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## REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Empirical evidence from the South African political milieu and the world suggests that coalition governments are becoming a reality of our politics. The plurality that the ANC maintained in the local, district and metropolitan municipalities where it lost power to opposition indicates that there are still millions of people who believe in the party. Results from by-elections also give an indication that the party is slowly reclaiming power in some wards that it had initially lost. Whether this could mean that the upcoming local government elections will see the party reclaim power and cease to govern through coalitions in metropolitan municipalities is yet to be seen. But my assessment is that even if it is going to reclaim power, the wins will be by exceedingly small margins as opposed to the overwhelming majorities that were attained in the earlier years of democracy. The 2016 local government elections changed the political field forever. South African politics will never be the same again even if the ANC retains the lost metros. It is a mathematical certainty that at some point, coalitions are going to become a norm. Power in a democracy is never lost absolutely – it is always lost in pockets. This is what we are seeing with the ANC and with all other former national liberation movements cum governing parties in democracies across Africa and the world. The idea of a single political party enjoying electoral hegemony is no longer sustainable and the reasons for this vary.

### **Evolution of National Liberation Movements**

On the African continent, we are seeing a significant decline in support for former national liberation movements. The haemorrhaging of electoral support that the ANC experienced in the previous local government and general elections is not unique even as it is concerning to us as ANC leaders and members. It is a universal trend across the continent, and in many ways, the ANC is better positioned than most former national liberation movements that have been relegated to opposition benches nationally or, in the case of the ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe, that have been stripped of legitimacy by elections deemed neither free nor fair by observers and other institutions.

There are numerous theories about why former national liberation movements on the continent experience sharp declines in support in the second decade of independence. Southall (2013) argues that this has to do with the evolution of liberation movements. According to this perspective, the making of a new nation as was required by transitions from colonialism or minority rule entailed the deliberate construction of a historical memory of how the nation had been forged and how it was to imagine itself. The process, he argues, has been an incoherent and extremely messy one. A part of this has to do with the fact that national liberation movements themselves emerged out of messy processes and were not necessarily strong beyond their organising power to overthrow the oppressive regimes. Liberation struggles everywhere in the world arose out of necessity and as a last resort in the fight against minority or colonial rule. They often followed decades of other modes of struggle such as defiance campaigns, as was the case with South Africa. Such campaigns were often non-violent in nature, and necessarily had to be because colonial and minority states enjoyed a monopoly on violence. The implication of this is that national liberation movements had limited ability to operate optimally, forcing organising and mobilisation to happen unconventionally and without some necessities.

This is perhaps one of the most uncomfortable conversations within national liberation movements cum governing parties, but it is a conversation that demands critical reflection. ANC stalwart Khulu Mbatha laid the ground for this conversation in *Unmasked: Why the ANC Failed to Govern*, when he asked how prepared the organisation was to govern and whether it understood the nature of the global and local economy, and what they meant for South Africa's economic future. While I do not agree with most of the arguments that are posed by Mbatha, I do think that there is value in reflecting on the holistic preparedness of men and women who had spent decades in the trenches waging armed struggles, dominated by a racial group that had, for centuries, been systematically excluded from the economy and dispossessed of the means of production, and whose practice of democracy did not emerge organically due to the space and time in which they organised, to govern newly democratised countries.

While I do not agree with most of the arguments that are posed by Mbatha, I do think that that there is value in reflecting on the holistic preparedness of men and women to govern newly democratised countries after spending decades in the trenches waging an armed struggle against a racial group that had, for centuries, systematically excluded them from the economy and dispossessed them of the means of production, and whose practice of democracy did not emerge organically due to the space and time in which they organised.

This reflection ought not to be done as a means of vindicating the bigoted idea that Black leaders were and are incapable of governing, but as a means of assessing how some commitments and decisions made at the dawn of our democracy were inherently

impossible. These impossibilities continue to haunt the democratic government, which on one hand seeks to redress injustices of the past and provide a life of value for everyone in South Africa, and on the other, must contend with the real limitations of political power in a neo-liberal global order.

Another factor is the embeddedness of colonialism, about which Public Affairs Professor Mashupye Maserumule argues that the fundamentals of the apartheid colonial social order are still in place, with the democratic regime unwittingly administering them. Maserumule (2015) contends that there has not been a meaningful challenge to the "colonial matrices of power", which have placed great impediments to the construction of the post-apartheid state. He goes on to argue that these matrices "foster institutional racism based on Hegelianism – a body of thought that characterises the cognitive faculty of Africans as, in Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Diagne's words, in *The Meaning of Timbuktu*, the "other reason and philosophical spirit" is bereft of the "capacity to think and live by a consistent system of sound principles". The implication of this is that the defeat of colonialism in Africa has not translated to the annihilation of coloniality. The latter finds expression in some of our public administration and management practices that are slowing down the pace of meaningful transformation. This then translates into unfulfilled promises by governing parties which, as national liberation movements, made bold commitments that were at odds with the material realities of governance, about what they would deliver. But a hungry mother living in an informal settlement, who registered for an RDP house in 1998, does not understand nor is she interested in the red tape that makes it impossible to simply allocate a newly built house to her. Neither does a young man interested in farming understand the processes that the state must undertake to avail arable land – which unfortunately include the purchase of such land from a private owner, usually a White man, and transfer of the land to the state for determination of use. These factors, among others, inform roaring support for former national liberation movements on the eve of post-independence and democracy, and the dying support decades later.

## **The Character of South African Political Parties**

Making sense of the experiences of coalition governments in South Africa demands honest reflections from key role players who were instrumental in the establishment and collapse of the coalitions. Coalition governments are neither easy nor rapid to establish. There is much work that goes into establishing coalitions, particularly in a South Africa wherein hundreds of political organisations contest elections. The 2016 local government elections were contested by over two hundred political parties – a similar number contested the 2019 general elections three years later. One of the hurdles that must be crossed is that of determining whether there is significant alignment in political interests – which is not always true even for political parties that may appear