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This article explores the electoral performance of the African National Congress (ANC) to argue that there is evidence of a two-fold movement. On the one hand the ANC is weakening as a national organization, and on the other the ANC is strengthening as a regional party based in KwaZulu-Natal. This article explores the significance of these developments for democracy in South Africa today and, more importantly, for the integrity of the South African nation. The article argues that the ANC has historically been the main mover of an inclusive ('cosmopolitan') vision of South Africa. As it weakens and metamorphoses, what will happen to its commitment to this brand of African nationalism? Furthermore, are the conditions of a South African nation sufficiently in place that the future of the country as a national community is secure, even as the ANC's commitment to such a vision weakens?

Introduction

In May 2014 the African National Congress (ANC) scored its worst electoral result in 20 years. It achieved 62.15 per cent of the poll, down from 65.9 per cent in 2009 and a hair's breadth short of 70 per cent in 2004. The victory, still massive by South African and international standards, has provoked a growing popular and scholarly debate about the future of the ANC itself.

For a long while the ANC's grasp on power has seemed unassailable, so much so that political analysis in South Africa settled on the notion of a 'dominant party system'.[1] Susan Booysen, for example, argues that the ANC manages and continues to regenerate its power despite difficulties with performance and governance.[2] The hold of this idea, though, is weakening, and there are scholars who now take seriously the prospect of the ANC losing power in the foreseeable future. Anthony Butler even advises party reformers: 'don't panic!'.[3] This article argues that the organisation is experiencing a generalised, uneven decline – offset in recent times by major growth in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.[4] It is different from other such analyses, however, in

1 H. Giliomee and C. Simkins, *The Awkward Embrace: One-party Domination and Democracy*, (London, Routledge, 1999).

2 S. Booysen, 'The ANC circa 2012–13: Colossus in Decline?', in J. Daniel, P. Naidoo, D. Pillay and R. Southall (eds), *New South African Review 3: The Second Phase – Tragedy or Farce?* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2013), pp. 39–60.

3 A. Butler, 'Introduction: Understanding Party Adaption', in A. Butler (ed.), *Remaking the ANC: Party Change in South Africa and the Global South* (Auckland Park, Jacana, 2014), p. 165; and see M. Plaut, 'South Africa – the ANC's Difficult Allies', *Review of African Political Economy*, 37, 124 (2010), pp. 201–12. At the time, Gillian Hart asked for caution with regard to the idea of a 'Zunami'; see G. Hart, 'Zunami! The South African Elections of 2009', *Review of African Political Economy*, 37, 124 (2010), pp. 247–8.

4 The ANC's party machinery has weakened substantially since the last election, with divisions opening up in the regional organisation. It remains to be seen how this will affect the ANC's electoral performance. As it happens, there is very little room for the ANC to grow further in the province, so stagnation or even decline is very likely.

that it suggests that the soft belly of the organisation's support base is not so much the 'middle classes' as those slipping in and out of employment, the so-called 'precariat'.

Much of the academic literature focuses on the import of these changes for South Africa's democracy. That is, the question uppermost in commentators' and academics' writing is the degree to which ANC politicians can come to terms with a defeat or setbacks – in other words, a more competitive electoral environment – within the framework of the constitution. I have dealt with this issue elsewhere and I will only comment on it briefly.

Instead, in this article I focus on something more basic. The weakening of the ANC raises a fundamental question about the integrity of South African society as a nation. For most of the 20th century, the ANC, together with its alliance partners, has variously given flesh to the idea of a South African people – in its membership and in its campaigns and through its various activities of resistance. Is the South African nation secure either when the ANC is no longer hegemonic or if it is no longer committed to its own brand of nationalism?

In the concluding sections, I will explore this last question, departing, however, from traditional analyses that measure the existence of the nation in terms of identity and identification. Put differently, it is not enough to show that the vision of a unitary society is today shared by most other social groups or political parties. Rather, this article will argue that societies have a material basis in the institutions that bring and hold people together. Has the ANC as a government already done enough to put in place the material conditions of the state, even as its influence wanes or changes?

African Nationalism

In 1987 Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido sketched the broad contours of a contemporary history of South Africa.[5] Their narrative represented the state of the art of 'radical historiography', drawing on, by that stage, a vital archive of histories 'from below' – the methodological and conceptual innovation of the social history movement. On their terms, the social and political topography of 20th century South Africa was made in the colossal struggle between two nationalisms, Afrikaner and African.

There was something asymmetrical about this struggle, however, not simply in that Afrikaner nationalism had state power at its disposal from 1948. The asymmetry related to their character as nationalisms. Afrikaner nationalism was a classical nationalism. It defined the political community on the basis of race, language and religion, linking full citizenship to whiteness and creating a hierarchy of political and economic belonging on the basis of these (fictive) ethnic markers.[6] It was also classical in that Afrikaner nationalism emerged in relation to imperialism (though not as the political expression of Boer resistance to British invasion). I cannot discuss the transition from Boer to Afrikaner here, other than to note that Afrikaner nationalism developed in opposition to the *artefact* of imperialism, the Union of South Africa. This 'anti-imperialist republicanism', as Saul Dubow calls it, was more prominent in the 1940s and 1950s than was apartheid thinking.[7]

This is what sets out the victory of the National Party (NP) in 1948 as a genuine rupture in South African history. Relative to other white political groups, the National Party was particular in its opposition to the very idea of South Africa. Dubow is correct, therefore, to point out that the NP's concept of segregation was more absolute than that of other white parties. In other words, the virulence of their racism is not what sets the nationalists apart. What does is that all other parties accepted the imperial legacy as the legitimate basis of the demos.

5 S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (London, Routledge, 2014).

6 I. Chipkin, *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of the 'People'*, (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2007).

7 Saul Dubow, *Apartheid, 1948–1994* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014).

The peculiarity of the ANC's nationalism stands out from this perspective. The ANC took as given that the people of South Africa referred to the residents of the Union of South Africa. The peoples thrown together in a common territory by colonial annexation and imperial war were regarded as a common people or, at least, potentially a common people. Today we might call such a vision cosmopolitan or multicultural. These terms fail, however, to capture the double significance of this historical reckoning. First, African nationalism in South Africa has been the principle force in favour of an expansive conception of the South African people. Secondly, this vision of South Africa has been anything but national. Instead it shared with other Third World movements,from Indonesia to Guatemala, a commitment to the idea of multiplicity and multinationalism.[8] In this sense, the epithet 'national', when applied to the main currents of ANC politics, especially after 1955, is an oddity of South Africa's political lexicon.

For most of the 20th century, the ANC has been the chief protagonist of this 'idea of South Africa': a single society in a unitary state. Its political successes derive largely from bringing to life this conception of the people in the street, in the village, in the factory and in community halls and at the ballot box. That the ANC is weakening electorally and socially is evidence that a profound historical mutation is in course. The idea of national democracy, with its transgressive vision of social boundaries (racial and class) is increasingly contested by new political and social formations, some with more regressive conceptions of the *body politic*. Furthermore, electoral trends suggest that the ANC's own commitment to African nationalism is itself weakening, as the heart of the organisation shifts to rural provinces and regions, especially KwaZulu-Natal, where its leverage and influence is believed to be dependent on chiefs and traditional authorities.

Electoral Changes

The results of South Africa's first democratic election in 1994 neatly summarise the story of the country in the 20th century. The ANC received 62.65 per cent of ballots cast. The NP scored 20.39 per cent of the vote. Collectively, almost 84 per cent of votes went to the principal representatives of African and Afrikaner nationalism. This was well above the 1.73 per cent received by the Democratic Party – the organisation that would soon eclipse the NP and become the second largest political party in parliament. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), representing at the time an aggressive form of Zulu nationalism, came third, with a solid 10.54 per cent of the vote. Collectively, parties or organisations claiming to represent particular peoples (Africans/ blacks, Afrikaners/Zulus) overwhelmed the first, inclusive South African parliament with more than 95 per cent of representatives. In contrast, parties that organised on expressly 'ideological' grounds – around, that is, a particular vision of how society should be organised (such as liberalism or Christianity) – received less than 2 per cent of support.

Fast forward to 2014 and the political landscape has changed dramatically. The New National Party (NNP) has disappeared, so that parties standing for the Afrikaner people or *volk* make up less than 1 per cent of all votes counted. Support for the ANC peaked in 2004, when the movement received more than 67 per cent of votes nationally, raising the question of whether or not the story of the last 20 years, especially in relation to the century before, is one of the triumph of African nationalism.

For 10 years between 1994 and 2004, the ANC's rise seemed unstoppable. Across all nine provinces and in most municipalities it outperformed what it scored in the historic election of 1994. Then, from 2009, its fortunes changed. The swing was strongest in the Western Cape, but was by no means limited to there. Even in provinces where the ANC had reached nearly 90 per cent of the vote in 2004 – Limpopo (89.2 per cent) and Mpumalanga (86.34 per cent) – opposition parties grew strongly. In the Free State the ANC's share of the vote dropped below

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8 V. Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York and London, New Press, 2007) p. 84.

70 per cent in 2014, from more than 82 per cent in 2004. In North West, the ANC also suffered a steep decline, tumbling from a high of 81.83 per cent in 2004 to 67.79 per cent in 2014.

The ANC's performance in Cape Town and the Western Cape broadly tracked its performance across the country. In 1994 the NP won the Western Cape, with 53.25 per cent of ballots cast. The ANC came second, with just over 33 per cent. After that the ANC's support grew steadily. It eclipsed the NNP – the name of the National Party after 1997 – in the 1999 election, and became the ruling party in the province thereafter. In 2004, the ANC's lead in the province strengthened further, to 45 per cent. In contrast, the Democratic Alliance (DA)obtained just 27 per cent of votes cast.

However, in 2009 the DA surged ahead, forming the provincial government for the first time, with 51 per cent of support, while ANC support dropped below 1994 levels, where it has stayed ever since. In contrast, the DA's vote rose to nearly 60 per cent in 2014. Similar dramatic falls in ANC support occurred across the big cities. In the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Area, ANC support fell steeply from a peak of almost 70 per cent between 1994 and 2004. In 2014 the organisation received less than 50 per cent of the votes. Similarly, in Tshwane, the country's capital, ANC support came down from more than 60 per cent in 2004 to roughly 50 per cent in 2014.

Elsewhere, although the patterns are complex, one thing is certain: the ANC's decline was not restricted to large urban areas, nor was it especially strong in the cities. Rather, the ANC suffered an *uneven but generalised setback*. By way of example, in Thabazimbi, in the heart of the Waterberg, the ANC's support fell almost 19 per cent, from 74.57 per cent to 55.7 per cent, between 2009 and 2014. There is no major city in the area, though there are iron-ore mines. We will shortly understand the significance of this fact. In neighbouring Greater Tubotse, ANC support fell almost 12 per cent in the same period. In the city of Polokwane, the decline was less steep, at 8.45 per cent, though it has increased to 18 per cent for the period from 2004 to the present. In other words, the urban decline in Limpopo is not more pronounced than the ANC's electoral fall in other areas. In the Eastern Cape, too, voters in many rural districts left the ANC in equal proportions to their urban counterparts. The near 20 per cent decline in the Nelson Mandela Metro and the 15.5 per cent fall in Buffalo City were matched by sharp falls in rural areas such as Ikwezi, Tsolwana, Inkwanca and Lukhanji.

These results tell a political tale at two levels. In the first place, they suggest that the Polokwane conference in 2007 constituted a watershed in the ANC's electoral fortunes. The electoral evidence, that is, flies in the face of much commentary, journalistic and academic, suggesting that Jacob Zuma rode a wave, a 'Zunami', as some in the media called it, of popular discontent with the politics and personality of Thabo Mbeki.[9] Indeed, the opposite is true. Thabo Mbeki rode successive waves of popular support, climaxing in the extraordinary gains of 2004. In contrast, ordinary ANC voters across the country, except in KwaZulu-Natal, were not impressed by the change in leadership.

There is a second sense in which the ANC's electoral performance is politically significant. It is evidence that the ANC is becoming a regional, ethnic party.

Precariousness and Changing Support Patterns

Bongani Ngqulunga starts his analysis of the ANC from the perspective that the organisation's electoral success is both remarkable and vulnerable. When mass resistance to apartheid resurfaced in the 1980s, leadership of the struggle was in the hands of Congress of South

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9 C. Ceruti, 2008, 'African National Congress Change in Leadership: What Really Won it for Zuma?', *Review of African Political Economy*, 35, 115 (2011), pp. 107–14. Ceruti endorses this idea that Zuma rose on a popular wave of discontent with Mbeki, though she tends to treat this as an internal ANC phenomenon rather than a mass social one.

African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the United Democratic Front (UDF). The ANC was not centrally involved in either of these movements.[10] Its surprising electoral success in the first inclusive, parliamentary election was built on a class alliance that it had developed during the anti-apartheid struggle but only really cemented during the build-up to the 1994 election itself. The coalition included members of the black middle class (which had arisen in Bantustans, and also through political reforms in the 1980s), organised workers and the unemployed. In the first 10 years of democracy, this alliance was consolidated through selective concessions to each group. The black upper and middle classes were accommodated by policies of affirmative action and black economic empowerment. To labour was conceded a fairly rigorous labour relations regime. Labour lost on broader macroeconomic policy, however. The resulting liberalisation of the economy, inconsistent with strict labour relations, contributed to job losses, especially in formerly protected smaller manufacturing firms. The resulting fall-out was offset and the unemployed incorporated into the post-1994 bargain with a robust growth in welfare provisions. It is among those who lost most, an increasingly informalised labouring class and the newly unemployed, that discontent with 20 years of ANC rule must be found.

Some sociologists have started describing such people as a precariat,[11] that is, a class of people in temporary or informal jobs slipping between employment and unemployment, who earn lower wages than those in regular employment.[12] In South Africa, millions of people have either been pushed out of formal, permanent jobs (as agricultural workers, miners, factory labourers, or in the service industries) into a twilight zone of 'piece-work' and short-term contracts. Eddie Webster *et al.* have called this South Africa's 'second economy'.[13] Although those living in a state of precariousness are not necessarily always members of an 'underclass',[14] precariousness in employment conditions – which has worsened since the 1970s – has accelerated considerably over the last 20 years.

Evidence from election results suggests that it is people in this situation who are leaving the ANC in substantial numbers. Consider, for example, voting patterns in NorthWest province. Between 2004 and 2014, ANC support fell by 13 per cent across the region. The decline was most severe in Rustenburg, where it dropped 23.36 per cent in the same period. This is the heartland of the platinum industry, where, since the introduction of the Labour Relations Act in 1995, more and more core mining activities have been subcontracted to workers hired through third-party labour brokers. This is what sociologists call 'externalisation' and is directly correlated with less secure employment and lower wages. In 2005 externalisation in the gold industry accounted for 14 per cent of the workforce. In the platinum sector it was 36 per cent. It was also very high in iron-ore mines and coal mines.[15] ANC support fell dramatically in the Waterberg, where Anglo-American's Kumba iron-ore mine is located. In Mpumalanga, the party suffered some of its worst setbacks in the coal-mining districts of the province. The emergence of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) in 1998, deteriorating

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10 B. Ngqulunga, The Shape of Things to Come: Prospects for Political Realignment in South Africa', unpublished paper, Pretoria, 10 February 2008. Bongani Ngqulunga is the Chief of Staff in the Office of the President of South Africa.

11 G. Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London, Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2011).

12 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

13 E. Webster, Asanda Benya, Xoliswa Dilata, Katherine Joynt, Kholofelo Ngoepe and Mariane Tsoeu, *Making Visible the Invisible: Confronting South Africa's Decent Work Deficit*, Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2008; available at http://www.lmip.org.za/sites/default/files/documentfiles//webster.pdf, retrieved 13 January 2016.

14 Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass, *Class, Race and Inequality in South Africa* (Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005); H. Bhorat, 'Unemployment in South Africa: Descriptors and Determinants', International Dispute Resolution Agencies, presentation to a conference, Mount Nelson Hotel, Cape Town, 22–25 October 2008.

15 Webster *et al.*, *Making Visible the Invisible*, p. 20.

labour relations in the area and, ultimately, the massacre of striking workers in Marikana must all be seen in this context of growing social and economic vulnerability.

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) have prospered as a party among this constituency.[16] For example, EFF support across the platinum belt was very high, peaking in Rustenburg, where the party won more than 20 per cent of the vote. In Thabazimbi in Limpopo, the site of Kumba, the EFF also did well. At voting stations near hostels the new party won more than 40 per cent support – achieving a respectable 14 per cent of the vote as a whole. In neighbouring Lephalale too, where the Medupi power station is being built, the EFF did well, especially at voting stations frequented by contract workers. In the contractor's village, for example, the party won almost a quarter of the votes cast. Given that many migrant workers were probably registered to vote elsewhere, EFF support is probably underestimated by these election results.

For those who remain loyal to the ANC during election times, there are different reasons for their support for the liberation movement. According to Booysen, ANC supporters move between 'two worlds'.[17] The first world is that of elections, whereby ANC supporters and strongholds put aside their differences during election times.[18] This is mainly because, 'elections overwhelmingly remain the time of closing of the ranks against a party political enemy of choice'.[19] However, in between election times – what Booysen calls 'other times',[20] – discontented party members demonstrate their grievances about government performance. Booysen's overall conclusion, in assessing the strength and ability of the ANC to regenerate itself, is that ultimately the ANC maintains a delicate balance between these two worlds, which 'affirms' the loyalty to their movement despite its fallibility.[21]

A Regional Party

Election results since 2009 do not simply tell a story of ANC decline or of an ANC balancing between worlds. They suggest, rather, that the ANC is itself undergoing a profound mutation. It is becoming a more regional party, with a strong ethnic Zulu base. In electoral terms, KwaZulu-Natal has been the only region to buck the national trend. Between 1994 and 2004, the ANC's support in the province mirrored its record across the country. Support grew from about one-third of votes in 1994 (though it probably did much better than that) to just shy of 50 per cent in 2004, when it beat Inkatha and formed the provincial government. Whereas ANC support began to fall everywhere else after that, it continued to climb in KwaZulu-Natal. In 2009, the ANC won the provincial election with 63.97 per cent of the vote, and in 2014 it received almost a two-thirds majority (65.31 per cent) in the provincial legislature. The 16 per cent growth between 2004 and 2009 came from voters in the former homeland of KwaZulu. Inkatha's core support was located in the northern districts of KwaZulu, organised around a spine of especially staunch support from Nongoma, Ulundi, Nkandla and Msinga. By 2009, all that remained of IFP support was this spine; by 2014, most of this had gone too. Nongoma fell to the National Freedom Party, an offshoot of the IFP itself. Only Ulundi and Msinga remained loyal to the IFP, though with drastically reduced majorities. The rest had turned green, the colour of the ANC.

The extent of this anomaly is emphasised by a consideration of what might have happened had KwaZulu-Natal followed the national pattern of ANC support. If we assume, for purposes

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16　This suggests that there is, potentially, a strong electoral base for a new labour party in South Africa, especially for one that is interested in reducing precariousness in social and economic life. It is also possible that such a message might be well received across sections of the middle classes who are moving into regulated townhouse estates as a way of dealing with vulnerability and unpredictability in everyday life (including crime, corruption, intermittent and unpredictable services). It remains to be seen if this is the ground for a new left-of-centre class alliance.

17　Booysen, 'The ANC circa 2012–13', p. 54.

18　*Ibid.*

19　*Ibid.*

20　*Ibid.*

21　*Ibid.*, p. 55.

of analysis, that KwaZulu-Natal had indeed followed the national pattern – growth from 1994 to 2004, then decline back to or below 1994 figures – we get a better sense of the how dramatic the ANC's fall has been elsewhere. On national trends, the ANC would have won between 30 per cent and 40 per cent of the vote in the province (rather than nearly 66 per cent) in 2014. If we work on an average of, say, 35 per cent, the ANC would have won around 1,360,000 votes, instead of the 2,530,687 it got in KwaZulu-Natal, bringing its national vote down to 10,266,000 (instead of 11,436,921); that is, to less than 56 per cent of votes cast.

Further evidence of the ethnic drift in the ANC's support base comes from an exit survey of voters in the 2014 election. The Social Change Research Unit at the University of Johannesburg conducted interviews at voting sites in Johannesburg and in North West province. The findings, observes Marcel Paret, reveal a clear profile of ANC voters in these areas: they comprise isiZulu speakers, either very young or older voting-age citizens, full-time employees, recipients of social grants and people who did not participate in protests or strikes.[22]

The ANC's growing dependence on KwaZulu voters may go some way to explain why there was a rush in 2004 to push through the Communal Land Rights Act. The law transfers ownership of land in former Bantustan areas from the state to 'traditional communities'. Working in tandem with the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003, it effectively re-establishes Bantu authorities, and brings 16,500,000 people under the jurisdiction of traditional leaders.[23] 'In other words', says Lungisile Ntsebeza, 'after ten years of prevarication, the ANC-led government has given powers to traditional authorities on basically the same lines as its predecessor, the Apartheid state'.[24] Both Claassens and Ntsebeza suggest that the law was introduced to placate chiefs and the Zulu king in the context of serious rivalry between the ANC and IFP in the build-up to the 2004 election. The strategy seems to have worked in KwaZulu, where, as we have seen, the ANC has progressively displaced the IFP in its traditional strongholds. However, as the ANC appeals increasingly to a regional and rural base, so it becomes less attractive in other parts of the country. More than party politics is at stake, however; the future of African nationalism is in the balance.

The Decline of African Nationalism

In 2007, the book *Do South Africans Exist* anticipated the terms of the current debate about the future of democracy. It argued that a South African people existed to the extent that the ANC brought it to life, symbolically in its statements and documents and materially in its membership and in the street. I have written at length about the difficulties of defining what made South Africans, a South African *people*, noting, in this regard, two tendencies, the one nationalist and the other what I termed democratic.[25] Apart from this question of identity, a more brutal political logic was at work as well. If 'the people' existed primarily in and through the ANC – one of the answers to the question in the title of the book – 'the people' were in power to the extent that the ANC was. On these terms, the weakening of the organisation electorally, or even its defeat, could mean only that 'the people' were not fully sovereign or not sovereign at all. On these terms, growing electoral competition was not so much the sign of a robust, democratic scene as evidence of a coming national calamity. My argument was that, under these circumstances, the ANC would be tempted to shore up its political dominance by repressive and authoritarian means.

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22 M. Paret, *The Politics of Contested ANC Hegemony: Evidence from the 2014 South African Election* (University of Utah and University of Johannesburg, Research Unit in Social Change, 2015), forthcoming in *African Affairs*.
23 L. Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of Land in South Africa* (Pretoria, HSRC Press, 2005), p. 238; A. Claassens, 'Power, Accountability and Apartheid Borders: The Impact of Recent Laws on Struggles over Land Rights', in Ben Fine and Aninka Claassens (eds) *Law, Power and Custom: Controversies Generated by South Africa's Communal Land* (Cape Town, UCT Press, 2008), p. 264.
24 Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised*, pp. 238–9.
25 Chipkin, *Do South Africans Exist?*

In 2007, such a process was almost impossible to imagine. Indeed, over the last 20 years, political scientists have been preoccupied with the ANC's seeming invulnerability, captured in terms like 'dominant party system'.[26] As recently as 2013, Adam Habib's *Suspended Revolution* considers the possibility of a meaningful opposition to the ANC and then dismisses the prospect as unlikely.[27] This sense of 'ruling until Jesus returns' has certainly been a mantra of the ANC leadership itself. None the less, the time of competitive elections has now arrived. It is hardly surprising that it is being greeted with nervousness. Some worry about the dangers of ethnic and racial conflict or tension that intensifying competition could breed.[28] Calland even raises the prospect of bloody years ahead as the ANC forsakes constitutional democracy in favour of authoritarian populism.[29] The violent eviction of EFF MPs from parliament at the president's State of the Nation address, and the constitutional principle that seems to have been violated in using policeman to do so, have been widely reported in the press as evidence that this time is already upon us. Ferial Haffajee, editor of the *City Press*, for example, discussed the evening's events as evidence of a 'rising police and security state'.[30] Anthony Butler, more circumspectly, suggested that dominant parties, including the ANC, are able to adapt to defeat and that South Africa's fall from democracy was not inevitable.[31]

There are costs, however, in discussing the decline of the ANC mostly in terms of its consequences for constitutional democracy. The narrowness of such an analysis obscures two more basic questions. First, given the metamorphosis in the ANC's own politics, is it still committed to non-racialism? Second, if the ANC has been the principle force for a unitary conception of the South African people, what does the organisation's weakening mean for the integrity of the people itself?

The argument made so far is that 'non-racialism' refers to an acknowledgement of the 'cosmopolitan'[32] character of South African society, rather than simply to a vision or hope of racial harmony. In 1994, this historic commitment translated into huge majorities for the ANC in almost all regions, among urban workers, rural folk and migrants, rural women, Africans, Indians and coloureds. It even scored modest success among some white South Africans. Since 2009, this has begun to change, as the heartland of the ANC shifts to KwaZulu-Natal, and the former KwaZulu in particular. We have also seen that evidence from a sample of exit surveys in Gauteng and North West suggests that ANC voters are more likely to be isiZulu speakers than anyone else, at least in those areas. Thus the question arises: is this the beginning of an ethnic drift in the ANC's politics at the expense of a universal and inclusive conception of the South African 'people'?

Even though, statistically speaking, the ANC's decline in urban areas is not more striking than in rural areas, it is in the cities that the stakes are highest. The historic core of opposition support – white voters – is concentrated in the cities. Moreover, the racial nationalism of Thabo Mbeki also saw the progressive decline of Indian and coloured support for the ANC. This has strengthened opposition parties in turn, especially the DA, in urban centres where these populations are concentrated. As black African voters change allegiances or don't vote, so these cities are, in principle, within reach of an opposition coalition. We saw earlier that in 2014, for example, the ANC won the City of Johannesburg with less than 54 per cent of the vote. It won the Tshwane metropolitan area with barely 50 per cent. In the Nelson Mandela

26　Giliomee and Simkins, *The Awkward Embrace*.
27　A. Habib, *South Africa's Suspended Revolution: Hopes and Prospects* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2013).
28　Paret, *The Politics of Contested ANC Hegemony*, p. 4.
29　R. Calland, '2015: The Year the Sands Start Shifting', *Mail and Guardian*, Johannesburg, 6 February 2015, available at http://mg.co.za/article/2015-02-05-2015-the-year-the-sands-start-shifting, retrieved 10 February 2015.
30　F. Haffajee, 'Something Broke Last Night', *News 24*, Cape Town, 13 February 2015, available at http://www.news24.com/Columnists/Ferial-Haffajee/Something-broke-last-night-20150213, retrieved 13 February 2015.
31　Butler (ed.), *Remaking the ANC*, pp. 6, 168.
32　As shorthand, I will use the term, though with my earlier qualifications.

Bay metropolitan area, including Port Elizabeth, ANC support dipped below 50 per cent in 2014. If these trends continue, it is likely that the ANC will lose power in Port Elizabeth and maybe even in Johannesburg and Tshwane. If this happens, 4 of the 8 metropolitan areas in South Africa would be in opposition hands, including the heartland of Gauteng province, the country's economic hub. Given the ANC's gains in KwaZulu, won on the basis of concessions to and support from traditional authorities, it is not unreasonable to imagine that the ANC will refocus on the rural areas, further allying itself to chiefs and traditional institutions and becoming increasingly conservative on matters of culture, gender and sexual orientation. At its most extreme, it might betoken the beginnings of a politicised urban–rural divide.

Our second question might seem ill-placed, given that there are no major political movements in South Africa today seeking the break-up of the state or even the strengthening of the federal features of the constitution. The DA, the largest opposition party, increasingly positions itself as the legitimate heir of the Mandela legacy.[33] That there is 'a South African people' has apparently been resolved, at least in so far as the political parties are concerned.

This would be true if the question of the 'people' was only or primarily a question of identification. This is the approach of much of the scholarship on nations and nationalism, especially since the 'cultural' turn in the mid 1980s.[34] It is the dominant approach in South Africa too, including in policy circles. The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), for example, administers an annual 'social cohesion barometer' that measures, *inter alia*, the degree to which South African citizens identify with the tolerant values of the constitution or endorse discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, disability and sexual orientation. These studies come in the wake of what Vanessa Barolsky calls 'anxieties' about the state of the social fabric and the increasingly 'fractious' character of the polity. She is correct that the discourse on 'social cohesion' over-emphasises consensus as the condition of 'national unity' and treats the question of the 'people' primarily as one of norms and values.[35]

What is generally overlooked is that what constitutes the 'people' is also a question of institutions, specifically the presence of certain kinds of institutions in the daily lives of citizens. One of the casualties of the 'cultural turn' in the social sciences is that this institutional perspective has largely been ignored. Yet without it, the relationship between nation-building and state formation is inevitably overlooked. In South Africa, the ANC's 'nationalism' focused on transforming the political economy of institutions so that they would no longer serve white domination and would serve the 'people' instead. This was also the promise of national liberation, that genuinely 'national' institutions would be established serving all equally. In this sense, 'the people', single and unified, would *come into existence institutionally*, in and through the shared experience that South Africans would have of the state and its departments. Queuing for an identity document would play the same role as queuing to vote in an election – literally and figuratively assembling the peoples of South Africa as a common people through a shared experience. How has the ANC government fared in this regard?

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33 At the time of writing, the Democratic Alliance had organised a 'Power to the People' march to parliament on 11 February 2015 in anticipation of the President's State of the Nation address. The *Mail & Guardian* newspaper reported that the DA's parliamentary leader, Mmusi Maimane, the head of the party and premier of the Western Cape, Helen Zille, and the Cape Town mayor, Patricia de Lille, sang struggle songs, danced and explained to the 400 supporters who had gathered that they were ready to pick up the baton of change that had been handed over to South Africa by Nelson Mandela, *Mail & Guardian*, 11 February 2015.

34 Benedict Anderson's pioneer study, *Imagined Communities* (London, Verso, 1982) set the trend in this regard, and over the last 30 years studies of nations and nationalism have focused on the imaginary character of nations, their ethnic underpinning, the exclusionary basis of national identities, how nationalism constructs particular historical narratives and national identities as processes of remembering and forgetting.

35 V. Barolsky, 'The "State" of Social Cohesion: Re-stating the Question of Social Cohesion and "Nationbuilding"', in Udesh Pillay, Gerard Hagg and Francis Nyamnjoh (eds), *State of the Nation: South Africa 2012–2013* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2013), p. 378.

Institutionalising the Nation

The ANC as a government has made only modest gains in elaborating a common citizenship, institutionally. This is not the place to discuss the history of public sector reform after 1994. It is sufficient to say that many of the changes made since then were introduced with the intention of extending services to areas that the apartheid state had deliberately neglected, expanding access to services and equalising the quality of services between blacks and whites and between regions.[36] It is also true that the success of these various measures is extremely uneven, and in key sectors, especially health and education, the results are poor.[37] Bureaucratic processes are poorly engineered or are, frequently, lacking. It is often difficult to access services or to rely on the routine performance of government functions. In other words, the main failure of African nationalism has been in the area of institution building and state formation.[38] Using the language of Gillian Hart, we might say that the failure to pay appropriate attention to state-building is contributing to the further 'de-nationalisation' of South African society.[39]

Ongoing research by the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), for example, reveals how fragmented and irregular the experience of government really is. The problem is structural. Since 1994, the proportion of the national budget spent on the procurement of goods and services from, in the main, private companies has grown to 42 per cent. This figure does not include spending on infrastructure, nor does it cover state-owned enterprises (SOEs). In effect, government departments, especially at municipal level, are outsourcing the lion's share of their work to third parties. Since the introduction of the Public Finance Management Act, however, the highly centralised model of procurement that existed during the apartheid period has been reformed in favour of a more decentralised model. From maybe a dozen sites of procurement, there are literally tens of thousands of places where government officials have the discretion to procure goods and services, according to the PARI studies.

These reforms have been introduced into organisations already struggling with very complex challenges of institutionalisation.[40] Many departments are fairly recent composites of multiple administrations, combining former homeland structures with the various racialised

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36 I. Chipkin and S. Meny-Gibert, 'Why the Past Matters: Studying Public Administration in South Africa', *Journal of Public Administration*, 46, 1 (2012), pp. 102–12; I. Chipkin, 'The Politics of Corruption: Two Competing Definitions', PARI, University of Witwatersrand, 2012; I. Chipkin, 'Whither the State? Corruption, Institutions and State-Building in South Africa', *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 40, 2 (2013), pp. 211–31.

37 PARI, *The Contract State: Outsourcing and Decentralisation in Contemporary South Africa*, (Johannesburg, PARI, 2014); PARI, *Hollowing out the State: Managerialism and Skills in the Water Sector*, (Johannesburg, PARI, 2015); I. Chipkin, G. Tshimomola and R. Brunette, 'Decentralised Procurement Fails the State', *Mail & Guardian*, 1 August 2014, available at http://mg.co.za/article/2014-07-31-decentralised-procurement-fails-the-state, retrieved 13 January 2016.

38 Contemporary debates in Brazil, drawing on a distinction between representation and participation, might be helpful for explaining South Africa's current institutional malaise and how to overcome it. What Brazil and South Africa shared during their respective transitions to democracy in the late 1980s and 1990s were social movements strongly committed to deepening democracy through popular participation in the affairs of government. Whereas in Brazil these ideas were instantiated in the 1988 constitution and then acted upon through participatory budgets and various national and regional conventions, in South Africa the politics of representation came to dominate the political life of government and institutions. Whereas participation in Brazil has been very positive for building and strengthening institutions and government administrations (see L. Avritzer, 'Democracy, Social Conflict and Political Innovation', paper prepared for the Belo Horizonte workshop on Conflict, Democracy and Social Change, Tramod, University of Barcelona, Belo Horizonte, 24–26 September, 2014), the politics of representation has had the opposite effect in South Africa (see I. Chipkin, 'Transcending Bureaucracy: State Transformation in the Age of the Manager', *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 77 (2011), pp. 31–51).

39 G. Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony* (Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013). In contrast to Hart, however, the focus on institution-building in this article provides a materialist basis to the nation beyond mere politics.

40 D. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990); B. Levy, *Working With the Grain: Integrating Governance and Growth in Development Strategies* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014); I. Chipkin, 'The State Wags the Dog, at the ANC's Cost', *Mail & Guardian*, 21 January 2015, available at http://mg.co.za/article/2015-01-21-the-state-wags-the-dog-at-the-ancs-cost, retrieved 13 January 2016.

administrations of apartheid South Africa. New departments and agencies have been plagued with problems of power as multiple actors struggle over the question of who has what authority in a department.[41] Conflicts are aggravated by processes of class formation, as officials and citizens contest positions in the ANC and government as a route to wealth and economic freedom.[42] Brian Levy discusses this situation as representing a problem of collective action where there are contending groups of principals;[43] matters have been made worse by the shift to public management after 1994 that has, in practice, vested responsibility for service delivery in the very echelon enfeebled by the conflict between principals.

Weak and sometimes faltering institutions are producing heterogeneous civil and sometimes political responses. So-called 'service delivery protests' are only the most visible of these processes. Across the country a proliferation of bodies, committees, networks and companies are filling the gap left by the state. In towns and cities throughout the country, 'middle-class' South Africans are increasingly moving into townhouse estates, where body corporates and homeowners' associations regulate the environment and social relations in a way that the South African state does not and cannot.[44] Disengagement from the state is happening in a host of other fields as well. Healthcare is but one instance. Private hospitals have increased by one-third since 1998 and now account for more than 20 per cent of all hospital beds in the country. This phenomenon is an urban one and is especially concentrated in the cities of Gauteng and the Western Cape. None the less, these facilities not only service those with medical insurance but also an estimated 3 million South Africans annually who pay cash to access private facilities rather than use public ones.[45] The shift away from public facilities is occurring across the class structure. Many South Africans consult traditional healers as their first resort, before going to public hospitals and clinics for medication, specialist treatment, or in emergencies. Schooling is another. By the beginning of the millennium, the number of private schools in South Africa had increased by 300 per cent from 1990.[46] This growth has been driven by black parents wanting alternatives to public schooling for their children. Policing is another area where those who are able to have largely forsaken the police for their everyday security, resorting to private firms. This is happening across the class structure. Increasingly, as the South African electricity grid is in crisis, so there are moves by private individuals and even whole suburbs (Parkhurst, for example) to reduce their reliance on the public infrastructure and even to go offline altogether. In Zandspruit, as in many informal areas across the country, property relations and rights are 'registered' and secured through civic associations and local leaders, even when they themselves do not have title to the land.[47] And on the sprawling Mangaung periphery, Thulisile Mphambukeli has explored how residents, many from Lesotho, negotiate access to municipal services and to housing through patrimonial networks.[48] The examples multiply over and over again.

41 W. Ngoma, 'Complexities of Organisational Change: The Case of the Eastern Cape Department of Education', PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2007.

42 K. Von Holdt, 'Nationalism, Bureaucracy and the Developmental State: The South African Case', *South African Review of Sociology*, 41, 1 (2010), pp. 4–27; J. Netshitenzhe, 'Competing Identities of a National Liberation Movement and the Challenges of Incumbency', *ANC Today*, 15–21June 2012.

43 Levy, *Working With the Grain*, pp. 150–2.

44 I. Chipkin, *Middle Classing in Roodepoort: Capitalism and Social Change in South Africa*, PARI Long Essays, No.2, Johannesburg, PARI, 2012; I. Chipkin, 'Ordinary Life: Capitalism, City, Commune in the 21st Century', *Social Dynamics*, 39, 2 (2013); F. Duca, 'New Community in a New Space: Artificial, Natural, Created and Contested – An Idea Taken from a Golf Estate in Johannesburg', *Social Dynamics*, 39, 2 (2013).

45 T. Matsebula and M. Willie, 'Private Hospital', in S. Harrison, R. Bhana and A. Ntuli (eds), *South African Health Review* (Durban, Health Systems Trust, 2007), p. 163.

46 J. Hofmeyr and S. Lee, 'The New Face of Private Schooling', in Linda Chisholm (ed.), *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2004), p. 143.

47 I. Makukule, 'Understanding the Informal Land Market: A Case Study of an Informal Settlement (Zandspruit) in South Africa', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (forthcoming).

48 T.N. Mphambukeli, 'Citizenship and Access to Housing in Emerging Communities in Mangaung', PARI working paper, University of the Witwatersrand, n.d.

The weakness of state institutions and the failure since 1994 to invest in institution-building means that the experience of government does not elaborate a shared experience of citizenship. It does not even produce and reproduce a stable class structure corresponding to discrete patterns of taste. The performance of schools (for example) is too capricious for that. Rather, there is a further splintering of society into discrete autonomous communities, sometimes but not always coinciding with historical cleavages of race, class, culture and gender. Very often, new, emerging communities are formed and shaped in response to weak public organisations, and through the new institutions that arise to fill the gap, from homeowners' associations and body corporates to neighbourhood associations responding to crime. Taken together, state formation in South Africa is not associated with the weaving together of a South African people, but rather with the further elaboration of multiple, discrete social worlds.

Conclusion

The evidence from a 20-year overview of election results shows that the ANC's electoral support has been falling since 2009, except in KwaZulu-Natal. As South Africa enters a period of meaningful electoral competition, governments at provincial and (especially) municipal level could change hands. We have seen, however, that this situation does not inspire confidence that the country's democracy is maturing or becoming consolidated. Instead, many commentators and scholars worry that the ANC will respond by resorting to authoritarian and populist measures. This outcome, however, is far from certain. The future turns on how the ANC comes to terms with its own history of nationalism. One likely possibility is that it rediscovers its cosmopolitan and democratic roots and reconciles itself to no longer being the dominant party. The other is that it remembers (invents) another nationalist past, either as the party of Africans or that it increasingly positions itself as a regional, ethnic party. In this scenario the party's democratic commitments weaken.

This article has argued, however, that the focus on democratic consolidation obscures a more fundamental question, namely the unitary character of South African society.

I have argued that the 'nationalism' of the ANC was unusual in several respects, in relation to both nationalism *tout court* and Afrikaner nationalism. The ANC accepted the legacy of British imperialism in the Union of South Africa as the legitimate and workable basis of the demos. In this regard, a powerful current in the ANC's politics historically has been cosmopolitan and materialist. It accepted the diversity of South Africa's peoples as an ontological fact and believed that they could be reconciled as a unitary people through an egalitarian political economy. That the ANC is in danger of becoming a regional party raises questions as to whether it will continue to be committed to 'non-racialism', this cosmopolitan understanding of the people.

To what extent has the ANC's vision of South Africa translated into material practices, especially at the level of the state? This article has argued that there are more basic conditions of the nation than that of a shared identity. Or, rather, a shared identity is the likely outcome of building institutions, ones that elaborate shared values (of the constitution, for example) and that, more fundamentally, generate an everyday public space through discharging their everyday bureaucratic tasks. In other words, the existence of South Africans is not simply dependent on the commitment of the ANC and other political organisations to a certain idea of South Africa. It is dependent on the building of common, national institutions.

This task has not been accomplished in the 20 years since the end of apartheid, and there is evidence of the weakening of those national institutions built in the late 1990s (National Treasury and the South African Revenue Services, for example, together with the National Prosecuting Authority, the police and so on). As the ANC's commitment to a national conception of the state weakens, will there be other political and social forces that can take up this work of state-building? It seems to me that this is the major political, existential challenge facing us now.

Acknowledgements

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