The Politics of Jacob Zuma
Edited by Sean Jacobs

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Introduction
The Politics of Jacob Zuma

Sean Jacobs

Jacob Zuma, the President of Africa’s most powerful democracy since April 2009, and the recently chosen ‘African President of the Year’ (Sapa 2009), arouses strong passions from his supporters and detractors.

A longtime ANC official from a humble peasant background in what is now Kwazulu-Natal province, Zuma was picked by the ANC to be the country’s deputy president under Thabo Mbeki in 1999.

The men, close colleagues during exile (and during the early years of negotiating with the Apartheid government), appeared to only enjoy a friendly rivalry at that point.

So when it came to predicting who would lead South Africa when Mbeki departed the national stage, most observers did not think of Zuma as a serious contender. He hardly featured in the daily cut and thrust of national politics, save for spearheading a ‘moral regeneration’ effort and co-chairing a national body to coordinate the government’s AIDS prevention and treatment effort with NGOs. No one took the focus on morals seriously and Mbeki was really in charge of AIDS policy.

Then in 2004 Shabir Shaik, a close associate of Zuma, was tried on charges of corruption and fraud relating to a controversial $5 billion government arms deal. During the trial it emerged that Shaik managed Zuma’s finances and that Zuma was probably embroiled in a corrupt relationship with Shaik (he was accused of procuring bribes for Zuma from arms manufacturers).

In June 2005, President Mbeki — alluding to possible corruption charges against Zuma — decided to relieve Zuma of his duties as deputy president. A few months later Zuma was charged with raping the HIV-positive daughter of his former cellmate on Robben Island.

Though Zuma was acquitted of the rape charge, during the trial he claimed to have showered after sex to prevent possible infection and also suggested that his alleged victim invited sex by dressing provocatively. His supporters — who held marches and rallies outside the court — also threatened his accuser with death. She eventually sought asylum in the Netherlands.

By most accounts, Zuma would have been set for certain political isolation. Instead, a combination of factors resurrected his political career.

Zuma’s warm personality contrasted sharply with Mbeki’s cold, secretive and paranoid character (Mbeki at one point had the Minister of Police investigate three of his rivals for ANC President). Zuma’s poor background — he is from a peasant family; his single mother was a domestic to white Durban families — also differed from Mbeki’s status as an ANC insider (Mbeki’s father was a rival of Mandela and served more than two decades on Robben Island; in fact, Mbeki was sent out of South Africa to prepare him for leadership).

Mbeki’s government also became associated with crony corruption and loyalty to non-performing ministers and senior government officials, AIDS deaths (and denialism) as well as other negative social indicators (massive unemployment and growing class fissures among blacks, among others).

Mbeki’s critics inside the ANC and its allies (the trade union movement and communists) found in Jacob Zuma — ‘the 100% Percent Zulu Boy’ — an ambitious politician and willing accomplice.

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For Mbeki’s opponents ground zero would be the party’s national conference in December 2007 — where the ANC usually anoints its leaders and, since 1990, when it was unbanned, its presidential candidates.

Publicly Mbeki — who by now could not conceal his open disdain for Zuma, denied that he wanted to change the country’s constitution and serve a third term, leaving it to his surrogates to publicly promote the idea. When his proposal of a third-term was rejected by the ANC, Mbeki instead offered to remain only as party president.

No one could predict what followed next: Zuma trounced Mbeki in elections for party leader (he won nearly twice the number of voters Mbeki got).

With Mbeki now controlling the state and Zuma the party, something had to give. It was clear Zuma’s camp held the upper hand and in September 2008 Mbeki resigned his post as the country’s president. This plunged the ANC into its first serious crisis since the 1970s (then a group of rabid African nationalists were expelled because of their views of whites and communists).

Some party leaders close to Mbeki eventually broke away to form the Congress of the People (COPE) in October 2008. Though the ANC appointed the party secretary-general, Kgalema Montlante, as President of South Africa, it was clear that the preferred candidate of those who had ousted Mbeki, was Zuma. In early 2009 the corruption charges against Zuma was dismissed. Soon after he was declared the ANC’s candidate for President. Zuma, contrary to elite opinion, especially foreign and domestic media, emerged as a capable leader, rallying the ANC’s core supporters and running a smooth, tight election campaign to be elected as South Africa’s third democratic president.

Zuma had campaigned with the promise that he would only serve one term, but in June 2009 he announced that he wants to serve the maximum allowed two presidential terms. This means Zuma will now certainly dominate South African politics for the next decade.

Unlike his predecessors as South Africa’s democratic presidents — Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki — Zuma is a relatively close book. He is also not known to write things down.

But Zuma, like Mbeki before him, is considered a polarizing figure in mainstream accounts. Journalist Mark Gevisser (2007), who authored a 900-odd page biography of Thabo Mbeki, later declared that he is not a fan of Zuma. Gevisser later wrote an article for the British Prospect Magazine to declare that he would not vote for the ANC with Zuma as leader (Gevisser 2009). Former ANC member of parliament, Andrew Feinstein, in his book about the arms deal, described Jacob Zuma as morally compromised. Some, like journalist Alec Russell, hedge their bets on Zuma. In his recent book on South Africa, Russell (who was a fan of Mbeki’s rightwing economic policies) speculates on what kind of leader Jacob Zuma will be: ‘If South Africa is lucky, Zuma will be its Ronald Reagan’. That is if Zuma leaves the governing to technocrats, while working to ‘make the country feel good about itself’. At the same time Zuma could develop into a ‘Big Man personality cult’ and a ‘charismatic populist,’ according to Russell (2009). But with the exception of Russell, none of the other books claim to be about Zuma specifically.

To shed light on the politics and ideology of Jacob Zuma, we approached a number of experts (among them historians, political scientists, and sociologists) based inside and outside South Africa, to shed led on Zuma’s politics and biography. In these essays, the contributors attempt to get beyond the headlines to explore aspects of Zuma’s political identity, his class politics, biography (Robben Island, his Zuluness), his political alliances, style of government, gender politics, among others.
Essays are by Suren Pillay, Peter Dwyer, Raymond Suttner, Ari Sitas, Hlonipha Mokoena, Thembisa Waetjen and Gerhard Mare and Fran Buntman. There is also an essay by an Anonymous contributor. Rather than summarize them here, we have decided to let them speak for themselves.

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References


Presidentialism and its Pitfalls: Towards a theory of how not to understand the Zuma Presidency

Suren Pillay

It was an unthinkable for many. That Jacob Zuma would become President of post-Apartheid South Africa. Or rather it was unthinkable for many in the West, and for many of the elites in the postcolonial world. At some point South Africa possessed one of the neatest narratives in the history of national liberation movements. A globally condemned problem- racism, and a globally revered leader- Nelson Mandela. A history of violence that was transcended through forgiveness and reconciliation. That was a much consumed version of the story in most of the world. The untidiness of historical actualities is of course a different matter. And yet it seems that the untidiness of actuality always struggles to find voice when it doesn’t seem to tell the story that is required. Perhaps that is because we grasp the world through genres of understanding. Our historical-political events, like our economic fates, are told through classificatory systems, concept repertoires, metaphors, and idioms that allow us to make the specificity of a moment both commensurate with other specific moments in other places at other times. Specificity is therefore inserted and dissolved into historical Time and space so that we can tell a story who’s dimensions, characters, and plot we are roughly already familiar with. We have good stories, and bad stories. There are the inspirational stories, the tragedies, dramas, and the farces, perhaps too much farce. Political life in liberal democracies, totalitarian states and other forms of centralized authority embodied in a person has a genre of its own, through which we seek to make sense of it all. Yet in making sense of the individual leader, the genre that governs plot, character and narrative in political journalism and much political science literature, has already predetermined what it looks for, even if it can’t always govern the timing of events, as the epics of Greek political tragedy demonstrate.

In Africa we perhaps suffer the worse forms of this genre of understanding political life and leadership, since we have to live with cardboard cut-out caricatures, such as a ‘Big Man’ theory of African politics, still very much alive in African Studies it seems, given the glut of B-movie ‘analyses’ of Robert Mugabe we have seen over the last decade. It would however be unfair to castigate scholars in and of African political life alone for mobilizing this heuristic device. It is a mode of understanding political life that exceeds us and is often taken from elsewhere and travels like a global cookie cutter in the sky, landing on a sovereign territory, and forcing its template onto the ground so that what emerges in relief are things like ‘The President’ and ‘the Masses’. All eyes are put on the leader if we want to understand what’s going on, and what’s going to happen. My point is not that this is necessarily wrong in some places at some times. Its just that this mode of analyses might not apply so well everywhere all of the time. And one place it doesn’t apply to very well too is in the analysis of the rise to power, and the practices of political power, the policies and futures we are going to have under the Presidency of Jacob Zuma. That is because while we might refer to him as President Zuma, and whilst we have a very complex institutional machinery designed around him, called the “Presidency”, it would be an analytical mistake to understand Jacob Zuma’s occupation of the presidency in the way that we might understand the rise to power of a political leader in a Presidential system, where an electorate votes directly for the president who is required to spell out an individualized vision.
and policy agenda.

Jacob Zuma might rather be understood as an ‘empty signifier’, as the name that marks something to be contested over, to be filled in, and to be discursively managed. The rise of Jacob Zuma to the presidency is quite distinct to the individual who went into exile, who spent a month locked in the same jail cell with his comrade Thabo Mbeki in Swaziland in the 1980’s, who became head of ANC intelligence in exile, and who became Deputy President of the ANC, and of the country. Whilst Mr. Zuma is not reducible to any one of these, his public persona is a compound of all these facets. To understand the “Zuma Presidency” I would argue requires studying two dimensions. Firstly, it requires a historical analysis of the ANC in exile, the transformation of the liberation movement into a political party, and an understanding of the local effects of a post-political techno-administrative rationality of governance in a specific global economic context after the Cold War.The ‘constitutive outside’, to invoke a concept from Ernesto Laclau, of the forces that congealed around Jacob Zuma—the figure of Thabo Mbeki and what he stood for — has largely been vanquished at the top and its remnants are slowly being rooted out throughout the bureaucracy. The struggle now is within the diverse unity that cohered around a particular set of grievances, and that found a groundswell in the form of Jacob Zuma as the agent of change.

Political events in South Africa understood as a Zuma-Mbeki personality struggle, as much as the Tsvangarai-Mugabe affair in Zimbabwe is told this way, do not encourage us to understand our politics as structurally shaped and historically grounded. We are encouraged rather to construct personality archetypes which become turn-keys to unravel the mystery in the drama. Yes, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma lend themselves to stark contrasts — the urban sophisticated intellectual who is thoughtful and reticent versus the formally uneducated goat herder who is warm and approachable. We may even find


2. The general secretary of the country’s largest trade union federation, Zwelinzima Vavi, described Zuma’s bid for the Presidency as an ‘unstopable tsunami’.
in the person of Thabo Mbeki that story we are looking for, of a seemingly deliberate individualized rise to power that appears less constituency based- he is quoted as saying when he came back from exile that he had ‘no constituencies’, where rivals like Chris Hani at Mafikeng in 1991, Cyril Ramaphosa at the negotiations in Kempton Park, Tokyo Sexwale later on — potential rivals that might have eclipsed him, are outmaneuvered in one way or another. We might find in Mbeki who participated in the secret talks with the apartheid regime whilst simultaneously drafting resolutions for the South African Communist Party demanding mass insurrection, a certain double-speaking tendency driven by a larger vision, in that case the realization that an armed struggle was unlikely to conquer power and that negotiations were the only viable route. To that extent, we could argue that Mbeki possessed a discernable vision which was stamped onto the Presidency, spelt out in his ‘I am an African’ speech, in the commitment to peacekeeping in the continent, in the style of dealing with the political events in Zimbabwe, in the stance on HIV/Aids, in the style of appointments and of dealing with critics of the vision that emerged from the Presidency, either through what it said or refused to say.

On the other hand, it would be difficult to find a policy quarrel between Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma; the latter was a cooperative part of the executive that made policy under the former’s presidency. What then is at stake in the divisive question of ‘succession’ in the ANC and of the country that brought Jacob Zuma to power? How then did Jacob Zuma emerge as the symbolic figure that represents ‘the Left’ of the tripartite alliance partners, as well as a popular figure who’s increasing legal woes only endeared him more and more to grassroots sympathy? Even if they possess very distinct personalities, why is it that the traits of the one resonated with the mass base of the ANC at this point in time rather than the traits of the other?

Post-apartheid South Africa has contended with two main legacies. The first is the legacy of the exclusion of the majority of those who resided in it from the political community of citizens. Transforming all who lived in it into full legal citizens defines its ‘democratic imperative’. The second legacy it confronts is the effects of economic exclusion and marginalization, which impoverished the majority of its residents at the gain of its few citizens. Improving the basic conditions of life for the majority therefore defines the state’s ‘developmental imperative’. The relationship between representing ‘the will of the people’ — the democratic imperative — and making ‘a better life for all’ — the developmental imperative — is however not a seamless one.

The presidency under Mandela and Mbeki read its mandate- the ‘delivery’ of basic services and the improvement of the welfare of the majority of citizens lives — as an administrative matter to be resolved by expertise. Its criteria for success or failure is to be able quantify its achievements with regard to delivery. There is a remarkable moment at the ANC conference at Polokwane in 2007 where Mbeki and Zuma squared off against in each in the vote for leadership of the ANC. Mbeki is met with open hostility by a pro-Zuma audience of delegates, whom the chairperson struggles to reign in. Mbeki’s advisers suggested to him that he use the opportunity to make a speech that was emotive, and that spoke to the hearts of delegates, that ‘looked people in the eye’, as Ronnie Kasrils said. Mbeki however, consistently technocratic, looked down and read the text of a speech crowded with facts and figures about the achievements of the Presidency. The audience was visibly bored and yawned through it. The technocratic and the popular seemed worlds apart in that moment.

Another dimension to the story is that citizenship in South Africa, which was racially and ethnically exclusive, seeks to create a legal subject of the political in a context where the Law still lacks legitimacy in the eyes of many South Africans, particularly its punitive side. Its important to note that the more Zuma became a subject of punitive law, as an accused of either corruption or rape, the greater the public displays of popular support were. Jacob Zuma, as a victim of Law, resonated with the political disposition of many black South Africans towards law, as a codification of injustice towards them, and therefore lacking legitimacy and authority. In a recent piece, Slavoj Zizek notes

The challenge is going to be how [Zuma] manages and is managed by the contending forces at work on the Presidency once they start criticizing what he actually begins to stands for.
that “the key fact here is that pure post-politics (a regime whose self legitimization would have been thoroughly ‘technocratic’, presenting itself as competent administration) is inherently impossible: any political regime needs a supplementary ‘populist’ level of self-legitimization”. The contrast of Zuma to Mbeki as a ‘populist’ leader to a centralizing one, in this context is both misleading and simultaneously useful. What is misleading is the view that Zuma in his person represents a ‘populist’ leader, in the mould of figures like Argentina’s Juan Peron. I would argue rather that the campaign around Zuma takes on populist forms which are projected onto Zuma, whilst we are likely to see that in practice his governance imperatives will force him to manage the relationship between technocratic problem solving, and popular approval, necessary elements of all democratic regimes and their leaders. Zuma has already shown himself willing to criticize the constituency that brought him to power. The challenge is going to be how he manages and is managed by the contending forces at work on the Presidency once they start criticizing what he actually begins to stands for.


4. According to a newspaper account, addressing workers debating to go on strike, he remarked ‘There is no pandering to the unions. Asked if he felt indebted to unions, Zuma said: ‘Not at all’. James Macharia ‘There is no Pandering to Unions’, Mail and Guardian, 12 August 2009. Also August this year Zuma paid a surprise visit to the town of Balfour, which had experienced protests, to check in on local government officials. The Mayor was apparently off sick, but rushed to the office when he heard of his visitor. Karabo Keepile ‘The day the President came knocking’, Mail and Guardian, 26 August 2009. There have been similar visits elsewhere in the country, not only by himself, but by other ministers, who have been vocal in the criticisms of perceived incompetence.
South Africa is revolting. Since May 2009 there has been a wave of uninterrupted township as police clash on an almost weekly basis with unemployed protestors and striking workers. A recent estimate counts 63 major ‘service delivery’ protests since January 2009 with 24 percent of protests taking place in Guateng and 19 percent in the Western Cape and Mpumalanga. As the protests continue, increasing strain is being put on the Tripartite Alliance as some African National Congress (ANC) leaders in national and provincial government have accused the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) of being behind violent protests.

What are misleadingly called ‘service delivery’ protests have been about a wide range of issues and have included the working poor, the unemployed and students protesting about increased student fees at campuses across the country from Cape Town to Johannesburg. In October in Gugulethu up to 2000 people protested about the lack of jobs being created for local people at a new Square Mall that recently opened. To the far north in Nelspruit people protested outside the 2010 Mbombela stadium at 6am demanding that the government build them a school they were promised when they were relocated to make way for the World Cup stadium. And still the protests erupt and spread. During the past several weeks Sakhile informal settlement in Standerton has been rocked by violent protests culminating in an incredible 10,000 people marching to hand over a memorandum to the local council.

What is in part fascinating about this wave of protests and strikes is that they come just months after the April re-election of the African National Congress (ANC) and the new President Jacob Zuma. He was seen by many, particularly his supporters in COSATU the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Soh Africsn Communist Party (SACP) as representing a new start for the ANC government after 12 years of neoliberal polices imposed by former President Thabo Mbeki. The belief in Zuma as a fresh start has not been missed. One protestor Sandile Mahlangu claimed “President Zuma promised to rid government of corruption and lazy officials”.

The township protests coincided with an outbreak of national strikes. These latest strikes followed the month long strike in June 2007 that was the longest and largest public-sector strike in the history of South Africa and included over 700,000 workers on strike and another 300,000, for whom it was illegal to strike, taking part in militant marches, pickets and other forms of protest. In August 2008 another general strike brought the economy to a standstill when COSATU called its two million members out on a one-day strike in protest of rising prices of food and fuel. This strike followed an announcement that electricity prices would increase by 27.5 percent. Since the start of 2009 there have been 24 officially recorded major protests across the country and government officials believe that the rate of protests this year will exceed those for 2007 and 2008.

Although South Africa is Africa’s most successful economy (it contributes a third of all sub-Saharan Africa’s 48 countries), not everyone has benefitted equally. Since the late 1990s South Africa’s economy has grown at 6 percent each year and inflation has been reduced to around 6 per cent, on a par with other similar economies. Yet this has been done through introducing neoliberal policies with tight control over public spending and service delivery, that has hit the poorest hardest as money has been diverted from public spending into tax cuts for the rich and middle class. Increases in government budget allocations have come not through some fundamental shift in macroeconomic policy but through emphasising fiscal efficiency. Such ‘efficiency
savings’, argue COSATU and others, are at the expense of social spending for the working class.

Yet the ANC government has found the money to line the pockets of big business through billions of pounds of tax cuts as they have reduced corporation tax from 50 percent in the early 1990s to less than 0 percent today. The growth in the economy in the last few years is linked to the growth in global demand, particularly from China, for South African manufacturing and primary commodities. As elsewhere in the world this coincided with a financial and speculative boom resulting in property prices rocketing by 400 per cent — higher than the rise in property prices in the USA and Ireland. Whilst there has been investment in infrastructure, this has been money based on Private Finance Initiatives similar those in the UK, with money ploughed into tourist projects such as the football stadiums for the 2010 World Cup, the controversial World Bank backed Lesoto Highlands Water Project and an elitist fast rail service (that avoids Soweto) between Johannesburg and Pretoria that will largely service rich and middle class commuters.

Although the proportion of people living below the poverty line dropped from 58 percent in 2000 to 48 percent in 2005 and many families have access to social grants and other poverty alleviation programmes, many households and communities remain trapped in poverty. Some 75 percent of African children lived in income poverty in 2007, compared to 43 percent of ‘coloured’ children, 14 percent of Indian children and 5 percent of white children. Little wonder that South Africa is a country in turmoil as the anger and bitterness of shattered dreams of liberation eats away at the very fabric of society. It is an anger that is also expressed in the average of 50 people a day murdered and high levels of child abuse and rape. Although crime figures have fallen over the past several years, they are still high by international standards.

The government claims to have built over two million new houses but there are still 2000 informal settlements across South Africa, in which people live without sanitation and electricity in shacks made of corrugated iron and waste materials. On average there are 10 shack fires a day killing several hundred people a year. These disasters devastate the lives of all concerned, putting young children, the old and disabled people particularly at risk and making the poor and vulnerable destitute. Life in the shacks is one of permanent drudgery as one shackdweller Funake Mkhwambi told how ‘My shack gets flooded every year. I have to move every winter to stay with my cousins elsewhere. We are a family of 8, including 5 children who often get sick because of the cold and dirty water’.

Two sets of figures released in October 2009 reveal much about South Africa one of the most unequal countries one earth. The Sunday Times annual rich list shows that despite the recession ‘... executives are pocketing all sorts of additional bonuses and making mega-profits on unacceptably generous share options. This is in addition to huge basic salaries and performance bonuses, with bonuses still being earned by many despite the nonperformance of their companies’.

Between 2003 and 2006, the number of days lost to strikes rose from 500,000 to 2.6 million, most of which took place in 2006. June 2007 witnessed the largest strike in South Africa history. It lasted four weeks, with 11 million strike days lost as public sector workers marched and struck and an underlying current of which was a growing antipathy towards the ANC leadership.

At the same time the Labour Force Survey shows that 1 million jobs have been lost in the last year with official unemployment put at 24.5 per cent but many in civil society put the figure at over 40 percent. A figure that will continue to rise as the global economic crisis starts to bite in a country whose recent economic fortunes have been built on demand for commodities such as coal, gold and platinum.

Little wonder that the demand for jobs and decent wages is at the heart of calls from township protestors and striking workers alike and a growing unemployed peoples movement organises mass thefts of basic foodstuffs in cities such as Durban. This is a country in which one worker feeds on average another 5 members of the family. In a country in which the every other
18-24 year old is unemployed a cursory glance at the media coverage reveals poor, hungry, angry faces. Yet having promised to create 500,000 jobs in a recent state of the nation address, President Zuma retracted and stated that ‘These are not the permanent jobs the economy should create but opportunities that should help our people survive in the short term’. And already analysts are already talking of, when it comes, a jobless recovery.

To understand today’s protests and strikes it is important to understand the significance of the election of Jacob Zuma and the expectations he unleashed. But it was an earlier rising tide of worker and township militancy that he deftly rode so enabling him to win the presidency of the ANC. By 2006 there were on average approximately 6,000 township and community protests a year across the country. These were largely local-based revolts against the failure of the ANC government to satisfy ‘service delivery’ demands. These revolts occurred at a greater rate then any other country in the world. But important in which have also been the independent ‘social movements’ typified by the Anti-Privatization Forum who have emerged since 1999 largely as an attempt to coordinate struggles against the ANC’s relentless commodification and privatization of basic services and produced the first cracks in the ANC monolith, proving that you can challenge the ANC’s commitment to neoliberalism. But it was the recent strikes that destroyed Mbeki that breathed new life into the left inside the Alliance.

Despite being written off by many commentators on the left as ‘bought off’ or ‘tied to the apron strings of the ANC’ there has been a revival of the organised working class. A significant turning point was the 2006 violent security guard and cleaners strike that in some cases went beyond the control of the trade union leaders and began, however falteringly, to show signs of independent rank and file action.

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Paradoxically, it was during this period that COSATU’s role in the Alliance led some activists on the left to discount the role of the working class – some even repeating the 1970s theory about the unionised representing a ‘labour aristocracy’. If this was the case, what sense could possibly be made of the strikes at the level of political analysis, let along political engagement?

What is clear is that political transformations have followed from labour struggles. So the last important event came in December 2007 at the ANC Polokwane congress. The writing was on the wall for Mbeki, the coup against him only a matter of time. In short these events, notably the uprisings and strikes - represented a revolt against Mbeki’s neoliberalism. A revolt that catalyzed Zuma to the head of the ANC. Some on the left missed how the rising militancy reverberated inside the ANC and argued that Mbeki was replaced as president due to the internal conflicts. But the conflicts inside the ANC reflect the anger and frustration with ANC neoliberal policies and Mbeki’s fate was not sealed by internal party manoeuvres but by general strikes and protests in recent years that Zuma cleverly latched on to with help from the SACP and COSATU. By seeming to victimise Zuma, Mbeki enhanced his popularity and created a new leader for millions of disaffected people.

Zuma, unlike Mbeki, is seen as a “man of the people” and a friend of the workers who is willing to listen to the trade unions. Touted as a leftist by his supporters, he sounds more like a US Republican, said one newspaper columnist, as he calls for tougher action against crime and freer markets.
South Africa’s rate of investment, fight crime and provide a progressive social safety net. He said that under President Zuma’s leadership ‘this isn’t about business versus the poor, it’s about creating an environment for business while tending to the needs of the poor.’ At one point prior to his election Zuma talked of establishing a ‘pact’ between businesses, government and unions to address low wages, strikes and inflation. Yet this has already been shattered by the strikes and protests and instead of bringing social peace, the Financial Times has noted ‘There is an ugly, unpredictable mood among South Africa’s poor’.

It is this mood of militancy; militant strikes and the township protests over the last few years that have had the cumulative effect of blowing apart the neoliberal consensus in the Alliance. With the election of Jacob Zuma as president many hoped that this would usher in a new period of social stability. 15 years of ANC rule have seen South Africa become the most unequal country in the world but also the protest capital of the world. In May 2008 government and police figures noted that between 1997 and 2008 there had been 8695 violent or unrest-related crowd management incidents and 84,487 peaceful demonstrations or peaceful crowd management incidents.

The difference this time is that whilst previous protests have focused on issues such as lack of water and housing, the recent protests have been more generalised and more violent. As protestor Mzonke Poni told reporters ‘Whenever the ANC government fails to deliver, it comes up with excuses and blames it on individuals. It’s true that its councillors lack commitment and skills, but it is the national leadership that is also to blame – and meanwhile people have to suffer. The only way the government notices us is when we express our anger and rage. Then they understand how we feel.’ The protests and strikes caught many people by surprise with some commentators expressing disbelief at the level of political anger at a government elected just three months before with 66 per cent of the vote. As one commentator said about South Africa ‘They just don’t vote they throw bricks as well’. Unless something drastic is done then the bricks look set to be thrown in the future as residents involved in the latest out break of protests in Eldorado Park in Johannesburg threatened “We will protest at the stadiums (of the 2010 World Cup) so the tourists can see how bad we have it here” said Hilton Cannell a member of the resident’s housing committee. By focusing much of its capital infrastructure spending on the World Cup in the hope that it would trickle down to the unemployed and working poor the government increasingly looks like it has scored an own-goal.

Peter Dwyer

Scoring an own-goal
The Zuma era in ANC history: New crisis or new beginning?

Raymond Suttner

The inauguration of the Jacob Zuma government was met with considerable popular approval and initially generated a great deal of euphoria, hope and encouragement, (as well as dread and contempt on the other hand). While this paper attempts to move behind these emotions to the character of the phenomenon, I have no contempt towards the outpouring of joy and hope invested in what is claimed to be a new beginning, albeit not always for the same reasons.

It is not easy to explain the joy that appears to have been evoked. At the same time, having said that, much of the discourse within the African National Congress (ANC) -led alliance and what is said to be at issue in the rise of Zuma and at the level of much of the leadership is the relationship between the masses and leadership, a question on which the new president is said to be quite different from former president Thabo Mbeki. This is not an easy issue on which to pronounce. I write with full consciousness that there is a body of thinking that equates the masses with an ignorant mob who spell danger to democracy.

I am in agreement with Williams, that the masses are not an ignorant mob, but believe that we need to be aware that there are various levels of information that guide any action and that the current mass support, may change — not as the wind blows — but for reasons that are in the main based on rational and sometimes irrational factors, that may be temporary or of greater or lesser duration and whatever information is at their disposal. Already some of the original ardour is being displaced by anger in strikes and protests over service delivery, often met by what appears to be excessive force (Benjamin 2009). It may be that the often loosely used concept of populism will provide clues, possibly in conjunction with Bonapartism, to the understanding of this set of relationships (see, for example, Marx 1934; Laclau 1977; Gellner & Ionescu 1969; Taggart 2002). At the same time the series of high wage rises (though not high in relation to costs of living), are causing anxiety to capital.

Thus my support for popular power has a degree of conditionality and is as much a problem to be solved as it is a goal. Nowhere in the world has there been a successful combination of mass and representative democracy. The formula for their interaction has still
to be worked out, though writers like Arblaster believe that such structures for popular involvement are already there with new modes of communication in the twenty-first century (Arblaster 2002: ch.8).

The rest of this paper contextualises the rise of Jacob Zuma within ANC history, attempting to characterise the extent to which the Zuma-led ANC and government represents a rupture and continuity in the recent and overall history of the organisation, mode of its leadership and the democratic dispensation inaugurated in 1994. To what extent is it Zuma or unfinished business of ANC history with which we are concerned? To what extent has the ANC itself made the elements of Zuma leadership which many find offensive or to what degree are they outcomes that were part of a range of ones that could potentially have emanated from ANC history and patterns of organisation? What is the chain of causality?

**Brief overview of recent history**

The ANC was established as the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912 and although its history has been varied, a constant theme, which was periodically marred by splits and expulsions, has been the need for unity. Much of the argument in this paper and what I intend to develop relates to unity and its relationship to opposition, pluralism, constitutionalism, essentialism and other factors, though much is only alluded to and not attempted to finalise in argument in the present paper. On the eve of founding the organisation, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, in a famous statement spoke of the need to draw lessons from the inter-chiefdom /kingdom divisions that had led to the conquest of the African people and said there should be unity. ‘We are one!’ (Seme 1972[1911]: 71-3). He also spoke of the SANNC as a ‘native union’ of the African people, carrying, though he did not say so, revolutionary potentialities as a counter union to the white Union of South Africa (Jordan 1988: 107-24).

This theme of unity continued to be on the lips of the most famous ANC leaders. While this was preceded and followed by minor splits or expulsions, there was a major breach in this unity with the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) breakaway in 1959 due to ideological disagreements mainly over certain clauses of the Freedom Charter and the role of whites and alleged Communist domination. The expulsion of the ‘Gang of 8’ in 1975 was also for ideological reasons, as was that of the Marxist Workers Tendency in the 1980s. Most or all of these people were allowed re-admission to the ANC after it’s unbanning in 1990, thus signifying the principle that it is better to have the differences within the organisation than outside, as enemies.

In the years following the establishment of the ANC it pursued a policy of petitioning the British Empire and the Union governments, a strategy that was an adaptation to the new conditions that the organisation found itself in, with the defeat of armed resistance. Over time, this approach proved fruitless and led to decline in the organisation and its being overshadowed by other political and workers organisations. I am not thereby seeking to criticise the early approach, without qualification, and the work of Peter Limb (2002) in particular shows that it was more complex than going ‘cap in hand to the masters’. It was however revived from the 1940s, first through the efforts of individuals like Dr A.B. Xuma as president and Rev (later Canon) James Calata as secretary-general (Walshe 1970: 256). The establishment of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) in 1944 could build on the organisational structures that Xuma and Calata had started. Without this their statements may have remained radical rhetoric.

The 1950s, following the adoption of the YL’s programme of action saw the development of mass and radical programmes and organisational steps. The 1952 Defiance campaign represented an embryonic rejection of legal obligation and allegiance to the apartheid state. The ‘M Plan’ was preparation for potential banning which was adopted following the illegality of the Communist Party. That party re-established itself as the South African Communist Party (SACP) in 195 and possibly earlier if we were in possession of more data on political activities in the rural areas (Suttner 2008: ch.2-3).

The Defiance campaign, initiated shortly after Chief Albert Luthuli entered politics and was dismissed as a chief, represented a break in the chain of legality that had characterised previous ANC politics. It saw the ANC membership rise from 7000 to 100,000 paid up members (Karir and Carter 1973: 427; Bensson 1985, 150). The defiers were led by volunteers, swearing an oath and wearing a special uniform. The uniform may

1. For a comprehensive discussion, see Gerhart 1978.
have carried symbolic military connotations thus echoing talk that was current about ‘fighting back’ and taking up arms. At the same time, the cap that was worn derives from Gandhi and thousands of years of Indian peasant history (Suttner 2009a: 61).

Sisulu indicated that they specifically chose the word ‘defiance’ rather than ‘passive resistance’ used in the 1946-1948 Indian anti-pass campaigns, to raise the level of struggle, even to a revolutionary level, where people would be prepared to give their lives. That is why the volunteers were called ‘defiers of death’ (Sisulu 2001: 79).

What Luthuli brought to the fore, along with the youth leaders already mentioned, was the ethical canon that distinguished the best of the ANC. He represented the notion of a leader who sought nothing for him or herself, who was prepared to lose all, and prayed that he would resist any temptation not to do what was his moral duty to his people (Suttner 2009c). Many cadres were very learned in political theory, but they were not prepared when it came to putting their life on the line. Luthuli was very clear on the nature of his beliefs, but more importantly, he prepared himself for a road of hardship and ultimate ‘mysterious’ death. This is what he called ‘the gospel of service’, that people had to understand ‘no cross, no crown’ (Reddy 1991: 71), though the notion of the crown carried some ambiguity. Whatever he advised others to do, he was prepared to do himself (Benson 1985: 144-5), in this respect echoing Gandhi and foreshadowing Mandela (Chatterjee 2007: ch.4; Mandela 1994: 360).

The Defiance Campaign was followed by the Congress of the People campaign which gathered popular demands and out of which the Freedom Charter emerged, which would serve as guidelines for a future democratic state. Unlike other human rights documents in the ANC, like the African claims of 1945 (see Asmal, et. al. 2005), and seldom if ever in international history has a document, whatever its flaws, derived from the actual voices of the ordinary people (Suttner and Cronin 2006).

The proceedings of the Congress of the People at Kliptown were halted just after the point of adoption, and the Charter was used as a basis for prosecution in the Treason Trial, involving between 30 and 156 of the top leadership for 5 years. While this was a blow to organisation it provided opportunities for meetings and friendships to develop, one of the most noteworthy being that between Luthuli and Moses Kotane, General Secretary of the SAPC, who became Luthuli’s closest adviser and confidant (Bunting 1998: ch.14; Magubane, et.al. 2004: 65).

Before the Treason Trial acquittal, the Sharpeville massacre occurred in 1960, followed by the banning of the ANC and PAC, and the detention of many leaders under the state of emergency. Of great symbolic importance at this time were photographs of Luthuli, Mandela and Sisulu setting their passes alight. People still speak today of how these images stirred them.4

This is an example of the Gandhian principle that the type of leadership of the time would set the example for their followers by being the first to take daring action, which others were urged to follow. (This is not to suggest that being in the frontline is invariably the best way to lead).

The 1950s began and ended with defiance, ultimately with banning of the ANC and its stating it would not abide by that decree (Suttner 2008: ch.2). The notion of defiance, even in its earlier form in the Defiance campaign crossed a threshold, in that from that moment the ANC implicitly denied any duty owed to the authority of the day. That denial would increase in intensity after banning, and led to the later declaration of apartheid as a crime against humanity, and the ejection of the South African government from the UN General Assembly for not being representative of the people of South Africa (Suttner 1984). While Luthuli refers to the actions of the 1950s as non-revolutionary (Reddy 1991: 46-50), revolution may mean a single decisive act or a series of embryonic acts of a transformative or rebellious kind, such as the Defiance campaign. The counterposition of evolution and revolution is one of the problems in much of the thinking of Leninists and those, including the ANC pursing a ‘decisive moment’ notion of national liberation (Hunt 1980; Kagarlitsky 1990; Lenin 1969[1918]).

2. The inquest found nothing untoward, but anyone who is conversant with inquests during the apartheid era would not regard that as the final word. It is regrettable that there has been no state enquiry, as in the case of Samora Machel.

3. See my interpretation, aided by theologian friends, in Suttner 2009c

The ANC underground experience, preceded by the SACP reconstitution in 1953, relied heavily on the experience of the latter, but it was difficult to take a mass organisation underground and its military efforts while dramatic were brought to a swift halt by the middle of the 1960s, with all of the top leadership in prison or exile. Bram Fischer lasted somewhat longer, but he was operating in virtual isolation and without much logistical support (see Meredith 2002; Clingman 1998). The Rivonia trial of 1964 again saw the spirit of denial of the legal right of the South African government to make laws, with all the prisoners declaring that ‘the government not they should be in the dock’ (Joffe 1995: 58-9). Later Mandela made his famous statement that he was willing to live but if necessary to die to realise the ideals of the liberation movement (Mandela 1990: 181; on preparedness for death, see Mandela 1994: 60).

Between Rivonia and 1976

With the leadership in prison and some, such as Oliver Tambo and Yusuf Dadoo having been sent out earlier in order to start the international solidarity campaign, history books record that a ‘lull’ reigned over South African politics, for the ANC was declared dead. Inkatha (with initial qualified support from the ANC) used the opening to claim to be the heir to the ANC. This also created space for the fresh and defiant strands of black consciousness (BC) to emerge.

In fact, it is not true that the ANC ceased to exist, and underground structures were re-constituted by a number of groupings. They started on a small scale, but gradually developed the capacity to help families of those in jail or detention, to send out individuals for training and receive MK (mKhonto we Sizwe, Spear of the Nation, the name of the ANC army) cadres who returned. It was slow, patient work, too slow for some of the emerging BC movement, many of whom entered into dialogue with the underground and later came to appreciate the need for this careful, painstaking building of the organisation (Suttner 2008: ch.4).

At the same time those who had left for training in the early years of MK had expected to return within a few months but found that it stretched into decades. This fed into problems of morale and discipline and while campaigns into then Rhodesia had more success than South African newspapers reported (Karis and Gerhart 1997: 29), they led to divisions, including complaints about the life style of the leadership, over-emphasis on international solidarity, and neglect of armed struggle and the need to return to South Africa. One of the symptoms of this sentiment was the ‘Hani memorandum’, which nearly led to Chris Hani’s execution (Shubin 2008: ch.6).

To attempt to heal these divisions and chart a way forward, a consultative conference was held in Morogoro in Tanzania in 1969. The conference emerged with a strategy and tactics document, which would have a significant effect for generations to come (ANC 1969). This document, which may fall into the category of Gramsci’s reference to a party acting as an intellectual or ‘collective intellectual’ (Gramsci 1971: ch.1; Suttner 2005) was an intervention which drew many people to the ANC and gave those already there a feeling that the apartheid regime was not invincible; this was part of the overall sense that there was both power and weaknesses in the make-up of the ‘enemy’ and its opponents. These had both to be exploited in a way that strengthened the resistance and weakened the regime.

The period that followed saw some limited attempts at realising these overall goals, some with a measure of success, others representing attempts but without much success.

The 1976 uprising was not initiated by the ANC. But many BC individuals and leaders had contact with key ANC underground figures, on a strictly secret, conspiratorial basis. Many listened to Radio Freedom, the ANC illegal broadcasting station. Many were impatient to leave BC, but they were counselled to stay where they were by older people, such as Joe Gqabi. Many left the country in the wake of the repression that accompanied and followed the uprising. The huge influx of new, young and optimistic people into the


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6. Interview E. Mtshali, (Johannesburg, 8 February 2003); Suttner 2008: ch 7. There are a number of personal wounds that remain from this period and are captured partly in Berstein (1994). This deserves a book on its own

7. Suttner (2008: ch.4), interviews with Murphy Morobe (Midrand, 26 August 2003) and Nat Serache (Johannesburg, 31 August 2002).
ANC and MK gave a spurt to those whose morale had been flagging and in the late 1970s led to a wave of MK attacks, including assaults on police stations that had participated in forced removals or were notorious in communities for their violence (Suttner 2008: chs.4&8).

The rise of PW Botha to prime minister and later the presidency, together with Niel Barnard as new head of intelligence, led to an attempt by the regime to ‘normalise’ the situation, but without intending to lose control (Sanders 2006). The lesson drawn from Rhodesia by the apartheid intelligence forces was that if the government did not open up it would lose everything. They should instead create some space which they assumed they would control, and contain and accommodate political manifestations on their own terms. Unfortunately for them, that was not to be.

A wide range of popular organisations emerged — including trade unions, community organisations and media — drawing thousands of people into activities on the fringes between legality and illegality, The Freedom Charter was revived and individuals were often buried under the ANC flag, such as, Hennie Ferrus in Worcester (Issel 2003). In the 1980s this process continued with the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983, an organisation which was both autonomous of and linked in various ways to the ANC and the underground. The formation of a powerful, unified trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985 changed the quality of labour intervention. In combination, these provided a more concerted and direct challenge to the regime.

In the meantime, on the international front, from the earliest beginnings of Tambo’s work, the international solidarity movement was making strides as the biggest international social movement in history, changing the notion of international relations, which is conventionally supposed to be between states, by entering as a non-state actor. All over the world, South African apartheid products were boycotted, the regime was isolated, trade sanctions were sometimes applied, UN resolutions proliferated, and the ANC had more international representatives than the South African government.

MK grew in strength and the range of its activities, but there was a gap between popular imagination, which saw it as capable of defeating the apartheid regime in battle, and attacks that were of great symbolic significance, such as the blowing up of the SASOL refinery in 1980. MK training from the 1970s had been inside8 as well as primarily outside the country.

Towards negotiations

It became clear that the rising of the mid-1980s, which the ANC and SACP officially intended to turn into an insurrection, was making apartheid unworkable and South Africa ungovernable. This was urged daily by the ANC through Radio Freedom and SACP publications like Umsebenzi (The Worker). At the same time, also at the urging of the exiled leadership, organs of popular power were established in a range of forms, though local creativity surpassed what may have been envisaged. They founded street committees, and other local structures and — in a sense — were the first example of popular, direct democracy in South Africa (ANC 1985 & 1986; Neocosmos 1998; Suttner 2004b & 2005).

It seemed apparent that governability was unlikely to be re-established. At the same time, this did not mean that the power of resistance was able to defeat the enemy on the battlefield. Many of the internal leadership were taken out of action by the arrest of over 50 000 during the states of emergency in 1985/6 and 1986-1989. This had the unfortunate effect of leaving younger people, and often gangsters, in the street committees, which led to various abuses, such as kangaroo courts.

In the meantime, Radio Freedom continued to call for insurrection and the SACP (1989) conference, held in Cuba in 1989, mapped out and elaborated a strategy for its achievement. This conference was chaired by Thabo Mbeki and included delegates from inside, co-ordinated by Mac Maharaj, at the time still a member of the SACP and in his capacity as leader of Operation Vula.

Maharaj, reporting to Oliver Tambo and Joe Slovo, in their capacity as leaders of the ANC and SACP respectively, aimed to join the external and internal

8. Interview. Morobe received some training from Tokyo Sexwale, amongst many others.
leadership; some individuals from outside worked underground for over four years. The boldness of this venture was such that the ANC’s (much prized amongst activists) January 8 anniversary statement appeared on doorsteps in 1989, next to the morning’s newspaper.

Nelson Mandela liked to remind cadres that the ANC was not facing an enemy on its knees. When neither side is able to defeat the other, there exists what Gramsci (1971: 238-9) calls a ‘reciprocal siege’ and that creates the possibility of talks and negotiations that may lead to a democratic settlement.

At the time, unknown to most individuals inside, and arousing some suspicion among those who knew or sensed it outside, talks with the government had begun, inside the country by Nelson Mandela (1994; Sparks 1997; Waldmeir 1997) and outside by Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, meeting with apartheid intelligence officials (Sanders 2006: 227ff).

There are some procedural necessities in initiating talks that lead to negotiations. One cannot start such a process by public announcement if one wants to succeed. It is often a condition of success that much happens in camera, at least initially. Nevertheless Mandela has always said that he had initiated talks without consultation because he knew that had he consulted he would have been stopped. This is an important statement, which may be vindicated in retrospect by a relatively successful result in achieving a democratic constitution. But it raises questions about collective leadership (a concept, which of course needs itself to be problematised), which would reappear from time to time. Allister Sparks captures Mandela’s alleged ‘aristocratic qualities’, in a discussion of Mandela’s attitude to what he perceived as the necessity to take advantage of what he saw as differences within the government:

Mandela knew that the vast majority of ANC members, and even most of the leadership would not understand this. They saw no need to offer the Boers an honourable retreat. He told no one: not his colleagues upstairs [in Pollsmoor prison at the time] nor those in Lusaka (with whom he was able to communicate by clandestine methods). For though he pays passionate lip service to democracy- and always tries to ensure the broadest possible support for all he does—he is by nature an autocrat. This was one case where autocracy was the best policy.

Mandela did not let his colleagues know that he was talking to the enemy until nearly two years later. By then, although no one could have known it at the time, the outlines of the future deal were already becoming clear. (Sparks 1997: 94)

Equally, while the talks in Europe were apparently initiated with Oliver Tambo’s approval, Chris Hani and others raised objections to the lack of report-backs (Shubin 2008: 255). There was an element of deception in a situation where an insurrectionary platform for the SACP was being initiated, with Mbeki as chair, and Zuma and other participants like Aziz Pahad (later deputy foreign minister for both Mandela and Mbeki) as Central Committee members agreeing, while parallel processes were in motion to avert this.

The question of mandate is important. Discussions with National Intelligence Service (NIS) operatives of the apartheid regime indicate that they sometimes felt that their political principals did not know various things (which NIS had learnt) and admitted having on occasion exceeded what they were authorised to do. Not having had discussions on this with ANC negotiators of that time, it cannot be gauged with certainty, how they saw things, and whether they acted in simi-

11. A similar decision to decide over and above the collective arose, inter alia, in relation to the RDP conference of 1993 which decided that the ANC NEC would appoint the cabinet. Mandela concluded that he would do it on his own (in consultation probably with whoever were his confidants at the time), announcing to the National Working Committee and explicitly referring to the RDP decision, which he considered unworkable. He repeated this on SABC television at the ANC conference in Stellenbosch in 2002. This was in some respects a return to the patterns of intervention of the young Nelson Mandela in the 1950s, continually acting above the organisation. Then he was a young man, now he was an organisational leader. See Suttner (2007). In Long Walk, Mandela (1994), more or less withdraws apologies made to the leadership of the time, reflecting that he was correct.
12. In my recollection, ‘honourable retreat’, in the ANC national leadership at the time of negotiations and UDF leadership before then, was not a major issue, but various guarantees for whites was a key question when negotiations started.
lar fashion.\textsuperscript{13}

For those who were throwing themselves in the face of armoured vehicles and gunfire and being tortured, the news of talks smacked of an element of cynicism and left much bitterness after 1990. The ANC, in fact, handled the transition badly, with insufficient sensitivity towards those inside as well as MK in particular, many of the latter and their supporters (mistakenly) believing that if they had been left to fight they could have achieved military victory.\textsuperscript{14} This was exacerbated by further concessions, at leadership level.

That the possibility of a negotiated settlement had been reached is wrongly attributed to the foresight of two great men, de Klerk and Mandela. Great as Mandela may be, the range of forces arrayed against apartheid compelled the apartheid regime to concede the unbanning of organisations, although they did so on an unequal basis, aiming to ensure that the ANC was disabled by violent attacks, which is reported on by various commissions and films of the 1990s (Sparks 1997: e.g., 171; Waldmeir 1997: 206; Gordin 2008: e.g., 51, 58).

It was this combination of factors acting against apartheid that enabled the ANC to start talks and win elections in 1994. Chief Luthuli in 1951, when Natal President of the ANC referred to the slogan of the year being ‘speak from strength’, meaning being backed by well organised structures (Pillay 1993: 41). The truth is that Mandela, beyond his great skills, was able to speak with power behind him. The notion of organised strength needs to be in the forefront of any discussion of popular democratic rule, if that is the proclaimed goal or that to which there is an aspiration. Crowds in a stadium comprise mobilisation, enduring structures means organisation.

Rebuilding the ANC and negotiations

Put briefly, the process of legalisation created a mammoth task for the ANC. It could not simply pick up from 1960 and draw in new members on the same basis. It had to rethink its approach, as members flooded in, many knowing little about the organisation, speaking different languages, and without adequate organisational and political education structures in place. Meetings were very complicated to conduct and it was hard to ensure adequate participation and translation into all the languages that were spoken in an area like Gauteng.

It was one thing — during Apartheid — inducting new members who would undertake illegal tasks and were generally steeled to face danger and torture. It was quite another with thousands who had merely to pay R12, and could not be screened. There was no way of stopping money makers, former torturers (where unknown) and similar people from joining the organisation.\textsuperscript{15}

While serious efforts were made to (re)build the organisation — with some success — this is merely to indicate the scale of the problem; when the conditions were totally new. The international conjuncture had also changed with the gradual collapse of the Communist Party states, headed by the USSR, on whose support the ANC had counted. The economic elements of this collapse had to be factored into any notion of what could be done in the future transformation and how that could be achieved.

Negotiations

The year 1990 ushered in a period when the ANC was rebuilt under completely different conditions from any that it had previously experienced. At the same time it brought together individuals from a range of political traditions — exiled civilians and bureaucrats, MK, underground, popular democratic, and the neglected category of freelance supporters and actors in illegal activities in advancing the aims of the ANC, as they

\textsuperscript{15} Dirk Coetzee, who blew the whistle on some of the activities of Vlakplaas was later admitted as a member of the ANC, despite having been involved in the assassination of Griffiths Mxenge. I was in ANC leadership around much of the 1990s and have never heard any discussion of this. It seems that the TRC process was pre-empted somewhere. It is not clear when the decision was made and it definitely did not occur after 1991. Exactly who could take such decisions is not clear to me. When I once asked Joe Slovo whether Coetzee was a member he said he would not belong to the same organization as such a person.
saw it. All of these forms of struggle or involvement in the ANC carried varying modes of operation, more or less democratic or hierarchical, conspiratorial or open, including patronage networks of various types or highly ideological or other forms of connecting individuals to one another.

Binding these traditions together was difficult, and the early trends of ANC leadership after 1990 set a pattern which tended to cast the membership — and the masses generally — as a reserve army to be called on where necessary, to be informed of victories, which they should applaud or into which they would make limited input.

This is not a tradition derived purely from exile, as is sometimes suggested, for it was found in various ways on the Island and in some sections of the UDF. The membership and supporters cannot be involved in every element of organisational activity. The question essentially was whether there was any conscious attempt to ensure mass-centred and driven activities. The answer, I believe, is that this combination of the popular and representative democratic activity is always difficult, but that it met with resistance at the top, from the time of Mandela’s presidency and more so under Mbeki/Zuma leadership.

The announcement of negotiations was not well managed in consequence of the earlier emphasis on insurrection, just as the leadership’s suspension of armed action in September 1990 left many of the ANC membership angry and excluded. Had these decisions been carefully explained or involved the cadres, they would not necessarily have left pockets of dissatisfaction. The entire period of negotiations saw a leadership-driven process where the membership was only called on from time to time when it was necessary to break deadlocks. They would be used as a battering ram to break the resolve of the National Party – apartheid regime.

Elections: new conjuncture

When elections were announced, yet another change of conjuncture set in with the establishment of the ANC as government and the downgrading of the importance of the ANC as an organisation. Crucial policy developments such as the adoption of the Growth Economic and Redistribution policy (GEAR), were not passed through ANC constitutional structures but simply announced in a manner that made these both government and ANC policies, referred to by both Mandela and Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel as ‘non negotiable’ (CDE 1997).

It is important to dwell on this, that whatever the centralised nature of the Mbeki period, much of the foundations had been laid by Mandela. Mandela may be one of the greatest figures in history. Considered in the context of internal organisational democracy he would certainly counsel cadres to abide by the collective. But his own example in the early days, in a different form in early negotiations and his presidency constantly demonstrated the practice of or asserted his right to override constitutional decisions of the organisation. There is no doubt that Mandela had the prestige to see himself through such situations in a way that Mbeki could not. Mbeki was seen as a mortal with many flaws. The flaws of Mandela were interpreted as virtues insofar as many of the decisions, displacing the organisation or not, had an element of farsighted leadership, where he saw the need to compromise or talk where others did not and did not wait for those to whom he was theoretically accountable. What I am pointing to is that the Mandela leadership which is feted in history books was nevertheless built in a manner that was problematic, in the context of the notions of leadership commended to ANC cadres. These were concealed by the results which were often victories or qualified victories. But the same practice when attempted by others or versions of these, could not work without creating a sense of deep dissatisfaction.

As indicated, above, collectivism cannot be absolutised and it may be that in studying or being in a revolutionary organisation, there are contexts that have not been adequately considered in evaluating the applicability of the notion. This debate requires more consideration than can be given now, beyond noting the impact that collective leadership has on the understanding and often conscience of the individual cadre (see Suttner 2008: ch.7).

16. This largely unrecognized category deserves a careful study, for my impression is that it comprised a large number of people.
17. Personal knowledge of UDF and Buntman (2003).
In the 1990s the UDF period of popular involvement in political activity remained fresh in people's minds but they were to be quickly disabused of any notion that they would play a significant part in government. The notion of serious discussion of people-driven policies and development has never been considered theoretically and practically and the recent elections of 2009 involved contestation over government delivery and is now depicted by the Zuma-led government as prepared for meeting that need—not by mass involvement (though aspects of popular involvement may be envisaged), but primarily by restructuring of ministries, visits to examine delivery and other versions of that orientation.

The ANC as an organisation became insignificant as a driver of policies from the moment of taking office in 1994. Insofar as its conferences decided on particular issues, whether or not they were implemented depended on the individual ministers. In both the Mandela and especially Mbeki/Zuma period (1999-2005), individuals were appointed as ministers and deputies who had little merit or were so lacking in merit in certain cases as to evoke ridicule. In some or most cases the persons were competent and developed in doing the work, but there was a sense that many others outside of Mbeki's circle could have done the job equally well. There was a perception that Mbeki operated with a tight circle of followers and the only outsiders were those who were in no sense personally threatening. This was a paradox for someone who is undoubtedly intellectually powerful.

Because of the incompetence of many of those appointed, the president or when Deputy President, Mbeki, was stretched in order to ensure that those who did not perform could have their non-performance contained, and his 'ideological legacy' was maintained through a range of in-depth speeches written almost entirely by him, and a weekly letter on the ANC website. One of the Ministers close to him asked me, ‘does anyone read this?’

The ANC had never developed a clear, democratic system for running a civil service in a transformatory society. Consequently the centralised leadership was replicated in a more extreme form in the steep hierarchies of the civil service, particularly the security sector, where those at the bottom tended to feel they had to wait for the DG (Director General) to pronounce on anything before they could act; the information and ideas flow from the bottom was consequently constrained, and, in the security sector, practically excluded. There is little discussion to this day about democratisation. The overall attitude in the civil service remains that everything should wait for the DG or other higher officials whose pronouncements are beyond discussion, whose tardiness in making decisions may hold up others below them or interacting with government from a sector outside government.

In this context, the SACP and COSATU initially still vibrant and full of interesting ideas and people, were pushed to the sidelines, and, as they said, treated like ‘small boys’. It was common in the Mbeki/Zuma leadership for tripartite alliance meetings to be called and for these to be cancelled just as some were about to travel from other parts of the country to attend.

**The Shaik trial, Zuma dismissal, demagoguery. Revolt no 1.**

After a year or two of democratic rule, a range of long-standing ANC veterans left jobs under clouds or allegations of wrongdoing, were convicted or appear to have used office or connections to enrich themselves in one way or another. Many of the allegations, convictions, or dismissals from office surrounded the arms deal where arms were procured with allegations or proof that there were payoffs or the Travelgate scandal where MPs defrauded parliament in some cases by R 250,000 (US$34,000) each or more (and some of these have been appointed to chair parliamentary committees now). One of these Mnyamezeli Booi, chair of the parliamentary defence committee, has recently been convicted of theft of R 50,000 and sentenced to 5 years with an option of a fine. The ANC rejected calls

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19. This role re-emerged in the period after Polokwane when Zuma was ANC president and Mbeki remained State president and it continues to be claimed that the organisation drives policies. It remains to be seen whether this will be so once the ANC government is settled into place, and whether the organisation means ANC government and partially ANC leadership or members as well. At a leadership level it may be that the personality of Gwede Mantashe, the secretary-general could sustain continued intervention. How wise the character of such interventions may be is open to question.

20. Personal communication from SACP leadership figures in early 21st century. I cannot give precise dates since this was during a series of meetings, where these perceptions were commonly held and communicated to me.
for him to resign (see also below). Many investigations appear to have been left uncompleted in the flux that has followed the collapse of the Zuma prosecution (see below) and new allegations or potential prosecutions continue to emerge.

But this was part of a range of areas of enrichment engaged in by youth leaguers as well as famous veterans, which cast doubt on the previously relatively un tarnished image of the ANC with regard to honesty on financial matters. Other allegations continue to surface. When Brett Kebble was assassinated and later shown to be a crook of the highest order, members of the ANCYL carried his coffin and ANC leaders attended his memorial service in a high profile manner. When Tony Yengeni and Rev Allan Boesak were jailed for fraud/theft they were seen off as heroes by crowds which included ANC leaders. They have both been welcomed back as heroes to the ANC and Congress of the People (COPE) respectively.

The atmosphere became increasingly one where people from outside the liberation struggle saw themselves retrospectively justified or represented themselves as not having participated because they anticipated this dishonest conduct that appeared to be so rife and also condoned. This is my personal experience of a smug sense that having been in the liberation struggle required ‘justification’ to the non-participants, especially found in academia.

Shabir Shaik, member of a family that had played a significant role in the liberation struggle was charged with fraud, and much of the fraud related to his dealings with Zuma. Zuma was not in Shaik’s trial. Prior to the start of the case, a statement by the then director of prosecutions and minister of justice said that while there was a prima facie case against Zuma, there was insufficient evidence for a prosecution. This was a strange statement in that a prima facie case is usually considered sufficient to bring a prosecution. But every evening in 2005, the TV carried evidence of money doled out to Zuma, and his bank statements. At the time, I personally felt some sympathy for Zuma, who was not on trial, but was being embarrassed in this way. However, when judgement was delivered the court found that Shaik and Zuma were in a relationship that entailed passing of wealth to Zuma for reasons that could not be explained on a contractual or other legal basis.

Mbeki acted after judgment. He dismissed Zuma as state deputy president, while he remained ANC deputy president with curtailed powers. There was a sense of outrage among sections of the ANC support base who believed that Zuma was a victim of a conspiracy on the part of Mbeki to deny Zuma the presidency, and mass demonstrations occurred where images of Mbeki were burnt.

The SACP and COSATU leadership involved themselves deeply in this rising against the ANC presidency. Zuma himself was quick to step into the role of a popular leader who differed from Mbeki in listening to the people, not being aloof and promising to attend to the needs of the poor. This approach found resonance in the 2005 ANC National General Council (NGC) where some of Zuma’s ANC powers were reinstated.

The SACP and COSATU leaderships depicted Zuma as part of a socialist project, belied by Zuma’s record, along with his long-time partner Mbeki, who had both left the SACP as central committee members in 1990. Later in the year preparations were made to prosecute Zuma for corruption and other charges.

In the meantime, however, in late 2005, a woman laid a charge of rape against Zuma. The trial followed in 2006. Known as Khwezi, she was the daughter of a former Robben Island comrade of Zuma’s and had known him since childhood, referring to him as malume (uncle). The trial was conducted in a classic sexist manner, with the rape complainant being transformed into the accused, where her ‘sexual history’ (in fact cases of abuse) was allowed as evidence, and Zuma was permitted to pronounce on what was and was not Zulu custom, that a Zulu man could not leave a woman who was aroused, (and similar phrases) that were unchallenged by the prosecution and the judge (Suttner 2009b).

Zuma was acquitted, though a better-prepared prosecution better able to contest Zuma on cultural and patriarchal issues, could well have led to the allegation of rape being proved beyond reasonable doubt. In-

21. The recent report of irregularities in the Youth League investment company.

22. Despite his infatuation with Zuma, Gordin (2008) gives a fairly comprehensive account of the extent of the Shaik hand outs to Zuma and his alleged involvement in bribery during the arms deal.
stead there was a meeting of minds between judge and
Zuma and acquiescence by the prosecution. At this
point Zuma is technically not guilty, which is not the
same as proven innocent. Detailed study of the court
records could well provide strong arguments to show
how this was in fact a decision that could have gone
the other way.

Every day Zuma was supported outside the courts by
large crowds who threatened the complainant and an-

dyone who supported her, and circulated her name and
address.

Zuma did not act with modesty or humility, and would
emerge from the court room to sing what was now
called his favourite song (forgotten between 1990 and
the trial), meaning in English ‘bring me my machine
gun’. The gun is a phallic symbol and shooting bullets
can be taken to connote ejaculation. That is why the
katyusha rockets, used by the Cubans against the South
African Defence Force (SADF) were known as ‘Stalin’s
organs’. His movements, while singing the song, could
also be taken to mimic a sexual act. What Zuma was
doing was re-enacting the rape he claimed not to have
committed (ibid). Thus, Mosioua ‘Terror’ Lekota, a
former senior Mbeki cabinet minister and now Presi-
dent of the Congress of the People (COPE) grasps el-
lements of the problem with Zuma singing this song
when he refers to its belonging to a different phase of
history. But Lekota does not relate it to its moment of
revival, a rape trial, and how the song evokes imagery
related to sex or rape. Likewise, Liz Gunner (2009) in
a profound study of the re-emergence of the song and
its history does not present it as having phallic image-
ry and in my view wrongly attributes to it provision of
agency to the masses. This combination of male sexu-
ality and power was a key element in the image that
Zuma manifested in the period that lay ahead.

It should be noted that the overall diagnosis of the
rape trial made by the SACP, COSATU leaderships and
other Zuma supporters, was that it was an element of
an overall conspiracy against Zuma. At the same time
Zuma’s mode of defence, an artillery-style onslaught
on the dignity of the complainant, was not criticised
by the previously gender-sensitive SACP (especially
under Chris Hani) and any who criticised this stance
were labelled as devious, counter-revolutionary or
similar phrases.

Having been acquitted then, Zuma repeatedly ap-
ppeared in court between 2006 and 2009 with his cor-
ruption charges dismissed or reinstated on technical
grounds.

The cash-strapped SACP allowed its General Secre-
tary, Blade Nzimande (now minister responsible for
higher education issues in Zuma’s cabinet), to dog the
trail of Zuma, following him from court case to court
case, rally to rally. COSATU and the SACP became
more and more absorbed in the Zuma project. Each
of these organisations had important programmatic
documents, but they were not publicised in the same
way as the necessity of Zuma leadership.

Polokwane

These events formed the backdrop to the ANC confer-
ence of December 2007, when a new ANC presiden-
tial election was held. Mbeki was defeated by Zuma. It
may have been Mbeki’s initial plan to use the ‘Soviet
option’, that is, retire to the ANC presidency but de-
clare that the revolution is led by the revolutionary or-
ganisation, and direct whoever succeeded him. Unfor-
nately, he found that option played out against him
and it finally led to his dismissal from office, following
a court judgment that was subsequently over-turned.

Before that happened, the results of Polokwane saw
the rise of a different ANC leadership from any seen
before, some 10 per cent of them being convicted
criminals or facing investigations that might lead to
conviction. It saw the election of a large number of in-
dividuals who had never had grievances against Mbeki
until they fell out of favour and lost their jobs, or were
disaffected for other non-political reasons, or saw
the turn of the tide towards Zuma. In the Johannes-
burg Times (7 May 2009) a photograph shows one of
these Mnyamezeli Booi one of the first to congratulate
Zuma on his election as president. It is the same Booi
who had formed the Thabo Mbeki foundation in Cape
Town in the days of his power. As noted above, he has
recently been convicted of theft under the Travelgate
scandal.

23. If, however, Lekota had gone further and related militarism to
the rise of violent masculinity he may have taken our understand-
ing of gender violence further.

24. Though even then, all military activities tend to have the po-
tentiality of taking booty, including women (see Suttner 2009b).
In general the Zuma project was not a political alternative counterposed to that of Mbeki. While there has often been left-sounding rhetoric when Zuma speaks to COSATU or SACP, though it is now more muted, a glance at the business pages of newspapers sees a note of continuity if not more conservatism than in the macro-economic policies of the Mbeki era. As the new government’s period in office starts to operate over time it has become very difficult for Zuma to balance the claims made on the basis of this rhetoric and the other demands that need to be addressed for governmental stability and for economic management in a situation of crisis.

The new ANC inaugurated a period of unprecedented threats and incitements to violence and other forms of lawlessness and political intolerance, more so during the election than after taking government. This emanated particularly from the ANC and Communist youth sections but very little was said to dissociate the ANC leadership from such statements or, if there were reprimands, similar statements would quickly follow.

The ANCYL’s president, Julius Malema, ridiculed ‘Khwezi’, saying that she must have enjoyed the encounter because people who ask for taxi money and stay there the whole night enjoy it, and those ‘who don’t enjoy it, leave’ (Times [Johannesburg] 30 January 2009; The Star 24 January 2009). The election campaign was devoid of reference to gender and that may be true of all parties. Quotas of women, which has been raised repeatedly, while important, is not the same as questions of gender and patriarchy, addressing such issues as the violent masculinities that prevent any successful campaign against gender-based violence and the spread of HIV/Aids. This may point to unfinished business in ANC feminist and gender policies which have left room for masculinities to be relatively unexamined.

What seems clear is that the battle of Polokwane was for power and loot. In Shakespeare the fool often says the wisest things. Julius Malema told E New International during the campaign: ‘Look at COPE they are poor. If you want to be prosperous, you must be with the ANC’.25

What has ensued in the period that followed Polokwane are more and more excessive statements, a flood of defections from the previous Mbeki camp to Zuma, and the continued creation of an atmosphere of fear and disrespect for constitutionalism, manifested in repeated attacks and ill-judged statements about the courts. In the current period (October 2009) what has emerged is that these are not purely ANC as organisation but elements of the government itself.

Revolt no 2: the emergence of COPE

After the dismissal of Mbeki, Kgalema Motlanthe, ANC deputy president, was installed as president. This led to the resignation of a number of ministers who had been in the Mbeki camp. They gradually moved to form an alternative party ‘true to the principles of the Freedom Charter’, which they claimed the Zuma ANC had abandoned.

Whatever threat the Democratic Alliance (DA) may have posed, most of the ANC’s attention was focused on COPE and vice versa. Many COPE meetings led to violence emanating from ANC supporters, which was covered on TV. Again, while there has sometimes been verbal condemnation, the attacks on meetings continued, thus threatening freedom of speech, association, assembly and political organisation. This disregard of constitutional rights form part of what may still become a systemic crisis.

COPE made the error of asking the public to assess its value by its electoral performance, claiming that it could displace the ANC from power. There was not preparation for after-life, following its 7.6 8% electoral performance. It is now a moment of rebirth or death, in that it drew people who felt that the Zuma-led ANC was not the ANC they wanted.

The rise of COPE may still have importance in its initial demonstration that the ANC is not invincible, and that they were capable of denting its support base. It also showed that there was another home and — unprecedented for an opposition party — for most of its leadership and probably following to come from a liberation movement background. There was now an alternative to the ANC that unlike the Democratic Alliance (DA) was not associated in any way with the apartheid past.

But that initial momentum was not maintained by demonstrating that COPE was a definite alternative to

25. E news international, 6 p.m report, 22 March 2009.
the Zuma-ites. It has also shown evidence of infighting and general disunity and it is not clear what unites them, other than claimed moral superiority to the Zuma ANC.

COPE appears to have lost momentum, lost the opportunity to make real gains, by actually advancing a qualitatively different programme. They are a revamped version of Mbeki-ism, with certain new warts. No violence, nor apparent corruption, but nothing to hold one’s attention. It seems unlikely to become a powerful force, consolidating a relationship between its base which had a large proportion apparently from the working class and its leadership, mainly from the rising African bourgeoisie or former government ministers and build itself into a democratic organisation with a democratic vision, going beyond that of Mbeki. If one is to risk a forecast, the prospects for COPE’s future do not look good, though had they moved slower and not been faced by an election it is possible that they would have remained a challenge.

Internal contradictions within ANC base

Beneath the surface of the ANC, there are differences within their immediate support base and backers that could lead to contradictions that could split the ANC. Both ANC and COPE (judging from film footage of those who attend their meetings) have or had in the case of COPE, substantial working-class support, people who want relief from recession and poverty, and generally hope for a better life, sometimes with ideological convictions more or less developed.

At the same time, ANC backers include sections of business. It should be noted that Patrice Motsepe, one of the world’s dollar billionaires sat on the stage in the ANC election rally at Rustenburg in April and continues to enjoy considerable access to ANC leaders as do other rising black bourgeoisie, in some cases different from those of the Mbeki era. In the past someone having no constitutional standing or formal connections with ANC leadership would not be seen in such prominence as Motsepe has enjoyed, especially if they were a member of the emerging bourgeoisie.

The present ANC depicts itself as the party of the poor, while many of its youth leaders are billionaires, and its backers are sections of business, some of a somewhat unsavoury kind. The Youth League itself has been shown to follow dubious practices in its business section.26

Now, while SACP and COSATU appear to be driving the Zuma project — and this is one of the reasons why some people are critical — the question is whether this is in fact true. My view is that SACP and COSATU are being swallowed at a leadership level by Zuma, not the other way round. Some realisation of that is manifested in the disputes over the power of Trevor Manuel as head of Planning Commission which Cosatu sees as undermining, former unionist, Ebrahim Patel, as Minister of Economic Planning. There is an unstated need to maintain continuity manifested by the presence and orientation of Manuel, insofar as this can be personalised. At the same time, the presence of left Ministers is a product of the COSATU and particularly SACP actually pursuing personal advancement, first of Zuma and then of themselves, especially in the case of the SACP. In reality, this is not a unified project and Zuma will have to choose (based on who has best access to him, but by the objective conditions of the economy). Like Mbeki, will the measure of stability he can achieve not dictate that preference is given to the wishes of business, and particularly white business, with its contact with overseas capital and the rating agencies?

Zuma has displayed great eagerness to win white acceptance, with apparent success on the side of business. The SACP has few constituents to whom it reports. COSATU, however stands to lose if it does not deliver to fairly well organised unions. Zwelinzima Vavi, COSATU General Secretary has already criticised some ANC statements, while ANC Treasurer-General M. Phosa and to a lesser extent Zuma appear to talk past him with assurances to business. This has now been replicated by new cabinet ministers. At the time of writing there are a series of strikes and service development demonstrations, with Vavi declaring his continued support for the Zuma-led government, but indicating that he has a constituency to support, whose interests have to be placed first.

The ANC leadership of today is fundamentally a coalition brought together by a sense of exclusion — from

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26. See, for example, Moipone Malefane, ‘The ANC Youth League and the missing millions’, The Times (Johannesburg), 2 August 2009.
wealth and power. It has drawn on disreputable elements who sit alongside some refined or seasoned ANC leaders. They are united by a desire for wealth and/or position. For the more respectable among them, contempt for Mbeki could not mean renouncing any position. That was unthinkable and determined their association, albeit generally discreetly, with the looters.

But despite an enlargement of cabinet, there are not enough positions to meet everyone’s needs, nor enough wealth to pillage. Consequently there are some who will emerge dissatisfied, which may create instability of a similar kind to that which resulted when some were excluded from the Mbeki patronage system. Already prior to the inauguration, the designated chair of the ANC caucus, Nozizwe Routledge-Madlala, resigned from parliament, as did the ANC national Chair Baleka Mbete — apparently on the basis of a decision, from which she was excluded27 —, retreating to ANC headquarters in Johannesburg, which is now weighed down by full time leaders who may not coexist well in one building.

The movement from patronage to patronage plus warlordism has been manifested after elections, by the MK Veterans threatening to make the Western Cape under DA premiership ‘ungovernable’, without any reprimand from leadership, and from conservative, anti-popular policies to no debate and the probable continuation of elite politics combined with lawlessness. This is not to say that there are no ideas advanced, but there is no engagement beyond the elite. The lack of engagement is more dangerous and less respectful of the best in the ANC’s legacies. Mbeki’s intellectualism or what Alec Russell (2009) calls pretences of that, are he claims now being displaced by anti-intellectualism. That is very evident in the absence of ideological engagement and debate. What has happened to National Democratic Revolution, ‘two nations’, the national question, the meanings of the Freedom Charter and other debates? In truth, many of the new leadership, especially the youth, know more about KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken) than the FC (Freedom Charter). There is much more to the Freedom Charter (repeatedly referred to as the reason for establishing COPE) than opposition to unlawful and violent behaviour (see Suttner and Cronin 2006, especially the introduction).

Shortly before the elections on 6 April 2009, all of Zuma’s many charges of fraud, money laundering, bribery and others, were withdrawn by the Acting Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr Moketedi Mpshe. This was on the basis of intercepted telephone conversations, mainly between the former director, Bulelani Ngcuka and head of investigations Leonard McCarthy. The conversations related, not to the substance of the case, but to timing, when Zuma should be charged. The integrity of the case itself, which had been prepared over years, remained free of any interference. The withdrawal meant that Mpshe had decided that the allegations would not be tested by the courts and that the relevance to that case of these alleged telephone conversations were decided by the NPA and not the courts. This has been questioned by one of the most eminent South African advocates, Wim Trengove, part of the prosecution team (Trengove 2009).

The argument that emerges — I: Mbekism continues, with no debate, more violence and probable economic continuity

There is very little difference in content in the Mbeki and Zuma vision. It is in fact a broadly common programme which is being pursued, with difference in style. This difference in style is however of much greater importance than wearing of suits or Madiba shirts, but relates to threats and actual use of violence and potential or existing graft.

Zuma was sworn in as president of South Africa on Saturday 9 May 2009, a moment long awaited with enthusiasm by his supporters and dreaded by others (whose numbers may be hard to estimate, as individuals like Archbishop Tutu now endorse Zuma). It is, however, clear that this is what the overwhelming majority of people in a high poll desired. Many may have under-estimated the extent of this support which is reflected in headlines and in an atmosphere of excitement apparently expecting the birth of something new and better for democracy. This notion of a ‘new beginning’ and approval of Zuma’s first 100 days flood the media. It is also encouraged by capital that has an interest in stability and ensuring by their support that the choices made are business-friendly.

What effect will this new situation have on the ANC and South Africa? Is the change radical and if so, what

27. Personal knowledge.
type of radicalism does it represent? What will it mean for the participation of ordinary South Africans and democracy and Zuma (2009) himself referred to ‘participatory democracy’ in his inaugural address? What will it mean for economic stability and development and the quality of peoples’ lives?

It is said that Zuma represents something very different from Mbeki. He traces his lineage to Mandela and generally explicitly omits Mbeki. I want to assert that of all people, the one person who cannot divorce his past from that of Mbeki is Zuma and it is complete fabrication to now paint him as always having been different, and with popular leanings. This is conceded by Zuma’s biographer, Jeremy Gordin (2008: 56, see also 47), who in speaking of the early 1990s remarks that ‘Zuma and Mbeki were almost joined at the hip; they operated as a team and had for a long time [...]’.

It is true that — like Nelson Mandela — he has a popular touch instead of the intellectual aloofness associated with Mbeki. Zuma can walk comfortably with the masses and speak in a language they understand. Even if some believed that he created embarrassment by some statements (for example that Afrikaners, amongst the whites are the only real South Africans, calling COPE dogs and snakes, homophobic utterances and most ridiculed, his theories on HIV prevention by showering) or should be advised to do this or that, there is no doubt that he struck a chord, well beyond the fora or circles where his legal woes were prepared or disposed of.

He and Mbeki worked together for decades, from the 1970s, including initial contacts with the apartheid National Intelligence Service (NIS) over prospective negotiations, on the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC and Central Committee (CC) of the SACP, in negotiations with Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and right wing Afrikaners and other issues in the post 1990 period. They worked together in government and those who have sat together with them in NEC or CC meetings can attest to there having been no visible difference in their overall political positions. It is hard to think of any issue where they were on opposite sides. In fact, the period from 1999 can be spoken of as a Mbeki/Zuma government.

The close comrades that formed the networks around each may in some cases have overlapped with the Zuma/Mbeki relationship, though it is not clear. It is important to remember that long, long before any tension between Zuma and Mbeki was visible, there was internal warfare seething between Mac Maharaj and Mbeki and Joe Slovo and Mbeki in the NEC in Lusaka, and Zuma was not with the Mbeki opponents. But the bond between Mbeki and Zuma had been consolidated after unbanning and was undeniable and there was no expression of any reservation on the part of Zuma towards any anti-popular or anti-democratic or secretive or conservative economic policies initiated by Mbeki. There would be stiff competition if one had to judge who of the two was more secretive, conspiratorial and operating more comfortably behind the scenes. That much is on the record — in the memory of all those who have worked with them — and I challenge anyone to show otherwise.

It may be that Mbeki in making Zuma deputy president believed that the latter would understand that he ought to have no ambition to succeed him as president and there is some evidence of Zuma not being very decisive or effective in managing an organisation. He was ineffectual as deputy secretary general of the ANC from 1991-1994 and as a Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) in KwaZulu Natal from 1994 to 1997. Nevertheless it later became clear that Zuma did indeed have in mind succeeding Mbeki, something that the latter may have found unthinkable. It is claimed that Mbeki initiated various conspiracies including charges to frustrate this ambition. The evidence has yet to be proven, though references to Mbeki allegedly appear on tapes that were used by the NPA to justify dropping charges against Zuma. Certainly it is far-fetched to claim that Mbeki initiated the rape trial, though the overall atmosphere made it possible for some of the SACP and COSATU leaders to depict this as part of the overall alleged conspiracy. It should also be noted that Zuma had at his disposal many close comrades with a lot of experience in gathering intelligence.

Whatever Mbeki may or may not have done to frustrate Zuma’s rise to power, the outcome is not an ideological or programmatic victory, the ‘democratic genie’ has not been let out of the box as Neil Coleman of COSATU (and now adviser to Minister Ebrahim Patel) put it (Coleman 2008), this is not necessarily a new opening for democracy in any greater respect than before. There is no reason to believe that the mode of working will involve any greater mass participation than in the

28. Personal information.
Mbeki period (earlier Mbeki/Zuma period). The notion of democracy will be essentially representative democracy and there is little practical mention of a mass driven process, as before. Any plan for popular driven policies depends on organisation and clear programmes. The preoccupation at the moment and in all previous statements has been around government delivery. After 5 months there are no indications to the contrary (revised late October 2009).

The fervour surrounding support for Zuma may extend well beyond the ANC, for Zuma has managed to reach out to people with apparent warmth and many of the public who are not ANC supporters appear to cast a blind eye towards the various warts which attach to him.

It is very interesting how not only business but the (big business owned) media have decided to ‘give Zuma a chance’ and the mass circulation Sunday Times has opened a column for a key Zuma backer, Mac Maharaj, former ANC and SACP leader, with his e-mail address given as at the Sunday Times. Such placing of ANC individuals in that or similar newspapers may be without precedent.

The Zuma electoral campaign was not geared towards politicisation but personalisation and elevation of the allegedly homely qualities of the leader. This definitely inspired a sense of warmth and also religiosity. One person spoke of meeting him and feeling as if she had met the Lord. Many churches have blessed the ANC and its members have drawn parallels between Zuma and Jesus Christ. Zuma and the ANC have done nothing to stop the messianic element that has emerged and whether that will cause problems in the future is not clear. It may be that the level of emotional rapport between Zuma and the masses has surpassed that of Madiba on the level of communication.

What is interesting is that the ‘traditional churches’, the Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Methodists and the South African Council of Churches have been sidelined, while the ‘charismatic’ churches, some of rather shady character have enjoyed favour and sought closeness to Zuma.

The same victory arouses dread in others, by their threat to freedom of speech, organisation, breaking up of meetings and high tolerance of gender violence. Some of these fear that a Zimbabwean type crisis will emerge. My personal belief is that this may well turn out to be a relatively conservative administration on an economic level, judging from the early but contradictory statements of Zuma, Phosa and now various ministers, like Pravin Gordhan in Finance. Plans for radical restructuring, emanating from COSATU and SACP may well be stalled or sidelined or the name of such plans may appear, but a left programme is unlikely or certainly not going to be implemented, as with the RDP. Even at this moment there are at the same time some successes that have been scored (though built but unpublicised in previous administrations) in small business development, for example, which may increase in the period ahead. There are clearly some positive elements that merely require continuity for good performance.

That the end of violence may not be here is evident not only emanating from the youth but the aggressive approach of the new Minister of Police who has indicated that police should not hesitate to shoot, fearing media responses or human rights groups, in dealing with crime. This has now been formulated in a range of ways, by MECs and the new Commissioner of Police, but the desire for greater use of lethal firepower is clear.

On one level it responds to an alleged crime wave where statistics are not clear, but where there is little doubt in our consciousness and experience that crime is rife. Apart from jobs and poverty relief, there is a broad consensus, extending across all sectors to end crime or bring it under control. The Minister is speaking into that sense of fear, insecurity and uncontrolled crime. The important thing is how we deal with crime that we do not feed into the idea that it is only through strong, highly aggressive policing that it can be contained. Where is the community policing and street committees in this plan, if the element of participation is taken seriously?

29. Contribution of Rev Ian Booth at seminar of 26 August in University of KwaZulu Natal Durban, and periodic media reports.
Is this a progressive way of responding, under a constitution that guarantees the right to life? Is it not replicating the type of response of some of the most reactionary regimes there have been? While we may have a crime crisis, we cannot spill unnecessary blood, whether in cross fire or through mistaken identification of criminals. We know that once the green light for shooting is given, not only the actual perpetrators of serious crimes will die, but many more. This is on the one hand, part of the new style (which was present in the approaches of former ministers of safety and security (really policing), Steve Tswete and Susan Shabangu and former police commissioner, Jackie Selebi), but it is also a sense of indifference to constitutional rights. One has to protect each constitutional right with cognisance of all others. This is not being articulated. Even as this call for tightening of legislation has been made, the police have fired and killed innocent people and statistics show that this has happened on a large scale.33

The fight against crime does not have one solution. To shoot more people cannot be the first option in a state engaged in an emancipatory project. This is not the way a democratic government operates. It should know that there are a range of approaches especially if it has a democratic basis and draws on neighbourhoods in a structured and organised manner.

The statements of the Minister of Police and others, illustrates dramatically the lack of breadth and depth and democratic commitment and awareness in sections of the Zuma leadership. Many do not show their hand obviously, but it is clear that the notion of an emancipatory project is not imprinted in their minds.

As indicated, a series of strikes and uprisings concerning wages, service delivery and a range of other issues have broken out, resulting in police using rubber bullets and live ammunition. In one report, entitled ‘Different regime, same brutality’ by Chantelle Benjamin, the force which the police used to stop protests led KwaZulu Natal province local government Member of the Executive Council (MEC), Willies Mchunu, to appeal for them to refrain from shooting at protesters. He was to meet with national and provincial security ministers to draw up a memorandum of understanding detailing how police officers should deal with such protests.

While Mchunu appealed for, protests to stop, he added: ‘Pictures of elderly men and women with injuries sustained as a result of the use of rubber bullets, and sometimes live ammunition, only serve to cast a negative perception on our young democracy.’ No report of any meeting has yet emerged.

Zuma has himself urged police to act swiftly against protesters and that there was no justification for violence, looting and destruction of violence, or attacks on foreign nationals. But John Appolis, an official of the Anti-Privatisation Forum said that the police had not attempted to talk to the community in Meyerton (one of the areas affected). They were just ordered to disperse and then police began firing (Benjamin 2009).

There is a sense that when the police arrive with heavily armed units before talking, that creates a more aggressive mood in the community. Public order policing directives require that police first attempt to resolve a situation before ordering people to disperse. In the past police have accompanied protesters to ensure that there was no violence or criminal activity. ‘We do not see this any more’, says Appolis (ibid).

A new element that emerges from this newspaper report is that within the range of contradictions contained within the government, are those between departments perceiving their roles in ways that conflict with one another.

The argument that emerges II — The centrality of feminism, patriarchy and gender

The rise of the Zuma phenomenon is deeply gendered and tied to the scourge of violent masculinities. The violent masculinities are manifested in a number of phenomena that precede the rise of Zuma, such as high violent crime and gender based violence (GBV), gangsterism and so on. But what the Zuma phenomenon has provided is a model of manhood that is conducive to violence. I am not suggesting that every boy will follow any example of manhood, their agency needs exploration (Wood and Jewkes 2001: 138-9).

The Zuma rape trial evoked both an image of the armed struggle being associated with a ‘Zulu man’ exercising his cultural duties. There has been an epidemic of rapes and murder of lesbian African women, and the stripping of women wearing mini-skirts or pants, in the name of ‘culture’ (Mhlana 2008). The ANC leadership has appealed for tolerance, while turning a blind eye to war talk and break up of election meetings. Separately, starting before Zuma with projected legislation, there is an unprecedented standing accorded to ‘traditional’ affairs (unproblematised as having an obvious, essentialised meaning) in the new cabinet, that also bolsters the most reactionary elements of patriarchal domination. Much of what is described in the above paragraph is likely to place strain on constitutionalism, in resolving the demands of respect for culture (where it is treated in an essentialised, static way) and that of gender equality. Large numbers of girls have their first sexual encounter through coercion. When they continue with a partner, it has been found that attempts to use a condom often lead to assault (Wood and Jewkes 2001: 14). In other words, displaying condoms in toilets (read: bathrooms) need to be supplemented by a range of organisational efforts addressed to models of masculinity.

What we are dealing with is that the ANC has never confronted feminism, patriarchy and gender in their fullest extent, but dealt primarily with women’s advancement and thus places great weight on its commendable attempts to advance the number of women in various positions of government and other structures. But by failing to locate the quantitative questions within the qualitative nature of patriarchal domination they are leaving the notion of masculinities unscrutinised and also neglecting the fact that some women elected to high office practice patriarchal modes of domination towards both men and women.

The way forward

Underneath the euphoria we have seen that there is incipient instability within the Zuma support base. That may be seen as healthy disagreement by some; alternatively and more likely it is a manifestation of personalised political infighting and potential instability. This is not a good condition for dealing with a recession and widespread unemployment and loss of food security and other social problems on a possibly unprecedented scale. There is not yet an alternative that can be inclusive and popular and involve a large number of people. Already, some have suggested that high wage rises in response to strikes may deter investors.

I have been hovering over the significance of the potential of a Marxist explanation of the rise of leadership like Zuma’s and its apparent popular base and how this relates to ‘circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past’ (Marx 1934: 10). In the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, amongst other works, Marx, Engels and Lenin provide significant and complex qualifiers, which need more study than can be provided here. Whatever the context currently framing political issues, the importance of leadership and the lack of leadership is an element in whether or not we are dealing with a crisis or merely personalities, or in my view both. This will also meant further study of the meanings of ‘populism’ and what salience, if any it bears.

An example of Zuma’s ad hoc leadership is his eve of election promise to delay implementation of the Bus Rapid Transport System (the BTR System), thus throwing all earlier negotiations into confusion. There is also an example of unrealistic undertakings in the promise to provide 600,000 jobs in a time of grave economic crisis. COSATU has expressed dissatisfaction in that what jobs have been created are short term ones.

We have had a situation where leadership was conducted by a powerful mind, when those around him delivered the good things of life to the masses, who were onlookers.

We have now moved to someone — and his followers — who combine promises with threats and inspire dread in some and trust in others. There is a break with the leadership tradition that has been bequeathed to the ANC. That tradition of Luthuli, Walter and Albertina Sisulu, Kotane, Tambo, Mandela, Ngoyi, Hani and others needs to be revived in public debate and teachings, emphasising its selflessness, the willingness to serve rather than to gain, to benefit the people as a whole rather than to secure one’s own wealth or position. *These also need to be scrutinised without romanticism and weaknesses identified before they are raised as models to follow.*

34. Reported on SABC on the eve of the general election.
It has been suggested that Mandela spoke from strength because he had organised backing. Mandela, Mbeki and Zuma, however allowed the ANC as an organised force to be run down. It is no secret that very few branches have clearly functioning roles between elections. It may well be that Zuma has aroused much emotional fervour. Whether or not this will be translated into continued support for him and the ANC, especially if it faces hard times, depends on organisation. Whether that has been thought about in a serious way, remains to be seen.

My concern in this paper has been primarily with safeguarding and extending the ‘democratic breakthrough’ of 1994 in a context where its foundations are threatened. Democracy is a value in its own right but the quality of that democracy affects the type of transformation understood. At this stage the ANC remains the most powerful political actor in South Africa. One cannot simply conclude that there is no remedial action to re-direct it towards a more sustained democratic path. What can be done in the short run appears limited and difficult to achieve or foresee how it will be achieved over time. It requires longer observation of the Zuma leadership and to see how the various potential divisions play themselves out and the extent to which other forces, inside and outside the ANC play significant roles and of what type.

Aknowledgements

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Why is the ‘100% Zulu Boy’ so popular?

Benedict Carton

In 2009 Jacob Zuma won the endorsement of Nelson Mandela and the overwhelming support of voters, thousands of whom wore ‘100% Zulu Boy’ t-shirts to celebrate the approaching end of an enigma, namely Thabo Mbeki’s technocratic (and some say authoritarian) rule over the African National Congress (ANC).\(^1\) Indeed, Jacob Zuma is admired at home because, unlike his inscrutable predecessor, he is a recognizable man of tradition and struggle. Decades ago, the young Zuma left his reserve for work and activism in a South African city, sharing a formative experience with millions in his country, including his idol Mandela. Thus, Zuma travelled a common path never trodden by his rival, an intellectual almost destined from birth for exile overseas. While Mbeki prepared for an economics degree at Sussex University, Zuma reached for the iconic Kalashnikov, his ‘mshini wami’.\(^2\) And no sooner had the cosmopolitan Mbeki settled into his English surroundings, than the guerilla Zuma (arrested and jailed) drew inspiration on Robben Island from boyhood tales of Zulu King Cetshwayo’s defeat of British invaders at Isandlwana. This stunning victory in 1879 also fired the imaginations of Zuma’s iconic cellmates. They, along with the ‘100% Zulu Boy’, debated tactics of armed struggle under the radar of prison censors, creating an oral world of military strategy with century-old resonances smuggled in from Cetshwayo’s royal house.\(^3\)

Yet it is increasingly apparent that Zuma’s popularity transcends his ‘mshini wami’ Island pedigree. Whether being interviewed on television in business suits or orating on stage in Zulu regalia, he is the people’s leader with a familiar touch. He conveys this touch to audiences versed in African languages by alluding to Zulu idioms and stories that draw metaphors and counsel from growing up in Nkandla. His ‘tribal’ birthplace is located on the deeply rural southern fringe of the old Zulu kingdom, where polygamous homesteads raise livestock and hunt izinyamazane (buck), and people ukukhonza the amakhosi, offer loyalty to their chiefs. In Nkandla King Cetshwayo lies buried in a sacred grave. Candidate Zuma, the son of this hallowed region, reminded crowds that he developed the resilience to survive the trials of public life by herding unruly cattle, trapping wily game, and hearing of Zulu opposition to the white man. He learned an enduring moral, patriarchal respect (ukuhlonipa or inhlonipho), from elders who said that attaining manhood meant ukwakha umuzi, accepting the challenges of ‘building the homestead’ — from abiding the absence of loved ones during migrant labour to managing the obligations of a patriarch with wives and children.\(^4\) When he


3. Official ‘struggle’ histories of South Africa’s second and third democratically elected presidents can be found on the anc.org.za website. This essay draws on key details presented in these hagiographic biographies, which appear to contrast Mbeki’s and Zuma’s involvement in liberation politics: [http://www.anc.org.za/people/mbeki.html](http://www.anc.org.za/people/mbeki.html) and [http://www.anc.org.za/people/zumai.html](http://www.anc.org.za/people/zumai.html), accessed 30 August 2009.

4. For an examination of the continued importance of ukwakha
speaks in this vein, Zuma is not addressing big news outlets. He knows the major print and broadcast media hear him differently.

The widely circulated dailies interpret Zuma’s lingua franca as political pandering that betrays a dangerous agenda, resurrecting the snake-charming ritual of South African governance. Editorialists warn ominously that he is serenading the volatile serpent of ‘tribalism’ to deflect attention from his own failings, abhorrently evident during his recent rape and corruption cases. Syndicated columnists, for their part, link Zuma’s cultural pride with the spectre of internecine bloodshed, leaving open for interpretation whether he plans to incite the violent chauvinism last unleashed during a civil war between Inkatha and the ANC in the lead-up to the democratic transition. Still other commentators ask whether Zuma’s intolerance of citizens he calls troublesome ‘feminists’ and ‘deviant’ gays foreshadows the subversion of constitutional equality with iron-fisted patriarchy. Unfortunately, this important question, like the other judgments above, presume the president and his followers embrace a tribal cult of personality founded on primordial male domination, a form of oppression reputedly nurtured by an atavistic genius named Shaka Zulu. In so doing the corporate me-


While Zuma promotes the dream of ordinary people, fulfilling this vision is a wager against long odds. Their president has a monumental task before him: improving economic conditions during a global recession while a national disaster unfolds at home. The horrific toll of AIDS should immediately come to mind, but this is probably not Zuma’s initial priority.

It is too early to tell how Zuma will fare, but if the president falters quickly on the economic front his common touch could well become part of common lore which conjures the fable of the imbulu, a mythic shape-shifter with a notorious reputation for taking, not providing. — through wedded motherhood in family hierarchies which bestow them with authority to direct (or redirect) resources and respect to men, including to men of public standing. How amakhosikazi uphold such domestic arrangements ought to provoke greater cu-
Why is the ‘100% Zulu Boy’ so popular?

Zulu patriarchy is not an ossified system safeguarded by the omnipotent father. Major transformations like shifts in labour time from subsistence production to wage earning have empowered older wives with the valued responsibility of preserving Zuma’s much-vaunted customs, including ukulobola, certainly as unmarried members of rural households entered into migrancy. Nor does Zulu patriarchy confine all women to well-worn paths of marginalization. Rather, it is a porous institution embodying gender partnerships as well as contested negotiations between the sexes and generations. Given these unpredictable, multivalent forces, might we ask, instead, if Zuma is imposing his personalized rendition of Big Man politics on South Africa?

To date, a few academic commentaries have broached aspects of this question, if only to portray the people’s ‘Zulu nationalist’ as a one-dimensional anomaly in the ANC, a pluralist party whose commitment to ‘anti-tribalism’ will probably outlast his anticipated one term. We are still waiting for a more comprehensive study of the historical and cultural processes that might frame (more usefully) the president’s place in South Africa, now and in the past. To this end, we might turn to the research of historians John Wright and Jabulani Sithole as well as the literary critic Mbongiseni Buthelezi. They analyse the diverse origins and temporal identities of Zulu men and women — not just one history of one tradition dictated by one gender. Furthermore, these scholars trace permutations of ubuzulu bethu (the many faces, in Sithole’s words, of ‘our Zuluness’) by gauging how African groups in KwaZulu-Natal over the last two centuries became members and non-members of a Zulu polity without abandoning their pre-Shakan lineage identities. In other words, Wright, Sithole and Buthelezi argue that Zuluness was and is continually reconstituted by people who speak Zulu and other languages. This conclusion rightly disputes the hoary belief that Shaka or Inkatha had a monopoly on the conception of masculine Zulu values. If anything Jacob Zuma, the reputed ANC anomaly, counters such a stereotype.

There should be no surprise that South Africa’s new president comes from a line of self-proclaimed Zulu pioneers of the ANC, among them John Dube and Pixley Seme, founders in 1912 of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), a forerunner of Zuma’s party. As studies by Shula Marks and Paul La Hause have demonstrated, Dube was a proponent of SANNC petitions to enlarge the qualified ‘native franchise’ and a tireless booster of the Zulu royal house. Dube’s colleague, Seme, revealed in Shaka’s accomplishments. Together, Dube and Seme enfolded their visions of early-twentieth-century African ethnicity and regional politics into a liberation ideology that eventually advanced national aspirations. For his part, the Ivy-graduate Seme, a B.A. valedictorian of Columbia University in 1906, loved to tap the well of Zulu tradition and capitalist modernity, the very same elixir from which Zuma drinks. While pursuing education in America, Seme signed letters ‘the Zulu Boy’. During the Roaring ‘Twenties, he liked the formal suits in America, Seme signed letters ‘the Zulu Boy’. During the Roaring ‘Twenties, he liked the formal suits of the era, which he occasionally adorned with strips of sacred animal skins. Seme also spun eerily familiar tales of a hardscrabble Zulu childhood, including renditions of how he learned to build the homestead and uphold patriarchal tradition. In 1925 Seme elaborated: [In] ‘Zulu country boys grow up showing deference to others (be sabana); younger ones show respect (khonipa) to older ones. . . . He [the herd boy] learns the names of . . . the mountains and hills which he can

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6. Zuma’s (Zulu-inflected) patronage presidency and the ANC’s pluralist politics are the subject of several articles in Representation, 45, 2 (2009), specially Raymond Sutner’s ‘The Challenge of African National Congress Dominance’, 109-123.


see, to which the beast [cattle] draws him forward. It draws him into the bush. . . He also learns to hunt and to run. His body becomes very firm as he grows. This is what makes black boys become strong more quickly than white children.11 Most tellingly, Seme, as we shall see with Zuma, may have had deeper reasons to be self-conscious of his claim to undiluted Zulu heritage. Seme was Thongan,12 a less heralded ethnic group on the northern reaches of Zulu influence (on the border with Mozambique). During the twentieth century, as scholars David Webster and Dingani Mthethwa have shown, Thonga lineages engaged in cultural entrepreneurialism, borrowing and selling adopted features of Zuluness to mining recruiters obsessed with hiring ‘disciplined warriors’.13

Zuma’s ancestral history might also be illuminating. Zuma’s praise name — honouring one of his pioneering patriarchs — Mshololo is a good starting point. Extant oral traditions (which should be evaluated critically) indicate that in the nineteenth century Mshololo (Mafahleni) kaNxamala was Inkosi (chief) of a lineage linked to abakwaNxamalala people from a region of KwaZulu-Natal west of Nkandla (near the confluence of the Mzinyathi and Thukela Rivers). As Shaka rose to prominence after major victories over military rivals, among them Inkosi Zwide’s amaNdwandwe in 1820, sections of the abakwaNxamalala probably felt they were next to be conquered. They seemed to have reacted to the Zulu threat by seeking protection from another formidable Inkosi named Ngoza, ruler of the amaThembeni and sworn enemy of Shaka. To avoid subjugation, some abakwaNxamalala probably joined Ngoza’s amaThembeni and his client lineages — the amaKhuze, amaMabaso, amaMbatha, etc. — in a migration south to the Mngeni River Valley near Pietermaritzburg, the present-day provincial capital of KZN. Other abakwaNxamalala remained behind and became part of the Zulu kingdom.14

In Shaka’s nascent polity, structured as it was by a pecking order of allies and menials, the abakwaNxamalala were designated lowly ‘outsiders’, or amaLala. Many amaLala dwelled beyond the heartland of the kingdom, for example, in Nkandla, the flank of Shaka’s influence. Zulu royals pointed to amaLala as inferiors, a designation the scholar Carolyn Hamilton attributes to social factors as well. AmaLala were not seen as ‘clean’ enough to be near Shaka and his favourites.15 Such associations between amaLala and ‘dirt’ could have induced fears that extended beyond ideas of bodily hygiene to notions of human pollution (umthakathi, malevolent dissidence), which authorities in the kingdom sought to remove from their territories through ‘witch’ (umthakathi) executions. Finally, the amaLala served as a foil to the amaNtungwa elite, the people of the ‘grain basket [that rolls]’, meaning those with direct access to Zulu patronage. Hence, amaLala clans, like some of Zuma’s ancestors, were restricted from tapping into tributary networks that offered amaNtungwa first rights to Shaka’s largesse, from royal gifts of cattle (for local redistribution) to preferential service in the king’s prized regiments.16

In the light of this interpretation should we reassess Zuma’s fervour for ‘insider’ nationalism? Is his so-

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Why is the ‘100% Zulu Boy’ so popular?

Benedict Carton called Zulu chauvinism really an echo of Shaka’s ‘empire-building’ ambitions? Or does the president’s reference to building the homestead speak to ubiquitous non-Zulu/non-elite ideals of providing for disadvantaged people on a local level? Perhaps Zuma’s evocation of ukwakha umuzi exemplifies the act of expanding one’s lineage through work, marriage and birth. This act of fostering kinship — and venerating the ancestors — is still embraced in Zululand, and in Maputaland, Mpondoland, Basotholand, and Sekukhuneland, as well as Soweto, Katlehong, KwaMashu, and Khayelitsha. Residents of these areas realize Shaka is long gone. What they might hear in the idiom ukwakha umuzi is a promise from Zuma to secure employment which buoys marital hopes, family well-being and personal integrity. The able-bodied boys and men of Nkandla still venture into migrant labour in hopes of using their earnings as their grandfathers did, to buy cattle for ilobolo, bridewealth, and support their domestic aspirations. Yet today in Zuma’s birthplace, as in so many other communities throughout South Africa, bridewealth, when expected, is unaffordable and the living wage a thing of the past. The president’s awareness of these realities probably underpinned his campaign vow to generate jobs that fill the belly and swell the home. Simply put, ukwakha umuzi symbolizes a better life for the poor based on a new foundation of wealth circulated the ‘traditional’ way (rather than elite-driven Black Economic Empowerment deals). One verse from the president’s isithakazelo, his praise-lines recited at public events, exalts the acumen of Zuma’s ancestral Inkosi, Nxamala, who undertook to procure and reallocate resources. Now Zuma, too, proclaims that he is going to spread prosperity. Indeed, the president’s isithakazelo hails his lineage patriarch, Nxamala, who came bearing (‘Zuma, Nxamala, Maphumphaepheth’') protein-rich meat (‘inyama ngapha’) and nutritious sour milk (‘amasi ngapha’), the very sustenance which enabled the Zuma clan to build its proverbial homestead: ‘Zuma, Nxamala, Maphumphaepheth, inyama ngapha, amasi ngapha . . . ‘. Those who listen to Zuma’s lyrical politicking have a sense of his affecting presence. He has an intimate mastery of amasiko (uqotho customs), izithakazelo, and specific imilando, clan and territorial histories of KwaZulu-Natal, which appeals to a huge black constituency that does not identify itself as Zulu. But expertise in these realms can create even greater or more precipitous risks for the leader who vernacularizes his rule. While Zuma promotes the dream of ordinary people, fulfilling this vision is a wager against long odds. Their president has a monumental task before him: improving economic conditions during a global recession while a national disaster unfolds at home. The horrific toll of AIDS should immediately come to mind, but this is probably not Zuma’s initial priority. His mantra of ukwakha umuzi addresses another emergency related to the pandemic, a worsening crisis of social reproduction, in the words of geographer Mark Hunter, which shows no sign of abating in the months ahead, as work and weddings continue to disappear.17 It is too early to tell how Zuma will fare, but if the president falters quickly on the economic front his common touch could well become part of common lore which conjures the fable of the imbulu, a mythic shape-shifter with a notorious reputation for taking, not providing.

Populism and the National Democratic Revolution in South Africa

Ari Sitas

KwaZulu-Natal has been and continues to be mutinous. There is a sense in the popular imagination, usually constructed by the media and embellished in everyday conversation, that there is something different, insubordinate and robust about the province.

But we do need to move away from the platitudes that its ‘character’ is somehow linked to the fact that there are too many Zulus (there are, of course there are) or Indians (there are) and that even its whites are uncomfortable with broader South Africa (memories of the Torch Commando and the Last Outpost).

What is correct is that it has presented, as a territory scrambled together by colonial forces, challenges to the Union and then to the Republic of Apartheid South Africa. It has also displayed a longstanding ability to present key challenges to African national struggles—harboring differentiating and sometimes secessionist streaks to them.

So prevalent is this popular image that even current KwaZulu-Natal politicians sport a mischievous glint in the eye (a glint that borders on pride) whenever the subject is mentioned. It seems to confirm their robust uniqueness. But correctly they protest that the current troubles in the ANC and Inkatha, with their succession contests embellished with a lot of Zulu-talk have nothing to do with any deep historical character-formation.

But the evidence is there, my historian friends protest in turn: such behavior spans the formation of all types of national organization in the country—from trade unionism to politics.

After all, the argument goes, any history-conscious person will recall A.W.G Champion’s ICU yase Natal. All it took is some problems with the national leadership of Clements Kadalie and his cohorts to be mixed with local dynamics before discord and division occurred. Or later, when committed communist and socialist trade unionists tried to revive trade unions, Zulu Phungula gave the dockworkers and other migrants who were to come his way, an independent ethnic base. Even in the late 1970s, the TUACC inner-circle of Durban, arrogantly (for some), confidently (for others) insisted on their way or no way in the formation of FOSATU. And even when their detractors like SAAWU decided to join COSATU, it was the Natal grouping that refused to comply, going on its own way. And it was in this province and no other that an UWUSA was to be possible.

On the political terrain, many would recall Chief Buthelezi’s ANC yase Natal, better known as Inkatha and the parting of the ways between the two in 1979. For historical reasons, Rowley Arenstein used to argue, the national liberation struggle in Natal immediately translates into a Zulu liberation struggle. Now, there is talk of the ‘Zuma-Zulu’ factor and/or the ‘Zulu anti-Mbeki core’, dramatized as a repetition of what had gone before: ‘our way’ or ‘no way’. However fascinating such conceptions are, they are dangerous, at a time of rising greed and need.

If there is ‘mutinous energy’ it is no longer between the ANC and the IFP but within each one. However respectful I am of in-depth regional histories and cultural formation, I submit that the reasons for the turbulence are not embedded in a primordial uniqueness.

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but they are due to very recent developments. Had it been about Mazisi Kunene’s, Prof Maphalala’s, Chief Buthelezi’s, S’bu Ndebele’s, Prof Jeff Guy’s or even Jacob Zuma’s understanding of historical Zulu-ness it would have been a great debate but it isn’t about that at all.

The Zulu-ness that we read and hear so much about is a new construction and is a response by African working-class people to a social crisis unfolding around them.

It is the coincidence of this construction with the political drama unfolding here that calls for serious self-reflection.

II

The main drama in the province has been political. In crude summary: it is about the ANC emerging as a clear winner through the ballot-box. This was a remarkable success given the organizational density of Inkatha. The latter did not depend for its existence on Homeland institutions and structures alone but also on the exercise of social power through its branches, its supporters and later its militia. No one could predict in 1994 given the first electoral results (although many social scientists did predict an ANC victory) that the ANC would grow. And indeed it did and Inkatha shrank somewhat.

To avoid platitudes this success story has to be understood in four distinct stages: firstly, key in the 1980s was the growth of democratic trade union organization beyond the broader democratic movement’s toe-hold. The latter, after the rise of civic movements and later the United Democratic Front was restricted through the Apartheid state’s and Inkatha’s territorial ‘fight-back’. For a while, until the rapid growth of COSATU democratic trade unions included large numbers of Inkatha supporters, spanning not only the main cities but also all the decentralized industrial areas of the province. Although its growth too was brought to a rude halt by the unfolding civil war, most African workers remained members of COSATU’s affiliates and were hardened into those ranks through the frontal assault on their organizations and their elected leaders.

The second stage coincided with Jacob Zuma’s stewardship of the ANC in the province in the immediate pre-election and post-election period. Jacob Zuma offered a ‘third way’ between the contending approaches of the insurrectionary Midlands (led by Harry Gwala) and the ‘pro-negotiation’ and ‘peace-settlement’ Durban core. Zuma’s candidacy had a strong support from the main COSATU and SACP networks in the province. His most important achievement was to enhance the independence of the Royal House and therefore to neutralize the monarchy as the custodian of the cultural integrity of all Zulu people. He also managed through the key economic ministry that he occupied as an MEC, the consolidation of robust regional economic interests.

The next stage under the stewardship of S’bu Ndebele won the electoral breakthrough and his ascendance to the premiership of the province. His vision of an African Renaissance as the vehicle through which the province would move ‘beyond conflict’ combined identity-linked idealism with a number of hard-nosed on the ground electoral pacts, deals and breakthroughs. For him, Zulu-ness was activated as an exemplar of broader African traditions as an evolving and ever-changing endogenous modernism. Any analysis of the last election results points to important increases in ANC support in areas where the organization had only tiny pockets of support in the past.

The fourth stage begins in earnest with the last national and local government elections. Ndebele argued that the Renaissance was cherished by intellectuals but remained ‘intellectual for the masses’. He was right, what was growing instead at local level was a grassroots populism (yes, the same that was later to be expressed as a rallying call against Jacob Zuma’s perceived humiliation) and it has been capturing grassroots discontent and resentment at the simultaneous growth of opportunities and inequality. It is a serious and emergent populism because it involves a clear shift in language from the popular-democratic past to populism with serious authoritarian undertones. It is beginning to be ‘uploaded’ from the grassroots and ‘downloaded’ from party structures in a mutually-reinforcing cycle.

For historians these stages are too short, the years they refer to can be subsumed under longer sequences and as the jargon has it, ‘trajectories’. Unfortunately, our lives are shorter than too short and we do need immediate analyses. For sociologists, at least, they are crucial: the 40 year-olds of the 1980s are now pensioners; the youth of the 80s are mature men and women
and the youth of today were only born in the 80s and
gained an understanding of the world around them in
the 1990s and 2000s. Under each evocative category
of analysis there is ‘the changing of the guards’, of per-
sonnel and of dispositions. I will return to this later in
order to try and speak sensibly about ‘populism’.

III

The shift in language is not due to a primordial re-
turn to ‘traditionalism’ however ‘traditional’ it sounds.
Rather it is a direct consequence of rapid democrati-
cation. Central here is the new Local Authority legis-
alation and as Gillian Hart and I have argued often, to the
turn to local authorities as key-points for development.
The crucial issue that has to be understood is that the
ANC has experienced (and I will speak of the ANC be-
cause my access to Inkatha networks is more limited)
a dramatic horizontal spread of its mass-base in the
province. There is no inch of this contested province
where there is no councilor, or a defeated councilor,
or a councilor-in-waiting and by implication a branch
and differential branch activity pregnant with its own
local dynamics.

Such a rapid process of horizontal decentralization
and spread of energies has gone hand-in-hand with an
unavoidable provincial (and at a larger scale national)
centralization. Without it, the ‘centre’ could not ‘hold’.
This is not only due to rank opportunism or anarchic
forces (the ‘parasitism that the SACP document ‘Bua
Komanisi!’ alludes to, after all ‘parasitism’ is always in
relation to how people ought to have acted according
to a theory of how they should have; or ‘ill-discipline’
in the ANC which according to Thabo Mbeki has bred
populism-July,2007) but, because given the broader
shift was already in place in the mass democratic
movers and ‘traditionalists’ on the one side and ‘traditionalists’ on the other, such
distinctions were blurred in the interests of peace and
‘development’. By implication the political culture
of mandates, accountability, participation was given
short shrift so it has begun to be indistinguishable
from the other: uhlonipha, loyalty and authoritative
obedience. Ubuntu these days, in a vague way, covers
both.

The emerging language of populism is made-up of key
‘Zulu characteristics’ not defined by what is cherished
by intellectuals, but what the ‘masses’ have found as
easily accessible points of unity. This is evident in the
public rhetoric of gatherings in the province. Whereas
this language might allow grassroots ANC-linked intel-
lectuals to erode Inkatha’s ideological building-blocks,
and Inkatha leaders to defend their perceived turf, the
differences are increasingly difficult to distinguish.
My experience and the experience of my peers and
senior students in gatherings in the province points
little difference between ANC and Inkatha branch-
based language, between cultural forms of expression
or hymnody (the same mix of giya and indlamu, isi-
cathama and maskandi, Christian and Zionist sounds
percutte everything). The most rhetorical form of the
isibongo alludes to different ‘heroes’ but the substance
of the moral lessons are the same.

Bar one difference: in ANC gatherings if ‘outsiders’
are involved, it takes one platform orator to mention
GEAR and poverty and the chants start against the
presidency and move quickly to Umkhonto we Sizwe
refrains and to ‘umshini wam’ incantations among
many other incantations from the 1980s. There is a
radical populism in the air punctuated by ‘veterans’
and by now, civil-war hardened ex- youths (remem-
ber: now, 40 year-olds) of the ‘amaqabane’ and ‘amad-
elakufa’ generations. It is a symbolic assertion of ex-
clusion and hope.

This phenomenon involved a cultural and ideological
shift- the first, the ‘cultural’ emerged from below, the
latter, the ‘ideological’ emerged from above. A cultur-
al shift was already in place in the mass democratic
movement-linked cultural organizations even before
the elections. I know. I was there. No other province
had the depth of grassroots cultural mobilization using
indigenous forms of expression as a democratic and
socialist manifestation in the trade unions and com-
unity organizations. It was a profound expression of
cultural creativity. The forms were deeply local using
both tradition and innovation, the forms were oral, the language isiZulu. The disillusionment with the insensitivity of ‘smarts’ and ‘intellectuals’ from Gauteng and the Western Cape who defined the cultural anti-apartheid terrain led to a withdrawal and re-direction of energies. The handing over of Arts and Culture to Inkatha nationally and provincially reinforced the trend towards an assertive Zulu-ness.

Starting from the ‘Jacob Zuma’ period of leadership but consolidated through the ‘S’bu Ndebele’ period a new definition of belonging started gaining force from ‘above’: that the past was regrettable and tragic. The Shakan modernizing and progressive project had remained unfinished, destroyed by internal division and external forces and much of the historical discord all the way to the ‘Natal violence’ was animated by it. This was a radical re-reading of Zulu history and a way of bringing forth a symbolic unity among people who killed each other with impunity. ‘We are in a province of blood that needs purification’, argued Pitika Ntuli (March 17, 2000) as part of the Ndebele-led Renaissance initiative: ‘we are in a province in which son kills mother, and father kills daughter-in-law and wife. We are in a province in need of spiritual renewal and revival’. No one disagreed.

These discourses partly cultural and subterranean, partly trumpeted from ideological platforms, have powered the ANC into areas where the ‘amaqabane’ of the past could not reach. Furthermore, as kinship-based ties were beginning to be re-established, ties that were torn during the violence- a process of reconciliation from ‘below’ — both the commonness of culture and the thought that the past was regrettable have eased many tensions.

Whereas for S’bu Ndebele a historical consciousness was a necessary search for an African modernity beyond race, for many of the grassroots intellectuals powered by cultural practices from below, it was an affirmation of a codified, static, unchanging, Zulu-ness. It was not long before a new ethnic ontology started defining who the ‘we’ were which excluded Indians and Whites (let alone other ‘foreign’ Africans). Ngeema might have apologized for his song ‘AmaNdiya’ in 2002 but it is still being sung. The latter, the AmaKhu-la and Abelungu can only belong to a national community through what they do, not through what they are. Their inclusion or exclusion had become a forceful Afro-Zulu judgement: they are at best tolerated stran-
gers.

All this offers a culturally powerful answer to four deep social ‘crises’ that have affected the grassroots to the core: it is my contention (a point that I have amplified in the journal *African Identities*) that in every locale we are experiencing the following: the spread of HIV/AIDS has exploded the intimacies of gender and kinship-based powers- what we witness is a response by men to a challenge by women that something has to be done for the sake of the children; we experience the imponderable crisis in livelihoods which has shamed easy correlations between economic growth and prosperity- there has been economic growth, there has been a radical loss of access to livelihoods- what we witness is a new politics of encroachment; what we witness too is the failure of institutions designed to equalize voices and participation to co-determine decisions- instead what we witness is the search for an ‘authoritative other’ to right the mess; finally we witness, the crisis of protocols and institutions that attempted to proscribe ‘otherings’, racism and derogation within new value systems.

They are crises because people’s cultural formations can neither recoil from them nor refract them into coherent practices and, in the process cultural formations lose their capacity for steering and navigating social action as such. What emerges is not a vibrant civil society, but a spasmodic and turbulent reconfiguration that points to directions away from the designed vectors and institutions of social change designed by our democracy. Only authoritative cultural and political intervention will do.

The de-gendering pressures concentrated on ruptures in man-woman (boy-girl) and therefore in kinship systems brought about by the spread of AIDS; the new forms of alienation from work and livelihoods-procurement, joblessness, vulnerability, casual and sub-casual work, bondage and growing indebtedness amongst the poor; the dis-oralic pressures that fracture the functioning of institutions of equal ‘voice’ leading to silence, evasion and mistrust; finally, pressures that lead to disvaluation, increasing ‘otherings’ and racial derogations, are leading to radical reconfigurations ‘from below’. They are being expressed at local level.
To return to the main point- the ANC’s mass-base has expanded and whereas in 1994 the ANC needed COSATU and its affiliates to reach the black working-class it now has, as an organization its own direct mass-base. For COSATU and its affiliates this has been experienced as a loss of centrality in the political life of the alliance and it has occurred at a time when its own industrial-base has been weakening especially in what constituted its traditional power-base- the clothing and textile industry where Indian and African women formed its core in Durban and its presence in Hammarsdale/ Mpumalanga, Newcastle, Mooi River and Mandini. And, its loss of jobs in any economic sector we might think of.

But the pressure of basic need and crude survival, of ill-health and resource-exhaustion has magnified pressures and struggles. This intensification of livelihood struggles is cutting into COSATU’s prowess in KZN in two critical ways (apart from the shift of all headquarters of trade unions to Gauteng and the Western Cape and the increase of the membership in white-collar unionism): firstly, they have brought with them a crisis of representation: the increase of casual, temporary and informal/survivalist labour cannot be represented in the old ways.

Even though in principle COSATU has adopted a policy of organizing in these new sectors, trade union structures are not conducive to that. Many of these workers and the new poor that are a character of our globalizing streets animate social movement activity outside the Alliance’s radar. Many manifest spasmodic explosions of anger or protest but do not become sustained upsurges with clear leaderships. Every attempt to bring these energies into some form of organization- SEWU or The Job Creation Forum in the late 1990s came to grief by the 2000s. It is still unclear of how movements like ‘Abahlali base Mjondolo’ and the newly-created Street-Vendors’ movement will pan out in the near future.

But secondly, most mutinous energy and action occurs in areas and wards where neither COSATU, and the SACP nor the new social movements have any sway even though their members might be centrally present in the dynamic. The horizontal expansion of councilors and branches, of ward committees and forums where ‘development’, IDPs, projects and opportunities are decided or fought over, creates a new spatial dynamic of note. Any survey through KWANOLOGA will show that the majority of new councilors are black working-class people, many current or past trade union members of COSATU affiliates or UWUSA but this does not translate into a working-class politics.

These sites or spaces generate intensive struggles based on contradictory class projects over ‘representation’ and ‘access’. Groups within the ANC or Inkatha who are claiming representation of community interests find that their efforts in turn, are unsuccessful. That they do fail or how they fail is another story what is vital for this argument is that ‘Failure’ is swiftly externalized (The fault is with the Council, the Metro, the Province, the National). Taking ownership of community interests and development is always a partial and vulnerable project because of the enormous need and the growing, accumulating greed.

What prevails instead and is increasingly the real ‘motive force’ are two African petty bourgeoisies- a real and an imagined one- on their road to class power. Real: groups who were established through Apartheid’s homeland system and groups that established themselves despite it (remember, no ‘native’, ‘bantu’ or ‘plur’al was supposed to own means of production). Imagined: working-class people who know that they can become middle-class through the opportunities of the new post-Apartheid dispensation. Both groups are not ‘bourgeois individualists’- they are social enough to have extended patronage networks, yet both are always too small and in order to sustain their accumulation they have to edge out of the terrain broader collective or cooperative projects. Those excluded or ‘wronged’ become restless and available for mobilization.

They do so in the name of the ‘community’, the collectivity even where empirically the community is highly fragmented and as mentioned above is deeply enmeshed in crises that affect their capacity to act in non-authoritarian ways. There is no side that is not claiming to be ‘doing good’ or ‘being good’. But their actions are frustrated by another ‘level’ beyond their reach because they are told so and that it is easy to imagine that it is so. Access to local power is not enough to unlock enough of the wealth, it has to be an access to a higher level and a higher one to unlock resources. In their everyday description what is expressed is a deep need for an ‘authoritative other’ — ‘someone,
somewhere? higher up’.

The tragedy being played out is that there is at once too much and too little: enough to enrich some people but not enough for all. Despite the fact that more resources than ever before are directed to the poorer wards and zones, the need is so high that only a few predominate. And to do so, they have to exclude others. Working-class leaders either join the fray (cheek how many have formed CCs) or they demand as they are powerless on the ground, a broader working-class politics to become this ‘authoritative other’ but to achieve that, it has to engage with a broader political terrain at a ‘higher’ level than the local.

There too, the pressures are enormous and most energy is caught up in immediate and short-term class contradictions (wage strikes, rate strikes, land invasions, control of streets for vending despite by-laws). The broader effort has been unsuccessful to impose redistributive policies that affect the long-term expanded reproduction of the working-class (e.g. welfare system, more state intervention, more collective bias in the rules of spending and redistribution).

The turbulence is further punctuated by the inability of BEE companies to become bourgeoisies ‘proper’—owning and controlling means of production or exchange. Despite affirmative state policies their share of wealth remains small and in the overall capitalist picture, insignificant. There is no way that the ‘market’ can allocate opportunities to them as the economic system in its Darwinian logic makes sure that initial conditions matter! This make BEE company-owners even more desperate for more access and to intensify their struggles of ‘encroachment’ at the local level and there is a constant need to construct more extended patronage systems and connections: networks controlled by them to be active and dense and often corrupt or corruptible.

The contradiction is that they are caught in this Darwinian struggle under the collective umbrella of ‘the’ community. To succeed they have to exclude many and privilege too few. But exclusion has to be defined as ‘impermanent’, because the excluded remain the disadvantaged community—there is always a promise and a hope that there will be ways of non-exclusion, of spreading the cheer—‘Us now, more of us later’. If it was not for the Council, the Metro, the Province ‘it’ would have been achieved. The reason why it is not achieved is because there is no ‘authoritative other’ who can politically intervene to right the mess. And this is not helped by extreme forms of competition and succession struggles that animate provincial leadership.

In this dilemma two new petty-bourgeois strata are vital to complete the picture: both have their distinguished status through their education. Most of the national leadership of the liberation movement in this province, as both Bernard Magubane traced in his early studies of sport in Durban and Leo Kuper observed in his African Bourgeoisie even in the 1960s were drawn from this fraction of a class: the lawyers, the teachers, the doctors, the clerks, the nurses, the social workers, the College and University graduates. They constituted the backbone and the idealists of the movement. Together with trade union leaders and some remarkable Amakhosi, they constituted by then the heart of the Charterist and popular-democratic movement. They have disappeared or they have been disappeared into Corporate and State structures.

Joel Netshitenzhe in a recent piece ‘Leadership for a New Age’ (Mail and Guardian, 31 August - 6 September 2007, p.23) reminded the public what this popular-democratic core of the ANC was and what it has to be in trying to find a ‘balance and an internal capacity for self-correction’, if the national democratic revolution was to succeed. He warned that what the movement needed to achieve, if a popular and people-centred democracy was to become a reality, was ‘the existence of a corps of cadres who are able to withstand the pull of negative energy and stay the course’. It is precisely the absence of such cadres at a time of rapid expansion of a mass-base that energies have not stayed but strayed the course.

Who are key-players though for these energies are members of the new middle class whose education has made them functionaries of the new state— the state salariat. Their patronage and their interaction and their ‘woo-ing’ by the old middle-class has been a vital component of access and failure. They too do not have it easy: their importance to accumulation strategies occurs alongside their constant criticism, castigation and trenchant attacks by the new populists. They defend their indifference to local needs by turning their criticism onto other tiers of government or that Whites or Indians in the administration stand in their way (in many cases they are not wrong) — amplifying the pop-
ular perception that there has to be an ‘authoritative other’.

The mutinous energies are there, threatening to break the ANC and the Alliance (and Inkatha), and yet at the same time they more than ever need them to be there, their project of accumulation would be unthinkable without them.

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The implication of what I am saying is as follows: Zulu-ness is not the problem, yet a version of Zulu-ness is (a Zulu-ness devoid of history or dignity) and so is the rise of a grassroots authoritarian populism. This is new. Had the cadres Netshitenzhe invokes been there, something else could have occurred.

After all, the ANC was never just a generic nationalist movement- its imagined community was horizontal, trans-ethnic, non-racist and since 1955- Charterist. The national democratic revolution was about making this imagined community real. The people who fought for it are now pensioners, the youth of the 80s are 40 year old men and women, ‘the new youth’ are growing up in the cacophony of the present.

The rise of populism and mutinous energy I have been describing is the result of three processes: rapid democratization; the loss of sway of popular-democratic and socialist leaderships in the spaces created; the absence of the ‘corps of cadres’ who ‘can stay the course’ that Netshitenzhe alludes to.

People here are animated by the reconstruction of torn communities through a civil war, which has not been experienced in other provinces and an intense competition for votes and access by the ANC and Inkatha. Both are punctuated by rising greed and need. Ergo, people ‘upload’ hope and leadership to an ‘authoritative other’. Zuma has stepped into that role as if his entire life was designed for it.

The danger of any analysis is that it ‘naturalises’ behaviour: given the objective conditions the results and the energies become obvious. Far from it- there were always choices that were chosen and ‘choosings’ still to come. And it is only hindsight that allows one the comfort to study the consequences (intended or unintended) of prior social action. Peace and its achievement in this province was a pre-condition for any life worth living for. The logic of the four phases of the ANC’s consolidation in the province is obvious. That peace has been achieved points to how effective and restrained the leadership of both sides has been. But effective is not enough, if the popular-democratic nature of a movement is conveniently changed.

No one in the ANC has formally asserted that the Freedom Charter is just a piece of paper to be crunched and thrown into the dustbin of history, although many seem to be saying so informally. It is convenient for many to say so. It is also convenient, especially in an African petty bourgeoisie on its road to class power, to always declare the national revolution unfinished into the ‘forever’. An analysis can always step in and explicate why this is so. Although I share Netshitenzhe’s moral insight about the values NDR-cadres should espouse, I warn that without a moral cadreship coincident with the spread of the ANC’s mass-base, it will have to be postponed to the forever. What is gaining strength in the province’s grassroots is an ANC yase KZN. And I do feel for my Communist Party friends who would then have to rationalize how the second-stage will have to (even if its elements are present now) follow beyond ‘the forever’.

Ari Sitas

Populism and National Democratic Revolution in South Africa
Jacob Zuma and the evanescent legacy of nineteenth-century Zulu cosmopolitanism and nationalism

Hlonipha Mokoena

‘Cosmopolitan’ is not exactly a word that comes to mind when describing South African society — both contemporary and historical. Yet, if we take the word ‘cosmopolitan’ as implying an embrace of the globe; an unbounded vision of humanity; then South Africa has been in the embrace of the world for quite some time. Whether one is thinking of Adamastor — the Greco-inspired mythological character invented by the Portuguese poet Luís de Camões in his epic poem Os Lusiadas (first printed in 1572) — or the indentured labourers (Indian and Chinese) who were transported to South Africa in the 1860s and early 1900s, South Africa has been in the world’s line of vision for centuries and a destination for many. What has complicated South Africa’s ‘cosmopolitan’ history is its racialisation: the history of apartheid is in some way a history of the denial of the hybridity and indeterminacy created by the forced and voluntary migrations and presence of innumerable cultural influences. The search for purity — a core value of the Afrikaner Nationalists of the 1930s — was a symptom of this fear of ‘otherness’. The ascendance of Jacob Zuma to the presidency of the African National Congress (ANC) and his inauguration as South Africa’s fourth democratically-elected president has once again forced South Africans to reconsider what they understand to be the cosmopolitan values of the society. ‘Cosmopolitanism’ should not be confused with that other perennial debate in South Africa, namely, the ‘Rainbow nationalism’ debate. The manner in which Jacob Zuma rose to power brought to the fore not only questions of cultural tolerance and relativism but also the unspoken and uneasy history of ‘exile’ in South African politics. While the sensationalist reporting and analysis of Zuma focussed on his personal life — his polygamous household; the corruption and rape charges; his relationship to Schabir Shaik; his personal finances and alliances — there were historical echoes and questions that remained unexplored. Zuma is not only a ‘Zulu’ but he is also a former exile and guerrilla operative and in all the debates that swirled around ‘JZ’ — as he is affectionately known — the meaning of Zuluness was a question mark and a taken for granted assumption. Whether he was singing Umshini Wami or choosing to testify in court in isiZulu, Zuma’s ethnic identity was easily available to be parodied, pilloried and purloined while at the same time he also played into the hands of his critics by constantly playing the ‘Zulu card’. What was often forgotten in these debates is that Zuma was not the first ‘Zulu’ to lead the ANC. Now that the election drama is over, perhaps we have the time and the reason to examine the historical antecedents of Pixley ka Isaka Seme (1881-1951) and John Dube (1871-1946), who were both ethnically Zulu and committed nationalists and cosmopolitans. Their instrumental role in the establishment of the ANC may help us understand why JZ’s Zuluness is simultaneously a return of ‘ethnic politics’ and a revival of long-forgotten nineteenth-century cosmopolitanism. If we are to de-racialise the country’s history, then we need to excavate the lives of those South Africans who embraced and were embraced by the world; South Africans who chose to be citizens of the world. Even this process of excavation is fraught — for a long time it’s been dominated by the biographies and autobiographies of the exile community — those South Africans who wilfully chose exile or were forced into exile in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The problem of the ‘exile’ is a problem of a negative cosmopolitanism; a cosmopolitanism that emerges out of crisis rather than as a celebration of global diversity and difference. Jacob Zuma, like many of his ANC comrades, is a product of

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this kind of cosmopolitanism. This contrast between the exiled and the nineteenth-century cosmopolitan is central to understanding the persona of Jacob Zuma. The contrast also serves a second function, which is to remind us that the nineteenth-century cosmopolitans were also in a crisis of sort — the crisis of being a colonized subject — but that they nevertheless tried to imagine a different place for South Africa both in Africa and the world.

Amakholwa — the historical background

It is impossible to understand the lives of John Dube and Pixley ka Isaka Seme without understanding the history of colonialism in southeast Africa. Although the colonial narrative of South Africa properly begins with the Cape, ‘Natal’ became an important site for the grand experiment of indirect rule and has therefore become central to historical interpretations of imperialism in South Africa. Thus, for example, Mahmood Mamdani’s book *Citizens and Subjects: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* references and uses the Natal and Shepstonian system of indirect rule as the archetypal example of ‘decentralised despotism’. The amakholwa (educated, converted and Christian Africans) were in the simplest terms, the Africans who were neither ‘tribal subjects’ nor ‘colonial citizens’ — to use Mamdani’s vocabulary. Yet, this dichotomy and schizophrenia of being ‘neither’ ‘nor’ wasn’t the only defining characteristic of the educated Africans of nineteenth and early twentieth century Natal. In fact, their relationship to the colonial state wasn’t purely that of supplicants petitioning for admission into the exclusive sphere of colonial civil society. Much of their writing and thinking focussed on the possibility of an African ‘imagined’ community, that was often removed, both culturally and ideologically, from the colonial state’s definition of tribal society or the ‘educated African’. This alternative public sphere which the amakholwa created and staged in newspapers, books and pamphlets is a repository for re-imaging South Africa in the nineteenth century especially if one is interested in sketching a more demotic picture of who was a ‘historical agent’ in that century. Too often studies of this period focus on the colonial state and its officials as the main ‘agents’ of history in colonial Natal. Alternatively, too much credit is given to the missionaries and their proselytization, which is depicted as the main transformative power and engine of social, political and intellectual reconfiguration of African society in the nineteenth century. What is often occluded in these studies is the fact that colonial society was a polyphonic society; there were multiple voices that spoke to the state and to the missionaries, and this includes the African voices that supported or were ambivalent towards the imperial and the cultural enterprises represented by ‘the Queen’ and her messengers — the missionaries and officials.

Seme and Dube — the biographies

The biographies of Pixley ka Isaka Seme and John Dube have become ‘public’ or ‘common’ knowledge since they were both instrumental in the foundation and establishment of the African National Congress in 1912. There are therefore several websites where you can just ‘cut and paste’ their biographies. There is little room for an original biographical interpretation and it is therefore easier to borrow and acknowledge these sources. The South African History Online (SAHO) project — an educational and encyclopaedic source on South African history — gives the following account of John Dube’s life:

“John Langalibalele Dube was born in Natal in 1871. He was the son of Rev. James Dube one of the first ordained pastors of the American Zulu Mission. John Dube’s grandmother was one of the first Christians to be converted by the American Daniel Lindley.”

“Dube was educated at Inanda and Amanzimtoti (later Adams College). In 1887 he accompanied the missionary W.C. Wilcox to America. There he studied at Oberlin College while supporting himself in a variety of jobs and lecturing on the need for industrial education in Natal. He went back to Natal but soon resumed to the U.S. for further training and to collect money for a Zulu industrial school - as he called it - along the lines of the Tuskegee Institute.”

Or, alternatively you can read his biography on the African National Congress website, which states:

“B.W. Vilakazi, a poet and author, wrote in 1946 that Dube was “a great, if not the greatest, black
man of the missionary epoch in South Africa” and earlier A.S. Vil-Nkomo had written in the same
vein: Dube was “one who comes once in many centuries - No one else in his education generation has
accomplished so much with such meagre economic means. He was scholar, gentleman, leader, farmer,
teacher, politician, patriot and philanthropist”.

There were other judgements. To the Governor of Na
tal in 1906 Dube was “a pronounced Ethiopian who
ought to be watched” and John X. Merriman, a Cape
“liberal” described Dube in 1912 as a “typical Zulu,
with a powerful cruel face. Very moderate and civi-
lised, spoke extraordinarily good English ...”. A little
later he commented:

“Dube in conversation gave me a glimpse of na
tional feeling which reminded me of Gokhale. How
they must hate us - not without cause.”

On Pixley ka Isaka Seme the SAHO website states:

Pixley Seme was born on 1 October 1881 in Natal.
He was the son of Isaka Sarah (nee Mseleku) Seme.
He obtained his primary school education at the
local mission school where the American Congre-
gationalist missionary, Reverend S. C. Pixley, took
an interest in him and arranged for him to go to
the Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts in
the USA. He then attended Columbia University in
New York and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts
degree (B.A) in April 1906. At the same time he
won the University’s highest oratorical honour, the
George William Curtis medal. His topic was “The
Regeneration of Africa”.3

These and other biographical treatments of the two
men give us a sense of two visible factors that domi-
nated and structured their lives: first, the missionary
education they acquired in colonial Natal and second,
their worldly travels and contact with people and in-
stitutions beyond the parochial intellectual culture of
Natal and South Africa. The latter factor is what con-
stitutes their cosmopolitan identities.

The competing power and pull of Zulu nationalism
and cosmopolitanism

In trying to understand the impact of the ‘wider world’
on Dube and Seme it is tempting to focus only on the
American and African-American connections evi-
dent in their biographies. However, in conceiving of
themselves as educated Africans who were obliged
to ‘spread’ their knowledge and invite other Africans
into modernity, both Dube and Seme presented them-
selves using a kaleidoscope vocabulary of Zulu nation-
alism, Pan-Africanism and cosmopolitanism. This tril-
ogy of –isms was not neatly arranged and packaged
by the two men; these ideas competed with each other
for prominence. These competing ideologies have led
many scholars to conclude that the modernity repre-
sented by the amakholwa was inauthentic, ambiguous
or at worst, a naïve mimicry of the Western version.
When however one hears Seme speak of what it meant
to be a ‘modern’ African, then these conclusions seem
hasty and incomplete. In his 1906 speech, he told his
Columbia audience:

I am an African, and I set my pride in my race
over against a hostile public opinion...The races
of mankind are composed of free and unique indi-
viduals. An attempt to compare them on the basis
of equality can never be finally satisfactory. Each is
himself...In all races, genius is like a spark, which,
concealed in the bosom of a flint, bursts forth at
the summoning stroke. It may arise anywhere and
in any race. (Karlis and Carter 1972: 69)

Compare this statement on being an African, to Dube’s
vision of a future Africa enunciated in 1892 in a pam-
phlet titled ‘A Talk Upon My Native Land’:

Oh! how I long for that day, when the darkness and
gloom shall have passed away, because the “Sun
of Righteousness has risen with healing in His
hand.” This shall be the dawning of a brighter day
for the people of Africa. Christianity will usher in a
new civilization, and the “Dark Continent” will be
transformed into a land of commerce and Chris-
tian institutions. Then shall Africa take her place
as a nation among nations... (Karlis and Carter
1972: 69)

Although Dube more than Seme gives his vision of a
new Africa a Christian foundation, the common thread
that binds both men is that they thought of Africa as
being on a point of renaissance and rejuvenation. In
his oration, Seme focussed both on the glories of the
African past — the pyramids of Egypt and Ethiopia

— and on the impact of Africans on European culture. On the latter he cited ‘one professor of philosophy in a celebrated German university’. He was referring to Anton-Wilhelm Amo (b. 1703 – d. 1756) who taught at the universities of Halle and Jena in Germany. This reference to the achievements of Africans outside the continent is the first of many examples of Seme’s cosmopolitan perspective and his attempt to link his struggles as a Zulu-speaker and colonial subject with those of other Africans in the diaspora. Dube on the other hand emphasised the role of Christianity in ushering in modernity into Africa. This is not surprising since he was a convert, but it has been inordinately highlighted as an example of the extent to which Dube and other amakholwa had succumbed and been seduced by the elusive promise of Christian humanitarianism and Victorian progress. This is partially true — the language of missionary emancipation and equality was certainly attractive to the amakholwa, but this is not a symptom of seduction as it is a sign of their ability to grasp and understand the power and effect of the discourses introduced by the missionaries. The discursive appeal of Victorian modernity was not a chimera for Dube and Seme; it was a horizon of possibilities in which they read not only the modernization of the Zulu and African peoples but also the modernization of the colonial state, which was intent on excluding them from the boon of progress. As representatives of an African modernity, they were therefore not just committed to Christianization but also the democratization of modernity, albeit in the form of Victorian respectability and civility.

In Seme’s terms this democratization of modernity was a rejection of the relegation of Africa to a marginal status in the production of knowledge. His regeneration of Africa therefore necessitated that Africans should, as in times past, contribute to the ‘store’ of knowledge. He noted:

He [the African] has refused to camp forever on the borders of the industrial world; having learned that knowledge is power, he is educating his children... These return to their country like arrows, to drive darkness from the land...

The African is not a proletarian in the world of science and art. He has precious creations of his own, of ivory, of copper and of gold, fine, plated willow-ware and weapons of superior workmanship. (Karris and Carter 1972: 71)

Although there is not space to elaborate on the fullest implications of Dube and Seme’s ideas and how these influenced their decisions to participate in the nascent political organizations that led to the formation of South African Native National Congress (1912), the predecessor of the African National Congress, it is important to point to the one sphere where Dube exerted an influence that was simultaneously political as it was intellectual. In 1903, he established the newspaper Ilanga lase Natal and was editor until 1920. This bilingual Zulu-English newspaper was not only the first newspaper to be established by an African in Natal, it became the main medium through which the Zulu-speaking literati of southern Africa communicated current affairs and opinion while also debating the very ‘essence’ of Zuluness and the meaning of their Zulu cultural heritage. It is this expression of a cosmopolitan consciousness that defines the contribution of Dube and Seme. This leads us to several kinds of theoretical conclusions that we can draw about the historical legacy left by the amakholwa literates.

The first kind of conclusion concerns the terminology introduced by Homi Bhabha (1994: xvi) to describe an alternative cosmopolitanism that as he states, ‘measures global progress from the minoritarian perspective’. He calls this cosmopolitanism a ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’. If we take these definitions seriously and apply them to the colonized amakholwa of Natal, we are confronted with the problem of having to define the extent to which their marginalisation could be called a ‘minoritarian perspective’. Experientially, the amakholwa understood themselves as a deterritorialized Zulu-speakers; they had severed ties with the independent Zulu kingdom and they were even labelled by their former cultural compatriots as amakhafula — ‘those who have been spat out’ — to symbolically and linguistically mark this expulsion.

The notion of a vernacular cosmopolitanism is especially apt when one considers that John Dube was not just a newspaper editor and a founder and first president of the ANC. He was also the first African to write a novel and publish a work of faction in the Zulu language. In 1930 he published the historical novel uJeqe: Insila ka Shaka, translated into English as Jeqe, the body servant of Shaka (1951). The significance of the novel resides in the fact that the ‘bodyservant’ / ‘insila’ is the subaltern of subalterns in the Zulu king’s household — he is the living spittoon upon whom the king expectorates because the king’s spittle was considered to
have ritual power and therefore could not land on the ground for fear of being collected and used by wizards, witches and such. I haven’t thought about this book since my teens; it was a ‘set work’ for my aunts in high school and now it has been given the status of a modern classic by Penguin who have recently republished the English translation. The question is: what does it mean when a supposedly elitist kholwa intellectual publishes a historical novel about a Zulu subaltern? In my reading it means that Dube like his contemporaries was establishing a kholwa literature and an archive which deserves a revisiting.

The other cosmopolitan literature that has been archived belongs to the twentieth century when thousands of South Africans went into exile for political and cultural reasons. This is the ‘negative cosmopolitanism’ alluded to at the beginning. Unlike the subject of a colonial state, the twentieth century exile was thrown into a condition of statelessness and for most their departure from South Africa was defined by the ‘exit permit’, which was apartheid’s spiteful version of a one-way ticket. Existentially, the experience of exile was summed up by Mark Gevisser — in a review of Hilda Bernstein’s book The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans — as ‘the mundanity of dates and moves; a train-timetable of displacement’. Another exile, Nat Nakasa described it differently in his essay ‘A Native of Nowhere’, when he wrote that his future ‘lies in a number of diplomatic bags’. This constant shuffling of past, present and future and the feeling that one has been reluctantly forced into a condition not of one’s choosing undoubtedly shaped the manner in which exiles thought of their relationship to the wider world. The grand image of the world traveller, embarking and disembarking wherever they wish, was not for them. The deprivation, isolation and homesickness led many, as Gevisser points out in his review, to alcoholism and fatalism even as they struggled to create new forms of community. This sense of community, formed out of the necessity of survival and the desire to preserve a modicum of homeliness, was what the returning exiles brought back with them in the 1990s. And, in the climate of South Africa’s transition and the anxiety induced by the sudden conversion of freedom fighters into negotiators and ‘stakeholders’, these communities morphed into cliques and factions. These contests over power and influence were the basic ingredients of the Mbeki-Zuma saga and they cannot be understood without understanding the nature of the cosmopolitanism imposed by exile.

Jacob Zuma and his ‘Return’ to Zuluness

As interesting and noteworthy as the biographies of Pixley ka Isaka Seme and John Dube may be, there is no obvious connection with Jacob Zuma and the 2009 South African elections. The main rationale for comparing Jacob Zuma with his kholwa predecessors is that one of the subterranean transcripts of the Zuma saga — especially its conspiratorial version — was that the ANC as a political party had been hijacked by Xhosas and that Zuma was the fitting heir to return the party to its ‘Zulu origins’, namely the legacy of John Dube. This is the evanescence referred to in my title. In the context of the contemporary crisis in the ANC, the legacy of John Dube was utilised to transform a leadership conflict between Jacob Zuma and his erstwhile rival into a ‘return’ to origins — whether these are Zulu or umKhonto we Sizwe. As my portrait of Dube has shown, his was not an ideology of Zulu chauvinism, even though it was tinged by a desire for a reformed and modern Zulu kingship and identity. When compared to Seme as well, Zuma does not seem to represent the trilogy of forces that were at work in the formation of their ideas namely Zulu nationalism, Pan-Africanism and cosmopolitanism. During the election campaign, Zuma was depicted and sometimes presented himself as a motley caricature of a singing and dancing Zulu warrior who was clutching at the straw of an ethnic identity in the hope that it will transform into the ubiquitous ‘machine gun’ which he conjured up every time he started up his signature song ‘umshini wam’. His attempt at marshalling Zulu identity for this purpose can be interpreted as a contemptuous reaction to the intellectualism and worldliness of Mbeki and his inner circle. Now that he is president of the republic, and has even passed the dreaded 100-day mark, Zuma seems to have abandoned the Zulu ethnic identity. He is transmogrifying into the president he was elected to be; part pragmatist and part conciliator. His aversion to intellectualism was entrenched in his State of the Nation speech, delivered to parliament in June 2009. It had none of the grandeur and poetics of a Mbeki speech; it was realistic — jobs, service delivery, poverty and social infrastructure were the keywords. Yet, even when he was being a programmatic, Zuma showed off the ‘warmth’ that Mbeki apparently lacked; he spoke in all but the 11th official language. He called for unity in Sesotho, he asked the rural poor for their co-operation in isiZulu and he conjured the spirit of communalism in Afrikaans. Thus, unlike Mbeki his
eye for diversity was focussed inwards — the diverse languages and cultures within South Africa — rather than outwards in the direction of the continent or the world.

Although a State of the Nation speech is not a predictor of the style of a presidency, it is already clear that Jacob Zuma is not interested in the kind of cosmopolitan vision represented by Mbeki, especially his diplomatic and foreign politics. This seeming disavowal of the legacy of Dube and Seme’s cosmopolitanism, which Mbeki attempted to emulate with mixed success, is not in itself a sign that Zuma is not cosmopolitan in his outlook. Rather, it creates the false impression and dichotomy, namely that only intellectuals, like Mbeki and his acolytes, can be cosmopolitan. It entrenches the idea that being cosmopolitan is a luxury, reserved for those who have the leisure and the means to contemplate the world. It stifles conversations about history, especially the history of South Africa’s relationship to the African continent. It leaves us floundering for an explanation of our kholwa and creole pasts. And, it does not bode well for our uncertain futures.

For a scholar interested in the history of South Africa’s relationship to the world, the equating of cosmopolitanism with intellectualism, complicates any recovery that one may attempt of the other cosmopolitanisms that have created the diversity, which South Africans celebrate in our constitution and our motto.

Works Cited


Tradition’s desire: The politics of culture in the rape trial of Jacob Zuma

Thembisa Waetjen and Gerhard Maré

In April 2006, African National Congress (ANC) president and one-time South African deputy president Jacob Zuma appeared in court to defend himself against a charge of rape. When called to the stand and asked to recall the events of 2 November 2005, Zuma chose to deliver his testimony in his Zulu mother tongue. This was his constitutional right, the right of an accused individual to defend himself in any one of South Africa’s eleven official languages. Yet Zuma’s linguistic choice was laden with political meaning and opportunity. Speaking isiZulu within a court that had thus far proceeded in English highlighted his membership to a particular cultural group and invoked his well-established reputation as a ‘man of tradition’. Furthermore, it drew attention to the courtroom also as a specific (as well as adversarial) cultural space, with Anglophone traditions, European legal origins and an Afrikaans-speaking judge who used Latin legal phrasings in his ruling. In the context of a nation with a deeply racist history, including decades of state-sponsored ethnic management and subjugation, Zuma’s linguistic medium was part of a powerful message: that this trial was also about the politics of culture.

In this article, we examine how issues of gender power were framed by and, in important ways, subsumed within a politics of culture. Of course, a rape trial, by its very nature, raises questions about ideologies of gender and sexuality, about normative practical relations between men and women, their relative status and about the nature of gender power. The case of State vs. Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma was no exception. The Judge even saw reason to complain—quoting a journalist—that ‘this trial is more about sexual politics and gender relations than it is about rape’. Yet, in fact, these crucial issues were remarkably circumscribed. In the fervour surrounding this trial, the burning political question of women’s status was continually cast as a private matter: debates about relations between men and women came to be focussed on issues of propriety, behaviour and etiquette rather than on questions about rights and power. The point we wish to make here is a simple one: that this privatization of gender was effected through the politics of culture.

This trial was not, of course, the only incident to draw national attention to the interface between sexuality and politics, nor was the high profile nature of this case merely a function of Zuma’s standing as an elected official, ruling party leader and possible presidential successor. Zuma’s celebrity itself had become politically charged when, a year earlier, prominent Durban businessman and one-time apartheid activist Schabir Shaik was convicted of fraud and corruption for a deal in which Zuma was alleged to be squarely implicated. Upon Shaik’s conviction, Zuma was deposed as the nation’s second-in-command by its president, Thabo Mbeki, in an action which supporters of Zuma condemned as opportunistic and pre-emptive, and which saw the figure of Zuma emerging as an alternative to the perceived elitism of the Mbeki ‘camp.’ While a split in the ANC was officially denied, bodies affiliated to the Party—the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) members—openly rallied behind Zuma, who also enjoyed enormous popularity with a sector of the public disaffected with Mbeki.

1. W. J. Van der Merwe, High Court Witwatersrand Division of the High Court of South Africa. Opening Comments to Judgment, State vs. Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma, 4 May 2006, p. 3.
The charge of rape followed upon these tense events and created new ones surrounding the trial itself. Jacob Zuma’s accuser was an HIV positive woman many years his junior, the daughter of a former anti-apartheid struggle comrade, who had been staying in his home. All of these details were considered pertinent, not only to the legal debates about whether a crime had been committed, but also to the political debates raging around the nation’s key challenges of high rates of sexual violence and the ‘denialist’ state response to devastating levels of HIV infection. In his public capacity, Zuma had been outspoken about the need for sexual caution and ‘condomizing’. He outraged health professionals and AIDS educators when he told the court that, after consensual sex with an HIV positive woman he had acted to remedy the absence of a condom by taking a shower. Meanwhile, many Zuma supporters saw the accusation of rape as politically motivated and as evidence of anti-Zuma conspiracy, citing the complainant’s presence in Zuma’s house, and her choice to wear a kanga, as cause for believing her to be a honey trap. Expressing this conviction outside the courthouse, pro-Zuma constituents rallied in T-shirts bearing Zuma’s face and holding placards with phrases like ‘Burn the Bitch’. In visibly smaller numbers, women’s rights groups were present on the streets as well, trying to draw attention to the general problem of the nation’s extraordinarily high rates of sexual violence and the general failure of the justice system to address cases of rape.

Jacob Zuma was acquitted of the crime of rape. Still, the trial was one of several important legal events that have affected the trajectory of his leadership and which continue to shape and reflect the broader political ferment in South Africa.

What the voices in support of Jacob Zuma express is confidence in a broad patriarchal morality. In this moral framework, young women and their sexuality bear the burden of a clearly profound social anxiety.

The sexuality of young women is seen to pose a threat not only to individual men (in which the case of Jacob Zuma may be one with unusually high stakes attached) but to a future of social and political justice and moral order that the leadership of men like Zuma appear to promise.

2. At this writing, it must be acknowledged that political change is extremely rapid in South Africa. Thabo Mbeki was removed from the office of state president by the ANC in late September 2008, following a legal ruling related to the National Prosecuting Authority’s handling of Zuma in relation to allegations of corruption. These various legal events, as well as others, which we do not recount here, will certainly shape the elections of 2009.
and it represents itself as a guiding principle of human agency. In the strong, ideological invocation we are concerned with, tradition is suggested to be comprised of an intergenerational loyalty to an imperative called ‘culture’. Putative obedience to the ways of ancestors or named forefathers infuses this vision of the past with a profound and essential morality. The longevity and immutability attributed to culture lends it the certainty of functionality, of ‘tried and true’ norms and mores and from this, too, culture gains its authority. Authority and morality are at the conceptual heart of the politics of culture and tradition.

As Zygmunt Bauman has noted, the idea of traditional community becomes salient and of political value when it has largely passed out of reality (2001: 3). It is probably true that utterance of the word ‘tradition’, even in its benign reference to lived experience, heralds a reality of doubt, challenge or threat to the field of existence which it proposes simply to name. Lived experience does not, in its own right, necessitate the concept of a ‘tradition’. The politics of culture rides on a sharp edge of loss; and it is sensitive and responsive to the moral anxiety generated by that sense of loss. Tradition and culture become resources through which new power relations can be negotiated in a context where the independence and material subsistence of the community is greatly diminished.

Invoked also in times of crisis, or brought about by social demise or rapid change, the appeal of culture/tradition is expressed as moral longing and a faith in its promise of moral resolution. But the politics of culture is framed as longing for a particular kind of morality, the morality of patriarchy. Indeed, the authority and morality of culture derives much of its legitimacy from the institution of the patriarchal household in which it is historically rooted. It offers a vision of an order kept by the firm but benevolent hand of senior men, of paternal protection and the wisdom of elders who maintain and provide for community. The framework of that morality is not merely authoritarian—it also denotes plenitude and care, as well as power that is personal. The community it imagines contrasts with the alien and abstract political realities characteristic of modernity. This social vision need not belong to deep psychologies; rather it resides in language and collective historical narrative, combined with the harsh materiality of want or need. Tradition’s desire is millennial in character, yet takes a secular political form in the domain of public life. Bauman warns that ‘community’ as ‘dream fulfilled’ ‘demands unconditional loyalty and treats everything short of such loyalty as an act of unforgivable treason’ (2001:4).

In South Africa, a country that is emerging from a deeply troubled past and facing the challenges of persistent divisions, desperate unemployment and economic inequalities, as well as a deadly and highly stigmatised disease, the longing for moral order goes very deep indeed. But there are critical elements in the specific history of South Africa which bear on the politics of culture, and which compound its complexity and power in the life of the new democracy. Here in this context, prevailing ideas about culture as an identity are linked to the idea of race. Both race and culture are uncritically considered to be fixed and immutable human classifications; both are designations that have divided divide South Africans into political categories. Race and culture have combined to designate human beings in South Africa as ‘tribal’ or ‘civic’, as ‘citizens’ or ‘subjects’, as rights-bearers, or criminalised, or propertied, or communal, and so on. While apartheid’s strategy of ethnic separation and preservation has now been overturned, the idea of distinct cultural groups—each with the right of self-expression, if not self-rule—has shown no sign of abating. Rather, the pursuit of cultural expression and cultural rights has come to signify a stand against the legacies of racism. Indeed, apartheid is often radically misconceived as a force which tried to destroy cultural distinctiveness in favour of imposing a Eurocentric and supremacist assimilationism. This conflation of apartheid with the more paternalistic segregationist era which preceded it is understandable: both forms of exclusivist white racial rule grossly assaulted the freedom of black people and precluded the evolution of a civic, non-racial cosmo-politanism. What is beyond doubt is that this complicated history has made the issue of culture a sensitive political trigger in an unevenly transforming society.

Colonialism and apartheid altered the political meaning of culture. Culture was salient long before Afrikaner ethnicity (and its preoccupation with cultural survival) became the banner under which the National Party came to power (Giliomee 2003). Indigenous cultural identities relating to language, kinship, geography and organizational structures were appropriated and rationalised into tools of political management under British imperialist policy concomitant with the mineral revolution; and before that by Theophilus
Shepstone in the colony of Natal (for example, Welsh 1973, Mamdani 1996). The resilience of many indigenous cultural practices and beliefs, the alteration of some, and the destruction of others, highlight both the unevenness as well as the necessary flexibility of power as groups of indigenous Africans were subjugated through violence, law and changing economic circumstance, first into residents of native reserves and, later, ‘Bantustans’. Indigenous authority structures were accommodated and incorporated, dismantled or restructured, always subordinated to state power (Ntsebeza 2006).

In this process, indigenous gender relations and household structures proved both a centre of cultural resilience as well as a stabilising (though hardly stable) feature in the developing migrant labour system and in maintaining the political authority of the amaKhosi3 (for example, Bozzoli 1983, Walker 1990). African men were increasingly recruited from rural homesteads as wage workers on a temporary basis, accommodated in company compounds in highly disciplinary circumstances, with documentary ‘passes’ mediating the legality of their geographical mobility in the urban spaces that were racially designated as ‘white’. Incorporated into industry as labouring bodies, rationalised as costs in production, these men were separated from the conditions of their social sustenance for sets of weeks, months, or years. As many revisionist historians and critical sociologists have pointed out, this dramatic separation between work and home was profitable for capital in that it kept wages low and the costs of social reproduction squarely on the backs of women, who sustained home for the working classes through agricultural and reproductive labour in the countryside. Gender scholars have also pointed to a confluence of patriarchal interests sustaining this arrangement: it suited both capital and African male wage earners to contain the labour power of women under local, tribal authority. In this way, agrarian family life, with distinctive social practices, languages and cosmologies, became institutionalised as ‘culture’ within South Africa’s racialized, industrial development. Politically and economically it was designated as a sphere of private authority—at the level both of household and community. The legal (political) and ideological (race) demarcation of ‘customary’ space in South Africa was a specific feature of the nation’s political and economic development. Indigenous tradition was therefore not ‘preserved’ in the sense of being left behind in historical time: rather it was the very premise of South Africa’s modernisation.

This is as much to say that current political meanings of ‘culture’ were constructed historically through spatial relations also of gender. These meanings are also racialized. As the bedrock of racial strata was gradually engineered by the state into four distinctive ‘levels’—‘Bantu’, ‘Asian’, ‘Coloured’, ‘European’—their nature was described overwhelmingly in the discourses of cultural tradition. Indeed, part of what gave apartheid its longevity was the legitimacy derived from the idea of culture, an idea sustained by the social science of anthropology (Dubow 2006), and from the way that culture supplied race with a political plausibility. The belief in culture, as a kind of nationality, was widespread.

It is not surprising then, that culture arose as a point of conflict during anti-apartheid political mobilisation. The organic power of culture as a designation of identity was made most apparent through the mobilisation of Zulu ethnicity by Mangosuthu Buthelezi’s Inkatha during the latter decades of apartheid (Maré and Hamilton 1986, Maré 1993, Waetjen 2004). Yet the politics of culture, both as instrumental control and as resistance to that control, faced a massive challenge from other identities mobilised in the broad church approach of political liberation. Black nationalists, workers, religious bodies, and non-racial democratic movements joined forces to create a South Africanist end to apartheid. It is notable that, as an alternative mobilisation strategy, Buthelezi’s campaign speeches were characterised by detailed and relentless reminders of what Zulu culture was and what it meant politically. In the 1980s and 1990s, the political meanings of culture were far from obvious and required persistent descriptive and historical narratives to link ideas about culture both to the contemporary political climate and to Inkatha’s own political agenda. Even the allegiance of Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini, who for many years appeared as a legitimising figure for Inkatha’s ethnic politics, quickly defected to the ANC after a victory for the latter seemed overwhelming, leaving little space for exclusively regional politics after 1994.

Culture has been a politically slippery discourse—but at the same time it is one that is powerfully felt precisely because it is considered so deeply authentic and personal. In the last 12 years, culture has been newly

3. Clan chiefs.
valourised by a wide range of players, from neo-traditionalist Afrikaners and Afrikaans-speakers to the ANC’s project of the African Renaissance, and Christian and Muslim parties. Moreover, the persistence of clashes between the state and traditionalists over matters such as circumcision rituals and virginity testing, as well as in conflicts over rural service delivery and land restitution, makes culture a prominent and competitive political field. The politics of race are never far from these relationships, given its ongoing (though diminishing) visible correlation with economic stratum. The meteoric rise of a small but growing black middle class has, in this racialized context, left many of the poor feeling left behind (Seekings and Nattrass 2006). And, as the poorest of the poor continue to suffer and to be treated to removals, police actions and criminalization that is astonishingly reminiscent of apartheid authoritarianism, the political landscape of social transformation has become very complicated indeed.

A Man of the People: The Trials of Jacob Zuma

Zuma is viewed by the rural poor, and by traditionalists, as their champion in the ANC. While comparisons have been drawn between Zuma and Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the Zulu Inkatha movement (now a political party), Zuma has not shown himself to be interested in splitting from the ANC to head up an ethnically based party. Yet he commands widespread popularity as a Zulu and as an African: he is viewed as a ‘traditionalist’ who cares about the fate of the rural poor in a way that many ANC leaders who have advanced themselves of the state’s neo-liberal economic policies do not. In this sense, Zuma’s perceived financial vulnerabilities—the borrowing of money from friends and his alleged involvement in corruption—have added to, rather than diminished, his appeal.

It would be impossible to pin down to one element the nature of the populist fervour surrounding Zuma. On the ‘Friends of Jacob Zuma’ website, even a cursory reading of the thousands of letters of support show that his base is broad and varied. He is called a ‘man of the people’, a ‘traditionalist’, a ‘man of God’ and an ‘advocate of the poor’; addressed as ‘Baba’, ‘Msholozi’ and ‘My president’; described as ‘humble’, ‘kind’, ‘good’, ‘purely human’ and a ‘born leader’. He is petitioned as a representative and rescuer by writers who feel their interests to have been forsaken, proclaimed as a leader who stands against ‘BEE [Black Economic Empowerment] beneficiaries’. Some Zulu writers see him as a Zulu among a mainly Xhosa political elite and express confidence that a Zuma presidency would mean service delivery for marginalised areas. Others, who decry tribalism find him an appealing universalism. The debates about gender, ethnicity, national politics, and morality which are argued in the space of the Friends of Jacob Zuma website, while obviously not a representative sample of voices, yet evidence a wide range of perspectives, concerns, interests and identities mobilised around the figure of Zuma.

Zuma can be seen as a career politician with an uncommon personal history. While many prominent political figures, Mandela and Buthelezi among them, could claim privileged or royal backgrounds as well as high educational achievements, Zuma derives much of his current legitimacy from his humble origins and lack of education, and his life as a military cadre. He was born in 1942 in the Nkandla district of Zululand, part of what was then Natal, nearly three decades before the KwaZulu Bantustan was created under apartheid. He grew up with the privations relating to education that still affect many rural children. His situation was aggravated when his father died at the end of WWII, and he ‘was never able to attend school’ (Gastrow 1990: 367). His mother became a domestic worker in the city of Durban, and the young Zuma ‘spent his early years moving between Zululand and the suburbs of Durban’. Gastrow notes that by the time he was 15 he started taking odd jobs. It was in the urban environment that he was exposed to a new set of influences, especially through his elder brother, a trade unionist, and in 1959 he joined the ANC. Two years after the banning of the organization in 1960, Jacob Zuma joined its military wing. Some work at sabotage followed, but in 1963, with a group of some 45 recruits, he was arrested near Zeerust, in what was then the Western Transvaal. Zuma was found guilty of attempting to overthrow the state and sentenced to ten years on Robben Island—where he studied formally for the first time (Callinicos 2004:305).

Upon his release he participated in forming underground structures for the ANC with Natal SACP firebrand Harry Gwala (Callinicos 2004:372, 402, Sisulu 2002:244-5). When Gwala was again arrested in 1975 Zuma left the country where he soon became a National Executive Committee member of the movement (1978), re-elected to the executive at the Kabwe Con...
ference (1985), and later became ANC ‘chief of intelligence’. He also served on the ‘military council’ from the mid-1980s. After leaving South Africa he worked alongside Thabo Mbeki with the ‘young exiles’ making their way through Swaziland and Mozambique. Zuma returned to South Africa immediately after the unbanning of the organization and was the ANC’s representative in one of the first committees to oversee the return of exiles, release of political prisoners, and other such steps preparatory to the actual negotiation process (Gastrow 1990: 367-8).

What is striking in this brief biographical sketch is the presence of two central influences and the absence of two others. The former are, first, his rural upbringing that continued even with, or because of, his mother’s peripheral and subordinate location in the urban environment; and, second, the political and military influence of the politics of the ANC, an organization which he joined at age 17, and whose military wing he entered three years later. He spent ten years of his young life under the harsh conditions of political imprisonment, but also under the formative influence of ‘movement politics’ with political comrades, a masculinist environment; and the rest of his adult life in the direct service of the ANC, both internally and in exile. The absences are a stable family life and home in the rural area where he was born; and of the socializing influence of school, and even tertiary education that was experienced by most of his ANC senior colleagues. In some ways, since returning to South Africa Zuma has tried to recapture both the camaraderie of the military, through his new allies and through his signature song ‘awuleth’ mashini wami’ and to confirm that rural upbringing, also establishing an own homestead. His homestead site, located at Nkandla, was made possible by benefactors who stood to gain from a Zuma presidency. Zuma has also married several wives. These absences are a stable family life and home in the rural area where he was born; and of the socializing influence of school, and even tertiary education that was experienced by most of his ANC senior colleagues. In some ways, since returning to South Africa Zuma has tried to recapture both the camaraderie of the military, through his new allies and through his signature song ‘awuleth’ mashini wami’ and to confirm that rural upbringing, also establishing an own homestead. His homestead site, located at Nkandla, was made possible by benefactors who stood to gain from a Zuma presidency. Zuma has also married several wives. These absences are a stable family life and home in the rural area where he was born; and of the socializing influence of school, and even tertiary education that was experienced by most of his ANC senior colleagues. In some ways, since returning to South Africa Zuma has tried to recapture both the camaraderie of the military, through his new allies and through his signature song ‘awuleth’ mashini wami’ and to confirm that rural upbringing, also establishing an own homestead. His homestead site, located at Nkandla, was made possible by benefactors who stood to gain from a Zuma presidency. Zuma has also married several wives.

When Thabo Mbeki took presidential office and a deputy president was to be chosen, the speculation was that it would need to be ‘a Zulu’. The ANC clash with Inkatha was still raw and still wielded significant sway in the east coast region of the country. Buthelezi’s name was mentioned, yet when Zuma was put forth he appeared the obvious candidate, a Zulu man who was also an ANC man. Zuma’s troubles as a politician has been interpreted by many of his supporters as the persecution of a Zulu African of humble heritage and traditional values, the persecution of a man of little education whose home is rural. Indeed, arguably the most important basis for his popular appeal is the aura of persecution surrounding him, which enables many to view him as a kindred sufferer at the hands of an unfeeling government. The more crimes he is accused of, the more fiercely he appears to be defended. The conspiratorial logic with which his supporters virulently defend him displays the depth of the social mistrust and crisis experienced by a sizable section of the nation.

In the context of the rape trial, this mistrust and conspiracy was channelled very specifically through the lens of gender. The scapegoat became the person of the accuser and—beyond her—the more general figure of young womanhood. Declarations of Zuma’s innocence were linked to the guilt of women: Zuma’s accuser came to stand for a general treason to patriarchal morality, affected by the undisciplined sexuality of young women. The complainant was herself accused of bringing down the reputation of a great man (who was most importantly a man of the people) in accordance with the designs of his enemies. In the discussions that surrounded the trial, a prominent theme was that the interests, as well as the defining features, of community were under threat due to a generalized loss of morality. This loss was linked to the undisciplined sexuality of young women.

**Womanhood on Trial**

Articulating his explanation of why sexual intercourse had proceeded without a condom, despite the risk of HIV transmission, Zuma told the court that the complainant was in a state of sexual arousal. He asserted that this placed him under an obligation:

> And I said to myself, I know as we grew up in the Zulu culture you don’t leave a woman in that situation because if you do then she will even have you arrested and say that you are a rapist.

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4. The song says ‘Bring me my machine gun’. Local political cartoonist ‘Zapiro’ made much of the ‘gun’ metaphor during the rape trial. Here we use the title as referenced by Jeremy Gordin, 2008. p. 234.
According to his own account, Jacob Zuma’s sexual actions are not to be interpreted as either aggressive or irresponsible but rather as those prescribed by the wisdom of culture, familiar to him since his youth. He was acting, he claimed, as a Zulu man. And what it meant to act as a Zulu man in such a context was to act with an awareness that he was confronting a potential danger. This danger, according to his interpretation of Zulu wisdom, was none other than the nature of women.

Through this single remark, Jacob Zuma proposed a strange reversal. Zuma the accused became Zuma the vulnerable; the alleged victim was invoked as example of the hypersexual womanhood he had been warned about as a child, a womanhood which required fulfilment and which could draw upon the powers of retaliation, using the legal system vindictively. Indeed, the insinuation was that this was precisely what had happened—he was in court because he had been victimized by the sexual irrationality of a woman. Further, his explanation removed the locus of actions from the specific circumstances of the night in question to a generalised ‘situation’, one which depersonalised the encounter. It removed the locus of responsibility from an individual male body to a collective male body, a collective body that prescribed specific forms of etiquette and behaviour.

The sleight of hand affecting these shifts was the ideological work of a politics of culture. Zuma’s claim to culture was a bid for the legitimation of his actions. Culture, in fact, was the real agent on trial. As we have argued, what gives such a claim its power is a national context in which culture is highly politicised. Invoking Zuluness in this case not only diffused his individual responsibility and his own will to action into a corporate field. It also placed his action in a domain historically persecuted by the various dominating forces of Eurocentrism; it was therefore a political claim. And it is a claim which has widespread resonance. One supporter who saw cultural prejudice as the reason Jacob Zuma was in court, wrote on the ‘Friends of JZ’ website:

We are tired of being referred to as lesser Citizens only because our culture allows a man to marry more than one wife. It is also disgusting to see that most of this media and complains about Women and child abuse are sensationalise as if is a culture thing.

How long should our culture be demonised to our silence? How long should we allow ourselves to feel inferior about who we are? And most hurting is the fact that, all is a lie. This is done to crush our spirit, and that spirit is also evident enough within the man we support. It is the African in JZ that is maybe a problem…

Such a statement is filled with the pain of South Africa’s racist past, and it also highlights the way that cultural claims have come to be framed as a means of defying structures of power. Some of the issues arising in the course of his trial are described by Zuma himself as matters of cultural etiquette, matters pertaining to private domestic arrangements of patriarchal morality. He was in court, he implied, because of the cultural ignorance of the state prosecutor when it could have been settled in a customary manner of offering lobola:

I accept that learned counsel might not know Zulu custom and traditions ... and it happens in our custom, even if you don’t know a girl … she can be dropped off at home and here she is and you have to pay lobola for her ... you just have to do that.

Here ‘you’ refers to a generic Zulu male, one who is obligated to obey the demands of culture and its prescribed patriarchal morality. Zuma’s alleged offer to pay a lobola for the complainant is portrayed as evidencing that the entire matter would have been best settled as a private matter of ‘culture’, that is, apart from the jurisdiction of a Eurocentric civil court.

Zuma’s invocation of Zulu culture in this context has, of course, invited heated debate about what can be claimed as a cultural norm. These debates are about cultural representation, authenticity and historical accuracy. Such debates are important, not least because interpretations of customary practices are in some cases being re-coded into national law—for example over land and the position and powers of amaKhosi (Ntsebeza 2006). Yet, our concern here is not with...
the validity or non-validity of Zuma’s specific claims. Rather it is the political power and masculinist content of cultural claim-making, and its effects, that we wish to highlight. Women are situated in an ambiguous and painful position in the politics of culture. As culture is politicised as a legal and secular ‘right’, gender is depoliticised to become a normatively ‘private’ and ‘customary’ domain. Asserting the rights of women can come to be defined as cultural treason. Women who do so risk losing access to resources and important kinds of community, over which men preside. This is not merely a South African dilemma, but a dilemma which is concomitant to the social conditions of modernity itself. Practising one’s culture, like one’s religion, is a matter of rights and human dignity. And yet, as indeed the case around the world, this sets up a contest between cultural rights and gender equality.

In the context of this trial, Zuma’s statement about the sexual arousal of the complainant and the mistrust of women’s sexuality it expressed appears to have drawn broad agreement. Indeed, the criminalization of womanhood it denotes was frequently supported by Zuma’s supporters as an observation of human nature or as a religious principle, implying universality rather than cultural specificity.

It may be useful to include here a few examples of statements made by some supporters of Jacob Zuma, to demonstrate the high level of suspicion expressed about the complainant and to reveal the normative expectations which she is accused of violating. One woman interviewed by the news media during the trial said she believed Zuma not guilty of rape and that ‘Women in this country should change their attitudes; they should stop crying rape whenever their boyfriends disappoint them.’ Another woman declared: ‘This mama is speaking lies because she was in Zuma’s room with that [kanga] on and he could see everything. After that Zuma slept with this mama and then she put the case against him. She’s got too much money and she didn’t really work, where’s this money coming from? This woman is a isigebengu’, she is Zuma’s girlfriend, otherwise why would she sleep with him without a condom?’ The issue of money was raised often, with the implications of a contract of exchange between Zuma and the complainant. For example: ‘That woman went to Zuma to ask for money, you can’t do that with someone you don’t like.’ Other comments draw attention to the expectations considered normative in matters of sexual relations: ‘I don’t want any woman to be raped. But her story! Firstly, she was invited, then she agreed to lock the door.’ And yet another woman said, ‘It’s nice that they burnt that picture [of the alleged rape victim]. Somebody who doesn’t like Zuma has paid something to her. I want Zuma to be the next president. This rape trial is not right because somebody raped this girl before Zuma, so why does she not bring him to court before Zuma? Why does she want to destroy Zuma?’

Discussions appearing on the Friends of Jacob Zuma website reveal variations on this theme. Druza, a regular contributor, writes that:

...JZ is purely human and maybe that’s what we tend to like about him. It is purely human for a man to be sexually attracted to a women and normally, dressing is a way a women, in the context of sex, can woo men to the most human act, of sex. Normally Mini skirt and revealing clothing are used to distract the attention of men and in most cases, seduce them, to get what they want. Hence it will take feminist maybe another century to can convince the human folk otherwise, that the way you wear and your actions can lead to other, normal human being to think of you as a sex object, and prefers to engage you in that activity.

On the other hand, what gives Madisha the conviction to pronounce on the mistrust of women’s sexuality are religious texts:

The bible in proverbs 7 from verse 10 says: ‘And behold, there met him a woman, dressed as a harlot and sly and cunning of heart. She is turbulent and willful; her feet stay not in her house.

8. These responses were from a single Mail and Guardian article (by Niren Tolsi, Kwarele Sosibo, Tumi Makgetla and Monako Di belle, 24 March 2006) in which various views about the trial were solicited. They provide an example of a discourse that was also prevalent on the Friends of Jacob Zuma website.

9. Posted by Druza, 4/6/2007 12:52:10 PM. Accessed 10 June 2007. The quotations used in this article cannot begin to capture the vast and emotionally expressed ‘letters of support’, which themselves highlight the very interesting and complex discourses at play about gender, class, culture and a number of other issues.
(Verse 21) she persuades him, with the allurements of her lips she leads him (to overcome his conscience and his fears) and forces him along. Go and read the whole chapter I am just showing you how dressing can have an effect on a man. Mark the following from the verses: 1. DRESSED as a harlot; 2. Turbulent and willing; 3. Her feet stay not in her house. You know very well that JZ is not made of steel, [but is] flesh and blood like every man. This woman (K) knew that by getting Cmd to bed she could gain something because the weakest point in men is in bed. So the bible tells us about woman ‘DRESSED’ as a harlot, with inviting eyes. Its just that [K] was not the owner of the house she should have shown her the door because her intentions was evidenced by the way she dressed, not to mention her greedy for money. If the bible says Dressed as a harlot, I see no reason why JZ can’t complain about dressing.

Such discussions about the relations between women and men are centred on issues of behaviour and propriety, the significance of dress, gesture, private financial transactions, and sexual messaging which are meant to showcase the power of women over men. It is on this premise that charges of political conspiracy, and the suggestion that the Zuma’s accuser was in fact a plant by his enemies, are intended to make sense.

By attributing such views about women to a specific cultural tradition (Zulu culture) Zuma made a bid for the normativity of his own gendered behaviour. Through the highly politicised language of culture, and the assertion of his membership to a cultural group with distinctive patriarchal norms, he designated the relationships between men and women as a matter of customary concern rather than one of liberal, universal or humanistic rights. In effect, identified gender as a field of propriety and etiquette, in which the chaotic power of women is rationalized and domesticated through the moral codes of (patriarchal) culture.

The relegation of gender to the private sphere is a structural feature of the historical rise of the modern public sphere (Habermas 1991[1962]). In South Africa it manifested in its current form with colonial rule which polarised the ‘customary’ and the ‘statutory’ as distinct legal spaces and as domains of political authority, subordinated to the colonial (later apartheid) state. The invocation of tradition in the rape trial could not but be political. It constituted the courthouse as the space of a cultural face-off: the man from Nkandla who kept a rural homestead and lived traditionally as the husband of several wives, up against hegemonic, Eurocentric secular legal forces. Here was not one of the most powerful leaders of the most powerful nation-state on the continent; here was the Zulu man persecuted by enemies from all sides. Supporters, many of whom saw in Zuma a victim of conspiracy, could see in the trial of an individual a more general, collective—and cultural—persecution, confirming the loss of a once-stable moral order.

**Conclusion**

Many observers of the Jacob Zuma rape trial were struck by the visible presence of women outside the courthouse who, donned in t-shirts bearing Zuma’s face and the words ‘100% Zulu boy’, hurled abuse and threats (such as ‘burn the bitch’) at the complainant. Advocates of women’s equality, in particular, registered distress at the absence of gender solidarity and at what seemed a vulgar, not to say militant, display of ‘false consciousness’. With national statistics for sexual violence and rape at astronomical levels, how could such confidence be expressed in the innocence and benevolence of a powerful man while such outrage, blame and violence was directed at a woman compelled to keep her identity as secret?

We argue that mediating the politics of gender is a politics of culture. Culture offered to Zuma a legitimate forum in which to express the normativity of gender inequality and patriarchal morality within the forum of a court of law, a court supposedly premised on the defence of civic individual rights. By invoking culture, he suggested that the proper place in which gender power be negotiated was in the private, customary sphere, rather than in the public arena of civic rights. It is clearly a powerful plea: culture was also invoked by ANC chief whip Mbulelo Goniwe who was reported to have told the young woman who accused him of sexual harassment ‘I thought you were a real Xhosa girl.’ In Goniwe’s case Xhosa clan leaders offered a fine of a number of cattle to assuage Goniwe’s accuser in the traditional, rural, cultural sphere and, thereby, earn him forgiveness in the public sphere of...
democratic politics."

What the voices in support of Jacob Zuma express is confidence in a broad patriarchal morality. In this moral framework, young women and their sexuality bear the burden of a clearly profound social anxiety. This is expressed through insistence on virginity testing, in campaigns of moral regeneration, in accusations of teenagers purposefully becoming pregnant to get welfare grants, and in the widespread idea that girls commonly ‘cry rape’ to bring down the reputations of males. The sexuality of young women is seen to pose a threat not only to individual men (in which the case of Jacob Zuma may be one with unusually high stakes attached) but to a future of social and political justice and moral order that the leadership of men like Zuma appear to promise. The greatest social danger is projected onto what lies just beneath a short skirt, just under a kanga. But it is the politics of culture that depoliticises the kanga and renders it as an object rather of tradition’s desire.

References


Three of the first four South African presidents — Nelson Mandela, Kgalema Motlanthe, and now Jacob Zuma — were incarcerated on Robben Island for substantial periods of time. (Govan Mbeki, the father of the fourth and longest-serving president to date, Thabo Mbeki, served 23 years in the island prison.) Moreover, Zuma told Motlanthe about Robben Island long before the Motlanthe’s own imprisonment, in a sense preparing the younger man for what might — and did — await him.

The important experience of prison is usually noted in the biographies of the four men, above all Mandela. Indeed, the iconic Mandela is key to much of the legend of Robben Island; witness, for example, the focus on Mandela’s cell in the guided tours to the once prison, now museum. Although Mandela is essential to understanding the Island, the frequent narrowing of the Robben Island experience to Mandela obscures rather than highlights the broader impact of the Island on South African politics and history. This influence is perhaps most significant in the shaping of leadership and the African National Congress (ANC), including in the case of Jacob Zuma.

What makes Robben Island substantively and not only symbolically important is that the political prisoners used their incarceration to sustain and strengthen themselves, their organizations, and their cause(s). Particularly in the period Zuma and Mandela arrived on the Island, the early 1960s, conditions in the prison were harsh, soul destroying, and dangerous. Insufficient food, woefully inadequate medical care, the legacy of torture and dislocation in the months that preceded most inmates’ arrivals on Robben Island, hard labor, callous and often brutal guards, and criminal thugs (later removed) were key features of the prison. The men — variously members of the ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), or other smaller groupings - successfully resisted and reconfigured much of this hostile environment by challenging the perilous conditions, resurrecting their organizations underground in prison, and enhancing their individual as well as group skills, education, and understanding.

Jacob Zuma is very much a ‘poster child’ for the use of the Island to broaden and deepen his education, knowledge, and understanding. Zuma came to Robben Island with basic literacy skills, largely self-taught, and a modest profile as an ANC leader, especially at the regional level. Although some biographies of Zuma paint him arriving in prison as illiterate and a political neophyte, this profile is not correct. Journalist Fred Khumalo reminds us that at the time of his trial, The Star newspaper called him a ‘prominent’ member of the ANC, and one of its ‘rising stars’. In a 1994 interview with me, Zuma corrected the common misimpression of his illiteracy, one that he had indeed fostered at least with his police interrogators who almost caught his lie when he began correcting their spelling of his name! Thanks to night schools he organized with others as well as from other sources, Zuma recalled that ‘by the time I was grown up I could read and write Zulu. It was absolutely no problem. I could speak the language English precisely because I had spent some time in Durban. I stayed with Indian kids at Greyville,’ and even played with white children there, with whom he and his playmates ‘tried to communicate’.

On Robben Island he furthered his academic educa-
Acquiring a formal education was difficult for Zuma, as for other prisoners. On reason was they were poor and had little access to funding. Another reason was that the apartheid prison authorities considered education a privilege which the regime allowed and denied at will, sometimes arbitrarily and sometimes to try to increase inmate compliance. Zuma was, however, able to acquire some formal correspondence education. He studied some ‘standard 6 as well as JC [Junior Certificate] ... subjects which I wrote and passed’.

Zuma regarded the informal means of self-education as more important than this certification. With others, he organized and engaged in classes based on mutual education. ‘We also had sort of adult education among ourselves. Those who were educated were educating those who were not educated’. His reputation grew; although from the single cells and another political organization, Neville Alexander had heard that Zuma ‘played a big role in the educational side of things’. Above all though, Zuma read ‘widely’. He loved reading anthropology and ‘studied a lot of Shakespeare ... I used to love Macbeth in particular’. Indeed, he recalled always keeping the complete works of Shakespeare with him in prison and exile; only upon his return to South Africa did he not have such a volume. In contrast to the image of the illiterate herd boy and traditional tribalist so common today, Zuma offered a very different self-image. In prison, he recalled, ‘I spent time reading and reading, in other words, further educated myself to a level where I had no problem. I don’t regard myself as an uneducated person. I think I began to have a wider understanding educationally speaking, and values as it were, to a degree that I didn’t think I had anything short in education’. While he did lacked formal qualifications and certifications, his reading and exposure meant that he considers himself ‘a modern person, or a person of today’.

Political and academic education, in addition to the revival and honing of (usually clandestine) organizational skills, was critical to the role of Robben Island in producing as well as refining leaders. Zuma offered himself as emblematic of how and why people sent to Robben Island often returned as more skilled, as well as credentialed, in the arts of political struggle. The crux of Zuma’s emphasis on education on Robben Island was political education. That education was partly in the ANC’s and South African Communist Party’s history and ideological understanding — an education of syllabi, lectures, and readings, partly experiential and focused on training, doing, and living as a political activist. Zuma reviewed his political education noting that soon after he arrived in prison, about five people from his pre-prison ‘labor theory discussion’ group resurrected the classes on Robben Island. There were additional ‘political lectures for everybody during lunch time, which was one hour; we used that to ... analyze news items’. It was in this context that Stephen Dlamini and Harry Gwala, ‘our political instructors [from] outside,’ were especially important. The ‘nucleus of the culture in Robben Island [was] the culture of political education’. Attendance at the classes grew to inmates from other parts of the country, and the initiatives became increasingly structured and organized; ‘we were actually looking at grading people in terms of their understanding’.

More broadly, political education was a key part of reconstituting the ANC on Robben Island, albeit illegally and clandestinely. ‘We had a political committee that was in charge of preparing political discussions with representatives of all the cells coming to take the political discussions to the cells over the weekend. More than above that, we actually had these groups which were study groups, specifically to develop cadres, politically speaking’. For Zuma, developments such as these ‘turned Robben Island into a political school in the true sense of the word’. There was a ‘culture of learning, the culture that we are here as politicians, we needed to understand more. We discussed the world, the country, the organizations more than anybody else. We had the time to do so’.

Zuma offered incisive analyses of how the political education system in prison fed into and was part of the ANC’s ‘serious underground structure’ in what might
be called the movement’s Robben Island branch. Under a secret executive in the general sections, necessary to protect against exposure or infiltration, was a complex organizational structure ‘with different levels of authority and function’ from small cell structures to sections, section committees, and section leaders. This secret structure ‘communicated with’ the ANC outside prison, ‘took ... disciplinary decisions,’ required reports and debriefing from incoming inmates, and facilitated the communication of messages: ‘We ran one of the most effective, and efficient underground structures.’

Political and academic education, in addition to the revival and honing of (usually clandestine) organizational skills, was critical to the role of Robben Island in producing as well as refining leaders. Zuma offered himself as emblematic of how and why people sent to Robben Island often returned as more skilled, as well as credentialed, in the arts of political struggle. Identifying himself as ‘an ordinary young cadre’ upon arriving at the Island, he described his political ascent through the organizational hierarchy, and the growing skills training and trust required at each step. In prison, he was initially put to ‘work in the smallest unit of the ANC, as a member of the group, and I was changed from one group to the other. Then at some point [I] became one of the cadres identified to collect news for the cell ... . [Later] I was appointed a group leader, which was different than me serving as a group member. Once you are a group leader you actually attend cell leadership meetings of all the groups. In other words you are now at the cell leadership collective grouping. At another point I was a PRO, the public relations person, in the cell,’ one of the few semi-public positions in the otherwise clandestine structures. ‘At times we’d be asked to prepare a lecture to give to comrades.... By the time I left Robben Island I was the chairman of the political committee that was responsible in disseminating political lectures throughout the prison’. For Zuma, his biography summarized the role of prison as ‘a clear example of how that leadership grew’.

Importantly, in many senses, Jacob Zuma’s Robben Island prison experience was more typical, and more emblematic of the overall Robben Island experience, than Nelson Mandela’s—all, of course, a result of the apartheid state, not the prisoners. Given their shared ANC membership and their different ages and sentences, probably the most important difference in their Island terms was where in the prison they spent most of their time. Mandela was in the single cells, imprisoned apart from the majority of inmates in what were called the general sections. The other men in the single cells were disproportionately educated and much more likely to be leaders in the eyes of both the regime and their organizations. Mandela’s fellow single-cell neighbors, for example, included fellow ANC members Govan Mbeki and, until their sentences ended in the 1960s and 1970s, Mac Maharaj as well as the PAC’s Zeph (Zephania) Mothopeng and Neville Alexander from the National Liberation Front.

In contrast to the small, individual cells of the leadership section, the majority of Islanders were in the general sections with barracks or dormitory style housing. While in prison, most of the men in the general sections never met Mandela, Mbeki, Sisulu, and other known leaders in prison, because they were incarcerated separately. There were people in the general sections who regarded as leaders by their peers, probably without the state realizing their status. In addition to the limited contact between and among the sections of the prison, people’s sentences did not always coincide or overlap; recall that Zuma met Motlanthe in Umkhonto we Sizwe training camps, after Zuma’s incarceration and before Motlanthe’s. But as Zuma’s preparation of the younger man attested to, movements in and out of the prison as sentences began and ended also facilitated shared knowledge and communication. Furthermore, within the prison there was a complex smuggling network that enabled intra-ANC communication and ANC political education, including between the single cells and the rest of the prison. (Other organizations had more or less similar structures.)

The political training and networks with which Zuma left prison helped and shaped his secret political work after release, before being forced into exile. He further credits the self-critique he and others engaged in on Robben Island, better understanding the apartheid state, as allowing him to avoid capture and instead escape out of the country. Those same insights and networks advanced his underground work. The late Harry Gwala attributed re-establishing the ANC in Natal to Zuma; Gwala recalled that ‘When I came out we kept touch with those who came out with me ... . It was not until Jacob Zuma came out’ that the ANC’s underground structure was reestablished, especially in Pietermaritzburg.
Zuma identified both Robben Island and exile as important to his political development. His self-identified gains from his time in prison include deep political understanding, education, and broad political understanding. But he also emphasized that ‘When you came out of Robben Island in the majority of cases you are not an emotional and sloganeering politician. You are a politician that looked at things with a strategic mind’. This emphasis on acting on strategy and substance rather than passions is why he argued Robben Island ‘produced people of a special quality in terms of leadership’. He identified the Island ‘progeny’ as including thinkers, lawyers, ‘real intellectuals,’ the ‘best negotiators,’ and the most ‘tolerant people in the political arena’.

While many of these characteristics might be dismissed as self-serving or familiar platitudes, they offer us insight into what Zuma values, at least in part. Furthermore, these perspectives were offered less than two months into South Africa’s newborn democracy, when Zuma was in a very different place, a regional leader in a province still reeling from years of political violence and controlled by the opposition Inkatha Freedom Party. Indeed, the very context of that June 1994 interview was revealing. Zuma had recently been elected to the KwaZulu-Natal provincial legislature when I arrived for our 2pm meeting to his nondescript and slightly shabby downtown Durban office. If there was a record of the appointment, it was irrelevant to the many people who also waited to see Zuma. While I was not privy to his conversations with people, my impression was that the visitors had come to ask for his help. My sense was not that he was a cacique delivering patronage but a chief delivering intercession and advice.

When I eventually got to see him it was about 8pm; we were the last two people in the office. Someone had brought him an ordinary dinner on a paper plate. I certainly did not imagine that fifteen years later this man would be president and, I suspect, neither did he. But I did learn of his more admirable qualities and astounding history that long day; there was no hint that alleged corruption, rape trials, and an electoral campaign invoking machine guns would be part of his future either. Perhaps South Africans need to hope to be governed by this Zuma, the Robben Islander who earned many of his achievements and status in a prison he rightly called ‘a hell of a place’. ‘A lot of political prisoners who went to Robben Island,’ he noted, ‘today are equal to the tasks of the nation’. That is the hope — and the question.
The first part of the title of this book is a play on a statement made by Zwelinzima Vavi, Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) general secretary, in 2005. At the time Vavi had said that any attempt to stop Zuma, then the ANC’s deputy president as he was preparing a challenge to Thabo Mbeki’s leadership, would be like ‘... trying to fight against the big wave of a tsunami’.

The editors of this volume suggest that the most recent general election in South Africa, April 2009, was mainly a referendum on Jacob Zuma. Though a number of other developments were also interesting — a decline in national support for the ANC with the exception of KwaZulu-Natal (it lost 5-10% of its vote share in eight of the nine provinces), the emergence of the new opposition party, the Congress of the People (COPE), among others— events around Zuma since 2005 dominated these elections.

The result is now well known. The ANC won by a large majority, just short of two-thirds, while COPE — a party of former ANC leaders closely associated with Zuma’s predecessor, Thabo Mbeki, established late 2008 — mustered 7 odd percent of the national vote. ‘... There was no serious suggestion during the 2009 election campaign that South Africa would have to confront the ‘turnover’ test — the willingness of an incumbent government in a new democracy to hand over power if defeated at the polls — which theorists consider the ultimate test of democratic consolidation’ (p.6).

University of the Witswatersrand political scientist Anthony Butler points out that the ANC hardly stretched itself. ‘Its manifestoes were moderate, uncontroversial, and anti-populist in economic policy’ (p.66).

The largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), which has participated in postapartheid elections since 1994 in various disguises, only increased its vote — still largely limited to the majority of whites and some coloureds — by single digits. (In the chapter on the DA, University of Cape Town academic Zwelethu Jolobe, concludes otherwise: he claims that the DA has achieved ‘considerable success’ [p.146] since 1994.)

However, the election pointed to a number of exciting developments. The 7% earned by COPE is remarkable given that it was only formed in 2008. Compare that to the DA, which has not reached even 20% despite participating in elections since 1994. Though the editors agree that the emergence of COPE does not signal the ANC’s monopoly over voters, it still represents a significant development, especially as it emerged from within ANC ranks. In her chapter on COPE, political scientist Susan Booysen — who dismisses the smear that COPE is a mere extension of Thabo Mbeki loyalists — argues that COPE’s impact on South African politics was twofold: ‘It rendered the ANC more vibrant than it would have been without it, and it helped breathe life into opposition politics’ (86).

The book also contains two chapters dealing with the smaller opposition parties — the ethnic Inkatha Freedom Party, the United Democratic Movement, Independent Democrats, Freedom Front Plus (a white sectarian party whose leader was co-opted into Zuma’s new Cabinet). The prognosis on these parties is not as positive as with COPE. Instead, this may have been the last electoral showing by some of these parties.

Another exciting development was the participation of young people. A first time 18-year-old voter in 2009 was not even born when Nelson Mandela was freed from prison. ‘A full third of the potential electorate had become eligible to vote’ (p.9). They were four when some of their parents voted for the first time in 1994. The only government they know is the ANC. They feel
less of a recidivist attachment to the ANC or the party’s role in defeating Apartheid. Though most of them still voted ANC, increasingly they’ll judge the ANC on performance and for them the ANC is associated with deepening inequality, homelessness, lack of healthcare, and poor education, little accountability by public representatives and increased public corruption. Since 2004 there has been an increased in protest actions by poor black people. Zuma has some sympathy with these voters. However, it is unclear how that support will last the further we move away from the end of Apartheid.

In what may be good news for opposition parties, Collette Schulz-Herzenberg, a pollster at the University of Cape Town, argues that, contrary to popular wisdom, South African voters have become ‘less predictable’ and ‘significant potential exists for electoral fluidity’ (p.24). However, Schulz-Herzenberg points out that South African voters still learn much about politics ‘racial cues’ (p.44). In what reads like veiled criticism of the DA and its leader, Helen Zille, Schulz-Herzenberg writes ‘... to contest future elections seriously, [opposition parties] need to be more attentive and responsive to subtle shifts in political identity’ (p.44). Schulz-Herzenberg’s findings also suggest that voters increasingly factor in government performance evaluations.

Three chapters deal with topics that are not specifically focused on the political parties. Jane Duncan studies the media while Idasa researcher Judith February evaluates the electoral system and electoral machinery. February concludes that the election was ‘well run and well managed’. She has nothing but praise for the electoral commission. However, she points out that South Africa’s electoral system requires reform. While the party-list driven proportional representation-system that South Africa uses since 1994 ‘supports democratic values of fairness and inclusivity,’ crucially it lacks accountability, with representatives reverting to party bosses.

Finally, Shireen Hassim, who is probably the country’s foremost scholar on the relation between politics and gender, writes that gender was a ‘major fault-line’ in the 2009 election, but not in the way feminists preferred. Hassim points out any casual (feminist) observer of the 2009 elections ‘might conclude that she had finally arrived in heaven’. ‘Two of the top four contending parties are led by women, half the number of candidates on at least two parties’ lists are women, and the country has one of the most advanced legal, constitutional and institutional frameworks for ensuring gender equality in the world’ (p.195).

However, politically active women were smeared as monstrous (Helen Zille became ‘Godzille’), as witches (supporters of COPE) or as benign mamas (the leaders of the ANC’s Women’s League).