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Power, Patronage and Gatekeeper Politics in South Africa
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POWER, PATRONAGE AND GATEKEEPER POLITICS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This article examines gatekeeper politics within the ANC and its implications for South African politics. Access to channels of public authority shapes patterns of elite accumulation and has become a central feature of post-apartheid class formation. Furthermore, securing access to these channels can represent a vital means by which political entrepreneurs and their followers navigate endemic structural violence. The article draws on an analysis of ANC discussion documents, key informant interviews with senior party officials, and interviews and observations at the ANC's centenary policy conference. The article will identify the symptoms and consequences of the gatekeeper politics, including the growth of crony capitalism, spoils politics, and bitter factional struggles within the party. It will be argued that far from constituting a 'developmental' form of patronage politics, such dynamics serve to entrench the inequity of the post apartheid social and political order.

ON 7TH OF MAY, 2014, THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC) secured a fifth successive landslide election victory, garnering an impressive 62% of the poll which reflects the party's continued domination of South African electoral politics. The election marked 20 years of democracy in South Africa, a country which has experienced mixed fortunes since the end of apartheid.¹ On the one hand, notwithstanding the dire socioeconomic legacies of apartheid inherited by the first ANC government, South Africa has achieved steady GDP growth rates since 1994. Access to basic services, such as water and electricity, is improving, and more than 16 million South Africans now have access to social welfare. This has contributed to a decline in grinding poverty² and gradual improvements to South Africa's Human Development Index (HDI).³ On the other hand, however, unemployment rates are

¹ For a good overview of this debate see Tom Lodge, 'The South African developmental state?', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, 1 (2009) pp. 253-261.

² Carol Paton, 'Stats SA reports big drop in grinding poverty' *Business Day*, 4 April 2014, <<http://www.bdlive.co.za/economy/2014/04/04/stats-sa-reports-big-drop-in-grinding-poverty>> (1 June 2014).

³ United Nations, 'Human development Report 2011: Statistical Annex', (UN, 2011) <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/HDR/2011%20Global%20HDR/English/HDR_2011_EN_Tables.pdf> (20 May 2014).

conservatively estimated to hover around 25% and remain among the highest in the world.⁴ South Africa is also one of the most unequal countries on earth and income inequality, like unemployment, has risen since 1994.⁵ In recent years frustrations over the slow pace of socioeconomic transformation have spilled over into a nationwide wave of protests, such that South Africa now has more instances of recorded protest per capita than anywhere else in the world⁶, marking what some authors have described as a ‘rebellion of the poor’.⁷

One issue that unites commentators from across the political spectrum is the threat that corruption poses to both the quality of South African democracy and the country's prospects for socioeconomic development. The endemic nature of corruption in Africa is widely understood to be intrinsically bound up in the nature of African political systems and the postcolonial state. Rather than being held accountable by the electorate based on their capacity to deliver on their promises of providing public goods (health, education, development etc.) in an impersonal fashion through the formal political domain, political leaders are argued to derive support and legitimacy by distributing patronage (power, status, authority, jobs, wealth, access to markets, etc.) through informal, deeply personalised patron-client networks built upon mutual expectations of reciprocity. This is referred to by a bewildering array of political labels including: clientelism, prebendalism, cronyism, patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism. The latter in particular has gained prominence in African Studies literature and is generally⁸ employed to denote the blurring (or even complete breakdown), of the distinction between private and public authority.⁹ This blurring occurs because of the existence of two realms of authority: the impersonal institutions of the state and personal patron-client networks rooted in socially constructed notions of traditional obligations, personal loyalty and deference.

Patrick Chabal and Jean Pascal Daloz once argued that this kind of politics predominated by patron-client relations and informal notions of reciprocity was the ineluctable manner in which "Africa works". They argued that this form of politics would pose as an anathema to development and would continue to subvert – or at best pervert – Western-style electoral democracy from taking root and that even visionary leaders, like Nelson Mandela, would be unable to escape this *modus operandi* of African politics.¹³ However, such teleological determinism risks over-generalising our understanding of politics in Africa. As Erdman and

⁴ Although their expanded definition estimates this to be closer to 34%. Statistics South Africa ‘Quarterly labour force survey’ (Statistics South Africa, 2013). <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02114thQuarter2013.pdf>

⁵ World Bank, ‘World Development Indicators’. <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.92014> (3 June 2014).

⁶ Peter Alexander ‘A massive rebellion of the poor’, *Mail & Guardian*, 13 April 2012, <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-04-13-a-massive-rebellion-of-the-poor> (14 May 2014)

⁷ Peter Alexander ‘Rebellion of the poor: South Africa's service delivery protests – a preliminary analysis’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 37, 123 (2010), pp. 25-40.

⁸ Although the use of the term is deeply contested – to the extent that some argue it to have been used so broadly that its analytical utility has been severely (if not irreparably) compromised. See **XXXXXX**

⁹ Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, ‘Neo-patrimonialism reconsidered: critical review and elaboration of an elusive concept’, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 45, 1 (2007), pp. 95–119.

¹³ Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford, James Currey 1999), p. 162.

Engel have noted, most African countries today resemble something more of a hybrid form of political system where patron-client politics exists alongside electoral democracy.¹⁴ Furthermore, Anne Pitcher et al argue that ‘significant elements’ of patron-client politics can ‘survive and thrive today without decisively undermining democratic processes or development.’¹⁵ While informal patron-client networks remain a prominent feature of African political systems, we must also understand how and why this style of politics has generated it has calls terminal decline and state collapse in some contexts,¹⁷ while in others it has been argued to be entirely compatible with developmental outcomes and the strengthening of the state.¹⁸ This requires an appreciation of how and why networks operate in various national contexts, and what implications this bears for the capacity of those in state power to deliver on their electoral mandate.

In South Africa, there is growing evidence of informal patronage-based political networks working in parallel with, and sometimes in opposition to, the impersonal political institutions of the state. This is highlighted by the ruling party itself, which admits that ‘neopatrimonialism and corruption’ are spreading within the ANC, and that this is creating ‘anarchy and decay’ within the movement itself; stifling its capacity to promote the socioeconomic transformation expected by South African citizens.¹⁹ Tom Lodge has also identified ‘symptoms’ of neopatrimonialism within the ANC, including the gradual breakdown of distinctions between public and private concerns, the growth of personality-based factional politics, and increasing incidences of “the affirmation by the ANC leadership of ‘traditionalist’ representations of indigenous culture, whereby moral legitimation is sought more and more from appeals to ‘Africanist’ racial solidarity and nostalgic recollections of patriarchal social order rather than on the basis of the quality of government performance.”²⁰

This article will analyse the proliferation of what will be called gatekeeper politics within the ANC. Within ANC circles, ‘gatekeeping’ is a term commonly used to describe the behaviour of ANC leaders, particularly at branch level, when they become embroiled in patron-client networks. Frederick Cooper used the metaphor of the gatekeeper to describe the presidential ‘big man’ in Africa whose power was premised upon his ability to ‘sit astride the interface between a territory and the rest of world, collecting and distributing resources that derived from the gate itself.’²³ Cooper employed the metaphor to denote a ‘gatekeeper state complex’ and how presidential elites could maintain their seat of power. Here, gatekeeper politics refers to a much broader phenomenon of political struggles affecting all levels of the ruling party in South Africa. This cannot be explained away as resulting from some ineluctable state form: it results out of a combination of factors including the contradictions of the post-apartheid political economy and the incapacity of ANC state leaders to reign in gatekeeping behaviour. The manner in which political leaders in positions of authority within

¹⁴ Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel ‘Neopatrimonialism reconsidered’, p. 113.

¹⁵ Anne Pitcher et al ‘Rethinking patrimonialism’, p. 127.

¹⁷ For a discussion of these variations see Chris Allen ‘Warfare, endemic violence & state collapse in Africa’, *Review of African Political Economy* 26, 81 (1999), pp. 367-384

¹⁸ David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, ‘Developmental Patrimonialism? The case of Rwanda’, *African Affairs* 111, 444 (2012), pp. 379-403.

¹⁹ ANC, ‘Organisational renewal’ (ANC, 2012).

²⁰ Tom Lodge ‘Neo-patrimonial politics in the ANC’, *African Affairs* 113, 450 (2014), p. 2.

²³ Frederick Cooper 2002 p. 157

the ANC or in public office control access to resources and opportunities in order to forward their own political/economic ends. A cyclical relationship emerges in which resources and opportunities are distributed through patronage networks to regenerate the political power of the patron (or gatekeeper), and political power (access to state spoils) is in turn used to replenish the resources needed to maintain these networks and ‘purchase’ the affection of their supporters. As Chris Allen argued, ‘to have power was to have the means to reproduce it; to lose power, however, was to risk never having the means to regain it’.²⁴ Zero-sum struggles thus emerge over control over access to public authority, and the ‘spoils’ that flow from it: gatekeepers have a capacity to grant or deny access to resources, contributing to a volatile and sometimes violent battle over who controls the gate – whether it be a councilor position, local mayor, ANC branch executive office or a position within the senior structures of the party. Gatekeeper politics is therefore not synonymous with corruption (though corruption is a pervasive symptom of it). Instead, it reflects something much broader: political and social structures through which authority and power is cultivated, disseminated and contested.

The gatekeeping metaphor is useful for describing a broader phenomenon of how and why patron-client networks operate in the ANC. While sharing some themes in common with traditional neopatrimonial politics, nonetheless embodies a broad range of practices that share a commonality with political practices in other parts of the world, such as crony capitalism, pork barrel politics, and the insidious influence of private lobbyists on public political processes. These are not reducible to the frame of neopatrimonialism, which itself has come under fierce critique when employed as a catch-all explanatory framework, particular when it is used to accentuate the notion of an exotic African ‘other’. Moreover, patron-client networks in South Africa do not necessarily resemble the kind of deeply personal bonds of reciprocity between patrons and clients described in much of the literature on neopatrimonialism, rooted in traditional notions of authority and subordination. First, gatekeeper politics in the ANC draws upon strong identifications with the ANC as a modern political party rather than simply some purely personal relations between patron and client group. As a result, the bonds between gatekeepers and their followers are fluid, unpredictable and volatile rather than having some supposedly deep-seated, ‘pre modern’ patriarchal character grounded in long-standing loyalties. Second, gatekeeper politics should not be drawn into discussions of Africa’s relative backwardness vis-à-vis idealised notions of Western politics: the dynamics of gatekeeping should be viewed on a broader political continuum of factional party politics, class formation and crony capitalism; all of which are better understood as a product of the post apartheid political economy, rather than an unavoidable outcome of the nature of post-colonial state formation in Africa.

The article draws upon an analysis of ANC discussion documents, key informant interviews with senior party officials, and interviews and observations at the ANC’s centenary policy conference in 2012. First, the article will examine the nature of gatekeeper politics in South Africa, arguing that there are two interrelated dimension to this: spoils distribution (the (ab)use of positions of public authority for private gain); and crony capitalism (the (ab)use of connections to public authority to facilitate private capital accumulation).

The importance of securing access to public authority through ANC channels provokes intense factional struggles for positions of influence and power within the party. However, this extends well beyond the predatory struggles of a few powerful elites within the party: The spread of gatekeeper politics, and the intensity of the factional struggles surrounding it, can

²⁴ Chris Allen ‘Understanding African politics.’ *Review of African Political Economy* 22, 65 (1995), pp. 301-320, p. 304.

only be understood in relation to issues of everyday political economy. The manner in which extreme inequalities of class, gender, education, and health etc. severally reduce the ability of ordinary South Africans to survive and flourish reveals the endemic structural violence at the heart of post-apartheid society.²⁵ Such diminished opportunities draw political entrepreneurs and their followers towards private patron-client networks attached to the ANC as a means to exploit access to public authority in an effort to navigate poverty and inequality. The ANC thus ‘sucks in’ popular anxieties and frustrations over socioeconomic transformation into the confines of patronage-based factional struggles within the party. South Africa does not stand anywhere near the precipice of ‘terminal spoils’ politics and state collapse. However, this form of patronage-based politics cannot be defined as ‘developmental’ because of the manner it contributes to depoliticising the structural violence at the heart of underdevelopment in South Africa, hiding them from view while reifying the power of the ANC and reducing the prospects for more transformative forms of political agency to emerge.

The spread of gatekeeper politics

Corruption and political patronage were constant features of the old apartheid regime in South Africa which, according to Hyslop’s study, became increasingly pronounced from the 1970s as the apartheid system began to disintegrate and the Afrikaner establishment was unable to discipline its followers and prevent the ensuing ‘scramble for personal enrichment.’²⁶ Lodge notes that during the apartheid era South Africa experienced corruption on multiple scales, including high-level scandals relating to arms procurement and oil sanctions, as well as widespread ‘petty corruption’ practiced by ordinary civil servants.²⁷ As both scholars note, patron-client relationships were also endemic within the African-run homeland authorities, such that ‘homeland government became a by-word for corruption and incompetence.’²⁸

Lodge argues that the persistence of corruption and the growth of neopatrimonial politics after 1994 is not simply a continuation of the old practices of the apartheid order: the roots of corruption and patrimonialism, he contends, run deep within the history of the ANC, which can be explained by several factors. First, patronage-based relationships formed the core of inter-elite alliances within the ANC in its early years; second, the participation of ANC elites within the Advisory Board institutions of the old apartheid state which were ‘centres of clientelistic politics’;²⁹ and third, the incorporation of criminal networks into the ANC during the struggle period nurtured criminal activity within the party and strengthened ‘patrimonial political predispositions.’³⁰

It is clear, however, that whatever potency of these ‘predispositions’, it was not until 1994, when the ANC assumed the incumbency of the state, that patron-client relations could

²⁵ Johann Galtung ‘Violence, peace and peace studies’, *Journal of Peace Research* 6, 3 (1969), pp. 167-191.

²⁶ Jonathan Hyslop, ‘Political corruption before and after apartheid’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 31, 4 (2005), pp. 773-789, p. 782.

²⁷ Tom Lodge, ‘Political corruption in South Africa’, *African Affairs* 97, 387 (1998), pp.157-187, p. 164-167

²⁸ Hyslop, ‘Political corruption’, p. 783; Lodge ‘Political corruption in South Africa’, p. 167-169.

²⁹ Lodge ‘Neo-patrimonialism’, p. 7-8.

³⁰ *Ibid* p. 17

begin to assume the scale and character that we can now witness. Access to a vast array of resources suddenly lay before ANC activists who could now utilize positions of party authority to leverage themselves into positions of state authority, whether as parliamentarians, cabinet ministers, mayors, councilors, civil servants or employees in the rapidly expanding state machinery. Others could use the skills and authority they had accumulated in the struggle period, as well as their political connections, to carve out new opportunities in the private sector for personal enrichment. Such processes were actively facilitated by the ANC itself, which promoted the deployment of its cadres' control over the state and the private sector as part of a broader effort to encourage the political and socioeconomic transformation of South Africa and to help ferment the growth of a black capitalist class.

Such a rapid assumption of power, however, came with challenges. As one senior member of both the Mandela and Mbeki administrations put it,

‘I think we were naïve not to have expected it. Our textbooks didn't prepare us to see how quickly it happened. That's the difference ... too quickly too many people saw the ANC structures as stepping stones not for the values of what we fought for but to get them into political positions which leads to economic gains.’³¹

In 1997 Mandela warned that the movement could witness the abuse of public authority for ‘personal gratification’ in what he described as a ‘desperate desire to accumulate wealth in the shortest possible period of time’.³² Indeed, former president Kgalema Motlanthe reflected recently that the ANC had often succumbed to the ‘sins of incumbency while in office, and that ‘dishonest wealth accumulation’ had become a mainstay of party activity.³³ This sentiment was echoed among delegates at the ANC's policy conference, who complained that the organization had become a sordid ‘pyramid scheme’ to ‘get rich quick’ scheme. One ANC activist, for example, bemoaned how ‘we are no longer revolutionary politicians, we are professional politicians’ going into politics to make a living.

ANC activists and leadership alike would often speak about this attitude through metaphors of eating, arguing that ANC members were now often of the impression that once they assumed positions of party or public office, ‘it is our time to chow’. But how did this ‘chowing’ happen? As one NEC member reflected, there were ‘two sides’ to patronage politics:

‘On the one side there is business and on the other side the one side of the patronage machine there are the issues of survival of ordinary members of the party and the communities who are unemployed and who end up making choices aligned to an individual because they are seen that they are somebody who will help them out. [usually linking to councillors or BECs].’³⁴

There are thus two, interwoven, dimensions to the exercise of neopatrimonial authority in South Africa: first, the direct (ab)use of public authority to distribute the spoils of the state along private channels (e.g. jobs, housing, public money), which we might label spoils politics. The second is the (ab)use of access to public authority to facilitate private capital accumulation, which one might refer to as crony capitalism.

Spoils politics

³¹ Interview, ex NEC member, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012

³² Nelson Mandela ‘50th National Conference: Report by the President of the ANC’ (ANC, 1997) <<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2461>> (14 June 2014)

³³ Kgalema Motlanthe ‘Speech to conference’ Oxford, 27 April 2014.

³⁴ Interview, NEC member, Johannesburg, South Africa, May 2014

Chris Allen first coined the term ‘spoils politics’ to denote where ‘public office is valued not for its powers or potential, nor to serve the public interest, but in order to achieve a cash return to the investment made in obtaining the office.’³⁵ Private wealth, status and power (and the ability to distribute these) thus constituted the ‘spoils’ of public office that the incumbent could consume as they wished.

One dimension of this spoils politics is the direct consumption of public resources for private benefit. In recent years allegations of such activities have surrounded ANC elites and one notable example has been President Jacob Zuma’s ‘security upgrades’ to his private homestead in Nkandla, KwaZulu Natal, which were ‘conservatively estimated’ by the Public Protector’s investigation to cost R246 million (US \$23 million).³⁶ The Protector argued that she found ‘serious difficulty’ in classifying the upgrades – which include a cattle kraal, swimming pool, amphitheatre, visitors’ centre, marquee area and chicken run - as security measures.³⁷ The Protector concluded that the President and his family had ‘unduly benefited’ from the public expenditure.³⁸ However, as Bayart notes, ‘contrary to the popular image of the innocent masses, corruption and predatoriness are not found exclusively among the powerful.’³⁹ Indeed, the manner in which corruption has become engrained in the everyday practices of a whole host of government departments has been well documented.⁴⁰

A second feature of this spoils politics has been nepotistic distribution of employment opportunities, which operates on a range of scales. A symptom of this has been the perception that political appointments at all levels of public office, including provincial premiers⁴¹, mayors and municipal managers⁴² are made on the grounds of political loyalties over competence, and that those on the wrong side of ANC power holders could expect to be ‘purged’ from their public office⁴³ or their positions within the party.⁴⁴ A politics of inclusion

³⁵ Chris Allen ‘Warfare’, p.377.

³⁶ ‘Statement by the Public Protector’ 19 March 2014 (Public Protector of South Africa, Pretoria, 2014) pp. 1-52, p. 3
<http://www.publicprotector.org/media_gallery/2014/Nkandla%20Statement%20by%20Public%20Protector%2019%20March%202014.pdf>

³⁷ Ibid pp. 26-28

³⁸ Ibid p. 45; For an overview of this issue see Phillip De Wet *Nkandla: The Great Unravelling* (Mail & Guardian, Johannesburg, 2014).

³⁹ Jean-François Bayart, *The state in Africa. The politics of the belly* (Polity, Cambridge, 2009). p. 238

⁴⁰ For the best overview see Lodge ‘Political corruption’.

⁴¹ Charles Molele ‘ANC denies claims of purging Zuma dissidents’, *Mail & Guardian*, 8 June 2013 <<http://mg.co.za/article/2013-06-08-anc-denies-claims-of-purging-zuma-dissidents>> (28 June 2014).

⁴² There have for example been recent stories reporting this, including, Ngwako Modjadji ‘New Limpopo Mayors Appointed After Purge’, *The Citizen*, 2 July 2014 <<http://citizen.co.za/203962/new-limpopo-mayors-appointed-after-purge/>> (4 July 2014); Lubabalo Ngcukana *City Press* ‘Anti-Zuma leaders purged one by one in Eastern Cape’, 20 October 2013 <<http://www.citypress.co.za/politics/anti-zuma-leaders-purged-one-one-eastern-cape/>> (4 July 2014).

⁴³ The best overview of these dynamics is given by Susan Booysen *The ANC and the regeneration of political power* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2011); for an insiders’ perspective see Franck Chikane *Eight days in September: The removal of Thabo Mbeki* (Picador, Johannesburg, 2012).

and exclusion emerges that reifies the power of the power and authority of ‘big man’/patron who can determine the fate of those below him.

Positions of public office were thus hotly contested, not only because they were an immediate source of wealth for the individual; they were also a means by which powerful patrons could distribute resources and opportunities to their extended networks of dependents. It was widely argued, for example, that obtaining office was not simply an individualistic pursuit of power, but about ‘helping out’ and ‘looking after’ those who were less powerful. As the ANC’s own documents explain,

Positions in government... mean the possibility to appoint individuals in all kinds of capacities. As such, some members make promises to friends, that once elected and ensconced in government, they would return the favour.⁴⁵

‘Sharing the spoils’ thus becomes central to maintaining moral authority based on shared expectations of reciprocity from both patrons and clients and highlights the need to understand this not simply in terms of corruption, but as the reproduction of political power structures and authority. As Schatzberg notes, a big man can be seen to ‘eat’ from the state but he must also ensure his clients can also share some of the proceeds, even if they only eat crumbs.⁴⁶ For example, it was often argued councillor positions at the community level were particularly lucrative for those that occupied them in this regard and was quite literally a ‘life and death’ matter. Furthermore, being a councillor was also a means of distributing spoils to their clientele. As one senior NEC official explained, this practice was particularly pronounced at local levels because state-sponsored development projects were required to use local labour and local businesses to complete the projects, and that the councillor would have a large influence over this:

When there is a development project, say in Diepsloot, there is a development project being done there and they’ve got houses being built there, the councillor forms what is called a project liaison committee that oversees firstly who are the local labourers that will be used because for these projects you have to recruit local labour: the guys who are gonna work on the project must come from the locality - that’s where the influence of the councillor is. The councillor must also decide who are the local small businesses who can do some of the small work locally like if there is a contract to build a local road or a school there, or do the plumbing....So the councillor also has influence with selecting subcontractors.⁴⁷

Indeed, reports into the functioning of local government regularly cite issues of corruption, nepotism and cronyism around local development projects as a primary obstacle to their successful completion, particularly where the whims and interests of powerful individuals prevail over an impersonal and formalised distribution of public goods.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ The most highly publicised case being that of the ANC Youth League members who opposed Zuma. *BBC News* ‘ANC Sacks Jacob Zuma Critics’ 18 March 2013 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21830787>> (June 27 2014).

⁴⁵ ANC National Working Committee ‘Through the eye of the needle - choosing the best cadres to lead transformation’ *Umrabulo* 11 (2001) <<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2945>> (1 July 2014)

⁴⁶ Michael M Schatzberg, *Political legitimacy in middle Africa: Father, family, food* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2001).

⁴⁷ Interview, NEC member, Johannesburg, South Africa, May 2014

⁴⁸ Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, ‘State of local government in South Africa’, (Government of South Africa, Pretoria, 2009), <www.gov.za/documents/download.php?f=110100> (4 June 2012)

Allen noted how this kind of neopatrimonial ‘spoils politics’ could degenerate into ‘terminal spoils’ and state collapse in the most extreme cases.⁴⁹ South Africa is nowhere near such a breakdown, and in reality reflects a far more sustainable spoils politics where elites ‘feeding’ from the state is not only resisted (as I discuss below), but also offset by the sheer scale of the growing private sector opportunities from which powerful interests could also benefit.

Crony capitalism

There has been a proliferation in the business concerns of senior ANC elites and their networks, most notably Jacob Zuma’s family which, by 2010 held 134 company directorships, of which 83 were registered after Zuma came to office.⁵⁰ Zuma’s current deputy, Cyril Ramaphosa, has an estimated net worth of \$700 million⁵¹ with a large shareholding in the Shanduka group that has invested across the South African economy and holds stakes in McDonalds (South Africa), Coca Cola bottling plants, Standard Bank and Lonmin, among others.⁵² While the precise nature of these links are difficult to prove, academic studies suggest that some business elites have benefited considerably from their ties to the ANC.⁵³ There are, for example, reports of foul play with regard to how individuals and consortiums with a history of making funding donations to the ANC have directly benefited from share deals, allegedly using the profits from these share holdings to finance party activity.⁵⁴ Such suspicions are fuelled by the public proclamations of ANC leaders like Jacob Zuma, who stated to the party’s anniversary gala dinner in Durban that ‘wise’ businessmen who supported the ANC could expect that ‘everything you touch will multiply.’⁵⁵

There are allegations that the ANC itself has benefited from its business connections. Paul Holden argues that the ANC’s party funding model is simply: ‘business fronts benefiting from state contracts that pass profits back to the ANC’s treasury,’⁵⁶ pointing to the party’s

⁴⁹ Chris Allen ‘Warfare’, p. 379

⁵⁰ Tom Lodge ‘Neo-patrimonialism’, p. 2.

⁵¹ This is the Forbes ‘Africa rich list’ estimate <<http://www.forbes.com/profile/cyril-ramaphosa/>> (7 July 2014)

⁵² Although in May 2014 Ramaphosa declared that he will now divest in Shanduka. Carol Paton and Phakamisa Ndzamela ‘Cyril Ramaphosa exits Shanduka’, *Business Day*, 27 May 2014 <<http://www.bdlive.co.za/business/2014/05/27/cyril-ramaphosa-exits-shanduka>> (30 June 2014)

⁵³ For example Gavin Capps makes this point in his detailed study of reform in the platinum sector. ‘A bourgeois reform with social justice? The contradictions of the Minerals Development Bill and black economic empowerment in the South African platinum mining industry’, *Review of African Political Economy* 39, 132 (2012), pp. 315-333, pp.325–330.

⁵⁴ For an interesting example of this see Tabela Timse et al ‘ANC stands to benefit from R1bn Capitec bank bonanza’, *Mail & Guardian*, 28 September 2012, <<http://amabhungane.co.za/article/2012-09-28-anc-stands-to-benefit-from-r1bn-capitec-bank-bonanza>> (15 June 2014)

⁵⁵ Lionel Faull and Sam Sole ‘Jo’burg’s R1bn “present” to Zuma benefactor’, *Mail & Guardian*, 18 January 2013. <<http://amabhungane.co.za/article/2013-01-18-joburgs-r1bn-present-to-zuma-benefactor>> (15 June 2014).

⁵⁶ Paul Holden ‘Ensuring reproduction: The ANC and its models of party funding’, in Martin Plaut and Paul Holden (eds), *Who rules South Africa? Pulling the strings of power* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 2012) pp. 193-202, p. 193.

investment arm, Chancellor House, which has reportedly built up a portfolio of close to R2 billion (US \$187 million).⁵⁷ Chancellor House has allegedly benefitted directly from the allocation of state tenders (contracts) for the provision of capital or services to state owned enterprise.⁵⁸ The ANC has also sought to bolster its finances and close ties to business through the establishment of the ‘Progressive Business Forum’ (PBF). Businesses are invited to pay high fees to join the PBF and in return the PBF boasts to offer them access to ‘ministerial networking events’, the opportunity to join trade delegations, and also access to ‘high end’ events including Presidential gala dinners and a ‘global BRICS and mining summit.’⁵⁹ Paul Holden has argued that this has significance for understanding the continued power of the party because ‘the ANC has successfully turned political power into economic power...and economic power begets further political power.’⁶⁰ Indeed, such connections to business help the ANC to fund its election campaigns and Roger Southall goes so far as to suggest that these connections ‘probably now makes it one of the richest political parties in the world!’⁶¹

This kind of crony capitalism – where capital accumulations is made possible through connections to private networks of public authority – exists on a range of different scales. The phenomenon of the ‘tenderpreneur’ is reported to be widespread, whereby a government project, for example the building of a local road or housing, is put out to a tendering process and businesses compete for the project (or ‘tender’). However, there are widespread reports of this process influenced by private patron-client networks linking capitalists to the state, rather than being a neutral process in the public interest.⁶² As one senior member of the NEC argued, ‘from the point of view of people who want to advance their business interests want to have influence over ANC processes. If they have someone friendly to them, you know, they think they have a shoe in on whatever business opportunities might be coming in there.’⁶³ Major suspicions have been aroused when decisions are made by a ruling party ‘acting as both player and referee’ in the process.’⁶⁴ Delegates at the ANC’s conference

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 211

⁵⁸ An alleged example of this was the award of R40 billion tender for supplying boilers for Eskom’s Medupi and Kusile power stations to Hitachi Power Africa, in which Chancellor House had a 25% shareholding. See Sally Evans and Jonathan Erasmus ‘Chancellor House lands new deal’ *Mail & Guardian*, 27 July 2012, <<http://amabhungane.co.za/article/2012-07-27-chancellor-house-lands-new-deal>> (1 July 2014) More recently, Chancellor House has been involved in a deal to take over a major supplier of equipment to Eskom, Pfisterer SA. See ‘ANC’s Chancellor House in secret R170m Eskom supplier deal’, *City Press*, 26 April 2014. <<http://www.citypress.co.za/news/ancs-chancellor-house-secret-r170m-eskom-supplier-deal/>> (1 July 2014). Paul Holden offers the most detailed discussion of Chancellor House’s activities: Paul Holden ‘Ensuring reproduction’, p. 205-212.

⁵⁹ This is documented in the PBF’s magazine. Renier Schoeman and Daryl Swanepoel ‘Letter from the co-editors’, *Progressive Leader* 11 (2014), pp. 15-16.

⁶⁰ Paul Holden ‘Ensuring reproduction’, p. 194.

⁶¹ Roger Southall ‘The ANC for Sale? Money, morality & business in South Africa’, *Review of African Political Economy* 35, 116 (2008) pp. 281-299, p. 290.

⁶² One example of this kind of alleged activity involves former ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema and how a company his family interests part-owned has reportedly benefitted directly from the tenders it helps to award. Piet Rampedi and Adriaan Basson, ‘Malema’s tender bonanza’, *fin24*, 7 August 2011, <<http://www.fin24.com/Economy/Malemas-tender-bonanza-20110807>> (21 June 2014).

⁶³ Interview, NEC member, Johannesburg, South Africa, May 2014.

⁶⁴ Tabela Timse et al, ‘ANC stands to benefit’.

would complain about this bitterly, arguing that projects like road building and house building were done to a poor standard on the cheap by tenderpreneur ‘sharks’ who wanted a quick pay off. The process is relatively simple. As one former cabinet minister put it:

People see that being a councilor is a means to become involved in small scale corruption, not big corruption like in the urban areas where big companies corrupt people to get hold of huge contracts, but it may well be that it’s the owners of a taxi rank who want it to be in a specific place, it may be some very small scale construction company that wants to be involved with building houses or road building or whatever else, and they would think that maybe if you can get a councilor on your side the councilor can fight your battle. Now councilors are not supposed to have a role in giving out contracts but they do by placing influence on other individuals like municipal managers, for example. So you have that low level corruption. And you know many councilors are very open about it saying ... we must chow [eat] now because maybe we’re not gonna get elected again as ANC councilors and there’s no other opportunities [for employment/livelihoods] in that area.’⁶⁵

What this illustrates is that access to the networks of *public* authority become a vital facilitator of *private* capital accumulation. Just as sections of the old Afrikaans capitalist class was dependent on private channels of state support of the apartheid regime, so too the emerging black elite is heavily reliant upon its connections to the new state authorities. South Africa thus shares similarities with other post-colonial African states, and in particular the manner in which processes of post-colonial class formation are inexorably bound up with the facilitation of capital accumulation through the mechanisms of political power.⁶⁶ Gatekeeper politics thus extends well beyond the dissemination of state resources in South Africa, and instead becomes an intrinsic feature of post-apartheid capitalism, similar to the kind of capital accumulation one can witness in the crony capitalism evident in the East Asian ‘Tiger’ economies⁶⁷ and post-Soviet Russia⁶⁸, where the ability to accumulate depends upon private connections to public authority, rather than successfully navigating an impersonal ‘market’. The ANC’s connections to business should also be understood on a broader spectrum of oligarchic politics evident in Western countries where private capitalist ‘lobbyists’ wield huge influence over public officials in order to promote private interests.⁶⁹

However, Southall notes that such connections have contributed to the ‘moral decay’ of the party.⁷⁰ Indeed, the contradictions of this relationship with private capital can also pit ANC elites directly against the party’s core constituency – the black working class. Deputy ANC President Cyril Ramaphosa, for example, was the largest shareholder in the Lonmin mining group at the time when 34 of its workers were killed by police when they were out on strike in 2012⁷¹, with the police allegedly under pressure from Ramaphosa to take firmer

⁶⁵ Interview, former cabinet minister, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

⁶⁶ Morris Szeftel, ‘Accumulation and Africa’s “catastrophic corruption”’, *Review of African Political Economy* 27, 84 (2000), pp. 287-306, p. 302

⁶⁷ David C. Kang, *Crony capitalism: Corruption and development in South Korean and the Philippines* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002).

⁶⁸ Daniel C. Bach ‘Patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism: Comparative trajectories and readings’, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 49, 3 (2011), pp. 275-294.

⁶⁹ This was something raised by a senior official at Luthuli House, who argued passionately that South Africa should be viewed within this broader context rather than presenting this as some unique African phenomenon. Interview, Luthuli House senior official, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

⁷⁰ Roger Southall, ‘ANC for sale’.

⁷¹ For a discussion of Marikana and this issue of ownership see Peter Alexander, ‘Marikana, turning point in South African history’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 40, 138 (2013), pp. 605-619, p. 613

action with the strikers.⁷² More recently it has emerged that Mineral Resources Minister held a stake in the platinum sector while he actively intervened in ending a workers' strike in the sector, constituting what his spokesman was forced to admit constituted a serious 'conflict of interest'.⁷³

Factions, fragmentation and violence

It is within this context of the importance of connections to public authority that we can begin to understand the emergence of intense factional struggles within the ANC over access to state authority. A cyclical relationship emerges in which patronage is distributed to regenerate the political power of 'big men', and political power (access to state spoils) is used to replenish the resources needed to maintain these networks.⁷⁴

Factional struggles rooted in patronage contests are nothing new to the ANC. The intensity of these has increased since the ANC has held public office, however, and the initial warnings raised in the mid 1990s⁷⁵ have become much more alarmist in tone in recent years, arguing that factionalism has become 'parasitic' by sapping the life out of the ANC's structures.⁷⁶ Such is the concern in the party that it has now introduced 'Organisational Renewal' discussion documents debated at length during its policy conferences. The most recent of these goes as far to warn of a 'new shadow culture' emerging within the party, leading to a shift away from 'transformative politics' towards 'neo-patrimonialism'.⁷⁷ It argues that,

'There is a silent retreat from the mass line to the palace politics of factionalism and perpetual in-fighting, the internal strife revolves around contestation for power and state resources, rather than differences on how to implement the policies of the movement. This situation has shifted the focus of the cadres and members of the movement away from social concerns and people's aspirations. These circumstances have produced a new type of ANC leader and member who sees ill-discipline, divisions, factionalism and in-fighting as normal practices and necessary forms of political survival. Drastic measures and consistent action against these tendencies are necessary to root out anarchy and decay.'⁷⁸

A great concern raised within the ANC is this 'ill-discipline' within its ranks. It is graphically evident at ANC gatherings, where factions will heckle, boo or simply block rival

⁷² Siphso Hlongwane, 'Cyril Ramaphosa's Marikana email batters ANC heavyweight's reputation', *Guardian*, 24 October 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/24/cyril-ramaphosa-lonmin-email-reputation>> (4 July 2014).

⁷³ Craig Mckune and Stefaans Brummer, 'Mining minister's platinum shares: A R20m 'conflict of interest', *Mail & Guardian*, 27 June 2014, <<http://mg.co.za/article/2014-06-26-mining-ministers-platinum-shares-a-r20m-conflict-of-interest>> (1 July 2014).

⁷⁴ Chris Allen, 'Understanding African Politics', p. 304.

⁷⁵ Indeed, these struggles were discussed throughout the 1990s following the ANC's first years in office. ANC '50th National Conference: Report of the Secretary General' (ANC, 1997), <<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2483>> (12 June 2014)

⁷⁶ ANC 'Leadership renewal, discipline and organizational culture' (ANC, 2010), <<http://www.anc.org.za/docs/discus/2010/leadershipn.pdf>> (10 July 2014).

⁷⁷ ANC, 'Organisational Renewal', (ANC, 2012), <<http://www.anc.org.za/docs/discus/2012/organisationalrenewalf.pdf>> p. 9 (3 April 2014)

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 9.

factions from taking to the podium. As the *Organisational Renewal* document notes, the movement has witnessed the deployment of ‘vast resources’ by competing factions ‘to organise lobby group meetings, travel and communications’ and even ‘outright bribing and paying of individuals in regions and branches to forward particular factional positions and/or disrupt meetings’.⁷⁹ The document also notes the use of factional t-shirts, songs, insults being widely used at all levels of the movement.⁸⁰ As delegates at the party’s 2012 conference noted, this was now becoming the ‘staple diet’ of the activities of the party, deeply embedded in everyday practice and fermenting a new organizational culture. The concern is thus raised by the ANC that, as one delegate put it, reflecting a widely expressed sentiment, ‘the rot has really set in everywhere’; a sentiment echoed in the ANC’s discussion documents that lament how ‘both “old” and “new” members and leadership echelons at all levels are involved, increasingly leaving no voice in our ranks that is able to provide guidance’.⁸¹

At the top levels, such factional struggles can result in the ‘purging’ of rival factions from public authority and the displacement of senior party officials from offices of power. However they can take on an entirely more sinister and, at times, dangerous character local levels. On the one hand, this was connected to national leadership struggles. Delegates reported that there were incidences of branches being established (or even completely fabricated) by competing factions to improve their standing in regions/provinces, despite having insufficient members to make the branch quorate. In some cases, local struggles could also erupt into violent clashes – which was widely reported by ANC members – and this was confirmed by the ANC’s discussion documents which note that police have been increasingly called into intervene in such clashes.⁸²

In some cases where there was a divide between the ANC faction in control of the branch and the local councillor then this could spill over into local coup attempts. What has emerged in recent years in particular is how genuine grievances over socioeconomic transformation have been hijacked by ANC party factions in an effort to rival one another and overthrow local councillors. This was an issue raised at the ANC’s conference and was argued to form part of a broader repertoire of tactics employed by rival ANC factions.⁸³ This was described in a range of different ways but in essence, a local ANC faction will either prey upon local grievances over issues like corruption, housing, jobs or service delivery or fabricate allegations of corruption, incompetence, nepotism etc. against the incumbent councillor. This could then involve mobilising local protests in order to undermine the councillor. They might then appeal to higher levels of the party to ‘recall’ the councillor from his position or simply undermine their future election chances. One story from a former government minister is particularly revealing of how these struggles played out within the party. They described how they had been sent by the NEC to investigate unrest in an area that had witnessed local protests. They called a meeting at the local ANC branch with the ANC Branch Executive Committee, the MEC from local government dealing with housing, and the local councillor. They recalled:

‘So we start the meeting and one of the branch gets up and points at the councillor and says ‘you know comrade, him he’s corrupt.’ I asked ‘why is he corrupt?’ And he said ‘you see he gave his

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 31-32.

⁸⁰ The unpublished discussion document submitted to the 2012 ANC Policy Conference by KwaZulu Natal Province gives some useful detail on this on p. 15.

⁸¹ ANC, ‘Leadership renewal, discipline and organizational culture’, (ANC, 2010) <<http://www.anc.org.za/docs/discus/2010/leadershipn.pdf>> (2 July 2014)

⁸² ANC ‘Organisational Renewal’, p. 32.

⁸³ Some excellent detail on this is provided by Susan Booysen, ‘The ANC’, pp. 126-73.

wife an RDP house'. So I asked the councillor 'did you give your wife an RDP house.' And he said 'no comrade, that house belonged to my wife before we were even married.' So then I confronted those making allegations because it became clear that they were lying and trying to intimidate this guy [the councillor] in our presence. So we resolved it and moved on to the second point. Again, some branch guy gets up and points at some guy in the municipality and says 'the councilor just gives jobs to his family and friends'. So I ask the councilor 'do you give jobs to your family and friends?' And he says 'there were six jobs and they were for grave-diggers and I did not give jobs to my family and friends. If you want I can give you the papers to show who we employed.' The ANC guys in the other faction never looked at the papers. Its just allegations. So for me it was clear that these issues being raised were not true. So we went to the public meeting later that day and when the councillor walks in he got *loud* applause from one particular side of this packed room. I asked why they were so supportive of him and I was told 'you know comrade, you see, he's not a bad councillor.' So we start the meeting and it gets rowdy – and I mean *rowdy* – shouting intimidatory and everything else from the other side of the room. Eventually they calmed down and the crowd asked their questions and we gave them answers. But then when I left through the back door I found the chairman of the branch frantising with the rowdy lot trying to bring down the councilor and they had been encouraging them! So I went back and told the SG [Secretary General] the problem is your ANC branch, the people on the BEC wanted the position of the councillor, so they were using these people and their problems to create a furor and try and remove the councilor. These are the problems that we are facing.... and we really didn't know that this problem would go so deep into the ANC branches.⁸⁴

Karl Von Holdt has describes the growth of such factional activity – and the violence that surrounds it - as heralding part of a 'transition to violent democracy' in South Africa.⁸⁵ Similarly, Jonny Steinberg also details how South African police have been drawn into these factional struggles, and that exercising discretion about which political leaders to investigate for corruption or which protests to quell by force becomes intimately bound up in factional power struggles within the ANC, forcing the police to take sides.⁸⁶ What is clear from such observations, and from the voices of activists within the movement, is that the bitter, patronage-fuelled struggles over positions of public authority have proliferated to a degree that they are spreading what the ANC describes as 'anarchy and decay', but what more accurately reflects the spread of neopatrimonial authority and the fierce competition of resources that are symptomatic of it.

Why has gatekeeper politics spread?

Although there was broad consensus that gatekeeper politics was spreading in the movement, there were mixed ideas about why exactly this had occurred. It was widely expressed by past and present members of the NEC who were struggle veterans that one reason for the spread of such 'tendencies' was a moral shift in the people entering the movement. It was often remarked, for example, that while it was impossible 'to paint everyone with the same brush', there was nonetheless an identifiable change in the reasons why people joined the movement. The crucial difference, it was alleged, was that during the struggle era people were 'recruited' based on their identifiable talents, whereas now people 'joined' the movement for individual benefit. As one prominent member of the NEC put it: 'You know I came here [to the ANC] to commit yourself to fight for a cause, knowing that it can result in death, imprisonment, in a family being destroyed, you having to leave your

⁸⁴ Interview, former cabinet minister, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

⁸⁵ Karl Von Holdt, 'South Africa: the transition to violent democracy', *Review of African Political Economy* 40, 138 (2013), pp. 589-604.

⁸⁶ Jonny Steinberg 'Policing, State Power, and the Transition from Apartheid to Democracy: A New Perspective', *African Affairs* 113, 451 (2014), pp. 173-191, p. 190

home, going into exile. The conditions are totally different [now]. So as the ANC we would be naive and stupid to believe that now when you have contest elections in a multiparty democracy that you will find the same quality of cadre.’⁸⁷ A sentiment that was quite often expressed was that, as one former NEC member put it, the ‘kids’ of today were too invested in making careers for themselves and ‘driving posh cars’ and ‘would look at you as if you were mad’ if you called on them to make sacrifices for the movement. There is clearly an element of nostalgia attached to these narratives, but they nonetheless resonated with a broader sentiment reverberating around the conference halls that the younger generation of activists joining the movement simply did not understand the importance of political activism, nor did they share the selfless commitment to ‘the cause’ exhibited by their elders. As Jonathan Dean writes, such ‘narratives of apolitically’ – which hold that younger activists are typically unable or unwilling to embody the authenticity, radicalism and commitment characteristic of older activists – often circulate irrespective of their empirical accuracy, and often serve to marginalize or render invisible potentially significant forms of youth activism.⁸⁸ Such narratives obscure the multiple reasons why people engage in the ANC, which is not purely instrumental and is instead often rooted in complex bonds of solidarity with the movement.⁸⁹ They also serve to short-circuit a more rigorous investigation into the structural roots of gatekeeper politics.

One key factor explaining the spread of gatekeeper politics since 1994 is the weakness of the state and the ANC’s organization. As Tim Kelsall has argued, the extent to which state authorities can control the spread of patronage depends in large part upon their willingness and capacity to centralize control over rent-seeking behaviour.⁹⁰ The great problem that both past and present members of the NEC would highlight was that the movement had always spent its time planning how to take power and that its fundamental capacity to govern was inadequate in 1994.⁹¹ It was in this context that former ministers would often describe their first years in office after 1994 as an exercise in frantically learning the ropes where they lacked the capacity to effectively keep track on, let alone reign in, rent-seeking behaviour. As one senior cabinet minister in both the Mbeki and Mandela governments concluded glumly, ‘We had very few cadres in exile and inside [the country] put together in 1994. We were too few to run a country like South Africa initially, there’s no doubt about that.’⁹² The diffusion of authority to the provinces further diluted the state’s capacity to reign in errant behaviour, it was argued. This lack of state capacity was coupled with a dearth of organizational capacity within the ANC itself, which had rapidly cobbled together its nation-wide branch structures once it was unbanned in 1990, such that it lacked the ability to contain the emergence of ‘gatekeepers’ at the branch level who would leverage their positions and exploit the lack of central oversight to amass power bases through which they could pursue their private interests.⁹³ Indeed, it was widely believed that these gate keeping tendencies was far more

⁸⁷ Interview, senior ANC official, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

⁸⁸ Jonathan Dean, ‘Tales of the apolitically’, *Political Studies* 62, 2 (2014), pp. 452-467.

⁸⁹ Alexander Beresford, ‘Comrades “back on track”? The durability of the tripartite alliance in South Africa’, *African Affairs* 108, 432 (2009) pp. 391-412.

⁹⁰ Tim Kelsall, ‘Rethinking the Relationship between Neo-Patrimonialism and Economic Development in Africa’, *IDS Bulletin* 42, 2, (2011) pp. 76–87.

⁹¹ This is a point made in several interviews with former ministers and NEC members.

⁹² Interview, former cabinet minister, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

⁹³ ANC, ‘50th National Conference: Resolutions - Building the ANC’, (ANC, 1997), <<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2427>> (24 June 2014); ANC ‘ANC - People’s

prevalent in areas where the ANC's organization has historically been weaker and where the 'strongest' cadres of the party returning from exile or jail had been unable to exert control.

While the issue of under capacity of the state was clearly an issue in terms of why it had been difficult to keep central *control* over the proliferation of rent-seeking behaviour, such behaviour should, in the first place, be seen as the product of a bottom-up dynamic rooted in issues of political economy. ANC activists would thus often reflect – quite sympathetically – that at local levels attaching oneself to patron-client networks within the party as a vital means to access resources and opportunities for themselves and their extended households to navigate the harsh realities of unemployment, poverty and inequality.⁹⁴ This found expression in sentiments such as 'this is all they know' and 'this is the only way they can make it': sentiments that highlighted a widely held belief that adopting stringent normative critiques of such behaviour, while not without validity, nonetheless failed to grasp that such behaviour ferments not because of some moral deficiency, but because of socioeconomic circumstance. As it was often argued, gatekeeping was considered to be more deeply rooted in areas where the socioeconomic conditions were such that activists had fewer options other than to pursue their livelihoods via neopatrimonial networks. As one senior NEC member argued, the 'machine of patronage' was stronger where 'how people relate to the ANC is a question of what is their daily bread' and where being on the right side of branch executives and local councillors could determine 'whether they have something to eat or not.'

This affects more than simply individual political activists, however, and it was argued within the ANC that communities themselves would be drawn towards patron-client networks and the factional struggles that go with them. At branch level, for example, it was understood that successful political 'entrepreneurs' were those who were best able to articulate and represent the broader desires and needs of the community and make these synonymous with their own personal advancement. As one NEC member and senior official in the ANC's headquarters explains,

'the ANC is like a parliament, it's got ordinary people who just want houses, want jobs, want electricity, want clean running water. And when they take a decision in their local community that 'our priority is to get a clinic and we're gonna elect John [to become a councilor], because John is close to the SG and we know John interacts with the SG, maybe we'll get our clinic.' ...They're getting the clinic by manipulating certain situations to get a clinic. So I think we underestimate communities in terms of how they also read situations in order to achieve their goals. I think they're more politically savvy than some of us [laughs]. They're politically savvy because if I [the community] get a clinic for my community you can call me what you want but that was our goal to get a clinic and if we supported John and John gets us the clinic my community is gonna be better off. You see? And *that's* the issue.'⁹⁵

According to this view, which was expressed by branch activists as well, it is impossible to reduce the motivations of individuals who aspired to take on positions in the ANC or in local public authorities as purely self interested: the expectation was that they would wield their influence for a broader collective good for their clientele and their position rested upon this. Those that reengaged on these implicit moral arrangements of reciprocity could face the same kind of destabilising mobilization from the community if they failed, or if their networks of patronage excluded the 'wrong' people.

While it is impossible to estimate how much protest action in South Africa's amorphous 'rebellion of the poor' is directed through ANC channels in such a way, the fact that this has

Movement and Agent for Change', (ANC, 2000),
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2358> (24 June 2014)

⁹⁴ James Ferguson has made a similar point in his study of labour and unemployment.

⁹⁵ Interview, senior ANC official, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

been widely reported in the media⁹⁶ and also within the ANC itself, suggests that this ‘sucking in’ of popular frustrations into factional patron-client networks is a significant phenomena to understand.⁹⁷ Ultimately, it reflects the deep socioeconomic roots of gatekeeper politics and the manner in which aspiring individual politicians, as well as the communities around them, might be drawn towards such networks not because of moral deviance and ‘corruption’, but as a means to navigate, as best they can, the endemic structural violence they encounter.

Developmental or demobilising patronage politics?

David Booth and Frederick Golooba Mutebi have argued that we must look for divergences from the assumed ‘modal type’ of anti-developmental patronage politics identified by Chabal and Daloz above.⁹⁸ Paul Kagame’s RPF regime in Rwanda, they argue, exemplifies a form ‘developmental neopatrimonialism’: Rather than sustaining its political authority by distributing short-term spoils, the RPF has maintained its political authority through ‘long-horizon’ economic planning which has promoted poverty reduction and most notably, economic growth through which the RPF’s has directly benefited through its sizeable business interests (crony capitalism). To do so, it has kept tight central controls over rent-seeking behaviour and a firm anti-corruption line so that state capacity and economic growth are not undermined. In short, whether patronage politics can be developmental thus depends on ‘whether rent management is directed towards the short-term enrichment of members of the political class and its allies, or alternatively towards “growing the pie” of the national economy, maximizing opportunities for long-term accumulation.’⁹⁹

From this one might conclude that South Africa demonstrates similar elements of ‘developmental neopatrimonialism’, such as the desire to promote economic growth to benefit the party’s investment arms and the corporate interests of ANC elites, as well as the gradual improvements to South Africa’s Human Development Index. However, as we have seen, the ANC has been less able to centrally contain gatekeeping is having a debilitating impact on the state’s developmental capacity. One specific concern was that when ANC members were deployed into public service, the immediate demands placed up them by their clientele would mean that they felt obligated to give jobs, tender contracts or responsibilities according to expectations of patron-client reciprocity, rather than based an objective assessment of their capabilities. It was thus remarked in a variety of similar ways that ‘the wrong people are running the country,’ whether locally, regionally or nationally. Furthermore, while Booth and Golooba-Mutebi paint the picture of the unproblematic ascent of RPF elites into positions of considerable class power, as we have seen above, in South Africa this can lead to extreme conflicts of interest where the capital accumulation of ANC business elites pits their interest in direct opposition to those of working class communities.

⁹⁶ One illustrative example would be Setumo Stone ‘Factionalism blamed for violent protests in Mafikeng’, *Business Day*, 8 August 2012, <http://www.bdlive.co.za/articles/2012/07/09/factionalism-blamed-for-violent-protests-in-mafikeng;jsessionid=305A04DCODE5EB8DF00AB44D7FB652AB.present1.bdfm>

⁹⁷ This is reported by academic studies including Karl Von Holdt ‘South Africa: The transition to violent democracy’.

⁹⁸ David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi ‘Developmental patrimonialism?’.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 394

Second, it is important to recognise that Booth and Golooba-Mutebi's definition of 'developmental' as measured by GDP growth, productivity rates and HDI figures is inherently narrow, and ignores the demobilizing political impacts that gatekeeper politics can have. As Szeftel notes, where political parties become consumer with factionalism it focuses political 'attention on the distribution of state resources rather than the use of state power to restructure society or change class relations.'¹⁰⁰ Indeed, there was a huge concern among ANC members that this form of patronage politics was severely undermining ideological debate and contestation within the movement. Activists from all levels of the movement would lament, for example, that there was 'no politics' involved in the battle over positions within the party, and that such contests were reduced to being seen to be for or against a particular individual and 'what I can get out of it'. Such sentiments are even publicly aired by those embroiled in factional politics, such as Zuma loyalist Blade Nzimande, who laments that:

I have no doubt that a lot of the people who supported Zuma at Polokwane did so because they wanted genuine changes in the way the ANC was being run, But it is clear to us now that there are people who went to Polokwane because they were hoping Zuma would help them to build a kleptocratic state.¹⁰¹

This particularly significant within a dominant party system like South Africa's because ideological debates within the party and its allies acts as a surrogate arena of democratic contestation where the formal spaces for such contestation (e.g. the parliament) are compromised in their capacity to affect real change by the predominance of one party. Outside of formal politics, the expression of frustrations and grievances by communities that result in protest action are, in a number of cases, co-opted into the factional struggles between rival ANC elites. As Gabrielle Lynch has concluded in relation to neopatrimonial politics in Kenya, rather than challenging the very nature of the political system that perpetuates social injustice, communities can instead can become lured into channeling their grievances into struggles between rival big men in factional struggles 'declaring that what they need is a representative of their own who will fight for, protect and promote their interests' rather than challenging the system in its entirety.¹⁰² In South Africa one might hypothesize that this 'sucking in' of deep-seated frustrations with the post-apartheid order reflects the reality that while communities are not devoid of agency, they nonetheless exhibit 'agency in tight corners',¹⁰³ where achieving tangible short-term 'fixes' by aligning with one or other ANC faction is preferable, and infinitely more achievable, than challenging the very structural foundations of social injustice.¹⁰⁴ In short, it reflects a strategy of navigating relations of

¹⁰⁰ Morris Szeftel, 'Clientelism, corruption and catastrophe', *Review of African Political Economy* 27, 85 (2000), pp. 427-441, p. 435.

¹⁰¹ *fin24*, 'Nzimande slams tenderpreneurs' 18 October 2011, <<http://www.fin24.com/Economy/Nzimande-slams-tenderpreneurs-20111018>> (18 June 2014); Sentiments echoed by trade union leader Zwelinzima Vavi: *fin24*, 'Vavi slates "tenderpreneurs"', 2 June 2011, <<http://www.fin24.com/Economy/Vavi-slates-tenderpreneurs-20110602>> (18 June 2014).

¹⁰² Gabrielle Lynch 'Negotiating Ethnicity: Identity politics in contemporary Kenya', 33, 107 (2006), pp. 49-65, p. 61.

¹⁰³ John Lonsdale uses this to explore the agency of African elites but this term is helpful in this non-elite context also. John Lonsdale 'Agency in tight corners: Narrative and initiative in African history', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 13, 1 (2000), pp. 5-16

¹⁰⁴ For an interesting insight into how this works on the ground see Claire Benit-Gbaffou "'Up close and personal" - How does local democracy help the poor access the state? Stories

dependency and endemic structural violence: playing the game, so to speak, rather than engaging in transformative forms of political agency. It potentially serves to insulate the ANC as a party from direct criticism and the roots of popular grievance, including the class power of ANC elites, are removed from sight and contestation.

Conclusion: is this what liberation is about?

It was clear that gatekeeper politics was considered to be dangerous for both the party and its capacity to deliver development in South Africa. How to combat this was a focal point of the party's debates over 'organisational renewal.' This debate centers around the character of party activists and the quality of the party 'cadres' that would be deployed into public office. A cornerstone of the ANC's conference resolutions in 2012 was thus to launch a 'Decade of the Cadre' which resolved to extend 'the ideological, political, academic and moral training of a critical mass of ANC members,' including the intensified rollout of the ANC's political school system.¹⁰⁵ The conference also reaffirmed a decision taken by the NGC to establish 'Integrity Commissions' at all levels of the movement that would have the power to dismiss any member, or public servant, for corruption.¹⁰⁶ In order to combat factionalism, the conference also calls for 'firm and consistent action to instil discipline across all levels of the organization without fear or favour.'¹⁰⁷ Conference resolved that members would have to undergo 'probation periods' before they could take up official positions in the party, thereby attempting to reduce the scope for 'opportunists' ascending to positions of power without having demonstrated a long-standing commitment to the movement and its goals, and it also introduced a mandatory six month 'probation period' for would-be ANC members where they will be given 'political education' and be expected to engage in 'community work' before they are given a membership card, so as to try and prevent branches being flooded before leadership elections with new members and also try and encourage the growth of a more active and 'selfless' ANC members.

However, one might question the efficacy of some of these 'fixes' to gatekeeper politics. First, calls for more 'political education' and enforcing greater adherence to codes of conduct are nothing new, [REF] and the idea of a new top-down disciplinary ethos disseminating its way through the party will be undermined if senior ANC leaders are seen to regularly flout the very standards they call upon ordinary members to follow. Moreover, gatekeeping is deeply embedded in the political economy of post-apartheid South Africa. Crony capitalism has become a fundamental element of elite patterns of accumulation, aided and abetted by neopatrimonial channels of state authority as well as the party's promotion of a macroeconomic climate amenable to its own capital accumulation. It is also, however, entrenched in local business 'tender' provision, making the tangled roots of crony capitalism much more difficult to weed out.

of accountability and clientelism in Johannesburg', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 46, 5, (2011) pp. 453-465

¹⁰⁵ ANC '53rd Congress Resolutions', (ANC, 2013)

<<http://www.anc.org.za/docs/res/2013/resolutions53r.pdf>> (2 July 2014), p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 6. An individual would have to be a member of the ANC for over 10 years to be eligible for election onto the NEC, 7 years for the PEC, 5 years for the REC, 3 years for the sub region and 2 years for a BEC.

Similarly, while the minimal ‘probation period’ for new activists before they can take up positions within the movement might provide obstacles to ambitious politicians eager to rise through the ranks quickly, the tone of the current proposals calling for the promotion of a ‘selfless’ party ethos through ‘moral education’ and the socialisation of new members into ‘community work’ misunderstands the socioeconomic underpinnings that drive gatekeeper politics. As one NEC member lamented,

‘The patronage machine exists because we are at a certain level of socioeconomic development... Currently the ones left out [and alienated from development] are just too many, and to break the machine of patronage is almost impossible without fundamental policy change. And policy change means addressing the needs of the overwhelming majority; to organise socioeconomic transformation in such a way that includes the overwhelming majority of our population: they must be included, they must have a stake.... and be in charge of their own destiny. For us, that’s what liberation is about.’¹⁰⁸

Indeed, this might well challenge the reduction of gatekeeper to a normatively ‘immoral’ cancer in need of lancing through ‘get tough’ measures and instilling a new ‘selfless’ mentality among ANC members: Access to ‘corrupt’ networks of public authority is a vital means by which individuals and communities can navigate extreme inequalities in relation to class, race and gender that have entrenched structural violence by depriving people of the means to survive and flourish.

This paper may offer some fairly gloomy insights into the spread of neopatrimonial authority in South Africa, it nonetheless rejects the teleological fatalism contained within the works of Africanists like Chabal and Daloz who predicted that this was the ineluctable way in which ‘Africa works.’ As Chris Allen noted, there is no singular trajectory for patterns of elite accumulation in post-colonial Africa¹⁰⁹ and this study has highlighted the importance of understanding the specificities of the national context within which gatekeeping behaviour both emerges and is subsequently contested. As recent studies of other African countries have noted, a considerable degree of variation exists in the nature and scope of neopatrimonial authority in various African contexts and this article highlights the importance of understanding the political economy of how gatekeeper politics has become an entrenched – but by no means immutable – feature of South Africa’s democratic politics. It rejects the notion that we witness a ‘developmental’ form of patronage politics, however. When the bounties reaped from neopatrimonial networks are so great, the dangers of being excluded from them are exponentially more acute, which leads to protracted and sometimes violent struggles for power. Because of South Africa’s dominant party system, this makes factional struggles within the ANC a particular focal point for these struggles which, it now appears, have the ability to ‘suck in’ and co-opt broader community struggles over access to resources and opportunities. This serves to reify the power of the ANC by channelling struggles that potentially challenge the underpinnings of the post-apartheid order within the confines of the ANC’s internal politics. Reaching out to neopatrimonial networks may well be a vital means of treading water for poorer communities, but we must be mindful not to celebrate this ‘agency in tight corners’, which is ultimately a politically neutered form of agency that does not address the roots of endemic structural violence that lie at the heart of South Africa’s unfinished liberation.

¹⁰⁸ Interview, senior NEC member, Johannesburg, South Africa, May 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Chris Allen ‘Understanding African politics’.