Party-state Collapse and Trajectory of Factionalism in the ANC Post-apartheid: Reflections from Buffalo City, 2005–2015

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Abstract

Party-state collapse is a term used to describe a process whereby the functions of the party and state are largely combined into one body, with a dominant role for the party. This paper traces the collapse of the party and state during the African National Congress's (ANC) political dominance post-apartheid and traces how this process shaped factional politics within the party between 2005–2015. The gradual conflation of the party and state occurred partly through two processes related to the party's imperatives of pursuing a transformative agenda. Firstly, the state itself had to be transformed in the way it operated and to reflect the demographic composition of the country. This presented an opportunity for the ANC to deploy its cadres into the state. Secondly, the party relied on the state as an economic actor to be a vehicle for redistribution and the transformation of the broader society for equity and growth. Hence, Black economic empowerment, state preferential procurement and other policies to uplift previously disadvantaged social groups became one of the stepping-stones for the emergent African middle and upper class. While these two processes have transformed the state, the paper argues that they also fundamentally transformed the party itself, as it became a site of accumulation and intense intra-party contestation. Patronage networks emerged to secure and defend political power and the material benefits it came with. The paper draws on primary research in the ANC's Buffalo City region in the Eastern Cape Province at the peak of factional battles between Mbeki and Zuma-aligned officials.

Keywords: African National Congress (ANC); party-state collapse; factionalism; patronage; transformation

Introduction

Contemporary discussions of the African National Congress (ANC) are punctuated by intraparty competition, commonly referred to as factionalism, that has repeatedly manifested in violent confrontations at conferences and meetings. Political killings and assassinations have proliferated, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga provinces, while the high turnover in the civil service across all spheres of government has also been attributed to factional battles in the ruling party.[1] Assassinations of ANC office bearers and representatives have become increasingly visible over the past few years, contributing to South Africa's violent democracy (Von Holdt 2013, 597). There is widespread agreement that underlying ANC factionalism is competition for state resources ring-fenced by what has been identified as patronage or neo-patrimonial politics by various observers in the academia and popular media alike (Lodge 2014; Mukwedeya 2015). Others have drawn on the notion of rent-seeking and gatekeeper politics to explain a volatile politics of inclusion and exclusion that emerges and provokes bitter factional struggles within the ANC, as rival elites compete for power (Beresford 2015). Debates on state capture or the evolution of a shadow state also draw on the relation between factional politics and patrimonial interests that are capturing state resources (Chipkin and Swilling 2018). In addition to this scholarly interest, factionalism, party-state collapse and patronage are frequently condemned in the public arena as "corruption" or criminal activity by a group of avaricious ANC members. This characterisation of the ANC as a party marred by avarice, begs the question: How did the ANC get to this point? While there might be avaricious party members, we cannot limit our understanding to subjective or individualistic analysis. Rather, an analysis that considers the broader context and underlying conditions that drove and merged factional politics with patronage networks, is necessary.

This paper traces the collapse of the party and state during the ANC's political dominance post-apartheid and suggests how this process shaped factional politics within the party during the Mbeki-Zuma leadership contestations. The imperative to transform the state saw the ANC deploying its cadres into the state, who could tow the party line. The party also relied on the state as an economic actor to be a vehicle for redistribution and the transformation of society. Both these processes contributed to the gradual conflation of the party and state, effectively making the ANC an economic actor through the state. With limited opportunities in an economy that took a neo-liberal turn from 1996, the party-state became a key site of accumulation for the emergent African middle and upper class. It is argued that while these processes transformed the state as they were intended to, they also fundamentally transformed the party itself, fuelling intense intra-party contestation. Factions increasingly became defined by patronage networks that emerged to ring-fence political power and the material benefits it came with. While these dynamics are characteristic of the ANC as a whole, they were and still are easily visible at the local state level, which has become the key site for South Africa's efforts

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1   "43 councillors killed in last political term," http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2017/10/12/43-councillors-killed-in-last-political-term.

to redistribute resources, consolidate democracy and manage the contradictions of neoliberalism (Hart 2013; Lodge 2014). Similarly, this paper focuses on the local state and draws on qualitative research in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM) at the height of factional politics between 2005 and 2015. The paper is organised around two closely interrelated themes that are discussed separately only for analytical convenience. Firstly, it discusses party-state collapse, and secondly, it discusses how factionalism increasingly came to be intertwined with patronage networks. It concludes by emphasising the contribution of dynamics in broader party-state to intra-party politics in the ANC. This is contrary to accounts that simply portray the party as one populated by avaricious cadres.

Transformation and the ANC's Collapse of the Party and State

The ANC is characterised as a dominant party after having established electoral dominance for an uninterrupted and prolonged period from the first democratic elections in 1994. The party has enjoyed dominance in the formation and running of government, and in determining the public agenda despite a waning electoral performance (Giliomee and Simkins 1999, 3; Schulz-Herzenberg 2009, 24, 27). Without a strong opposition party, some scholars have pointed out that dominant parties run the risk of lapsing into unilateral and arbitrary decision-making. They can make key appointments to the public sector institutions like courts, official commissions, and the office of the auditor general, to mention a few, thereby undermining the autonomy of some key institutions crucial for a democracy (Giliomee and Simkins 1999). In other words, dominant parties are susceptible to blurring the boundary between the party and state. The collapse of the party and state can lead to the abuse of office that undermines the integrity of democratic institutions, particularly that of the legislature and its ability to check the executive (Brooks 2004). While the ANC is dominant nationally, some municipalities, such as Buffalo City, have excessive dominance of the party, with the ANC consistently garnering over 65% of the votes since 1994.

In South Africa, the collapse of the party and state is facilitated by the deployment of party officials into public positions in the state. While deployment itself is a common and accepted practice—whose noble intention should be to build a strong, capable state and get the best people placed in a particular manner without overwhelming the public service system—the ANC has at times used it for ill-deserving officials, prioritising party interest over public interest. Butler (2009) has characterised the ANC's machinery of "deployment" as one whereby the ANC "deploys" party members to key state and civil institutions and calls upon their loyalty to ensure those institutions are not used to damage the interests of the party. The abuse of the deployment policy peaked during former president Jacob Zuma's nine-year leadership, when private individuals (including the Gupta family) used deployed officials irregularly, clinching contracts from state-owned companies worth billions. While party-state collapse is captured in debates around the dominant party thesis, this paper adds the role that the ANC's

transformative agenda has contributed to progressively blur the line between the party and state.

After the attainment of democracy in 1994, the ANC-led government sought to transform the social, political and economic circumstances of the South African society that was based on decades of racial discrimination and separate development. Broadly, transformation entailed democratising every aspect of South African life. As Houston and Muthien (2000, 38) remark: "The word transformation is found in virtually all ANC documents, in many speeches of the ANC and government leaders, and in most policy documents of the new government." Notable ANC documents that refer to transformation range from the ANC's policy guidelines for a democratic South Africa adopted at its 1991 national conference, titled *Ready to Govern,* to the discussion document released in November 1996, titled *The State and Social Transformation,* and the draft strategy and tactics released before its December 1997 national conference, titled *All Power to the People* (Houston and Muthien 2000, 38). Various speeches by former President Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma also reaffirmed the party's commitment to transformation that included building a non-racial society and, importantly, the socio-economic upliftment of former oppressed racial groups. More recently, the notion morphed into radical economic transformation, popularised during president Zuma's tenure as a justification for state capture. Transformation has, therefore, meant different things or emphasised particular aspects such as democratic deepening, participation and, more recently, the distribution of economic opportunities. Despite this, it is important to note that in whatever context transformation is used by the ANC government, the state always plays a central role in the transformation. However, after the onset of democracy in 1994, the state itself had to be transformed because despite assuming significant political power after the 1994 elections, the ANC's grip on state power was threatened by a civil service dominated by officials appointed by the previous regime. Jonathan Hyslop (2005, 776) succinctly observes the dilemma the ANC was confronted with regarding the civil service when it came to power:

> When the ANC entered government, the incumbent experts in the centre of the civil service in Pretoria, the people who knew how to make the administrative system work and who advised on technical questions, were not trusted by the incoming regime. Although the ANC had some highly educated and trained cadres, few had any experience in the organisation of a modern state. The ANC had therefore the classic dilemma of an insurgent regime; they had to manage the immense risks of transition, while relying on a bureaucracy in which they had no trust. This circumstance has tended to favour a situation in which government prioritises considerations of political reliability of officials and of political stability over considerations of the effectiveness or probity of public service. (Hyslop 2005, 776)

To address this dilemma and avoid an insurgent regime that Hyslop (2005) refers to, the ANC adopted a deployment policy in which it populated the civil service with party cadres it could trust. The appointment of less qualified and even unqualified ANC cadres was, therefore, a price that had to be paid in some cases. The ANC managed to suppress

controversy over the extension of party control by arguing that "mainly White" institutions are products of apartheid and motivated by racism. The dominant narrative was that its push to transform the state is justified, disguised and facilitated by racial transformation. This process contributed to the collapse of the party and state and the party was able to undermine the legitimacy of institutions that provide a check on its power (Giliomee, Myburgh, and Schlemmer 2001, 169–170).

In addition to extending political control, deployment of party cadres into the state is also tied to the ANC's project to uplift previously disadvantaged groups. ANC documents, such as the 2015 National General Council discussion document, point out that the party sought to transform the state at the same time as it utilised its capacities to change society as a whole. The state, therefore, had to be the driver of wider socio-economic transformation in South African society. Southall (2007, 210) observes that after the ANC's capture of the state in 1994, the party put in place top officials and managers it felt it could trust, and overhauled the public sector staffing policies in terms of the interrelated strategies of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), affirmative action, employment equity and to achieve demographic representativeness. Just as the National Party (NP) had used the state since 1948 to promote the welfare and upward mobility of Afrikaners, so now would the ANC use the state in favour of its own constituency through the programmes mentioned above to ensure demographic representativity (Southall 2007, 210). In particular, the ANC's policies on preferential state procurement and staffing became pivotal to enhancing the welfare and upward mobility of the aspirant African middle to upper class.

The use of preferential state procurement as a catalyst to empower Africans coincided with the ANC's move toward a neoliberal trajectory with the adoption of the policy of Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) in 1996. Neoliberal principles that broadly limit the role of the state and encourage private sector initiative through the market, set the scene for public sector reform in which the contracting out of government services to third-party providers was pivotal (PARI 2014, 5). Also, Southall (2007, 214) notes that while the privatisation of state assets under GEAR was viewed as an important tool for reducing national debt, invigorating local industry and attracting foreign investment, it was also seen as an instrument for promoting Black empowerment.

The contracting out by state institutions to private companies that upheld BEE policies was so widespread that the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI) found that:

> … the role of public servants has changed from that of administration to that of managing contracts. That is, when they are not complying with National Treasury, Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) and other departmental regulations, public servants are effectively managing service-delivery contracts with private firms, other departments and parastatals. The quality of service delivery often depends on how well these contracts are negotiated and enforced. (PARI 2014, 7)

It has been argued that South Africa became a "contract state" as "state capacity" came to be predicated upon the ability of the state to tap into and manage (through contractual relations) private sector capacities (PARI 2014, 7).

In many peripheral contexts, such as rural areas and small cities, neoliberal deepening stifled opportunities in the economy, and the local state was left as the major institution upon which people were dependent. This dependence stretched from (and continues to rely on) state contracts, cash transfers in different forms of social grants, support for social development programmes such as agricultural and small business support initiatives, and direct employment in different levels of the local bureaucracy. Government tenders and contracts also contribute immensely to the economies of small municipalities. Therefore, the local state has become the primary agent for social mobility and redistribution through the above mechanisms. As Tom Lodge has pointed out, the material conflicts between South Africa's different communities are most evident in the local allocation of resources in local government (Lodge 2014, 86; see also Hart 2013, 97). Hart (2013, 5) adds that "the local state has become the impossible terrain of official efforts to manage poverty and deprivation in a racially inflected capitalist society marked by massive inequalities and increasing precarious livelihoods for the large majority of the population."

It is within this context that municipalities such as Buffalo City are prone to party-state collapse. The local state is central to the socio-economic heartbeat of the city. The state is the biggest employer in Buffalo City, owing to Provincial Government Head Offices located in Bhisho as well as the regional offices of the government departments that are in East London. The government sector employs about 30% of the employed in Buffalo City. This is followed by trade (22%) and manufacturing (19%) (Buffalo City Metro IDP 2011–2016).[2]

In addition, there are thousands indirectly employed by the local state in contracting companies that benefit from state procurement, contracts and tenders. In addition to high-level positions in the municipality, access to state contracts and tenders has been a major platform for some people to be part of the local elite. Government procurement occurs in two classifications: i) goods and services; and ii) payment of capital assets. While there are no reliable statistics for Buffalo City, a general overview provided by the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI) is revealing. The report states that in 2012/13, the budget of national, provincial and local government combined was R876.6 billion; R372.9 billion (42%) of this was allocated to procurement. Most procurement expenditure occurs at the levels of local (52.2 % of the total) and provincial government (29.4%). As service delivery in South Africa is increasingly performed by private

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2   COGTA (2020) has different statistics of the leading economic drivers of Buffalo City, with community services (largely government services) contributing 18.4%, followed by trade at 13.7%, finance at 13.2%, and manufacturing at 10%.

companies, the role of public servants has changed from that of administration to that of managing contracts (PARI 2014, 6–7).

The dependence on the state is further exacerbated by the high levels of poverty and unemployment. In 2017, there were 500 000 people living in poverty, using the upper poverty line definition, while the unemployment rate was 35,1% and the youth unemployment rate was even higher at 45.1% (COGTA 2020).[3] The centrality of the state in Buffalo City extends to the ANC as the dominant political party that controls the municipality. Access to the state and its resources prioritises ANC-connected individuals, thereby fuelling intense competition within the party. Processes of transforming the state and using it as a vehicle to drive wider societal transformation have, therefore, transformed ANC intraparty politics and the way the party operates.

Because neoliberal deepening has increased the society's dependence on the local state for economic opportunities, "the material conflicts between South Africa's different communities have been most evident in the local allocation of resources in local government" (Lodge 2014, 86). The ANC's decision to transform the state itself and to use the state as an instrument for socio-economic transformation under a neoliberal framework created opportunities for upward mobility that centred on the state. The unintended consequences of this were that contestation over staffing and procurement intensified, fuelling factionalism in the ANC; therefore, the party was also transformed. These processes occurred simultaneously and created an environment for factional politics that increasingly centred on material interest, as different groups sought to secure the opportunities for upward mobility that came with state resources, such as jobs and state contracts. The party, via the state, became a site of accumulation and intense intra-party contestation. Patronage networks emerged to secure and defend political power and the material benefits they came with, as will be explained in the following section.

The Interplay between Factionalism and Patronage

While the ANC sought to transform the state and use it as a vehicle for transformation, the party also embarked on a neoliberal economic drive for the country. Neoliberal deepening "has produced a country with one of the highest unemployment rates in the world (40%), obscene inequality, a deepening ecological crisis and growing hunger" (Satgar 2012). As opportunities in the private sector constricted—especially after the 2008 global financial crisis—dependence on the state has increased. The size of the civil service has always increased since 1994, as well as the state's spending on procurement. Between 2009 and 2019, the number of civil servants in South Africa grew from 1,780,553 to 2,108,125; an increase of 327,572. (Africheck 2020). The South African civil service works on a huge annual budget that largely goes towards the wage bill. In

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3   Other researches that question the reliability of census data have put the unemployment rate in Buffalo City at 45% (Housing Development Agency 2013, 40). Buffalo City Development Strategy (2007) estimated unemployment to be between 55% and 60% in Buffalo City municipality as a whole.

addition, almost half (42%) of the budget allocated to national, provincial and local government is allocated to procurement (PARI 2014). This has translated to intense internal party competition within the ANC for the power to control and distribute these state opportunities and resources. As Reddy (2014, 14) points out, "the immense predictability of election outcomes for the dominant party shifts competition for state resources into the party."

The struggle over state resources is intense in Buffalo City, which is a relatively small metropolitan city, when compared with the other metropolitan municipalities, such as Johannesburg, Cape Town or Ekurhuleni. This is because of the sheer dominance of the state in the socio-economic sphere relative to the private sector, as highlighted above. There is, therefore, higher dependence on the state as a source of livelihood and a vehicle for upward mobility and elite formation. Factional struggles are rampant and pronounced at the local government, including the patronage networks that have emerged to ring-fence access to scarce state resources. Andiswa, a senior ANC local politician in Buffalo City, who had been a councillor for over 10 years, explained why this is the case and periodised when it began:

> It is a recent thing … the 1994 era was not as bad as the 2000 era. From 2000, people started to awaken to say the first group that went in [government] it improved them, so they said let's go too, it's our time. The 1994 era was the opening period, people went in wanting to work and probably they started to see things and started to gain things and we started looking and we saw that people are improving because they are in parliament, so everybody wanted to be in parliament. (Interview with Andiswa 5 August 2013, King Williams Town)

In addition, through policies such as affirmative action and Black economic empowerment, elite formation was spurred through accessing jobs and lucrative state contracts. Thus, the opportunities for upward mobility experienced by public officials encouraged others to also join the public service, as observed by Andiswa. However, this created the conditions for contestation within the party, as struggles to secure these scarce state resources became avenues for factionalism and patronage. Faced with finite opportunities, intra-party competition intensified in the 2000s, peaking with the Mbeki-Zuma leadership contest in the years leading to the 2007 Polokwane conference. After that conference, the buoyant Zuma camp purged Mbeki loyalists in government. At local government level, mayors, speakers, chief whips, municipal managers and councillors were recalled in their droves. The factional purge of Mbeki supporters after the 2007 Polokwane conference was so intense in Buffalo City that the council could not have a quorum, crippling the functioning of the municipality after the expulsion of 19 councillors for allegedly bringing the party into disrepute by supporting COPE (Mukwedeya 2016, 133). The triumphant band of Zuma supporters was a loosely connected group of left-leaning cadres, including the institutional left of the South African Communist Party and the trade union federation COSATU. The purges of Mbeki supporters made way for the Zuma-aligned faction to weave its own patronage network of officials, tenderpreneurs and local elites more broadly loyal to preserving

the Zuma group. However, Zuma's patronage network quickly alienated key members from the SACP and COSATU, as the network centred on radical economic transformation and eventually elite formation centred on outright state capture. Similarly, Von Holdt et al. (2011) also observe that "salaries from high-level jobs in the local town council, the power to distribute both high and low-level council jobs, as well as the opportunities for business with council, and the patronage networks that link the two, are key mechanisms in the formation of the elite, especially in small towns with limited employment opportunities" (Von Holdt et al. 2011, 20).

Beresford (2015) also observes that positions of public office are hotly contested, not only because they are an immediate source of wealth for the individual, but they are also a means by which powerful patrons can distribute resources and opportunities to their extended networks of dependants (Beresford 2015, 233). Likewise, Akhona, a COSATU provincial official, suggested:

> … the contestation is not about people wanting to deliver, but people wanting to position themselves to get lucrative tenders. It's not about delivery … the reason why people are fighting is because of these tenders, that's all. People want their persons to be in strategic positions, so that tenders should go down to where they are. (Interview with Akhona 30 May 2012 at Southernwood)

Akhona was essentially referring to a patronage network that organises politically as a faction within the ANC. Tenders and other state resources were distributed within the network and used to sustain the faction. For many residents of Buffalo City, political office is also closely associated with the nexus of power, status and money. Previously unemployed individuals who successfully secure political office, such as being a local councillor or various party leadership positions, have had their material conditions radically shift for the better. With access to salaried jobs, tenders and the capability to distribute jobs, they have made visible improvements in their quality of life. Community members and ordinary members of the party already expect to access state resources such as jobs through party leaders, thereby collapsing the party-state divide from below. Not only does the public offer political support in exchange for jobs, but for many in a context of limited opportunities, securing employment through political connections is usually the best and only option there is.

In other words, for the poor in townships and informal settlements of Buffalo City, access to the state depends on the party and its leaders. For this group of people, this is usually their best and most effective way to access the state for services and jobs. Siwe, an ANC activist in one of the townships, illustrated this. He was 33 years old and only had a matric certificate as a qualification. He had been unemployed for the greater part of his adult life. In 2012, when I first met Siwe, he was an active member of an ANC branch and was planning to contest as the branch secretary to which he was elected in 2014. In July 2012, we had spent the greater part of one afternoon together when we began to talk about seeking employment. Siwe made a general comment:

> … here in South Africa, it's not about what you know or what you have; it's all about who you know in terms of getting a job. There are guys who did not even qualify to be managers of the municipality but they are managers because they have connections, they knew people in higher places … my target is to work in the municipality so I am going to contest in my branch elections to be in the executive so that I can be more visible to work in the municipality … I am close with the chairwoman Zukisa Faku … she has my CV and my hopes are on her. (Interview with Siwe, 7 July 2012 at East London)

To achieve his goal to work for the municipality, Siwe said he had begun to be more politically active, hence the decision to contest in the branch elections. He explained that he was now close to the former mayor, Zukisa Faku, who was the ANC regional chair at the time. He supported her during the elective conference in March 2012, and after that, he became active in a group called "friends of Zukisa Faku," which was created by her loyalists to support her during her trial for allegedly using a municipal credit card fraudulently. Although he said he supported her because she is a humble and understanding leader who cares for the poor, Siwe also said: "She has my CV … I have put my faith in her in terms of a job." Siwe pointed out that he attended all of the "friends of Zukisa Faku" meetings and pickets to be visible; and he was expecting a job for which he occasionally sent her text message reminders. For Siwe, Zukisa Faku was a suitable patron but one with many suitors; therefore, he had to be visible and active so as to earn his place as a client in the patronage network. For the patrons, managing these expectations often entails succumbing to the demands of supporters since their political survival depends on delivering on the expectations of their party supporters. In 2014, Siwe landed a job in the municipal waste management department as a waste collector. Without such political networks, it would have been difficult to achieve his dream of working for the municipality. His experience demonstrates how jobs (even at the lower end) have become politicised. A petition brought before parliament highlighted how even the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), which was a mechanism for alleviating poverty and unemployment, was being re-tooled to enable politicians to "reward" loyal members, friends and family members to the exclusion of everyone else (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2021).

This section has highlighted several interrelated processes that contribute to our understanding of the political milieu in the ANC. The process of transforming the state and using it as a vehicle for transformation and the process of neoliberal deepening, coupled to intensify the role of state resources in the internal party politics. The separation between party and state became increasingly blurred, and the party fragmented into numerous factions, glued together by patronage networks to ring-fence their access to state resources. Dominant party theorists attribute the collapse of the party and state to the inherent nature of the dominant party without explaining fully how this transpires. However, the preceding discussions show that the collapse of the party and state is facilitated by various processes and patron-client relationships. Party-state collapse is, therefore, not only a top-down process, but is often a bottom-up process as clients exert pressure to access the state.

Conclusion

Drawing on experiences from Buffalo City, it has been shown that the merging of patronage networks and factionalism should be understood in the context of two broader processes that blur the party-state boundary. These include the use of the state as a vehicle for transformation and neoliberal deepening. The centrality of the state to the ANC's plan to redistribute wealth meant that there was a collapse of the party and state. Through affirmative action and Black economic empowerment, the state became an important site for upward mobility. As the party increasingly became the de facto space to access the state, patronage networks that control the state became intertwined with factionalism. Therefore, the ANC's use of the state in the post-apartheid era has transformed it by creating a party-state. However, this fundamentally transformed the party itself by influencing its internal politics and fuelling factionalism.

In smaller municipalities, such as Buffalo City, where the negative effects of neoliberalism have been more pronounced, the dependence on the state is higher. The intensity of competition, the importance of the stakes, and the consequences of failure may explain the instability of networks and alliances and may also explain the high levels of violence in some instances (Von Holdt et al. 2011). Factions now coalesce around individual personalities and preferences resulting in personalistic relationships or patron-client relationships.

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