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**Presented by Ebrahim Fakir: Manager –Political Parties and Parliamentary Programme, Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa to the Institute for Security Studies Seminar on:**

**Public violence in South Africa:  
What are the causes, and what does it mean for policing?**

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I drew for this presentation, collective insights from three pieces of published work :

1. Fakir, Ebrahim. "Institutional restructuring, state-civil society relationships and social movements." *Development Update* 5, no. 2 (2004). Available at:

<http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za/files/Ebrahim%20article.pdf>

2. Fakir, Ebrahim. "Politics, State and Society in South Africa: Between Leadership, Trust and Technocrats." *Governance Working Paper Series One. Development Bank of Southern Africa* (2009). Available at:

[http://www.dbsa.org/EN/About-](http://www.dbsa.org/EN/About-Us/Publications/Documents/DPD%20No%201.%20Politics,%20state%20and%20society%20in%20South%20Africa-%20Between%20leadership,%20trust%20and%20technocrats.pdf)

[Us/Publications/Documents/DPD%20No%201.%20Politics,%20state%20and%20society%20in%20South%20Africa-%20Between%20leadership,%20trust%20and%20technocrats.pdf](http://www.dbsa.org/EN/About-Us/Publications/Documents/DPD%20No%201.%20Politics,%20state%20and%20society%20in%20South%20Africa-%20Between%20leadership,%20trust%20and%20technocrats.pdf)

3. Fakir, Ebrahim, and Maureen Moloi. "Why Balfour was burnt: anger over non-responsive government." *Recognising Community voice and dissatisfaction* (2011): 111. Available at:

<http://ggln.org.za/solg-2010-recognising-community-voice-and-dissatisfaction.pdf#page=112>

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The theme of Governance Failure is an important one when considering the protests. The accountability – oversight – responsiveness nexus is crucial whether one is talking about the failure of accountability and responsiveness of politicians and officials to citizens, whether its people being held to account in political parties, or whether it is the weaknesses and failures of supervision, oversight, accountability and compliance in state institutions or organisations. It is true also of the performance of political parties, parties in legislatures, legislatures themselves, local councils, state departments and organisations like the police, in general. Sometimes this is a consequence of macro policy.

Macro policy impacts and constrains delivery. Even IF the accountability – oversight – responsiveness nexus can be resolved, constraints may occur because macro policy dictates may constrain, for example capital expenditure - when councils are forced to drive for budget surplus. In that instance crucial expenditure on infrastructure maintenance, spare parts, technical specialists and the like, hampers delivery. This in turn has downstream effects.

Governance failure from a more instrumental policy perspective results in downstream problems in sequencing and planning - inappropriate prioritisation, improper planning and inadequate budgeting. Without priorities, planning and budgeting “service delivery” on scale, to target and which meets citizens needs, cannot happen.

Important to also note discursive shifts in tone and substance on the protests. Though there is a persistence in referring to them as “service delivery” protests, increasingly that there is a recognition that some of the protests are demands for accountability, better governance and responsiveness with some authors suggesting that “People are demanding public service, not service delivery”, Business Day, Steven Friedman, August 06 2012. All of these characterisations are appropriate. But we cannot ignore that the service delivery dimension is present, as is the fact that some protests are driven by intra political party battles between local party bigwigs who may be displaced on party lists or as ward candidates or because of influence in awarding contracts and tenders.

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It is also worth pointing out that there are METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS in collecting data about causality and the discourse is prone to generalisations. There are also issues, when counting and cataloguing protests about what is included and excluded, for eg: strikes and other industrial actions, peaceful gatherings as well as the number of unreported incidences.

From a political perspective, there has been a constant MISHEARING OF WHAT PEOPLE are saying. Whether regarding the protests or the Boo-ing of the President. The solutions, to wit have either focused on law enforcement, though that has been a huge problem but the ANC’s approach to the Boo-ing of President Zuma is telling. They care about finding out WHO did it, NOT WHY they did so. While it’s important to identify the WHO in order to find out the WHY, in the days following the boo-ing of President Zuma as well as three subsequent occasions, it’s clear the ANC wants to find out who did this not because they wish to elicit their reasons for doing so, but to “deal with them”. Much the same logic is followed by the ANC as a party and as a party in Government with regard to protests – trying to explain it away by saying it’s the 5% who want what the 95% have and Govt hasn’t been fast enough in delivering to them. Yet again a purely instrumental diagnosis and solutions casts purely in instrumental delivery terms – when in fact important nuances may be being missed

Returning to the PROTESTS, derivations drawing on work I had previously published, one can contend that there appears to be an uninterrupted culture of generalised social violence, cultures of protest, resistance and ungovernability deriving from SA's unjust past and resistance to the abomination that was apartheid capitalism. There are continuities with the past. Probably only an interregnum of three or so years where this was absent (1996-1998).

More importantly – SA is not specific. With the onset of the global rising prices of FFF (finance, fuel, food) mass direct action and collective action has been evident on the streets of the UK, Portugal, Ireland, Greece, France, Kenya, Uganda, Latin America, most recently Brazil.

So where does this come from? While a global phenomenon, declining levels of trust and confidence in political parties has particularly acute consequences for a divided and cleavaged society such as South Africa's. Across the world, 2005 data from a time at which the world economy and the South Africa economy were buoyant, suggest that 65% (Gallup, 2005) of people didn't believe that their countries are run by the will of the people. The lack of more recent worldwide data notwithstanding, if data from 2005 suggests a trend of declining levels of trust in political leaders and institutions, the reasonable expectation is that by 2013 lack of confidence in leadership would have declined further. Using 2005 worldwide data, a combined 80% of people would rather give more power to religious leaders, academics, intellectuals and journalists than business leaders and politicians (Gallup, 2005). Religious leaders are the most trusted group and politicians the least trusted, with just 13% of people around the world expressing trust and confidence in politicians (Gallup, 2005). Religious leaders are the most trusted group in Africa, trusted by 74% against 33% globally (Gallup, 2005). There is low level of trust in all types of leaders throughout Europe. Almost a third of people did not trust any of military, religious, business or political leaders (Gallup, 2005)

Reliable public perception surveys conducted by both the Human Sciences Research Council and the Institute for Justice & Reconciliation (IJR) show that trust in political parties has been in precipitous decline. A South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2011, 2012 shows that in 2011, 25% of people surveyed demonstrated some trust in political parties. A year later this figure had gone down to 21%. The IJR's SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey for 2012 shows that only half of all adults (50.3%) and less half of the youth (49.7%) trust leaders to do what is right. This same survey shows that less than half of people surveyed (44%) think that the economic situation is likely to get better in the next two years and only one third (33%) trust that the Government is doing well getting young people into jobs.

The beginnings of this kind of insurrectionary activity began as early as 1997/1998 – at the time of massive public sector cuts, curbs in capital expenditure and the restructuring of municipal service units and utilities. In response started things like the Soweto electricity crisis committee, the anti privatization forum, the anti Igoli 2002 platform, in a resumption of social movement type politics and activism which, behind a common rejection of the ANC's apparent conservative turn in macroeconomic policy, displayed important differences from mainstream organisations (especially the Congress of South African Trade Unions [Cosatu] and the South African Communist Party). These movements have, to a significant extent, originated at the level of urban localities in response to the government's restructuring of local government and municipal service provision. Whatever the limitations of the new social movements then have been in an organisational, political and strategic sense, they represent different trajectories in our evolving political discourse and political practice.

More importantly they assumed organisational form and spread across the country – the Abahlali Base Mjondolo in Durban , the Anti -eviction campaign in the Western Cape, Landless Peoples Movement and a myriad other organisations. Initially many of the activities were in general fragmented, dealt with a single issue or with a single dimension of a problem, without attempting to articulate it into an overall alternative political project. They were largely spontaneous social and political ruptures which are temporary in nature, due to the transitory nature of issues that they dealt with, impacting on their long-term sustainability as a political project. Now however, there are still ephemeral in nature, can be flash in the pan, but have a level of organisation, identifiable leaders, and some degree of coherence. In other instances – organisations involved in direct action activities like Equal Education, Section 27, My vote Counts etc... have adopted single issues, but have mobilised across organizations, classes, races and communities, and have adopted structured organisational form and importantly sustained campaigns of some duration. Though not involved in violent service delivery protests, on occasion people can be found to be participating across both of these types / modalities of civic or political expression.

**Let me turn specific attention to the study we conducted in Balfour:**

Whatever the root cause of the protests the residents of Siyathemba, Balfour undertook their first major direct protest action in July 2009. This was organised outside of any formal community, political or social structure or organisation. Government investigated the protest actions and discovered that amongst other issues, residents were unhappy about the decision to demarcate Siyathemba into the Mpumalanga Province rather than leave it zoned within the Gauteng Province. Interviews conducted by EISA also revealed that what appears to have been an executive administrative decision, has had direct consequences on people's perceptions regarding the costs, scale and quality of service delivery and their experience of citizenship and power in the manner in which they relate to government. Through the interviews, it became clear that people viewed themselves as powerless objects and subjects of government, rather than as citizens whose voice is taken seriously in government decision-making. In linking a government administrative decision to their experience of 'life', in addition to the demand for the reincorporation of Siyathemba into the Gauteng Province from Mpumalanga; people highlighted the issues of unemployment; unmaintained, deteriorating and decaying infrastructure; unresponsive and perceptibly unaccountable ward councilors, and a mayor who appears to ignore their grievances, as their key causes and sources of frustration.

Response to the residents' relentless protests, Government dispatched a high-powered delegation to the area to conduct an initial round of fact finding consultations, followed by a visit by President Zuma on the 4th August 2009. The President's visit instilled a sense of hope amongst residents that their grievances would be attended to and seriously considered.

However, in February 2010 the township erupted in violence, illustrating a continuing sense of frustration. While some reasons for the sense of frustration experienced by citizens in the area have been proffered, it is unclear, what precisely triggered the violence accompanying the protests that precipitated the second wave of violent direct action. which found expression in the burning of a library and the damage of public infrastructure

In the morning of the 7 February 2010, the residents of Siyathemba took to the streets. This second wave of protests was characterised by violence resulting in the burning of the library and the municipal office in

Siyathemba as well as the vandalising of the community hall. The protest commenced on a Sunday morning and continued throughout the day into Monday, 8 February 2010. Coincidentally, the protests occurred two days before the 2010 opening of Parliament and State of the Nation address by President Jacob Zuma, who had visited the area on 4 August 2009 during similar protests.

#### WHAT WERE THE ISSUES :

- . **Water and Sanitation:** the condition of the drinking water is clearly in a poor state. Water in the area is visibly brown, muddy and unclean. Yet the municipality claims that the water has been certified safe to drink by the national Department of Water Affairs (DWA). At the same time, the municipality acknowledges that the ageing water infrastructure needs replacement. No movement on this is in evidence.
- . **Infrastructure:** – which is not maintained and is visibly crumbling and deteriorating. Roads, including newly tarred ones have huge potholes, school buildings are in a state of disrepair and government offices have crumbling walls, are visibly dirty and unkempt.
- . **high mass street lights,** which were erected after the 2009 protests have never been operational since their installation. Due to this, crime remains rampant in the areas where there is insufficient street lighting.
- . **The provision of housing:** Whatever few low cost houses that were provided, are structurally problematic. In most cases projects that were reported to the community as being underway are virtually nonexistent. The promised establishment of a fully functional Home Affairs office has not occurred and the area is still serviced by an office that is operational only twice a week.
- . There is no **police station in Siyathemba:** There is only a police station in Balfour. A tragic example of the importance of having a permanent police presence in the township is that a female resident was raped in Siyathemba and after having called the police to report her ordeal she was told that she would have to come to the Balfour police station to make a statement as there were no vehicles to fetch her. On her way to the police station she was raped once again by another assailant.
- . **Emergency services are problematic:** The nearest hospital that the community can access is in Standerton, 75 kms away from Siyathemba. A temporary solution to this problem was initiated through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Gauteng Department of Health and the Mpumalanga Department of Health, in 2010, allowing the residents of Dipaleseng Local Municipality to have access to the Heidelberg Provincial Hospital which is only 30kms away.
- . **Improved and accessible sports and recreation facilities:** The community is demanding a multi-purpose community centre.
- . **Unemployment and local investment:** This is at endemic levels in the Dipaleseng local municipality. Respondents were at a loss over the role of a fulltime Local Economic Development (LED) coordinator, under circumstances of nonexistent economic activity in the area and no visible difference being made through having a full time LED coordinator employed by the municipality. According to respondents, there is lack of consideration of local job applicants for jobs in the area. Large private sector companies with locally based operations (such as the Burnstone gold mine, which was a primary target of protestors on two occasions and Karan Beef) as well as parastatals such as Eskom also appeared to hire labour from elsewhere rather than draw on the pool of available labour residing in the community. Moreover, despite repeated calls for meetings by community organisations with the large manufacturing and mining concerns in the area in order to discuss scaling up local investment into the area as well as discuss local companies deployment of corporate social responsibility investments in the area, no meetings between the local private company operations and the community has occurred, nor are any corporate social responsibility programmes in the area reported, or in evidence.

- **There is also a demand** for an FET college/skills training centre to be constructed in the locality.
- Interviews with a Somali shop owner in Siyathemba revealed that both in 2009 and in 2010 there were no xenophobic sentiments amongst protesters. Criminal elements, however, took advantage of the unrest and mayhem, and looted shops. They did not necessarily distinguish between those owned by South Africans and those owned by foreigners. Xenophobia has never been a cause of tension between “locals” and “foreigners” in Siyathemba. Interview respondents were adamant that ‘there is no evidence of demands for foreigners to leave the community. In fact, there is a history of opposition to xenophobia in Siyathemba.

#### **WHAT DID WE FIND:**

- Instead of engaging with the community, the municipality’s response was to send in law enforcement agencies, which in turn served to inflame the volatile situation further. Some residents argue that the violence was deliberately used as a vehicle to draw attention to SiyaThemba, which appeared to be ignored by everyone.”
- Alarmingly, the tendency to use violence as a tool of protest is increasing in frequency. In most cases, protesters say they opt for violence as their voices would not be heard otherwise.
- The construction of democracy as both a system of government and a culture by and through which citizens associate among themselves and relate to government institutions requires checks between the able agency of citizens to exercise and advance their rights and institutions which must help them to do so. For this, an effective system of participation, checks and balances, oversight and accountability, responsiveness and consultation are required.
- In the case of SiyaThemba almost all of these elements appear to be absent, with citizens appearing to express frustrations through violence because of a government and private sector that is perceived to be unresponsive.

#### **So, what are some of the general conclusions we can draw:**

- The political legitimacy of locally elected leaders is low and declining further and the credibility of national government decisions are increasingly called into question. The ability of “facilitative” and “consultative” leadership through deriving citizen consent for being governed is in peril, and increasingly it appears that government (the system of execution of policy, administration and management) and governance (the relationship between those who are meant to govern and those who are governed) can only be maintained through coercion. A simultaneous decline in the popular political legitimacy of the political leadership and the credibility of government management and decision-making may have deleterious consequences for enhanced democracy, development and continued political stability.
- Collectively, it is assumed that this rebellion of the poor may lead to an “African Spring”, akin to the “Arab Spring” . This is unfounded. The Arab Spring was premised on the fact they were fighting against illegitimate governments. Here, the legitimacy of government is not in question. Rather, it is the credibility of its operations. It is about the Governments ability to function or not, not its right to exist
- The second is that some public discussion has tried to draw a linkage between the protests and what occurred in Marikana. This however, is a distinctive phenomenon. While the underlying roots might be same—political and social inequality and the lack of social power—the drivers are very different, Much of the service delivery protests are sporadic uprisings, leaderless, ambiguous and flash in the pan. Marikana was not like that. It had very specific dimensions, such as the inter-union rivalry, identifiable leaders, quite specific demands (R12500 pay for rock drillers on the mine) and there is a level of organisation (a formal Union) and the issues are identifiable and clear.

- . From a security perspective, it is clear that South Africa's intelligence services are clearly not serving the country with information to avoid social confrontation, conflict and political risk.
- . One of the shortcomings of the commission of inquiry into the Marikana massacre is that it does not probe the failure of the intelligence services to detect what was brewing at Marikana.

**I try to provide a typology for characterisation of direct action – and this is very tentative and imprecise:**

I aver that they can be placed, thus far, in one of FIVE categories:

- (1) a social movement/civic activity (organised, uses multiple strategies, including courts and building contingent and situational alliances with parties, other movements, labour / professions, religious bodies etc...)
- (2) a spontaneous, unorganised activity (anomic, atavistic , driven by sentiment, rhetoric, ephemeral) – usually targetted at local government for an service delivery issue.
- (3) spontaneous eruptions grounded in specific need(s) and a definite alternative policy , or demand for accountability ( spontaneous but organised, could be well organised but contingent – so if something is not done by a certain time then there is a protest, it is given to bargaining and trade-offs, it is not generalized and is community specific, it bargains with power or allows formal power holders to act as mediator or intermediary in resolving the issue)
- (4) a political trajectory opposed to current dispensation (organised, sustained, in the realm of contesting formal power, sparks or assists protests, and the EFF is an example of attempts to latch on to protests)
- (5) organised INTER or Intra party factionalism and power struggles of local political strong men.

### **In conclusion**

Historically, the administrations post 1994 demobilised what could have been levels of social and civil organisation such as the UDF and associations loosely allied to the tri-partite alliance and the mass democratic movement) that could have served to contain, or constructively channel this. The downside risk for them as a party at the time, though, was clear – social and civic organisation could have served to replace the political structures of the ANC. The upside consequence was maintenance and grip on the instrumentality of political power but with an almost daily insurrection (though localised) in the streets.

Two issues need some attention. The first is what impact this might have on the 2014 elections? There were problems at some voter registration points when the IEC last conducted voter registration. Whether this will translate into impact on voter turnout generally or in specific areas will have to be monitored.

More long term is, investigating the link, if ANY between personal, inter-personal and public violence that has been a part of the protests.