



The Ever Changing Political Landscape in South Africa

The political landscape in South Africa has been changing rather rapidly lately, after two decades of democracy in South Africa. Among the issues that play a big role or contribute to the rapid changes we observe is reconciliation or lack thereof. Linked to reconciliation is development; inclusive development to be sure. With regard to development, there is a general view that socio-economic transformation has been slow since the dawn of democracy in South Africa. Indeed, nation building (as in a cohesive society), development, freedom and related phenomena have suffered in post-apartheid South Africa because there has been an inability to acknowledge and respect South Africa's repulsive political and economic history of deprivation (as I have been arguing). Consequently, the power base of the African National Congress (ANC) has been eroding. The ramifications of apartheid colonialism have not been directly addressed and the weaknesses in the ANC and in government have given the minorities room to renege from reconciliation efforts.

The last local government election made the point more sharply; that if reconciliation and development fail other political parties will gain more traction. The language of the Economic Freedom Fighters in particular – and actions taken since the party was formed – appeals to the majority of South Africans, especially the youth. The ANC has been losing traction as it has taken the eye from the ball. It had become embroiled deeply in internal squabbles and widespread corruption making government unable to function optimally. Development must come back to the agenda and reconciliation re-prioritized.

The piece links development with reconciliation as well as with freedom and justice, to some extent. I am particularly concerned with the relationship between justice and freedom and inclusive development (more so in the particular case in South Africa). The theorisation that is critical and can add value, in my view, is examining various interpretations of (inclusive) development and contextualise those in a particular context (i.e. South African) – and address the question of the relationship/s between justice, freedom and (inclusive) development. The changing political landscape provides an opportunity for the analysis of justice, freedom and (inclusive) development because these factors have played an important role in shifting votes from the ANC to the EFF as argued above.

Post-apartheid South Africa is generally performing below par, in the economic sphere in particular, notwithstanding that the size of the economy has grown substantially since 1994. The economy had stabilised from early 2000s, but comparatively South Africa's economic performance has been pedestrian relative to many comparable countries – I have been making this point for a while. South Africa has been drifting away from the envisaged democratic developmental state although the policies that South Africa has pursued since 1994, and especially from 2005, have been focusing on ensuring that South Africa becomes a developmental state.

Many seasoned scholars and activists have argued that part of the challenge South Africa faces has/had to do with the transition: South Africa's transition from apartheid to post-apartheid society or to a democratic society has been characterized by Patrick Bond, Hein Marias and Sampie Terreblanche, among others, as *elite transition* or *elite compromise*. The argument advanced is that the post-apartheid development experience has to be understood within the context of many compromises that were made during the negotiations in the early 1990s that do not allow society to move forward faster. Although there is merit in this view, it can be argued that the political settlement we ended up with was the best at the time (in the context of the global political economy and the changed character of the ANC). The first 10 years or so were about reconciliation and stabilizing the economy. After that the focus should have been on directly addressing the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. The ANC needed to have a clear plan for that. The Ready to Govern discussion document was a step in the right direction but it was not a comprehensive plan. The National Development Plan is even weaker. The plan I am thinking of should have used the Africans' Claims as the starting point – the Africans Claims, as a response to the 1941 Atlantic Charter, remains the most robust articulation of the demands of Africans in South Africa. African nationalism within the ANC should have informed the plan I have in mind.

With regards to the link between justice, freedom and development, the eminent Chabani Manganyi, in the Introduction to a book he edited in 2004, made a point that 'at the heart of South Africa's transition a number of important defining features such as the development agenda are coupled with the pursuit of freedom and democracy.' According to Manganyi, as many others have submitted, 'much of the first decade of democratic rule has been concerned with bridge building and laying new foundations.' Despite attempts by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) to achieve catharsis from the ills of the past, however, lack of honest and remorseful acknowledgement of the evils of the apartheid regime have continued to spur revolutionary pressures from the previously disadvantaged groups. In her recent book, Christine Qunta argues that the TRC did not deal with the institutional aspects of the atrocities committed by the apartheid regime, for instance. In other words, only individuals were expected to account but not the apartheid system as a whole. There are many others who have critiqued the TRC, just like many have questioned the theoretical soundness of the Colonialism of a Special Type thesis and the ideological strength of our Constitution and the Freedom Charter which largely shaped our democratic dispensation.

In conclusion, because South Africa has not directly addressed the historical injustice (i.e. apartheid colonialism), reconciliation remains a pipe dream – so is development. By consequence, or as a consequence, justice and freedom for the majority remain compromised. Besides constraints imposed by the global neo-colonial and imperial order, inappropriate policies and or poorly sequenced reforms have limited the pace of development since 1994. And of course implementation has significantly weakened of late. We are indeed dealing with a case of 'incomplete liberation' as John Saul puts it. In recent books on South Africa, Lawrence Hamilton concludes that South Africa is a case of 'revolution still pending' while Adam Habib concluded that South Africa is a case of 'suspended revolution'. It might very well be – judging from the frequency and the violent nature of protests – that the revolution has started.

