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POWER, PATRONAGE AND GATEKEEPER POLITICS IN SOUTH AFRICA

ALEXANDER BERESFORD*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the rise of gatekeeper politics within the ANC drawing on an analysis of ANC discussion documents, key informant interviews with senior party officials, and interviews and observations from the ANC's centenary policy conference. On the basis of this material, I identify the symptoms and consequences of gatekeeper politics, including the growth of patronage networks, crony capitalism and bitter factional struggles within the party. Rather than resembling some uniquely 'African' form of political aberration and breakdown, gatekeeper politics should be viewed on a broader spectrum of patronage politics evident elsewhere in the world because it is intrinsically bound up with the development of capitalism. Political leaders who occupy positions of authority in the party or public service act as gatekeepers by regulating access to the resources and opportunities that they control. A volatile politics of inclusion and exclusion thus emerges and provokes bitter factional struggles within the ANC as rival elites compete for power. The rise of gatekeeper politics undermines both the organizational integrity of the ANC and its capacity to deliver on its electoral mandate. It can also depoliticize the social injustice in post-apartheid South Africa by co-opting popular struggles over access to resources that might otherwise challenge the political status quo.

ON 7TH OF MAY, 2014, the African National Congress (ANC) secured a fifth successive landslide election victory, garnering an impressive 62 percent of the vote which reaffirmed the status of the ANC as South Africa's dominant party. The election marked 20 years of democracy in South Africa, a country that has experienced mixed fortunes since the end of apartheid.¹ One issue that unites commentators from across the political spectrum is the threat that corruption poses to both the quality of South African democracy and the country's prospects for socioeconomic development. The endemic nature of corruption in Africa is widely understood to be intrinsically bound up in the nature of African political systems and the postcolonial state.² Rather than being held accountable by the electorate based on their capacity to deliver on their promises of providing public goods such as health and education in an impersonal fashion through the formal political domain, political leaders are argued to derive support and legitimacy by distributing patronage through informal, deeply personalised

* Alexander Beresford (a.beresford@leeds.ac.uk) is a Lecturer in the Politics of African Development at the University of Leeds and is also a Senior Research Associate attached to the Chair for Social Change at the University of Johannesburg. The author would like to thank the editors, anonymous peer reviewers, Ray Bush, Jorg Wiegatz, Emma-Louise Anderson, Laura Mann and David Moore for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper, as well as the audiences at the University of Johannesburg seminar series for their helpful suggestions.

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

² For example Frederick Cooper *Africa since 1940: the past in the present* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), pp. 156-190.

patron-client networks built upon mutual expectations of reciprocity. This is referred to by a bewildering array of political labels, including: neopatrimonialism, clientelism, prebendalism, and cronyism. Neopatrimonialism in particular has gained prominence in African Studies literature and is generally employed to denote the blurring - or even complete breakdown - of the distinction between public and private authority: the former exercised through the impersonal institutions of the state and the latter exercised through informal patron-client networks rooted in social institutions and loyalties that predate the establishment of the colonial state.³

Patrick Chabal and Jean Pascal Daloz once argued that this kind of patronage-based politics was the ineluctable manner in which "Africa works". They suggested that this form of politics would be an anathema to development and would continue to prevent Western-style electoral democracy from taking root. Even visionary leaders, like Nelson Mandela, they argued, would be unable to escape this *modus operandi* of African politics.⁴ However, such teleological fatalism risks over-generalising our understanding of politics in Africa. As Anne Pitcher et al. have noted, most African countries today resemble a hybrid form of political system in which 'significant elements' of patron-client politics 'survive and thrive today without decisively undermining democratic processes or development.'⁵ Thus, while informal patron-client networks remain a prominent feature of African political systems, we must understand how and why this style of politics has generated terminal decline and state collapse in some contexts,⁶ while in others it has been argued to be entirely compatible with developmental outcomes and the strengthening of the state.⁷

In South Africa, there is growing evidence of informal patronage-based political networks working in parallel with, and sometimes in opposition to, the impersonal political institutions of the state. This is openly raised by the ruling party, which admits that 'neopatrimonialism and corruption' are spreading within the ANC, and that this is creating 'anarchy and decay' within the movement itself; stifling its capacity to promote the socioeconomic transformation expected by South African citizens.⁸ Tom Lodge has also identified 'symptoms' of neopatrimonialism within the ANC, including the gradual breakdown of distinctions between public and private concerns, the growth of personality-based factional politics, and increasing incidences of 'the affirmation by the ANC leadership of "traditionalist" representations of indigenous culture, whereby moral legitimation is sought more and more from appeals to "Africanist" racial solidarity and nostalgic recollections of patriarchal social order rather than on the basis of the quality of government performance.'⁹

This article argues that the spread of patronage-based relationships in the ANC has augmented the growth of a volatile form of gatekeeper politics that threatens both the party's internal integrity and its capacity to deliver upon its electoral mandate. In doing so, it draws on an analysis of ANC discussion documents, key informant interviews with senior party

³ For a review of this approach see Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, 'Neo-patrimonialism reconsidered: critical review and elaboration of an elusive concept', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 45, 1 (2007), pp. 95–119.

⁴ Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as political instrument* (Oxford, James Currey 1999), p. 162.

⁵ Anne Pitcher et al 'Rethinking patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism in Africa', *African Studies Review* 52, 1 (2009) p. 127.

⁶ For a discussion of these variations, see Chris Allen 'Warfare, endemic violence & state collapse in Africa', *Review of African Political Economy* 26, 81 (1999), pp. 367-384

⁷ David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, 'Developmental patrimonialism? The case of Rwanda', *African Affairs* 111, 444 (2012), pp. 379-403.

⁸ ANC, 'Organisational renewal' (ANC, Johannesburg, 2012).

⁹ Tom Lodge 'Neo-patrimonial politics in the ANC', *African Affairs* 113, 450 (2014), p. 2.

officials, and interviews and observations with delegates from all levels of the movement at the ANC's centenary policy conference in 2012.¹⁰ Gatekeeping is a term commonly used within ANC circles and the term gatekeeper politics is employed here to refer to how political leaders in positions of authority within the ruling party or in public office control access to resources and opportunities in order to forward their own political and economic ends. A cyclical relationship emerges in which resources and opportunities are distributed through patronage networks to regenerate the political power of the patron (or gatekeeper), and political power (access to state spoils) is in turn used to replenish the resources needed to maintain these networks and 'purchase' the affection of their supporters.¹¹ As Chris Allen argued, 'to have power was to have the means to reproduce it; to lose power, however, was to risk never having the means to regain it'.¹² Gatekeepers have a capacity to grant or deny access to resources and opportunities, contributing to a volatile and sometimes violent battle over who controls the 'gate' – whether that be a position of influence and authority within the party or in the public service. Gatekeeper politics is therefore not synonymous with corruption (though corruption is a pervasive symptom of it). Instead, it reflects something much broader: political and social structures through which authority and power is cultivated, disseminated and contested.

While sharing some themes in common with the traditional concept of neopatrimonialism, gatekeeper politics cannot be reduced to this framing. First, the patronage networks in the ANC described here are not necessarily rooted in 'traditional' structures of authority and subordination such as ethnicity or kinship. Instead, they are channelled through the operation of 'modern' party politics and the loyalties associated with it, making the bonds between gatekeepers and their followers fluid, unpredictable and volatile. Second, neopatrimonialism is often employed as a catch-all concept to describe a pathology of African state failure and developmental malaise.¹³ Gatekeeper politics, however, will be used here to describe political processes that do not denote some kind of exotic 'African' form of political aberration and breakdown, nor a departure from idealised notions of Western capitalist democracy: the dynamics of gatekeeper politics should be viewed on a broader spectrum of informal politics that forms an integral feature of contemporary liberal capitalist democracy across the world, such as crony capitalism, pork-barrel politics, and the insidious influence of private lobbyists on public political processes. The proliferation of patronage-dependent accumulation in South Africa, like elsewhere in the world,¹⁴ is a central feature of the development of capitalism, and

¹⁰ Access to interviewees and the ANC congress was negotiated on an understanding that anonymity would be maintained due to the sensitive subject matter. Interviewees were willing to talk frankly and openly when they understood that their anonymity would be protected, although invariably they preferred to speak in general terms about broad trends of patronage and corruption, rather than their own direct experiences that could implicate either themselves or others directly. In order to open up the discussions I would often refer directly to information that was already in the public domain – such as the party discussion documents – and I stressed that the purpose of the research was to understand longer-term trends, rather than some form of investigative journalism. Where possible the broad trends described by interviewees are related in this article to incidences reported in the press or in other academic studies. Interviews were conducted with past and present members of senior structures of the ANC in order to get a view from across the factional divides in the party. However, any identifiable data has been removed.

¹¹ This terminology was employed by Goran Hyden, *No shortcuts to progress: African development management in perspective* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983).

¹² Chris Allen, 'Understanding African politics', *Review of African Political Economy* 22, 65 (1995), pp. 301-320, p. 304.

¹³ For a strong argument imploring scholars to move beyond this frame see Hazel Gray and Lindsay Whitfield, 'Reframing African political economy: Clientelism, rents and accumulation as drivers of capitalist transformation', *LSE Working Papers Series* 14, 159 (2014), pp. 1-32.

¹⁴ For detailed discussion of this see Mushtaq Khan and A.S. Jomo, *Rents, rent seeking and economic development: theory and evidence in Asia* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000).

it is inexorably bound up with the processes of class formation that accompany it, rather than resulting purely from some ineluctable characteristic of the post-colonial African state.¹⁵

There are two interrelated dimensions to gatekeeper politics: spoils consumption (the use of control over public resources for private ends); and crony capitalism (the use of connections to public authority to facilitate private capital accumulation). The importance of securing access to public authority through ANC channels provokes intense factional struggles for positions of influence and power within the party. However, this extends well beyond the predatory struggles of a few powerful elites. The spread of gatekeeper politics, and the factional struggles surrounding it, can only be understood in relation to issues of everyday political economy. The manner in which extreme inequalities of class, gender, education, and health severally reduce the ability of ordinary South Africans to survive and flourish draws political entrepreneurs and their followers towards private patron-client networks attached to the ANC as a means to exploit access to public authority in an effort to navigate poverty and inequality. The ANC can thus ‘suck in’ popular anxieties and frustrations over socioeconomic transformation into the confines of patronage-based factional struggles within the party. South Africa does not stand anywhere near the precipice of ‘terminal spoils’ politics and state collapse. However, while this form of patronage-based politics has been compatible with some developmental outcomes (for instance GDP growth), we should not overlook the way in which it contributes to depoliticising the inequalities and social injustice at the heart of underdevelopment in South Africa, hiding them from view while reifying the power of the ANC and reducing the prospects for more transformative forms of political agency to emerge.

The spread of gatekeeper politics

Corruption and political patronage were central features of the old apartheid regime in South Africa, which according to Hyslop’s study, became increasingly pronounced from the 1970s as the apartheid system began to disintegrate and the Afrikaner establishment was unable to discipline its followers and prevent the ensuing ‘scramble for personal enrichment.’¹⁶ Lodge notes that during the apartheid era South Africa experienced corruption on multiple scales, including high-level scandals relating to arms procurement and oil sanctions, as well as widespread ‘petty corruption’ practiced by ordinary civil servants.¹⁷ As both scholars note, patron-client relationships were also endemic within the African-run homeland authorities, such that ‘homeland government became a by-word for corruption and incompetence.’¹⁸

Lodge argues that the persistence of corruption and the growth of neopatrimonial politics after 1994 is not simply a continuation of the old practices of the apartheid order: the roots of corruption and patrimonialism, he contends, run deep within the history of the ANC, which can be explained by several factors. First, patronage-based relationships formed the core of inter-elite alliances within the ANC in its early years; second, the participation of ANC elites within the Advisory Board institutions of the old apartheid state which were ‘centres of clientelistic politics’;¹⁹ and third, the incorporation of criminal networks into the ANC during

¹⁵ This is where I would differ from Frederick Cooper’s notion of the gatekeeper state, where he argues that patronage politics is a product of very particular processes of African state formation. Frederick Cooper ‘Africa since 1940’, pp. 156-190.

¹⁶ Jonathan Hyslop, ‘Political corruption before and after apartheid’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 31, 4 (2005), pp. 773-789, p. 782.

¹⁷ Tom Lodge, ‘Political corruption in South Africa’, *African Affairs* 97, 387 (1998), pp. 157-187, p. 164-167

¹⁸ Hyslop, ‘Political corruption’, p. 783; Lodge ‘Political corruption in South Africa’, pP. 167-169.

¹⁹ Lodge ‘Neo-patrimonialism’, p. 7-8.

the struggle period nurtured criminal activity within the party and strengthened ‘patrimonial political predispositions.’²⁰

It is clear, however, that whatever the potency of these ‘predispositions’, it was not until 1994, when the ANC assumed the incumbency of the state, that patron-client relations could begin to assume the scale and character that we can now witness. Access to a vast array of resources suddenly lay before ANC activists who could utilize positions of party authority to leverage themselves into positions of state authority, whether as parliamentarians, cabinet ministers, mayors, councillors, civil servants or employees in the rapidly expanding state machinery. Others could use the skills and authority they had accumulated during the struggle period, as well as their political connections, to carve out new opportunities in the private sector for personal enrichment. Such processes were actively facilitated by the ANC itself, which promoted the deployment of its cadres’ control over the state and the private sector as part of a broader effort to encourage the political and socioeconomic transformation of South Africa and to help ferment the growth of a black capitalist class.²¹

Such a rapid assumption of power, however, came with challenges. As one senior member of both the Mandela and Mbeki administrations put it: ‘Too quickly too many people saw the ANC structures as stepping stones; not for the values of what we fought for, but to get them into political positions which lead to economic gains.’²² Such sentiments are widespread among former ANC leaders. In 1997, for example, Mandela warned that the movement could witness the abuse of public authority for ‘personal gratification’ in what he described as a ‘desperate desire to accumulate wealth in the shortest possible period of time’.²³ Indeed, former president Kgalema Motlanthe reflected that, as a dominant party facing very weak opposition, the ANC had often succumbed to the ‘sins of incumbency’ while in office, and that ‘dishonest wealth accumulation’ had become a mainstay of party activity.²⁴ This sentiment was echoed among delegates at the ANC’s policy conference, who complained that the organization had become a sordid ‘pyramid scheme’ to ‘get rich quick’. One ANC activist, for example, bemoaned how ‘we are no longer revolutionary politicians, we are professional politicians’ going into politics to make a living. ANC activists and party leaders alike often spoke about this attitude through metaphors of eating, arguing that ANC members were now often of the impression that once they assumed positions of party or public office, ‘it is our time to chow’.

As I will now explain, there are two interwoven dimensions to the exercise of gatekeeping authority in South Africa. The first is the direct use and abuse of public authority to consume and distribute the spoils of the state along private channels. The second is the use and abuse of access to public authority to facilitate private capital accumulation, which one might refer to as crony capitalism.

Spoils consumption

²⁰ *Ibid* p. 17.

²¹ See William M. Gumede *Thabo Mbeki and the battle for the soul of the ANC* (Zebra Press, London, 2005), pp. 215-256.

²² Interview, former NEC member, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

²³ Nelson Mandela ‘50th National Conference: Report by the President of the ANC’ (ANC, Johannesburg, 1997). <<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2461>> (14 June 2014).

²⁴ Kgalema Motlhanthe ‘Speech to conference’, Oxford, 27 April 2014.

Chris Allen coined the term spoils politics to understand situations where ‘public office is valued not for its powers or potential, nor to serve the public interest, but in order to achieve a cash return to the investment made in obtaining the office.’²⁵ Securing positions within the party or in public office grants a gatekeeper control over the consumption and distribution of resources and opportunities: the ‘spoils’ associated with state power. One dimension of this is the direct consumption of public resources for private benefit. In recent years allegations of such activities have surrounded ANC elites and one notable example has been President Jacob Zuma’s ‘security upgrades’ to his private homestead in Nkandla, KwaZulu Natal, which were ‘conservatively estimated’ by the Public Protector’s investigation to cost R246 million (US\$ 23 million).²⁶ The Protector argued that she found ‘serious difficulty’ in classifying the upgrades – which include a cattle kraal, swimming pool, amphitheatre, visitors’ centre, marquee area and chicken run - as security measures.²⁷ The Protector concluded that the President and his family had ‘unduly benefited’ from the public expenditure.²⁸ However, as Bayart notes, ‘contrary to the popular image of the innocent masses, corruption and predatoriness are not found exclusively among the powerful.’²⁹ Indeed, the manner in which the corrupt consumption of state spoils has become engrained in the everyday practices of a whole host of government departments has been well documented.³⁰

A second feature of this spoils consumption is the nepotistic distribution of employment opportunities, which operates on a range of scales. A symptom of this has been the perception that political appointments at all levels of public office, including provincial premiers,³¹ mayors and municipal managers,³² are made on the grounds of political loyalties over competence, and that those on the wrong side of ANC power holders could expect to be ‘purged’ from their public office³³ or their positions within the party.³⁴ A politics of inclusion and exclusion thus emerges that reifies the power and authority of the gatekeeper who can determine the fate of those who look to them for resources and opportunities.

Positions of public office are hotly contested, but not only because they were an immediate source of wealth for the individual. They were also a means by which powerful patrons could distribute resources and opportunities to their extended networks of dependents. As the ANC’s own documents explain:

Positions in government... mean the possibility to appoint individuals in all kinds of capacities. As such, some members make promises to friends, that once elected and ensconced in government, they would return the favour.³⁵

²⁵ Chris Allen ‘Warfare’, p. 377.

²⁶ Thuli Madonsela, ‘Statement by the Public Protector’ 19 March 2014, p. 3, <http://www.publicprotector.org/media_gallery/2014/Nkandla%20Statement%20by%20Public%20Protector%2019%20March%202014.pdf> (5 July 2014).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45

²⁹ Jean-François Bayart, *The state in Africa. The politics of the belly* (Polity, Cambridge, 2009). p. 238

³⁰ For the best overview, see Lodge ‘Political corruption’.

³¹ Charles Molele ‘ANC denies claims of purging Zuma dissidents’, *Mail & Guardian*, 8 June 2013, <<http://mg.co.za/article/2013-06-08-anc-denies-claims-of-purging-zuma-dissidents>> (28 June 2014).

³² Lubabalo Ngcukana *City Press* ‘Anti-Zuma leaders purged one by one in Eastern Cape’, 20 October 2013, <<http://www.citypress.co.za/politics/anti-zuma-leaders-purged-one-one-eastern-cape/>> (4 July 2014).

³³ Susan Booysen *The ANC and the regeneration of political power* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2011).

³⁴ The most highly publicized case being that of the ANC Youth League members who opposed Zuma. *BBC News*, ‘ANC Sacks Jacob Zuma Critics’, 18 March 2013 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21830787>> (June 27 2014).

³⁵ ANC National Working Committee ‘Through the eye of the needle - choosing the best cadres to lead transformation’, *Umrabulo* 11, 2001, <<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2945>> (1 July 2014).

Sharing the spoils thus becomes central to maintaining moral authority based on shared expectations of reciprocity from both patrons and clients and highlights the need to understand this not simply in terms of corruption, but as the reproduction of political power structures and authority. For example, it was often argued councillor positions at the community level were relatively well remunerated, compared with other forms of local employment. What made the struggle over such positions a ‘life and death’ matter, however, was that they would also be utilized to distribute spoils to their clientele. As one senior party official explained, this practice was particularly pronounced at local levels because state-sponsored development projects were required to use local labour and local businesses to complete the projects, and that the councillor would have a large influence over this because:

When there is a development project to build houses in Diepsloot, the councillor forms what is called a project liaison committee. [The committee] oversees firstly who are the local labourers that will be used and the councillor can also influence with selecting subcontractors for the project.³⁶

Indeed, reports into the functioning of local government regularly cite issues of corruption, nepotism and cronyism around local development projects as a primary obstacle to their successful completion, particularly where the whims and interests of powerful individuals prevail over an impersonal and formalized distribution of public goods.³⁷

Allen noted how this kind of ‘spoils politics’ could degenerate into ‘terminal spoils’ and state collapse in the most extreme cases.³⁸ South Africa is nowhere near such a breakdown, and in reality reflects a far more sustainable spoils consumption where elites ‘feeding’ from the state is not only resisted, as discussed below, but is also offset by the sheer scale of the growing private sector opportunities from which powerful interests could also benefit.

Crony capitalism

There has been a proliferation in the business concerns of senior ANC elites and their networks, most notably Jacob Zuma’s family that held 134 company directorships by 2010, of which 83 were registered after Zuma came to office.³⁹ Zuma’s current deputy, Cyril Ramaphosa, has an estimated net worth of \$700 million⁴⁰ which until recently included a large shareholding in the Shanduka group that has invested across the South African economy and holds stakes in McDonalds (South Africa), Coca Cola bottling plants, Standard Bank and Lonmin, among others.⁴¹ While the precise nature of these links are difficult to prove, academic studies suggest that some business elites have benefited considerably from their ties to the ANC.⁴² There are, for example, reports of foul play with regard to how individuals and

³⁶ Interview, NEC member, Johannesburg, South Africa, May 2014.

³⁷ Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, ‘State of local government in South Africa’, (Government of South Africa, Pretoria, 2009), <www.gov.za/documents/download.php?f=110100> (4 June 2012).

³⁸ Chris Allen ‘Warfare’, p. 379.

³⁹ Tom Lodge ‘Neo-patrimonialism’, p. 2. Roger Southall, ‘Family and favour at the court of Jacob Zuma’, *Review of African Political Economy* 38, 130 (2011) pp. 617–626.

⁴⁰ This is the Forbes ‘Africa rich list’ estimate, from November 2013, <<http://www.forbes.com/profile/cyril-ramaphosa/>> (7 July 2014).

⁴¹ Although in May 2014 Ramaphosa declared that he will divest in Shanduka. Carol Paton and Phakamisa Ndzamela ‘Cyril Ramaphosa exits Shanduka’, *Business Day*, 27 May 2014, <<http://www.bdlive.co.za/business/2014/05/27/cyril-ramaphosa-exits-shanduka>> (30 June 2014).

⁴² For example Gavin Capps ‘A bourgeois reform with social justice? The contradictions of the Minerals Development Bill and black economic empowerment in the South African platinum mining industry’, *Review of*

consortiums with a history of making funding donations to the ANC have directly benefited from share deals, allegedly using the profits from these share holdings to finance party activity.⁴³ Such suspicions are fuelled by the public proclamations of ANC leaders like Jacob Zuma, who stated to the party's anniversary gala dinner in Durban that 'wise' businessmen who supported the ANC could expect that 'everything you touch will multiply.'⁴⁴

There are allegations that the ANC itself has benefited from its business connections.⁴⁵ Paul Holden argues that the ANC's party funding model is simply: 'business fronts benefiting from state contracts that pass profits back to the ANC's treasury,'⁴⁶ pointing to the party's investment arm, Chancellor House, which has reportedly built up a portfolio of close to R2 billion (\$187 million).⁴⁷ Chancellor House has allegedly benefitted directly from the allocation of state tenders (contracts) for the provision of capital or services to state owned enterprises.⁴⁸ The ANC has also sought to bolster its finances and close ties to business through the establishment of the Progressive Business Forum. Businesses are invited to pay high fees to join the Forum and in return the Forum claims to offer them access to 'ministerial networking events', the opportunity to join trade delegations, and also access to 'high end' events including Presidential gala dinners and a 'global BRICS and mining summit.'⁴⁹ Paul Holden has argued that this has significance for understanding the continued power of the party because 'the ANC has successfully turned political power into economic power...and economic power begets further political power.'⁵⁰ Indeed, such connections to both national and global sections of capital help the ANC to fund itself.⁵¹

This kind of crony capitalism, where capital accumulations is made possible through connections to private networks of public authority, exists on a range of different scales. The phenomenon of the 'tenderpreneur' is reported to be ubiquitous, whereby a government project, for example the building of a local road or housing, is put out to a tendering process and businesses compete for the project (or 'tender'). There are widespread reports of this process being influenced by private patron-client networks linking capitalists to local-level gatekeepers in the party, rather than it being a neutral, impersonal process in the public interest.⁵² As one senior ANC leader argued, 'from the point of view of people who want to

African Political Economy 39, 132 (2012), pp. 315-333, pp. 325-330. Ruth Hall 'A political economy of land reform in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy* 31, 100 (2004), pp. 213-227.

⁴³ Tabela Timse et al., 'ANC stands to benefit from R1bn Capitec bank bonanza', *Mail & Guardian*, 28 September 2012, <<http://amabhungane.co.za/article/2012-09-28-anc-stands-to-benefit-from-r1bn-capitec-bank-bonanza>> (15 June 2014).

⁴⁴ Lionel Faull and Sam Sole 'Jo'burg's R1bn "present" to Zuma benefactor', *Mail & Guardian*, 18 January 2013, <<http://amabhungane.co.za/article/2013-01-18-joburgs-r1bn-present-to-zuma-benefactor>> (15 June 2014).

⁴⁵ Anthony Butler (ed.) *Paying for politics: Party funding and political change in South Africa and the global south* (Jacana, Johannesburg, 2010).

⁴⁶ Paul Holden, 'Ensuring reproduction: The ANC and its models of party funding', in Martin Plaut and Paul Holden (eds), *Who rules South Africa? Pulling the strings of power* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 2012) pp. 193-202, p. 193.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 211.

⁴⁸ For example see Sally Evans and Jonathan Erasmus, 'Chancellor House lands new deal', *Mail & Guardian*, 27 July 2012, <<http://amabhungane.co.za/article/2012-07-27-chancellor-house-lands-new-deal>> (1 July 2014); *City Press*, 'ANC's Chancellor House in secret R170m Eskom supplier deal', 26 April 2014.

<<http://www.citypress.co.za/news/ancs-chancellor-house-secret-r170m-eskom-supplier-deal/>> (1 July 2014).

⁴⁹ This is documented in the PBF's magazine. Renier Schoeman and Daryl Swanepoel 'Letter from the co-editors', *Progressive Leader* 11 (2014), pp. 15-16.

⁵⁰ Paul Holden 'Ensuring reproduction', p. 194.

⁵¹ Roger Southall 'The ANC for Sale? Money, morality & business in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy* 35, 116 (2008) pp. 281-299, p. 290.

⁵² One example of this kind of alleged activity involves former ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema and how a company his family interests part-owned has reportedly benefited directly from the tenders it helps to

advance their business interests want to have influence over ANC processes. If they have someone friendly to them, you know, they think they have a shoe in on whatever business opportunities might be coming in there.’⁵³ Major suspicions have been aroused when decisions are made by a ruling party ‘acting as both player and referee’ in the process of awarding tenders.’⁵⁴ Delegates at the ANC’s conference would complain about this bitterly, arguing that projects like road building and house building were done to a poor standard on the cheap by tenderpreneur ‘sharks’ who wanted a quick pay off. The process is relatively simple. Local councillors play a particularly prominent gatekeeping role. As one former cabinet minister put it:

People see that being a councillor is a means to become involved in small scale corruption. It may well be the owners of a taxi rank who want it to be in a specific place, or some very small scale construction company that wants to be involved with building houses. They think that maybe if you can get a councillor on your side the councillor can fight your battle.⁵⁵

What this illustrates is that access to the networks of *public* authority becomes a vital facilitator of *private* capital accumulation. Just as large sections of the old Afrikaans capitalist class were dependent on private channels of state support of the apartheid regime, so too the emerging black elite is heavily reliant upon its connections to the new state authorities. South Africa shares similarities with other post-colonial African states regarding the manner in which processes of post-colonial class formation are inexorably bound up with the facilitation of capital accumulation through the mechanisms of political power.⁵⁶

Gatekeeper politics extends well beyond the dissemination of state resources in South Africa. It is an intrinsic feature of the development of post-colonial capitalism. It resembles the kind of capital accumulation one can witness in the crony capitalism evident in the East Asian ‘Tiger’ economies,⁵⁷ post-Soviet Russia⁵⁸, and the ‘oligarchic’ politics evident in Western countries where private capitalist lobbyists wield huge influence over public officials.⁵⁹ What we can witness in South Africa should be understood on this wider spectrum of informal political practices that cloud the distinction between public and private interests, and where the ability for capital to accumulate depends heavily upon gateways to public authority, rather than successfully navigating an impersonal ‘market’.

However, Roger Southall notes that such connections have contributed to the ‘moral decay’ of the party.⁶⁰ Indeed, the contradictions of this relationship with private capital can also pit ANC elites directly against the party’s core constituency: the black working class. Recently, for example, it has emerged that Mineral Resources Minister held a stake in the platinum sector while he actively intervened in ending a workers’ strike in the sector, constituting what

award. Piet Rampedi and Adriaan Basson, ‘Malema’s tender bonanza’, *fin24*, 7 August 2011, <<http://www.fin24.com/Economy/Malemas-tender-bonanza-20110807>> (21 June 2014).

⁵³ Interview, NEC member, Johannesburg, South Africa, May 2014.

⁵⁴ Tabela Timse et al., ‘ANC stands to benefit’.

⁵⁵ Interview, former cabinet minister, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

⁵⁶ Morris Szeftel, ‘Accumulation and Africa’s “catastrophic corruption”’, *Review of African Political Economy* 27, 84 (2000), pp. 287-306, p. 302.

⁵⁷ David C. Kang, *Crony capitalism: Corruption and development in South Korean and the Philippines* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002).

⁵⁸ Daniel C. Bach, ‘Patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism: Comparative trajectories and readings’, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 49, 3 (2011), pp. 275-294.

⁵⁹ This was something raised by a senior official at Luthuli House, who argued passionately that South Africa should be viewed within this broader context rather than presenting this as some unique African phenomenon. Interview, Luthuli House senior official, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

⁶⁰ Roger Southall, ‘ANC for sale’.

his spokesman was forced to admit constituted a serious ‘conflict of interest’.⁶¹ In a more extreme case, current Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa was the largest shareholder in the Lonmin mining group at the time when 34 of its workers were killed by police when they were out on strike in 2012,⁶² with the police allegedly under pressure from Ramaphosa to take firmer action with the strikers.⁶³

Factions, fragmentation and violence

It is within this context of the importance of connections to gatekeepers in party positions or public office that we can begin to understand the emergence of intense factional struggles within the ANC over access to state authority. A cyclical relationship emerges in which patronage is distributed to regenerate the political power of the gatekeeper, and political power (control of the gate) is used to replenish the resources needed to maintain these networks.⁶⁴

Factional struggles rooted in patronage contests are nothing new to the ANC.⁶⁵ However, the intensity of these struggles has increased since the ANC has held public office. The initial warnings raised in the mid-1990s⁶⁶ have become much more alarmist in tone, arguing that factionalism has become ‘parasitic’ by sapping the life out of the ANC’s structures.⁶⁷ Such is the concern in the party that it has introduced ‘Organisational Renewal’ discussion documents debated at length during its policy conferences. The most recent of these goes as far to warn of a ‘new shadow culture’ emerging within the party, leading to a shift away from ‘transformative politics’ towards ‘the palace politics of factionalism and perpetual in-fighting’, and that:

[T]he internal strife revolves around contestation for power and state resources, rather than differences on how to implement the policies of the movement.... These circumstances have produced a new type of ANC leader and member who sees ill-discipline, divisions, factionalism and in-fighting as normal practices and necessary forms of political survival. Drastic measures and consistent action against these tendencies are necessary to root out anarchy and decay.⁶⁸

A great concern raised within the ANC is this ‘ill-discipline’ within its ranks. It is graphically evident at ANC gatherings, where factions will heckle, boo or simply block rival factions from taking to the podium. As the *Organisational Renewal* document notes, the movement has witnessed the deployment of ‘vast resources’ by competing factions ‘to organize lobby group meetings, travel and communications’ and even ‘outright bribing and

⁶¹ Craig Mckune and Stefaans Brummer, ‘Mining minister's platinum shares: A R20m 'conflict of interest', *Mail & Guardian*, 27 June 2014, <<http://mg.co.za/article/2014-06-26-mining-ministers-platinum-shares-a-r20m-conflict-of-interest>> (1 July 2014).

⁶² Peter Alexander, ‘Marikana, turning point in South African history’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 40, 138 (2013), pp. 605-619, p. 613

⁶³ Siphso Hlongwane, ‘Cyril Ramaphosa's Marikana email batters ANC heavyweight's reputation’, *Guardian*, 24 October 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/24/cyril-ramaphosa-lonmin-email-reputation>> (4 July 2014).

⁶⁴ Chris Allen, ‘Understanding African Politics’, p. 304.

⁶⁵ Stephen Ellis, *External mission: the ANC in exile 1960-1990* (Hurst, London, 2012) pp. 103-108.

⁶⁶ ANC, ‘50th National Conference: Report of the Secretary General’, 1997, <<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2483>> (12 June 2014).

⁶⁷ ANC, ‘Leadership renewal, discipline and organizational culture’, 2010,, <<http://www.anc.org.za/docs/discus/2010/leadershipn.pdf>> (10 July 2014).

⁶⁸ ANC, ‘Organisational Renewal’, 2012, <<http://www.anc.org.za/docs/discus/2012/organisationalrenewalf.pdf>> (3 April 2014), p. 9.

paying of individuals in regions and branches to forward particular factional positions and/or disrupt meetings'.⁶⁹ The document also notes the use of factional t-shirts, songs, and insults being widely used at all levels of the movement.⁷⁰ As delegates at the party's 2012 conference noted, this was now becoming the 'staple diet' of the activities of the party, deeply embedded in everyday practice and fermenting a new organizational culture. Concerns are raised within the ANC that, as one delegate put it, reflecting a widely expressed sentiment, 'the rot has really set in everywhere'; a sentiment echoed in the ANC's discussion documents that lament how 'both "old" and "new" members and leadership echelons at all levels are involved, increasingly leaving no voice in our ranks that is able to provide guidance'.⁷¹

At the top levels, such factional struggles can result in the purging of rival factions from public authority and the displacement of senior party officials from offices of power. However they can take on an entirely more sinister and, at times, dangerous character at local levels. On the one hand, this was connected to national leadership struggles. Delegates reported that there were incidences of branches being established (or even completely fabricated) by competing factions to improve their standing in regions/provinces, despite having insufficient members to make the branch quorate. In some cases, local struggles could also erupt into violent clashes – which was widely reported by ANC members – and this was confirmed by the ANC's discussion documents which note that police have been increasingly called into intervene in such clashes.⁷²

In some cases where there was a divide between the ANC faction in control of the branch and the local councillor, then this could spill over into local coup attempts. ANC party factions have hijacked genuine grievances over socioeconomic transformation in an effort to rival one another and overthrow local councillors. This was an issue raised at the ANC's conference and was argued to form part of a broader repertoire of tactics employed by rival ANC factions.⁷³ This was described in a range of different ways but in essence, a local ANC faction will either prey upon local grievances over issues like corruption, housing, jobs and service delivery, or fabricate allegations of corruption, incompetence, and nepotism against the incumbent councillor. This could then involve mobilizing local protests in order to undermine the councillor. They might then appeal to higher levels of the party to recall the councillor from his position or simply undermine their future election chances. One story from a former government minister is particularly revealing of how these struggles played out within the party. They described how they had been sent by the National Executive Committee (NEC) to investigate unrest in an area that had witnessed local protests. They called a meeting at the local ANC branch with the ANC Branch Executive Committee, officials from the local government dealing with housing, and the local councillor. He recalled:

We started the meeting and one of the branch gets up and points at the councillor and says 'you know comrade, [pointing at the councillor] he's corrupt.' I asked 'why is he corrupt?' And he said 'you see he gave his wife an RDP house'. So I asked the councillor 'did you give your wife an RDP house?' And he said 'no comrade, that house belonged to my wife before we were even

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 31-32.

⁷⁰ The unpublished discussion document submitted to the 2012 ANC Policy Conference by KwaZulu Natal Province gives some useful detail on this on p. 15.

⁷¹ ANC, 'Leadership renewal, discipline and organizational culture', 2010, <<http://www.anc.org.za/docs/discus/2010/leadershipn.pdf>> (2 July 2014)

⁷² ANC, 'Organisational renewal', p. 32.

⁷³ Susan Booyesen, 'The ANC', pp. 126-73.

married.’ So then I confronted those making allegations because it became clear that they were lying and trying to intimidate this guy [the councillor] in our presence.⁷⁴

He then explained that a series of false allegations were raised against the councillor, each alleging nepotistic job allocations or incidences of corruption. It was clear, he argued, that this ‘rowdy’ faction was trying to stage a local coup by encouraging the local community to come and disrupt the meeting and raise these false allegations and grievances about local service provision. He argued that it was clear a particular ANC faction in the branch was ‘using these people and their problems to create a furor and try and remove the councillor.’⁷⁵ Such instances were regularly raised by ANC leaders and by ANC delegates at the 2012 policy conference who bemoaned how local anger over jobs, service delivery and corruption was instrumentally aggravated and channeled within these volatile factional struggles over positions of gatekeeping authority.

Karl Von Holdt describes the growth of such factional activity, and the violence that surrounds it, as heralding part of a ‘transition to violent democracy’ in South Africa.⁷⁶ Similarly, Jonny Steinberg details how South African police have been drawn into these factional struggles, and that exercising discretion about which political leaders to investigate for corruption or which protests to quell by force becomes intimately bound up in factional power struggles within the ANC, forcing the police to take sides.⁷⁷ What is clear from such observations, and from the voices of activists within the movement, is that the bitter patronage-fuelled struggles over positions of public authority have proliferated to a degree that they are spreading what the ANC describes as ‘anarchy and decay’, but what more accurately reflects the spread of gatekeeping politics and the fierce competition of resources that are symptomatic of it.

Why has gatekeeper politics spread?

Although there was broad consensus that gatekeeper politics was spreading in the movement, there were mixed ideas about why exactly this had occurred. It was widely expressed by past and present members of the NEC who were struggle veterans that one reason for the spread of such ‘tendencies’ was a moral shift in the people entering the movement. It was often remarked, for example, that while it was impossible ‘to paint everyone with the same brush’, there was nonetheless an identifiable change in the reasons why people joined the movement. The crucial difference, it was alleged, was that during the struggle era people were ‘recruited’ based on their identifiable talents, whereas now people ‘joined’ the movement for individual benefit. As one senior party organizer put it: ‘You know I came here [to the ANC] to commit yourself to fight for a cause, knowing that it can result in death, imprisonment, in a family being destroyed, you having to leave your home, going into exile. The conditions are totally different [now]. So as the ANC we would be naive and stupid to believe that now when you have contest elections in a multiparty democracy that you will find the same quality of cadre.’⁷⁸ A sentiment that was quite often expressed was that, as one former NEC member put

⁷⁴ Interview, former cabinet minister, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ Karl Von Holdt, ‘South Africa: the transition to violent democracy’, *Review of African Political Economy* 40, 138 (2013), pp. 589-604.

⁷⁷ Jonny Steinberg ‘Policing, state power, and the transition from apartheid to democracy: A new perspective’, *African Affairs* 113, 451 (2014), pp. 173-191, p. 190

⁷⁸ Interview, senior ANC official, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

it, the ‘kids’ of today were too invested in making careers for themselves and ‘driving posh cars’ and ‘would look at you as if you were mad’ if you called on them to make sacrifices for the movement. There is clearly an element of nostalgia attached to these narratives, but they nonetheless resonated with a broader sentiment reverberating around the conference halls that the younger generation of activists joining the movement simply did not understand the importance of political activism, nor did they share the selfless commitment to ‘the cause’ exhibited by their elders. As Jonathan Dean writes, such ‘narratives of apolitically’ – which hold that younger activists are typically unable or unwilling to embody the authenticity, radicalism and commitment characteristic of older activists – often circulate irrespective of their empirical accuracy, and often serve to marginalize or render invisible potentially significant forms of youth activism.⁷⁹ Such narratives obscure the multiple reasons why people engage in the ANC, which is not purely instrumental and is instead often rooted in complex bonds of solidarity with the movement.⁸⁰ They also serve to short-circuit a more rigorous investigation into the structural roots of gatekeeper politics.

One key factor explaining the spread of gatekeeper politics since 1994 is the weakness of the state and the ANC’s organization. As Tim Kelsall has argued, the extent to which state authorities can control the spread of patronage depends in large part upon their willingness and capacity to centralize control over, and thus contain, rent-seeking behaviour.⁸¹ The great problem that past and present members of the NEC highlighted was that the movement had always spent its time planning how to take power and that its fundamental capacity to govern was inadequate in 1994.⁸² It was in this context that former ministers often described their first years in office after 1994 as an exercise in frantically learning the ropes where they lacked the capacity to effectively keep track on, let alone reign in, rent-seeking behaviour. As one senior cabinet minister in both the Mbeki and Mandela governments concluded, ‘We had very few cadres in exile and inside [the country] put together in 1994. We were too few to run a country like South Africa initially, there’s no doubt about that.’⁸³ The diffusion of authority to the provinces further diluted the state’s capacity to reign in errant behaviour, it was argued. This lack of state capacity was coupled with a dearth of organizational capacity within the ANC itself, which had rapidly cobbled together its nation-wide branch structures once it was unbanned in 1990, such that it lacked the ability to contain the emergence of ‘gatekeepers’ at the branch level who would leverage their positions and exploit the lack of central oversight to amass power bases through which they could pursue their private interests.⁸⁴ Indeed, it was widely believed that these gatekeeping tendencies were far more prevalent in areas where the ANC’s organization has historically been weaker and where the ‘strongest’ cadres of the party returning from exile or jail had been unable to exert control.

While the issue of under capacity of the state was clearly an issue in terms of why it had been difficult to keep central *control* over the proliferation of gatekeeper politics, such behaviour should, in the first place, be seen as the product of a bottom-up dynamic rooted in issues of political economy. ANC activists acknowledged that at local levels, attaching oneself to patron-client networks within the party was a vital means to access resources and

⁷⁹ Jonathan Dean, ‘Tales of the apolitical’, *Political Studies* 62, 2 (2014), pp. 452-467.

⁸⁰ Alexander Beresford, ‘Comrades “back on track”? The durability of the tripartite alliance in South Africa’, *African Affairs* 108, 432 (2009) pp. 391-412.

⁸¹ Tim Kelsall, ‘Rethinking the relationship between neo-patrimonialism and economic development in Africa’, *IDS Bulletin* 42, 2, (2011) pp. 76-87.

⁸² This is a point made in several interviews with former ministers and NEC members.

⁸³ Interview, former cabinet minister, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

⁸⁴ ANC, ‘50th National Conference: Resolutions - Building the ANC’, 1997, <<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2427>> (24 June 2014); ANC, ‘ANC - People’s Movement and Agent for Change’, 2000, <<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2358>> (24 June 2014).

opportunities for themselves and their extended households to navigate the harsh realities of unemployment, poverty and inequality.⁸⁵ This found expression in sentiments such as ‘this is all they know’ and ‘this is the only way they can make it’: sentiments that highlighted a widely held belief that adopting stringent normative critiques of such behaviour, while not without validity, nonetheless failed to grasp that such behaviour ferments not because of some moral deficiency, but because of socioeconomic circumstance. As it was often argued, gatekeeping was considered to be more deeply rooted in areas where the socioeconomic conditions were such that activists had fewer options other than to pursue their livelihoods via patronage networks. As one senior party official argued, the ‘machine of patronage’ was stronger where ‘how people relate to the ANC is a question of what is their daily bread’ and where being on the right side of branch executives and local councillors could determine ‘whether they have something to eat or not.’⁸⁶

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

A community might take a decision that ‘our priority is to get a clinic and we’re gonna elect Alex [to become a councillor], because Alex is close to the SG [Secretary General] so maybe we’ll get our clinic.’ ...They’re getting the clinic by manipulating the situation. So I think we underestimate communities in terms of how they read situations in order to achieve their goals. I think they’re more politically savvy than some of us [laughs].⁸⁷

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

While it is impossible to estimate how much protest action in South Africa’s amorphous ‘rebellion of the poor’ is directed through ANC channels in such a way, the fact that this has been widely reported in the media⁸⁸ and also within the ANC itself, suggests that this ‘sucking in’ of popular frustrations into factional patron-client networks is a significant phenomena to understand. As Hannah Dawson’s study of protests in Zandspruit has shown, this takes the form of a ‘battle for patronage from below’ where local grievances against the

⁸⁵James Ferguson ‘Declarations of dependence: labour, personhood, and welfare in southern Africa’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19, 2 (2013) pp. 223-242.

⁸⁶ Interview, senior ANC official, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2012.

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

⁸⁸ One illustrative example would be Setumo Stone ‘Factionalism blamed for violent protests in Mafikeng’, *Business Day*, 8 August 2012, <<http://www.bdlive.co.za/articles/2012/07/09/factionalism-blamed-for-violent-protests-in-mafikeng;jsessionid=305A04DC0DE5EB8DF00AB44D7FB652AB.present1.bdfm>> (7 July 2014).

state are co-opted into ANC factional struggles.⁸⁹ Ultimately, this dynamic reflects the deep socioeconomic roots of gatekeeper politics and the manner in which aspiring individual politicians, as well as the communities around them, might be drawn towards such networks not because of moral deviance and ‘corruption’, but as a means to navigate, as best they can, the endemic inequalities and social injustice they encounter.

Depoliticizing patronage politics?

David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi have argued that we must look for divergences from the assumed ‘modal type’ of anti-developmental patronage politics identified by Chabal and Daloz.⁹⁰ Paul Kagame’s RPF regime in Rwanda, they argue, exemplifies a form ‘developmental patrimonialism.’ Rather than sustaining its political authority by distributing short-term spoils, the RPF has maintained its political authority through ‘long-horizon’ economic planning which has promoted poverty reduction and most notably, economic growth through which the RPF’s has directly benefited through its sizeable business interests. To do so, it has kept tight central controls over rent-seeking behaviour and a firm anti-corruption line so that state capacity and economic growth are not undermined. In short, whether patronage politics can be developmental thus depends on ‘whether rent management is directed towards the short-term enrichment of members of the political class and its allies, or alternatively towards “growing the pie” of the national economy, maximizing opportunities for long-term accumulation.’⁹¹

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

Second, it is important to recognize that Booth and Golooba-Mutebi’s definition of ‘developmental’ as measured by GDP growth, productivity rates and Human Development Index figures is narrow and we should not downplay the demobilizing political impacts that gatekeeper politics can have. As Morris Szeftel notes, where political parties become consumed with factionalism, it focuses political ‘attention on the distribution of state

⁸⁹ Hannah J. Dawson ‘Patronage from below: political unrest in an informal settlement in South Africa’, *African Affairs* 113, 453 (2014) pp. 518-539.

⁹⁰ David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi ‘Developmental patrimonialism?’.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 394.

resources rather than the use of state power to restructure society or change class relations.⁹² Indeed, there was a huge concern among ANC members that this form of patronage politics was severally undermining ideological debate and contestation within the movement. Activists from all levels of the movement would lament, for example, that there was ‘no politics’ involved in the battle over positions within the party, and that such contests were reduced to being seen to be for or against a particular individual and ‘what I can get out of it’.

This is particularly significant within a dominant party system like South Africa’s because ideological debates within the party and its allies acts as a surrogate arena of democratic contestation where the formal spaces for such contestation (such as the parliament) are compromised in their capacity to affect real change by the predominance of one party. Outside of formal politics, the expression of frustrations and grievances by communities that result in protest action are, in a number of cases, co-opted into the factional struggles between rival ANC elites.

As Gabrielle Lynch has concluded in relation to patronage politics in Kenya, rather than challenging the very nature of the political system that perpetuates social injustice, communities can instead become lured into channeling their grievances into struggles between rival gatekeepers in factional struggles ‘declaring that what they need is a representative of their own who will fight for, protect and promote their interests’ rather than challenging the system in its entirety.⁹³ In South Africa one might hypothesize that this ‘sucking in’ of deep-seated frustrations with the post-apartheid order reflects the reality that while communities are not devoid of agency, they nonetheless exhibit ‘agency in tight corners,’⁹⁴ where achieving tangible short-term ‘fixes’ by aligning with one or other ANC faction might be preferable, and infinitely more achievable, than challenging the very structural foundations of social injustice.⁹⁵ In short, it reflects a strategy of navigating relations of dependency and endemic structural violence: playing the game, so to speak, rather than engaging in transformative forms of political agency. As Claire Bénit-Gbaffou warns, however, the cooptation of popular anxieties and protest movements into patronage struggles ‘contributes to fragment or sedate local organizations or social movements and it prevents contestation of existing policies and dominant power structures.’⁹⁶ It can serve to insulate the ANC as a party from direct criticism. Meanwhile, the roots of popular grievance and the class power of ANC elites (in terms of their control over capital and state resources), are obscured and channelled away from direct contestation.

Conclusion

It was clear that gatekeeper politics was considered to be dangerous for the ANC and its capacity to deliver development in South Africa. How to combat this was a focal point of the party’s debates over ‘organisational renewal.’ This debate centers on the character of party

⁹² Morris Szeftel, ‘Clientelism, corruption and catastrophe’, *Review of African Political Economy* 27, 85 (2000), pp. 427-441, p. 435.

⁹³ Gabrielle Lynch ‘Negotiating ethnicity: Identity politics in contemporary Kenya’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 33, 107 (2006), pp. 49-65, p. 61.

⁹⁴ John Lonsdale uses this to explore the agency of African elites but this term is helpful in this non-elite context also. John Lonsdale ‘Agency in tight corners: Narrative and initiative in African history’, *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 13, 1 (2000), pp. 5-16

⁹⁵ Claire Bénit-Gbaffou ‘“Up close and personal” - How does local democracy help the poor access the state? Stories of accountability and clientelism in Johannesburg’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 46, 5, (2011) pp. 453-465.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 453. See also Hannah J. Dawson ‘Patronage from below’, p. 537.

activists and the quality of the party ‘cadres’ that would be deployed into public office. A cornerstone of the ANC’s conference resolutions in 2012 was thus to launch a ‘Decade of the Cadre’ which resolved to extend ‘the ideological, political, academic and moral training of a critical mass of ANC members,’ including the intensified rollout of the ANC’s political school system.⁹⁷ The conference also reaffirmed a decision taken by the NGC to establish ‘Integrity Commissions’ at all levels of the movement that would have the power to dismiss any member, or public servant, for corruption.⁹⁸ In order to combat factionalism, the conference also calls for ‘firm and consistent action to instil discipline across all levels of the organization without fear or favour.’⁹⁹ Conference resolved that members would have to undergo ‘probation periods’ before they could take up official positions in the party, thereby attempting to reduce the scope for ‘opportunists’ ascending to positions of power without having demonstrated a long-standing commitment to the movement and its goals, and it also introduced a mandatory six month ‘probation period’ for would-be ANC members where they will be given ‘political education’ and be expected to engage in ‘community work’ before they are given a membership card, so as to try and prevent branches being flooded before leadership elections with new members and also try and encourage the growth of a more active and ‘selfless’ ANC members.

However, one might question the efficacy of some of these ‘fixes’ to gatekeeper politics. First, calls for more ‘political education’ and enforcing greater adherence to codes of conduct are nothing new,¹⁰⁰ and the idea of a new top-down disciplinary ethos disseminating its way through the party will be undermined if senior ANC leaders are seen to regularly flout the very standards they call upon ordinary members to follow. Moreover, accessing gatekeepers in positions of party and public authority is vital for enabling both elite accumulation and for individuals and communities to navigate extreme inequalities, unemployment and poverty. Far from resembling an exotic ‘African’ deviation from global political norms, the spread of gatekeeper politics should thus be understood in terms of political economy: patronage networks, crony capitalism and factional struggles are inexorably bound up with the development of capitalism and can be witnessed – to varying degrees – in even the most ‘advanced’ liberal capitalist democracies.

This kind of gatekeeper politics is not, in short, the ineluctable way in which ‘Africa works’. Patronage, corruption, cronyism, poverty and inequality are, nonetheless, intractable features of contemporary global capitalism, and will remain a predominant feature of South African politics for the near future. The domestic forces capable of resisting this, both within the ANC and opposition parties, must confront the fact that the elites dependent on nefarious gateways to public authority to secure their ability to accumulate wealth are unlikely to change their spots quickly, nor are they likely to concede power easily. For ordinary citizens, reaching out to patron-client networks may well be a vital means of treading water, but we must be mindful not to celebrate this ‘agency in tight corners’, which ultimately does not challenge the roots of social injustice that lie at the heart of South Africa’s unfinished liberation.

⁹⁷ ANC, ‘53rd Congress Resolutions’, 2013, <<http://www.anc.org.za/docs/res/2013/resolutions53r.pdf>> (2 July 2014), p. 5.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 5

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 6. An individual would have to be a member of the ANC for over 10 years to be eligible for election onto the NEC, 7 years for the PEC, 5 years for the REC, 3 years for the sub region and 2 years for a BEC.

¹⁰⁰ Such concerns and prescriptions are evident throughout the 1990s in the ANC’s discussion documents.