THE CHANGING MEANING OF CHANGE: THE LEGACY OF THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Ineke van Kessel, African Studies Centre, Leiden, Netherlands
(**kessel@ascleiden.nl**)

The United Democratic Front (UDF) was easily the most representative social movement in the history of South Africa, spearheading internal resistance against apartheid in the 1980s. Although the UDF had a heterogeneous constituency, the dominant perspective envisaged post-apartheid South Africa as a colour-blind, participative and egalitarian society. The UDF was broadly associated with the African National Congress (ANC) in exile, but it did acquire an identity of its own. While the vision of a nonracial, egalitarian society was broadly shared across South Africa, different regional UDF organisations developed their own regionally flavoured character.

After the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, the UDF disbanded as most of its activists flocked towards the ANC as the most likely instrument for changing South Africa as well as for advancing their individual careers. Only in the Western Cape was the dissolution of the UDF contested. Some the Front's constituent organisations (student organisations, trade unions, civic associations etc.) resumed their autonomous role as civil society organisations. This paper reflects on the legacy of the UDF in post-apartheid South Africa: mission accomplished or vision betrayed?

South Africa's 1996 constitution has been widely praised as a state-of-the-art model of liberal democracy, but it is quite removed from the egalitarian society envisaged by social movements in the 1980s. South Africa has become the world's most unequal society, having recently surpassed Brasil.[1] Policies of Black Economic Empowerment have created a wealthy, politically well-connected black elite as well as a rapidly growing black middle class, while one third of black South Africans of working age remain unemployed. Mandela's celebrated 'rainbow nation' has been superseded by an exclusive brand of African nationalism that is at odds with the previous ideal of a non-racial society.

How do former UDF activists deal with the dissonance between their previous ideals and contemporary reality? In this research project, I revisit people and places where I initially did research around 1990-1992 (van Kessel 2000). What has been the long-term impact of the UDF? How do former activists make sense of the changes in South African society? Does the legacy of the UDF serve as a source of inspiration for new social movements?

I. WHAT WAS THE UDF?

Origins

Around 1980 the leadership of the ANC in exile made a strategic decision to rebuild mass-based organisations inside the country. The UDF grew out of locally based initiatives, but consultations had been made with the leadership in exile as well as with the ANC underground. During the 1970s, collective protest in South Africa was located in two distinct social categories: black workers and black students. Their protest actions remained isolated phenomena rather than features of a co-ordinated

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[1] "South Africa has widest gap between rich and poor", *Independent Online*, 27 Sept. 2009

rebellion. The 1980s however witnessed the growth of a broad-based social movement that mounted a sustained challenge to the apartheid state.

Protest politics shifted from uncompromising non-collaborationism to a more pragmatic result-oriented approach. By taking up the bread-and-butter issues that occupied people's minds at the level of local communities, activists succeeded in broadening popular organisations and involving a wide range of ordinary residents who would otherwise have been reluctant to become involved in overtly confrontational politics.

While the ANC had been banned, some of its key documents had not been outlawed and continued to inspire anti-apartheid activity. The *Freedom Charter*, adopted in 1955 by the ANC and its allies in the Congress Alliance, was by far the most influential document. The opening paragraph states that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people". The Charter set the tone for an inclusive ideology that combines racial equality with aspirations for redistribution of wealth as well as popular participation in government.

Secondary and tertiary students, and youth in general played a crucial role in the rebellion of the 1980s. Civic associations began emerging around 1980. Civics, as they came to be known, were local neighbourhood associations that took up residents' concerns such as rents, electricity, transport, safety on the streets and education. From 1981-82, many of these organisations became involved in discussions on the formation of a United Front to counter government plans for limited constitutional reforms. The UDF was formed as an ad hoc alliance, with the limited goal of boycotting the elections for Indian and Coloured South Africans. The new constitution envisaged a tricameral parliament that would incorporate Indians and Coloureds in separate chambers, while whites would retain ultimate control. Africans would remain excluded from national politics: their separate ethnic 'national destinies' were to be pursued in the context of the Bantustans. As the government had come to accept the presence of Africans in urban areas as a permanent feature of a modern, industrialised state, urban Africans were to be given a very limited form of self-rule by elected town councils. These Black Local Authorities were made responsible for raising their own revenue. The resulting rises in rents and service charges proved instrumental in igniting the township revolts of the mid 1980s.

The main trade union movement decided against affiliation to the UDF as it wanted to maintain the autonomy of workers' organisations, taking part in wider popular struggles on its own terms. The national launch of the UDF on 20 August 1983 in Mitchell's Plain, a Coloured area near Cape Town, was attended by about a thousand delegates, representing some 575 community organisations, trade unions, sporting bodies and women's and youth organisations. Over 12,000 people attended a simultaneous mass rally. A convenient shorthand formula measured the strength of the UDF as a front representing some 600 organisations and two million people.

Parallel to election boycotts and school protests, a third source of 'unrest' consisted of locally based community protest against increases in bus fares and rents. From 1985, the UDF leadership began to realise more clearly the mobilising potential of bread-and-butter issues.

People's Power
With rebellion spreading into remote corners of South Africa, boycotts flaring up intermittently, mounting international solidarity campaigns and increasing signs of nervousness among white business, the UDF felt confident that soon "the people"

would be empowered to shape their own destiny. Advocates of "People's Power" envisaged a form of direct democracy, with an ongoing process of consultation and mass participation. They were quite dismissive of political pluralism and representative democracy, which was branded "bourgeois democracy".

After the feverish episode of mass mobilisation followed by heavy repression under the state of emergency imposed nationwide in 1986, township residents began to show signs of exhaustion and a loss of patience with the "rule of the comrades", young militants who often used heavy-handed and coercive methods. This period of despair and forced inactivity had a sobering effect on leading activists. When new political space opened up in 1989, they emerged from detention and hiding with a new realism. No longer intoxicated by views of imminent liberation and insurrectionary seizure of power, they set out to rebuild organisations. A series of local negotiations prepared the way for talks about the central issue of state power.

Disbanding the UDF

After the unbanning of the ANC in January 1990, the release of Nelson Mandela and his co-accused from prison and the return of the ANC leaders from exile, UDF activists deferred to the leadership of the historic liberation movement. In the popular imagination, the ANC leaders in exile and on Robben Island had acquired the status of larger-than-life heroes. Within the UDF, three options were discussed:

- to disband
- to transform itself into a coordinating structure for the organisations of civil society
- to wait and decide later

The argument for disbanding the UDF was that the Front had served its purpose, and now the ANC should resume its rightful place. The UDF's continued existence would only cause duplication and confusion. The second option was to transform the UDF into a coordinating structure for civics, student organisations, religious bodies and those youth and women's organisations that decided against merger with the ANC Women's League and the Youth League. This position was favoured both by activists who argued that an umbrella structure was needed to exercise hegemonic control and by the proponents of an autonomous civil society. The wait-and-see option prevailed during 1990, but in 1991 the UDF decided to disband. By now, dissolution had become a foregone conclusion, as the UDF's most capable activists had been absorbed into the ANC. Paradoxically, the unbanning of the ANC had a demobilising effect: many people believed that they could now rely on the ANC to solve their problems.

What made the UDF a successful movement?

The umbrella formula of the UDF proved eminently suitable for combining a broad range of organisations committed to eliminate apartheid, from middle class whites to township youth. The front formula enabled people to identify with the banned ANC, without exposing themselves to immediate state repression. It allowed for organisational flexibility and accommodated a broad range of manifestations of protest and rebellion, from prayer services to chasing black mayors and chiefs out of the townships and rural villages. It configured visions of an alternative social, political and economic order, without imposing a political orthodoxy on its heterodox following.

The UDF not only coordinated and directed internal resistance to apartheid, but also provided a cultural framework that lent a wider meaning to a great variety of local struggles. By participating in rent boycotts, stay-aways, boycotts of white-owned business and school protests, people not only addressed their immediate concerns but also played their part in the struggle for a new society. The key to its broad appeal was the Front's ability to frame different messages for various audiences, ranging from a struggle for civil rights to a radical agenda for social transformation.

However, the dominant vision within the UDF was for an egalitarian, non-racial society, with a strong emphasis on grassroots participation. Participation was more important than pluralism. This vision of a just society had also a strong moral component. Religious inspiration and legitimation was characteristic of many activities.

With the return of the ANC to the centre stage of South African politics, the focus shifted from the streets to the negotiating table, while the ANC simultaneously had to rebuild its party structures throughout the country. Often, UDF structures were happy to embark on their new mission of building the ANC, but occasionally UDF organisations resented being taken over by ANC newcomers. Coming from exile or prison, these newcomers were often out of touch with local conditions and sensibilities.

Agreement on an interim constitution was followed by elections in April 1994, which brought a Government of National Unity to power, under the presidency of Nelson Mandela. The ANC had won almost two third of the votes. After parliament approved the final constitution in 1996, the National Party left the government. South Africa's constitution has been widely praised as a state-of-the-art model of liberal democracy, but it is quite removed from the egalitarian, participative society envisaged by social movements in the 1980s.

How did social movement actors deal with this discrepancy between the liberal democratic state and their erstwhile ideal of an egalitarian society governed by "organs of people's power"? Those individuals and affiliates that became part of the ANC followed the trajectory towards institutionalisation, as the ANC established itself as a centralist, hierarchical political party. Some, such as the civic associations, struggled to find a new role for themselves, while others simply folded in the early 1990s, such as social movement media.

II LEGACIES OF THE UDF

Who were the activists?

Much of the academic discourse in South Africa in the 1980s focused on the class composition of the liberation movement. The UDF proclaimed itself a multi-race and multi- class alliance, but this inclusive approach had to be reconciled with the dual principles of African leadership and working class leadership. This issue was obviously of vital importance to those who wanted to carry the struggle beyond national liberation to socialist transformation. It was widely believed that the class base of the alliances formed in the 1980s would determine which class would rule a post-apartheid society. From a radical perspective, it was of strategic interest to secure a leading role for the working class and to keep the petty bourgeoisie in check. In the influential analysis of the social composition of the liberation movement by Saul &

Gelb, the petty bourgeoisie is cast in the role of potential traitor, ready to betray the revolutionary cause and to abandon their working-class allies in favour of a reformed, non-racial capitalism (Saul & Gelb).

Other authors took a more positive view of the role of the petty bourgeoisie, arguing that not the proletariat, but the aspiring middle class was the driving force in challenging the apartheid state. Lodge & Nasson observe that the UDF was largely a movement of the poor, but that a disproportionate share of the original UDF leadership came from a radicalised middle-class intelligentsia. (Lodge & Nasson: 55). However, from 1985 the profile of the regional executives became more militant and more working-class, while maintaining elements of an intellectual/professional leadership such as lawyers, medical doctors etc

While much of the academic analysis focused on the race-class debate (Posel 1983), the engine of mass mobilisation in the 1980s was youth. "Youth" is of course a very broad category that could include anybody between, say, 12 and 35. Youth in the sense of young political activists tended to be relatively well-educated and overwhelmingly male. They were not desperate paupers but young people who were not prepared to put up with the hardships and humiliations endured by their parents. Often, they were the first generation in their families to attend secondary school or tertiary education.

Unlike race, gender and (mostly) class, youth is of course a transitory if sometimes extended phase in people's lives. At the onset of the democratic transition, many youth activists were ready to embark on the next phase in life: the time had come to establish a family, find a job or complete a study, and settle down. The UDF was carried by the generation that reached adulthood during the 1980s. The post-1990 generation, known as "born-frees", is less inclined to engage in socio-political activism. Social movements are about people: activism as a life-long career is rare.

The vast majority of my informants, with whom I reconnected some 18 years after the first interviews, are no longer involved in social or political activism, and many are no longer active in the ANC. However, the social networks have largely survived, not necessarily in terms of friendship but in terms of being aware of the whereabouts of other ex-members. My new round of interviews was greatly facilitated by the cell phone: once I had located a few key informants and explained my new mission, they would pull out their cell phone and provide the contacts of their erstwhile comrades.

In 1990-92, most of my informants fell in the 25-35 age bracket. Quite a few were fulltime activists, while others were students, teachers, journalists, religious leaders and trade union activists. Many were unemployed jobseekers. The current position of my informants ranges from cabinet minister to unemployed and surviving on mothers' pension. Most found a civil service job in government, at the municipal, provincial or national level and in the judiciary, or serve as members of a provincial legislative assembly or the national parliament. Some are teachers, school principals or self-employed, while a few high profile UDF activists (Popo Molefe, Mohammed Valli Moosa, Cheryl Carolus) have embarked on a lucrative business career. I have re-interviewed some two third of my original sample of about a hundred informants. Some had died, some were out of my reach (cabinet ministers Trevor Manuel and Joyce Mabudafhasi), a few declined. In most cases, I managed to reconstruct the outlines of the life stories of those whom I was unable to meet, with the use of internet, newspapers and conversations with other former activists.

My 1990-92 interviews were concentrated in three areas: Sekhukhuneland, a very rural part of the then bantustan Lebowa in the north of South Africa; Kagiso and

Munsieville, twin townships of Krugersdorp, west of Johannesburg; and the Cape Flats, a largely Coloured area near Cape Town. Revisiting my informants led me to the same places, but also to Polokwane, capital of Limpopo province, as many activists from Sekhukhune moved into the provincial administration. The former township activists were mostly to be found in Kagiso, Krugersdorp (Mogale City) and Johannesburg. Most Coloured activists no longer lived on the Cape Flats: the new round of interviews led me to Cape Town, Pretoria and Johannesburg.

A sense of disillusionment is most palpable when former ex-activists discuss their former comrades. Some are genuinely appalled by the ruthless power struggles. Others resent the success of their contemporaries and have exaggerated expectations of what the person on top could be doing to assist less fortunate comrades. Some were expecting to be rewarded by the ANC for their commitment and sacrifices, and now feel abandoned. However, quite a few feel that, overall, some or most objectives of the liberation struggle have been accomplished.

The colour of non-racialism

The struggle against apartheid was framed in terms of universal values. The ANC in exile campaigned to have apartheid condemned as a crime against humanity. Nowadays ANC politicians make frequent recourse to the particularist values of Africanist ideologies, advocating "African solutions for African problems" or invoking "African traditions". In the case of Zimbabwe, the call for "African solutions" - meant to delegitimise policy interventions from the West - often comes from the very same politicians who once campaigned for sanctions and boycotts against apartheid South Africa.

In the heated debate within the ANC about the nationalisation of mines, the ANC Youth League, a fervent campaigner for nationalisation, recently objected to the composition of a study group of ANC ministers with economic and financial portfolios.[2] Since Africans were in a minority in this group, it would not be able to reflect the aspirations of the African majority. The ministers concerned were not whites, but Coloureds and Indians – categories which in the days of the UDF were accepted as "black". In the 1980s, activists claimed their rights as South Africans and as fellow human beings. Now they invoke their Africannes as a resource, both in the ideological and in the material competition.

An exclusive brand of African nationalism, also labeled 'nativism', seems set to become the new hegemonic discourse. Xolela Mangcu defines racial nativism as the idea that

> the true custodians of African culture are the natives. The natives are often defined as black Africans because they are indigenous to the country, and within that group the true natives are those who participated in the resistance struggle. And even among those who participated in the liberation struggle, the truest natives are those who are on the side of government. By dint of their authenticity those natives have the right to silence white interlopers or black sell-outs. (Mangcu:2)

Black nationalism may indeed provide the glue in securing the loyalty of the ANC's main constituency, but in the process another cherished principle of the liberation

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[2] [2] "Nationalisation row grinds on*", Mail & Guardian* 26 nov. 2010

struggle, –non-racialism– is increasingly under pressure. Numerous Coloured, Indian and White UDF activists have become disillusioned with the exclusive brand of African nationalism that has succeeded Mandela's Rainbow Nation. Although they are often quite content with their careers and current status in society, they are no longer active members of the ANC. The UDF provided them with a political home, but their initial enthusiasm for the ANC was soon dampened by a sense of not-belonging

Among Coloured and Indian former activists, there is indeed a sense of betrayal, or at least a sense of not-belonging. Legislation in terms of affirmative action continues to use the broadly inclusive definition, but in everyday discourse 'black' in most cases equals 'African'. This sense of alienation also prevails among white ex-activists, but they of course were never included in the label 'black'.

In 2007, journalist Ryland Fisher, a former UDF activist in the Western Cape, published a book entitled *Race*. In the introduction, he argues that issues of race, racism and race-consciousness continue to pervade every corner of South African society. Like many Coloured students of his generation, Fisher adopted the identity of "black" under the influence of Steve Biko's Black Consciousness ideology.

> Recently, however, I have noticed that people who used to accept me as black now refer to me as coloured and, by that action, exclude me and others who may or may not look like me from the majority of South Africans once again (Fisher: 5).

This sentiment is widely shared among the former activists from the Cape Flats. Quite a few replied to my questions with a simple counter question: "Did you read Ryland's book?" Adli Jacobs, a fellow UDF activist with a background in the Call of Islam, an organisation of Cape Moslems, believed that Fishers book came at the right moment:[3]

> We should have dealt with the issue earlier. It is a journalistic book, a bit shallow, but I agree with Ryland: non-racialism has indeed been lost. The ANC Western Cape has been destroyed by the race issue. Tony Yengeni says that Africans must lead the Western Cape. The ANC closed down entire branches to achieve Africanisation: Athlone, the city of Cape Town, it was all closed down.
> Thabo Mbeki used the race card whenever he was criticised. I was not surprised at this outbreak of xenophobia. That is what you get once you allow the divide and rule of ethnic claims. Zuma symbolises the rise of ethnicity. Ethnicity gets broken down into ever more components. Not only foreign Africans were chased, also South Africans from different ethnicities than their neighbours.

Have the erstwhile ideals of a participatory, egalitarian society been betrayed?

Apartheid South Africa was an extremely unequal society, but Post-Apartheid South Africa has achieved the unenviable status as the world's most unequal society. The previous ideal of an egalitarian society seems overtaken by the desire to get "stinking rich". As former activist Smuts Ngonyama famously conceded: "I was not in the struggle to remain poor".

Visions of direct democracy and participatory citizenship have been overtaken by the introduction of a conventional multiparty parliamentary democracy, which

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[3] Interview Adli Jacobs, 7 April 2009, Johannesburg. He refers to an outbreak of xenophobic violence in May 2008.

however fits uneasily with grassroots understandings of democracy. As in the 1980s, in my interviews over 2006-2008 I often encountered a profound distrust in pluralism. ANC officials and representatives often do not see a distinction between party and state and perceive the ANC as the sole legitimate locus of power. This legitimacy is derived from its past as the liberation movement that defeated apartheid. Jonny Steinberg makes similar observations in his analysis of the civics movement, when he states that the leadership of resistance in the 1980s is inclined to see itself as the "authentic" leadership, the only legitimate voice of the people. (Steinberg: 193)

ANC politicians in Sekhukhuneland tend to view opposition as illegitimate. It is alright to have the Democratic Alliance in Cape Town, which is perceived as "a thing for whites", in spite of the DA's substantial Coloured support. However, in one's own district, municipality or constituency, rival political parties such as the PAC and AZAPO ought to be silenced, sidelined or even "crushed". The distinct historical traditions in different parts of South Africa have produced different understandings of the concept of democracy. In Sekhukhuneland, the ANC has been deeply rooted for at least half a century. When I conducted my research in 1990-91 into UDF affiliates such as the Sekhukhune Youth Organisation (SEYO), I found that numerous activists had never heard of the UDF. Through their activities in youth movements, they belonged to "the organisation" –and "the organisation" was the ANC.

In Kagiso, activists in the 1980s organised in a civic association (Krugersdorp Residents' Organisation-KRO) that was affiliated to the UDF: most township activists perceived themselves as KRO activists. The Africanist tendency in Kagiso organised a rival civic association. These tensions still simmer, but seem less significant than the divisions caused by the ruthless power struggle that erupted post 1990 among the UDF and ANC activists themselves. Laurence Ntlokoa, a key civic activist during the 1980s, was reluctant to discuss his experiences in this period, as he harbours bitter memories. In 1994 when he was the coordinator for the RDP (the ANC's Reconstruction and Development Programme), he went to talk to Afrikaner businessmen in Krugersdorp about input in the RDP and reported back to the ANC branch. He was branded a traitor, and became a persona non grata. "It was all about power, everybody jostled for positions. They wanted to destroy me, I was too articulate, I could think! They wanted to get ahead, and I was in their way. But I never envisaged a political career, I was interested in development. Now I am no longer active in politics, I do not attend meetings.[4]

The Western Cape lacks a strong ANC tradition, but has a long history of fragmented political opposition as well as religious diversity. In the 1980s, UDF activists in the Western Cape were not inclined to accommodate political rivals in the anti-apartheid struggle, but nowadays most former activists here view political pluralism as an essential characteristic of constitutional democracy.

Around 1990, activists framed their aspirations in Marxist terms. Asked about his vision for South Africa, Maurice Nchabeleng, a youth leader in Sekhukhuneland, stated in 1990: "I want the dictatorship of the proletariat". Looking back now, he reformulated his ambitions at the time as: "We wanted to go to the place of the whites".[5]

In all likelihood, most activists wanted a better life, modeled on the comfortable lifestyle of white South Africans. This aspiration was framed in the

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[4] Interview with Laurence Ntlokoa, Kagiso, 22 April 2009.
[5] Interview with Maurice Nchabeleng, 10 March 2007, Apel

dominant discourse of the liberation struggle at that time, i.e. a mix of Marxism and African nationalism. Marxism seemed to make eminent sense as an analysis of South African society and moreover, it assured with scientific certainty that the class struggle would lead the workers to victory. Being versed in Marxism added to one's prestige as an "advanced cadre".

Nowadays, getting rich and focusing on individual advancement have become quite acceptable aspirations in ANC circles. Former activists now frame their aspirations in the currently dominant terminology. But have the aspirations really changed? Or is it rather the mode of expression that has changed?

Egalitarian ideals are currently out of fashion. Among quite a few former activists, Mrs Thatcher's TINA (There Is No Alternative –for the free market and liberal orthodoxy) has become received wisdom. In his biography, former UDF activist Trevor Manuel, who has served as cabinet minister ever since 1994, explains his steep learning curve in financial and economic matters, largely under the influence of his encounters with the outside world (Green). Exposure to the world of international finance has not been a common experience for most former activists, but many would now agree that their erstwhile views were rather naive and uninformed.

Others indeed speak of betrayal, but more often than not they feel betrayed by former comrades rather than by ANC policies. Some critics of the neo-liberal order seem genuinely committed to their belief in a more just society, but quite a few just want a share of the riches. A former youth leader in Sekhukhuneland expressed his frustrations eloquently:

> Self-proclaimed communists have become capitalists. The ANC has become a bourgeois national democratic movement. Only people with money own the ANC. The SACP has become a forum for people who missed out on opportunities and positions. Some of them know nothing about communism.[6]

Still versed in Marxism, Moss Mabotha had a ready explanation: "one's world outlook is determined by one's class position". But in spite of all the articulate criticism, the bottom line of his resentment was that he wanted to be part of the good life. He admitted to being jealous: "I also want to be rich".

Although many former activists expressed a sense of dissatisfaction, more often than not their discontent focused on former comrades in the struggle, rather than on ANC policies per se. Youth leader Silas Mabotha, now a high school principal in Sekhukhune, remarked that relations of trust among former comrades have been undermined: "We cannot even advise former comrades, because they suffer from paranoia. They think you are after their job". Silas Mabotha, reputed as a militant and articulate youth activist, nowadays is not active in the ANC, "just like most of us". The ANC government, he complains, follows a capitalist agenda:

> The BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) is nothing else but building a black bourgeoisie. Unemployment is growing while some people become super rich. We see privatisation, and casualisation of labour. That is not what we fought for, privatisation. They are trying to do away with government altogether.

However, Silas Mabotha also wants to share in the fruits of liberation: "We are worried that they will have run out of Mercedeses before our turn has come".[7]

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[6] Interview with Moss Mabotha, Polokwane, 15 March 2007
[7] Interview with Silas Mabotha, Apel, November 2006.

The stark increase in socio-economic differentiation after 1994 has put considerable strain on the comrades' networks. Can solidarity networks survive when members find themselves in vastly different positions? Is jealousy perhaps a means to keep members in check and to remind them of their obligations towards group members?

The problem remains: how to reconcile the current model of liberal democracy with the expectation of a (more) egalitarian or at least less unequal society? Observing that whites still control most of the economy and three-quarter of the land, many of my informants concluded: "We have won political freedom, but not yet economic freedom". The fundamental flaw of the constitution in the view of many black South Africans is the property clause: a constitution that protects the ill-gotten gains of centuries of dispossession and apartheid lacks legitimacy. Did the Freedom Charter not promise that South Africa's national wealth, "the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people"? The T-shirts proclaiming "No Land! No House! No Vote" express the aspiration among current social movement activists for a different kind of social contract between state and citizen.

III OLD EN NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Researching the UDF and its legacy is not only of historical interest. The UDF has not only become an object of nostalgia, it is also a source of inspiration for South Africans who aspire to resurrect a new broad civil society-type movement. In an analysis of a civil society conference in October 2010 sponsored by the trade union federation COSATU, Aubrey Matshiqi noted: "It is not uncommon these days to hear people bemoaning the fact that the United Democratic Front (UDF) was disbanded after the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1990."[8]

The ANC's reaction to this conference, sponsored by its ally in the tripartite alliance, was marked by extreme paranoia, with ANC leaders accusing COSATU of sponsoring attempts at "regime change". Matshiqi remarked that the ANC viewed the civil society venture as "an attack on the ANC and, therefore, counter-revolutionary". The incident is illustrative in two respects. It underlines that the UDF is remembered (and romanticised) as the model par excellence of popular mobilisation and it demonstrates that the ANC, carried to power on the strength of the trade union movement and popular mass movements in the 1980s, has acquired authoritarian characteristics that make it suspicious of spontaneity and criticism.

However, when the honeymoon of the Mandela presidency was over, new social movements proliferated, often building on the repertoires of popular mobilisation first established by the UDF in the 1980s. Thus far, popular protest politics remain largely localised and fragmented. At first sight, most movements seem to be single-issue oriented, but some have a wider scope than their name suggests. The Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, formed in 2000, does not only campaign for the provision of electricity as a basic need, but also deals with housing, education, health and employment. The Anti-Privatisation Forum focuses on the free provision of water as a basic necessity, but uses this as a platform to proselytise a broader anti-capitalist agenda.

Authors such as McKinley (2004), Bond (2000), and Dawson (2010) stress the commitment to a socialist ideology in many of the new social movements, but it

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[8] Aubrey Matshiqi, "Dissecting ANC's hostile response to Cosatu-sponsored civil society conference", *Polity Daily News*, 12 November 2010, http://www.polity.org.za.

remains uncertain to what extent the discourse of the activist leadership represents the sentiments of the grassroots constituency. In much of the criticism of the ANC- in - government, the gross inadequacies in service delivery are blamed on its turn to neo-liberalism. The implicit assumption that state-owned enterprises and strong state involvement would deliver better services to the poor remains untested. Considering the much cited lack of capacity in government, notably at the provincial and local level, it is at least doubtful that the provision of housing, water and electricity would fare better if only the ANC had not 'betrayed' its commitment to state planning.

The mass movements of the 1980s have lost their leadership and most gifted activists to the government and the public sector. There might be a parallel here with the United States, where the ghettos became ever more marginalised as the black middle class moved out following successful emancipation. In spite of all the articulate criticism about the "neo-liberal onslaught" under the ANC government, there is no permanent or semi-permanent umbrella structure to frame the disparate struggles about housing, water, electricity, jobs, land and health into a coherent alternative vision.

Some academics on the left signal the rise of a new militant grassroots activism with a potential to culminate in a new liberation struggle, combining forces against the "betrayal of the revolution" by the ANC-in-government (e.g. Saul 2005). In my own research, I have heard ample and bitter complaints about the failures of the ANC, but seen no evidence of a broad-based sustained protest movement. This of course raises a new question: why do people put up with this?

IV IN SEARCH OF A NEW LEGITIMACY

Class, Culture, African nationalism and the (neo-patrimonial) welfare state

In the literature, I found four possible analytical frameworks to interpret my findings and to locate them in the wider context of post-apartheid South Africa. Two of these frameworks are generalised macro narratives, which present a distinct reading of the state of present-day South Africa based on a prior analysis of the South African condition under apartheid. I have summarised these interpretations as: Class or Culture? The other two interpretative models start from a localised case-study but also arrive at an analysis which has wider applicability. I have labeled these interpretations as: African nationalism and the neo-patrimonial welfare state. Obviously, these models are not necessarily mutually exclusive: there is some overlap.

Class: a 'patriotic bourgeoisie'
Class-based interpretations of Apartheid South Africa have of course dominated much of the intellectual discourse for some three decades. From the campus and the trade union movement, class analysis filtered down to local student and community activists. When conducting my interviews in 1990-91, the vast majority of informants interpreted South African society in terms of the class struggle. Liberation would not only mean the end of apartheid; it would bring an egalitarian society with participatory modes of decision-making. The means of production would be owned by 'the people'. Marxist adherents of class analysis argue that the revolution has been betrayed by the national bourgeoisie, the new elite, with its greedy eyes set on self-enrichment.

However, recent scholarship uses a class analysis to demonstrate how the notion of a patriotic black bourgeoisie is used as a new legitimizing concept. In a

lucid article, Okechukwe Iheduru describes how, from 1999, the creation of a black bourgeoisie became one of the pillars of Mbeki's endeavour to create a new legitimizing ideology. (Iheduru 2004) For most of its history, the ANC neither considered the idea of black entrepreneurs nor dismissed it. But its commitment to radical socio-economic transformation implied that priority beneficiaries of liberation would be the urban and rural poor, not black capitalists. When and why did the ANC shift towards black capitalism? And what are implications for the future?

With Mandela's honeymoon over, and the threat of massive popular disenchantment as the promise of "a better life for all" seemed to evaporate, the government turned to cultivating a supportive black business class as a strategy to defuse potential challenges to the regime. In doing this, the ANC followed the example of many post independence African governments as well as the precedent set by the Afrikaner state elite in a previous dispensation.

Thabo Mbeki first spelled out his vision of **Black Economic Empowerment** in a speech to the Black Management Forum in November 1999.

> The struggle against racism in our country must include the objective of creating a black bourgeoisie. (…) I would like to urge, very strongly, that we abandon our embarrassment about the possibility of the emergence of successful and therefore prosperous black owners of productive property… The government must come to the aid of those among the black people who might require such aid in order to become entrepreneurs.

Mbeki's focus was on de-racialising the economy, not on dismantling capitalism. Strategically, the black middle classes, especially an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, would become the vanguard of black integration into the economic mainstream. The government devised a broad range of policy instruments to implement BEE. Policy instruments include procurement, employment practices, quotas and licenses, company records in terms of training black staff, outsourcing to black business, minimum shareholding requirements for blacks.

Since the mid-1990s, black capitalists, corporate South Africa and the state have jointly co-opted some of the most notorious bastions of anti-capitalist sentiment to join the accumulation effort. The most unlikely convert has been organised labour, which from 1995 established dozens of 'union investment companies'. The expectation was that this would temper worker militancy, so as not to hurt the system from which they have gained increased influence and wealth.

Also, thousands of small black investors have through various civil society organisations been recruited to partake in this 'popular capitalism'. Leading black businessmen such as Nthatho Motlana and Cyril Ramaphosa led consortia that involved many thousands of black shareholders. In the post-apartheid order, "the promotion of a black capitalist elite speaks not only to the tiny coterie of individuals able to capitalize on the opportunities created, but also to the yearnings of millions more." (Marais 1998)

BEE serves to render legitimacy to the ANC government, while black capitalists have been used largely to balance the potentially explosive expectations of the black majority to immediately attain economic power and prosperity. But in view of the mounting criticism, this legitimation seems fairly short-lived. Criticism abounds that only a small, politically well-connected black elite benefited from BEE deals. These 'comrade capitalists' copied the behaviour and strategies of white business, with closely interconnected deals and subsidiaries. BEE is also branded as a

form of re-racialisation, fuelling white fears and emigration. Other critics point to increasing income disparities among the black population.

But which alternatives did the ANC have at its disposal? Iheduru points out that, a decade into the 'New South Africa', the legacy of apartheid remained largely intact: whites who constitute less than 10% of population still controlled over 85% of the economy. In his article, the problematic side of BEE is not ignored. Black business has not developed an autonomous voice on the basis of common class interests. BEE remains very much an instrument of the state and is directed by the state. The black bourgeoisie depends on state patronage and political connections and has little entrepreneurial drive of its own.

Culture

A number of recent publications seeks "to examine the limits of liberation from a different angle, one that investigates the limits of liberal democracy in relation to questions of 'culture', identity, citizenship and governance. Instead of reiterating political economy critiques of neo-liberalism (...) the contributors interrogate the prospects for liberal democracy in relation to questions of cultural diversity, post-apartheid ideas and practices of citizenship and governance". (Robins 2005: 3) In some of these discussions, 'culture' seems to be used as a politically correct euphemism for race.

The Comaroffs argue that popular politics in future will not be shaped by notions of race or class (Comaroff & Comaroff 2005). Notions of ethnic identity and poli-culturalism will frame local struggles against the authority of the state. In their view, ideological debates are a thing of the past. The Age of Ideology, of "genuinely competing ideas" is over, killed off by a mix of world-historical and local conditions. The result is a depoliticised arena, in which party platforms tend to converge, in which charismatics crystallise their popularity into 'customised' political brand, in which differences are confined largely to the implementation of policy and the distribution of material advantage(Comaroff & Comaroff 2005: 35). Identity-based struggles haven taken over from the universalist ideological passions that once inspired the liberation struggle.

Votes for welfare

In his study of the rural town of Bushbuckridge, Isak Niehaus concludes that the framework of neo-patrimonial politics offers the most fruitful approach for an explanation of the paradox of massive discontent about broken promises and continued high support for the ANC in elections (Niehaus 2006). Continuing loyalty to the ANC is tied to the relatively modest but expanding social benefits of the welfare state. In view of declining employment opportunities, the electorate has become increasingly dependent upon the distribution of welfare by the neo-patrimonial state. Unlike Saul c.s., Niehaus does not believe that widespread dissatisfaction will lead to a new 'liberation struggle'.

When asked what has changed since 1990, many respondents in my own research indeed replied by citing social benefits: the child support grant, pensions have been raised and are now paid on time, school feeding programs, drinking water and electricity, subsidized housing. Particularly since 2002, social benefits have increased substantially, making South Africa now a modest welfare state where about a quarter of the population benefits from some kind of social grant.

While I agree with Niehaus that a new 'liberation struggle' seems unlikely, I disagree with his notion that the provision of welfare follows a neo-patrimonial logic. When it comes to social grants, the South African state functions as a Weberian bureaucratic state, dispensing its services to those who qualify and not only to ANC loyalists. When it comes to the allocation of housing, contracts and certainly recruitment for jobs, there is ample room for favouritism, but the social grants system seems largely immune from political interference.

The glue of African nationalism
I came across one other longitudinal survey of the changing fortunes and worldviews of activists: Ari Sitas's survey which traces 400 working class leaders in KwaZulu-Natal over the period 1988-1998 (Sitas 2004) He found that 51% of respondents was much better off than before (the upwardly mobile); 25 % was stuck in the same occupational milieu as before (the stuck), while 22% had experienced a rapid deterioration of life chances (the deteriorated). The *upwardly mobile* were earning much more than before, but became frustrated when confronted with the limitations of mobility. A crucial variant in these careers was education. The higher their education, the more mobility. However, for women mobility was independent of education. For *the stuck*, issues of race were not salient: their main concern was job security. They manifested a strong sense of class consciousness as well as increasing antagonism towards state policies. The *deteriorated* tended to blame their misfortune on corruption, illegal migrants, the compromise deal between ANC and NP, but most of all on their own prior disadvantage: their lack of education. However, all agreed that their life now was much better than under apartheid: now there is peace and fairer treatment. Sitas' findings point towards the resilience and longevity of African nationalism as a defining ideology.

IN CONCLUSION: THE CHANGING MEANING OF CHANGE

I venture yet another possible explanation: perhaps we have all along misinterpreted the nature of the anti-colonial struggle? Perhaps liberation movements were inspired by the desire to inherit the colony, not to undo colonialism, in spite of all the revolutionary rhetoric? This is hardly a novel view. Adam and Moodley have argued that mainstream African nationalism aimed at the limited goal of equality, of the realization of bourgeois freedoms, not at a revolutionary road to a socialist society. (Adam & Moodley 1986). "Like Afrikaner nationalism, which used the state to seize its share of wealth from English imperialism, so Black nationalism, on the whole, aims at capturing capitalism for its own benefit rather than overthrowing it."
Some former activists have become hugely successful in government or business. In my sample, they belonged to the national or provincial UDF-leadership. In terms of local level activists, careers range from meteoric (premier of Gauteng Province; MP's) to miserable. With activists sharing similar backgrounds, the burning question focuses on the key to success. What or who does he/she know that I don't know? The comrades' network indeed did and does provide 'social capital', but social capital is in need of permanent maintenance. A prolonged absence can result in a core activist becoming a relative outsider. Moreover, bonds of 'horizontal comradeship' are severely strained by rapidly increasing socio-economic differentiation.
Talk of 'betrayal' is fairly common, but here the focus is not on ANC policies, but on former comrades who have neglected the advancement of their friends or who are seen as getting ahead at the expense of others. It is felt that activists have a moral

responsibility to take their fellow-activists along on the road to fame and riches. Some interviewees openly confessed that they were jealous. Jealousy might be interpreted as the flipside of comradely solidarity: it is considered improper if someone embarks on a successful career without taking the others along, at least part of the way.

In that sense, the ideal of equality is still valid: former activists feel entitled to be equally rich as their peers. My interviewees have not forgotten their erstwhile ideals of equality and popular participation, and they come up with various explanations of South Africa's trajectory to a liberal democracy with huge inequalities in standards of living. However, as far as the ideal of a non-racial South Africa is concerned, I encountered widespread amnesia among my African informants.

Neither the turn towards a more exclusive African nationalism nor the creation of a black bourgeoisie through BEE policies is out of tune with the worldview of most of the African former activists. The demise of the rainbow ideology that guided the UDF is much regretted by coloured, white, and Indian former activists but is hardly problematised by my African interviewees. Black Economic Empowerment and the fostering of a black bourgeoisie is decried as betrayal by leftwing academics of all races (Bond, Saul, Alexander), but among former activists at local level the cause for resentment is the feeling of being excluded from the looming consumerist paradise. As pointed out by many of its critics, BEE policies have conjured a tempting dream: everybody can get rich, stinking rich, almost overnight, as long as you have the right political connections. Opportunities are not waiting for those with skills, expertise, diplomas and experience, but for those with access to the right people. What counts is not entrepreneurial skills and guts, but access to the dispensers of BEE-deals.
In my interviews, principled opponents of black capitalism are few and far between. Most do not contest ANC policies as such but aspire to be included among the beneficiaries.

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