

The 2016 Local Government Elections in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: Is Jesus on his Way?

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Introduction

When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? (Luke 12:55)

Post-1994, the African National Congress (ANC) has increasingly allied itself to traditional authorities in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Part of the reason for this has been to undermine the support base of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). In more recent times, the alliance between chiefs and the ANC has seen them linked to mining interests, often running rough-shod over local forms of resistance. In addition, the August 2016 local government elections showed a weakening of ANC support in some of these rural hotspots of KZN, thus creating the possibilities for activists to build alliances anew.

The 1980s in KZN was a decade riven by bloody battles between IFP and ANC aligned groupings, fuelled by state agents commonly referred to as the 'third force'. Leapfrogging into the present, it is no wonder then that politically motivated killings in KwaZulu-Natal in the run-up to and following the 2016 local government elections have brought back memories of the low-level war waged between the IFP and ANC during the 1980s. This proto-civil war left thousands of people dead and many fleeing their homes. It is estimated that from 1987-1997, approximately 11 600 people died in KwaZulu-Natal (Jeffrey 1997, 1). While ANC-aligned communities formed defence committees and were involved in a range of pre-emptive attacks on the IFP, the IFP was able to act with a degree of impunity as it had the backing of the apartheid state. The unbanning of the liberation movements in the early 1990s and the drive to a negotiated settlement however, slowly changed this scenario. The Boipatong massacre on June 19, 1992 was the last of the IFP's open onslaughts on ANC supporters, while the ANC reined in its reaction units.

It is now part of history that at the last minute, the IFP agreed to participate in the first democratic elections in 1994. It won a majority in the Provincial parliament in KZN and accepted cabinet positions at a national level. In this respect, Nelson Mandela's ability to cajole recalcitrant forces into the democratic process gave the transition its halo, despite the violence and bloodshed that accompanied it (Sparks 1995).

Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the first democratically elected President of South Africa on May 10, 1994. The declared goals of progressive organizations and individuals in the immediate years after the unbanning of the ANC were to build non-racialism and overcome apartheid's legacy of exclusion and inequality. The first years of ANC government were marked by the unity of the ANC alliance with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and South African Communist Party (SACP). Both these allies of the ANC had their members

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serving in parliament and cabinet, albeit wearing ANC hats. The summary adoption of conservative macro-economic policies by the ANC was given strident left cover by COSATU and the SACP.

In the Mandela years, the most popular of the SACP leaders, such as Joe Slovo served in the cabinet together with former general secretary of COSATU, Jay Naidoo and trade union colleague Alec Erwin. The ANC was keen to suture the local economy into the rhythms of global capitalism. In their analysis, this mitigation of internal conflicts and the inauguration of a Government of National Unity (GNU) would pave the way for foreign investment, fuelling economic growth and acting as the bridgehead for deeper societal transformation through a myriad of reconstruction and development programmes (Marais 2011).

During the Thabo Mbeki years, from 1999 to 2008, the Alliance began to show signs of disquiet and dissent. COSATU felt marginalized, while the SACP, having seen either the resignation of many of its leading cadres or allowing their membership to lapse, lost its position of influence in the Presidency (Saul and Bond 2014).

When the Thabo Mbeki/Jacob Zuma split spilled into open sectarian conflict, the SACP and COSATU lined up alongside Zuma. His victory at Polokwane in December 2007 saw their fortunes once more on the rise. Blade Nzimande, the Party's general secretary and its deputy general secretary Jeremy Cronin both entered Cabinet, and COSATU warmed to its task of Zuma's keeper (Buhlungu 2010).

There were tensions outside the Alliance too. The ANC Youth League, then under the leadership of Julius Malema, attempted to assert its 'nationalism' against the increasing influence of the SACP and engaged in a series of spats. But the Alliance held. For a while. By the time of the elective conference in Mangaung in 2012 however, Malema had been expelled, Zwelinzima Vavi, COSATU's general secretary was out of favour and Zuma faced a challenge, albeit doomed to fail, from Kgalema Motlanthe.

Zuma emerged victorious and a purge of those who had opposed him began. Simultaneously, Zuma's stealthy conquest of key institutions through the appointment of loyalists became apparent. From Crime Intelligence in the South African Police Service, to the secret service and the National Prosecuting Authority, Zuma was seen to have parachuted in chief executives who would do his bidding. Throughout this period, the SACP hardly raised any concerns about these developments, probably blinded by their numbers increasing in Cabinet. However, as cadres jostled for position and as the effects of the 2008 recession left far less government spending available to maintain patronage networks, tensions within the Alliance could not be contained. While initially rallying COSATU behind him on a populist economic manifesto, Zuma failed to deliver on many promises. These failures stood in stark contrast to the iconic feature of his presidency, the R256 million worth of improvements to his Nkandla homestead. All of this - a perception of Zuma's abuse of the state apparatus for his own ends, the inability of the fiscus to satisfy the rent-seeking behaviour of the whole network of his allies, and non-delivery on economic promises - each in its own way caused dissenting voices to be raised. Some were raised too loudly for comfort and resulted, for example, in the expulsion of the powerful National Union of

Metalworkers (NUMSA) from COSATU (Satgar and Southall 2015). A rash of other individual purges and side-linings took place. These expulsions and purges made the Alliance seem light years away from the inclusive glow of the Mandela years.

By the time of the August 2016 local government elections, the political landscape had changed significantly from the heady days of Polokwane. The expelled Malema had gone on to form a new party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). In the first national elections it participated in in 2014, the party gained just over a million votes and 25 seats in parliament. Vavi, together with NUMSA, coalesced around a new formation, the United Front. The shooting of miners at Marikana, together with a swathe of corruption scandals, which reached their acme with a Constitutional Court ruling against President Zuma on the upgrades to his home in Nkandla, found the ANC scrambling to maintain its hegemonic position as the party of liberation. In reading this state of affairs, the Democratic Alliance (DA) sought to distinguish Mandela from the present ANC, much to the latter's consternation. With Zuma fast approaching his constitutional sell-by date as head of state (2019), in true ANC tradition, the jostling to anoint a successor before a congress began in earnest, if also in secret. By tentatively lining themselves up behind Zuma's deputy, Cyril Ramaphosa, the SACP contradicted the pro-Zuma push for a successor who would show Zuma unstinting loyalty, such as his former wife, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. Another SACP action, bound to have raised Zuma's ire, was their strong denunciation of the notorious Gupta family. The Guptas are personal friends and benefactors of the president and his family, to the extent that a new word has entered the public domain, the Zuptas. Their perceived nefarious and corrupt influence over government (even cabinet) appointments has been widely decried in the country and has led to allegations of 'state capture' and an investigation by the Public Protector.

In the run-up to the 2016 national local elections, much discussion surrounded the divisions and tensions inside the ANC. There were also increasing reports of deepening ANC/SACP tensions. In addition to the Ramaphosa/Gupta issue, there has been the assertiveness of African nationalists and the ANC's increasing tendency to build support among traditional leaders in the hope of ensuring rural support. The SACP sees the latter move as a backward step but the rural base is vital to the ANC's electoral success.

As the elections approached, the SACP began to mobilize to get its candidates on the ANC slate for the elections. This was particularly the case in KZN in 2015, and in early 2016, a series of skirmishes began for the influential leadership of the eThekweni region and the Province itself. While KZN is a Zuma stronghold, the SACP has always had a presence there. The iconic Harry Gwala, leading figure in the SACP, dominated ANC politics in the early 1990s in the Midlands of KZN. Blade Nzimande hails from KZN, and through the years, many a regional leader or potential ward councillor has realised that the support of the SACP was useful in getting the nod necessary for inclusion on the ANC slate of candidates for office. This was known, but given the pliant relationship between the SACP and ANC at national level, it had only led to low level tensions. To this must be added the sheer survival politics involved in getting onto the list of candidates to become local government councillors. For many, it is a lifeline that feeds a whole network of people standing to gain from local level tenders and contracts, not to gainsay the huge salaries and perks that come with a councillor's position.

But as divisions began to grow at a national level, with leading SACP figures becoming more vociferous on corruption and raising the spectre of state capture by the Gupta family, alongside a resurgent African nationalism emerging from below in KZN (with undertones of both racial and tribal identities), the terrain is changing fast. The so-called Premier League (made up of Premier of the Free State's Ace Magashule, North West's Supra Mahumapelo and Mpumalanga's David Mabuza) has been vociferous in its support for President Zuma. At the same time, stalwarts of the movement have come out in criticism of the ANC, while regions like Gauteng and the Eastern Cape have also made known their feelings of discontent. Occasionally, the press would report on rumours that SACP cabinet ministers were under threat of dismissal. These fissures though have been overshadowed by the increasingly stark divide between the Minister of Finance Pravin Gordhan and the Treasury and the Zuma-camp, most of them allied to the Gupta family. Along with widespread corruption at the highest levels, symbolized by the Nkandla scandal, these fractures have been blamed for the ANC's poor showing in the 2016 local government elections.

In the spiritual home of the ANC, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality of the Eastern Cape, the ANC lost power, while in the economic heartland of Gauteng, in Johannesburg and Tshwane, it lost its outright majority. One has to read this together with the crushing defeat administered in Cape Town, for a decade now in opposition hands. The voter repudiation of the ANC in four of South Africa's major cities in the 2016 local government elections lends support to Ivor Chipkin's claim that in the future, the ANC could more and more take on the guise of a regional party (2016). Many would argue that it is fast becoming a rural party. It has seen its national support decline from 61.9% in 2011 to 53.9% in the 2016 local municipal elections. The DA on the other hand has climbed from 23.9% in 2011 to 26.9% in 2016 and the EFF obtained 8.2% of the vote.

Over the last few years, support for the ANC has grown in the rural areas of KZN, taking advantage of splits and fissures in the IFP. In addition to this, issues around mining rights and development in certain rural areas in KZN has opened up spaces for environmental activism. Thus far, the ANC has allied itself to traditional leaders to secure land for mining. But with the ANC weakening in some areas of rural KZN, this alliance is not as powerful as it once was. It creates spaces for activists to build alliances anew.

The Province will play a vital role in the succession battle that will accelerate as the ANC prepares for its conference towards the end of 2017. KZN boasts the largest number of ANC members and is solidly behind Zuma. It is against this background that the article focuses on the lead-up and aftermath of local government elections in KZN, with particular emphasis on the tensions and fractures inside the ANC-led alliance. The central thesis put forward is that while figures indicate solid support for the ANC, they occlude the fact that the Province is also riddled with internal divisions that have led to murder, a pattern of assassination and a climate of fear. One of the central divisions is growing strife between the ANC and SACP.

A house divided against itself shall not stand (Matthew 12:25)

The eThekweni region is a powerful force in the ANC, given the number of branches affiliated to it. Its voting muscle is decisive in deciding the Provincial leadership but also in the context of the possibility of a new ANC President in 2017, a vital support for any potential

candidate. It was rumoured early on that Bheki Cele, the once Commissioner of Police, who was found to have acted improperly and removed from office, would make a run. Cele, who was given a lifeline as a Deputy Minister, still smarted from his humiliation and what he saw as Zuma's lack of support, and saw the leadership of eThekweni as a powerful base to re-launch his police career. But, given that he had been frog marched out of office on account of impropriety, his election would be a hammer blow to the ANC, already on the back foot around allegations of corruption. Cele would have a platform to oppose Zuma or anyone he seeks to anoint as his successor. ANC Head Office, known colloquially as Luthuli House, stepped in. They issued an edict that anyone who served on a higher structure in the ANC (Cele was on the National Executive Committee) could not stand for a lower office.

A powerful woman candidate, Zandile Gumede, had already emerged in this period. With tacit support of Luthuli House, she made her bid. The sitting Mayor, James Nxumalo, was the favoured candidate of KZN Premier Senzo Mchunu. In the first elective conference in February 2015, Nxumalo was declared winner by the narrowest of margins. But this result was declared null and void by Luthuli House, citing a number of irregularities. When a second vote was held, sensing that they did not have the numbers, the Gumede faction disrupted proceedings. It seemed that Nxumalo, who was also chairperson of the SACP in the region, would prevail.

But then the balance of forces changed. The Premier of the Province Senzo Mchunu had seen off the challenge of Willies Mchunu for Provincial Chairperson of the ANC but in November 2015, was subsequently unseated by Sihle Zikalala, a Zuma loyalist but also a man with no links to the SACP. As the *Rand Daily Mail* reported; "The removal of Mchunu has strengthened Zuma's position in the province and also that of ANC treasurer Zweli Mkhize — seen as a dark horse in the simmering 2017 presidential battle" (May 25, 2016) .

Gumede, supported by the new Provincial leadership, was bolstered. In another round of elections on 13 December, 2015, she prevailed and became chairperson of the eThekweni Region. The SACP smarted and began to turn its attention to the Provincial lists for the upcoming local government elections.

In the Gumede/Nxumalo rift, the latter was cast as an SACP candidate, while Gumede was seen as part of the nationalist grouping. A lot is at stake that often has little to do with ideology. As the well-connected political analyst Protas Madlala points out: "Whoever emerges as the regional leader will have the final say over the municipality budget – which will be in excess of R33.7-billion... brother will turn on brother when it comes to the big prize of leading the region" (*Mail and Guardian*, December 8, 2014). Money also plays an important part in soliciting branch support, with those who have a vote offered payments, a point made by once ANC insider, Xolani Benedict Dube:

The commonality between James and Zandile's campaigns is the flow of illicit funds sourced from the same invisible hands. I shudder to entertain a thought that might be a reality, which is that James and Zandile are mere Trojan horses for those wanting to get their hands in the R36 billion budget of the eThekweni municipality (*The Post*, September 7, 2016).

Also at stake in this fight was the ANC candidate list for the August 2016 local government elections. The way one gets the nod to be a candidate is torturous but its virtue is that it gives

branches a say in the process. It also gives branch bosses the power to marginalize those it does not want. Potential challengers and their supporters are denied membership on a myriad of grounds. The SACP complained about this in the run-up to the selection of candidates. Division also allowed the ANC List Committee to step in, lending support to the idea of imposed candidates. To be fair to the ANC however, it has to balance a number of issues, not least a commitment to gender parity.

Across the Province, murmurings of discontent about the candidate list turned into a ground-swell. Some long-standing ANC members opted to stand as independents, a move that a few years before would have never been contemplated. A former ANC member standing as an independent in KwaMashu stated that:

Independent candidates generally face an uphill battle with voters choosing political parties rather than individuals. I have been threatened that I must pull out of the race or I will be shot and killed, but I am not going back because I know my community has nominated me to stand against the candidate that was imposed by the ANC from above (*Business Day Live*, August 2, 2016).

The growing numbers of independent candidates (57 independent in the eThekweni Metro) was largely seen as a result of the imposition of candidates by the ANC, a reflection articulated by another ANC member, who said:

There are too many people contesting independently. It's unprecedented; almost all the wards have an independent candidate, these are serious ANC loyalists. This says the ANC is in a leadership crisis - people are seeking alternative options (*Revolution*, June 23, 2016).

The acrimony between the SACP and ANC broke out into a very public spat with threats of serious divisions in the alliance. Attempts at a rapprochement were made when the SACP Provincial Secretary Themba Mthembu was offered the post of MEC for Agriculture. This placed the SACP in a quandary however, as the offer was made to the most vocal of critics of the ANC and at a time when the SACP was on the run in many communities.

Murder most foul (Hamlet Act 1, Scene V)

The imposition of candidates and discontent between the ANC and SACP played itself out in the most horrific manner, with candidates murdered in the lead up and subsequent to the elections. KwaZulu-Natal Premier Willies Mchunu said it was saddening that some lives had been lost.

We make one mistake as citizens of this country, particularly citizens of this province. We fight among ourselves to the extent of killing one another. We expect the police to come and deal with our problem, the problem we create and it does not make sense (*Daily News*, August 8, 2016).

In the run up to the local elections, 12 ANC members, two SACP, three IFP and three National Freedom party (NFP), an offshoot from the IFP, members were killed.

Amongst the dead were ANC PR Councillor Zodwa Sibiyi, shot dead on 16 April 2016 at Glebelands hostel in Umlazi, followed a week later by the fatal shooting of ANC member Themba Tombo in Richards Bay. ANC ward candidate Thami Nyembe, 50, was fatally shot, while driving

in the Emasundwini area of Nongoma with his wife, Nolwazi Mngomezulu, 34, who was also shot. She survived. Simo Mncwabe, former chief financial officer in Mpofana Municipality (Mooi River), was shot while taking his children to school in Edendale, Pietermaritzburg on 28 May. ANC Youth League regional deputy chairman in eMalahleni region in Newcastle, Wandile Ngubeni, 28, was killed on 28 May, and on 29 June, ANC branch chairman in ward 12, Msunduzi Municipality, Nathi Hlongwa, was gunned down near his home in Edendale.

Bheki Mngomezulu of Mzala Nxumalo Centre for the Study of South African Society pointed to one potential reason for the violence: “People felt entitled to positions, that's why they resort to killing each other. It's not about serving the people it's about positions. They see positions as professions” (*Sunday Tribune*, May 1, 2016). The SACP's Deputy National Chairman Thulas Nxesi said that “‘money driven factionalism’ had permeated the organisation from top to bottom”, adding that “The 20 intra-ANC assassinations in the run-up to the elections and the subsequent assassination of another ANC councillor-elect in Tsolo is an indication of just how dangerously sick large parts of the ANC have become” (*The Citizen*, August 29, 2016).

Politically motivated attacks have been a constant presence in South Africa. The Institute for Security Studies Public Violence Monitor carried out a survey from January 2013 to June 2016 on election related violence and “pinpointed the ANC as being involved in most of the 100 political attacks tracked since 2013” (*City Press*, July 19, 2016), with KwaZulu-Natal holding the number one position in such attacks.

In June, Phetheni Ngubani and friend, Badedile Tshapha, both ANC members were shot as they left a branch meeting in Imbali, a township outside Pietermaritzburg. The alleged killer was a former ANC ward councillor, Bonginkosi Shabalala, who at the trial, was released on bail. In the case, the state alleged that Shabalala had defected to the EFF, which the court found to be false, the magistrate stating “Why not any other party? Why the EFF? There is no substance to this allegation, save to stir up trouble and create political instability, which I must say is very irresponsible” (*Daily News*, July 15, 2016). These killings were followed in July 2016 by the fatal stabbing of two NFP members who were putting up election posters in Newcastle, and in Harding and Ladysmith, another two ANC members, “Bongani Skhosana, a Ward 1 candidate in Harding, was killed at his home, while Khanyisile Ngobese Sibisi, a Ward 20 candidate in Ladysmith, was shot on her way to a Mandela Day event” (*The Mercury*, July 20, 2016).

Mary de Haas, KZN violence monitor, reflected that the recent spate of deaths were almost certainly carried out by professionals, a point reiterated by ANC provincial secretary, Super Zuma, who said that they appeared “to have been executed by well-trained operatives” (*The Mercury*, July 20, 2016). Haas went on to say that the deaths resulted from

deep division within the ANC and there are powerful factions. There is also deep resentment over the nominations list where some candidates were pushed on to people and the thinking now is that there will always be a by-election. (*The Mercury*, July 20, 2016).

In deeply divided areas and wards where the murder of a candidate would lead to a by-election taking place, the tensions have resulted in many candidates treating the nomination process, according to ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe, as a “‘life-and-death situation’,

and that some candidates were prepared to kill to keep their position” (*Business Day Live*, August 1, 2016).

At the heart of the matter is the increasing use of top-down politics, a situation where the ANC imposes its own candidates on local municipalities, negating local community voices and fuelling inter-party conflict. SACP leader Themba Mthembu pointed out that the killings were not limited to councillors or candidates but also that “key municipal staff had been murdered in outlying towns, while a hit list on staff in Pietermaritzburg had been circulated earlier this year” (*City Press*, May 29, 2016).

Inchanga in KwaZulu-Natal has been a traditional ANC stronghold, and with news that support for the party was on the wane in the pre-election run-up, they sent in the big guns that included President Zuma, Blade Nzimande, and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. The reception the latter received was hostile, and she was “booed, jeered and heckled...by people clad in SACP t-shirts” (*Business Day Live*, August 3, 2016). Much is at stake in keeping ANC votes in peri-urban areas, and Inchanga is no exception, having a 50.9% dependency ratio (StatsSA 2011) and a high rate of poverty.

The political pressure from on high came as a result of simmering tensions within the tripartite alliance, as SACP and ANC members had become embroiled in a spate of killings. SACP members, Philip Dlamini and Mandla Hlatshwayo were killed during a local branch meeting in Inchanga. At Dlamini’s funeral,

Mourners booed and heckled ANC provincial executive committee member Siphso Gcabashe as he addressed the gathering. Angry SACP members began shouting at Gcabashe as he took to the podium to pay his respects (*Enca*, February 1, 2016).

The SACP made claims that they had been prevented from participating in the nominations process, with second deputy secretary Solly Mapaila stating:

The elections process is an alliance process led by the ANC. It is not a favour to involve the SACP, Cosatu, Sanco² and the mass democratic formation in that particular process...So let's not allow people to fool us and create an impression that only the ANC has the final say in this, it is not like that (*Enca*, February 1, 2016).

In this hotly contested and divided ward 4 of Inchanga, KwaZulu-Natal, the election results saw independent candidate Malombo Petrus Nxumalo claim a landslide victory over the ANC. Independent might be a misnomer, as Nxumalo, a relative of outgoing eThekweni mayor James Nxumalo, is an SACP member whose organization backs the ANC in the elections. The victory led to violence in the area and signs of cracks in the tripartite alliance. Residents claimed that:

Some local ANC leaders were the cause of the mayhem for refusing to accept the victory of independent candidate, Malombo Nxumalo, in the municipal elections. ‘Nxumalo won the election, but there are people who refuse to accept that. Their supporters are out to kill those who accept the victory, hence the murder of ‘Nsiki’ on Sunday’ (*Daily News*, August 23, 2016).

² Sanco stands for South African National Civic Organisation.

Nsiki is Nonsikelelo Blose, aged 40, who was the secretary of the SACP's Inchanga branch. She was shot three times on the 21 August near a local tavern. Blose had been a witness in the killing of Philip Dlamini, another SACP member gunned down in January 2016. In what was seen as a revenge attack for Blose's death, ANC Youth League member, Xolani Ngcobo was shot and stoned to death during the rampage following her death. According to one resident:

Blose was 'silenced' because she was about to testify as a witness in a case in which another SACP member, Phillip Dlamini was killed in January. 'Dlamini was shot dead in broad daylight during an SACP meeting at the Ndokweni grounds here. It's women's month yet we have men who have no qualms in killing women. It's time that the ANC leadership resolved the existing differences before we see some retaliation' (*Daily News*, August 22, 2016).

If the area hadn't seen enough tension after the spate of murders, the funerals of Blose and Ngcobo were arranged to be held on the same day, Sunday August 28, 2016, inviting consternation in some circles and cries of possible further retribution. A joint memorial service had already been cancelled, with the families telling a local journalist that "if they were brought into the same space 'hell would break loose'" (*Daily News*, August 26, 2016).

With heightened police presence throughout the area, the funeral of Blose was held at the Nondlini Sport and Community Hall and was attended by over 3000 party members, including senior Party leaders, Themba Mthembu, former mayor James Nxumalo and Thulas Nxesi, while 5kms away and surrounded by Metro police vans, 1000 ANC supporters attended the funeral for Xolani Ngcobo at the Michael Gwala hall. At Blose's funeral, Thulas Nxesi said

Not since 2007 have we seen such visible signs of division among the national leadership and the wilful bypassing of ANC and Cabinet-mandated positions on things like the SABC, SAA, digital migration, nuclear [energy], Marius Fransman, etc, etc. There is a climate of extreme recklessness in the ANC and in government and across many parastatals (*The Citizen*, August 29, 2016).

While these statements are often made in South Africa, it was incredible that it came from a Cabinet Minister, one who had sought to protect Zuma during the Nkandla debacle. ANC/SACP tensions were being played out in the upper echelons and in everyday relations that saw communities being divided and ravaged by tit for tat killings.

The violence and its potential to engulf the community led King Goodwill Zwelithini to enter the fray, suggesting that the ANC should step aside in favour of him if they could not govern:

the tit-for-tat political murders in Inchanga, allegedly as a result of infighting between alliance partners the ANC and the SACP before and after the local government elections were signs of a failed leadership... "It hurts me when I am seeing people holding two separate funerals on the same day in one area while they belong to one party, one alliance" (*Business Day Live*, September 6, 2016).

Cracked in pieces by malignant death (Richard III Act ii, Scene iii)

The situation became more complicated once the election results were released. In nine municipalities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, the results were hung, and a month later, in some of these municipalities, nothing has been done to settle the outcome. It is a time for interesting

Palace intrigues that echo the period of the very first Zulu Kings, Shaka and Dingaan. Hamilton 1998).

In Jozini municipality in northern KZN, the ANC won 19 votes and the IFP 18, with the DA, EFF, and an independent holding one vote each, resulting in a hung vote. When voting took place for mayor and other Executive positions, it produced a draw. Given the historic violence between the ANC and IFP, rather than a penalty shoot-out, the latter suggested a toss of the coin to settle executive positions of Speaker, Mayor, and Deputy Mayor (*The Mercury*, September 7, 2016). Meanwhile, Jozini was literally drying up. Despite being close to Jozini dam, many residents still don't have a regular water supply. As local resident and taxi driver Siyabonga Fakude bemoaned, "The last time the tankers came it was on August 3. Since then there has been no water. The road here is terrible. They need to sort out their problems and start to help us. That is what we voted for" (*City Press*, September 18, 2016).

Three meetings were scheduled to resolve the crisis, but ANC members didn't arrive, causing further delays. On September 8, 2016, a meeting was scheduled to take place to resolve the issue, but the acting municipal manager, SW Zondo, had 'run away' before other parties could ascertain why the meeting had been postponed. IFP Member of Parliament, Mkhuleko Hlengwa suggested that the ANC was holding matters up in a "selfish and inconsiderate" political game. Eventually, on September 16, an IEC official tallied the votes for the council posts. Once more, it was expected there would be a draw and the only option to resolve the deadlock would be to toss a coin. When the votes were counted for the key positions of speaker and mayor, the IFP emerged victorious. Two ballot papers had been spoiled. Claims of 'the enemy within' resounded in the Chamber when the ANC caucus met. It was a view confirmed by ANC spokesperson Mdumiseni Ntuli:

During the course of the negotiations between ourselves and the other political parties, when we were trying to find a solution here, we got to know that some of our own comrades were also negotiating outside of the formal process we had agreed on (*Times Live*, September 19, 2016).

In another hung municipality of Nquthu, the IFP won 15 seats, the ANC 14, NFP two, and the EFF and DA one each. In this case, the opposition parties had already agreed to vote against the ANC in a coalition in order to govern the municipality, but before this could happen, the Provincial Minister for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Nomusa Dube-Ncube dissolved the municipality and ordered a new vote for officials, causing the opposition to accuse her of interfering in the democratic process. Pressure was also applied in other more sinister ways. In rural Nondweni township, Bonginkosi Zwane won for the DA but said that he had received "threatening calls from people warning that he will be killed if he does not vote for the ANC's candidates for mayor, deputy mayor and speaker in the Nquthu local municipality" (*Business Day Live*, September 2, 2016). The DA's provincial leader Zwakele Mncwango said of the threats that they showed

'ANC leaders are so desperate for positions that they are willing to take lives to achieve this objective. They started by trying to bribe him by promising huge sums of money and positions.' He said DA councillors and office-bearers were increasingly coming under pressure (*Business Day Live*, September 2, 2016).

When asked how long this “chaotic death spiral could continue”, Themba Mthembu said: “That is not a question anyone can confidently answer. If things continue at this pace along this course, by 2019 it could all be over for the ANC. It could be pushed out of power” (*Times Live*, September 10, 2016).

The challenge to the ANC’s rural dominance in KZN has immediate implications for environmental struggles. The ANC has sought to shore up its support in rural areas through the passing of the Communal Land Rights Act. “The law transfers ownership of land in former Bantustan areas from the state to ‘traditional communities’. Working in tandem with the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003, it effectively re-establishes Bantu authorities, and brings 16,500,000 people under the jurisdiction of traditional leaders” (Chipkin 2016, 221). Traditional leaders have, with the support of the ANC, been at the forefront of opening spaces for mining companies in rural KZN. There have been a number of examples in KZN, such as Makhasaneni near Melmoth and Fuleni adjoining the iMfolozi wilderness area, where the ANC and local traditional authorities have collaborated to grant coal mining rights. While there has been heroic resistance to mining in the area, the alliance of traditional leaders and the ANC is nevertheless incredibly powerful. One activist in Fuleni stated: “I doubt our traditional leaders will ever see the gates of heaven. They just sign off our ancestral land belonging to our forefathers very easily, without us being consulted” (*GroundUp*, July 26, 2016). But with significant losses to the IFP in the 2016 local elections in areas in Northern KZN and a working relationship between the latter and the DA and EFF, the ANC/traditional leader dominance is weakening. The test for activists is going to be their ability to take advantage of this fluidity in party politics, to make the kind of alliances that challenge the ANC/traditional leader dominance, while in the short term, ensuring that the granting of access to mines is set aside.

Environmental activists have long protested against an ANC that has subsidised mining-related corporate mega-projects. Occasionally, there have been discordant voices from inside the ANC alliance. SACP Deputy General Secretary and Deputy Public Works Minister Jeremy Cronin argued in 2012 that: “Too much of our development has been plantation to port, mine to port” rather than “social infrastructure, such as water, hospitals, schools, and housing...” (*City Press*, October 19, 2012). While this is often just speechifying from the SACP, the recent schisms and tensions in the Alliance could well see more and more voices like Cronin’s coming forward, which will undoubtedly strengthen the hand of environmental activists. In this context, the plug has been pulled from the plans to build a massive new dug-out port in South Durban, with the start date now postponed to 2032. While a myriad of issues have coalesced to delay the plans, two key factors were local levels of activism and the uncertain political climate created by the challenge to ANC electoral dominance. Remember that for capital, the mantra, in the words of *Business Day* editor Peter Bruce, is to “mine more and faster and ship what we mine cheaper and faster” (February 13, 2012). While activism might not have completely forestalled the mania for approach, it has certainly slowed it down. In addition to this, the expulsion of NUMSA from COSATU has potential benefits for environmental struggles. NUMSA is keen to organise port and chemical workers in Durban as part of a United Front networking workers, residents, environmentalists, women and youth. In this regard, fractures in the ruling alliance will undoubtedly create opportunities for alliances between environmentalists and workers.

Slouching towards South Africa

“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Luke 12:49).

The 2016 local government elections dealt a severe blow to the ANC. It lost its majorities in Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurheleni as well as Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality in the Eastern Cape.

In KZN, while holding on to Durban and Pietermaritzburg, it lost ground to the IFP in crucial rural municipalities. The networks of patronage are starting to dry up. The current political landscape is fluid, with accusations, rumours and fractures growing louder every day. At a press conference in Durban in September 2016, Free State Premier Ace Magashule, linked to the ‘Premier League’, pleaded for unity, saying that “people have been targeting KZN and Eastern Cape to be divided because they know if these provinces are divided, they are able to weaken the ANC” (*Daily News*, September 9, 2016).

A low intensity warfare continues in wards across the Province. ANC councillors perceived to be imposed by ANC head office have come under attack. SACP figures who feel marginalized by the ANC list process build independent structures. Blade Nzimande gave a clue to the pressure the SACP faces from African nationalists, but also their importance and commitment to fighting for their place inside the ANC:

We are members of the ANC, and the ANC is ours. The ANC would never survive without the communists. Those who are trying to use the ANC to sideline the SACP will fail. This is not the first time they have failed. Others, who had been saying they don’t want the SACP in the ANC since we were formed in 1921, are six feet underground (*IOL*, January 28, 2016).

But SACP leaders, such as Themba Mthembu, are caught in a bind of their own making. He voices criticism of the ANC but serves as MEC for Agriculture in KZN. This is at the heart of the conundrum that faces the SACP; it serves in political office at the behest of the ANC but still seeks to criticise and adopt a Left posture. This need to signal a Left stance has become more acute as the EFF advances on that front.

The war of the words then has to be taken on by surrogates. The Young Communist League (YCL) has asked its parent body to run as an independent party in 2019, a call which has been welcomed by many in the party. These poses and postures do not make a dent on the EFF’s onward march as the cadres of the SACP in Parliament, Cabinet, Provincial Legislatures and local councils are indistinguishable for the ANC.

The fissures and rifts in the ANC increase daily, with even Zuma loyalist, Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba, conceding: “The ANC is divided. The center doesn’t seem to be holding.” (*Mail and Guardian*, Sep 20, 2016). Meanwhile, Zuma yes men, the Premier League holds the numbers in the NEC. The KZN ANC leadership stands firm behind Zuma but it has to look over its shoulder at dissent and challenges within its own camp. Many ANC stalwarts have broken ranks and become openly critical of Zuma. Their numbers grow. The present conjuncture gives credence to William Gumede’s assessment that we are at the point

when many African liberation governments turned governments, who fail to deliver adequately on promises, either break-up, splinter or fragment when members and supporters leave it for new

parties. The tipping point has been reached where the gap between the ANC leadership and the daily grind of ordinary members may have now become such a wide gulf that many ANC members who may have deep affinity with the party may now not be able anymore to identify themselves with both the leaders and the party (2013).

The centre that Mandela built and Mbeki sought to consolidate is crumbling. The ANC scrambles to put it back together, but every day new schisms appear. If it does coalesce around a new leader, in all probability the billionaire Cyril Ramaphosa, does it feint to the Left in an attempt to undercut the EFF or shift to the Right in order to pre-empt the DA? There are other intriguing possibilities; will Left leaning SACP and ANC members, smarting that a Zuma loyalist gets imposed on them, make common cause with the EFF? Do the centrists in the DA and ANC coalesce?

The 2016 local government elections have infused a new fluidity, excitement and uncertainty into South African politics. The years of Madiba Magic and the Rainbow Nation of God seem of another time, even of another place.

President Zuma has indicated that the ANC will rule till Jesus comes (Van Onselen 2014). As we hurry to the national elections of 2019, more and more analysts are predicting that the ANC could lose its majority. Everywhere there are sightings of the bearded one. Walking on water across Nelson Mandela Bay, overturning the tables at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, slouching towards the Free State town of Bethlehem. Some have argued that the deepening splits, comrades turning on each other, and the murders are signs that Jesus is here already, biding his time, preaching that he comes to bring division amongst those entrusted to rule in his name:

From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (Luke 12:52).

From the heady days when the ANC was on the edge of a two thirds majority, political outcomes are now much more uncertain. In places that were once ANC strongholds, the opposition have run it so close that elections for executive positions in Councils are decided on the toss of a coin. In wards in KZN where the ANC still dominates, who will finally become councillor is all too often decided by the cocking of a gun. And when a councillor takes their seat after an election, there is always the possibility that someone from within the Party might pull the trigger.

For over two decades, South African politics has seen ANC dominance buttressed by its alliance partners. It seemed to face no serious challenge in formal party politics, giving some credence to Zuma’s assertion that the ANC will rule till Jesus comes. But internal discontent in the build-up to the 2016 local government elections has seen the erosion of ANC support, with some commentators predicting losses in the 2019 national elections that will threaten its majority. As this article shows, it is not only opposition parties that are a threat to the ANC, but internal strife is so powerful that it has led to bloodletting.

These uncertainties and fractures have created opportunities for environmental activists to build alliances with both new and older resurgent political forces. As I write, the #fees must fall

campaign has once more taken to the streets, marching to the Chamber of mines to demand increased corporate taxation to fund their education. On the same day, Right to Know campaigners marched on the South African Broadcasting Corporation, raising issues of corruption and nepotism. In the midlands of KZN, lying in the shadows of the mighty Drakensberg Mountains, plans to begin fracking have been stalled by sustained activism cutting across class and race divides. In Northern KZN, activists who have confronted the gifting of land for coal mining are making alliances with opposition parties like the EFF and DA, but also with the IFP, which while always supportive of traditional authorities, is ever keen to take advantage of their weakening ties with the ANC. The challenge for environmental activists is to continue building forms of mass resistance, while staying alive to the possibilities of finding common ground with sympathisers in formal political parties in what is an increasingly fluid political conjuncture. In these contexts, the NUMSA inspired United Front needs to be much more responsive to unfolding struggles as it is this kind of structure that can form the basis for community, labour and political party alliances.

Everywhere fires are kindled.

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