

Article

African National Congress: from an emancipatory to a rent-seeking instrument

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Abstract

Patronage is fast proving to be an intractable problem in South Africa's post-apartheid politics. Reports of in-fighting both within the ruling African National Congress and in municipalities are common-place. This article probes the phenomenon of patronage politics. It does so through the use of case studies, illuminating the various ways in which patronage politics manifests itself, and examines the various understandings and rationales of the actors. The article contends that patronage politics is a mechanism for redistribution as well as accumulation. It is a reciprocal relationship that involves both power holders and ordinary people, through which each political party gets what it needs, thereby reducing the organisation to an instrument preoccupied with control and supply of material rewards without any regard for normative ends. Rules and institutions are flouted and undermined.

Being a political party in government has proven to be a double-edged sword for South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC). Whilst securing control over state power, and providing it with an opportunity to fashion South Africa into its ideal society, incumbency has also thrown up challenges that have threatened to re-define the character of the organisation. 'Sins of incumbency' is what one of the ANC's leading theoreticians (Netshitenzhe 2012) has dubbed the problems that confront Africa's oldest liberation movement.

So intractable have the problems been that the party's conferences have taken to issuing a call for organisational renewal. The initial call was sounded out at the party's 1997 Mafikeng national conference, just three years into office. That conference warned against leadership in the ANC being 'seen as stepping-stones to positions of power and material reward in government

and business'. The 2000 national general council echoed a similar concern, lamenting 'disturbing trends of careerism, corruption and opportunism' creeping into the organization. So it has been with every subsequent conference.

The 'sins of incumbency' manifest in different forms. They range from factional fights to siphoning state resources and patronage-politics. It is upon the latter that this paper focuses, specifically on how this phenomenon has played itself out within the various local branches and regional structures of the ANC. The article draws on the findings of case studies conducted in various local communities of the Eastern Cape village Mhlontlo, Gauteng's (partly informal) settlement Diepsloot, and Free State's rural area township Nketoana, over the period between October 2010 and July 2012.¹ The focus is not solely confined to the office-bearers, but also extends to ordinary members of the ruling party as well as local residents. In other words, this article illustrates that patronage-politics involves multiple actors and is a mechanism by which all these actors seek access to, or dispense, material resources.

The article is divided into three sections. Immediately below it defines patronage politics and shows how it has manifested itself over the various historical epochs. Following this definitional section is a discussion on the various ways in which patronage-politics plays out in local communities; thereafter a conclusion with some analysis of the impact of this phenomenon on local politics.

Defining patronage politics: a historical perspective

Patronage politics is primarily about securing access to material resources. The objective can be viewed as either redistributive for the benefit of the 'have-nots' or accumulative to enable the 'haves' to accumulate even more. The phenomenon itself has existed across different historical periods, beginning under feudalism. Its current expression, as explained below, dates back to the onset of the party system, for political parties seek control over the state, which, in turn, secures them access to material resources.

Feudalism inaugurated patronage politics as a reciprocal relationship. It involved an exchange of services and goods between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', enabling one to get from the other what he/she did not have – a practice anthropologists have called 'generalised-exchange'. This entailed a landlord giving a vassal a piece of land on which to eke out subsistence in exchange for either labour, a share of his produce or military service

(Hosking 2000).

The modern form of patronage-politics has its origin in monarchical rule, in Europe. Where imperial rulers could not pay a salary, they paid officials in kind. Monarchs often ignored their subordinates' soliciting favours from the subject population. Subjects resorted to offering officials tribute to gain protection against arbitrary rule and abuse of power. 'In these circumstances', as Hosking (2000: 308) puts it, 'law was not a complex of mutually binding rights and obligations, but took the form of command from above, reinforced by peer pressure'. Under monarchy, therefore, patronage was considered just payment for administrative duties. It was offered by the powers-that-be. Because it also involved abuse of office, subjects also engaged in the practice, but did so to secure protection.

The introduction of the party system transformed patronage politics. Ordinary people became just as prominent in the exchanges as the power-holders. Frank Sorauf puts it succinctly: 'Patronage has for long remained a tail tied to the kite of party; once its importance to party was conceded, its fortune rose with those of party. To attack patronage was to challenge party and to appear to be burning the barn to kill the mice' (1959: 116). Patronage came to be dispensed by the leadership of the political party and beneficiaries included both party loyalists (or cadres) as well as the voters of the party.

To be sure, the catalyst was not so much the introduction of the party system, but more the imperative to win elections. Political parties contest elections and, in order to win, need to build a majority on their side. The promise and the actual handing out of patronage became the tool: firstly, to build a party machinery that can mount an effective election campaign; and, secondly, to canvass and turn-out voters on election-day to cast their votes in favour of the party. Thus Sorauf (1960: 28) defines patronage as an incentive system – 'a political currency with which to purchase political activity and political responses'.

Though effectively instrumentalising political activism, the initial onset of political parties, however, had a progressive effect and was impelled by a normative objective. Andrew Jackson's political movement, which eventually became the Democratic Party, turned America's electoral politics into a mass-based activity. Before it burst onto the political scene in 1829, public office was considered a preserve of members of the American elite, who had distinguished themselves through education and wealth. The Jacksonian movement opened up service in the state to ordinary people regardless of social background or standing. Jackson demystified public

office, arguing that, as James Scott puts it, ‘administrative responsibilities were capable of being made “so simple and plain” that any citizen of normal capacity could readily perform the public work’ (2005: 17).

Although the Jacksonian movement attracted support with the offer of employment in the public sector, Scott (2005) contends that it was nonetheless redistributive in character. It rotated public sector jobs, for a limited period of time, to numerous party loyalists. The idea was to enable as many people as possible to get jobs, rather than restricting them to a few individuals within the party. Perhaps even more noteworthy was that, by attracting massive numbers into the electoral process, the Jacksonian movement both nurtured and spread democratic culture. Material gain was not an end in and itself, but an instrument to a normative objective – civic mindedness.

Furthermore, Scott (2005) argues that material inducement into the electoral participation was justified. The general American populace at the time, Scott explains, suffered from an anti-party and anti-organisational political culture. Material rewards acted as a solvent. If not for their conviction in party system, then ordinary people were enticed into party organisation by the promise of rewards. But, once they were within the fold of the party and participated in the electoral process, party recruits were likely to become civic minded.

However, the principle of job rotation also yielded unintended results for the Jacksonian movement. Though successful in recruiting new members, it could not sustain the loyalty of old members. Since an administrative job was held on rotational basis, it was unlikely that one would hold it twice and one would have to wait for a long period to get another job. Old members, who had completed their four-year employment stint in public administration, were thus discouraged from remaining loyal to the party.

The high turnover of members, therefore, coupled with the increasing competitiveness of the electoral contests, was to transform the ‘pure-and-simple-spoils party’ that characterised the Jacksonian movement into political machinery in the 1870s. Electoral competition was the catalyst, reconfiguring the nature of the political party, the manner in which patronage was dispensed, as well as the objective of party recruitment. It became critical for parties to have an experienced core of cadres that would campaign and turn-out voters for the party. The emphasis thus shifted from rotating to retaining members because of their experience and knowledge of how the party functioned. Thus a political party, as a political machine, was born with patronage as the main instrument of recruitment, engendering mixed results

for both the nature of politics and the quality of governance.

A political machine is a well organised, elaborate and hierarchical structure. The party is defined by a wide-spread organisational network, patterned along the geographic spread of the country, and manned by committed party activists at different levels. Local leaders assume the character of a ‘boss’ with a posse of cadres under their charge. Patronage is allocated on the basis of votes that a ‘boss’ brings to the party. Those who perform impressively are rewarded, whilst those who do not deliver the votes are simply replaced. The machine is geared towards vote-maximisation – the idea being that the clients bring in votes for the party in exchange for spoils. Supporters thus become life-long members of the party with a stake in maintaining it in power so as to keep their jobs. They become devoted to the party because it is the source of their livelihood (Sorauf 1960).

A political machine, therefore, is essentially an instrument that secures and dispenses patronage. Members are enticed to the party, not so much by ideological conviction, but more by the offer of material benefits. Political activism is reduced to material indulgence or gain. The political machine therefore operates on a principle of reciprocity – votes in return for a job. In other words, as Scott (1969: 1144) explains, the party:

... relies on what it accomplishes in a concrete way for its supporters, not on what it stands for. A machine may in fact be likened to a business in which all members are stockholders and dividends are paid in accordance with what has been invested.

Patronage is thus critical to the functioning of the party. Where ideological conviction is absent, patronage keeps the party intact. It can be harnessed to promote intra-party cohesion, enticing dissident local party leaders or factions back under the discipline and hierarchy of the party leadership (Sorauf 1960).

If the intensity of electoral competition injected the initial impetus towards patronage politics, conditions of poverty and marginality made it prosper:

Machines characteristically thrive on suffrage of the poor and, naturally, prosper best when the poor are many and the middle-class few ... Poverty shortens a man’s time horizon and maximizes the effectiveness of short-run material inducements ... Attachments to policy goals or to an ideology imply something of a future orientation as well wide loyalties, while poverty discounts future gains and focuses unavoidably on the here and now. (Scott 1969: 1150)

Hence patronage politics is most pronounced in developing countries and within the immigrant communities of the developed countries. Immigrants, especially the first generation, tend to be uneducated, without the requisite skills to get employment. The offer of a job in exchange for party activism is evidently difficult to resist, for it is the only route available to employment. Party bosses do not particularly consider merit when they employ their loyalists. Jobs in the public service are simply the rewards for the election victory. Thus a new governing party terminates the service of the loyalists of the defeated rival, whilst bringing in its own party loyalists into state employment.

The spoils of victory also extend to the specific communities that supported the party. 'Pork-barrel projects' (or public works programmes) whose necessity is not always apparent are initiated with the clear intention of providing employment to that community. This is what makes patronage politics, according to Sorauf, 'the politics of the underprivileged' (1960: 31). Nonetheless it is not far-fetched to conclude, as Johnston (1979: 385) does, that at some level patronage politics bridge 'social divisions by seeking money from the affluent and votes from the poor'. It facilitates social mobility of marginal classes that would otherwise remain on the margins of society (see also Freedman 1988, Gump 1971).

It is equally important to note though, as Scott (1969) reminds us, that patronage politics is not peculiar to poor people. The middle and upper classes do vote for a party in return for certain rewards. But theirs is different to the 'politics of the under-privileged' and elicits different results. Whereas patronage among the poor and immigrant communities takes the form of material rewards, such as pork-barrel projects or public works and undeserved employment, the middle to upper income groups are enticed to vote through the promise of promulgating a particular legislation and policy that advances their class interests.

The legislation may entail tax concessions or subsidies. The benefit is nonetheless without perverse effect on governance. There are no inappropriate appointments made nor are these classes prone to tolerate a corrupt government, even if they elected it. They are attracted to the party by its ideological commitment, not offers of personal favours. Albeit without any immediate corrosive effect on governance, patronage-politics amongst the middle class and affluent tends to perpetuate inequality. That is particularly true of political parties or politicians that are wholly dependent on business donations for their election campaigns. Once in parliament or

government, they become lobbies or proxies for private business, sponsoring or promulgating legislation that adversely affect the poor and working class communities.

Albeit counter-productive in some instances, Scott (1969) asserts that patronage, especially in developing countries, has a legitimising effect. Newly independent, post-colonial states especially suffered from a lack of popular democratic culture. Democratic ideas were not entrenched in public culture nor were they widely shared by the populace. The promise of patronage induced an otherwise uninterested citizenry into the electoral process, and established legitimacy for the new democratic state.

Reducing democracy purely to material gain, without any supporting democratic ethos, however, is potentially erosive. Post-colonial African states proved especially vulnerable to ethnic manipulation by wily politicians. They targeted a majority ethnic group, or a coalition of ethnic groups, giving them preferred treatment over the rest, in return for their bloc votes. And, voters did not necessarily hold them accountable. Politicians behaved as they wished, even abusing public office. Material benefits were sufficient for voters to repeatedly return what were, in most cases, inept and corrupt politicians back to political office (Mwenda and Tangri 2005). Also, patronage is inadequate as a foundation upon which to build a democratic state. The ruling party or public sector only has a limited number of jobs to which the party can place its party-workers. Party loyalists exceed the number of public sector jobs available. Others will certainly not be accommodated.

Patronage politics, therefore, is primarily a function of socio-economic dynamics. It is a mechanism for either accumulation or redistribution, involving both powers-holders and ordinary people. It entails a quid pro quo. Through patronage politics, one secures what one otherwise lacked. The nature of goods and services exchanged vary, depending on the historical context. Similarly, participants vary from power-holders to ordinary, powerless individuals. The findings reported here, arising from three of the case-studies done between October 2010 and December 2012, bear out some of the foregoing theoretical assertions. Of importance for our purpose is that our focus is strictly on the impact of patronage on the institution of the political party, especially at the local (or branch) level. It probes how this phenomenon affects relations amongst local leaders, as well as between residents, on the one hand, and party leaders and municipal officials, on the other. Included in the analysis is also a mention of how this impacts on the other institutions of government, especially local municipalities, and popular

participation in public forums.

Before looking at the specific instances, some discussion of the socio-economic profile of our case studies is necessary here to provide context.

Socio-economic context: case studies

The selected case study areas are largely poverty stricken and suffer from relatively high levels of unemployment. They are especially vulnerable to such problems as one is a semi-rural township (Nketoane, under Petsana municipality near the Free State town of Reitz); another is a rural village (Eastern Cape's Mhlontlo); and the other an informal urban settlement (Diepsloot in Gauteng). All these communities lack viable economic activity.

Located in the former Transkei bantustan, Mhlontlo is indicative of the labour supplier status which the former homeland assumed within the broader South African economy. The Transkei region had the highest number of the offices of The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA), which recruited migrant labourers for the mining industry. Most of these recruiting offices were concentrated in the near-by town of Lusikisiki. As shown in Figure 1 below, a considerable number of families are headed by women, with some dependent on (irregular) remittances sent by their migrant-labour spouses.

Local employment in Mhlontlo is largely offered by the (local) State. This pertains also to Nketoana which is located in Reitz, a rural town. The town had previously relied heavily on the agricultural sector, but productivity has dwindled in the last few years. This has precipitated migration towards Nketoana especially in search of employment and residence. The result has been a burgeoning population of shanty and backyard dwellers. The state is the major employer either as municipal labourers, teachers or clerks. Only a sprinkling of the retail industry constitutes the little there is of the private sector.

Diepsloot sprung up as an informal settlement. The shanty township offered relatively easy informal residence to migrants and immigrants from rural South Africa, the continent, and from countries as far afield as Pakistan and Bangladesh. Equally enticing about Diepsloot, because of its location in Johannesburg – ‘the city of gold’ – is that it dangles prospects of employment. This accounts for what appears to be the notably youthful and unskilled profile of its largely migrant population. However, residents have found jobs either quite scarce or experience fierce competition for those available. Competition is both amongst locals, and between locals and

foreign nationals. The result has been tension, which, in some instances, has imploded into violence.

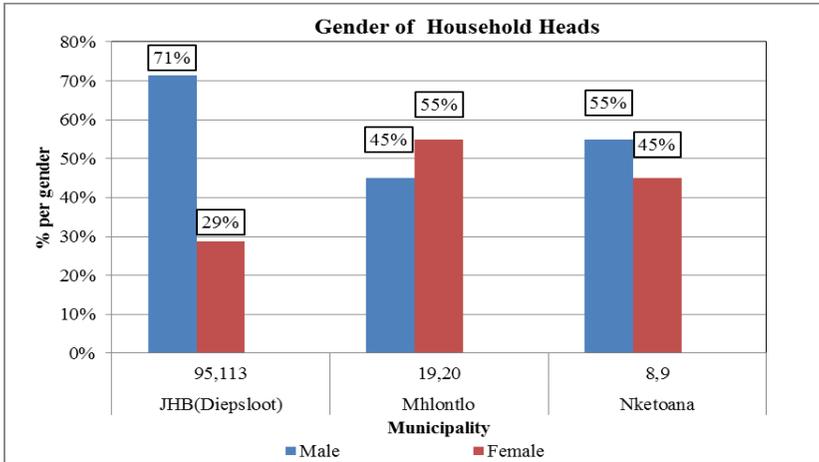


Figure 1: Gender of Household Heads, Source: Census 2011: Community Profiles in SuperCross, published by StatsSA

Dependence on the state

Because of the high levels of poverty, the state assumes an even greater role in people’s lives. It provides livelihood in the form of both grants and employment. Attending to day-to-day living amenities is the one area, about which residents are most grateful to the state. This even compensates somewhat for the slow pace of infrastructural development. One resident in Mhlonhlo put it thus:

We do not have toilets and we see them in other villages as we pass through the roads and what we can appreciate is the paraffin that SASSA is giving us, we are happy with the government on that one. People do get the paraffin but the issue of food parcels is going at a snail’s pace. (Focus group interview, December 7-8, 2012)

Another resident not only echoed similar sentiments, but also singled out the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), which falls under the department of social development and welfare, as the model that other departments should emulate:

I would like to appreciate the work that SASSA does because they say people must not go to town to apply for grants, each and every month

they come to us to get people to apply for old age and child support grants. I wish Home Affairs could do the same and help people with getting IDs because people do not have money to go to town. And when they do go, they find long queues and miss buses going back home. We like what SASSA is doing and so we wish Home Affairs can also do the same. (Focus group interview, December 7-8, 2012)

In other words, even though services may be available, accessing them is often-times a problem, especially for low-income and unemployed people. Diepsloot residents complain, for instance, that accessing state opportunities requires spending money they do not have. ‘The Department of Labour’, one resident tells us, ‘collects information to hire people for internships and learnerships ... The nearest labour department here is in Randburg or Midrand’. The problem though is that ‘if you don’t have the R13.00 for taxi fare to give to the child to go to Midrand to go register for such services, where is that child going to get that kind of information?’ (Focus group interview, November 24-25, 2012).

State assistance, however, goes beyond welfare grants to employment. This includes community development workers (CDW) and internships. Though not a salaried position, internships are similarly coveted as they sometime lead to full employment. Because it is one of few opportunities available for employment, CDW placements are highly contested by locals and councillors play a decisive role in their allocation. They are another form of patronage for councillors to dispense to supporters.

Appointment of CDW in Mhlontlo, for instance, was frustrated by infighting among two contending factions in the municipality. Each supported a different candidate. A general meeting of the ward 19 in May 2012 provides illuminating details on the impasse. It emerged at the meeting that, at the inception of the initiative back in 2005, appointment of CDWs was largely decided by a ward meeting. This primarily involved ward residents. That is how the initial CDW, Wezile Mhlobo, was appointed. Her subsequent relocation to Mthatha necessitated a replacement. This time around, however, councillors insisted on being involved in the process to decide on the replacement (Field-work notes, May 22-31, 2012).

However, councillors could not agree on a suitable candidate. Some locals complained that councillors sought to ‘parachute an “outsider” to replace Mhlobo’, a move that was resisted by locals. Just a week before the ward 19 meeting, Lulama Ndlabhu, had been appointed CDW. The meeting contested Ndlabhu’s appointment, and his name was not on the

municipality’s list of CDWs per ward. Rather, one Handsome Yongama Guqa was listed as the CDW for ward 19. Repeated telephone calls to Ndlabhu, on a number listed next to his name, to verify his appointment, went unanswered.

Reliance on the state, especially in informal settlements such as Diepsloot, even extends to interactions with the outside world. Councillors are key in informal dwellers getting a bank or a credit account, for instance. Such applications require proof of residence, which often comes in the form of a bill for municipal services. Because they live in an informal settlement, shack dwellers do not get bills, which means they cannot prove their residence. In that case, a councillor provides an official document – called ‘Proof of Residence’, which is a form signed by the councillor – that vouches for the local residence of the bearer. It reflects the bearer’s identity document (ID) number, address (that is, the stand number), and the extension where the stand is to be found.

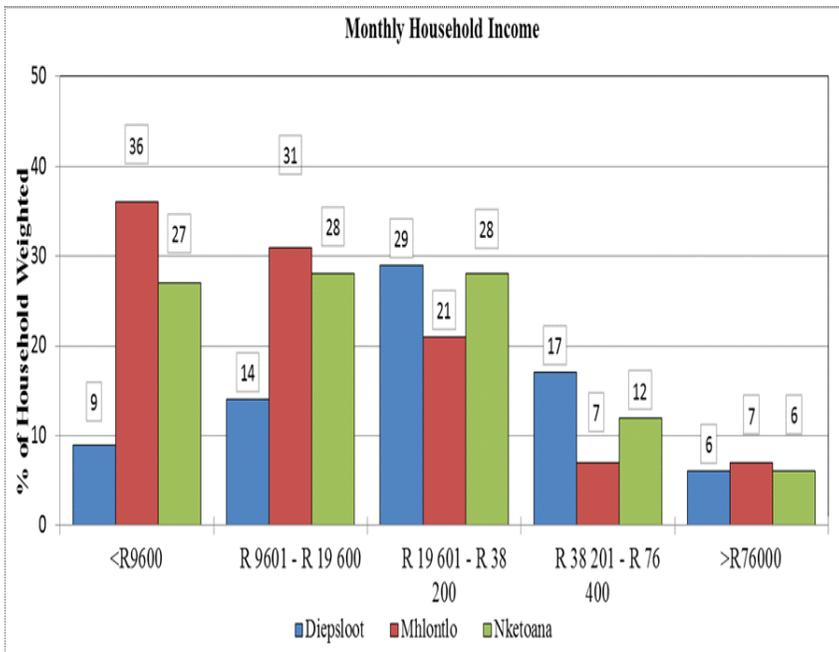


Figure 2: Monthly Household Income, Source: Census 2011: Community Profiles in SuperCross, published by StatsSA

Patron-client activities

With such dependence on the state, councillors, manipulate their mediatory role between officialdom and the public for personal gain, either politically or financially. Diepsloot's local politicians, for instance, trade accusations of giving jobs to card-carrying members of the ANC in return for support in internal party contests. Samuel Seale, an ANC activist, accused councillor Makhubela of such practice. The idea, according to Seale, is that beneficiaries of employment, in turn, vote for Makhubela in the contest for nomination as party's candidate in local government elections. Seale had contested Makhubela for nomination for the party's candidature for the 2011 local elections and ascribes his loss to Makhubela's supply of patronage to party members. Several other respondents echoed a similar claim, corroborating Seale's charge (Fieldwork notes, July 23, 2012).

Residents in Mhlontlo also complained of a similar practice. A public meeting, for instance, would not start if the unwanted persons are in attendance or the favourites are absent. Politicians employ all manner of trickery to either get the personae non gratae to leave or delay starting a meeting until their intended beneficiaries have arrived. One resident explained it as follows:

...I also stopped attending meetings, it happens that we are called for a meeting in a certain place like he says there are two camps, we go to the meeting and sit there with no one present to host the meeting and you find that they are phoning each other and telling people not to come to the meeting and people end up leaving and when they realize that we have left they come to the meeting, in so much that there are meetings that take place in the evenings because of such things. (Field-work notes, July 23, 2012)

Thus residents complain bitterly of favouritism. Some get employment in public works project or food parcels, whilst others are excluded:

...there are things that do not go well from the people that we have elected as our leaders like things like tractors by the councillors. We hear of things that are supposed to come our way but you will find that there is discrimination and things do not really come to the satisfaction of the people. You will notice that the government has given us tractors but they end up being given to people who live closer to the councillor. The government does provide for us but the councillor favours people that live closer to him. All this goes back to the issue of service delivery because we see development in other parts of the ward like some people have toilets built for them but not for everybody. (Field-work notes, July 23, 2012)

The same complaint of favouritism and exclusion in employment was echoed in Nketoana as well. It came up in two budget forum meetings held in May 2012 at Kgotso/Uxolo high school and KwaThabileng guest lodge. At the former meeting, for instance, Mfiki Mguni, an unemployed youth serving in the ward 9 Committee, complained that some people were excluded from employment in one chicken slaughter project, which is implemented by VKB, an agricultural company. Though called to finalise the budget proposal, the discussions at the meeting quickly turned towards how people were hired on local development projects and why others were not given opportunities (Field-work notes, May 18-25, 2012).

On the whole, however, Nketoana councillors complained that they were not sufficiently involved in service delivery. They blamed the municipality, especially the municipal manager, for marginalising them. So unhappy were the councillors that they even staged a protest in February 2012, storming the manager's office. They were arrested and charged with trespassing, acts of violence and intimidation. The charges were laid by the municipal manager against the entire municipal council (Field-work notes, February 16-23, 2012).

Councillors consider being on the forefront of service delivery a major part of their mandate. As noted earlier in the instances of Mhlontlo and Diepsloot, this function enables them to dispense patronage in order to build a personal power base. In Nketoana their insistence on this brought them into conflict with municipal officials. Stephanie Venter, an official responsible for the integrated development plan, was adamant that councillors desist from making promises to create jobs. She complained that they made impossible promises that cannot be met and, as a result, put the municipality under immense pressure as people demand that councillors live up to their word.

In response councillors are insistent that service delivery is an integral, if not sole, part of their functions. Councillor Semela, who stayed in a back-yard 'shack' at his mother's house and was one of the councillors arrested, boasted that, 'we are the first council to truly stand with the community. We will never fall because we identify with our community'. The previous council, Semela charged, was in cahoots with the municipal management and did not sufficiently advocate for community interests. Semela and his colleagues found it unacceptable that they had been in office for a period of seven months and yet could not point to anything new they had done. Instead, he alleged, the municipal manager was more interested in awarding

residential sites to people who support him (Field-work notes, February 16-23, 2012).

One municipal official was puzzled by the councillors' discontent. To her the new municipal council was a great improvement from the previous one: 'we have had the first unqualified audit, and we emerged from disclaimer, then qualified, so we have achieved a lot'. The main problem for the official was that councillors were not supportive of municipal officials and did not acknowledge their hard work (Field-work notes, May 18-25, 2012). The official did concede, however, that the council could not do much in terms of social development. The budget did not quite allow for it. Not many residents paid for municipal services and, as a result, municipal coffers were slim. The indigent policy, which provides a certain quota of free water and electricity to low-income earners, was the best they could do.

Beside the controversy over the demarcation of responsibilities, other respondents contended that councillors simply disapproved of the choice of mayor and the municipal manager. Both were appointed by Free State's provincial leaders. The mayor, Matshukudu Molapisi, was a proportional representation (PR) councillor, which meant she was susceptible to dictates from the party's provincial headquarters as she could easily be removed from the position. Conversely, a directly elected ward councillor cannot be arbitrarily dismissed from the position. Nketoana councillors thus saw the appointment of a PR councillor to the mayorship as the province's way of imposing control over the council. Their suspicions of provincial attempts at municipal control were further confirmed by the choice of the municipal manager. He was not a local, but hailed from Parys – the same home-town as the premier of Free State province, Ace Magashule.

At a budget forum meeting in May 2012, councillors could not even hide their dislike of mayor Molapisi. They were openly confrontational towards her. The mayor could not account for how the budget of the previous year was spent. There was no report at the meeting on what the municipality had achieved with last year's budget. But, the mayor and municipal officials insisted that people take them at their word, that they made some improvements with last year's budget allocation. In the absence of visible improvements, however, the attendants doubted the assurances. As the gathered crowd found the mayor's answers unsatisfactory, they became restless. The meeting broke into near-pandemonium. More than half of the attendants walked out even before the end of the meeting.

Mayor Molapisi blamed the tension at the meeting to irregular contact.

More public meetings, she reckoned, would ensure that people were kept abreast of municipal activities and performance. This is why, the mayor expanded, she failed to connect with the crowd. It turned out it was her first public appearance, eight months into her tenure. For an observer, however, the mayor was not just failing to connect, but she was simply failing to articulate her thoughts. In one instance, a municipal official even had to intervene, attempting to clarify what she guessed the mayor was trying to communicate.

If not to build a power-base, councillors establish patron-client relations for financial gain. This complaint is wide-spread. Locals have even dubbed councillors '10%'. The allegation is that one never gets a contract without paying back a councillor 10 per cent of the value of the total contract. In the case of Nketoana, locals even charge that the practice has repressed local economic initiatives, especially by co-operatives. Locals were encouraged, leading to one lady forming Lerato Cooperatives. Mme Lerato, as she is known locally, registered 19 cooperatives (Interview, December 8, 2011).

Those who formed cooperatives, Mme Lerato explained, were informed that they would be awarded contracts to do work with the municipality. That promise, however, never materialised. 'When there is work that could easily be carried out by cooperative', Mme Lerato elaborated, '[t]he municipality awards the work to CK (company). There was an event in which cooperatives were invited, but the municipality also invited CK' (Interview, December 8, 2011). She was not helped either when she initiated a factory to manufacture toilet paper in 2005. She had hoped that the municipality would provide a site, but she ended up renting out a place at an exorbitant cost. Since 2006 to date, there has been no work or contract from municipalities given to cooperatives, she said despondently:

The problem is that, the province and region are not exerting sufficient pressure on municipalities to prioritise cooperatives. The most feasible project that could be carried out by the cooperatives is the school feeding scheme. This project is not being handed to cooperatives because school principals have vested interest in companies that get tenders to provide the services.

Involving co-operatives in local development appears to be mere talk. In fact, a local economic development office opened just a few months before we commenced field-work in Nketoana. This suggests official indifference towards promoting local economic activity, preferring instead to support companies from which they stood to make financial gain. Indeed the office

of the auditor general (AG), in its 2011-2012 municipal audit report, uncovered that councillors and officials had not declared interest in contracts worth R104 million; and contracts to the value of R93 million were awarded to their close family members. In another instance, councillors (and officials) simply awarded themselves contracts totaling R118 million.

Political Rivalry

The spoils attached to the office have increased the stakes in being councillor. The contest for the position is fierce. Even during service, an incumbent employs all manner of shenanigans to ensure re-election and marginalise potential rivals. Thus the rivalry manifests itself both within the party structure as well as in the municipality.

Local office is not only coveted for what it offers, but also for its own sake. Political office is often the only source of employment for a sizeable number of politicians. They lack requisite qualifications to secure employment elsewhere. A study administered by the local government sector for education and training (LGSETA), among newly elected councillors in 2011, for instance, is quite revealing in this regard. The councillors had attended an induction programme, part of which was to determine their qualifications and training needs. Of the total 8,398 that took part in the programme, 4,037 answered the questionnaire, which is 40 per cent of the total number of participants (LGSETA, 2011). The results of the questionnaire revealed that about 52 per cent did not complete matric; 25 per cent had managed to secure some kind of a certificate or diploma; 14 per cent had tertiary qualifications; and 7 per cent had post-graduate qualifications. In other words, those with tertiary and post-graduate qualification made up the smallest component of the sample. Given the scarcity of labour-intensive employment and their lack of formal qualifications, political office is one of the few sources of income for such individuals.

One instance in Mhlontlo is instructive on the nature and impact of factional fights within the local party structure and in the municipality. The municipality council's executive committee (Exco) passed a resolution on February 20, 2009 removing Mzimkhulu Jeremiah Jikijela and Mandisa Giyose from the Exco of the municipal council. The two had apparently fallen out with the regional leadership of the ANC. The resolution cited poor performance and that 'they brought the ANC and the Municipality into disrepute'. Jikijela and Giyose, the applicants, appealed their removal to court on July 2010, on the grounds that the Exco did not follow proper

procedure. The gist of their appeal was that were not given prior notice that, among the agenda issues, the meeting was to deal with the matter of their removal from the Exco. The council did not contest the procedural requirement of notice, but insisted that it did provide the two applicants with notice that a proposal to remove them was tabled for discussion at the said meeting.

The court proceedings reveal not only disregard for procedures, but also use of deceitful measures to legitimise impropriety. Before delving into the court details, it is worth noting that the resort to court followed failed appeals to the ANC for intervention. Jikijela and Giyose initially approached the regional leadership, through its secretary Siyakholwa Mlamli, but the appeal was not seen to conclusion. Thereafter, they approached the provincial executive committee, which appointed Xolile Nqatha to investigate. They were never informed of the outcome of the meeting, giving the impression that the investigation had simply fizzled out.

Appearing in court as a respondent, the municipal council first disputed the date of the meeting that decided on the removal. Contrary to the date cited by the applicants – ie February 20, 2009 – the municipality insisted that the decision was made at the meeting that sat on March 23, 2009; and that the applicants were advanced a notice of the tabling of their removal on March 4, 2009. Evidence presented in court, however, showed municipal assertions to be false. The notice of the removal was actually dated March 16, 2009, and had not even been signed by the municipal manager, Monde Sondaba, as is procedural, but by someone else. In other words, the notice was generated days after the date claimed by the municipality, and was invalid in any case.

On examining the minutes of the meeting convened on February 20, 2009, which were signed on April 9, 2009, by both the speaker and the municipal manager, the judge also discovered that the decision to remove the applicants was actually taken in that meeting, not on March 23, 2009, as claimed by the municipality. Specifically, the minutes note that ‘the reshuffling of the Exco is listed ... as a motion without notice’, and their removal is reflected under resolution number 04-20/02/2009 to be effected ‘with immediate effect’. Accordingly, the March 2009 salary slips of the applicants showed a deduction that was consistent with loss of additional income, which they had received owing to their service in the Exco. In its defence, the municipality maintained that the minutes were signed by mistake without proofreading them. The judge expressed his incredulity at the response: ‘...it is difficult to imagine that two officials who both hold responsible positions can sign a document containing important resolutions of the Council without satisfying

themselves as to the veracity of the content thereof' (Mthatha High Court Judgement 2011: 12). Giyose and Jikijela were reinstated.

The lead-up to the 2011 local elections saw yet another round of infighting. This time around Jikijela faced up against a local politician and a member of a Hlubi traditional council, Mzikalimela Mxinwa. It was over the nomination for the party's candidate for ward 19. Both vied for the ward 19 nomination, and Mxinwa had the edge because of his position as chair of the ANC branch in that ward. Seeing that the scale was tipped against him, Jikijela formed his own ANC branch. One resident explained how people, especially those who are illiterate, were then coaxed into signing up for branch membership:

...people will be told to bring IDs because there are job opportunities and people would do so and they would fill in some forms only to find that the forms are for voting for a certain individual and not a job opportunity. So people have been discouraged by such things because they heard about, yes meetings are called but people do not have trust any more and it is because of them. (Focus group interviews, December 7-8, 2012)

Now ward 19 had two ANC branches. Locals call this phenomenon 'parallelism', a descriptive term for 'parallel structures'. The new branch, unsurprisingly, duly elected Jikijela chairman and nominated him for the local government candidature. Mxinwa's bitter protest that Jikijela's branch was illegitimate proved fruitless. Not only that, the party nominated Jikijela for the ANC's candidature for ward 19. Mxinwa was convinced that the provincial leadership colluded with Jikijela. And, Jikijela often, according to Mxinwa, taunted him 'that he would die a poor man because he is supported by "small boys" whilst he is supported by the Party's PEC'.

Mxinwa's accusations of bias in the nomination process were not without merit. Jikijela's nomination was a violation of the party's own policies. The ANC had resolved earlier to bar their members from holding other employment whilst serving as councillor. A principal of Tshilitwa high school, Jikijela did not qualify for nomination and he retained his post, whilst serving as ward councillor.

Jikijela's dual position as principal and councillor made him an influential figure in Mhlontlo. According to Mxinwa, Jikijela sought out such positions specifically for the influence and power that they accord their occupant. This even pitted Jikijela against the Hlubi traditional authority: 'He "hijacks" development and wants to take credit for even those things that were

organised by the Chief', complained Mxinwa. Indeed Jikijela's biography does suggest an individual with significant networks and knowledge of how to get things done. Before 1994, he worked for the Transkei department of foreign affairs as a labour representative based in Pretoria and Durban; currently he holds an honours degree in education management, and was then studying towards a masters degree in public administration. Furthermore, he keeps an impressive company of friends and acquaintances such as reverend Harris Majeke (then ambassador to India), Stone Sizani (ANC MP) and Mandisi Mpahlwa (a former cabinet minister), whom he credits for recruiting him into the ANC.

Jikijela eventually resigned around mid-2012. The ANC could no longer turn a blind-eye to the flouting of its own policies. The party forced Jikijela to choose between being principal or councillor. He chose the former. His successor was Mawethu Kiviet, who won in an uncontested by-election held on August 1, 2012. Some residents, however, remained unsure whether or not Jikijela was no longer councillor. The confusion stemmed from Jikijela going around telling residents that he was still councillor. This suggests he had resigned reluctantly. And, residents seemed unable to independently verify the claim. One resident put it as follows:

Okay let me raise the truth here, as we were still confused Mr. Kivithi came disclosed that he was councillor in our village and I saw him in the office because our councillor used to be Jikijela. So he came to our village to tell us that he is the new councillor. So now some of us do not understand as yet what is going on and I just want us to be on line and not be confused. (Focus Group Interviews, December 7-8, 2012)

Ward 19 residents were clearly victims of misinformation. Some possibly lacked the know-how to determine the truth for themselves. But, even in instances where they suspected the truth, others were hesitant to acknowledge that publicly. They were fearful of supporting the 'wrong leader'. Councillors provide a livelihood to their supporters. 'There are two camps of the ANC here', one resident explained:

If you are not following this particular one or you do not attend meetings it becomes clear when you are really poor. Could that be true because when you really need a job they will tell you that we do not know this one, he is not one of us, so I want to know if that is true from the government? (Focus group interviews, December 7-8, 2012)

Other residents still followed 'the old councillor while we have the new one now'. The cause of all this, he explained, is 'poverty because a person

follows the side that will bring food on the table. But, the first one did not do anything for us and we cannot blame the new one as yet’.

Controversy over nominations, especially for the 2011 local elections, was not confined to Mhlontlo. It was commonplace and widespread throughout the country. A subsequent task-team set up by the ANC to investigate the complaints, for instance, registered its concern:

It is worth noting that during the election processes almost every province had experienced violent protests and growing intolerance emanating from amongst others dissatisfaction with the nomination and selection of candidate processes, albeit to varying degrees. This is indeed a serious matter that would require earnest redress. (ANC 2012: 4)

The task-team had begun its investigation a month after the local elections, held in June 2011. It uncovered all manner of malpractices. Senior leaders deployed to oversee the nomination process at the branch level either turned a blind-eye to manipulative practices or sided with one faction against another. In order to secure nomination of a certain individual, for instance, members that are known to support a rival candidate would not be allowed into a meeting, even though they had valid membership cards. They would simply be told that they were not on ‘The Wisdom List’. In some instances, names of nominees would simply be removed and substituted with names of favoured individuals. This meant disregarding choices made by branches and endorsed through public participation processes. Some of the candidates ‘only joined the ANC after being nominated. In certain instances the candidates (now incumbent councillors) have shockingly little knowledge of the ANC’ (ANC 2012: 20).

Overall, 419 wards were investigated. Of that number, the task-team recommended that 125 wards must redo their nominations and, where necessary, election of councillors. This meant that if the disputed councillor was not nominated in the rerun process, he or she would step down. A by-election would then be held. The severity of the manipulations, the task-team felt, was such that the organisation should consider instituting criminal charges against the suspected candidates.

The Eastern Cape had the highest number of disputes, at 167, with the majority of which coming from OR Tambo (where Mhlontlo is located) and Amathole regions. In the case of OR Tambo, the report of the Dlamini-Zuma task-team, among other things, said:

Worth noting in OR Tambo was the high tension between the Region and the Province as it relates to the list and organisational processes.

Consequently, in OR Tambo in particular, some list processes were sanctioned by the REC whilst others were conducted by resident PEC members without the knowledge and mandate of the REC.

Almost all the disputes from OR Tambo appeared from OR Tambo appeared to relate to the changes made by the PEC of the candidates who emerged as the preferred ones from the BGMs conducted by the persons deployed by the Regional Office. These candidates were often replaced with persons who emerged from subsequent processes conducted by resident PEC members. (ANC 2012: 10-11)

In sum, the ANC has become a political machine. Its main preoccupation is seizure of political power. Premium is placed not on what the party is able to achieve with state power, but largely on the spoils of office. Political power has become less of an instrument to transform society along certain values, but more for self-aggrandisement.

The use of office for self-benefit is partly a function of the social background of the local political elite. They lack educational qualifications to secure employment anywhere else. This makes political office one of the few sources of livelihood open to them. Rules are flouted and institutions are undermined. This not only impacts negatively on the party, but also on local government.

However, politicians are not the only ones involved in patronage-politics. Ordinary people too are involved. Their involvement is a function of their dependence on the state for livelihood. They get jobs in return for supporting politicians in their contests. This is a reciprocal relationship between residents and local politicians. Whilst mutually beneficial, such patron-client relations are, however, detrimental to social cohesion and civic participation. Local communities split into beneficiaries and losers, and enthusiasm for participation in public institutions is dampened.

The party's nomination of Jikijela over his rival, Mxinwa, is indicative of changed dynamics between the party and the chieftaincy. Mxinwa is a member of the Hlubi Traditional Council, and thus had the backing of the village's traditional authority. The party did not seem particularly concerned that preferring an ordinary candidate over a member of the traditional council would harm their electoral fortunes. Previously, and because it believed that traditional authorities swayed people's political choices, the ruling party was very careful not to alienate chiefs. In this particular instance, that seems not to have been a consideration. Locals preferred Jikijela partly because he is able to bring development projects to the village.

Note

1. The study was undertaken by the Mapungubwe Institute and looked at the interplay of patronage-politics, poverty and inequality.

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