But as Mati notes:

> "There (was) externally… a lot of pressure from capital to conclude this thing and to conclude it in a way that doesn't upset the fundamental structures of society. So, it [the ANC] was given political power, but it [Capital] did not concede on economic levers of power, so to speak. So, there was that pressure, it's constant and it's also happening at an ideological level. Communism has failed – just look at what happened in Eastern Europe … And then there's the regime as well, which is unleashing violence, just making it impossible for us to meet democratically and discuss and talk about the solutions to our country's problem, whether we meet street by street and whatever. There was a lot of reliance on brilliant individuals who were gathered around the negotiation table, who could lead us in the process. And then our (role) was just now to fold arms and then wait for the process to unfold with the hope that these are our leaders, they've come back, and they know what is right for us and so on. So that's what we were led into – a process where the leadership knows … Maybe there's something that they are seeing that we don't see because of where they are positioned. And it was these things that were just making it impossible sometimes to contest. And of course, there's an element of fatigue as well which had taken root; a lot of people were exhausted through the process of struggle because it takes its own toll, emotionally, at an individual, kind of personal level for individuals. So, all of these elements just made it for a kind of a process that resulted in 1994 and then eventually in the elections."

It was around its unbanning that we also see the ANC returning with archaic multi-racial 'Congress Wheel' memory politics of the era of the 1960s from Robben Island and from exile. This failed to appreciate either the depth or possibilities and processes of this materially rooted agenda of insurgent non-racialism under construction and which was directly informed by the psychologically emancipatory politics of Black Consciousness and progressive worker mobilisation of the 1970s. The ANC commandeered the emancipatory infrastructure painstakingly established by the diverse, multi-organisation UDF primarily for its electioneering and organisational consolidation purposes – a return to the politics of symbolism by an unbanned ANC and for which there was also a mass appeal.



Shepi Mati expressed this organisational displacement of an insurgent non-racialism and its subversive social mixing as follows:

> And [the ANC] didn't even take into account how the UDF was organised, because it was not only organised at a street level, but [in] area committees. And all those areas were organised in a particular way that allowed people, over time, to get to know each other – there were people that you would know … you'll meet them at an area committee meeting of the UDF, and you'd connect with so and so … there was a structure there. And when the ANC was rebuilt, the [ANC] branches just upset all of that, didn't take into account all of that. And they redrew those boundaries and new people now, you didn't even know. … You say, "man, where was this person? They are members of the ANC?" … Whereas with the UDF, we knew those people, because the UDF had built a network and some level of intelligence, that it understood who's who. Would we really have this problem that we have with all the issues of local government and the weaknesses [if we had maintained the system of grassroots accountability originally established by the UDF]? (Interview, 12 February 2022)

UDF leader and patron Allan Boesak also recounts the dissonance felt with ANC leadership figures in relation to the new politics of insurgent non-racialism that the UDF was forging in communities. In discussion with Mandela, he observed the following:

> So, when Mandela came out, you will remember the first shocking thing was how casually he brought back the old racial terms, that from the Black Consciousness days and into the UDF we had completely done away with. I mean, all of a sudden, he talked to me. And he recognised me as a 'Coloured leader'. And I was saying to him, what is that? I've never been referred to [as that] … the only places that refer to me as a 'Coloured leader' was *Die Burger* and *Rapport* [Afrikaans newspapers]. (T)hat's the only language they understand, but in our circles … it was a shock, because I did not know that the African National Congress still thought in those terms, but then I discovered they never forgot those terms. I mean, that was the only language the ANC knew.
>
> And then [Mandela] argues for that and then he says … what one must never forget how important it is that all those distinctive features are there … of the colour of your skin, the texture of your hair, size of your nose. And he says this as if he doesn't know how like an apartheid apostle he sounded. Wow. I mean, what is the difference between Mandela and Andries Treurnicht [Afrikaner leader of the White supremacist Conservative Party] when you hear things like that, absolutely. (Interview, Feb 3, 2022)

This position of racial reification by the ANC leadership as represented here by Mandela and which the UDF had assiduously tried to break down in its political practices across Black communities was then further re-inforced organisationally by the post-1990 unbanned ANC through a willingness to seek allyship with dis-credited political figures who collaborated with the de-legitimated, apartheid governance structures:

> Clearly, they came out of … Robben Island and maybe out of their discussions, [and thought] that it would be essential in order to win the full support of the so called Coloured people to bring in the Alan Hendricks [Coloured political collaborator with the racially exclusive White Tri Cameral Parliament] of this world. And we had then tried to explain to [Mandela]: these people were not only our sworn enemies and sworn enemies of democracy, you have no idea what … disgust they have been looked at in the so called Coloured community that we built the UDF … we … had so much overwhelming Coloured support, specially from the younger people, because we were so clear about those people and the role that they were playing, and how we were never fooled.

> And I shouldn't really mention names, but that is how so many people with the mindset of Coloured politics and the Coloured Representative Council, and their children, were brought into the ANC and given key positions in the African National Congress. (Interview with Allan Boesak, 3 February, 2022)

A related dimension of the ANC's politics of racial reification taking an organisational form was the disbandment of community-based organisations allied to the UDF and its inorganic integration with structures established under the leadership of the unbanned ANC. The author recalls as chair in 1991 of a vibrant branch of 20 consistent core members of the South African Youth Congress (Sayco) in Lansdowne on the Cape Flats that an instructional letter was received from an Interim Chair of the ANC Youth League, Jackie Selebi, saying that their local Sayco branch was to disband, their members were instructed to join the re-established ANC Youth League formed in the neighbouring Athlone region, as 100 members were a minimum requirement to form an ANC Youth League branch. Literally overnight a dynamic, progressive youth organisation first established in the local community in 1980 was disbanded. This same letter was received by all community-based Sayco branches in one form or another.

A statement on the official dissolution of the UDF was released by its National Executive Committee on the 15 August 1991 with rallies announced at the Rocklands Civic Centre in Mitchells Plain, the original launch site, and in Johannesburg. The statement importantly drew attention to the style of organisation the UDF aspired to, indicating that, "[i]ts leadership functioned collectively. In practice it constantly sought mandates from its affiliates and from the communities at large to ensure that its actions were in tandem with the wishes of its constituencies. It endeavoured to give to our people a new experience of democracy. In this context the UDF became an embryo of a new South Africa that we are busy building." The statement also referred to its "trail of achievements" including that it "built unprecedented unity amongst South Africans across race and class" (UDF, 1991, SA History Archive).

The obvious question is given these impressive achievements claimed, why was the UDF not maintained as a fundamental site of democratic practice for a new civil society and the insurgent non-racialism further developed and built upon, as the "embryo" of the new society claimed?

This issue needs further sustained attention to better understand how the mass democratic and workers' movements and aligned left forces were so rapidly de-mobilised and an inclusive, radically humane community-based politics of

The evidence suggests the ANC changed its class orientation from the oppressed to the mainly White ruling class whom it set out to appease.

transformation displaced to a self-serving politics of elitism, patronage and money.

An insight is provided by Boesak who attended the UDF dissolution rally, where he counterposed the politics of the UDF with that of the exiled ANC as revealed in the rally, where he was invited to speak alongside Trevor Manuel, Cheryl Carolus and Steve Tshwete amongst other:

> All I remember, all I remember about it, it's a funny thing, how the mind works very, because I block out. Because it's such a painful memory. All I remember is Mac Maharaj standing up and saying at the closure of the UDF, "I am a soldier! I've always been a soldier! I'm proud to be a soldier! I stand here today as a soldier!" And I thought, what does that mean, though, for people in the UDF, whose basic philosophy was nonviolent resistance? And maybe that's how you should understand that. So if you don't understand that we are just closing you down as an organisation, we are closing down the philosophy that you stood for. If they had gone on to be more honest and say you [UDF] people believe in the Freedom Charter, we [ANC] are walking away from the Freedom Charter, which they did. They didn't say that. But if they did say that it would have been clearer to all of us. So it was not a day that I felt I covered …myself in pride [in agreeing to speak at the rally]. And I will always, always, always regret that, although somebody said to me, what do you think you could have actually done about it? Not very much, though. But I could, I could have withheld my cooperation that day [of the dissolution rally]. (Interview, 3 February 2022)

Drawing on similar observations of a militaristic style of engagement in certain exiled ANC members who were appointed into leadership positions, Mati observes the consequences this had for democratic practices:

> In the Western Cape, for instance, we had a provincial secretary whose experience had just been as a soldier … underground before leaving the country, then a soldier outside. And then now you talk to people, you address a public platform [I used to do a lot of coverage of the (ANC political) events as part of Community Video Education Trust (CVET)] to video-document these events. And I could hear this person … when you address people, you address them as if they are soldiers, you are giving instructions and you're not engaged in a dialogue, you're not engaging through communication and communion with people, because people have ideas and they have solutions to their problems, and they understand, they've built confidence, themselves, in the streets fighting the *boers*, and this is not a military camp that you are

> addressing. Anyway, so there was that. So, [the re-integration of the ANC into internal structures] it didn't take into account that we have that military tradition [in the ANC].

The reasons and process leading to the dissolution of the UDF and MDM, which comprised 600 organisations and not all of whom had direct legacy political affiliations to the ANC, needs to be re-excavated and scrutinised so that a fuller account is obtained of how the organic politics of resistance and re-construction as represented by the UDF was shut down.

In this endeavour the provocative argument by political scientist Padraig O'Malley (2007: 247) on the relationship in the 1990s between the returned exiled ANC (and its underground Vula formation) and the internal UDF and MDM needs to be confronted:

> The mass movements were creating a mass revolution. Lusaka was trying to gain a foothold, parade its pedigree, invoke Mandela – Madiba went down far better with the masses than with the NEC. In a sense Vula [the ANC's strategy for armed insurrection if the negotiations failed] was subversive. It infiltrated the MDM, used the political underground it harnessed to seduce MDM leaders and hijack its revolution-in-the-making. Although the MDM did not know it, the ANC in exile needed the MDM far more than the MDM needed the ANC (O'Malley, 2007: 247).

How is it that grassroots members of the internal UDF and MDM, who discussed and engaged with complex theoretical papers on liberation theories and insisted that a culture of democratic mandates and accountability inform political practices, subsequently and passively surrendered their agency to 'ANC leaders' to negotiate the economic and social content of their freedom? South African Communist Party (SACP) and MK leader Chris Hani, arguably the most respected leadership figure alongside exiled ANC president Oliver Tambo amongst grassroots members of the MDM, drew attention to the problem of lack of consultation by the ANC leadership with the grassroots membership during the Codesa negotiations (1991-1993) leading to strategic errors of judgement. One significant issue concerned the Boipatong massacre in 1992 where 45 people were killed by Inkatha vigilantes and which led to the ANC withdrawing from the negotiations. Hani reflected that the Boipatong massacre:

> … was an important catalyst. It made us [to] sit up and to look critically at our own strategies, at our own tactics, at the path we have traversed, and made the movement [to] participate in soul searching in discovering its own weaknesses, and above all, in realising that negotiations have made us [to] drift away from the people, to drift away from our own base. It was important therefore to take two steps back in order to restore the cohesion, the unity, the togetherness between the leadership and the membership.[5]

To what extent this "soul searching" in response to the "drift away from the people" observed by Hani was also shared by other members of the ANC leadership sufficiently for them to action a different form of democratic engagement between the "leadership and the membership" we do not know.

Conclusions: from national democracy to violent social implosion

Whatever the past, my own view for the future is that maintaining the current trajectory unchecked can potentially lead to violently catastrophic mass conflict in South Africa in ways that are occurring increasingly in other parts of the world. All the ingredients of comprehensively failed government institutions, increasing violent political factionalism in the ruling party over the patronage networks to access increasingly diminished public resources, further economic immiseration of the masses of people and deep social and political polarisation will serve as the likely backdrop. (Also see Von Holdt's (2013) concept of SA as a violent democracy). Understanding how we got to this abysmal moment still matters and may help us to avert such a catastrophe. If 30 years of post-apartheid democracy has not yet realised the possibilities and hopes of a humane democratic socialist transformation, then the post-election moment must allow for honest reflection and action. Learning the lessons of the UDF would be reclaiming "memory as a weapon" in the inimitable phrase of the late, great poet Bra Don Mattera, a weapon that must be wielded carefully and purposefully to re-invest self-belief so that we can complete our journey of social emancipation. **NA93**

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ENDNOTES

1 'Action Kommandant' was a community mobilising slogan popularised by the late Ashley Kriel, an influential and much loved grassroots community leader, socialist and MK activist from the Cape Flats who was assassinated by the apartheid Security Police in 1987. https://vimeo.com/154108468

2 I am grateful to Prof Greg Ruiters for his insightful comments and feedback that informed the finalisation of this article.

3 See https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/interview-johnny-issel-key-udf-western-cape-leader-2003

4 See https:// www.iol.co.za/news/politics/full-text-of-mbekis-state-of-nation-speech-314525).

5 See https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00607/06lv00635.htm

This article forms part of a Wits University School of Governance project on the politics of transition from the United Democratic Front to the African National Congress.

Unemployment, poverty and inequality in SA

as seen through a feminist political-economy lens

- By Sbusisiwe Sibeko

Sbusisiwe Sibeko is an economist and researcher. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Economics from Duke University and a Masters in the Political Economy of Development from SOAS, University of London. She has worked at the Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ), where her research focus was macroeconomic policy and was the co-Chair of the Budget Justice Coalition (BJC). She considers herself a feminist political economist in training and is determined to be a part of unwinding structural injustice.

Much social reproduction is based in households, with women at the forefront, yet this work is still delegated to the periphery of political-economic policy discussions. In this article Sbusisiwe Sibeko provides a feminist political-economic perspective to investigate how women's bodies and labour might be conceptualised as the 'last colony' of accumulation.

Flickr, Photographer Tobin Jones

Introduction

Much has been written about the structure of South Africa's economy and the drivers of unemployment, poverty and inequality from a formal economic perspective. This article, however, is concerned with advancing the understanding of South Africa's social reproduction – the reproduction of the totality of the capitalist mode of production through market and non-market spheres.

Critiquing mainstream economics and heterodox schools of thought, Folbre (1986:247) asks:

> Why are both the neoclassical and the Marxian paradigms so "silent" on the issue of inequality within the home? Their convergence is somewhat ironic: On the one hand, we have a paradigm, largely unconcerned with issues of conflict, which offers a well-developed theory of nonmarket production. On the other hand, we have a paradigm with a well-developed theory of conflict that is largely unconcerned with nonmarket production.

In this article I investigate how women's bodies and labour might be conceptualised as the basis of financialised capital accumulation (see Mohamed in this issue). Historically, black women were the basis of producing and reproducing black migrant labour – upon which the enormous wealth of colonial capitalism was built. The increased feminisation of labour markets and unpaid care work in the domestic economy shows that in almost all areas of life, women are disproportionately discriminated against. I suggest that intensified oppression of women is both a premise and result of capitalism. Feminist economists and other heterodox scholars have continuously highlighted the importance of contextualising social, economic, political processes throughout history to understanding economic phenomena.

The family and household structure, employment, sexual assault, education, climate change and health are some of the factors contributing to the feminisation of poverty. Kabeer (2015:194) highlights that:

> The processes of poverty can be divided into those which explain why poor people remain poor over extended periods of time, the so-called 'poverty trap', and those which explain why people, both poor and non-poor, become poorer over time.

This requires that we assess vertical and horizontal structures and how they change over time. Inequalities tend to intertwine, magnify and exacerbate each other. Gender disparity intersects with both hierarchical inequalities and various other societal disparities. But women are not a monolithic group, and they experience overlapping oppression, exploitation and extraction depending on their intersecting identities. It is important to note here that while the feminist economics approaches (theoretical and empirical) provide us with heterodox understandings of these intersections they are still limited in their inclusion of non-binary genders.

This said, black women and youth have been the most vulnerable in the labour market and bear the burden of unemployment. In 1994, there were 41 million South Africans, with only 8.9 million of the population employed. The unemployment rate was estimated to be 22% in 1994 (Stats SA, 2015). The official unemployment rate peaked in 1999 at 36.4%, fell below 25% from 2006 to 2015, and then fell to 21.5% in 2008, at the onset of the Global Financial Crisis. In the third quarter of 2023, the unemployment rate in South Africa was 32.1% (expanded definition: 40.3%) (Stats SA, 2024). Black African unemployment rates have been much higher than whites.

Poverty was higher for female-headed households than for male-headed households (49% versus 33%) while black South African life remains unviable for the majority. According to Statistics South Africa (2017), in 2015, 55% of the population – 33 million people – lived below the official poverty line of R992 per person per month. A quarter of the population lived in 'extreme poverty', unable to afford enough food to meet their basic physical needs. Vulnerability to poverty is highest among teenage girls living in rural parts of the Eastern Cape and Limpopo.

Apartheid policies entrenched racial inequality, distorted economic structures and shaped patterns of ownership and control within the economy. When the new democratic state was established in 1994, much needed to be done to put South Africa on a different trajectory. However, as Mohamed (2019: vi) argues, "[t]he end of apartheid during the 1990s coincided with widespread neoliberal deregulation and economic globalisation of trade and financial markets and growing financialisation" which ultimately led to a "disconnect between equity and financial markets and the real economy". These mainstream economic approaches have failed to adequately address the structural challenges facing South Africa, including high levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality.

The feminist lens, black households and the feminisation of poverty

Feminists have described the trends in disparity between men's and women's standards of living as the "feminisation of poverty". This phenomenon is partly explained by the fact that, relative to men in the same socioeconomic rank, women and children are disproportionately represented in the lower socioeconomic status.

South Africans have been experiencing a protracted cost of living crisis, which is compounded by inadequate access to basic services and transport. In South Africa, "[p]overty patterns continue to be gendered and female-headed households are more likely to have low incomes, to be dependent on social grants, and less likely to have employed members" (Stats SA, 2013: iii). South Africa has a very high number of female-headed households which is a legacy of the migrant labour system. According to Stats SA (2017), the typical profile of a poor household in South Africa:

- is headed by a black African female who is younger than 35,
- is in a rural area in a rural-based province,
- has lower levels of education,
- lives in a dwelling that usually has between 0 and 1 bedrooms,

Source Diego Delso

- is less happy than they were 10 years ago, with the general health status of its household head being poor, and
- is more likely to be unemployed and located in the lower quintiles.

Black women are the most deprived. A recent study found that more than 60% of the black population experienced severe deprivation, whereas the Indian/Asian and white populations encountered deprivation at rates of 16% and 17% respectively. Furthermore, women exhibited a higher susceptibility to deprivation compared to men, and employed individuals experienced lower levels of deprivation than the unemployed (Adelzadeh and Ngangelizwe, 2024).

There is a long history to black household formation. For almost 50 years before 1994, economic activity in South Africa was orchestrated by the apartheid state that reshaped society on racial and spatial segregationist lines. Dutch and British settlers under colonial racial capitalist property relations violently dispossessed the natives. The 1913 Natives Land Act was a significant facet of law that deprived black South Africans of access to fertile land more extensively than in most other colonised countries. Only about 7% of arable land was accessible to black people (Davenport, 1991). Federici (2021) discusses how expropriation of land was not only a means of capital accumulation but also coerced men to join the labour force (the widescale integration of women as migrant workers would come later).

The labour migration system, designed to provide "cheap" (or undervalued) labour to the mining sector, marginalised the rural population's land-based livelihoods while offering limited alternative employment prospects. Those remaining in the former Bantustans (black homelands) – delineated by the colonial regime and formalised during apartheid – were compelled to engage in unpaid activities such as subsistence farming and child care to sustain the labour force migrating to urban centres and mines. Townships emerged as spatial organisations of inexpensive migratory labour to drive the capital-intensive sectors owned by white elites with a white welfare state.

The state also enforced a "separation" between the reproductive and productive spheres of the economy. Black men were the source of labour while black women reproduced the labour power both in black and white families (as domestic workers). Racial discrimination under apartheid meant that women were trained in line with the education system designed for their race. African women studying through Bantu education could only hope to become either doctors, nurses or teachers in the public sector. Those who did not get into these positions ended up as domestic workers or informal sector traders (Okeke-Uzodike & Ndinda, 2012). Black men worked in places far from their families and spent extended periods away from home (Budlender & Lund, 2011). Federici (2021: 115), writing about the development of capitalism, states that:

> [T]he construction of a new patriarchal order, making of women the servants of the male work-force, was a major aspect of capitalist development. On its basis a new sexual division of labor could be enforced that differentiated not only the tasks that women and men should perform, but their experiences, their lives, their relation to capital and to other sectors of the working class. Thus, no less than the international division of labor, the sexual division of labor was above all a power-relation, a division within the work-force, while being an immense boost to capital accumulation.

This brief history is fundamental in understanding how social reproduction, particularly the non-market sphere in South Africa today is shaped by the development of capitalism.

The household economy in democratic South Africa

Thirty years of democracy have produced a South Africa with obscene inequality (see Mohamed in this issue). This also means that those who own more and have higher incomes gain disproportionately from the benefits that accrue to the economy and society from the extra burden of unpaid work pushed onto women. During a crisis, like Covid-19, approximately 80% of women were spending more than four extra hours per day on child care during the strict lockdown, compared to 65% of surveyed men. Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen and Von Werlhof (1988) speak of women's bodies and labour as the 'last colony' of accumulation, which is defined by a set of processes whereby new subjects have been brought into the structure of capitalism in exploitative and often violent ways. But arguably women's labour and bodies are also the first colony. Using the 2010 Time Use Survey, Oosthuizen (2018) shows that males spent more than 60% of their total productive time in waged work whereas females spend 71% of their productive time on household production averaged across all ages.

Household production is essential to social reproduction yet remains on the periphery of economic discussions. Mainstream economic theory has been reliant on methodological individualism. Samuelson (1956) asked, "how can individual preferences collapse into an aggregate one for the whole household, so that it

could fit neoclassical economic models?" (Kabeer, 1994) The feminist economics critique of mainstream conceptualisations of the household is that they are based on theoretical shortcomings underpinning the conceptualisation of the household as well as intra-household dynamics. The assumptions are void of bargaining power. According to feminist economists an individual's bargaining power is determined by both quantifiable – such as economic assets – and non-quantifiable factors – such as community-based support, social norms and institutions, or perceptions about contributions and needs (Agarwal, 1997). Rules, social norms and institutions define the boundaries on the resources on which bargaining is socially accepted (Agarwal, 1997; England & Folbre, 1999).

Households are internally fragmented, they are one of the sites where inequalities and power differentials are reproduced. While gender is an ideological and cultural construct, it is also reproduced within the realm of socio-economic practices, and in turn, influences the outcomes of such practices. Gender relations play a systematic role in the division of labour, work (paid and unpaid), income, wealth, education, productive inputs, publicly provided goods and the like. Paid work refers to income-generating activities which are generally linked to markets, while unpaid work relates to the care and development of people and their capacity to work. There is strong empirical evidence that depending on who controls resources in the household, production, consumption and welfare outcomes are likely to be different (Jones, 2010; Udry, 1996; Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2000; Duflo and Udry, 2004; Duflo, 2000).

Feminist economists have continuously highlighted how households subsidise the capitalist economy through unpaid care work (see for example Agarwal, 1997; Folbre, 1986; Federici, 2021). A continuation of the deliberative division of labour, women and girls undertake a disproportionate amount of unpaid work on vital household duties, which is not included in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) calculations. The injustice of this feature of GDP is that vital unpaid work that is essential for the health and productivity of household members and communities is treated as being without value in the country's national accounts.

Housework was transformed into a natural attribute, rather than being recognised as work, because it was destined to be unwaged. Capital had to convince us that it is a natural, unavoidable, and even fulfilling activity to make us accept working without a wage (Federici, 2012: 16).

Whether GDP should be modified to include unpaid care and domestic work remains a much-contested area in feminist economics.

Systems of National Accounts (SNA) documents, which are a set of internationally standardised measures of economic activity,[1] explain the exclusion of services produced in households as follows:

> A large volume of household services including the imputed values derived from production would distort the usefulness of the accounts for policy purposes and for the analysis of markets and market disequilibria – the analysis of inflation, unemployment, etc. (quoted in Varjonen *et al.*, 1999:12).

The SNA documents also argue that household production “is relatively isolated from, and independent of, market activities” (Varjonen *et al*., 1999:14).

Assa (2019:82) highlights that “recent critiques consider GDP to be a statistical measure, flawed but nonetheless designed to objectively measure economic activity such as total production and income… the proposed remedies for GDP’s shortcomings are likewise statistical patches”. Assa (2019) highlights how GDP has been a political tool – unpaid care work has been excluded from this production frontier. The core argument here is that GDP is a biased measure and a non-objective tool. Highlighting the history of GDP, Assa (2019) shows how the changes in the 1968 SNA made finance productive, in that it changed the status of banks’ financial intermediation profits. Before 1968, finance was treated as a cost to business not value added to GDP. One could argue that if governments were willing to include finance in GDP (even at the risk of distorting) GDP, why can’t household unpaid services be included?[2]

There have been continued efforts by feminist economists to quantify unpaid care work to demonstrate its value and to show how market and non-market activities are interrelated. In South Africa, Budlender (2008) reports results of a study that used two variants of the average earnings approach (all earners and all employees), and two variants of the generalist approach (the average earnings of occupations involving work similar to housework, such as cleaning and cooking, and the earnings of paid domestic workers). The use of the average earnings approach finds that the value of unpaid care and domestic work is a higher percentage of GDP than the use of the generalist approach. Using median average earnings, Budlender (2008) finds that the value of unpaid and domestic work is 30% of GDP. Using earnings of paid domestic workers, the value is 11% of GDP. Measuring the relative size of SNA to unpaid care work, Budlender (2008) finds that men spent 30% of total hours spent on work on SNA work, and 20% of total hours spent on work on unpaid care work in South Africa. Women spent 13% of total hours spent on work on SNA work, and 37% of total hours spent on work on unpaid care work. The relatively low levels of SNA work for men and women are explained by the high unemployment rates. Budlender finds that men were undertaking 86 minutes per day on housework versus 225 minutes per day for women.

Using the 2010 Time Use Survey, Oosthuizen (2018) concludes that household production was valued at R749.9 billion in 2010. Almost three-quarters of this household production was contributed by women. Oosthuizen used a specialist replacement wage to calculate household production in monetary terms and found that such production was equivalent to 27.3% of GDP (close to Budlender’s average earnings approach). Elson (2021: 46) argues that:

> [a]mong the ways to provide gender analysis of the macroeconomic strategy embedded in the budget is to incorporate the unpaid care and domestic economy into macroeconomic modeling, using data from time-use surveys that reveal unpaid as well as paid work. This approach would ensure that the sustainability of the aggregate budget deficit or surplus would be assessed not only in

> financial terms but in social terms, revealing for instance depletion of women's capacities and undermining of the social framework through budget deficit reduction strategies that place too much reliance on women's unpaid work to substitute for public services and income transfers.

As Assa (2019: 94) highlights: "GDP is a numerical tool of political rhetoric rather than a true statistical measure". Moreover, Assa (2019) argues that "to change a tool of political rhetoric, a political process rather than a technocratic one is needed". As highlighted, household and household reproduction are already not prioritised in mainstream literature, which means there is still a way to go on this front.

The ongoing feminisation of labour markets

South African women's labour supply increased considerably before the democratic transition. According to the data from the population census, women accounted for 23% of the economically active population in 1960 and 41% in 1991. Women's labour force participation continued to grow in the post-apartheid period. In 1995, women accounted for approximately 44% of the economically active population and by 2001 this had risen to 49.7% (Posel, 2014). Moreover, the rise in women's labour supply was far more than the rise in their employment and consequently women's unemployment rates also increased considerably over the period. An increase in women's employment was derived from the growth in work typically associated with low earnings and few opportunities for advancement. Of the 1.7 million additional jobs recorded amongst women from 1995 to 2007, almost 40% were self-employment in the informal sector, employment that includes subsistence or survivalist activity and that typically is associated with very low and insecure earnings (Posel, 2014). Casale and Posel (2020) note that while there has been an increase in women's employment in higher-level occupations in South Africa, a large part of the increase was due to women entering low-paid work, especially subsistence farming and informal self-employment and domestic work.

As of quarter four, 2023, the unemployment rate for women was 34.4%, compared to 30.1% for men. Statistics South Africa (2018: para 1) reports that "the South African labour market is more favourable to men than it is to women and men are more likely to be in paid employment than women, regardless of race".

The "male breadwinner" bias constructs the rights to make claims on the state for social benefits around a norm of full-time, life-long working-age participation in the market-based labour force. The assumption is also that the wages paid to the homo-economicus (or economic man) are then redistributed to a set of dependents. The result has been the exclusion of many women from entitlements, and the reduction of the scope of the entitlements of many others, making women dependent upon men. Macroeconomic policy approaches that rely solely or principally on full employment to achieve social goals such as equitable income distribution and elimination of poverty suffer from the male breadwinner bias.

The full employment, and male breadwinner bias, needs to be contextualised within capitalistic competition that "encourages firms to seek cheap sources of labour and deregulated investment conditions that maximise profits locally and transnationally" (True, 2012: 45). This has been characterised by poorly regulated economies of low pay and insecure jobs, and attracting women from developed and developing societies into wage employment on a large scale. Informalisation has been another means through which companies have sought to reduce their wage costs. Informalisation is a process accentuated by globalisation for work and workers to become informalised (Munck, 2002). Chang (2009) describes this process as the common substance of capitalist labour that becomes socialised labour. The premise of informalisation is that labour lies on a continuum of securities and benefits. Employees who are informally implied do not have formal contracts that might protect them to a certain level from losing their job. Informalisation is a form of precarious work whereby the person is poorly paid, insecure and unprotected – this applies to both formal and informal work. Informalisation is not confined to the informal sector, it can occur in formalised institutions and systems. Munck (2002: 12) notes, "informalisation is a critical component in capitalist globalisation today, particularly but not exclusively in the global South".

With the globalisation of the 1980s-1990s, there were transformations in women's integration in the global economy – feminisation of labour, labour-intensive and export-oriented industries, global care chains with domestic labour becoming global. True (2012: 45) argues that:

> While the neoliberal policy environment has led to the expansion of women's employment, it has also led to the intensification of their work-load in the market and at home, and to the 'feminisation of poverty' especially among unskilled and marginalised poor women in developing countries who lack access to productive resources or public services. Such poverty, marginalization and lack of protective mechanisms make women easy targets for abuse and undermine the prospects for their empowerment. These conditions also disempower many men who may react to the loss of employment and economic opportunities by reasserting their power over women through violence.

During the period of feminisation of paid work, more men were marginalised in the labour force, if not pushed out altogether. The types of employment typically performed by women – insecure, low-paid, irregular – have been expanding relative to forms of employment typically performed by men – regular, stable, unionised. Standing (1989) argues that there have been two types of feminisation processes: one relates to the increased share of women in paid employment, while the other concerns the degradation of male jobs whereby the conditions associated with them deteriorate to a level characteristically associated with female jobs. In other words, the feminisation of labour in the second sense has been closely linked with the so-called flexibilisation of labour.

What is clear from the evidence is that women enter the labour force on unequal terms and are exposed to super-exploitation (Elson and Pearson, 1981).

Prior to the introduction of the minimum wage in South Africa approximately five and a half million workers across South Africa did arduous work that did not pay them enough to keep them and their dependants out of poverty; these are the "working poor" (Finn, 2015). Statistics South Africa (2019) reported women earned 30% less than their male counterparts, with black women earning 40% less (StatsSA, 2019). Despite orthodox macroeconomic claims of neutral wages based on human capital, there are persistent wage gaps. In South Africa, it is observed that often returns to education are the *same* or *higher* among women than among men, but within occupational categories, women are often paid less than men – pay discrimination, different job tasks, certain highly feminised occupations are valued differently by society (Mosomi, 2019).

Mainstream programmes prioritise women's contribution to capitalist development rather than considering how development can be reconceptualised to promote gender equality. In an attempt at the latter, the National Development Plan (NDP) mentions unpaid care work once, stating that:

> Social, cultural, religious and educational barriers to women entering the job market should be addressed. Concrete measures should be put in place and the results should be evaluated over time. Access to safe drinking water, electricity and quality early childhood education, for example, could free women from doing unpaid work and help them seek jobs. (South African Government, 2012: 249)

Neoliberal mainstream approaches have tended to legitimise and reinforce existing unjust structures by not challenging the concept of unpaid domestic work which is seen as polarised from decent work (a Western concept). Gender instrumentalism has focused on speeding economic development by raising productivity and promoting the more efficient use of resources (Razavi and Miller, 1995). This has led to the rise of the "business case" for gender equality. For a just society, the purpose of economic policy should be to ensure that the socio-economic rights, as envisaged in the Constitution of South Africa, are realised. If we understand household production to be an economic good (and not polarised from waged work), economic policy then will be orientated differently.

Conclusion

Economic policies are predicated on a set of gendered production and distributive relations across different social groups. These relations are informed by historical and ongoing social, economic and political processes. The purpose of this article is to nuance the discussion around unemployment, poverty and inequality such that solutions emerging do not accommodate and naturalise power in the form of gender mainstreaming. It is important to understand how women have always been crucial economic actors, both in the productive and reproductive spheres. Thus, addressing

unemployment, poverty and inequality requires that we critically question the structure of social reproduction, both the market and non-market spheres, holistically and how it continuously reproduces the high levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality in our society, particularly for black women. NA93

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ENDNOTES

1 GDP is the central measure of national accounts.

2 I'd like to acknowledge Dr Seeraj Mohamed for suggesting this point to me.

Dateline Africa

Looking back on the past 30 years in ten countries beyond SA

South Africans have been sorely disappointed by the first 30 years of democracy – unemployment has increased, inequalities have deepened, corruption is rampant, there are water crises, electricity blackouts, potholed roads, awful education, creaking hospitals, lots of crime, gender-based violence, xenophobia, discordant politics … but no civil war, no genocide, no famine, no military coups, no mass kidnapping, no insurgencies, no unfair elections, no censorship, no capital punishment, no arbitrary arrests, no run-away inflation.

Yes, the Mbeki government denied South Africans free HIV treatment, resulting in over 300,000 deaths (HSPH, 2009). And yes, there was Marikana, which left 34 miners dead, and one (short) insurrection in which more than 300 people died. But South Africa has free trade unions, vibrant civil society organisations, legal protection for LGBTI+ and a strong constitution protected by checks and balances. South Africa has been trying to find a way to make democracy work.

In this Special Issue of New Agenda on 30 Years of Democracy in South Africa, IFAA's regular quarterly Dateline Africa column looks beyond the country's borders to see how democracy has fared in other countries in Africa over the last three decades. We look at the ten African countries with the highest populations to provide a comparative perspective – and we have added Rwanda.

Each brief country profile cites a novel published since 1994 because, as acclaimed Egyptian writer, Naguib Mahfouz, said in 1988 on receiving his Nobel Prize in Literature, "…literary writers… spread the fragrance of joy and wisdom in this grief-ridden world of ours."

Top ten countries, and Rwanda, (by population size)

Rank	2020 Population		Regime Type (EIU, 2024)	
	Africa	**1,338,488,228**		Comparison
1	Nigeria	206,139,587	Hybrid regime	like Turkiye
2	Ethiopia	114,963,583	Authoritarian regime	like Pakistan
3	Egypt, Arab Rep.	102,334,403	Authoritarian regime	like China and Russia
4	Congo, Dem. Rep.	89,561,404	Authoritarian regime	like Iran
5	Tanzania	59,734,213	Hybrid regime	like Mexico
6	South Africa	59,308,690	Flawed democracy	like India - and USA
7	Kenya	53,771,300	Hybrid regime	like Mexico
8	Uganda	45,741,000	Hybrid regime	like Turkiye
9	Algeria	43,851,043	Authoritarian regime	like Pakistan
10	Sudan	43,849,269	Authoritarian regime	like Iran
	Rwanda	12,952,209	Authoritarian regime	like Pakistan
	The Rest	506,281,527		
	Total	1,338,488,228		

Sources: World Development Indicators (2023) and EIU (2024)

NIGERIA

In brief – democratised in 1999, but has experienced insurgency, kidnapping, poor election management, weak judiciary. Can boast of a vibrant economy, although there is a deep divide between the poor and the millionaires.

Population 206 million (highest in Africa); hybrid regime

Thirty years ago Nigeria was being subjected to terror and persecutions under the rule of the looting military dictator, Soni Abacha. He died, suddenly, in 1998 and since then Nigerian leaders have all been elected.

Olusegun Obasanjo (by far the best of all Nigeria's leaders) took the presidential oath in the presence of Nelson Mandela and other heads of state on 29 May 1999 – which he named Democracy Day. But Nigeria has never been a stable multi-party democracy. Corruption and incompetence have marked both central and state governments. When Obasanjo left office in 2007, at the age of 70, he was subjected to a "torrent of abuse" (Iliffe, 2011:183). The country's leading constitutional lawyer described the departing regime as "a bad dream, a nightmare for the Nigerian people and a disaster for the rule of law, democracy and good governance".

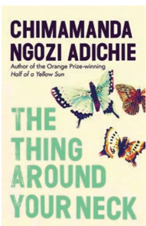
Despite its huge wealth as an oil exporter, Nigeria has to import petrol and diesel as its refineries have collapsed. People face water shortages, outages of electrical power and deteriorating security. The banditry of the extreme Islamist Boko Haram has been combined with powerful criminal gangs who rob, kidnap and extort bribes.

Bronze, ivory and wooden artworks, known as the Benin Bronzes, were plundered from Benin City in the 1897 British Colonial Military Campaign

Nigeria is a huge, complex country with over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own agenda and many harbouring deep resentments. Ethnic clashes and disorder, with uncontrolled police and military forces, disrupt 'normal' life.

Elections are held, usually with severe flaws, but allowing some element of the will of the people to influence their government. The abysmal conduct of the judiciary and the poor management of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) marred the 2023 presidential elections. Commentators pointed to "endemic problems. These include the nature of Nigeria's politics, its elite, a lack of political will, lack of rule of law and constitutionalism, unpopular government policies, and a distrust of the system, particularly INEC" (Thompson *et al.*, 2023).

A novel published since 1994



The Thing Around Your Neck by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Fourth Estate, 2009. Kindle $10.10.

ETHIOPIA

In brief – civil war ends, but what remains is a flawed democracy with discord, censorship, strife, despite remarkable economic growth.

Abiy Ahmed at the controversial Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

Population: 115 million; authoritarian regime – host to the headquarters of the African Union

In 1994, Ethiopia approved a new constitution, providing for a parliamentary system. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) won the first multi-party election in Ethiopian history in 1995 and Meles Zenawi, its charismatic leader, became prime minister of the new Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.[1] Zenawi introduced economic reforms that led to Ethiopia becoming one of Africa's fastest-growing economies. However, he followed a policy of ethnic federalism and ruled with a heavy hand, with Tigrayan interests dominant.

When Zenawi died suddenly in 2012 many observers predicted that Ethiopia would be wracked by destructive internal power struggles. These came – with disastrous effects – in 2021 when Abiy Ahmed provoked a civil war targeting Tigray in the north. Abiy had been welcomed widely as a new democratic leader. He was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in ending the intense border dispute with Eritrea between 1998 and 2000 in which 100,000 people died,[2] as well as for releasing political prisoners and adopting liberal governance within Ethiopia.

The civil war was marked by extreme brutality and the use of mass starvation as a weapon. In 2022, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the World Health Organisation, said the ongoing war in Ethiopia was worse than any other humanitarian crisis in the world. An estimated 600,000 people died and several million were displaced. Journalists were banned from reporting on the conflict and there were internet and phone blackouts. A peace deal was negotiated at the end of 2022 but the effects of the war – not least from the destruction of economic infrastructure – will linger for generations.

A novel published since 1994

The Shadow King: A Novel by Maaza Mengiste. W.W Norton, 2019. Kindle $12.01

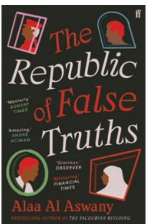
EGYPT

In brief – all hopes from the Arab Spring reversed by intense repression

Population 102 million; authoritarian regime, with an army of 438,000 – the biggest in Africa.

For more on the fortunes of Egypt after 1994 see the extract from *Laughter in the Dark: Egypt to the Tune of Change* by Yasmine El Rashidi on page 135 in Book Reviews.

A novel published since 1994



The Republic of False Truths by Alaa al-Aswany (author) and SR Fellowes (translator from the Arabic). Knopf, 2021. Kindle $9.19

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)

In brief – a journey to hell and back again, and again and again and again, not helped by the curse of its extensive mineral deposits and by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda next door.

Population 90 million plus; second largest country in Africa; authoritarian regime

Source UNHCR John Wessels

The long dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko (1971-1997) was already crumbling in 1994 when the Rwanda genocide broke out, destabilising the entire region. A total of 1.5 million refugees fled to eastern 'Zaire'.[3] Paul Kagame instigated the formation of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for Liberation (AFDL), an alliance of Rwandan, Ugandan, Burundian and Congolese fighters, which became known for its child soldiers, to make it look like a domestic uprising.

The Congo wars have been numbered: War the First was from 1997 to 1998 in which the AFDL drove out Mobutu and Laurent-Désiré Kabila became president. During this war there were six massacres and hundreds of thousands died; War the Second followed from 1998 to 2003 after Kabila fell out with his backers – Uganda and Rwanda – who invaded creating anarchy and *over five million died*.

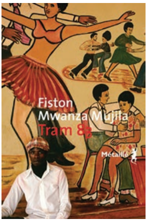
But the wars are not strictly countable. Despite the deployment of the largest and most expensive peace-keeping initiatives of the United Nations and literally hundreds of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) the fighting goes on. Elites in Congo and Rwanda benefit from the wars, which are driven by the mining of gold, diamonds,

copper, cobalt and cassiterite (tin). Mining is both large-scale, by international and state-owned companies, and of the smallest scale, with intense self-exploitation by miners and mining communities.

Elections have been scheduled, postponed and eventually held several times since 1994. None have met standards of fairness. But Kabila and his son, Joseph Kabila, who took office ten days after the assassination of his father and remained in power until 2019, and his successor, the current president Félix Tshisekedi, have all been elected after a fashion.

Mining, music and military operations continue alongside agriculture, refugee camps, volcanic activity and bad roads. Kinshasa, the capital, is one of the largest cities in Africa and the fount of all manner of cultural innovation – and corruption.

A novel published since 1994



Tram 83 by Fiston Mwanza Mujila (author) and Roland Glasser (translator from the French). Dallas, TX: Deep Vellum Publishing, 2015.

TANZANIA

In brief – one party has ruled since independence.

Population: 60 million; hybrid regime; the home of African socialism '*ujamaa*'

In 1994 Tanzania was reaching the end of a period of one-party rule which had lasted since independence. The Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the 'Party of the Revolution' founded by Julius Nyerere, was the sole legal political party until 1992. Multi-party elections have now been held every five years since 1995. The CCM has won every election, maintaining a supermajority throughout.

CCM can take credit for Tanzania's strong sense of unity and togetherness; loyalty to the country often counts for more than tribal or religious identity. Kiswahili and English are the only two official languages in a country with over 100 languages. This long-term policy has reduced tribe and language-driven tensions in politics.

The CCM has provided stable, if largely ineffective, government. There was a spurt in economic growth as old state economic policies based on discredited "African socialism" loosened up after 1995. Tanzania was 10th out of 105 countries in terms of the extent of state ownership in the economy over the period 1975-1995. Subsequent rates of growth were impressive, if from a really low base, up to about 2010.

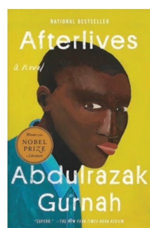
President of Tanzania, Samia Suluhu Hassan

Economic progress took a severe hit from the policies of the erratic President John Magafuli, who was elected in 2015 after Jakaya Jikweti stepped down, in accordance with two leadership terms policy. In addition to unfriendly economic policies, Magafuli transformed Tanzania into a strongly authoritarian state – with repression against the media and opposition political figures. The judiciary, appointed by the President (as are many other offices) does not act as a check or a balance.

Magafuli's sudden and unexplained death in 2021 led to the accession to the presidency of his deputy, Samia Suluhu Hassan, in accordance with the constitution. As a woman and a representative from the politically marginal island of Zanzibar she would never have been chosen to head the CCM, but for the constitution. She faces a presidential election in 2025.

Suluhu implemented some democratic reforms, releasing detainees and creating an atmosphere in which political exiles returned, but laws passed by her predecessor to limit the operation of NGOs and the media remain in force. Also, the opposition faces an unreformed electoral system and has yet to recover from six years in which their rallies were banned.

A novel published since 1994



Afterlives: A Novel by Abdulrazak Gurnah (who was awarded the 2021 Nobel Prize for Literature). Bloomsbury, 2020. Kindle $12.81

KENYA

In brief – from a one-party state to murderous multi-party politics with ruthless corrupt elites and tendering scandals galore and with difficult northern borders.

Population 54 million; hybrid regime

Violence and conflict often accompany Kenya's elections

In 1994 Daniel Arap Moi's corrupt and repressive regime had been in place for 16 years. He had succumbed to international and internal pressure to return to multi-party politics for the 1992 elections, but the process was dominated by ethnic tensions and electoral malpractice. He was re-elected in 1997 and stepped down in 2002 after two terms.

The Kenya African National Union (KANU), the ruling party since independence, lost the 2002 election to the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) whose presidential candidate, Mwai Kibaki, won a landslide victory over the KANU candidate Uhuru Kenyatta.

NARC split in 2005 when Kibaki lost a referendum that aimed to change the constitution to entrench his power and that of his 'Mount Kenya mafia' of Kikuyu politicians. The Luo leader, Raila Odinga, once a Kibaki ally, was expelled from the cabinet after he launched a 'No' campaign.

Opinion polls expected Raila Odinga and his new Orange Democratic Movement to win the 2007 elections but despite obvious signs of fraud, Kibaki was declared the winner by 231,728 votes. In the aftermath of the elections Kenya fell apart in an explosion of ethnic violence and looting in which more than 1,100 people were killed and 650,000 had to flee their homes.

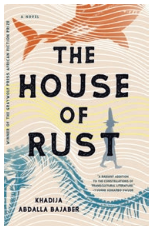
A subsequent commission of inquiry found there was so much interference in the election – from both sides – it was not possible to identify the actual winner. Kofi Annan, who led the Panel of Eminent African Personalities set up by the African Union, brokered an agreement: Kibaki, President; Odinga, Prime Minister – each selecting half of a huge cabinet. Cynical observers said this just doubled the number of mouths to feed from ongoing state corruption and tender manipulation.

The International Criminal Court indicted several leading Kenyan politicians on a charge of crimes against humanity perpetrated in the wake of the 2007 elections. These included soon to be president Uhuru Kenyatta and current president William Ruto. Charges were dropped by 2016 and no one has been held to account for the dreadful events.

Uhuru Kenyatta won bitterly contested elections in 2013 and 2017 against Raila Odinga. Odinga has contested the elections for president five times, has never won and each time has alleged vote rigging. In 2017, the Supreme Court annulled the results of the election – but Odinga and the opposition boycotted the rerun. After a truce in 2018, Odinga joined Kenyatta's government. Kenyatta backed Odinga in the presidential elections in 2022, but William Ruto was declared the winner.

Kenyan voters have been unable to move much beyond tribal identities – and the philosophy of "it's our turn to eat," (Wrong, 2009) as one set of ethnic alliances replaces another. Corruption takes many innovative forms and government procurement scandals persist.

A novel published since 1994



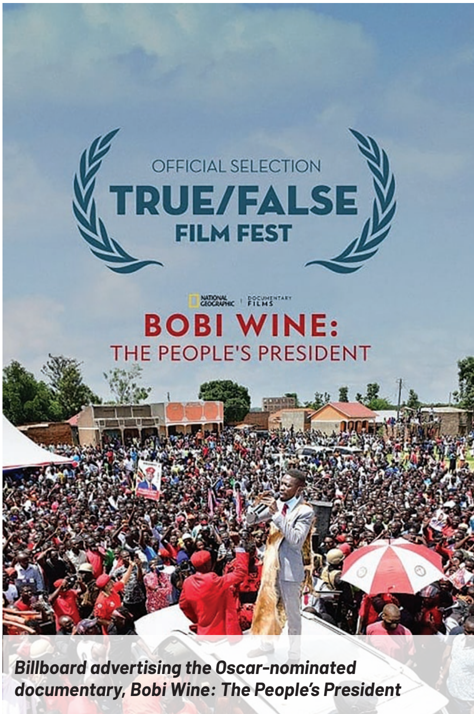
The House of Rust: A Novel by Khadija Abdalla Bajaber (who won the 2022 Ursula K. Le Guin Prize for Fiction). Grey Wolf Press, 2021. Kindle $11.19

UGANDA

In brief – long rule by an aged and increasingly testy strongman, despite vibrant and daring social activists who risk violence and death. But it was worse before him.

Population 46 million; authoritarian regime

In 1994, Yuweri Museveni had been President of Uganda for eight years after he seized power in a military invasion in 1986. He was re-elected in 1996 and 2001. In 2005, presidential term limits were removed and he won again in 2006, 2011 and 2016. In 2017, the previous upper age limit of 75 was also removed (in time for his 75th birthday in 2019) and Museveni won a sixth term in 2021. Many campaign rallies had been banned



Billboard advertising the Oscar-nominated documentary, Bobi Wine: The People's President

before the elections – because of Covid-19 – and oppressive action was taken by the government against the opposition and its leaders. The most well-known opposition figure was the musician and legislator, Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine.

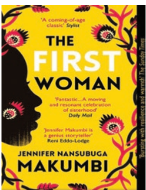
Reports say, "Museveni's security forces are among the most brutal and violent in the world. They have tortured legislators and killed opposition supporters, gunned down unarmed villagers, and sparked conflicts in neighbouring countries (Epstein, 2021)."

Museveni was one of the few African leaders who confronted HIV / AIDS openly (even if he was sceptical about condoms) – and supported policies that significantly reduced its prevalence.

Uganda has the most extreme anti-LGBTI+ legislation in Africa. On 3 April the country's constitutional court upheld the main parts of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act, which became law in May 2023. The law has long prison sentences for "promoting homosexuality" and prescribes the death penalty in particular cases. The judges did strike down a section that imposed a duty to report gay people to the police. The court said the law reflects Uganda's history, traditions and culture.

Uganda has also acted harshly against young climate activists who have opposed the controversial East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP).

A novel published since 1994



The First Woman by Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi. Oneworld Publications, 2021. Kindle $10.83

ALGERIA

In brief – civil war, dodgy elections, rule by a clique of clans, censorship … and bread (but no circuses!)

Population 44 million; biggest country in Africa; authoritarian regime

The Hirak peaceful, popular movement – defeated by oppression and Covid restrictions (IFAA thanks TheMaghrebTimes.com for its permission to reprint this photo)

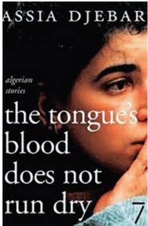
In 1994 Algeria was engaged in an intense and bloody civil war that had started two years earlier after the Algerian army cancelled elections that the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) had been poised to win. An estimated 150,000 people died in a decade of violence with Islamist rebels which ended after peace negotiations and, eventually, an amnesty for all involved. A state of emergency was in place until 2011.

From 1999 to 2019 Algeria was headed by Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was re-elected in 2004, 2009 and 2014. A movement called the Hirak led peaceful protests against the ruling elite that saw Bouteflika overthrown in 2019 – after he had announced a bid for a fifth presidential term.

The Hirak continued regular demonstrations against the rule of *Le Pouvoir* ("the powers that be"), the corrupt clans who ran Algeria from the shadows throughout Bouteflika's long rule (and continue to do so). The protests have been stifled by arrests, detentions and oppression. Elections have never been free or fair, in a system marked by media censorship and harassment of political opponents of the military-dominated government.

At the same time Algeria's vast oil and gas wealth – nationalised in the 1960s – has been used to honour constitutional guarantees to provide citizens with education, health care and housing and massive subsidies provide cheap water, electricity and housing, as well as staple foods. "No one goes hungry," concedes a critic of the regime.[4]

A novel published since 1994



The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories by Assia Djebar (author who goes by the pen name of Fatima-Zohra Imalayen) and Tegan Raleigh (translator from the French). Seven Stories Press, 2010.

SUDAN

In brief – a dictatorship and civil war, with the country split; the protest movement triumphed briefly but there has been military rule and catastrophic conflict since April 2023.

Population 44 million; authoritarian regime – no government since April 2023

The capital, Khartoum, lies in ruins

According to *The Economist*, "Since independence Sudan has been governed, with only occasional breaks, by an Arab elite in Khartoum, bent on plundering the country's considerable wealth at the expense of its people. Their rule, exercised through the army, has been cloaked in the language of Islam; it is really a kleptocracy. The consequence is a country beset by wars and conflict between the centre and the immiserated peripheries".[5]

By 1994 Omar al-Bashir had been in power in Sudan for five years, heading an Islamist dictatorship which he imposed after a military coup. The regime supported terror attacks across north Africa and in other countries. Civil war enveloped the oil-rich south of the country. By 2002 when a peace agreement gave the south the right to secede (which it did in 2011, creating the new country of South Sudan) two million people had died.

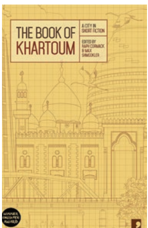
A rebel insurgency in Darfur in the west was met with a campaign of ethnic cleansing to drive out the local population and replace it with Arab settlers. 'Janjaweed' militias, supported by the government, could kill, loot and rape at will. By 2010 – when Bashir was indicted by the International Criminal Court for ordering mass murder, rape, torture and genocide – 300,000 people had died in Darfur violence.

In April 2019 Bashir was overthrown after four months of mass protests triggered by rising prices. When government forces tried to clear demonstrations, some elements of the army and navy joined the crowd. An alliance of generals and technocrats ruled the country from August 2019 in a 'transitional government' with elections to be scheduled after two to three years. But the popular revolution – which unleashed a wave of optimism – was hijacked by a military junta in 2021 and General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan arrested the civilian prime minister Abdalla Hamdok and others in a coup. In November 2021 Hamdok was back in 'office' but under the military. He resigned on 2 January 2022.

Sudan was then ruled by an increasingly uneasy alliance between the 'Chairman of the Transitional Sovereignty Council' al-Burhan as head of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Deputy Chair, Muhammad Hamdan 'Hemedti' Dagalo, the head of a powerful militia named the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

In April 2023 the alliance between the two Sudanese generals collapsed and war broke out. There have been fierce military battles within the capital city, Khartoum, and at the last count the number of people displaced, both inside and outside Sudan, has reached 8.4 million. Over 14,700 women, men and children have reportedly been killed. Nearly five million people are one step away from famine and 18 million people are facing acute food insecurity.

A novel published since 1994

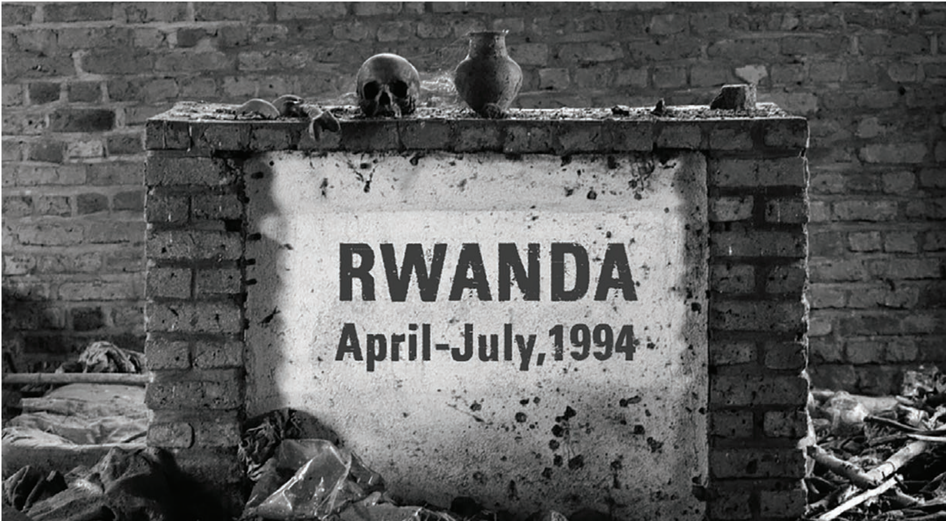


The Book of Khartoum: A City in Short Fiction by Raph Cormack and Max Shmookler (editors) and various translators from Arabic. Reading the City, 2016. Kindle $7.28 – but only 92 pages.

RWANDA

In brief – when the genocide ended the country returned to totalitarian rule under Paul Kagame, who has been approved by 98% of voters.

Population 13 million; authoritarian regime, beloved by many other governments



Remembering the 1984 genocide

The exact numbers are not known, but internecine fighting involving the Tutsi minority and Hutu majority led to about 800,000 (mainly Tutsi) deaths over just 100 days from April to July 1994.

The genocide was stopped by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel army made up mostly of ethnic Tutsis that had formed in neighbouring Uganda during the 1980s. The RPF took power after their military victory. Millions of refugees from the genocide had fled into neighbouring countries and, particularly, destabilised the eastern provinces of the DRC (then Zaire). The RPF, supported by Uganda, fomented regional wars that escalated until a peace deal was reached in 2003. The death toll in the region exceeded five million.

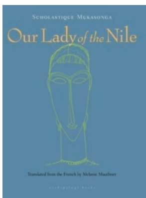
Paul Kagame, the *de facto* ruler of Rwanda from 1994, became President in 2000. A new constitution was adopted in 2003 and Kagame won the first post-genocide election with 95% of the vote. He was re-elected (with 93% support) in 2010 for a second seven-year term. He won again in 2017 (with 99%) after a referendum approved the adjustment of term limits – just for Kagame. (If he wishes he may run for election in July 2024 and five and ten years after that!)

Rwanda has never been a democratic country and when there have been elections and referenda they are not and have never been free and fair. Critics of the government and Kagame are silenced or acted against with a determination that extends beyond the borders of the country.

Internally, using lots of foreign aid, Rwanda has shown some economic success, most notably a fast GDP growth rate. The towns are notably clean and orderly. Most people live in rural areas where the soil is extremely fertile and well-watered. Farmers can get two crops a year.

Externally, over the last decade, Rwanda has made itself indispensable by supplying disciplined peacekeepers to trouble spots across the continent (e.g. in Mozambique). Rwanda has accepted money from the UK to house Britain's unwanted asylum seekers (none have yet been sent). From 2012 Rwanda has provided military support for the 'M23 movement' a militia in the DRC that has, in recent months, displaced hundreds of thousands of people near Goma on the Rwanda border. Rwanda shares in the shady networks that profit from minerals mined in the DRC.

A novel published since 1994



Our Lady of the Nile by Scholastique Mukasonga (author) and Melanie Mauthner (translator from the French). Archipelago, 2014. (Winner of the Prix Renaudot, published by Gallimard, 2012 as *Notre-dame du nil*). Kindle $11.49 **NA93**

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ENDNOTES

1 This followed a civil war in which the EPRDF defeated the Derg junta, the military dictatorship that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987.

2 Ethiopia included present-day Eritrea until a 1993 referendum in which the people of the northern province of Eritrea voted for independence.

3 Zaire was the name of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1971 to 1997.

4 See https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2022/11/17/why-algerias-rotten-regime-has-been-lucky

5 See https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2022/01/04/why-is-sudan-so-unstable

The idea of a 'social protection floor' for South Africa

Developing an approach for social justice and inclusion

- Edited by *New Agenda* from the work of Viviene Taylor

Prof Viviene Taylor is a long-standing board member of IFAA and a specialist in comparative social policy. Now retired, she was Head of Social Development at the University of Cape Town. Professor Taylor's career consists of both national and international development experience spanning more than 35 years. She is famously known as chair of the 2002 *Committee of Inquiry into a comprehensive system of social security for South Africa* and its inspiring and challenging recommendations. "The Taylor Report" called for the phasing-in of a Basic Income Grant. Amongst many other roles she has served as a Commissioner on the National Planning Commission (NPC).

South Africa leads the developing world in building a social protection system. A total of 28 million people — 45% of the population — currently receive a grant, including the nine million who get the Social Relief of Distress grant which has been extended every year since Covid. VIVIENE TAYLOR outlines how the idea of a 'social protection floor' developed over the 30 years of democracy and the shortcomings that still delay its full implementation.

Source: Needpix

Over the last 30 years South Africa has established the basis for elements of a "social protection floor", which should assist even the poorest households to attain a decent standard of living. Achieving a social protection floor is an essential requirement because of historical, political and constitutional imperatives.

We still have to address the huge gaps in social provision that exist for many. A social protection floor provides support that reduces vulnerability, alleviates poverty, and empowers individuals, families and communities.

The overarching framework within which South Africa is addressing poverty, inequality and unemployment is the *National Development Plan 2030: – Our Future: Make It Work* (NPC, 2011). Chapter 11 of the National Development Plan (NDP) states that a social floor should be determined that can be progressively realised as part of a wider process of achieving a social compact. The initial approach was to engage on the key questions on which South Africa needs to focus to promote dialogue on the social floor, rather than try to reach finality on answers that, among others, define the elements of the social floor itself.

The goal is to determine what combination of public and private services is necessary to attain a vision of an inclusive system of social protection which has an agreed social floor as its central platform. We need to deal with the questions: how do we arrive at a defined social minimum or social floor that prescribes an adequate standard of life; and how do we reduce the cost of living so that a decent standard of life is attainable even in the poorest of households?

These principles have been debated and subject to experiment for over 30 years. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) states : "No political democracy can survive and flourish if the mass of our people remain in poverty, without land, without tangible prospects for a better life. Attacking poverty and deprivation must therefore be the first priority of our democratic government." (RDP, 1994: 1.2.9).

Social and economic rights in South Africa are justiciable and they have the same status as civil and political rights. Importantly, the South African Constitution mandates the right of access to healthcare, food, water and social security in Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights. More precisely, Section 27(1)(c) states that everyone has the right of access to "social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance".

Chapter 11 of the NDP (2011b:341) notes that:

> Concepts such as a social wage and social floor have been used in South African debates to adjust crude distributional indicators to reflect a more balanced picture of distributional fairness. It is generally recognized that there is a need to identify a crucial 'package' of social benefits capable of generating levels of social inclusiveness to radically transform economic development in South Africa. South Africa needs to work towards defining a social floor below which no one should fall.

This understanding fits well with that of the Taylor Report (RSA, 2002:41) which refers to:

> Comprehensive social protection for South Africa that seeks to provide the basic means for all people living in the country to effectively participate and advance in social and economic life and in turn to contribute to social and economic development.

There is conceptual and policy continuity in the thinking that underpins Chapter 11 of the NDP (NPC, 2011) and the Taylor Report (RSA, 2002:41-42). This continuity is also evident in the statement that refers to some of the elements that constitute an acceptable minimum standard which states, "Comprehensive social protection … incorporates developmental strategies and programmes designed to ensure, collectively, at least a minimum acceptable living standard for all citizens" (RSA, 2002:41).

The elements of the intended social protection package are set out in the table and graph below.

Table 1 Comprehensive social protection package and components

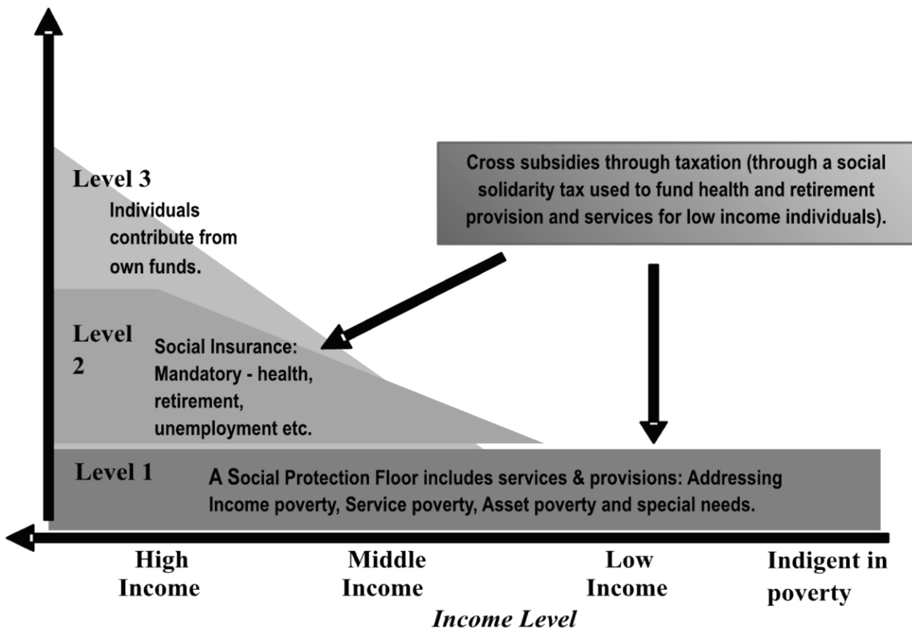
Response to:	**Application**	**Key components**
Income poverty	Universal (a)	• Basic Income Grant • Child Support Grant • Maintain State Old Age Grant
Capability poverty	Universal/eligibility criteria (b)	• Free and adequate publicly-provided healthcare • Free primary and secondary education • Free water and sanitation (lifeline) • Free electricity (lifeline) • Accessible and affordable public transport • Access to affordable and adequate housing • Access to jobs and skills training
Asset poverty	Universal/eligibility criteria (c)	• Access to productive and income-generating assets such as land and credit • Access to social assets such as community infrastructure
Special needs	Eligibility criteria (d)	• Reformed and improved Disability Grant, Foster Care Grant, Child Support Grant, Care Dependence Grant, Special Pensions for Veterans
Risk and contingencies over the life cycle – social insurance	Eligibility (e)	• Cover for old age, disability, unemployment and health needs

Source: Adapted from Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive Social Security System for South Africa (Taylor Report), (RSA, 2002:42).

Table 1 (above) provides a clear indication of the components that contribute to a social protection 'package' or floor. These are necessary to address long-term structural conditions and risks and vulnerabilities experienced by people over the life cycle.

Figure 1 (below) illustrates how a social protection floor could be achieved within a mixed state and private approach that allows choice in a comprehensive system and that relies on solidarity and "subsidiarity". The principle of subsidiarity has a normative aspect in ensuring all who need social protection are able to access it. The principle gives effect to Nussbaum's argument (2004:13) that ultimately the state has responsibility for providing guarantees for the protection of all citizens, especially in a constitutional democracy. The state should contribute through subsidies to shore up a social protection floor to enable universal access to goods and services.

Figure 1 Achieving a social protection floor as a basis for social justice and inclusion



Achieving a social floor using human rights principles as a framework makes a qualitative contribution to existing initiatives to reduce poverty and inequality.

South Africa's Constitution, the NDP and related legislation require that practical steps be taken to advance a social protection floor that removes poverty and reduces inequalities. South Africa's current approach to social provision falls short of these imperatives because it is selective, categorical and means tested and does not provide protection for the millions of working poor and unemployed. Ironically, this outcome is

contemplated in the Constitution, which does not "grant" social protection, but speaks of "progressive realisation". Subsection 27(2) states: "The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights."

South Africa's social and economic context and the social protection gap

The reality for many people who live in situations of intolerable conditions and deprivation is that political democracy post 1994, has not yet resulted in significant changes or improvements in their daily lives.

Despite the inscribing of poverty in post-1994 social protection policies, the evidence shows that income for poor households has declined in real terms since then. A third of households, consisting of 18 million people, are estimated to live in poverty and 54% of the poorest are children. Households in rural areas and former homelands are the worst affected by poverty. The social protection measures currently in place are diluted in their impact partly because their cash amounts are too low and partly because of a combination of structural conditions and exposure to new risks and vulnerabilities that arise from neoliberal economic globalisation.

Unemployment rates are particularly high among women and also among rural people, young people and black people in general. In the formal sector, there is a decreasing need for semi-skilled or low-skilled workers. The main cause of unemployment is not simply inadequate education but can be attributed to the economy not creating much-needed jobs. Among the employed, many are located in informal employment, in part reflecting changing employment practices through outsourcing, sub-contracting and the use of labour brokers.

The impacts of unemployment, under-employment and poverty are multidimensional and intergenerational. These effects can be reduced through comprehensive social protection measures that provide the means for inclusion in labour markets and society. The NDP reinforces such a comprehensive social protection approach and explicitly states that social protection "should enable and support participation in the labour market by narrowing the gap between wages and the cost of living for those employed in low wage jobs" (NPC, 2011:327). It further clarifies that the type and level of support required for everyone to have a decent life above a minimum threshold must be determined and agreed as a priority (NPC, 2011:327).

The support necessary for individuals and households to achieve a decent standard of living includes access to both health and education. Tragically, recent evidence shows that access to education remains highly unequal and is among the main reasons driving race- and class-based inequality. The life chances of black children

No political democracy can survive and flourish if the mass of our people remain in poverty.

contrast sharply with those of white children who have a far higher chance of graduating from higher education institutions. Such inequalities point to the need for adequate social protection measures that are responsive to the initial social and economic conditions in poor communities. Social infrastructure and essential social services, including books and other equipment that enable school learners to study, is generally not available in poor communities. These factors compromise poor people's integration into labour markets and their integration into society.

Social and economic rights in South Africa are justiciable and they have the same status as civil and political rights.

Poverty affects health outcomes in the most direct way. Low-income households have substantially worse health outcomes than richer ones. The inability to pay for health care and the increasing burden of diseases experienced by the poorest households not only impacts on the quality of life but also highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to social protection. This includes the need for access to quality health care for all through an adequately resourced public health system.

Despite significant policy and legislative changes that widen access to education, to health and to essential services, the life chances for black citizens are far from just and equitable. An important feature of the social and economic landscape is that workers living in poverty, particularly those who are structurally unemployed and who are vulnerable and at risk and therefore not covered by government's social assistance provision, remain excluded and marginalised. For example, most of the unemployed report that they have never worked and have not contributed to the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and thus do not qualify to receive such benefits. What happens to those working age individuals who live in poverty and are without income or livelihood support? Public employment programmes offer a limited option of waged work but these programmes only provide work for 3% to 6% of the unemployed. Social insurance coverage is not available for people working in the informal sector and most people working in public employment programmes are without UIF.

Other social protection gaps show that even in one of the government's most successful programmes of social cash grants, poor people are excluded from income support because they do not meet the criteria used for means testing, or because they do not fit the designated category in terms of age, or simply because the grant administrative system is inefficient and corrupt. Administrative barriers are such that many people are unable to acquire birth certificates and identity documents which are necessary for making claims. Similar gaps exist in the exclusion of many people with disabilities from the Disability Grant. Many older persons and children still remain outside the social protection system although they live in households that are income poor.

NO DOCUMENTATION: Bomkazi Nkebe, 30, can't get a child support grant for her five-year-old son as he doesn't have a birth certificate — because she doesn't have an ID document; nor did her mother or grandmother. Read Bhekisisa's original story here. Source: Oupa Nkosi, Bhekisisa

A combination of poor social services delivery and lack of implementation as well as selective criteria that target only the poorest individuals for basic social protection leaves millions of people without employment and human development processes. For these individuals and their families, the democratic dividend has yet to be translated into social and economic protections that give effect to the Constitution. Moreover, the transmission mechanisms and transactional agreements within and outside government for delivery of health services, education and social assistance are open to corruption and greed that is fuelled by competitive procurement processes.

The progressive realisation of socio-economic rights contained in the Constitution distinguishes South Africa as a developmental state. The notion of 'developmental' is one that reflects the aim of systematically advancing a rights agenda over time with a predetermined plan that gives programmatic effect to the realisation of human rights. The Constitution provides the policy framework that ensures the realisation of the political mandate for the attainment of social and economic rights in South Africa.

However, the gaps in social protection, especially for black people who were historically excluded and remain trapped in multi-dimensional poverty, amplify the policy distance between the intentions in the Constitution, their social and economic realities and the vision in the NDP. **NA93**

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As we celebrate, we indict

A personal reflection on 30 years of democracy by a rank-and-file activist

- By Shepi Mati

Shepi Mati is a Rhodes University academic and a journalist. He previously worked for the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa) as a researcher and manager of its democracy radio project. Formerly a national president of the Congress of South African Students (Cosas), he has also worked for various civil society organisations in various parts of the country. Mati holds an M.Phil in Journalism (University of Stellenbosch) and an Advanced Diploma in Institution Development (Manchester University).

This is a personal reflection of a rank-and-file activist on 30 years of democracy in South Africa. Whilst it celebrates the achievements of democracy, it seeks to indict us all for the crime of ukuxhaphaza nokunyela abantu baseMzantsi Afrika, (abusing and trampling on the dignity of the people of South Africa). SHEPI MATI explores how the fight for democracy impacted on our emotions, our hearts and our experience of living under formal democracy.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this personal reflection to the memory of those who lost their lives in their struggle to make this world more liveable and just. Among them, 33-year-old Andries Tatane, a resident of Maqheleng, who was shot dead by police in Ficksburg on 13 April 2011 whilst protesting for service delivery. And the 34 miners of Lonmin who were shot dead by police in Marikana whilst on strike demanding R12,500 for rock drill operators. Also 48-year-old Ayanda Kota, the tower of Makhanda, who succumbed to cancer – one of the pathologies we are subjected to under a system which puts profits before human life.

Jazz music is the perfect metaphor for democracy. We improvise, which is our individual rights and freedoms; we swing, which means we are responsible to nurture the common good, with everyone in fine balance; and we play the blues, which means no matter how bad things get, we remain optimistic while still mindful of problems.

Wynton Marsalis[1]

This year marks 30 years of democracy in South Africa. April 2024 was 360 months since all South Africans – irrespective of colour, class, gender or creed – cast their votes to choose their public representatives for the first time. If we were to count this in days, it amounts to 10,958 days. I still remember the excitement and the buzz in the long snaking queue to cast our votes on that historic Wednesday at the Salt River Town Hall in Cape Town. I seek to trace my own personal journey as a young person belonging to a generation who, in the words of Franz Fanon, took up the challenge to define their mission and sought to fulfil it.

At issue here is whether we have fulfilled it or betrayed it. Although I speak for myself, I am a member of my generation of activists and militants. I have never lost hope in the dream and vision of social justice, and the capacity of what Fanon calls “the wretched of the Earth” and Uruguayan writer and journalist Eduardo Galeano calls “the nobodies” to be agents of social change.

Locating myself: inequality and democratic stirrings

I belong to a generation born at the time of the banning of the ANC and PAC and the formation of Umkhonto We Sizwe. I have lived about half my life under democracy and half under apartheid.

About 90 days before I saw the sun across our well-endowed continent, the CIA and Belgian intelligence, with the assistance of local puppet Colonel Joseph Mabuto and the complicity of the United Nations, had just captured and murdered Congo’s democratically elected Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, and his two comrades, Joseph Koito and Maurice Mpolo. About four days before I emerged from my mother’s womb, 1,400 Cuban exiles, armed and financed by the United States of America, mounted an invasion at the Bay of Pigs on the south coast of the island. And by the time my umbilical cord was severed and I saw light for the first time, almost 1,200 members of the invading brigade were taken prisoner – soon to be exchanged with the US for $53 million worth of baby food and medicines.

At that time in my country those born in public hospitals in the same year as me were either born in a Non-European Only or a European Only maternity section of the hospitals and destined for either a life of privilege or that of poverty, at the end of which they would be buried six-feet underground in a graveyard for Whites or Non-Whites – all depending on the colour of their skin.

I was born into a community that had been dispossessed of its land and natural resources by violent colonial conquest and occupation. It had been a community of independent producers who produced what they consumed and consumed what they produced until their encounter with the disruption of colonialism. Through the wars

of dispossession and land theft, they were transformed into a proletariat which, in the words of Rwandan President Paul Kagame, had come to "produce what we don't consume and consume what we don't produce".[2]

The diamond and gold mines needed labour. And to force the African peasants and independent producers to work on the mines, the colonial settler government imposed a limitation on or culling of livestock and introduced hut, poll and labour taxes and then required that this tax be paid in money (Callinicos, 2014). In this way the government of Cecil John Rhodes ensured that Africans formed a steady stream of cheap labour to the mines of Kimberley and Johannesburg. This, together with the primitive accumulation which had been provided by slavery in the Cape, built the economy of this country. The claim that it was the brains and muscle of the White man that built this country is a lie. Every generation of my own family, since the discovery of diamonds and gold between 1860 and 1880, joined this steady stream of people to the mines to dig for diamonds and gold. Slavery and cheap black labour are what built the economy of southern Africa.

A song of lament by Stompi Mavi captures the emotional toll of mine labour on those left behind to keep the home fires burning – the lovers, wives, mothers. It goes:

> *Lomlung' uTeba ngokwenene ndiyamzonda ngokuthath' is'thandwa sam*
> *Andisoze ndiy' eGoli*
> *Uzubathuthe loliwe, uzubathuthe loliwe*
> *Andisoze ndiy' eGoli*
> (This White man TEBA[3] I deeply loathe for taking away my lover
> I will never set foot in the City of Gold
> You carry them railways, you carry them railways
> I will never set foot in the City of Gold)

When I reflect back on my own personal journey to a life committed to participatory democracy and social justice, I can identify some defining moments, often at the knee of my great-grandfather Daniel Daniso Mati. I was brought up by my great-grandparents, Daniso and Deliwe, in an isolated homestead called KwaDingane between what the KhoiKhoi called eKhobonqaba – and the colonialists called Adelaide – in what is now called the Eastern Cape province. Often my great-grandfather would send me after a stranger walking past our homestead on the way home to one of the many farms around. When I brought him back, my great-grandfather would engage in conversation with the stranger, offering tea and *amasi* and, after an evening meal, a place to sleep until he could resume his journey in the morning.

Years later I interviewed a Somalian refugee – a man who held a master's degree in mathematics and was a highly regarded musician in his home country before the war – and he told me a similar story of growing up in Somalia where people lived as nomads, travelling great distances for trade, and often finding shelter overnight with strangers where they were fed and offered a warm bed, and in the morning, after exchanging the traditional *as-salaam-alaikum*[4] greeting, moving on to their destination.

Even today in our "multiply-wounded" and broken society (Cabrera, 2002), when

I see a stranger walking past, I am tempted to offer them water, tea and a chair to rest. Or when I drive past someone walking, I want to offer them a lift onwards to wherever they're going. These are the deeply embedded values driving the heartbeat of those of us who, from an early age, were revolted by the cruel and inhuman treatment of one human being by another, and who committed ourselves to a struggle for human dignity and social justice.

The second defining moment was after my great-grandfather had passed on when it dawned on me that I was now on my own in the world and had to contribute to the household income of my uncles and aunts. As soon as I could string together a sentence in Afrikaans, *baas, ek soek werk,* I found myself working after school as a so-called garden boy and a caddie on the golf course for White people in Adelaide. Barefoot and wearing an oversized hand-me-down khaki shirt that used to be worn by my uncle as part of his South African Railways uniform – it was big enough to cover as my underpants as well – I walked the streets of the town and the suburbs to and from work amazed at how the Whites lived compared to us in our townships. As a curious child, I would ask myself 'why?' Why was it the way it was? The best answer I could find was maybe God wanted it this way for us. But as I grew older, this explanation was just not solid enough as more doubts began to flourish in my fertile young mind.

Local to global and back

My generation was baptized by the victory celebrations of the racist rulers of our country as they massacred hundreds of protesters, banned the liberation movements, imprisoned the resistance leaders. As the poet Arthur Nortje says, "… the laager masters recline in a gold inertia behind the arsenal of Sten guns' (in Berthoud, 1984:1-14).

By the end of the 1960s our elder brothers and sisters had, in the words of Fanon,

identified their mission and sought to fulfil it. At Rhodes University they walked out of the conference of the mainly White National Union of South African Students (Nusas) and launched the South African Students Organisation (Saso) heralding the era of Black Consciousness with its 'I'm Black and proud' and 'Black Power' slogans. This was the era of Afro hairstyles, dashikis and Nina Simone's *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*. Thus we entered the 1970s awakening to talking walls in our townships that screamed 'Where is Barney Pityana?', 'The People Shall Govern', 'Down with Vorster'.

I was about to complete Standard Three (Grade 5) when on 19 October 1973 the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) took a decision to impose an oil embargo on the US. This was the Arab countries' response to US President Richard Nixon providing the Israeli government with $2.2 billion emergency aid to support the Yom Kippur War. By January 1974 – as I was preparing to enter Standard Four – the price of oil had jumped from $2.90 to $11.65 per barrel of oil, which affected the price of every single consumable item. I remember as a child being regularly sent to buy bread and milk. If my memory serves me well, a half a loaf of brown bread in 1970 cost about 2 cents and a full loaf 4 cents. But after the 1973 oil price hike, if I left home with 4 cents I came back with only half a loaf of bread. OPEC lifted the embargo in March 1974 but the price of oil did not come down and the result was an increase in inflation. Of course, our *laager* masters, having long bought our White working-class brothers and sisters, were cushioned comfortably by a capitalist system based on racism and cheap black labour.

The many lives of democracy

We are told democracy was born in the ancient Greek city-state of Athens about 500 years before the birth of Christ (Korovkin, 1981). Yet this was a slave-owning democracy and slaves did not enjoy the democratic rights of the rest of society. As for the story of democracy in Africa, Asia and in what Cuban patriot and freedom fighter Jose Marti calls 'Our America,' it is yet to be told.

In the US, the so-called shining example of democracy, women only achieved the right to vote in August 1920 with the passing of the 19th Amendment of the Constitution. And although former slaves in the US were granted the right to vote under the 15th Amendment to the US Constitution, many states continued to deny this right to African-Americans. It was only in 1965 with the adoption of the Voting Rights Act that the right to vote was granted to African-Americans throughout the country.

Our own democracy was born on the streets in the struggle against colonialism, apartheid and social injustice. One of the most celebrated of these moments was the decade of mass action in defiance of apartheid laws, which culminated in the adoption of the Freedom Charter[5] in Kliptown in 1955. This was before I was born. The other great moment was the decade of mass protest and defiance in the 1980s, often ascribed to the call by the then banned and exiled ANC to "make the townships ungovernable and the institutions of apartheid unworkable."[6]

Communities mobilised and organised themselves against the rising cost of living, rent increases, deteriorating services in black townships, the lack of maintenance of infrastructure in schools. They formed street, area, neighbourhood and village

committees to defend themselves against anti-social elements, the police, the askaris[7] and the apartheid local authorities. These organs of people's power, as they became popularly known, became a *de facto* alternative government. The apartheid authorities, the bourgeoisie and local and global capital feared people's power. They feared the voice of the people, Galeano's 'nobodies' who he describes thus:

> …The nobodies: the sons of no one,
> the owners of nothing.
> The nobodies: treated as no one,
> running after the carrot, dying their lives, fucked,
> double-fucked.
> … Who don't do art, but rather crafts.
> Who don't practice culture, but rather folklore.
> Who are not human,
> but rather human resources.
> Who have no face but have arms,
> who have no name, but rather a number.
> Who don't appear in the universal history books,
> but rather in the police pages of the local press.
> The nobodies,
> the ones who are worth less
> than the bullet that kills them.
> *"Los Nadies"* (The Nobodies), in *Galeano's* 1989 poetry collection
> *El libro de los abrazos (The Book of Embraces*)

It was this capacity to organise themselves and imagine a more humane future that the powers-that-be feared most and did everything to throttle. They unleashed a brutal campaign of violence in what has been termed low intensity warfare against households, neighbourhoods and communities where people lived, in the trains on their way to work, where they gathered to mourn loved ones. The apartheid agents, of all shades, would emerge out of the darkness and spray bullets at them or hack limbs and life out of these 'nobodies' who dared to challenge the hegemony of White supremacy and the market.

In the mid-1980s, with the imposition of the state of emergency and the banning of the Congress of South African Students (Cosas), we saw in Gramscian terms the ideological defeat of apartheid. Hence the resort to mass scale detention without trial, the banning of leaders of the Mass Democratic Movement, the unleashing of naked violence and the occupation of the townships by the apartheid military.

When the regime unbanned the liberation movements and called for peace and negotiation it was clear that the objective was to negotiate with a weakened opponent and extract maximum concessions from the other side.

Even the semblance of democratic consultation during the negotiation process soon became a sham. As a member of an ANC branch in Guguletu, I remember very clearly

attending a meeting to deliberate on the issue of the role of traditional leaders in a democratic system, only to hear from those who arrived late – because they had to catch up with the latest news on TV – that a decision had already been taken on this issue at the negotiations. This, if anything, demoralised ordinary rank and file members who had looked forward to participating in shaping the future of the country. Our agency was effectively outsourced to our leaders, something which, as the Hungarian philosopher István Mészáros once warned us, could have disastrous consequences: "Politics affects the life of everybody ... politics is far too important to be left to the politicians, even the most far-sighted of them (Mészáros, quoted in Kanellis, 2000).

When a democratic government came into power in 1994, a new discourse took root amongst our ranks – delivery at the expense of agency, consumers instead of citizens, products instead of services. And the ordinary men and women who only yesterday were at the forefront of dislodging, with their bare hands and their brains, a system declared a crime against humanity by the United Nations, were now expected to demobilise and go back home to wait for the government to deliver services.

I still remember the excitement and the buzz in the long snaking queue to cast our votes on that historic Wednesday at the Salt River Town Hall in Cape Town.

Today we are told privatisation is the panacea to all our social ills and the market is worshipped like a God. This as the elite in our country is bent on pursuing neoliberal policies and belt tightening austerity measures. What they've forgotten, now that they have moved to the suburbs and left the townships behind, is that the poor have neither belts to tighten or full stomachs. Indeed the looting 'now it's our time to eat' brigade, driven by the zeal of a market on steroids – *uvulazibhuqe* – have descended like vultures on their prey of SOEs (State Owned Enterprises) and are already gouging the carcass. Noam Chomsky warned, "that's the standard technique of privatisation: defund, make sure things don't work, people get angry, you hand it over to private capital."

Who do we blame?

The White man is a beneficiary of a system which over 300 years has subjected the people of this country to appalling conditions. And the Black man bears responsibility for the failure to deal with this.

We celebrate...

There are substantial achievements we can celebrate under democracy; there has been massive housing provision by the democratic government. Sometime in 2017, Rhodes University was host to Prof Wamba dia Wamba, a guerilla leader of one of the

liberation movements in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). I took him to visit the other side of Makhanda. After seeing the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) houses in Extension 9 and being told that these houses were provided for free as part of a national housing project by the Department of Human Settlement, he remarked that to his knowledge South Africa may be the only country in the continent to provide free housing to its citizens. This is in itself a remarkable achievement and the realisation of a dream encapsulated in the Freedom Charter of 1955. We celebrate this even as we indict those rapacious tenderpreneurs, who, inspired by the capitalist logic of keeping input costs down whilst reaping maximum profits, build houses whose walls begin to crack the minute they vacate the site.

The other achievement has been extensive provision of social grants, which have rescued the most vulnerable from starvation. As far as health care goes, we have made advances in terms of free health care for pregnant mothers and the broader provision of free care at public hospitals and community health centres. In fact, one of the local day hospitals in Makhanda provides what I consider the best dental care I have experienced in a long time. All for free.

The hope and faith the majority vested in the liberation movement is being taken advantage of by those who get into politics to feed their stomachs through looting, stealing and lying.

We indict...

In the IsiXhosa lexicon, *ukuxhatshazwa*, means to be abused in such a way that your dignity is crushed, to be taken advantage of. The hope and faith the majority of South Africans vested in the liberation movement is being taken advantage of by those who get into politics to feed their stomachs through looting, stealing and lying.

However, as we celebrate the achievements, we must acknowledge our health care system arrived under democracy on crutches. By the advent of democracy, the apartheid government had effectively privatised health care provision, which had led to the mushrooming of the medical aid industry and growth of the supply of private health care for the few. The system was so loaded that in 2019, of the total health budget of R462 billion, 51.3% was spent on funding the 15% of the population who are covered by private health care through the medical aid system whilst the remaining 48.7% of total health care spending was used to fund 85% of the population who are dependent on public health care (Simkins, 2021).

A keen observer and passionate advocate of public health, Dr Kgosi Letlapa, recounts how in 1984 when he was a senior house officer working in a cardiothoracic department at Baragwanath Hospital, he could not have attended to White patients as hospitals were still segregated under apartheid.[8] Letlapa goes on to say it was after 1976 that the apartheid government "made a strategic decision to no longer invest in the public health care system, but to privatise it and build a private health care system". The health care system inherited by the democratic government after 1994 was the result of careful planning of what Letlapa calls "pursuit of separateness under commercial guidelines not determined by the colour of your skin but by the colour of your money".

At the time of writing, the President of South Africa had recently signed into law the National Health Insurance Act. Even though critics say it is lacking in a solid management and implementation plan, it has once again raised the hopes of a population which has either been left outside the provision of quality health care or is gradually drowning under the rising costs and shrinking services provided by the medical aid schemes.

As far as education goes, in many respects we began on the wrong footing. We closed down the teacher and nursing colleges, which arguably provided more practical training programmes, in favour of universities, which many say are way too academic. Then we messed up the language policy. Education provision has nearly decimated township schools, whilst what used to be called the Model C schools have thrived – even teachers in township schools send their children to Model C schools.

What we experienced growing up was the equalising role of public education. In our township schools the sons and daughters of teachers, nurses, lawyers and doctors sat in the same desks next to the sons and daughters of street sweepers, mineworkers and dustbin collectors. This was a guarantor of quality provision of education, despite the best intentions of apartheid.

Any self-respecting and genuine revolution builds on any positive and progressive aspects of social life obtained before the revolution. One of the most shortsighted decisions of the democratic government was the dismantling of the system of trade schools and apprenticeships, let alone the specialist teaching and nursing colleges. I would add the system of cooperatives and welfarism that lifted the Afrikaners and White community from paupers to a middle-class lifestyle in one generation. These instruments, it appears, were simply cast away under democracy. I am yet to find a rationale for such decisions.

Hope and democracy

> *"This world is not democratic at all … The most powerful institutions, the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and the World Bank, belong to three or four countries. The others are watching."*
>
> *Eduardo Galeano*[9]

The global situation of democracy in 2024 has reignited a sense of hope and optimism as young people – this generation – have taken to occupying their campuses right inside the belly of the beast, the US, and demanding a ceasefire of what most of humanity considers to be a genocide in Gaza. And this genocide is being carried out by one of the most sophisticated armies supplied by the taxes of the citizens. These young people – who include Jews of conscience – are saying 'not in our name'.

Finally, when you're in doubt and the prospects appear grim and grey, let one of the most vocal and prolific activists to emerge from the Indian subcontinent lift you up. This is a voice that often captures the depth of feeling of those who are in the trenches of the continuing struggles for personal and social emancipation:

> *"Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. Maybe many of us won't be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing."*
>
> *Arundhati Roy*[10] **NA93**

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ENDNOTES

1 See https://billmoyers.com/story/democracy-jazz-wynton-marsalis-amazing-grace/

2 Facebook post by Paul Kagame, press conference, May 13, 2016. Available at https://www.facebook.com/100044367342302/posts/10153402661527282/

3 TEBA (The Employment Bureau of Africa) was the successor to the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA later called Wenela), which was established in 1902 to recruit labour for the South African mines.

4 Arabic greeting meaning 'Peace be upon you'

5 See https://www.britannica.com/topic/Freedom-Charter

6 See https://www.nytimes.com/1985/09/07/world/apartheid-foe-says-protest-in-white-areas-is-inevitable.html

7 Askaris were informers and traitors who turned against their communities and joined the apartheid military and police forces.

8 Video interview, Tik Tok @pioneersofourgeneration

9 See https://www.truthdig.com/videos/eduardo-galeano-this-world-is-not-democratic-at-all-video/

10 From *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* by Arundhati Roy.

South Africa after 30 years

Still a nation of two economies

- By Roland Ngam

Dr Roland Ngam is programme manager for climate justice and socioecological transformation at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Southern Africa, where he coordinates the climate blog, ClimateJusticeCentral. Before that, he was a postdoctoral research fellow in the Emancipatory Futures Studies Programme at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The ANC is confronted with one tough question: reform or die slowly. ROLAND NGAM delves into the ANC-led attempts at creating a South Africa that works for all and examines why the Freedom Charter's resolution – "the People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth" – is still an aspiration three decades into Black majority rule. He posits that that many fundamental aspects of the national question, especially land and the economy, have been postponed for too long.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Introduction

Thirty years into the democratic dispensation, South Africa is still a country of two nations as former President Thabo Mbeki once famously described it. The dream of economic freedom post-apartheid is deferred indefinitely. The challenge of poverty remains, to borrow the famous words of the eminent African American scholar, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, "the problem of the color-line". The rural countryside also looks and feels cast adrift. It is dominated by pervasive apartheid geography with a preponderance of informal settlements. Municipalities are struggling under the yoke of corruption and poor service delivery and because municipalities are struggling, hospitals, public transport, schools and security are struggling. A key priority of the national question, i.e. the long-promised land reform and a demand of the 1955 Congress of the People is yet to be delivered. This is fuelling a sense of betrayal among Blacks and it has become the cudgel that political parties, notably the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and rabble rousers use to beat the ANC with at every opportunity. Some anxious and sometimes mischievous voices have started saying openly that things were better for Blacks in the apartheid era.

A country of two nations

In his seminal 'two nations' speech, sometimes referred to as the 'two economies' speech, delivered to the National Assembly on 29 May 1998 on the theme 'reconciliation and nation building, former President Mbeki described the chasm that existed between White and Black South Africans in the '90s as follows:

> We therefore make bold to say that South Africa is a country of two nations.
> One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. This enables it to argue that, except for the persistence of gender discrimination against women, all members of this nation have the possibility to exercise their right to equal opportunity, the development opportunities to which the Constitution of '93 committed our country.
> The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled. This nation lives under conditions of grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. It has virtually no possibility to exercise what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity, with that right being equal within this black nation only to the extent that it is equally incapable of realisation.

> This reality of two nations, underwritten by the perpetuation of the racial, gender and spatial disparities born of a very long period of colonial and apartheid white minority domination, constitutes the material base which reinforces the notion that, indeed, we are not one nation, but two nations.
> And neither are we becoming one nation. Consequently, also, the objective of national reconciliation is not being realised. It follows as well that the longer this situation persists, in spite of the gift of hope delivered to the people by the birth of democracy, the more entrenched will be the conviction that the concept of nation-building is a mere mirage and that no basis exists, or will ever exist, to enable national reconciliation to take place.

The challenge for the ANC has always been to ensure that this two nations paradigm is dismantled and replaced with a fairer model that shares the country's wealth more equally among all citizens. Former president Mbeki indicated in his speech that bridging the gap would take time. Repairing a broken country like South Africa required an almost faultless run of wins by the government, decade after decade.

South Africa under the ANC: The good

By any standards, some of the ANC's achievements are unprecedented in Africa, both in the scope and scale of the changes as well as the time frame in which they were realised. South Africa's biggest achievement under Black majority rule of course is a new social contract. The national project is born of the December 1996 Constitution and is based on the values of human dignity, non-racialism and non-sexism, supremacy of the Constitution, the rule of law and universal adult suffrage governed by a national common voters' roll, regular elections and a multi-party system of democratic government. The Constitution further guarantees a right to a healthy, unharmed planet and equal enjoyment of the country's rivers, lakes, forests, *veld* and parks.

Since the beginning of the democratic era following the historic elections of 26 and 29 April 1994, South Africa has had five presidents: Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki, Kgalema Motlanthe, Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma and Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa. None of them has tried to modify the Constitution in order to remain in power indefinitely, as is often the case in many African countries. The previous national Parliament had 46% women representation, one of the few countries in the world to score that high on this matrix. Furthermore, South Africa has a truly decentralised system of government with three tiers: national, provincial and local. More recently, the national government has been allocated 48.6% of nationally raised funds, with 41.4% going to provincial governments and 10% going to local government.

With the consolidation of the social contract, the ANC government has overseen major advances over the past three decades. When the ANC came to power, access to potable water for Black families was almost non-existent. Today, it stands at over 88%, although recent episodes of drought and corruption mean that the taps remain dry for

days at a time in some parts of the country. The electricity penetration rate in Black communities was at 36% in 1994. Today it has reached 94%. Bantu education has been replaced by an education system that seeks to equip young Black learners with the skills needed to succeed in today's society. More Black students are going to university than ever before thanks to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) that offers finance to the majority of learners who complete their secondary education every year. At least 4.7 million Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses have been built for the poor and President Cyril Ramaphosa recently announced that another 4,188 would be constructed in the Northern Cape. South Africa has the tenth most extensive paved road network in the world.

Repairing a broken country like South Africa required an almost faultless run of wins by the government, decade after decade.

South Africa is Africa's number one economy with a large manufacturing and services base. It is among the world's top exporters of wine and fruit. It is Africa's biggest producer of energy in general (with nominal capacity of 52,000MW) and green energy in particular on the continent (6,200MW owned by Eskom and Independent Power Producers and another 6,000MW owned by homeowners). With abundant electricity and technical know-how, the country has become a major manufacturer of automobiles, steel, heavy machinery and consumer goods. It was the first African country to build a high-speed rail network, the Gautrain, which Thabo Mbeki identified as key to hosting the FIFA 2010 World Cup.

Many parts of urban South Africa are no different from metropolises in the Global North and in fact, if you were to go from Sandton, Johannesburg, to London or Los Angeles, the first obvious change that you would pick up would probably be the wall sockets rather than the level of infrastructure. In those areas, virtually everything else, such as streets, restaurants, businesses, billboards and apartment complexes, would be on similar levels of modernity. The internet is great, the streets are of very good quality, the houses are even better than in many parts of the Global North, the lawns are immaculate, the schools offer world-class education and for young people, the sky is the limit in terms of what they can achieve. In fact, in certain respects, one can say that South Africa is more advanced than some countries in the Global North.

Black South Africans now represent the biggest share of the middle class, the biggest share of graduates from universities, the overwhelming majority of the public sector's 1.2 million workers, the majority of the private sector's 14.3 million staff, and the overwhelming majority of homeowners. Unfortunately, too much wealth ends in urban areas. Visiting the rural parts of the country is like travelling to a different place.

Source: Needpix

The bad: Still a significant wealth gap

The gains of the democratic era drop significantly as one moves out of the cities in the direction of the countryside. It is common to see groups of strong, able-bodied young people standing around, waiting for a piece job. Thabo Mbeki's nation of two economies is now decidedly also urban versus rural although one must also say that the Black middle class earns much less than the White middle class. Peri-urban areas are still dominated by overcrowded townships where most working class people live. The dormitory towns of apartheid-era labour have been upgraded somewhat. They now have neat rows of formal housing. However, these are slowly being surrounded and swallowed up by the shacks of an ever-growing number of people who cannot afford anything else. Think Alexandra, the dormitory shantytown for Sandton, South Africa's financial centre. Think Soshanguve, the cheap labour reservoir for Pretoria. Think Khayelitsha, from where poor children can see the shiny buildings and immaculate lawns of gated communities in the Cape Town city centre. Every metropolitan area still depends on a majority Black township for cheap labour three decades into Black majority rule.

South Africa is officially the most unequal country in the world with a Gini coefficient of 63. When we delve down into granular detail, the land Gini coefficient of Limpopo province is 0.93%, the highest in the country and among the highest in the world (Redders, 2021). Speaking at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2022, Thomas Picketty said that the top 10% of South Africans own more wealth than 85% of the country's households. According to the World Inequality Lab, the 3,500 richest South Africans own more wealth than the bottom 32 million people combined. Income inequality per capita is twice as high in so-called rural provinces like Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, North West and Northern Cape.

According to Statistics South Africa, there are over eight million unemployed people in the country, of which 6.1 million are long-term unemployed (StatsSA, 2023). In terms of where the poor live, the data shows that the majority are based in Mpumalanga,

Limpopo, North West and Eastern Cape where the average unemployment rate is 40%. The bulk of South Africa's economic activity is concentrated in Gauteng (33%), KwaZulu-Natal (15%) and the Western Cape (14%).

Statistics South Africa's 2021 *General Household Survey* shows that grants are the second most important source of income (51%) for households after salaries (59,4%). The study adds that a larger percentage of households receive grants compared to salaries as a source of income in Free State (60,0% versus 53,2%), Eastern Cape (63,7% versus 46,2%), Limpopo (65,7% versus 49,7%) and Mpumalanga (66,2% versus 50,9%). Grants are the main source of income for households in Eastern Cape (42,0%) and Limpopo (35,2%) (StatsSA, 2021). At least 85% of South Africans farm the land to secure an extra source of food while a further 4% are entirely dependent on agriculture for all their food (StatsSA, 2021: 54). It is only in Gauteng and Western Cape where a majority of the people engaged in agriculture do so as a leisure activity.

A recent study by Amnesty International revealed that the majority of students in rural provinces aged nine cannot read for meaning. There are many teachers working in schools where learners' first language is not the language of instruction. Apartheid geography is still a strong driver of success and the top 200 schools have better results than the next 6,600 schools below them. The Amnesty International report quotes government data for 2018 which show that out of 23,471 public schools, 19% had only illegal pit latrines for sanitation (37 schools had no sanitation facilities at all); 86% had no laboratory; 77% had no library; 72% had no internet access; 42% had no sports facilities; 239 schools had no electricity; 56% had a shortage of physical infrastructure and 70% reported a shortage of library materials compared to an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 16%.

In some areas, there is no potable water or electricity. Children lack proper libraries, playgrounds and quality laboratories with the same equipment and consumables that students have in urban areas. Often they live in areas where the only business is a mine or a large-scale commercial farm or maybe a lodge. There is not much else happening. Grandparents often use their grants to feed their grandchildren and pay their school fees. For such families, education is the only way to get out of poverty. Like President Cyril Ramaphosa said in his letter to the nation, *From the Desk of the President* of 22 January 2024, "in 2023, matriculants who receive some form of social grant together achieved more than 160,000 distinctions, and more than 200,000 qualified for university entrance … Learners from no-fee paying schools constituted more than 65% of the total bachelor passes obtained." That says a lot.

The success of some learners should not mask the challenges that many young people, especially girls, face in rural areas. In 2016, South Africa recorded about 114,000 teenage pregnancies. This figure increased by almost 50% between 2017 and 2021 (Barron *et al.*, 2022). According to Statistics South Africa, (2022) a total of 129,223 births were delivered by adolescents in a public health facility in 2021/22. Most of these births occurred in rural provinces where young girls are often lured by the money that they get from the so-called *AmaBlessers* (sugar daddies). Many of these young people live either in single-parent households where the breadwinner is away at work all day or in the care of their

grandparents while their parents work in the city. Needless to say, *AmaBlessers* are also responsible for a high proportion of HIV/AIDS cases.

The land question: Still a source of anger and division

The land question remains unresolved and as long as things stay this way, there is always going to be significant tension between White and Black South Africans. For many people land represents a lodestar, an anchor, a homeland where their ancestors are buried and where they constitute themselves into a strong unit or leverage from which they project outwards to conquer the world or to which they go back to rest and rebuild their strength. Land is therefore more than just an asset. It represents identity. Importantly, in the case of South Africa it is an unofficial indicator of progress made towards correcting the wrongs of the apartheid era. In 1994, the ANC promised to transfer 30% of 87 million hectares of fertile land to Blacks by 2000, but by 2019, only ten million hectares had changed hands. To achieve this ambition, they launched a series of programmes, including the Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant (launched in 1995), the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (launched in 2001) and the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (launched in 2006). Concurrently with these programmes, legislation (the Extension of Security of Tenure Act 62 of 1997, the Prevention of Illegal Occupation of Land Act of 1998, etc.) and court processes have helped to advance the restitution and tenure reform agenda.

An undercapitalised programme, the willing buyer–willing seller approach, means that land reform has advanced at a snail's pace. Too often the government has let the private sector dictate debates about land. Whenever there has been an indication of the ANC deviating from willing buyer–willing seller, the biggest farmers' union in the country, Agriculture South Africa (Agri-SA), mounts media campaigns about discrimination and possible hunger and starvation in South Africa. Similarly, pressure groups like AfriForum kick up a fuss and argue that lazy Blacks want everything for free. They go to major media houses in the Global North such as *Fox News* and say that there is an ongoing genocide against White South Africans.

Another major reason for the slowness of land reform is that the South African government focuses too much on replacing White commercial farmers with a similar number of Black ones. In other words, every time a farm was bought from a White farmer, every effort was made to get the Black beneficiary to transform the plot into a thriving farm, even when the beneficiary was someone who had never managed a large-scale commercial farm before. Large-scale commercial farms are typically massive, about 1,640 hectares on average. Land reform is typically based on transferring plots of exact dimensions from Whites to Blacks. When one considers that in 1994 there were only 120,000 White commercial farmers, it means that hundreds of thousands of Blacks are going to remain disappointed for a very long time if subdivision of farm land does not become a key land reform strategy.

Agri-SA's arguments are also dated. Mechanisation and consolidation has shrunk the number of commercial farmers to just over 37,000. That leaves significant manoeuvre room for the government to launch ambitious reform projects. As far as restitution is

concerned, even when Blacks can prove that they were evicted from a plot for which they had a freehold title, litigation often takes years. In certain cases, some of these cases can go on for decades.

Three dimensions of the national question are making the need for decisive action on the land question all the more urgent. The first one is poverty. Recent data shows that half the country cannot afford to buy food on a regular basis. Thriving farms are often targeted by gangs because they represent the only significant business activity in a large radius. Owners of large estates do not need to till their land to make it productive. Popular hiking trails can make up to R300,000 per weekend. Opportunistic crimes of this nature are only going to grow if people cannot feed themselves.

The second dimension is the climate crisis. South Africa is a water-stressed country. Paradoxically, it is also the 12th largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world (largely due to its coal power fleet) and the biggest exporter of agriculture commodities on the African continent. The large-scale commercial farms that dominate South African agriculture use up more than 60% of the country's available water. They tend to employ many workers who are often furloughed when there is a drought. This was the case in the 2010s when a multi-year drought caused at least 14,000 people to lose their jobs. Many of the furloughed workers ended up in informal settlements in urban areas.

The third is a troubling deterioration of race relations. Farm murders have become a hot topic in the country because the victims are often White. This has led to some White political parties and pressure groups like AfriForum claiming that there is a genocide against White farmers, although Blacks are still overwhelmingly the victims of an overwhelming majority of violent murders. Attacks perpetrated against Whites are more publicised because they represent a minority. Rabble rousers use land-related talking points to drive a wedge between the races and South Africa to the brink. We saw this following the very brutal murder of young farm manager Brendin Horner in 2020 when skirmishes between Blacks and Whites almost resulted in a shootout on the streets of the sleepy town of Senekal in the eastern Free State. Similar episodes played out again in the town of Piet Retief in Mpumalanga province in late April 2021 when four white farmers appeared in the magistrate's court following the murder of two job seekers.

Bridging the gap: Solving South Africa's rural poverty challenge

What should be the ANC's agenda going forward? The single most important priority is fixing South Africa's municipalities and making them fit for purpose. The budgets of municipalities have become the kitty of tenderpreneurs, rent seekers and never-retire ANC cadre who live at taxpayers' expense. There is little doubt that the hottest target of hired assassins is municipal councillors. South Africa has three tiers of government, i.e. the national, provincial and local. The national government is responsible for only 48% of the budget. The rest of it goes to provincial and local government.The problem with decentralisation typically occurs at provincial and local levels where there is a long history of corruption and incompetence. The 2021/22 government financial audit revealed that only 38 out of 257 municipalities and only two out of the eight metros produced clean audits. The State of Local Government Report

for the same period indicated that 64 out of 257 municipalities across South Africa were dysfunctional. Poor leadership generates an average of 300 service delivery protests every year.

If the municipalities are fixed, that can open the way to the second most important fix. This is universal basic infrastructure. South Africa's two nations problem persists in great part because the rural areas lack the fit for purpose leverage that people in great cities have in abundance. This is universal basic infrastructure in the form of bandwidth, schools, mobile connectivity, water, electricity, healthcare, civil status register, land, quality affordable housing, entertainment, public spaces and security. These assets are a necessary step to producing the quality of citizenry and industry that the rural areas require to take off. Failure to provide these services means that over three decades into the democratic era, apartheid geography and inherited redlining policies continue to exist. The government must invest large amounts of money to ensure that Black rural citizens get the quality education and support that they need not just to seek jobs elsewhere, but to live and transform their communities.

At the same time, the government should explore the possibility of doubling the grants that are offered to Blacks. There is an ongoing debate about introducing a Universal Basic Income Grant in South Africa. While the contours of that debate are still being explored, why not start by doubling grants? Doubling grants would significantly increase the amount of money that goes into feeding and educating Black children. It would also help people to get better infrastructure to enable them to live better lives.

At least 3.2 million South Africans in the rural provinces practice some form of agriculture to supplement their food, but they often lack land to do more. That is why the land reform process should be seen as not simply providing land for commercial purposes. For example a key intervention should be limiting land plots to between two and ten hectares, and handing them over quickly to Black beneficiaries, together with some form of capital or implements to put the land to use. Land and start-up capital are key. Having very carefully planned technical training and transfer backed by significant capitalisation will take forever to accomplish. Beneficiaries gain from starting with what they have and jumping in the deep end – if they have something to start with. This is what Zimbabwe's small-scale tobacco farmers did during the country's Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in the early 2000s.

Education needs to improve significantly. South Africa's universities often complain that the secondary cycle is producing too many matriculants who cannot keep up with the requirements of tertiary education. This creates a logjam of students who spend too much time repeating courses, as former Statistician General Pali Lehotla once argued during the Fees Must Fall campaign. While he was still in office, Lehotla oversaw an audit that uncovered over 400,000 students who were trapped in the university system, but who still needed National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) funds to continue their studies. He told Parliament: "The truth of the matter is that we have (close to) a million students, so we're spending money on students who do not succeed, who do not finish … We have 300,000 people in the (higher education) system who should not be there, who are not succeeding to finish … There's a lot of anecdotal evidence that they don't have the money to take them through their studies and therefore they can't go through."

Two new universities were recently built, Sol Plaatjie University in Kimberley and the University of Mpumalanga. Two more are planned for Hammanskraal and Ekurhuleni. Although there is a strong desire amongst Blacks to get a university education, a necessary route to white-collar jobs, the South African economy has shown that the number of openings is narrowing every year. In contrast, there is a massive shortage of artisan skills: electricians, plumbers, builders, welders, IT technicians, web developers, chefs, etc. This reflects a wider problem in Africa where universities were presented early on as the centres where the country's white-collar elite would be trained. As economies grew and urbanisation picked up pace, little was done to change this paradigm.

Finally, incubation centres need to be set up in rural areas where Blacks are given the opportunity to practice their knowledge. These incubation centres should be in all growing areas of the South African economy: green energy, IT, agriculture, tourism, etc. By creating hundreds of solar and windmill incubation centres around South Africa, for example, the government can help Blacks bridge the emerging gap in this key industry. The fact that just three years into South Africa's renewable energy boom, Whites own the overwhelming majority of renewable capacity says everything. It is also a sign that if serious interventions are not implemented, the same results are going to keep emerging.

Elsewhere, young Black farmers can also be given the resources needed to run small farms, transport logistics and small markets and supermarkets that they connect to. Efforts must also be made to link governments' and municipalities' purchasing power to new companies started on such incubation sites. Some preferential supply chains have emerged in recent years. However, most of them are based in urban areas. Reaching out to rural areas helps spread the wealth.

Conclusion

Thabo Mbeki quoted the American poet Langston Hughes to Parliament on several occasions, specifically his poem "Harlem":

> *What happens to a dream deferred?*
> *Does it dry up*
> *like a raisin in the sun?*

Or fester like a sore –
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over –
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

The dream of power to the people and equal opportunity for all has not really materialised in South Africa. It is festering in some instances and in others it stinks, like Langston Hughes' poem says. Too many people have waited too long to share in the country's wealth. After many years of trickle-down economics, it is time to develop a concerted effort that is surgically targeted at rural areas and backed by money and high-level supervision. If this is not done, the gulf between Black and White South Africa shall continue to widen. The July 2021 riots followed specific patterns. The stores that were looted first and most often were supermarkets. The rioters did not touch bookstores. This is a clear indication that people are crying out for solutions that can help them feed themselves and their families. The risk of not doing this, as Langston Hughes points out, and as Thabo Mbeki reminded the South African Parliament, is that the dream explodes. **NA93**

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Looking to the past to shape Parliament's future

Yunus Carrim says *hamba kahle*, after 30 years in the House

- By Moira Levy

Moira Levy is Media Manager of the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) and Production Editor of *New Agenda*.

On the eve of his retirement after 30 years as a Member of Parliament, Yunus Carrim shares a timely reminder of South African democracy's "glorious" days. In an interview with MOIRA LEVY he reminisced about the 1994 Parliament, which he described as "an organic reflection of what this country is capable of".

A long-standing veteran of student, civic, community and political struggles since the '70s and in what became the Mass Democratic Movement of the '80s and early '90s, Yunus Carrim says the political culture of that time was carried over into the country's first democratic Parliament and made manifest in the ANC's legacy of peaceful negotiations.

He recalls a moment during his first term. Leaving his office at about 2am and finding that the exit gate to the parking area in the basement was closed, he had to detour past the Old Assembly chamber. As he got nearer to it, he could hear a murmur of voices and clinking of cups and cutlery.

"Outside the chamber, people were milling around the tables with urns, sandwiches and biscuits. I couldn't resist, I peeped into the chamber. Ramaphosa was in the chair. Obviously, someone had said something amusing because he was roaring with laughter and everybody else was laughing, including the old National Party government MPs. There was such an air of banter, maybe even camaraderie. I stood there for a minute or two, transfixed – and it struck me: 'my God, look at this! In the late '80s who would have thought this was possible?'"

This was early in 1995 when the Constitutional Assembly was busy drawing up the final Constitution.

Carrim also recalls looking down from the Public Gallery one day, after seating some guests who were visiting Parliament: "I was stunned at how multicultural it [the House] was. It was the first time I got a bird's-eye view of the House, which you can't get when you're sitting in it, and I realised how wonderful this Parliament is: Africans, Indians, 'coloureds' and whites. Traditional leaders and gender activists; capitalists and communists; non-racialists and ethno-nationalists; MPs in traditional attire and others in western dress; and more – artists, poets, religious leaders, atheists – a microcosm of South Africa – engaging in debate, not fighting, over class, race, gender and other issues. It was so lovely to see, the images there [reflected] the promise of that period and what the country is capable of being."

That is clearly what has inspired him to keep going for 30 years – even when the going got much tougher – and what still moves him today.

"We did wonderful things when we first came to Parliament. You didn't have to wear a tie. You could wear traditional outfits, dress how you wanted provided [it was] reasonable. It was exhilarating, remarkable. The first few years of that Parliament were actually glorious, a phenomenal experience for people of my '70s generation of activists who knew we'd see a non-racial democracy someday, but not necessarily in our lifetimes, and certainly not that we'd end up being its first MPs. Imagine what it felt like to the generations of activists who came before us – who endured so much and never gave up hope – who ended up in Parliament!

"The public was free to come to Parliament in any attire they wanted, within reasonable limits. And members were instructed to keep their office doors open at all times, which was symbolically important as it signalled that Parliament was open and accessible to the public. But then MPs found their possessions disappearing from their offices – handbags, items of clothing, computers and so on. So, MPs were given keys for our offices."

Carrim started out in struggle politics in 1971 when, as a high school student in Pietermaritzburg, now Msunduzi, he became chairperson of the Pietermaritzburg branch of National Youth Action. He continued being politically active at the University of Durban-Westville, was detained for five months for his role in the student protests in solidarity with the Soweto uprising, got a UN scholarship to study sociology in the UK, and from the early '80s played an active role in civic organisations. He became secretary of the Pietermaritzburg Combined Ratepayers' and Residents' Association and served in other community organisations that were part of the United Democratic Front (UDF). Through his interest in table tennis he became active in the South African Council on Sport (SACOS). In 1987 he was elected to the Natal Indian Congress executive and since 1990 served in the ANC District Executive Committee and several South African Communist Party (SACP) structures, including the SACP Central Committee and Politburo, editing its publications, "Umsebenzi" and "African Communist".

Carrim's 30 years in Parliament were mostly spent in the National Assembly where he chaired several portfolio committees and served as Deputy Minister of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) (2009 to 2013) and Minister of Communications (2013 to May 2014). Most recently he was a member of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) where he chaired the NCOP Select Committee on Finance.

Carrim still talks the language of 'people's power'. "Our vision in the ANC was that Parliament is an organ of popular power, a tribune of the people, a People's Parliament." But then he qualifies this, saying "of course, that's in theory. In practice, sadly, we have increasingly fallen short of that."

While all three pillars of state – the Executive, the Judiciary and the Legislature – are important, in his view Parliament is ultimately the most important. "If Parliament doesn't work our democracy doesn't work. We need to make significant progress in being a much more effective Parliament if we are going to make this democracy work, now more than ever."

For this he looks to the Constitution and related legislation that still binds us to a narrative that was forged in struggle. "We have the most open, transparent, democratic Parliament imaginable. It's a tribute to the national democratic revolution that we waged. It is as close as you can get to our concept of a People's Parliament."

He recalls as a new MP being transported on a NDF [National Defence Force] helicopter to rural northern KwaZulu-Natal in 1995. That was at the time of the Constitutional Assembly. "We had to go to remote areas to report back on the [talks]. Those people were not interested in clause 79a or b of the Constitution. They wanted to talk about jobs and basic issues, like when would they get electricity and so on. The majority of people, it seems, also came to see the new government; it was an emotional/psychological thing for them.

"But they were given an explanation in isiZulu about the key features of the Constitution. Some academics estimated two and a half million people had been consulted by then about our country's Constitution. It was unprecedented."

One of the most remarkable features of the new Parliament, he says, "was the democratic way we did things, the give and take manner in which we did it." This he firmly attributes to the culture of negotiations that underpinned the ANC at that time.

"The legacy of negotiations [emerged] when we started talking in the mid '80s [and through] the entire period from the late '80s. That was carried over into Codesa [Convention for a Democratic South Africa] and into the first ten years of our Parliament. It flowed mostly from the ANC and its leadership, and its ability to negotiate. You saw that reflected in the Parliament of the first five to ten years. We shared the chairing of committees and so on. It really was a government of national unity."

Carrim likes to say, "that didn't fall from the skies. It didn't happen by accident." He says it was the product of a unique national coherence that brought together Madiba and the National Party's De Klerk, and eventually Prince Buthelezi and Constand Viljoen, the two outliers who had resisted negotiations. "We had the wisdom of people like Tambo, Madiba, even De Klerk. Ten days before the election, Buthelezi came in. [Then came] Viljoen, who had his base amongst the white right. That this country brought these four people together was unprecedented.

"Of course, there are people, mainly the youth, who feel our negotiated settlement – by not putting fundamental transformation of the economy and class and land issues high on the agenda – was a sell-out. Parts of their criticism are correct. But they also don't recognise the precarious, unstable, conditions in the country at the time and the specific context. Also, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, retreat of western social democracies and the emergence of a unipolar world in which the West was dominant. The pressures of all of this and from our neigbouring countries and allies on the continent constrained what was possible, given the domestic and global circumstances.

"In any case, it was a vibrant, dynamic, effective Parliament. [It came] as close as you could get to what the ANC's vision was of a National Democratic Parliament."

Carrim refers to his existential state at the time. "I could have pinched myself. It was such an honour to be in the first National Assembly in a democracy. Little me, who would have thought?'" Yet there was guilt too, he says. "There were so many others, including those killed [in the struggle era) … so many others [who] did more than people like me, who deserved to be in Parliament.

"That was the first five years, maybe ten, but that tradition has faded fast. I think that it is sad where we've come to."

Carrim has loved being in Parliament he says, although he adds maybe not so much nowadays. He does reminisce a lot about the early years of the democratic Parliament, but he is not simply dwelling on the past. He feels the new seventh Parliament could maybe do better.

He is outspoken about where he thinks the ANC has gone wrong, citing arrogance and complacency: "We continued to get a very high percentage of the votes at elections … [We had] a misplaced notion that the masses will always be with us." In this way Carrim reminds one of another MP of the first Parliament, Professor Ben Turok, the founder of the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) and its journal, *New Agenda*. They are among the few who have combined determined loyalty to the ruling party that was

their life-long political home with an ability to call it out for reneging on its promises to the people by putting the needs of the party first.

"The reason Parliament has declined is because the ANC has declined as a whole. The one reinforces the other. You see increasing corruption, distance from the masses, the mismanagement of resources … Parliament is the way it is because the ANC is the way it is … You can't separate the decline of Parliament from the decline of the ANC. Yet each of these structures could help the other to grow stronger if they worked in particular ways."

He compares the quality of those early committee chairpersons with the current crop. "It's partly to do with the fact that those chairs had a struggle pedigree. Now, if you're in a chair, unless you're an NEC member, you don't carry the same political, social, cultural weight in the movement. Those chairs in the first five to eight years were quite strong mainly because of their histories."

> Parliament is a 'tribute to the national democratic revolution that we waged. It is as close as you can get to our concept of a People's Parliament.'

The quality of MPs is also declining, he says, and suggests this may be because they "don't have deep roots [in the struggle] like the first lot of MPs and chairpersons [had]. What is puzzling is that when the first lot of ANC MPs came to Parliament they had no experience of governance, They were struggle activists. Yet they adapted very fast from struggle to government mode.

"What drove those first generation of MPs was a struggle ethos, a feeling that we must deliver. Also, maybe deep down, we felt we had to prove that people of colour could run a sophisticated, modern, highly advanced developing country. It was about showing that it can work, that it doesn't have to be sadly, like many of the countries on our continent, Asia and elsewhere in the developing world [that] went through colonialism and ended up, over time, not being able to govern effectively and becoming distant from the masses."

He adds another reason for what he describes as the "fading" of the democratic Parliament: "Some people are coming into Parliament for the wrong reasons. They see it as a personal career and are driven at times by material need or for power or the ability to offer patronage, or because they can increase their profiles."

The other problem Parliament faces, says Carrim, is the deep divisions that started emerging in the ruling party, especially since the 2007 Polokwane conference in which Thabo Mbeki was replaced as ANC president by Jacob Zuma. These divisions are often reflected within the ANC study groups in Parliament and affect the performance of committees. The majority decision reached in the parliamentary study groups is supposed to be binding on all ANC MPs in all subsequent committee and House deliberations,[1] but that is no longer always the case, Carrim asserts: "Especially in years

of the ANC elective conferences, for example, the Zuma and Ramaphosa factions in the ANC made it hard to get consensus in some study groups and you couldn't always move swiftly in decision-making in the committee."

There is also the ongoing problem of lack of resources and the increasing disparity between the resources – in research and other technical support – available for the Executive and for Parliament.

"Take our Finance Committee. We had a good researcher and content advisor, but neither of them was a tax expert. How do you manage a finance portfolio without a tax expert?

"We've been raising this repeatedly – empower us with better technical skills. Obviously we can't match the battery of experts [the Executive] has on its side." He refers to the National Treasury as an example: "We cannot hire external experts from the universities, private sector and multilateral institutions as they do. We just don't have the means."

Referring to the way in which candidate lists are finalised he says, "once you've got those elected to the top of the list, then you say there are not enough women or youth or regional representation or the list is not non-racial enough, then you alter it accordingly." He would also like to see the introduction of a code of conduct for MPs like the one for municipal councillors. and believes the party list system must be "fundamentally altered".

"I think there's a need to review the electoral [system]. We've reached a stage now where we need to consider a combination of a ward and list system as we [have] in local government." His preference is for multi-member constituencies.

Carrim was allocated the Alfred Duma constituency in KZN. However, he doesn't live in the area and it's a three-hour drive, and more if he goes to the outlying areas, there and back from his Msunduzi home. Since the outbreak of Covid and the increase in his workload in Parliament and other political responsibilities, he has not been going to Alfred Duma municipality anywhere near as much as he used to. But he actively does constituency work, taking up issues by engaging with department officials through emails, phone calls and cell phone messages. But delivering to his constituents by using a cell phone or iPad or a computer without meeting them personally is "not right," he says. He has had to attend to many constituency issues from his home town and from different parts of the country and makes every effort to be accessible; he has kept the same cell phone number since 1995. He also thinks the allocation of resources to constituency offices must be considerably increased.

That said, it is the constituency work that he will miss most when he leaves Parliament. "If you take up an issue [in the constituency], even if it takes you five times longer than it used to, at some stage there's an outcome, mostly favourable, sometimes not. But you do see a tangible result. With legislation and political oversight, results take much longer."

And he plans to still take part in electioneering and other campaigning. "You enter into people's homes, you sit there, you may not, to your shame, speak isiZulu, somebody translates, if English won't work, but inside a home you get a much better sense of how

people live, how they see things, and you get a better feel for where the country is."

Carrim makes it very clear that "improving public participation is utterly crucial, indispensable, to make this democracy work. What is Parliament, after all, if not a representative organ of the people? It is utterly indispensable that we have more active and concerted public participation."

He says a People's Parliament and participatory democracy cannot be the responsibility of Parliament alone. Citizens must visit Parliament, sit through committee hearings, observe House proceedings from the public gallery. They do come, he says, but not as much as they used to. He struggles to explain why that is the case. There was more participation before Covid and the introduction of Zoom meetings since Covid and after the fire at Parliament, he says. Then there is the inevitable bureaucracy at the Visitors' Centre to gain entry to Parliament. .

"But I'm not convinced that the reason they're not coming is because of the bureaucratic process… People do come to Parliament, at least they did before Covid." So, what is different now? "People have lost interest," he concedes.

"In the early days civil society was based on grassroots organisation but those ordinary people who engaged Parliament at that time are no longer engaged. They're just trying to put bread on the table and [keep] their heads above water. And if they do engage, its through taking to the streets in anger."

Now it is mostly the "elites" who appear at public committee hearings, those who have "a vested interest" in making representations. "It's big stakeholders – big business, Cosatu and all the big unions. Where are ordinary people, the individuals coming to make presentations? Where are the smaller trade unions, the smaller and less-funded NGOs and community organisations?

"Parliamentary funding for smaller organisations to take part in public hearings has faded … We need to provide free access to data. We have to have multiple languages in committee meetings and translators. We need to advertise public hearings more in traditional local languages, especially on radio.

"We don't have anywhere near the resources that are required. Right now, the national fiscus is extremely strained and Parliament's budget has been reduced."

When civil society structures do make representations, he says, they focus on their specific, narrow interests. "We say to them, look how much more weight you will carry if you all march on Parliament. In a vibrant democracy, a democracy that claims to have a People's Parliament, you can't just come and make representations at a public hearing. You also have to mobilise, organise, take to the streets. You have to petition, you have to write to the papers, you have to engage in social media, put all sorts of pressure on us."

On the way ahead for Parliament Carrim says only, "we are opening up into a very new era". He was speaking before the 29 May election and was understandably cautious, saying only that we could expect the seventh Parliament to be "more splintered across the board" with coalitions.

But he was clear on the urgent need for more cooperation, and not only in Parliament. "Our aversion to the private sector needs to be reviewed, given the deep economic, financial and other crises we face. We urgently need economic growth and

jobs. We need private sector assistance for Transnet, for Eskom. The only issues are the terms on which the state engages them. Public private partnerships are an alternative to privatisation. The state must have majority control of water, electricity and other basic services, but the private sector can take part in a variety of forms of partnership without taking control of these services."

His advice for the new Parliament is a repeat of a deeply felt political principle he has raised in public before: It's a call for greater cooperation between political parties. "Now more than ever before, no matter how much we dislike each other, if we do not cooperate more in Parliament how are we going to get the cooperation of the private sector, trade unions, civil society, NGOs, CBOs, traditional leaders, religious leaders? We need that goodwill."

The need to remove what he calls the unnecessary divisions in Parliament is clearly a theme close to his heart: "Whatever our ideological, policy and other differences, we need to work much more closely together to achieve developmental goals that we share in common that are in the interests of all the people but primarily the poor and disadvantaged."[2]

He points to the dangers of mobilisation around a tribal base – "once you light that fuse you won't be able to put it out easily" – and of the fractionalisation of the ANC, which he says is allowing for the emergence of "regional fiefdoms". Drawing on his experience in the NCOP he calls for the expression of provincial and other interests below the level of national government and for strengthening the NCOP "to allow for the expression of diversity as part of our national unity".

He was possibly addressing his own party when he expressed the need for "more give and take in Parliament" and less emphasis on the need to be a majority: "We can't just do what we want. We need to be called to account.

"There is a new set of dynamics. We are not used to not being a party without a majority vote, and if that happens a new party culture has to emerge. But even if we are the majority, we have to respect Parliament more, take it more seriously. If you strengthen Parliament that can help to strengthen the ANC and vice versa.

"We are edging towards a tipping point – [but we are] not there yet. Yes, we, the ANC, are mainly responsible for the mess we're in. But we've certainly done a lot over the 30 years overall and have shown we are capable of doing good work. The potential is certainly there. We need to harness it and work across all political parties – including the EFF – whatever our differences, and across the widest range of civil society [organisations]." NA93

ENDNOTES

1 An ANC parliamentary "study group," which comprises ANC MPs who serve on a particular portfolio committee, allows each person to express their views, but when consensus is reached the majority decision is meant to be binding on all members in the committee.

2 See for example https://www.pa.org.za/blog/yunus-ismail-carrim

What does it mean to be 'progressive' in South Africa today?

Viewpoints from civil society

- By the *New Agenda* team

An awful lot has changed during South Africa's 30 years of democracy – but clearly not nearly enough. The state's provision of certain basic services is broadly recognised, and commended, but democracy is not measured only according to the ability of the state to deliver services to its citizens. It is reflected in the ability of every person to exercise their human rights to secure better lives for themselves, their families and their communities. Manifesto's aside, how could the country now move forward, from where we are? We publish three views – from the Cape Town-based Progressive Citizens Initiative, from Abahlali baseMjondolo and from My Vote Counts.

The Cape Town-based Progressive Citizens Initiative (PCI), an informal group of current and former activists, begins its statement of intent by defining "progressive" in broad Left thinking: "'Progressive' in our understanding means the striving to make real a just balance between equality and freedom." The PCI's 12-point declaration is published in full below:

1. Whereas much has been gained since 1994 in the area of freedom: free movement, freedom of expression, freedom to associate, freedom to elect and be elected, we are surprised at the constant attack on what guarantees the survival of such freedoms: the Constitution and its Bill of Rights! Being progressive means the defence of such freedoms and their deepening in all aspects of social life. Progressive also means to criticise its social non-observance of such rights in the perpetuation of patriarchy, violence against women, children and people who do not conform to binary classifications.
2. Despite the entrenchment of key freedoms very little has been achieved in terms of a move towards equality in terms of income and livelihoods. South Africa remains a most unequal country, getting more unequal by the day. Why? How? Progressive means to understand what constrains its achievement and a struggle to remove such constraints. Income inequality is just one dimension: unequal education, unequal health-care, unequal access to housing and services, unequal city/metro residential/spatial dispensations inherited from apartheid. The list is long and troublesome. The rhetorical refrain of inequality, poverty and unemployment has to be turned into serious action plans that need to bring both Democratic Socialists and Social Democrats closer together: we cannot keep the poor just above starvation with measly grants. Being progressive means providing alternative strategies, making the basic income grant real and job creation within a growing solidarity economy a vital priority.
3. Key areas of cultural, linguistic and religious freedom should be defended and discrimination or derogation against any must not be tolerated. Such freedoms come with responsibility and the need for ethical conduct and care, and a commitment to human flourishing.
4. Inequality, poverty and limited life-chances have been at the heart of the movement of many people reaching our country. Being progressive means that one understands the reasons for the flight or migration and seeks to work with them so that they experience hospitality and social support. Being progressive means that one tries to build bridges between them and local communities and tries to create a climate of tolerance. It also means that one understands the fears and frustrations of citizens whilst trying to help bring their life-chances within the confines of legality and rule.
5. As South Africans we also understand that we exist within a world system of inter-state relations. We respect sovereignty and respect other people's right to self-determination. We understand that the world is moving towards a post-imperial multipolar system and we understand the tensions between the G7 and G20 and G77 and how the multilateral system of the United Nations and its institutions are in crisis. South Africa does not have or need enemies and being progressive means that

we reach out to others across borders who share our beliefs and aspirations. Being progressive means holding our governments at all levels accountable and focused on a progressive development agenda that prioritises negotiation over conflict, development goals over reckless accumulation and an environmentally sound dispensation rather than extractive self-interest.

6. Being progressive means to be vigilant over how the state amasses, distributes and animates resource-usage and how the private sector behaves in relation to government procurement; how both relate to their employees and how their actions affect community integrity. Our ethical framework asks of us to understand the levels of criminal and violent activity in society and encourages short-term and long-term solutions.
7. The climate crisis, the Covid pandemic and the intransigence of TB, has shown us the urgency for climate justice, food sovereignty and the need for serious education programmes about the invisible threats to our social fabric.
8. Being progressive also means that our political representatives are kept in check. Election should not mean an abandonment of community bar a frugal service to it; the excessive ornamentations of power and elite benefits should be curbed. Similarly, the differentials between corporate executive and worker earnings should be radically reduced.
9. Being progressive means vigilance about how contemporary media manufacture lies and how they help normalize abnormal self-interest. Vigilance too is necessary about the motives of civil society activity, NGO behaviour, philanthropy, community-based organisations, trade unions and all entities that assert the interest of communities and people. Many don't, even if they say they do! All must pass the normative test of valuing accountability and mandates and a commitment to be building collective organization for a better future.
10. Being progressive means an engagement with everyone that nurtures and facilitates creative talent in cultural or athletic expression in our communities and helps in the development of facilities, venues and programmes.
11. Being progressive recognises the rights of all people to decent shelter that provides protection against the vagaries of the weather and fire close to their places of employment.

12. Being progressive means undoing the legacy of apartheid spatial planning by both locating new housing developments close to places of work and provision of adequate and affordable transport.

Abahlali baseMjondolo (a Zulu phrase meaning *"people who live in shacks")* is a nation-wide shack dwellers' movement that strives to improve the living conditions of poor people primarily by campaigning for land, housing and dignity and against xenophobia. It is a socialist group that aims to democratise society from below. Formed in Durban in 2005 at the last count it has 120,000 members in 87 branches.

On 7 April 2024 Abahlali baseMjondolo released : "Election 2024: The People's Minimum Demands". This was initiated at the movement's General Assembly held in Durban in February 2024, and it developed into an extensive consultative process in all its branches across four provinces. The aim of this mobilisation was to develop a collective strategy for the 29 May election. Some time thereafter the organisation declared its electoral support for the EFF.

The organisation conducted a voter registration drive to encourage all citizens to participate in the 2024 election. It said it would work with "like-minded membership-based organisations to begin a process of considering how to build a political instrument for the people, a political instrument that aims to put the people in power rather than a new set of individuals."

The membership expressed the desire to be able to vote for a "left party" in the 2029 election, although in their statement they made it clear that Abahlali baseMjondolo believes "electoral politics is just one terrain of struggle and [that] it should never replace or distract from the work of building popular democratic power from below, of building socialism from below."

These are the three starting points agreed on in the General Assembly in February:

- The ANC has been assassinating our leaders since 2013 and in 2022 we lost three leaders to assassination and a fourth to a police murder. It is therefore imperative that the ANC be given a very strong message that repression will not be tolerated, and [it is] preferable that it be removed from power altogether. The new MK party is an off-shoot of the ANC in which some of its worst people and tendencies are present. It has taken some dangerously right wing positions. It must also be considered as a serious threat to society and to our movement.
- We are a socialist organisation committed to building socialism from below via the construction of popular democratic power. However there is no left party on the ballot and so we cannot vote for the programme of any party or with any confidence in its allegiance to the people and to progressive principles. It is not possible to vote for our key principles such as the full decommodification of land or the right to recall.
- Given the seriousness of the crisis of repression, a crisis that poses an existential threat to our movement, abstentionism is not a viable strategy and it is therefore necessary to make a purely tactical vote against the ANC and MK. No tactical

considerations can enable a vote for the DA as it opposes land occupations, puts the commercial value of land before its social value and refuses to condemn the ongoing genocide in Palestine.

"These demands are not a statement of our full political vision or our political practices. They are a statement of the minimum criteria for us to be able to offer a party our tactical support as we take our struggle against political repression onto the electoral terrain."

The organisation listed the following 20 minimum demands that emerged from the two months of intensive discussions:

1. Well located urban land must be made available for people to be able to build homes and other community infrastructure, including community gardens. This will require a land audit to make planning effective.
2. Those who wish to receive government housing and meet a reasonable income criteria should be placed on the housing list. Government housing must be built at scale and with urgency and must be decent and fit for human beings. Transit camps must be rejected as an insult to the dignity of the people. The housing list must be transparent and neither renters nor any other particular group of residents should be excluded from the list.
3. There must be a serious commitment to affirming and defending the dignity of the people, of all the people including the poor and all vulnerable groups.
4. There must be a clear and viable plan to provide either decent jobs or a liveable income for all. While youth unemployment is a particularly severe crisis for people over 35 must be included in this plan. Informal forms of work should be respected, supported and, where there is danger and exploitation, regulated to ensure safety and fair labour practices. This must include sex work.
5. There must be an end to the criminalisation of land occupations which need to be understood as a form of grassroots urban planning. When there are genuine social complications around land use these must be resolved with negotiation and not with state violence.
6. Existing shack settlements and new occupations must receive collective tenure and the provision of non-commodified access to basic services such as water, electricity, sanitation and road access, and refuse collection must be undertaken as an urgent priority.
7. There should be extensive state support for community gardens including seeds, tools, irrigation and fencing, as well as participatory workshops in agroecological farming methods. The state should also support a system of community controlled markets for produce to be sold. People receiving grants from the state should be able to use their cards to buy at these markets.
8. There must be a clear and viable plan to end load shedding that includes commitments to provision for access by the poor, to a responsible transition to socially owned and managed renewable energy and to ensure that workers in the current system are not discarded.

9. There must be lifelong, free and decolonised education available to all, irrespective of age. Education must include skills for people to be able to find employment and develop their communities as well as forms of education that are simply there for people to develop themselves. Community run creches and schools (along the lines of the Frantz Fanon School in eKhenana) should receive state support if they meet clearly elaborated criteria for democratic management and a social function.
10. There must be state support for democratically run communes and cooperatives and the tendering system should, wherever possible, transition from supporting private business towards supporting cooperatives.
11. There needs to be a clear plan to address the crisis in the health care system, which must include employing many more doctors, nurses and other health care workers. The overcrowding of clinics and hospitals must be addressed.
12. There needs to be a clear plan to address the crisis of violence in society, including violence against women, as well as other forms of socially damaging behaviour. This must not take the form of escalating the endemic state violence against the poor but should rather take the form of building a more peaceful, safe and just society.
13. There needs to be a program to decentralise access to educational opportunities and possibilities for employment to ensure national access, including in rural areas.
14. Political parties need to have a clear program to develop the intellectual strength and integrity of their leaders, and to do the same for government officials.
15. Corruption needs to be understood as theft from the people and to be dealt with decisively. After due process any politician shown to be guilty of corruption must be suspended from their political party for a period of five years, after which rehabilitation can be considered if there is genuine acknowledgment of wrong doing. Any official seeking to extract bribes, to sell houses or to only allocate houses, services or any other benefits to members of a particular political party must be swiftly investigated and, after due process overseen by an elected jury from the affected community, dismissed from their position.
16. There must be a serious commitment to dealing with the environmental crisis from a people centred perspective. This includes effective action to stop the dumping of rubbish in shack settlements.
17. Participatory democracy – affirmed under the slogan 'nothing for us without us' – must be committed to as a clear principle to guide all engagements between the state and the people. This is particularly important at the community level.
18. There must be clear opposition to the genocide being carried out in Gaza, and a clear commitment to freedom and justice for the Palestinian people, and for all oppressed people everywhere.
19. There must be a clear rejection of xenophobia, ethnic politics, sexism, discrimination against LGBQTI+ people and all other attempts to divide and weaken the people.
20. There must be a clear commitment to oppose all forms of political violence and political repression in South Africa, no matter which person or organisation is suffering political violence or repression. This commitment cannot be limited to empty words and must be backed up with real action including mass mobilisation,

> media campaigns, legal action, etc. There must be a commitment to work against political violence and repression with all political forces opposed to political violence and repression.

My Vote Counts (MVC), another grassroots civil society organisation, presented its viewpoint in its March 2024 newsletter entitled "#30Years0fDemocracy." This was in response to President Cyril Ramaphosa's 31st State of the Nation address in February in which the President referred to South Africa's "30 years of freedom," which MVC described as "fallacious".

It was critical of Ramaphosa's use of the fictional character he called Tintswalo which, the organisation pointed out, is a Xitsonga term loosely translated as "the feeling of grace and mercy you have for receiving a gift". The authors were scathing about the implication that the ANC government has gifted housing, healthcare, social grants and many other blessings to the mass of poor South Africans.

"The Tintswalo narrative is not an accurate reflection of the material conditions of most people living in South Africa. But more importantly, the President's reflection lays bare his government's disdain for democracy."

Drawing on the experience of the past 30 years, the article denounced the idea that the current government has gifted the people; instead it noted that the "gift of a meaningful anti-retroviral programme" was not a gift at all but the product of mass struggle by the people themselves. "[H]is predecessor Thabo Mbeki denied treatment to millions of people amid the AIDS pandemic. The successful programme was guaranteed by the people's movement that mobilised more than 16,000 activists under the banner of the Treatment Action Campaign, demanding their constitutional right to healthcare."

Similarly, MVC pointed out that while the President in his SONA address commended the state for intensifying its commitment to end the scourge of gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), it had been "mute on the crisis until women led a nationwide protest in August 2018 demanding concrete action to end GBVF".

Dismissing the President's assertion that his government has "invested in the future" by "gifting" destitute South Africans social relief and distress grants, the organisation called the government to account for "disregarding the united front of civil society, unemployed people and organised workers who demanded social relief after he announced the shutting down of the economy amidst the Covid-19 pandemic".

MVC states that achievements that have been gained over the past 30 years are the outcome of popular mobilisation, not government generosity.

"He (the President) marvels at how land reform policies have transformed the economy, but the most successful land reform programmes since 1994 have been through occupations of unused land by landless people and mass movements like Abahlali baseMjondolo.

"Ramaphosa refuses to recognise that socio-economic progress since 1994 has happened because people have a say. Not because of the benevolence of his government.

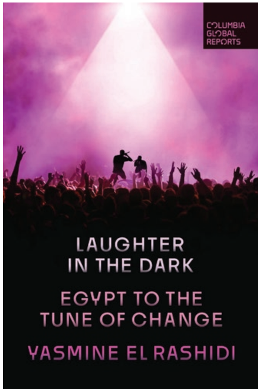
"… The governing party insists that it is solely responsible for upward shifts in the economic status of former oppressed people, and therefore deserve their gratitude and

mercy. This approach is especially irresponsible when South Africans have little trust in democratic institutions and most would prefer a dictator in exchange for food, housing and jobs (live links included in the original).

"Democracy is not the ability of the state to deliver services to its citizens. It is the ability of every person to equally influence all spheres of their lives – political, social, and economic.

"A true reflection on 30 years of democracy understands the extent to which our society meets this objective.

"In moving beyond 30 years, we must better use the tools that democracy provides us to shape a more viable society. We must force a people-centred politics and we must work towards the ability of everyone to equally influence all spheres of social life." NA93



Laughter in the Dark:
Egypt to the Tune of Change

Yasmine El Rashidi
Columbia Global Reports,2023, 111 pgs. R338

An extract

The modern history of Egypt is told, by insiders and outsiders alike, largely through the narrative of authoritarian leaders and their so-called "iron-fisted" rule. Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956–1970) was well known for his method of having people disappeared – "behind the sun" is the Arabic refrain[1] – if they disagreed with his socialist, nationalist policies, as well as for his persecution of Egypt's Jews.[2] And for thirty years, under the rule of the late Hosni Mubarak (1981–2011), citizens did not dare speak of politics, for fear of the deep state, with its troops of secret police and informants,[3] notorious for their ruthless methods of kidnapping and torture.

This was the atmosphere I grew up in; this was what my parents before me had been raised to understand: politics could put you in jail, if not simply get you vanished away. I learned this myself early on, in the way my parents, their friends, and our relatives distinguished what could or couldn't be said. Rumors were rife about what happened to a classmate's father. We heard snippets of things, but knew we could never ask outright. This, too, was something we came to understand, without ever having to be explicitly told. If we broached a subject that was out of bounds, we were brought to silence, not vocally, but by stern eye contact from an elder. As children, we quickly learned these cues. There were subjects that were never to be addressed.

It was as easy, back then, to control what we spoke of as it was to control what we consumed. There were only two government-operated television channels broadcasting some twelve hours a day, and a third channel that stopped at 1:00 p.m. You were guaranteed to be watching a black-and-white Egyptian film (probably a tragicomic one) twice a day, several newscasts, and an educational program for children, generally about what was morally right and wrong – "never lie to your parents." (The president's wife was referred to on these programs as "Mama" Suzanne.) The greatest indulgence would be a foreign film once every few days (usually a western), and a cartoon (Tom and Jerry). This was the universe we were exposed to: a carefully curated worldview courtesy of the Egyptian government's broadcasting arm,[4] a mouthpiece for the Mubarak regime.

Things didn't change much even as Egypt became more exposed in the early 2000s, with the arrival of the internet and eventual widespread access to mobile phones. The government had so successfully indoctrinated citizens – partially through patronage, partially through fear – that few dared to speak out, even if asked to. This undertone

of the unspeakable had become so deeply entrenched in the cultural and social fabric of Egypt, that mine was a generation that seemed to simply inherit the silence that our parents had mastered. It was a "know-how," in a sense, that extended fluidly from childhood into early adulthood. As a journalist working in the country from the age of eighteen, I was quick to learn the "red lines," as we referred to them, the clear parameters of what could or could not be broached. Red lines were considered, tiptoed toward, and never crossed.

The Egyptian Revolution of 2011[5] changed this atmosphere in fundamental ways, even as its recent ten-year anniversary was marked by a political climate of censorship and human rights abuses. Although official figures are hard to come by, it was estimated by human rights groups that up to 60,000 political dissidents were being held in jail as of late 2022,[6] many for belonging to the wrong political party, or for expressing personal views not aligned with the state. As I write this, late in 2022, I believe it is fair to say that Egypt is at its most oppressive point in its modern history. Few would contest that. Government and army officials have often been quoted saying that the long-standing "emergency rule" measures[7] have been necessary, to avoid the chaos of Syria, or the political mayhem experienced under the Muslim Brotherhood's rule. The president, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, has explicitly stated on television that he will never allow what occurred in 2011 to happen again.[8] People I know are in prison simply for voicing opinions or personal experiences. One friend, Alaa Abdel Fattah, a blogger, computer programmer, and activist,[9] was arrested in 2019 for a Facebook post, and has been in prison ever since, on fabricated charges of spreading false news that undermined national security. Freedom of speech is a calculated risk you choose to take.

Yet despite this repressive atmosphere and the constant threat of censorship and silencing, what happened in the eighteen months between January 2011 and July 2013 – the street protests that led to the downfall of Mubarak and his clan, and the subsequent ones in 2013 that led to the ouster of Mohamed Morsi, who had become the first freely elected post-revolution president – can perhaps never entirely be reversed. What I am referring to specifically is the breaking of a fear barrier of personal and political expression.

It was a surprise to everyone that the Egyptian Revolution unfurled with the speed and impact that it did, even as there were indications throughout 2010 that something in the political landscape and imagination was shifting – the result of a confluence of predicaments and events. In the span of six months, between the summer and winter of 2010, inflation was at a record high, power cuts had become daily occurrences, and prices of basic commodities skyrocketed. That November, the parliamentary elections were rife with unprecedented thuggery and bullying at the hands of the state, which was angling for Mubarak's son, Gamal (aka Jimmy), to take the helm of the ruling National Democratic Party. He was widely expected to take over from his father, in a succession plan that was being likened to monarchy. Citizen grievances were high. People felt pressured by the inconveniences and economic difficulties of managing the very basic needs of their everyday lives.

On December 31, just weeks before the revolution erupted, a suicide bomber exploded himself outside a church in Alexandria just as worshippers were leaving New Year's Mass, killing twenty-one people. The government was accused by Muslims and Christians alike of neglecting Egypt's minority Coptic community, and a week later, on Coptic Christmas Eve, tens of thousands of Muslims formed human chains around Coptic churches across the country.[10] If suicide bombers intended to blow up the Christians and their churches, they would have to blow up the Muslims first.

Adding to the backdrop of all this were protests raging in nearby Tunisia, which Egyptians watched closely via satellite television. The atmosphere in my home city of Cairo, and across many of the country's twenty-seven other governorates, was tense. You could feel it in the air. On New Year's Day 2011, for the online Egyptian news site, *Ahram Online*, I wrote:

> The cumulative and unprecedented peak of discontent – of the elections, the persecution, and the longstanding economic troubles that plague the majority of the nation's 80 million population – may very well serve to unite disparate groups of activists and politicians, bringing them together in a larger, more forceful movement for change. And the example of Tunisia, and the courage its youth have displayed in risking their lives, may very well be the impetus Egypt's own youth and activists need to take their activities to a new level of vitality.[11]

Less than three weeks later, Egyptians took to the streets of the capital in the tens of thousands, and in cities and towns across the country. I was part of the protest movement from early that morning, when there were just several hundred of us in total marching in different groups through the city's streets. But by late that afternoon, numbers had swelled, and approximately 30,000 protesters had gathered in Tahrir (Liberation) Square[12] in central Cairo, in a standoff with riot police that went on for hours. By the time I had left the Square, well after midnight, the crowds were still there, with no signs of leaving – neither the putrid tear gas that filled the air, nor the rubber bullets that were being fired at protesters by the police, had effect. The protesters were steadfast. Three days later, more than a million people joined in a march through Cairo and toward Tahrir Square. From that point on, the numbers simply multiplied by day. Egyptians demonstrated in the streets of the capital, and through cities, towns, and villages across the country, often camping out in public squares in makeshift tents and temporary constructions. They marched with banners calling for reforms and basic rights; they used pots and pans for percussion and drums, and they chanted, mantras such as the most popular refrain, "bread, freedom, social justice."[13] And they broke into song.

Grievances left unspoken for decades had been unleashed, and for eighteen days, Egypt was at a complete standstill. Protests had overrun the country, the internet had been cut off by the government, businesses were shut down, and a curfew was in place from 6:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. The army rolled into central Cairo in tanks and trucks,

lining main streets and central squares in the name of "protecting the great people" of Egypt. For the most part, however, the officers and soldiers simply stood by, watching. With millions of Egyptians spending nights in the streets, political power – for the first time in decades – lay there. Civilians had taken over patrolling their cities. They were setting the rules of the streets, as well as the political agenda.

In the months that followed, the popular social, political, and economic expression that had found an outlet in the streets in the form of banners and chants extended into the mainstream narrative through articles, web-sites, magazines, and books. Political parties were formed in unprecedented numbers. Manifestos seemed to be everywhere, posted on lamp-poles, handed out in public squares, and circulated online. Activists founded NGOs and human rights organizations, Critiques of the government, the president, the ministers, and even the long-sacred army became commonplace. The public protest against the government became the go-to means of complaint. Its form became the marching body, and its message in the chants and songs that accompanied it.[14]

Those of us who partook in the "revolution" or "uprising" never expected the sense of agency to end. But it disintegrated when the army formally came to power with the ouster of Morsi in the summer of 2013, and the contrived election the following spring of then-defense minister and army general Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. Muslim Brotherhood members were rounded up by the hundreds and thrown in prison. Politically active citizens were arrested and put through swift trials in military court, without lawyers, bypassing due process, and most of them were thrown in jail. Death sentences became commonplace. A judge sentenced 683 alleged Muslim Brotherhood members to death in a single trial.[15] Gatherings of ten people or more were outlawed. Police began to stop young people in the streets and search their phones. This had never happened before.

Under Mubarak, the political red lines had been clear – black and white, so to speak. Anything critical of the president, his sons, and a small circle of his advisors and confidants – which included businessmen as well as members of parliament and the state was off limits. One could not address bilateral agreements with Israel, including major trade deals such as the Egypt-Israel gas-supply pipeline. Beyond that, everything was fair game. Under Sisi, those lines morphed, expanding beyond political discourse to include anything from lurid lyrics in a song, to social media posts that are deemed "morally offensive." As I write this, at least six young women are in jail for being in videos said to be in violation of "family principles and values upheld by Egyptian society"[16] – one clip involves a divorcée in tight-fitting clothes dancing with her boyfriend. Such arrests are not a matter of state policy per se, but the Stasi-like practice of "citizen patrolling,"[17] of spying, monitoring, and reporting against fellow citizens. This policing system has discouraged anything potentially disruptive to the state, to include content posted by local social media influencers.[18]

The content is perhaps less the offense than is the number of viewers who see it; under a law passed in 2018, social media users with more than 5,000 followers are considered "media outlets,"[19] making them subject to prosecution for publishing anything considered "false news" or "incitement" – umbrella terms that can be twisted

to include most all personal expression. In a state that has deemed itself perennially at threat, there are also no clear-cut criterion – the only constant is that parameters are continually shifting. Who is reported, prosecuted, arrested, released – all this is arbitrary.

Within this political climate, it is telling, then, that Egypt's independent music scene, with its Arabic genre of hip-hop, known as *mahraganat*, has been thriving. In the tradition of Snoop Dogg, Tupac, Eminem, and Jay-Z, and borrowing from the history and technical forms of the genre, these Egyptian music artists are reliant on lyrics grounded in deeply personal, political, sexual, and socioeconomic realities – most everything the government would prefer citizens not to speak about, and the kind of material that citizen patrols love to report. The artists rap about their own lives, their neighborhoods, their rivals, their personal, economic, and political battles, as well as their successes, money, women, and dreams. In one song, for example, the duo Oka and Ortega[20] rhapsodized about drinking alcohol and taking drugs – both considered blasphemy in Islam, and the drugs, needless to say, punishable with jail:

> You're sitting alone, idle-minded
> Satan is leading you to the wrong path
> He keeps telling you "let's play, dude"
> Let's play, dude, why don't you play, dude, let's play, dude, let's play, dude
> You want to be a man of principle
> quit the drugs
> and say "I'm starting"
> Satan comes and keeps telling you
> Drink, dude, drink, dude, light it, dude

A growing league of local artists, mostly in their twenties, boast millions of followers online. They have sold-out concerts at licensed venues, but also at street weddings and private parties, even as the state has repeatedly attempted to shut them down. Many of the most popular of these music artists were too young to properly partake in the Egyptian Revolution – most of them were pre-teens or in their early teens – but they came of age at that moment of rupture, when everyone was speaking out. It has, over time, come to define who they are, too – outspoken, uninhibited, independent, *free*.

Unlike my generation, which came of age in the nineties and was raised in constant fear of speech, the rules of the game for these music hipsters don't abide by any social or cultural norms the country has known before. The long-held parameters of what can and can't be said have become obsolete in their hands. They rap about long-taboo issues. They have no hesitations, and political fears seem not to exist for them.

These singers have commanded my attention, even envy at first, precisely for their lack of inhibition – for their fierce assertion of independent, nonconformist identities. They are free in an environment that does everything it can to break individual freedoms. They did not cave in, as my generational peers did. They do not swallow their words.

Egypt's official population is pushing 105 million citizens. It is widely known that the number is larger some analysts estimate by at least 5 to 7 percent. In August 2022, the government announced that the population had grown by 750,000 in the past six months.[21] Sixty percent of that population, or 65 million people, are under the age of twenty-nine, so it is no surprise that these young musicians have millions of fans at their command. It is those fans, influenced by the music artists they revere, who are the future of the country the ones who will essentially define what Egypt comes to be.

In as much as one can attempt to capture the energy and dynamics of a place as vast and diverse as Egypt, this book is a distillation of an ongoing moment in time, through the prism of a segment of these youth, and with a view to the future. The artists profiled are all illustrative, but they are also select – there are at least one hundred more that make up the scene. This book is not written for the insider, neither of the music scene nor of the country. Many of us who live here know this history and these stories, albeit through divergent political viewpoints and proximities. The book is therefore intended for the millions who had followed the Egyptian Revolution with intrigue, and have since turned their attention elsewhere. The story of Egypt, and of its revolutionary fervor, is not yet over.

New Agenda readers can purchase the book in Kindle format at https://www.amazon.com/Laughter-Dark-Egypt-Tune-Change-ebook/dp/B0BK4RFFXC/ (US$10, plus 15% VAT.)

To listen to the music, playlist[22] of artists and songs featured in the book is available on Spotify.

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ENDNOTES

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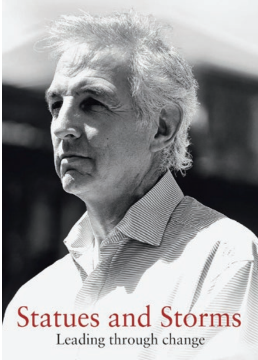

Statues and Storms:
Leading through Change

Max Price
Tafelberg, 2023, 320pp.
ISBN: 978-0-624-08776-2.
R350.00
Review by Linda Chisholm

Not thirty, but twenty years after democracy, South Africa's oldest and most prestigious university was wracked by tumultuous upheavals sustained over two long years between 2015 and 2017. Although contestation and challenge were not new to the university, the nature and degree of student protest, directed at the university itself, were. A few years later, Max Price's successor, Mamokgethi Phakeng, experienced different storms that relegated the events of 2015-7 firmly to the past. The book is nonetheless still relevant, as the calls with which those years were associated, for 'free, quality, decolonial education,' have endured.

Predictably, Price's account of how he navigated UCT through one of the most difficult periods has attracted admiration and opprobrium, in equal measure, on the one side from fellow Vice-Chancellors and on the other from some staff and students of UCT. His leadership and the decisions he took to steer the institution into calmer waters continue to be contested.

Price did not then, and with this book will not now, please everyone. But it is worth noting the changes resulting from the events in which he played a key role: the removal of the statue of Rhodes on the campus in 2015, changes in financial aid provided for students, the in-sourcing of workers, and the wide-ranging debates on the role of art and society. In 2016, in the face of extraordinary levels of conflict, disruption and violence, he reasserted a central principle of democracy: debate, dialogue and negotiation. From his perspective, the main achievement was the restoration of peace on campus and changes in the institutional culture of the university. The most important lesson was that of understanding the rage underlying the protests, so that institutions will know how to deal with the accompanying violence in future.

But what kind of a book has the author written about the events? In the first instance, it is a memoir. Typical of the genre, it presents the author's point of view. It is the perspective of the Vice-Chancellor, the leader of an institution caught in an eruption at once local and national. It provides a textbook case of how the liberal university deals with protest: mainly through deliberation and dialogue but also, and simultaneously, through the force of the law. The Price-UCT story, with its own context and specificities,

is skillfully interwoven with what was happening on a national level and at other institutions such as Wits University. So too are the personal and emotional, the familial and affective dimensions, with full acknowledgement given to his wife Deborah Posel, an accomplished scholar and historian in her own right, and his children, on occasion on the other side of the barricades.

The book shows how controversial decisions were arrived at collectively, with senior management and Council, how these decisions were informed by a strategy developed in advance, and how they were intended to be sensitive to the differences and nuances of opinions amongst different university constituencies. I found the openness with which he discussed what is normally kept behind closed doors unusual and enlightening. There is abundant background information on particular issues. When a decision had to be taken with which he disagreed, he says so, but always makes his own position clear. When mistakes were made, he acknowledges them. There are no holy cows. Nothing is cast in stone. Everything is a matter for debate and discussion.

Seen from his perspective, Price and his senior management were in an unenviable dilemma. At one level, they were caught between trying to reconcile legitimate student demands – that then degenerated as the student movement fragmented – and the imperatives of an institution that had to remain open and keep its annual calendar of lectures, seminars, exams and graduations going if a knock-on effect of the crisis for students and the institution was to be avoided. At another level, they were caught between those who wanted more rather than less assertion of authority, and those who condemned the assertion of authority in terms of 'militarising' and 'securitising the campus' in the form of interdicts, suspensions, expulsions, police intervention. As 2016 unfolded in a nightmarish cycle of ever-changing student negotiators and constantly-expanding demands, amid personal threats to himself and his family, Price's determination not to be provoked and to avoid violence at all costs prevailed.

The book is much more than a memoir, however. Written not in the heat of the moment, but after a period of research and reflection, it carefully periodises events and uses varied sources to construct a narrative analysis of the competing forces that shook the university between 2015 and 2017, and of the leadership's responses. It is a gripping, analytical and contextualised account that sets out, with great clarity, how the storm morphed from one over statues in 2015, through free higher education, in-sourcing, and artwork, to the campaign for 'free, quality, decolonial education' at the end of 2016. The conflict was at fever-pitch in October and November 2016; the university was on the brink of shutting down, with exams about to start on the 7th November, as livestream plenary negotiations were being conducted between the university and students. The storm petered out following the successful negotiation of an agreement with students, hammered out over long days and nights, in the midst of a fury that was also unleashed on other campuses.

In one of his central arguments in the first part of the book, Price explains that institutional culture – its middle class 'whiteness' – was the main unresolved issue when he arrived, and that this issue was progressively addressed. The last part of the book deals with possible responses of a liberal university to the violence of the student

movement, expressed in disruption, occupations, vandalism to buildings (including the throwing of faeces into teaching and learning spaces), arson, physical violence and threats towards people, and the increasing racial polarisation amongst staff members. Price discusses *in extenso*– in theory and in practice – the relative merits of campus security, the police, and private security forces. And he declares his own position on violence, as well as that of student and other university constituencies.

Obscured in this account, and in the events themselves, are the changes that have been most significant in university culture over the last thirty years: the managerialism associated with university rankings and a funding model that rewards quantitative research and teaching output over its quality. How this is articulated with the racial institutional culture appears not to have been at issue for the students, and it does not surface in Price's narrative. Does this mean that it does not affect the workings of UCT in a way similar to other universities? Or was this a blind spot for students and management alike in those fraught years?

The book is to be commended for its clear delineation and assessment of the politics and actions of different student organisations, as well as those groups outside of the university who came to wishfully think about the potential of the university to ignite a wider revolution. At no point does Price generalise about the actions of students, though. He shows which particular groups engaged on which issues. He shows when, how and why they interacted with students at other institutions, on a national level; and he examines the role of social media in their actions. For those wanting to trace changes in the student movement over time, this book provides valuable insight into the organisations, politics and practices of organised student activity in this period, albeit through the prism of UCT, and from the perspective of the vice-chancellor. The sources are impeccable.

Also noteworthy is the evidence of the role played by government, the Minister and President in relation to university leaders, particularly on the question of tuition fees. This clearly was not a relationship of trust: university leaders found that they could not rely on government for support. As far as government was concerned, policy trumped institutional specificities.

The book ends on a slightly unsatisfactory note, with a somewhat hastily-written Postscript about dissatisfaction with recent processes, which are not specified; it is presumed that the reader is familiar with them. Unlike the rest of the book, the sketchiness of the Postscript points to an unfinished story.

With so strong a contribution from the side of the institutional leadership, however, one hopes that something similar will be written from the perspective of student leaders and other institutional actors. Did a new vision of the university and the role of the students emerge from this period? And is it proving to be sustainable? If not, why not? Was Covid the game-changer?

Why higher education became the focus of such intense conflict in this period is now relatively well-understood. Whether the next educational explosion will be in higher education, schooling, or some other part of the system remains to be seen. One thing is certain: conflict in higher education is neither new, but nor is it over. NA93

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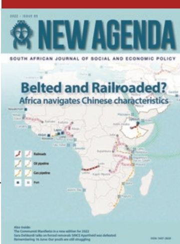

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