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### **Jacob Zuma and meaningful markets in South Africa, 2009-2018**

**Heinrich Matthee**

#### **Abstract**

Neoliberal frameworks of politically and culturally disembodied markets dominate among Western political risk analysts for business. So does an implicit strict dichotomy between states and markets. This paper explores whether and how diverse narratives from cultural, religious and ideological discourses co-constituted markets during Jacob Zuma's presidency in South Africa, 2009-2018.

The narratives of Zuma and his supporters in the ruling African National Congress (ANC) were crafted for political and business ends from discourses involving a revisionist and anti-imperialist international order, a state-led National Democratic Revolution, racially-tinged nation-building, nativism, appeals to Christianity and African traditional religion and custom, socio-economic redistribution and the decolonization of universities.

The narratives were endogenous to competition, co-competition and cooperation between domestic intra-party elites, inter-party elites and foreign political and business elites in a hybrid regime. In interaction with political forces and events, they shaped the institutional rules of the game, the horizons of intelligibility, the position of some actors, and the symbolic frameworks of entrepreneurship, production, market participation and consumption. They also shaped local and international processes related to labour, the allocation of profits and resources, and investor and property rights. In this sense, markets were full of contested meaning and meaning-making.

The narratives and patronage politics under Zuma helped the ANC to maintain one-party dominance in South Africa. However, the weaker state capabilities and socio-economic value destruction during Zuma's presidency created discursive and structural opportunities and incentives for decentralization and self-help initiatives. A more multipolar order is emerging. Whether decentralization and self-help initiatives will become discursively coupled to decolonization, remains to be seen. Compared to the first five years of ANC rule under Nelson Mandela (1994-1999), the interaction between discourses, agents and structures under Zuma (2009-2018) significantly reshaped the meaningful markets and rules of the game in the political economy.

**Key words: Meaningful markets, political economy, value repertoires, multipolar order**

**Author: Dr. Heinrich Matthee** is a senior lecturer at the International Business School, Hanze University of Applied Sciences. He has more than 15 years experience as a political risk analyst for business in the Middle East and is a Member of the South African Academy for Science and Art. He can be contacted at [heinrich.matthee@jisr.eu](mailto:heinrich.matthee@jisr.eu)

## **Introduction**

Jacob Zuma became the leader of the African National Congress (ANC) in 2007. The ANC ruled South Africa since 1994, and Zuma, a head of the ANC's intelligence and security apparatus during its guerilla struggle, became the country's president shortly after the Great Recession of 2008. This paper explores whether and how diverse narratives from cultural, religious and ideological discourses co-constituted markets during Jacob Zuma's presidency in South Africa, 2009-2018.

## **Embedded markets**

Political risk analysts in Western capitals work for companies that provide services to multinational companies, all embedded in neoliberal ecosystems (Read, 2009). In the frameworks and language the analysts use, but often also in the literature on political risk, "the market" is implicitly or explicitly quite disembedded from social, cultural, religious and political forces and structures. However, neoliberalism did not disembed markets from cultures and societies. It reconstituted cultural frameworks with space for the image of disembedded markets (Best & Paterson, 2010, p. 3).

Best and Paterson see the economy as a loose assemblage of objects, subjects, practices and institutions which are reified in appearing as something more solid (Best & Paterson, 2010, p. 14). In African Studies, the interactions between political and socio-economic institutions are mostly recognized, also in frameworks of neo-patrimonialism (Erdmann & Engel, 2001). De Waal notes that the challenge is to locate different forms of neo-patrimonial governance within different political-economic circumstances, also allowing for the dynamic impact of bargaining between actors under changing conditions (De Waal, 2009).

De Waal's model, also used here, is of a political market, in which different African countries differ in the degree of dispersion of coercive instruments, the combination of institutions and patron-client networks, and the conditions of regional and international integration. A range of foreign sources (aid, mineral exports, security cooperation) or local business may fund patronage and the timebound loyalties of key actors (De Waal, 2009).

## **Narratives and meaningful markets**

De Waal differentiates between fast-changing political dynamics and slower continuous cultural and religious factors, and focuses on the former. This dichotomy, or a dichotomy between continuity and change, does may not capture the key issue. The ideas and images in cultural, religious and ideological repertoires in different periods and places could more accurately be seen in terms of the outcomes of contests, negotiation, recasting and creative engagement by Africans as agents. It may involve diverse processes of selection, adaptation, uneasy co-existence or recombination, also embedded in political and economic processes.

Actors are not solely driven by the available cultural, religious and ideological ideas in discourses. They also craft their own narratives for political and business ends. They articulate their motivations and demands in relation to their networks and various cultural, religious, political and economic dimensions, contests or fields. These choices and activities shape the scope of later options, which has an effect of path dependence or path shaping. The contested construal of discursive forms and the construction and practices of institutions may result in

sedimentation and stabilities in meaningful market formations. However, improbabilities and the contingencies of (re)politicization by actors remain (Sum & Jessop, 2013).

### **The ANC's hybrid regime**

Some political, economic and cultural dynamics in South Africa do not apply to other countries in Southern Africa. However, all five regimes in South Africa, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Mocambique are rooted in a regional history of liberation struggles and post-colonial economies still inscribed in international flows of capital, people and commodities. All of them operate through centralised presidencies, conflate their party and the state, pursue a nation-building construct, denounce minorities who mobilize on issues of importance to them, and delegitimise political opposition (Southall, 2003, 37; Sumich 2017). Considerable economic potential and inequalities exists in all of them.

Based on elections and the formal constitutional order, South Africa is described as a democracy by many analysts. The position in this paper is that one can only sufficiently explain political and economic events during Zuma's presidency by using the framework of a hybrid regime. The ANC's one-party dominance since 1994 has allowed the party to change the political and economic playing fields to its advantage. The locus of politics during his presidency was no longer elections or the legislature. The locus of politics moved to a field of power where democratic and non-accountable actors and processes interacted.

Elections still occurred, although participation dropped from 86% in 1994 to 57% of the eligible voters in the 2014 national elections. The ANC's rule during Zuma's second term rested on 35% of the eligible voters. Overall, the ANC HQ's control over parliamentarians, executive presidentialism, extensive neo-patrimonialism and selective patronage, crony capitalism, factionalism, violent protests, dozens of political assassinations and intimidation changed the rules of the game and the incentive systems, also in the political economy (Matthee, 2019). It is in this regional and national context that Zuma and his supporters in the ANC used certain ideological, cultural and religious narratives.

### **National Democratic Revolution**

During the ANC leadership election in 2007, Zuma presented himself as an alternative to those in the ANC who did not sufficiently recognize traditional authorities or his Zulu support base. His opponents were portrayed as politicians who conspired with the black middle class and white capitalists, whereas Zuma would serve as the representative of the poor, the vulnerable and rural voters (Gumede, 2012).

The ANC repeatedly committed itself to a National Democratic Revolution (NDR) that would create a new political and economic order in South Africa. It also pursued a policy of cadre deployment, which entailed placing party loyalists in "key centres" of power. The ANC conference in 1997 identified these centres of power as including parastatals, regulatory bodies, the public broadcaster, and the central bank. The 2007 ANC Polokwane conference, during which Jacob Zuma was elected as president of the ANC, added the "private sector" (Jeffrey, 2012).

Zuma as president found a system of strong ANC-driven informal systems in the political economy. He led his patron-client networks to move it towards a more powerful position. It became a decentralised system in which various strong party leaders could conduct their own

operations as long as they provided support or did not hinder Zuma's faction at various levels of the state (Von Holdt, 2019).

Under Zuma, extensive staffing of the public service generated a new labour elite in the labour market, namely the unionised public sector employee. Zuma also used senior appointments to parastatal enterprises like Eskom and SAA to extend not only ANC control but his own networks of power and patronage (Holden 2012). The huge turnover and numbers in cabinet members was especially focused on retaining power (Karodia & Soni, 2016).

The factional struggle over the political gates to patronage was extremely intense, involving local political assassinations as well as the fear of such assassinations at provincial and national level (Shaw 2017; Ardé, 2020). Statements by senior ANC figures reflected a politics of the belly, with its material and symbolic dimensions (Bayart 2009; Beresford 2015). It remains a theme for further research, to what extent Zuma's form of patronage politics converged with or diverged from the changing norms and limits regarding social solidarity among various communities, and to what extent it exceeded or infringed upon such norms.

### **Distrust of the private sector**

In 2012, the ANC's document on the NDR re-emphasized "freedom from socio-economic bondage" more, calling for a second transition beyond democratisation that would restructure the constitutional and economic order (ANC, 2012).

In this context, several ANC-directed regulations, policy initiatives and legislation regarding investment, expropriation, mining and energy, the security industry, affirmative action, black empowerment and land emerged. A common thread was that they weakened the investor protection and property rights of foreign and local business, reduced private-sector autonomy, and threatened business with high penalties (Jeffery, 2014). The Sebenza Constitutional Court judgment, led by the Zuma-appointed chief justice Mogoeng Mogoeng, reinforced the trend. Any legislative transfer of property from existing property holders would no longer be recognised as expropriation if it was done by the state as custodian of the country's resources (Dugard and Seme 2018).

Foreign diplomats voiced their concerns about ANC interventions. The main American, German and EU business associations, usually reluctant to publicly oppose policies, expressed their dismay (Cohen, 2014). However, the ANC increasingly left out the domestic private sector from its political discourse with voters (Montalto, 2014). In 2016, Ann Bernstein described ... *a dysfunctional relationship between business and government that manifests failings on both sides, but has its roots in deep suspicion about business and markets, flourishes in and around the governing party.* (Bernstein, 2016).

### **BRIC beacons and anti-imperialism**

The EU is South Africa's major trading partner and South Africa has a strong private sector. Nevertheless, under Zuma, the ANC privileged relations with China and Russia. The ANC explicitly lauded the Chinese Communist Party's state capitalism as its model for a developmental state. The education of higher-level executives at South African parastatals and senior ANC party cadres was conducted in cooperation with the Communist Party of China. Trade and investment linked to Chinese actors expanded markedly, reshaping South Africa's international relations compared to the Mandela period (Cilliers, 2016). To what extent it became entangled in Zuma's patronage politics, is not well-researched.

Similarly, a major foreign policy discussion document of the ANC in 2015 supported Russia's position and a revisionist international order (ANC, 2015). It came at a time when Russia-EU relations were chilly. Good relations developed between Russian president Vladimir Putin and Zuma, also involving the arms industry and energy sector, with rhetoric and policy documents referring to a common stance against US imperialism. During Zuma's presidency, statements by leading ANC figures regularly denounced political opponents, critics of the ANC and NGOs as agents of US imperialism (Matthee, 2016). Major trading partners like Germany and the UK at times experienced less warm diplomatic relations compared to the mid-1990s.

### **Crony capitalists and “white monopoly capital”**

Historically, the ANC experienced tensions between professed non-racialism and racial nationalist convictions among its leaders and members (Ellis, 2012). However, as ANC factionalism and decreased electoral support increased, ANC discourse allowed an increasing fervour for a racially-tinged project of national unity that excluded non-black groups and black political opponents (Van Kessel, 2011). Zuma's predecessor Thabo Mbeki eventually criticised him for it.

Under Zuma, the policy of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) was reconfigured as Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). Major South African companies claimed that behind closed doors, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) pressured them, also those with black CEOs, to adopt new BBBEE regulations or favourable arrangements under the threat of damage to their reputations (Sharp, 2015; Paton, 2016). According to Moeletsi Mbeki, BEE did not benefit all black business people, but a small group of black capitalists with huge political influence (Bröll, 2014).

Zuma's faction tried for years to gain more access to patronage via lucrative deals and SOEs. It also used parallel networks in the security services to prevent the Treasury and Ministry of Finance from opposing its efforts (Pauw, 2017, 270). Under attack for having too much influence over Zuma's decision making, the three Gupta brothers obtained the help of Bell Pottinger, a major public relations company. According to leaked documents, Duduzane Zuma, Zuma's son, stated that the campaign should be “along the lines of economic emancipation of whatever” with a “narrative that grabs the attention of the grassroots population who must identify with it, connect with it and feel united by it”. A campaign ensued that targeted businesses critical of the ANC as constituting “white monopoly capital” (Cave, 2017).

The UK industry's regulator, the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA), found in 2017 that Bell Pottinger had stirred up racial tensions (Maclean, 2017). It expelled Bell Pottinger from the PRCA and the company collapsed as a result of clients withdrawing their business. The Guptas scandal also entangled some of the biggest multinational companies, damaging the reputation of HSBC, McKinsey, KPMG and SAP.

The Zuma faction argued that Zuma came under attack because of his support for BRICS, which challenged Western imperial interests (Desai, 18). In current ANC factional politics, Zuma has recrafted a pro-poor populist message targeting “white monopoly capital”.

### **Previous dominant groups**

Like many African states, South Africa with its 11 major cultural groups has no cultural majority. Political shifts and opportunism informed Zuma's public statements about other

cultural groups. Like his predecessor Thabo Mbeki, he considered Afrikaner nationalism and Zulu nationalism among the forces that could disrupt the existing order.

When he became ANC leader, Zuma reached out to the Afrikaners and called them the most South African group among whites (SAPA, 2009). He did so, despite the key role played by Afrikaner actors in the apartheid system. In effect, his statements weakened the symbolic position of white English-speakers. Historically, they had played a major role in capitalist institutions and the institutions of British imperialism. The latter had forcefully unified various authorities and territories into the relatively young political order called South Africa, including the former Zulu kingdom (Giliomee, 2003). In public statements, Zuma sometimes used his Zulu mother-tongue, but mostly he used English.

Even after a more racialized nation-building narrative emerged, Zuma stated that Afrikaans, an official language spoken by citizens from all population groups, was an African language (Bendile, 2015). However, many Afrikaans-speaking actors considered the Zuma period as one of continued weakening of their position within South Africa, and most continued to support opposition parties (Steyn, 2014, 473).

Early in 2015, at a time the ANC faced competition from the redistributionist and nativist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Zuma stated that all problems in South Africa started when the Dutch colonialists under Jan van Riebeeck and the VOC trading company came to South Africa. A charge of hate speech was laid against him at the national human rights watchdog (Smith, 2015). When Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte visited South Africa in November 2015, Zuma shifted tack and stated that Van Riebeeck was an individual and that the Netherlands did not have to apologize for him (Fabricius, 2015).

### **Traditional authorities and resource politics**

Up to a third of South Africa's population lived in areas where more than 800 traditional authorities of nine cultural groups were influential. Vast areas of these territories were rich with resources, with complex interplays between chiefs, businesses, state officials and politicians dis-embedding and re-embedding different elements in the circuits of capital and commodities (Von Holdt, 2019).

Under Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, the ANC was led by Xhosa politicians with a largely modernist outlook. In contrast, Zuma openly espoused the pride in his Zulu identity, but also his adherence to Zulu tradition and his respect for Shaka, the autocratic founder of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Zulu empire. A polygamist married to several wives and with an estimated twenty children, Zuma used traditional customs to justify personal choices and political moves (Gevisser, 2010). Although Zuma's narrative repertoire combined traditional and modernist elements, some in the business media and the ANC seemed ambivalent or uncomfortable in recognizing the validity of traditional heritage. Zuma could not always reckon with their understanding.

Early in his presidency, Zuma reinforced the institutional recognition of the traditional authorities and he repeatedly encouraged traditional authorities to claim vast stretches of land (Ainslee & Keep, 2016, 7). The 2014 elections demonstrated that the ANC's middle-class and working class constituencies were fracturing and that some former supporters were supporting the pro-business Democratic Alliance or the socialist Economic Freedom Fighters (Booyesen,

2015). After the ANC lost control over several key cities in local elections in 2016, Zuma's rhetoric and actions reinforced his links to them.

In some cases, it did not work. In response to the ANC's land expropriation policies, Zulu king Goodwill Zwelithini called on Zulus to defend their culture and lands. The predominantly Afrikaner Afriforum pressure group allied with the Zulu king and Khoisan communities to provide services and oppose ANC policies (Nicholson 2012; Daniel 2018). However, among other chiefs the efforts of Zuma, who had previously brought many Zulus into the ANC, reinforced support for the ANC (De Kadt and Larreguy, 2018) and dual legitimacy systems (Mershon & Shvetsova, 2019).

### **Nativism and local markets**

During Zuma's presidency, Afrobarometer surveys indicated that many South African citizens distrusted foreigners from elsewhere in Africa, wishing to restrict their residence rights. The ANC's secretary general, Gwede Mantashe publicly regretted the number of shops in Soweto belonging to foreigners. (Crush et al., 49). Mantashe announced in April 2014 that the government would restrict small foreign-owned businesses from being opened in the country's townships and rural areas, so as to create opportunities for South Africans. In January 2015, the minister of Small Business Development, Lindiwe Zulu, said that foreign business owners should share their business practices with locals if they wanted to live and trade in South Africa without fear of disturbance or violence (Pilane, 2015).

Widespread attacks targeting foreigners took place in May 2008 and in April 2015. Evidence suggested widespread participation in, and support for, the attacks on foreigners. Zuma publicly condemned the attacks. Local leaders, faced with perennial shortfalls of services, dwellings and jobs, allowed and abetted the scapegoating and appropriation of foreign-owned shops, houses or goods (Claassen, 2017). According to Amnesty International, there was no strong political will to address nativism and xenophobia (Amnesty 2018). Intimidation and weak property rights remained part of the rules of the game in many informal markets.

### **Spiritual and youth narratives**

Zuma had a colourful and down-to-earth speaking style that resonated with many voters (Calland, 2013). During different election campaigns, he crafted political narratives that also referred to Christianity, sometimes to African traditional religion. He participated in traditional ceremonies and threatened voters that if they would leave the ANC, they would leave the only movement anointed by God's pastors, the ancestors of the ANC would turn their backs on them, and continuous misfortune would follow (West, 2010; Van Onselen, 2012). In September 2017, Zuma blamed witchcraft for the ANC's failure to beat the Democratic Alliance at polls in the Western Cape (De Klerk, 2017).

Zuma's narratives did not only aim at traditional areas or at reinforcing his legitimacy with voters, but also at youth constituencies. The student protests that erupted in October 2015, which demanded an end to student fees, were the biggest since 1994. It crystallized new mobilizations and reproduced new narratives that the Rainbow Nation and 1994 settlement were the ideas of sellouts. Demands were made that colonization in science and education, black identity politics and radical economic restructuring be promoted.

Both major ANC factions supported "radical economic transformation" at the December 2017 conference and adopted a resolution calling for land expropriation without compensation

(Stoddard, 2017). In December 2017, Zuma also announced free higher-education for students from poor households, which positioned him for his post-presidential factional struggles.

### **Reshaping “the market”**

An ensemble of diverse narratives from cultural, religious and ideological discourses co-constituted markets during Jacob Zuma’s presidency in South Africa, 2009-2018. The narratives were crafted from discourses involving a revisionist and anti-imperialist international order, a state-led National Democratic Revolution, racially-tinged nation-building, nativism, Christianity and African traditional religion and custom, socio-economic redistributionism and the decolonization of universities.

Zuma and ANC factions crafted these narratives with political and business ends in mind. The narratives were endogeneous to competition, co-competition and cooperation in a hybrid regime, between domestic intra-party elites, inter-party elites, and foreign political and business elites. They formed part of the effort to dis-embed and re-embed different elements in the circuits of people, capital, labour and commodities.

As a result, the narratives were selective with regard to the issues and actors included, excluded or silenced. Simultaneously, they tried to recombine elements from traditional and modernist narratives in a flexible value repertoire. They papered over contradictions in structures and ANC positions. They were also used to divert from policy failures, to delegitimize political opposition, and to marginalize alternative decentralized, communitarian or developmental visions of African liberation.

### **Mixed outcomes**

In conjunction with factional struggles and political actions, the narratives of Zuma and his supporters in the ANC shaped the frameworks of entrepreneurship, production, market participation and consumption. They also shaped processes related to labour, the allocation of profits and resources, and investor and property rights in South Africa.

Zuma relied on wily moves, patronage and means of pressure in his cabinet rather than on argumentation or decisive decision-making (Calland, 2019). More or less bureaucratic governance continued, but ANC politicians and their followers mainly measured their performance based on control of the state institutions and their ability to deliver resources to their followers (Booyesen 2015; Von Holdt, 2019). The outcomes included declining but continued electoral dominance by the ANC in elections, and 17 million of the poor receiving welfare grants.

However, economic value destruction and the misuse of social capital occurred. The tax base, consisting of about six million people paying personal tax, shrunk considerably. Growing components of the state budget went to salaries, welfare grants and debt repayments (Rossouw 2013). Despite pockets of sufficient delivery, political interventions and mismanagement at SOEs, the security agencies, and many ANC-governed local authorities led to decaying services and crises regarding security, electricity, water management, waste management, roads and railways (Montalto, 2014; Institute for Security Studies, 2017; Heinecken, 2019).

By the end of Zuma’s second term, considerable de-industrialization since 1994 had continued. Youth unemployment remained above 50%. Considerable emigration by skilled



professionals and entrepreneurs from all groups continued. Many of the top companies abstained from further investment, while foreign investment dropped by 31% in 2018 to reach its lowest level in a decade. International credit rating companies started downgrading South Africa's credit rating to eventual junk status. The generation of black African professional, managerial and technical workers aged 25 to 34 had dropped by 2%, leaving this generation less skilled than their parents (Matthee 2019).

### **An emerging multipolar order**

During Zuma's presidency, the state became less capable and less well-funded to deal with the demands of the population, which had grown from about 40.4 million in 1994 to 49 million by 2009 and an estimated 58.4 m by 2020, a growth of 44% in 26 years. Private and collective action became necessary, in addition to bureaucratic and legal changes, to enable economic actors to better perform their market exchange functions. Business also had to devote considerable resources to activities that prevent crime and opportunistic breaches, to mitigate or avoid inconvenient business practices and too high risk, and to explore and cultivate alternatives (Fafchamps 2003, 483).

In South Africa, the political economy is also constituted by diverse economic formations, which have different capabilities or opportunities when participating and competing in the regional and global economy. Dual or multipolar governance, where non-state actors fulfil roles and provide services associated with the nation-state elsewhere, was and is quite prevalent in different African territories, including southern ones (Ellis, 2011, 120; Boege, 2009).

During Zuma's presidency, many services usually performed by the state were complemented or substituted by actors rooted in specific cities, regions, communities and private institutions. These trends continue. New alliances and projects emerged to fill the gaps left by a weaker state and economy, for example between agribusiness, Afrikaner, Tswana and Zulu organizations. In the Western Cape, predominantly ruled by opposition parties since 1994, governance, business policies and political initiatives also express efforts at greater autonomy. The value repertoires, networks and outcomes of these initiatives in terms of collective goods differed and differ. However, social network effects and relational contracting were visible both in Zuma's rule and the responses to it, creating uneven playing fields more challenging to outsiders wanting to enter (Aoki, 2001, 10; Fafchamps 2006, 36-37).

The narratives and patronage politics under Zuma helped the ANC to maintain one-party dominance in South Africa. However, the weaker state capabilities and socio-economic value destruction during Zuma's presidency created discursive and structural opportunities and incentives for decentralization and self-help initiatives. A more multipolar political order is emerging. It is recasting the state structure established under British rule over smaller political orders and culminating in the Union of South Africa in 1910. Whether decentralization and self-help initiatives will become discursively coupled to decolonization, remains to be seen. Compared to the first five years of ANC rule under Nelson Mandela (1994-1999), the interaction between discourses, agents and structures under Zuma (2009-2018) significantly reshaped the meaningful markets and rules of the game in the political economy.

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