

Mashele, Prince / Qobo, Mzukisi, *The Fall of the ANC: What Next?* Johannesburg: Picador Africa 2014, 228pp.

This is a courageous and insightful book by two young scholars who are deeply concerned about the direction and future of South Africa under the ruling African National Congress (ANC). Shaped by their discussions in the "scintillating atmosphere of the Midrand Group" (p 211), the book is intended for a general readership; hence its logic and accessibility "is in part polemical, in part historical musings for contextualisation, and in part analytical" (p xi). The book succeeds on all three accounts in imposing critical order on the authors' main concern which is to examine and explain why the ANC finds itself in a disintegrating and "vegetative state" (p ix) and furthermore, what this implies for the country and its citizens. In making their case about what constitutes good government based on truth, justice, and trust, the authors also draw generously from the Western canon of moral and political philosophy. The book is thus replete with references to Alexis De Tocqueville, Herbert Marcuse, Karl Popper, Louis Althusser, Isaiah Berlin, Eric Hobsbawm, Karl Marx and so on. This forms a useful normative and analytical backdrop for helping the reader understand "... the current state of politics in South Africa — of corruption, factionalism, the use of politics as a means of accumulation, all of which have become emblematic of the ANC ..." (p 14).

The book consists of an introduction and nine chapters. The first chapter deals with the historical elaboration of the *apartheid* system with reference to settler colonialism and black exploitation. This frames the emergence of African nationalism and the founding of the ANC as a "reaction to the politics of racial exclusion ..." (p 37). On the basis of its historical record as the *primus inter pares* of the liberation movement and its lengthy forced exile, the authors wrestle with the question in Chapter 2 of whether the ANC was indeed ready to govern a society as complex as South Africa, given its myth-making, ideological naivety, and "historicist bravado" (p 39). While major gains were registered by the ANC in addressing the historical deprivations of *apartheid*, "[b]eneath the patina of success during the Mbeki years, rot was festering ...". And, since his departure, the authors argue that "the situation seems to have gone from bad to worse" (p 57). We are led in Chapter 3 through a rear-view mirror look at whether South Africa's miraculous transition to democracy was a case of false optimism. A range of worrisome symptoms has emerged along with the ANC's distended stay in power, including a "... slow-growing economy, decline in the quality of education, and deepening social in-

equalities" while platitudes such as 'A better life for all' are punched out by the "ANC's slogan factory" (p 67).

A diagnostic assessment in Chapter 4 lays the blame for the ANC's fall on its oligarchic character based on "... vote buying, factionalism, tribalism, and cabalism ..." (p 85). For the authors, these traits have become more pronounced and pervasive under the Zuma administration where corruption has become a deeply entrenched pathology, resembling the Russian mafia state under Boris Yeltsin and whose roots can be traced to the ANC's long years in exile. The judgements are often quite harsh: "There is a continuity of evil in the corrupted political culture of the ANC" (p 94) and "Zuma is Yeltsin incarnate" (p 102). Moreover, and as the authors argue in Chapter 5, the ANC's oligarchic nature has not only been aided and abetted by its alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) but its writ over the state and society has indeed been strengthened by the alliance albeit drawing both into its ferocious factional battles. The same can be said about the ANC's relationships with its Youth and Women's Leagues who are dubbed "children with defective genes" (p 124) as evidenced by the deviant and corrupt behaviour of Julius Malema.

But is the ANC any different in the annals of liberation and post-colonial history in Africa? This is a question to which the authors turn in Chapter 6, which recounts how the hope and high wave of post-independence politics soon gave way to cynicism, despair, and misrule: thus what observers detect in South Africa "... today is very similar to what they saw in Kenya in the 1970s, or Ghana in the 1960s, or Zimbabwe in the 1980s" (p 145). However and like many a post-liberation party, the ANC underestimated the task of building a new society out of the socially engineered detritus of *apartheid*. While the ANC has certainly succeeded at the formal legislative level in reshaping the country's social landscape, the authors argue in Chapter 7 that the transformation processes recorded since 1994 have "actually reinforced inequality and sustained the status quo, with little changes here and there" the consequence of which "has been an elitist process, empowering a few members of the black elite ..." (p 157).

With Zuma's profane declaration in mind — that the ANC will rule South Africa until Jesus Christ returns — in Chapter 8 the authors examine options for the country in terms of two considerations: firstly, the changing demographics of an aging political elite and 11.2 million new voters, who have never experienced *apartheid*, being added to the voters' roll between 2014 and 2034; and secondly, endemic poverty and unemployment as the major concerns over the next two decades which the ANC has not suc-

cessfully addressed. The country will thus confront two scenarios: in the 'God help us' scenario, the ANC remains the dominant force in society and "a great deal of cynicism will attach to politics. There will be a rise of messianic politics — a politics characterised by weak public institutions, dominated by theatrical individuals controlled by cliques, factions, gangs and tribal entrepreneurs" (pp 171, 173). The opposite, 'Towards the ideal' is also possible according to the authors. This would be based on a comprehensive renovation and overhaul of the public education system in order to generate the requisite skills required not only to fuel the economy but most crucially to lift future generations out of poverty and unemployment and to bridge the racial divide of inequality. A literate citizenry would be "... economically independent, socially engaged and politically flexible" (p 177) and this would be salutary for the growth of South Africa's democracy across three critical political alternatives: it could turn the ANC into a more accountable party for fear of losing power; or the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) would benefit and grow provided its leadership was more African so as to appeal to a broader (and disenchanted ANC) electoral base; or a new political party could emerge as a real challenge to ANC dominance.

These alternatives are examined in greater detail in Chapter 9 in terms of political parties as vectors of change and their ability to address the persistence of racial politics and group identity. As new political parties, Agang SA "has disappeared into the realm of speculation" (p 196) while the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) under Julius Malema is dismissed as "a band of anarchists who seem prepared to tear the country apart" (p 197). Against such depressing tableaux where then is the source of hope? For the authors, "it is important to keep faith in human agency, in particular the ability of human beings to push for progressive change beyond the liberation movement" (p 191).

However, it is precisely the undeveloped nature of this human agency which is the book's major weakness. The extent to which this can be located at the interface between the private and public realms of politics would mean that civil society has an important role to play in a classical sense, a serious lacuna which the authors do not adequately address or elaborate. Civil society has undergone a major evolution and has had to redefine its role and purpose since 1994. The authors usefully refer to Isaiah Berlin's distinction between negative and positive liberty in his *Four Essays on Liberty* (p 189). In the context of South Africa's transition and echoing Gramsci's formulation, civil society has become a source of tension where the hegemony and legitimacy of the ANC was once realised but is now increasingly being challenged in an often adversarial and combative

standoff. The negative dimension of civil society has focused on its watchdog role as a check against the ANC and the government overstepping the bounds of the constitution and its rights regime. On the other hand, the positive dimension has fostered social solidarity and an associational ethos for self-directed participation and different levels of engagement, but increasingly manifesting in violent service delivery protests. An explication of how civil society activism has found expression after 1994 in the crucible of redefined state-society relations and in both Berlin's negative and positive dispositions would have enriched the book and its purpose.

But ultimately, this is a very satisfying book. The writing tends to be very colourful, embroidered, and satirical but also very serious, introspective, and reflective which perhaps is a function of the differing temperaments of the authors. As diagnosis and prognosis, the book is a passionate but sobering assessment of where South Africa currently finds itself under ANC rule and what the future could possibly portend. As such, it is worth reading and highly recommended.

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