WHOSE ECONOMIC FREEDOM ANYWAY? REVELATIONS FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The Economic Freedom Index published by the Heritage Foundation ranks South Africa at 72nd out of 178 countries in terms of economic freedom in 2015. This index classifies South Africa as moderately free in terms of its level of economic freedom. While the country may be in the middle of the pack on the Economic Freedom Index, it is also often classified as one of the most unequal societies in the world. South Africa is often seen in the top five unequal countries globally with a high Gini-coefficient, and when using the Palma index (measuring the ratio of income share between the top 10 per cent and bottom 40 per cent), South Africa can also be classified as highly unequal. Therefore a contradiction seems to exist. While South Africa ranks as economically moderately free on one hand, the country is also regarded as one of the most unequal societies in the world, on the other hand. It is this contradiction that brings to the fore a contested ideological construction of economic freedom within its political narrative premised on a view that the promise of democracy had not delivered. This article presents a critical discourse analysis of the contested interpretations of economic freedom through the lens of securing liberation and the promise of democracy in South Africa: a promise built on the Freedom Charter's construction of a democratic South Africa.

1. Introduction

The concept of economic freedom is accredited to the seminal work of Adam Smith entitled *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* (De Haan and Sturm 2000: 217; Johnson and Lenartowicz 1998: 337). Generally this concept is used to determine to what extent a market economy is present within a given state (Bergen 2003: 194). To do this, a number of key variables are measured to assess the level of economic freedom to pursue capitalist economic activity within a state. These include voluntary exchange through contract, free competition, freedom from governmental controls over individual transactions, and protection of private property rights (Berggen 1999; Hanke and Walters 1997; Berggen 2003: 194; De Haan and Sturm 2000: 217). The classic interpretation of economic freedom is found in the conceptualisation of Gwartney and Lawson (2001) who state that —

> Individuals have economic freedom when property they acquire without the use of force, fraud, or theft is protected from physical invasion by others and they are free to use, exchange, or give their property as long as their actions do not violate the identical rights of others.

It would thus seem that the realisation of economic freedom is dependent on the right to private property, a minimalist state in regulating economic activity and a high degree of autonomy for actors in pursuing economic activity. This also extends to international trade where state actors are able to transact freely. In other words, actors are free to make choices and engage in activities for their economic livelihoods.

We see two paradoxical themes within the contested debate on economic freedom. On the one hand we note individual autonomy, independence and freedom of actors in pursuing economic activities, and on the other, a welfarist discourse seeking to protect individual actors from 'too much' economic freedom (De Haan and Sturm 2000: 216).

A somewhat neglected discourse within democratisation scholarship is the alternative construction and interpretation of economic freedom and the purpose of the state in securing democracy in the context of reducing inequality. The vehicle to secure the economic dividend of democracy seems to be the democratic developmental state (Routley 2014).[1)] The philosophical narrative on the nature and conceptualisa-

tion of economic freedom that shapes the purpose of the democratic developmental state has not been interrogated. This creates a somewhat disconnected rhetoric of a democratic developmental state advancing the interests of a greater polity, but without a necessary theoretical conceptualisation of what is meant when we speak of economic freedom.

This article presents a critical discourse analysis of the narrative on economic freedom that drives perceptions on democratic sustainability using the South African context as an emerging democracy, which may be caught in a cycle of democratic regression.[2)] The article first provides an overview of the theoretical debate in defining the concept of economic freedom and its relationship to democratisation. This is followed by an analysis of the narrative of the African National Congress (ANC) and its break away party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) when they were part of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL), on economic freedom and the role of the state in securing a democratic society. The analysis focuses on their construction of the concept of economic freedom and what the role of the state should be in pursuing sustainable economic strategies to achieve democracy.

2. Democratisation and economic freedom

Dominant conceptualisations of economic freedom within the academic literature take on a liberal philosophical character with a focus in individual autonomy and independence in the pursuit of economic activities. Definitions of economic freedom stress the right to obtain and hold on to private property (the absence of state appropriation of property or violent land evictions or forcible removals) and the right to engage in contractual transactions on land ownership (De Haan and Sturm 2000: 217) and the extent to which individuals and collectives are able to exercise choice in their economic activities (Wright 1982 cited in De Haan and Sturm 2000: 217). There is a tendency to draw a distinction between political freedom, civil liberties and economic freedom. Here scholars stress that economic freedom is inherently distinct from political freedom in that one may find high levels of economic freedom in repressive governments (Hanke and Walters 1997; Johnson and Lenartowicz 1998: 371). In drawing this distinction, Berggen (2003: 194) highlights that —

> Economic freedom is a composite that attempts to characterize the

> degree to which an economy is a market economy — that is the degree to which it entails the possibility of entering into voluntary contracts within the framework of a stable and predictable rule of law that upholds contracts and protects private property, with a limited degree of interventionism in the form of government ownership, regulations, and taxes. Economic freedom is distinct from political freedom (participation in the political process on equal conditions) and from civil freedom (protection against unreasonable visitations, access to fair trials, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech).

The literature on economic freedom creates distinct 'freedoms' as we can find economic freedom in authoritarian contexts (Johnson and Lenartowicz 1998: 336). Scholarship on economic freedom also highlights the intrinsic link between a market economy, economic growth and the sustainable decline of economic inequality (Hanke and Walters 1997; De Haan and Sturm 2000), interpreted as the absence of difference in disposal income between individuals (Berggen 1999: 250).

While there is a general acknowledgement that income inequalities can in fact be exacerbated in the early phases of capitalist economic development (De Haan and Sturm 2000), there is also a general consensus that the best path to achieve economic growth is through creating conditions that facilitate liberal economic freedom. Thus, the conventional wisdom is that for states to successfully conceptualise strategies for economic growth they need to adopt an open-market system with minimal state intervention in regulating economic activity and a guarantee for the right to own and, more importantly, keep private property.

Economic freedom and economic growth are also linked to overall human well-being and democracy. To this effect Hanke and Walters (1997: 117) highlight that —

> Economic growth is, quite literally, a matter of life and death. The relation between income growth and life expectancy is, of course, complex. Growth affects life expectancy through many channels: higher individual and national income produce favourable effects on nutrition, on standards of housing and sanitation, and on health and education expenditures.

Similar assertions are found on various platforms, including think tanks, which advocate for economic freedom. For example, the Fraser Insti-

tute's Free the World website posits that —

> Economic freedom has been shown in numerous peer-reviewed studies to promote prosperity and other positive outcomes. It is a necessary condition for democratic development. It liberates people from dependence on government in a planned economy, and allows them to make their own economic and political choices.[3)]

The Economic Freedom website, a non-governmental organisation that provides advocacy for the Charles Koch Economic Freedom project states that —

> Economic freedom is the driving force behind why some societies thrive while others do not. Improving well-being for all people can only be accomplished if the true cause of economic prosperity is understood, and years of empirical research and exhaustive analysis show that economic freedom is the overwhelming catalyst in creating jobs, fighting poverty, building a safe environment, and improving overall human well-being.[4)]

This conceptualisation of economic freedom links the concepts with the ideals of democracy and human development. This, however, is not a new viewpoint within democratisation literature. Various studies[5)] highlight the intimate link between liberalising economic spaces so that emerging democracies, generally found in the global South, may embark on a path to prosperity and wealth while consolidating their democracy. Key to this was creating conditions conducive to facilitate declining economic and social inequality (Pzerworski, Alvarez, Cheirub and Limongi 1996: 49; Haggard and Kaufman 1995: 2-3; Di Palma 1990: 107).

Generating consensus on how the state is going to generate and distribute wealth are essential questions that need to speak to transformational agendas of democratising the state (Nelson 1995: 51). It also speaks to citizens' expectations of the new democracy, where equality remains a central transformational goal and should inform redistributive policies. In the liberal tradition, utilising strategies associated with an open market economy is seen as a vehicle to reduce political and social instability through the provision of greater economic equality and redistributive benefit within society (Leftwich 2005: 687).

Economic freedom is also aligned to the idea of human empowerment and subjective wellbeing (Welzel and Inglehart 2008: 128). Strong democracies can be created through a reciprocal relationship

between the state (political institutions), economic development (economic freedom) and empowerment (human prosperity to be independent and free actors). While economic freedom can be found in authoritarian contexts with a market economy, scholarship highlights a reciprocal relationship between political institutions that must guarantee political freedom and civil liberties, and economic growth through a market economy to generate sufficient economic development for democratic legitimation. Welzel and Inglehart (2008: 128) conceptualise the relationship between state and economy as one that must work to facilitate human empowerment. For Welzel and Inglehart, thus, the starting point seemingly to advance human development is through the economy, which 'enables' people to make economic choices through action resources found within a market economy. Essentially, they posit that —

> Action resources include both material resources and cognitive resources, such as education and skills, which help people to govern their own lives. Modernization not only increases people's economic resources, it also brings rising educational levels and moves people into occupations that require independent thinking, making them more articulate and better equipped to participate in politics (Welzel and Inglehart 2008: 129).

This essentially Western conceptualisation of economic freedom, modernisation, and democratisation is contested in the global South.[6)] A cursory glance at the narrative emanating from various non-Western spheres highlights a discourse against the perceived dominance of the 'Empire'[7)] and alternative forms of political and economic organisation to achieve human empowerment. Further to this, one hears a narrative of African cultural theories of democracy,[8)] Asian-inspired models of democracy, or the 'Chinese alternative' to liberal democracy.[9)] Similarly, one sees the emergence of texts positing Islamic modernity as a response to Western modernisation in the Middle East (Baraz 2010). Also, the proposal to create a Bank of the South by Venezuela's former president, Chavez, was a response to the perceived dominance and "debt enslavement …",[10)] and an attempt to "liberate the [South America] region's countries from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IBD) control that condemn millions to poverty through their lending practices".

A sense of disillusionment with rising inequality and weak polit-

ical institutions seemingly creates conditions for the emergence of populist discourse on increased state intervention in economic activities to secure 'economic well-being' of those who remain on the economic periphery. We know that —

> … essential progressive concerns of populism and socialism are as alive as ever … long-standing goals such as a welfare state, social justice and political inclusion, substantive equality and dignity for working people, and rights for disadvantaged groups remain unfulfilled and continue to spark mobilization (Schamis 2006: 32-33).

In this sense, as the South African case demonstrates, disillusionment with democracy, as the economic dividend of a 'better life' had not materialised. The Afrobarometer Survey 2015 found that South Africans are discontent with democracy and "a majority of citizens would be willing to give up elections in favour of a non-elected government that would provide basic services" (Afrobarometer 2016). This indicates that intrinsic support for democracy in South Africa remains weak, and the essential instrumentalist commitment to democracy weakens in the context of mediocre delivery of economic and material goods. This in turn may have affected satisfaction with democracy in South Africa and perceptions of whether the country is indeed a democracy. The Afrobarometer Survey, for example found that in 2000, 60 per cent of South Africans perceived the South African political system as a full democracy or a democracy with minor problems (Afrobarometer, 2016). By 2015, 48 per cent of South Africans held the same view. This correlates to levels of satisfaction with democracy in South Africa, where in 2000, 52 per cent indicated that they are very or fairly satisfied with democracy compared to 47 per cent in 2015 (Afrobarometer, 2016).

The seeming elusiveness of attaining *a* better life for all' that may underpin a disillusionment with democracy may see populist and anti-establishment narratives of alternative 'economic freedom' legitimised on the basis of delivering a just and equal society under the banner of equality, transformation and justice.

3. The clarion call for economic freedom: Emerging (South) Africanist discourse

The debate on securing economic freedom became a focal point in the South African post-*apartheid* political landscape in 2011 with the re-

lease of ANCYL's Declaration of the 24th National Congress in 2011 signed under the banner of Economic Freedom Fighters (ANCYL 2011). Using historical frames of racial oppression and economic exclusion of the black majority in general, but Africans in particular,[11] through the continuation of 'colonialism of a special type',[12] this declaration issued a commitment to a new struggle "in the war for economic freedom in our lifetime" (ANCYL 2011). This struggle for economic freedom is premised on the Freedom Charter's clarion call to "transfer the economy from the minority to the people as a whole" (ANCYL 2011). There was a moral obligation, ANCYL argued, for the ANC, South Africa's oldest liberation movement and current ruling party, to pursue a political and economic agenda to realise the Freedom Charterist vision of South Africa as a country that belonged to all and the people shared in its wealth (ANC 1955). By 2014 ANCYL was divided. Following a political clash with its mother body, the ANC, members of ANCYL left to form the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) of which Julius Malema is the public face.

Since 2011 the term economic freedom has dominated political discourse in South Africa, yet this narrative has not been subjected to a normative and philosophical analysis from a democratisation perspective. In other words, a reflection on deconstructing the narrative of economic freedom with a focus on domination, oppression and achieving 'true' democratic rule is lacking in the literature. Especially, if one considers the emergent narrative of economic freedom in the context of disillusionment with democracy in South Africa, there is a need to engage with this alternative construction of economic freedom.

Before, I progress, it is important to note a few important factors in a discourse analysis. The interpretation of discourse in the socio-political sphere is concerned with the social cognition of various role-players within linguistic markets (Van Dijk 1994: 107; Van Dijk 2001; Legreco and Tracy 2009: 1516). The relationship between discourse and society is located within various social practices that guide interaction between individuals, groups and institutions and are executed in terms of speakers and recipients within specific social contexts (Van Dijk 1994: 107-108). These social settings form the linguistic market of a particular discourse or narrative and integrate discourse with group identity and a particular social experience (Ruiz-Ruiz 2009). Through an analysis of these linguistic markets, one will be able to construct models of social perceptions that guide socio-political action based on constructed representa-

tions of society and forms of social knowledge (Van Dijk 1994: 111; Szalay and Kelly 1982). Thus, before conducting a discourse analysis, it is important to determine the context of a specific narrative through rhetoric, schemata and local meaning (Van Dijk 1994: 122). Schematas entail accepted meanings of the discourse found in specific linguistic markets that form a type of superstructure for the narrative (Van Dijk 1994: 119).

Consider the campaign slogan of the ANC: 'A better life for all'. This slogan is interpreted in two ways, depending on who you talk to: a better life for all is seen as an expression of the ANC creating a better life for South Africa's poor and that life is generally better now under ANC rule than 20 years ago under *apartheid* rule. This is evident in the number of people who now have access to basic services and the growth in a multi-racial middle class (Biko 2013: 1).

However, there is also the story of a better life for some, whereby there is general acknowledgement that life is better under democracy, but that the socio-economic plight of the poor has still not been addressed. For producers of this discourse, life under ANC rule has only benefited a few while leaving a large majority of the oppressed black majority behind (Biko 2013: 1). This is evident in the increase in protests and instability that have characterised South African political society since 2004 (Alexander 2012) and is an expression of the rebellion of the less privileged "against a society that gives them social grants instead of economic freedom" (Biko 2013: viii-xi). We thus find two contending schematas: one of liberation and one of continued oppression.

ANCYL's *Clarion call for Economic Freedom Fighters*[13)] point to the failure of the ANC to deliver on the liberation promise of economic spoils envisaged in the Freedom Charter. Here the interpretation of economic freedom focused on the high levels of socio-economic inequality that characterise South African society. This clarion call sought to mobilise society behind the seven pillars to achieve 'economic freedom in our lifetime'. This included mass nationalisation of strategic sectors through a direct transfer of wealth, direct state intervention through a developmental state, expropriation without compensation to facilitate transformation and an amendment to the property clause to allow the state to expropriate property in the name of the public interest, inclusive and decentralised economic development based on the redistributive strategy of the Reconstruction and Development Programme, land restitution and agrarian reform, extension of South Africa's enter-

prises on the African continent, and the provision of education, skills and expertise to the people (ANCYL 2011). Economic freedom here thus focuses on reducing income inequality through an interventionist state that acts as a custodian and gatekeeper to economic resources.

The ANC was seen as the epicentre of the complete emancipation of the oppressed in South Africa in that it "has close for 100 years been at the forefront of battles in war for political, social and economic emancipation for the people of South Africa, in particular the black majority and Africans in particular" (ANCYL 2011).

Similarly, the ANC's mode of self-writing is also firmly rooted in a liberation identity. As early as 1997, the ANC defined its character as that of national liberator who will focus on "mobilising around the aspirations and transformation objectives of the historically oppressed majority" through a movement character of a broad church and a "hegemonic character" (ANC 1997). ANCYL endorses this role through presenting the ANC as the leader within the National Liberation Movement (NLM) that carries on its shoulders the hope of the oppressed globally (ANCYL 2011).

The initial discourse of economic freedom was premised on the notion that the ANC failed to deliver on the promise on the Freedom Charter as it had "lost the liberation struggle for political, social, and economic emancipation of the black majority and Africans in particular" (ANCYL 2011). The loss of a liberator's identity, ANCYL maintains, is expressed in the neo-liberal nature of macro-economic policy, although the ANC conceptualises this policy framework as one encapsulating a mixed economy.[14)]

While the ANC continues to present rhetoric of revolutionary transformation to create a non-racial and democratic South Africa and driving what is conceived as the overall emancipatory project for South Africa to deliver on the vision of the Freedom Charter (ANC 2012), ANCYL in their *Clarion Call for Economic Freedom* essentially accused the ANC of reneging on their obligation to ensure the economic emancipation of the oppressed majority or needing to "give coherent economic meaning to the concept of national emancipation" (ANCYL 2011). For ANCYL, the "ANC did not use the political power at its disposal to transfer the economy from the minority to the people as a whole, a clarion call made by the Freedom Charter" (ANCYL 2011).

South Africa's transition from an *apartheid* authoritarian system to a racially inclusive democracy was a political negotiated settlement.

This settlement was characterised as a means for the ANC to gain control of the state through an electoral mandate that can then be used to restructure South African society and economy (ANC 1998). To this effect, thus —

> Arising from this are two interrelated questions which form the basis of the NLM's [National Liberation Movement] approach to transformation. Firstly, political power is not attained for its own sake, but to pursue given political and socio-economic objectives. As such, the state is not a neutral, non-partisan entity; but it is an instrument that is used to pursue the interests of a class or group of classes. Secondly, the battles around political power are in the final analysis about socio-economic resources and their allocation. Thus, at the core of any revolution is the issue of property relations: how classes and groups relate to capital in particular and resources in general.

Societal and economic transformation was conceptualised as first taking control of the state in that "the struggle for the social and economic transformation of the South African society is essentially the task of replacing the apartheid state with a democratic one" (ANC 1998). The narrative of the ANC points to its role as leading the "struggle for the economic transformation and social emancipation of South Africa" (ANC 1998). This also points to a phased liberation project, whereby first the ANC takes control of the state in order to facilitate complete liberation through a restructuring of the distribution and ownership of wealth. From the onset, thus, the conceptualisation of 'economic freedom' entailed some form of transfer of wealth from the white minority to the black majority.

However, ANCYL highlights that real economic transformation remains elusive in that the —

> post 1994 democratic [South Africa] State has not achieved anything substantial due to the fact that the economic policy direction taken in the dawn years was not about fundamental transformation, but empowerment/enrichment meant to empower what could inherently be few black aspirant capitalists, without real transfer of wealth to the people as a whole (ANCYL 2011).

To address what is often conceptualised as the triple challenge of poverty, unemployment and inequality in post-*apartheid* South Africa, ANCYL seems to suggest a 'return to revolutionary roots' for the ANC through presenting a new strategic mission, the Freedom Charter:

> The meaning of economic freedom in our lifetime means the attainment of all Freedom Charter objectives as urgent as possible. This is vital because the Freedom Charter is historically and currently the common programme of the entire National Liberation Movement and mobiliser of the people of South Africa on what should be the future (ANCYL 2011).

The Freedom Charter presents a vision of the nature of a post-*apartheid* society: (1) the people shall govern; (2) all national groups shall have equal rights; (3) the people shall share in the country's wealth; (4) the land shall be shared by those who work it; (5) all shall be equal before the law; (6) all shall enjoy equal human rights; (7) there shall be work and security; (8) the doors of learning and culture shall be opened; (9) there shall be houses, security and comfort; and, (10) there shall be peace and friendship.

The justification of the new strategic mission of economic freedom is found in two Charterist principles: sharing in the country's wealth and sharing the land by those who work it. This is evident in the call to expropriate land without compensation and the nationalisation of key industries like banks and mines (ANCYL 2011). Expropriation of land without compensation is regarded as the central component of wealth redistribution, but under the custodianship of the state. Here ANCYL argues that —

> Central to the democratic government primary responsibility post-1994 is to ensure that injustices of the past are redressed and all South Africans are given equal opportunities for development and growth … with the balance of forces having shifted in favour of the forces of change, the ANC carries a responsibility and an obligation to move more decisively towards attainment of all Freedom Charter objectives. This can only happen through enabling the State to expropriate private property … without compensation for redistribution purposes … the State should expropriate strategic sectors of the economy without compensation because paying all the key and strategic resources stolen from the black majority and Africans in particular will take more than a life time … expropriation is vital in the realisation of economic freedom in our lifetime because fundamentally, this should include transfer of wealth from the minority to the ownership of the people as a whole.

The discourse presented here on conceptualising economic freedom points to one whereby individuals have economic ownership through

the ambit of the state who act as custodians of economic citizens. The ANC's approach seems to focus more on 'economic wellbeing' through a caretaker state that enables people to "empower people to take themselves out of poverty, while creating adequate social nets to protect the most vulnerable" (ANC 2007). Here the state provides a safety net whilst emancipating citizens to lift themselves out of poverty.

Thus, the ANC favours a welfarist approach, and conceptualises the role of the state as creating an enabling environment through a welfare system for human empowerment. Thus, the state aids in securing economic wellbeing through the provision of welfare where individuals have a responsibility to use opportunities to break a cycle of poverty. In contrast, the EFF argues for a state driven from of redistribution, not to secure material benefit and economic wellbeing *per se*, but rather economic freedom in that the patterns of economic ownership must be changed through radical policy interventions.

Both the ANC and ANCYL (as the predecessor of the EFF) present their narrative of economic freedom within the overall schemata of inequality, albeit the ANC's narrative is one of success while ANCYL stresses that the emancipation project had failed. The rhetoric on the economic freedom hinges strongly on the notion of societal transformation — moving from the old 'colonial' structure to a new 'democratic' structure under the guidance and hegemony of the liberator. Local meaning is generated through references to colonial and *apartheid* losses and the continuation of inequality expressed through an incomplete liberation project (ANC) or a lost liberation project that only benefited a few black 'capitalists' (ANCYL 2011).

The notion of liberation for the complete emancipation of South Africans brings to the fore the highly contested notion of economic freedom — one that sees economic freedom as a continuation on a journey of transformation and the other highlighting that the ANC sold out to the 'capitalists and imperialists' to enrich a few and leaving a large majority in poverty. This is not a new observation, but rooted in a Marxist frame of analysis of a class struggle between 'those who have and have not'. However, in the South African case, the narrative implies that the *apartheid* advantaged 'settler and colonialiser' continue to enjoy economic freedom (read access to wealth), while the indigenous oppressed (read black population but Africans in particular) still live in poverty and squalor due to a lack of access to the means of the production and land.

We know that at the birth of the South African democracy in 1994, the idea of freedom was intimately linked to that of transformation. As much was evident in the many discussion documents of the ANC, including their *Ready to Govern: Policy guidelines for a democratic South Africa* (ANC 1993). Democracy implied not just transforming the state through political power, but also extended into the economic sphere with a stated commitment to create an inclusive economy in which all South Africans shall enjoy the spoils of the country. The narrative on economic freedom demonstrates that while political democracy has arrived, true transformation remains an elusive post-*apartheid* aspiration.

4. And the liberator is the gatekeeper

There is a vast body of scholarship that demonstrated that South Africa remains a highly unequal society and that inequality has increased over the course of the first two decades of democracy (Marais 2010). As Marais (2010: 4) highlights: it is not just a problem of poverty, but rather "the glaring disparities that assault people day in and out" creating a "seething sense of injustice … generating rancor and insubordination".

These unfilled aspirations in an emerging democracy context like South Africa, can ignite socio-political instability and potential revolt in that the promise of a 'better life under' democracy did not necessarily materialise for many people, while political elites seem to have gained their 'economic freedom'. This may be evident in the perceptions that a non-elected government may be preferable if they can deliver material and economic goods to the polity.

While liberator parties, like the ANC, justify the *status quo* on the basis of a continuing journey to emancipation under its leadership, the EFF, the third largest political party in Parliament, challenge the ANC as they now construct their role as the proverbial vanguard for the ANC's forgotten constituencies: the working poor and the unemployed. By structuring their rhetoric through the schemata of the ANC 'selling out' on the socialist democratic dream of Nelson Mandela and the Freedom Charter, the EFF's conceptualisation of securing economic freedom through radically changing patterns of economic ownership could resonate with the economically marginalised, who constitute the majority of the population.

Both the conventional construction and emergent discourse in

South Africa of economic freedom finds moral justifications in the notion of the economic wellbeing of citizens. In the South African narrative, however, 'economic freedom' extends beyond economic wellbeing, but rather entails an overhaul of the patterns of economic ownership. This excludes the white population and to a degree the Indian and coloured population as well.

The narratives of the EFF speak of an interventionist state that drive an 'economic freedom' agenda through a proposed nationalisation project to deliver on the democratic aspirations of South Africans, most notably the black population and Africans in particular. The increasing levels of inequality in a post-*apartheid* context create the linguistic market for the narrative on state-controlled economic strategies to facilitate 'economic freedom'. This justified is on the basis that the South African economy still mirrors *apartheid* created patterns of ownership, which, in turn, continue to exclude those who suffered the most under the brutality of *apartheid* from enjoying the full benefit of democracy: economic freedom through ownership of the means of production like land.

This emergent narrative of economic freedom from the EFF is akin to the early Marxist-inspired discourse of Nkrumah's African socialism which argued that "underdevelopment and cultural alienation … are not more than symptoms of Africa's seminal problem, namely its state of subjugation" (Boele von Hensbroek 1998: 151). To this effect, then the EFF asserts that the ANC has not used its political power to lift the African majority out of subjugation (EFF 2014).

The allegation that the ANC has failed in delivering on the promise of the Freedom Charter creates a narrative akin to that found in the theme of a 'liberated Africa' attributed to thinkers like Senghor, Nkrumah, Cabral, and Fanon (Boele von Hensbroek 1998: 151). The linguistic market of this conceptualisation of economic freedom ties in with the philosophical schemata of a 'liberated Africa'. Liberation discourse in this tradition has a number of assumptions at its core: (1) capitalism and imperialism will perish as it facilitates the continued entrenchment of subjugation; (2) the world is divided into camps of oppressor and oppressed; and (3) the oppressed will force the dominant capitalist system to change to facilitate human emancipation of the oppressed (Boele von Hensbroek 1998: 152). Analysis of oppression within a 'liberated Africa' discourse places the nature of economic systems at its core (Boele von Hensbroek 1998: 153). Furthermore, Boele

von Hensbroek highlights that this narrative advances a view that to achieve full liberation, the nature of power relations must change and the struggle is rooted in advancing real 'freedom and liberation'. Success of the liberation struggle is measured in the nature of the outcome (that is, economic freedom of the oppressed) and most notably the form of an interventionist or socialist state that is able to influence and structure economic relations to facilitate full political AND economic emancipation of the people (Boele von Hensbroek 1998: 153).

This discourse is not uniquely African, however. Similar arguments are found in the construction of the Bolivarian Revolution led by Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and in Fidel Castro's construction of the Cuban liberated utopia. Like the Freedom Charter inspires the quest for 'economic freedom' as a political project in South Africa, so too is the Bolivarian Revolution inspired by the legacy of Simón Bolívar who "symbolizes the country's emancipation and is commonly referred to as the Liberator" (Aponte-Moreno and Lattig 2012: 38). Encapsulating a strong "class-based, anti-neoliberal, anti-imperialist claims" (Spanakos 2011: 17) the Bolivarian Revolution represented an alternative to the dominant and liberal construction of economic freedom for human empowerment. This alternative saw radical state intervention through nationalisation and land seizures as a means to transfer wealth and empower the people. However, as Spanakos (2011: 19) highlights, the people are constructed as the "fundamental social and moral unit of the nation", but this concept is not inclusive as the people are the oppressed and poor of Venezuela. Middle classes are excluded. Similarly, for the EFF, the people remain the poor and oppressed African majority for whom political freedoms mean nothing without the necessary accompanying economic ownership to secure economic freedom.

When the liberator party seizes political power, its project is the complete socio-economic transformation of society through transferring wealth from the rich to the poor. This political project works to legitimise an entitlement to govern as the legitimation of political power is rooted in a transformation agenda of human empowerment under a new democracy. However, this may also lay the foundation for de-democratisation and democratic regression, as the polity may construct a commitment to democracy based on what material and political goods are provided as opposed to valuing democracy intrinsically. Growing dissatisfaction with low levels of subjective wellbeing may create a linguistic market for political parties advocating radical policies to secure

an elusive economic freedom, and by default, true democracy.

5. Conclusion

Economic freedom remains an ideologically loaded term, especially in the context of democratising and highly unequal states. What emerges from this exploratory analysis that we find two constructions of economic freedom. On the one hand, the conventional liberal construction of economic freedom enables private enterprise to pursue their economic activities unabated by state interference. The state may engage in activities to facilitate economic wellbeing through welfare interventions, but ultimately, through the market and economic growth, inequalities will decrease.

The South African discourse as narrated by the EFF, however, demonstrate that the notion of economic freedom is not just akin to economic wellbeing, but extends into ownership of economic goods and the means of production. This populist discourse advocates an alternative 'economic freedom' where the focus is on state intervention to secure material security for marginalised societies through a radical programme of changing economic ownership patterns under the watchful eye of the state.

The purpose of the state in this context is to become the custodian of economic interests and act as a vanguard to ensure the complete 'democratisation' of society, politically and economically. Political democracy, it seems, remains an empty ideal without radically changing the patterns of economic ownership. The democratic experience, according to the EFF, is one of continued oppression and subjugation. The promise of democracy had not materialised, which, for them is evident in the continued patterns of economic exclusion based on race. To restore the dignity of those who are economically marginalised, a radical and strong response from the state is needed: to engage in mass redistribution under the ambit of the nationalisation to secure true democracy in South Africa.

Endnotes

1. See also Taylor, I (2002). "Botswana's 'Developmental State' and the 'Politics of Legitimacy'". Conference paper presented at the Political Economy Research Centre of the University of Sheffield and Centre for the Study of

Globalization and Regionalization, University of Warwick "Towards a New Political Economy of Development: Globalization and Governance" at the University of Sheffield, United Kingdom, 4-6 July 2002; Edighediji, O (2005). "A democratic development state in Africa?", Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies. (Available at: http://www.rrojasdatabank.info/devstate/Botswana.pdf, last accessed 21 June 2015); Mbabazi, P and I Taylor (eds) (2005). *The potentiality of 'developmental states' in Africa: Botswana and Uganda Compared*. Dakar: CODESRIA; Meisenhelder, T (1997). "The Developmental State in Mauritius", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 35 No 2, pp 279-297.

2. Indices measuring rule of law, media freedom, transparency, and quality of government have reduced South Africa's ratings. See Diamond, L (2015). "Facing up to a democratic recession", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 26, No 1, pp 141-155; and South Africa's Quality of Government rating has steadily declined between 1994 and 2012 (see http://qog.pol.gu.se/data).
3. See the Fraser Institute, Economic Freedom. (Available at: http://www.freetheworld.com, last accessed 21 June 2015.)
4. See Economic Freedom (2015). "What is economic freedom". (Available at: http://www.economicfreedom.org/about/, last accessed 21 June 2015.)
5. See for example Pzerworski, A, Alvarez, M, Cheirub, J A and F Limongi. (1996). "What makes democracies endure?", *Journal of Democracy,* Vol 7 No 1, pp 39-55; Haggard, S and R R Kaufman (1995). "The challenges of consolidation", in Diamond, L and M F Plattner, (eds), *Economic Reform and Democracy*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, pp 1-12; Haidenus, A (1994). "The duration of democracy: Institutional versus socio-economic factors", in Beetham, D (ed), *Defining and measuring democracy.* London: Sage Publication, pp 63-86; Nelson, J M (1995). "Linkages between politics and economics", in Diamond, L and M F Plattner (eds), *Economic Reform and Democracy*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, pp 45-58.
6. Liberal economic structures are also contested in the West, most notable on the premise of rising income inequalities between rich and poor. See http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/09/its-still-not-the-end-of-history-francis-fukuyama/379394/. Various movements, like "We are the 99" and the "Occupy Movement" challenge free market organisation and capitalist economic organisation, most notably after the global economic recession of 2008. The focus of this article is on the experiences of the global South in general and South Africa in particular.
7. Hugo Chavez in pursuing his social, participatory democracy stresses that a collision with the American empire is inevitable as he offers a viable alternative to the unequal and exclusionary nature of the market economy (and per implication neo-liberal economic policies) and liberal democracy (War on Democracy, 2007).

8. See for example Jinadu, A L (2007). "Explaining and managing ethnic conflict in Africa: Towards a cultural theory of democracy", *Claude Ake Memorial Papers*, No 1. Uppsala, Universitestryckeriet; Fayemi, A K (2009). "Towards an African theory of democracy", *Thought and Practice*, Vol 1 No 1, pp 101-126.
9. See Bell, D A (2006). *Beyond liberal democracy: Political thinking for an East Asian context*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
10. Debt enslavement in this sense refers to the phenomenon that poor states need new loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to service old loans and are trapped in indebtedness. Structural adjustment programme lead to a situation where one finds an ever-growing gap between rich and poor. See Lendman, S (2010). "An alternative to World Bank and IMF dominance — The Bank of the South", 29 July. (Available at: http://www.rense.com/general78/nbank.htm, last accessed 29 October 2010.)
11. In terms of racial classification in South Africa the term black is used to refer to all non-whites. This includes the Indian/Asian and Coloured populations. The term African is used to refer to the indigenous black population.
12. The South African Communist Party advanced that South Africa suffers a colonial peculiarity known as colonialism of a special type. Here they highlight that "within South Africa, bourgeois domination and capitalist relations of production, which emerged within the context of colonialism, have been developed and maintained since 1910 through a specific variant of bourgeois rule — colonialism of a special type. It is a variant of capitalist rule in which the essential features of colonial domination in the imperialist epoch are maintained and even intensified. But there is one specific peculiarity: in South Africa the colonial ruling class with its white support base on the one hand, and the oppressed colonial majority on the other, are located within a single country". See SACP (1989). "The path to power". (Available at: http://www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=2638#3.1, last accessed 26 November 2015.)
13. Members of the ANC Youth League under the leadership of Julius Malema were expelled from the ANC in 2013 following an internal factional battle. They subsequently formed the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a political party campaigning on the slogans of Economic Freedom in our Lifetime and drive a narrative of nationalisation to establish a socialist state that will facilitate the full emancipation of the oppressed black majority.
14. See ANC (2007). "The character of the ANC", *Strategies and Tactics of the ANC: Building a National Democratic Society*. (Available at: http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2405, last accessed 21 June 2015); ANC (2012). *The Second Transition: Building a National Democratic Society and the Balance of Forces*. (Available at: http://www.anc.org.za/docs/discus/2012/transition.pdf, last accessed 21 June 2015.)

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