Historical Reflections on the role of Politicised Collective Identity Groupings against the African National Congress (ANC) Led Government in South Africa: An Un(realistic) Challenge to Democracy?

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ABSTRACT The local state is important for understanding the social context within which social conflict and contestation occur. Therefore, the local arena, with its specific historical development and local political scene should be factored into any analysis of social conflict and protest. The study acknowledges that most social movements and community protests have their base in the locality and are often aimed at challenging particular aspects within this geographic space. Furthermore, the study attempts to reflect on whether or not community protests in South Africa are aimed at challenging the newly established democracy or not? In this study, the author contends that in one way or another community protests are politically motivated with the purpose to a certain extent destabilising the ruling African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. In providing a historical reflection on these protests, the study acknowledges the fact that there is a link between community protests and the complaints against the issue of poverty escalation in South Africa. In the socially stratified South African society, the problem of closing the gap between the *haves* and the *have nots* is a contested terrain among political parties, politicised collective identity groupings as well as those individuals contesting the ANC's rule and governance in South Africa. Although there are other reasons for contesting the ANC's rule and governance, community based or social issues are mainly used as springboards to challenge the ANC in terms of the delivery of services are concerned. The final analysis of the study shows that in the main, the instigators of these community protests are politicised collective groupings with certain sociological and political identities.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, community protests, as one of the challenges faced by the ANC's government, have been subjected to continuous scrutiny by both academics and political scientists alike. The study acknowledges the achievement of political liberation by South Africa as a measure of democracy and the process of significant de-racialisation since 1994. Almost 20 years into the democratic dispensation, South Africa under the ANC government still experience community protests in the majority of the country's townships. This is sometimes due to deep social inequalities linked with what is believed to be an unequal distribution of resources. The South African Constitution stresses the notion of cooperative governance and identifies the local sphere of governance as one arena crucial for service delivery. More community protests were reported in the first half of 2009 than in any previous year, accounting for almost a quarter of all protests since 1994 with the Western Cape and Gauteng provinces being the hardest hit. Therefore, the study explores the nexus between politically identifiable collective groupings and the perpetuation of community protests in South Africa. Thus, it questions the synergy between the two; either in attempts to destabilise the governance of the ANC or having genuine community concerns which arguably the ruling party is failing to address. Furthermore, the study briefly discusses the role of such groupings and their applied strategies in posing social as well as political challenges to the ANC as the ruling party in South Africa. The study aims to address the following critical questions: What are the main characteristics of community protests? What are the causes of community protests? Why is there any ideological juxtaposition between service delivery by the ANC and community protests? In what ways do the history and culture of struggle against apartheid influence community protests in the post-apartheid South Africa? How is the ANC dealing with community protests?

Theoretical Framework

As indicated previously, a broad spectrum of research has been conducted on the role of politicised collective identity within the context of social movements and politically identifiable groupings in the escalation of community protests in South Africa. For example, McAdam et al. (1996) contend that studies of social movements can be discerned along three lines. The first mode of analysis is through looking at the structure, political opportunities and constraints confronting a movement. Secondly, some analysis has tended to focus on the forms of organisation available to collective actors. This has been referred to as the resource mobilisation theory. Lastly, other scholars focus on the process through which a collective identity is formed and an ideology negotiated. The conventional shorthand for these three aspects is: political opportunity structure; structures/resource mobilisation theory and the framing process.

According to Alexander (2010: 25-40) there are three possible effects of community protests on the local state and local politics. In the first scenario, the dominant political society simply reacts to these community protests through a range of political manoeuvres which include: co-opting protest leadership; removing unpopular councillors; making some cosmetic improvements in the communities concerned; and increasing political repression. In order to fully understand the role of these groupings under discussion in perpetuating community protests, the study will further unpack their development stages leading to such protests.

According to Jensen and Simonsen (1981: 279-291), 'the local area, with its specific historical development and local political scene', should be factored into any analysis of social conflict and protest. On the issue of politicised collective identified groupings, Simon and Klandermans (2001: 319) state the following: 'People evince politicised collective identity to the extent that they engage as self-conscious group members in a power struggle on behalf of their group knowing that it is the wider, more inclusive societal context in which the struggle has to be fought out'. The above could be said about the nature of community protests in the post-apartheid South Africa.

Literature Review

In the past few years since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, the country witnessed a growing trend in community protests, together with identity processes associated with the dynamics of such protests. This is, in fact, not surprising as all protests are usually defined as a form of collective behaviour triggered by some perceived injustice done to groups with which people identify. Consequently, in the South African academic sphere it did not take long for scholars to write about identifiable processes which became an integral part of community protests. There is evidence that identity processes have both an indirect and a direct effect on protest participation. An indirect effect arises because collective identity influences instrumental reasoning, such as taking a 'free ride' thus becoming less attractive. Indeed, as argued by some scholars, politicised collective identified groupings is a way to overcome the social dilemma built into the dynamics of movement participation (Klanderman et al. 2002: 235-236).

In post-apartheid South Africa, scholars such as (Desai 2002; Seekings and Natrass 2006; Southall 2007; Dawson 2008) have attempted to highlight the impact of the poverty gap in the country. The issue of poverty gap could be viewed as one of the recipes for community protests in South Africa. Although in the past during the apartheid era, poverty was mainly seen between Whites and Blacks; currently, the poverty gap is overwhelmingly amongst the Black population and this could be the reason for the recent and ongoing community protests.

Saunders (1986: 225) makes an admission that production and consumption are dialectically linked, in that production influences consumption patterns and vice versa. He furthermore questions the links between class and consumption capacity, the changes in the structure of capitalist production and the bearing this has on the provision of the means of collective consumption. Although community protest has tended to be viewed negatively, given its widespread associations with public disorder and violence, some scholars acknowledge that they hold considerable value as an indicator of social change (Ramjee and van Donk 2011: 15).

The study argues that even though few studies contest that the increased privatisation of the provision of the means of collective con-

sumption such as water, electricity, housing and transport has reconfigured the contours of social conflict, would challenge the suggestion that 'a fault line is opening up in society, not along the lines of class, nor even along the lines of gender or ethnicity … but around ownership and non-ownership of the key resources of consumption'. Studies on community protests give insightful reflections on this most interesting history of the ANC and the challenges of leadership.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research reported here is part of a larger study on community protests and politicised collective identity against the ANC led government in South Africa. In the context of this study, interviews were conducted. In some cases, the study was designed to investigate the ANC government's responses to community protests. The participants in the interviews came from samples drawn from selected, diverse community leaders and the ANC's political and community representatives. The criteria used to select the participants were (1) a large enough population of community leaders; and (2) representatives of government. Despite the above, not all interviews conducted were utilised in this study. Furthermore, the study relies to a certain extent on the mainstream media and academic articles. In addition to a literature review, the analysis in this study also draws on personal observations over a period of time.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

What are Social Movements?

There are various definitions of social movements. For the purpose of this study, social movements are defined as those movements that wage a series of demands or challenges on behalf of a social category that lacks an entrenched presence. In most cases, social movements can harbour politically identifiable groupings. Ballard et al. (2006: 3) defines social movements as politically or socially directed collectivities that involve networks and multiple organisations which are geared towards changing one or more elements of the status quo. A different viewpoint came from De la Porta and Diani (1999: 20-21) who argues that 'social movements are discern-

ible from other forms of collective action as they constitute a distinct social process through which actors engage in collective action and share a collective identity, linked by dense informal networks, and involved in conflicting relations with clearly defined opponents'.

Stages of Social Movements Leading to Community Protests

There have been many social movements throughout history that have dramatically changed the societies in which they occurred. These movements have varied widely in their ideologies, are revolutionary in their aims and thus advocate reforms to the existing system. Others are more conservative in their orientation and work towards opposing changes in society. The four stages of social movement development are: emergence, coalescence, bureaucratisation and decline (Christiansen 2009: 1-2). The four stages of the development model can be applied to understand how movements form, grow and dissipate. One of the earliest scholars to study the movements of social processes is Blumer, who identified four stages in the lifecycles of social movements. The four stages he describes are: social ferment; popular excitement; formalisation; and institutionalisation (De la Porta and Diani 2006: 150). In the main, social movements are interpreted as grievance-based, and are considered to be imprecise groupings of agencies, activities and ideas around problems and/or solutions.

Brief Historical Background to Community Protests

Community protest is a complex phenomenon which requires further critical examination, as well as rigorous and coordinated explanation initiatives. Despite a remarkable post-1994 transformation involving a whole new system of integrated and de-racialised local governance driven by a strong philosophy of developmentalism, local government is showing signs of being overwhelmed. Community protest phenomena have become a research area for sociologists, political scientists and historians in South Africa. Nleya (2011: 3) argues that 'the notion of community protests in South Africa has perhaps become a cliché in South Africa. While there was a lull in protest activity (excluding industri-

al action) in the first decade of democracy, the second decade has been characterised by increased militancy reminiscent of the anti-apartheid struggle days, with many of these diagnosed as so-called service delivery protests'. For example, during the 1970s and 1980s there was a shared interest in resistance to racial domination and apartheid in South Africa. During this period (1970s to 1980s) there were recurring and increasingly violent mass protests against local government. Such protest action assumed multiple forms including petitions, marches, demonstrations and violent confrontations, often displaying a historical continuity with the rolling mass action of the anti-apartheid era which sought to 'make the townships ungovernable' (Nyar and Wray 2012: 22).

According to Ashton (2013: 8), South Africans have a proud history of peaceful protests, from the women's march in Pretoria in the 1950s, the pass protests into the cities across the nation in 1960, the student demonstrations during the 1970s, right through to the United Democratic front (UDF) marches in the late 1980s and 1990s that shut down entire cities; violence was inevitably triggered by police excess. Beinart (2010: 5) opines that 'South Africa had a proportionately larger urban and migrant working class than any African country. This reflected the influence of socialist and neo-Marxist theories, which placed class at the heart of history, as well as the links between academics, intellectuals and the independent trade unions launched in the 1970s … Academics writing on resistance also espoused elements of the new social history'.

Protest action in South Africa is diverse and multi-faceted. It is undertaken by different, mostly urban groupings, such as labour, the unemployed, shack dwellers, informal traders, students, local communities and ordinary residents, whose grievances are related to issues of socio-economic justice (Nyar and Wray 2012: 23). Therefore, it is argued in this study that there is a continuity of community protests from the apartheid era. Bond (2000: 17) succinctly puts it: '… indeed even after 1994 with the Mandela government's 'honeymoon', there were strong movements demanding reforms and wide-scale benefits in virtually all issue-areas where civil society was mobilized'. It cannot be said that the recent increase in the community protests can be seen as an indication that the ANC-led government has failed in providing services to the South African citizenry. However, the ANC-led government is viewed as being slow in reacting towards such protests and sometimes fails to prevent such protests from happening. Consequently, it cannot be said that the recent community protests indicate the end of an era for the ANC-led government but a realistic challenge to South Africa's democracy (Twala 2014: 159-167).

Community Protests and Collective Identity

Mottiar and Bond (2012: 309) contend that 'very high levels of popular demonstrations in South African communities, often termed 'service delivery' protests, suggest a significant amount of social discontent, even if this does not yet mean the rise of a protest 'movement' with similar norms, values, strategies and tactics, nor a transformational political agenda arising from the discontent. The discontent can sometimes rise violently and subside, or can simmer for months or years'. Collective identity has been treated as an alternative to structurally given interests in accounting for the claims on behalf of which people mobilise, an alternative to selective incentives in understanding why people participate, an alternative to instrumental rationality in explaining what tactical choices activists make, and an alternative to institutional reforms in assessing movements' impacts (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 283).

Jensen and Simonsen (1981: 282) identify three reasons why collective consumption has a politicising effect. Firstly, because access to collective consumption is partially determined by class membership, access, or lack thereof, can create new and reinforce existing class differences and antagonisms. Secondly, decisions affecting the allocation or distribution of the means of collective consumption are more open to public scrutiny, conscious understanding and collective challenge. Finally, collective consumption is centred on the local state and this makes this sphere an arena of fierce contestation. Therefore, it is imperative that when one analyses the development of collective consumption and community protests, an examination of both local and political environments should be taken into consideration.

Collective identity is useful in that it departs from the view that perceives social conflict as a deviation from the normal functioning of soci-

ety. Therefore, collective identity, conflict is an integral part of society and embedded in the manner in which different societies are organised. In most cases, collective action results from structural developments as opposed to individual choice.

Nyar and Wray (2012: 24) put it succinctly by stating: 'It is interesting to note that there appears to be little recognition amongst communities that local government only has certain powers and functions to deliver services and that some of the dissatisfaction should be directed toward the other spheres of government (provincial and national) which also have a role to play in delivering services'.

In justifying the issue of collective identity through community protests, Sekwena states: 'In most cases, people who embark on community protests are doing so because the government does not want to listen to us. We used to attend community meetings as called by our councillors but we don't get satisfactory answers from them when we asked questions about the poor delivery of services to our townships. The fact that they don't listen to us, we then mobilise other disgruntled members to embark on such protests. In the main, we are challenging the Zuma government' (Sekwena, 15 June 2013). Mofokeng (2013) laments: 'We do not care who the councillor is, we just need the services which should include water, sanitation, jobs, houses and health facilities. The government promised us all those things but what we get is nepotism and corruption'.

Community Protests and Resource Mobilisation Theory

Community protests are traditionally seen as extensions of more elementary forms of collective behaviour, with their focus on institutional changes. According to Jenkins (1983: 527), 'Resource mobilisation theory has recently presented an alternative interpretation of social movements. The review traces the emergence and recent controversies generated by this new perspective. A multi-factored model of social movement formation is advanced, emphasizing resources, organisation, and political opportunities in addition to traditional discontent hypotheses'. At its most general, this theory starts from the straightforward observation that all political

action is socially structured and that the resources available to activists are patterned accordingly. It makes the assumption that movement activists are at least as rational in a calculated way as are the more conventional political actors. Therefore, they will devise strategies of action which make the best use of the resources they have and which minimise the requirement for resources they do not possess (Rootes 1990: 7).

It is clear from the above that group organisation can be a major determinant of mobilisation potential and patterns. Mass society theory, relative deprivation and collective behaviour theory point to sudden increases in individual grievances generated by the structural strains of rapid social change (Jenkins 1983: 528). In the South African context, resource mobilisation theory has traditionally been seen in terms of collective actors struggling for power in an institutional context. Therefore, recent community protests in South Africa have demonstrated the significance of increased grievances generated by sudden and major threats to the interests of cohesive and moderately resourceful groups. Interestingly, in South Africa support for these community protests comes overwhelmingly from either those members of the ANC who have been disgruntled with the current leadership of the organisation or from those who feel that service delivery has been compromised. It was interesting to note how these disgruntled participants in organising community protests attempted to settle 'old political scores' through the protests. Furthermore, this was an indication that politicians and ex-politicians monopolise community protests in the name of service delivery in order to pay revenge. In the main, this compromised the legitimacy of good governance principles as envisaged by the ANC.

A research report released by the University of the Witwatersrand's Society Work and development Institute entitled: 'The smoke that calls: Insurgent citizenship, collective violence and the struggle for a place in the new South Africa' highlighted that there were complex webs of political divisions in councils, communities angry about municipal leaders seen as just fighting for tenders with little access to jobs or services. It was found that collective protests were largely directed against the government, with protestors demanding services, jobs and respect (Flanagan 2011: 2).

Potential Unhappiness with Policies or Some Social Conditions

Protest activity in South Africa has, for the most part, emanated from shack settlements and townships rather than the better resourced suburbs. As indicated previously, there is inadequate service delivery and a lack of accountability by local councillors. Therefore, protests related to demands for improved service delivery also highlighted the lack of dignity suffered by the urban poor. Protests against a lack of political accountability further reflected local frustrations and anger. Alexander (2010: 25) labelled community protests in South Africa as a 'rebellion of the poor'. In most cases, individuals participated in community protests because of some policies by the ruling ANC government, as well as the prevailing social conditions in the country. In the main, they would argue that the ANC has failed to address their grievances, or have not taken any action in this regard. As previously mentioned, having originated as a discourse of the public sector, community protests bear some similarity to the apartheid-era catchphrase 'township unrest' which served then as an umbrella term for a diverse range of political actions, such as rent and consumer boycotts, labour strikes and student revolts. The messages of grievance emerging from community protests are far-ranging: lack of communication with municipal authorities; poor quality of services; allegations of nepotism and corruption; political in-fighting; and problems with community development projects related to contracts and tenders (Booysens 2009: 130).

Different patterns and trends exist in explaining the root cause of community protests in post-apartheid South Africa. The major ones are the following and identified as contributing factors to poverty in most of the country's townships: The first such trend is that protests tend to be spatially located in informal settlements and townships (Alexander 2010: 26). These protests showed little evidence of medium- or long-term planning or of any alliances with the elite or with institutions. The underlying grievances driving the protest action relate usually to basic services, but also connect with wider issues of dissatisfaction with governance (Booysens 2009: 130). Protestors are commonly area-based residents and community activists. However, in this community activism, there have existed other criminal elements which play an inflammatory role by exacerbating the protests through initiating the destruction of public property. Sinwell et al. (2009: 3) argue that the criminality and violence that often accompany protest action feeds into government's perception of violent protest action as crime-related and thus underplays their concerns. Furthermore, Sinwell (2011: 63) observes that given the fragmented nature of current protests, there is a danger that they are 'romantically' understood; that radical tactics are not necessarily underpinned by revolutionary politics.

According to Nyar and Wray (2012: 30-31), protest actions normally include one or more of the following: *toyi-toying* (rhythmic chanting of political slogans); marches; the intimidation of, or physical attacks on councillors; the looting and/or burning of government infrastructure facilities, such as municipal offices, libraries and vehicles. The above sentiments are also corroborated by Mokena (2013) who stated: 'People used different ways in which to voice their anger; particularly when the government authorities do not want to listen to their plight. The fact that the provision of services take longer whilst community leaders, such as the councillors, are driving expensive cars, cause disgruntled people to turn to violence'.

In the cases mentioned above, a large part of the problem sparking protests has been the very poor communication between the representatives of the ruling party, namely, the ANC and communities. The reason for this is partly pragmatic, with informal settlements containing neither a number of registered voters, nor the local branch lobbying strength of more formalised areas. In addition, the fluidity of informal settlements is such that they do not necessarily present themselves as organised and cohesive communities with representative leaders.

CONCLUSION

While the issue of reducing poverty remains a pressing concern of the ANC government, the escalation of community protests around the country offers some useful insights into countering the aforementioned assertion. On the part of the organisers of protests, one can tell that in some instances, there is a lack of organisational emphasis and a preoccupation with political change. At the most fundamental level, commu-

nity protests are a natural and probable consequence of systemic institutional problems that exist in the provision of basic services to the most poverty-stricken members of South African society. The study contends that a combination of intra-ANC battles and structural constraints can be factored in to explain the instability brought about by community protests. In most cases, the protesters argue that they resort to protests because of poverty and of not being listened to by those in government circles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view if the questions asked in this study, it is evident that the community protests which in most cases turned out to be violent, proved to be an unsuccessful method of voicing dissatisfaction. It has been argued in this study that the realm of governance, the legitimacy and efficiency, and the resultant satisfaction of those at whom service delivery was aimed, were indicators of bad governance. It is rightly said that local government in South Africa should be associated with the deepening of democracy in state and society and the provision of instruments to effect this. Without doubt, the study provided important insights on the issue of community protests. The author is conscious of the fact that the study might not provide for unqualified generalizations, but do provide some pointers for future considerations. It is important that all community structures play role in the agenda-setting and implementation of policies and programmes. When these structures participate in the decision-making process, they have a right to hold the government accountable for policies and service delivery.

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