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The iconography of persuasion: An analysis of political manifestos and messaging of top three parties in South Africa's 2019 elections

ABSTRACT

South Africa's 2019 elections, like others before, will be remembered for the historical significance around the ANC ruling party's sharp decline in polls, the surging and re-emergence of the ideologically extreme parties, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the Freedom Front Plus (VF+). This election, for the first time since the rebranding of the main opposition, the Democratic Alliance, saw that party losing its momentum, culminating in the eventual resignation of the party's first black leader, Mmusi Maimane. This study examines how the three dominant parties in South Africa contest with each other in the race to attract potential voters through poster advertising and campaigns. Going into the 2019 election, the three dominant political parties were – the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). Specifically, the paper examines messages on the posters, the parties' manifestos and speeches at different rallies before the elections. Drawing on our analysis, we make a claim in this paper that the 2019 election in South Africa for the ANC, DA and EFF was largely about “unresolved questions”.

Keywords: elections, South Africa, Democratic Alliance (DA), Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), African National Congress (ANC)

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INTRODUCTION

Political advertising during the electoral campaign period takes many different forms such as social media advertising, television and radio advertising, electronic billboard and street poster advertising. Most of these are paid for forms of advertising, except possibly for street poster advertising. Electoral advertising has evolved over the years owing to changes in voter profiles and the proliferation of newer forms of media and communication. For instance, in the USA, President Regan introduced 'trendy' bumper stickers which helped spread his campaign message (Stuckey, 2017), and years later, President Obama used Twitter as his main electoral campaign platform (Aharony, 2012). The introduction of newer forms of media has not necessarily killed the older forms of media or made them irrelevant but has expanded the options of platforms for placement of electoral messages (Mare & Matsilele, 2020). Electoral advertising is an important component of electoral campaigning in democracies as it helps political parties and their candidates to provide "adequate information on party policies, ensuring party visibility, communicating clear-cut vision as well as political agendas to enable the electorate to choose their candidates based on full information" (Ojokwe, 2016:13-14). The creation of platforms that make possible provision of information to the electorate is a key ingredient used to determine the freeness and fairness of elections.

This article specifically focuses on electoral messaging with attention to how street poster advertising is used by dominant parties in South Africa to compete for potential voters and also entrench their distinct ideological positions. At the core of this research is the analysis of how and what political parties communicated through posters and campaign messages. Apart from this, we analyse and explain the underlying meanings and implications of such messages for the current socio-political and economic environment of the country. South Africa is considered one of the most democratic countries in Africa, not only considering the consistent ritual of elections since the end of apartheid in 1994, but it also has strong institutions that are independent of external control. However, this does not in any way suggest that South Africa is a perfect democracy and distinct from other post-liberation African states. For instance, just as what has happened elsewhere in post-liberation Africa, the party of independence – the ANC – has been in power for more than two decades. Even though the party still enjoys the liberation dividend, it faces growing opposition from both old and new parties (Marrian, 2019). This growing opposition to the ANC's dominance has meant that elections in South Africa are fiercely contested. As such, for any party to win votes in an election, politicians need to conjure messages that resonate with the aspirations of the majority of their targeted constituencies so as to increase the chances of the party's threshold (Anon., 2015). In crafting their messages, parties need to 'refer to the voters as the hero and play up what the voters stand to benefit from voting a particular candidate as against another in an election' (Anon., 2015).

The 2019 national elections came 25 years after the end of apartheid. They came after considerable strides having been made towards deracialising South Africa's economy. Even

so, it seems, not enough has been done to eradicate the psychological, social, economic and political demons of the evil apartheid system. More so, the 2019 elections came at a time when the global and local economy is in decline. During this period, addressing economic challenges became the focal point of almost all electoral contests globally. The country's economy saw a decline in the first quarter of 2019 posing fears of a technical recession. Economic performance takes place within a racialised context, in the most unequal country in the world. Such is the case because racism has failed to "leave" South Africa despite several attempts being made to tackle the problem. It is therefore unsurprising that in periods leading to elections, the issue of race finds expression in the campaign messages of the different political parties.

Ever-higher levels of unemployment among the youth, the ever-increasing gap between the rich and the poor, and a weak economic outlook rank among the major challenges that the country is faced with. In July of 2019, Statistics South Africa announced that unemployment had worsened by two percent in the six months to June. On the political front, a host of challenges still remain. Notably, a number of elected public officials continue to be implicated in cases of corruption and this consequently has resulted in a generalised lack of trust among citizens in representative modes of politics and their attendant processes. The ANC has struggled to shrug off the tag of being an "arrogant party" that only listens to people's concerns during election times (Southall, 2005).

At the level of local government, there exist severe challenges, with the main one being the delivery or redistribution of basic services especially to poor citizens. Such services include water, electricity and sanitation. In response to this crisis of local government, ordinary citizens have often resorted to protest as a mechanism of contending with those in power and also highlighting their grievances (Mottiar & Bond, 2012). The governance crisis at local level saw over 10 000 protests between 2009 and 2016. These protests have come to reveal not only the levels of service delivery backlogs within municipalities and provinces but also the extent of variation in terms of service provision existing between rich and poor communities in South Africa. More than anything else, these protests are reflective of some kind of a grassroots rebellion, leading to Alexander (2006) to describe such protests as amounting to what he calls "the rebellion of the poor".

For mostly the ordinary poor in South Africa, it seems, after 25 years of democracy, there is a disjuncture between political liberation and economic liberalisation (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000). It is therefore not surprising that the 2019 elections occurred against the background of a number of widespread community unrests whose grievances centred largely on issues of service delivery and the perceived failure of post-liberation politics to attend to the everyday concerns of ordinary citizens. In all this, the ruling African National Congress became the target of rebuke and accusations. In some circles, the ANC was characterised as exhibiting an "exhausted form of nationalism" that is devoid of understanding for the harsh realities within communities (Bond & Manyanya, 2012). This was worsened by emerging evidence linking party officials to corruption,

patronage, abuse of state resources and the capture of key state institutions. Owing to this, it became more apparent that the party saw the 2019 elections as presenting it with a window of opportunity to reinvent or “renew” itself, especially in the minds of the voting population.

For the ANC, the election was crucially about regaining the confidence of the ordinary voters and also about maintaining their hold on political power as a liberation movement. Before the 2019 election, there had been evidence suggesting a decline in ANC support and a generalised unhappiness within the broader South African society on the direction the party was taking (Makhanya, 2019; Stone, 2019). Apart from the ANC, the elections were equally significant for the two main opposition parties in South Africa, the DA and the EFF. The two parties had on an overall scale performed well and exceeded public expectations in the previous local government elections in 2016). For the DA and EFF, the 2019 election was therefore about improving on their past impressive performances so as to surpass previous thresholds. The understanding here is that the more votes the DA and EFF garnered, the more likely that the ANC’s hegemony or hold on political power would be weakened. For instance, the loss of two metropolitan provinces and three significant municipalities by the ANC to a coalition of opposition parties in the 2016 local government elections served as a strong indication to the DA and EFF that the ANC’s hold on power was slowly drifting away. Based on the issues at stake for each party going into this election, the period leading to the 2019 election heralded a sustained form of political campaigning that relied largely on both new and traditional forms of mass media.

Although historically in South Africa, posters have been used a method of election campaigning, the 2019 election was somehow unique in the way it carried messages that resonated with the everyday concerns of different electoral constituencies. Compared to previous elections, our analysis will demonstrate that the 2019 election in South Africa was largely about longstanding everyday and existential concerns. The confluence of these two sets of concerns (everyday and existential) in turn informed the crafting of election campaign messages.

This paper therefore seeks to explore campaign themes from selected political parties. In doing so, our aim is twofold: (1) to interrogate the saliency and meanings of the campaign messages from selected political parties, and (2) to examine how South Africa’s three largest parties used posters to sell and brand themselves in the elections of 2019.

1. POSTERS AND ELECTIONS: A REVIEW

Posters have played a large role in election campaigns for the past two centuries and this trend continues (Deželan & Maksuti, 2012). One of the central reasons why the use of posters has persisted in the era of high technological electioneering is their ability to act as constant reminders of a political actor’s embeddedness in a community’s shared space; they are primarily used to signal an actor’s electoral competitiveness in the district, while their role of transmitting ballot-related information is only secondary (Dumitrescu, 2009:3). As Dumitrescu further argues,

posters are thus argued to be the only form of electoral communication that uses the well-defined physical space of a community to send information about the parties and candidates involved in an election. During election campaign periods all over the world, posters are used to familiarise candidates to the electorates and entice them to vote for candidates (Sharndama & Mohammed, 2013). In this context, posters are used to enable voters to make informed decisions on which party or candidate to vote for (Dezelan & Maksuti, 2012). Apart from the role that posters play in profiling or building the image of candidates and political parties, Fourie (2007) argues that the use of posters makes it possible for parties and candidates to communicate their programme of action. From this perspective, the use of campaign posters is considered a “deliberate and strategic” exercise rather than a mere issue of political tradition (Smith, 2017:74). Given their centrality as forms of political communication, campaign posters have evolved over time and continue to be a preferred platform of communicating with a wide array of target constituencies for political parties across the globe (Holtz-Bacha & Johansson, 2017). There is no denying that such a preference has got to do with the way posters have been relied upon historically as an effective mode of communicating political campaign messages. *Can this historical value that parties attach to posters be used explain how and why the use of posters has survived the onslaught of postmodern forms of campaigning?* Existing evidence tends to suggest that although history matters, the continued use of posters lies in the flexibility that comes with their use. In line with the significant changes unfolding within society, the content, style and rhetoric of campaign posters continue to change (Carlson, 2017).

For some, what has made posters survive the test of time is their inherent affective power to appeal to voter's feelings and emotions (Ridout & Searles, 2011). In a study on election posters in Finland, Carlson (2017) shows how visual images (cues) appeal to the emotions of potential voters. Unlike other forms of political campaigning, the affective dimension that election posters provide has made them survive over time (Smith, 2017). Adopting the same line of thinking, Seidman (2008) contends that the messages conveyed through election posters only serve the purpose of persuading voters and eliciting emotions.

The durability and pervasive character of campaign posters as forms of political advertising can therefore be seen in their continued use in elections in many parts of the world. This enduring appeal of posters might also stem from the way posters have the ability to vividly capture the minds (psychology) of potential voters (Houston et al. 2013).

2. METHOD AND DATA

We gathered data through selecting campaign posters of the three parties (ANC, DA and EFF). This exercise was performed in three different provinces, being Gauteng, the Western Cape and Limpopo. Our selection of the three sites was guided by existing data from previous elections which showed that Gauteng is a stronghold for the ANC. This evidence also showed that the Western Cape has been traditionally a DA stronghold, at least for the past decade. While the

EFF is still a relatively new political party compared to the ANC and DA, they proved to have a huge following in the Limpopo Province in their debut election. A total of 12 posters (N=12) were selected and analysed (4 for each party). All the posters selected were in English, the reason being that our three research sites were largely urban and most of the posters on the streets were in English. In terms of party manifestos, they were all in English. We analysed at least one campaign speech for each political party. Our focus was on those speeches delivered by its elected officials. For the ANC, the speech delivered by Cyril Ramaphosa while campaigning in Gauteng was analysed. To inform our analysis, we also relied on a speech delivered by Ace Magashule, the Secretary General of the ANC. The speech in question was delivered in the Western Cape Province. For the DA, we paid attention to the speech by Herman Mashaba who was the Mayor for the City of Johannesburg. Lastly, a speech delivered by Julius Malema of the EFF while campaigning in KwaZulu-Natal was analysed. For all three parties, the selected campaign speeches were chosen to inform the analysis given that they informed some of the issues that the parties considered central to their respective campaigns.

We used qualitative content analysis to analyse the electoral posters. The focus was on the ANC, DA and the EFF electoral posters displayed on the streets before the election. These parties have the largest following and number of seats in the National Assembly. Posters addressing the issues of land, immigration and the economy from the three parties were deliberately selected for analysis in this article. Qualitative method allows us to “subjectively interpret and analyse the data” from the electoral posters through “the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1278). To ensure the trustworthiness, reliability and credibility of our findings, we triangulated different sources of data. The data from posters and campaign speeches were later used to make inferences about what the major issues at stake were in the 2019 South African elections. More crucially, the data from posters collected from the three provinces were extrapolated to other provinces outside the three (Gauteng, Western Cape and Limpopo).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chibuwe (2017) calls for a multi-theoretical approach in studying political advertising, in part due to the dearth of literature on political advertising. As a result, borrowing from Chibuwe (2017) and Tshuma (2019), this study uses insights from political advertising, functional theory and sign theory. This multi-theoretical approach is vital in that it utilises the strength of each theoretical aspect (Tshuma, 2019). There has been considerable scholarship that has gone into political advertising over the past decades, however most retains tenets articulated by Kaid (1981:25), who notes political advertising as “the communication process by which a source (usually a political candidate or party) purchases the opportunity to expose receivers through mass channels to political messages with the intended effect of influencing their political attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviours”. The intention is usually to persuade voters to believe what the candidate will be promoting or dissuading them from believing a political rival. Persuasion,

for this study, will be taken to mean the ability of a message to influence a person's political beliefs, attitudes or values (Franz & Ridout, 2007). Any political advertising's intended goal is to improve comprehension, appreciation and ultimately "buying" of the message from the candidate. Taking into account that the posters which are subject of analysis in this study mainly use short messages and images to communicate, the use of sign theory is valuable. Goldman and Papson (1996) argue that the continued desire for attention from audiences has resulted in what they describe as "sign wars". The scholars argue that these wars represent "a mature stage of brand competition" (Goldman & Papson 1996:25). The study also uses Benoit's (2006) functional theory which provides the four foundational premises that (1) voting is a comparative act because a candidate must be perceived as preferable to opponents, (2) candidates must distinguish themselves from their opponents (one cannot be preferable if the contenders are indistinguishable), (3) political campaign messages are the means for establishing distinctions, and (4) that campaign discourse creates preferability using three functions: claims (positive statements about oneself), attacks (criticisms of an opponent), and defences (refutations of attacks from opponents). As Benoit and Sheafer (2006:284) argue, the functional theory subdivides policy utterances into three forms: past deeds (accomplishments or failures), future plans (specific campaign promises), and general goals (objectives). Character comments are divided into three forms: personal qualities (personality traits), leadership ability (experience in office), and ideals (values or principles). Goldman and Papson (1996) argue that sign wars refer to the continually and endlessly escalating battles waged by advertising agencies for the attention of radio listeners, readers of newspapers and magazines, and especially television viewers – that is, those whom advertisers hope will purchase the products and services being advertised. They argue that advertisers are always in need of new ways to differentiate themselves from their rivals, always involved in "one-upping" them – even if this leads to everyone cannibalising signs and images wherever they can find them, ultimately creating a stage the authors describe (taking a cue from Baudrillard) as "hypersignification".

4. CORPUS, DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The posters for the ANC, the EFF and the DA that were considered in this study are shown in Figures 1 to 3 respectively. Our analysis revealed five major focus areas in the party campaigns, as detailed in the subsections that follow.



Figure 1: ANC 2019 campaign posters: Credit: ANC/ Authors



Figure 2: EFF 2019 Election posters. Credit: EFF/Authors



Figure 3: DA 2019 election campaign posters. Credits: DA/Authors

4.1. THE ANC AND THE RAMAPHOSA EFFECT: LAND, RENEWAL AND ECONOMY

Our analysis of the ANC's posters, campaign messages and manifesto showed that the party's 2019 campaign was largely predicated on three major themes - land, renewal and economy. Drawing on this analysis, in what follows, we take each in turn.

For the ANC and any other liberation movements in Africa, land has always been a central element of pre- and post-liberation politics. It is unsurprising therefore that for the 2019 elections the ANC premised their political campaign on the subject of land, among other issues. Analytically, it would appear that there are a number of reasons to explain this decision. For our purpose in this discussion, we will focus on two fundamental ones. First, prior to the 2019 election, the ANC had faced a number of criticisms (from within its ranks, from political foes and from ordinary citizens) on its failure to redistribute land since 1994 (Lahiff, 2017). This "failure" to act on land redistribution was interpreted in some circles as amounting to a betrayal of the promise of liberation. Although riddled with many controversies, the Zimbabwean land exercise appears to have not made it easy for the ANC to make an excuse. Given the growing calls for the subject of land to be dealt with decisively in South Africa, the ANC had to demonstrate to their followers that the party can still be trusted by bringing the subject of land not only into its political register but also its electoral campaign. Second, the 2019 election occurred after the important NASREC conference where the ANC adopted bold decisions on land and the economy. Chief among these were "the expropriation of land without compensation" and "radical economic transformation" (Omarjee, 2017).

Apart from the policy decisions that emerged out of the ANC's NASREC conference, the party had elected Cyril Ramaphosa as its leader. For the ANC and its leader, the urgent task was to reinvent and renew the image of the ANC. This was urgent because a number of electoral polls were showing that the party was losing its support, popularity and moral standing owing to a number of issues. The perceived "disastrous" tenure of Jacob Zuma, its former leader, appeared to have worsened the situation for the party (Everratt, 2017). It was clear that for the ANC to win the elections and assert its dominance in South African politics, the party had to re-invent under its new leader. The mere fact that in all our research sites, campaign posters with Ramaphosa's face (see, Figure 1) headlined the ANC's campaign shows that in the eyes of the ANC, he was an essential component of its renewal drive. Empirically, this is crucial given the way it highlights the role that morality and individual personality play not only in political advertising, but also in modern African politics. The ANC has traditionally relied on these in all its history and previous electoral successes (Booyesen, 2011; Lodge, 2014).

We noted also in our analysis that the "economy" was central in the ANC's campaign and this was evidenced by some of the party's campaign posters and their political manifesto. The party's focus on the economy centred on economic growth, job creation and tackling corruption.

Such could have been the case for a number of reasons. First, as indicated earlier, the 2019 elections occurred at time when the South African economy had recorded a decline in its Growth Domestic Product (GDP). Also, various ratings agencies had downgraded South Africa's economic outlook. Second, apart from the downward economic growth trajectory, poverty, inequality and unemployment ranked as the major challenges confronting South Africa (South African Government News Agency, 2017). Faced with these realities, it was logical for the ANC's to focus and direct their political campaign on these. In the following section, we provide a more exhaustive analysis of the ANC's focus on the economy (including land) and compare such a focus to that of its major competitors-the EFF and the DA.

4.2. OPPOSITIONAL ALTERNATIVES: THE EFF AND DA ON LAND AND ECONOMY

A cursory look at Figure 2 shows that the EFF made land the cornerstone of its electoral campaigns. The land issue also occupies prominence in the manifesto of the EFF, appearing first on the Action Plan. The party makes far-reaching proposals in seventeen points from land rentals, national parks to traditional land. It also proposes radical steps such as nationalisation of land, giving 50% of land to women and amending Section 25 of the Constitution. The EFF manifesto states that:

The EFF government will redistribute land in a manner that is demographically representative, meaning that black people will accordingly control the majority of the land, as they constitute the majority in South Africa (EFF Manifesto, 28).

One poster (Our Land & Jobs Now) carries undertones of urgency required in redressing the land question, which is a view shared by many landless blacks as demonstrated through consultations about the proposed Section 25 amendment. The EFF argues that stolen land cannot and should not be paid for. This issue of land for the EFF is tied to its leader, Julius Malema, who is characterised in political posters as a "Son of the Soil". The use of this description is meant to demonstrate to voters that "only" Julius Malema cares about giving land to the black population.

The ANC manifesto, unlike the EFF's, approaches the land question from a legalist and moralist position. A look at the ANC manifesto shows that land reform doesn't occupy priority position, as it is below aspects such as the economy and jobs, which is in clear contrast with the EFF's manifesto. The language the ANC uses in its manifesto is also non-committal; it reads like a passing comment that inserted land as part of the normative requirements. The first point under the land reform (ANC Manifesto, 30) section reads that the ANC will,

... support the amendment of Section 25 of the Constitution to clearly define the conditions under which expropriation of land without compensation can take place. This should be done

in a way that promotes economic development, agricultural production and food security.

A close reading of all the points under the land reform section demonstrates that the ANC in its manifesto was interested in having an “orderly” land reform programme that speaks to the main issue in its manifesto, which is employment creation, and inclusive and shared growth. The DA has a different approach as it calls for a halt to moves towards expropriation without compensation. It believes that the coalition of the EFF and ANC is disastrous to the land question, private property rights as well the structure of the economy. One of the posters in Figure 3 (Stop ANC and EFF) calls for voters to vote against the two parties (ANC and EFF) that are pro-expropriation. The DA’s manifesto, like that of the ANC, articulates land reform in its relation to economic growth and jobs. The party also flags the issue of property rights, which has been its anchor when dealing with the land question:

The Democratic Alliance believes that South Africa belongs to all who live in it and we will continue to fight for the protection and expansion of individual property rights for all (DA Manifesto, 20).

The juxtaposition of property rights and land reform demonstrates the DA’s unwillingness to redress the land question, which explains why “ANC and EFF” should be stopped in some of its posters as they “would undermine property rights”.

4.3 “INSIDERS” AND “OUTSIDERS”: DA AND ANC SOUTH AFRICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

That South Africa has been a leader in many fronts in the economy is indisputable. To that extent, the country has prided itself as a multicultural and diverse society epitomised by the rainbow nation metaphor where human rights are upheld way better than its peers on the continent. The country boasts a world respected constitution, and during Thabo Mbeki’s presidency the country had a major role to play in conflict resolution on the continent. Despite all this, xenophobic attitudes and violence have become regular phenomena in South Africa. While xenophobia is a global phenomenon, for South Africa it carries violence of particular proportions: “In South Africa, xenophobia manifests itself through negative attitudes and violence against non-nationals from other parts of Africa, a phenomenon now popularly referred to as ‘Afrophobia’” (Koenane, 2018:1).

During the 2019 electoral campaigns the DA, EFF and ANC engaged with the issue of xenophobia. The DA, for a long time, had former Johannesburg Mayor, Herman Mashaba as its anti-foreigners poster boy and his populist pronouncements seem to have permeated the national electoral campaign of the DA. Even the ANC jumped onto the bandwagon in the electoral campaign with Ace Magashule, the party’s Secretary General, arguing that “this issue

of undocumented foreigners was raised by the general society in South Africa. That is why the ANC wants to focus on it and deal with it once and for all” (cited in Morphy, 2019). There is no truth in Magashule’s statements, as probably the first person to raise the issue of foreigners and possibly sowing seeds of subsequent attacks in March 2019 was the President of the party and country, who said during an electoral campaign rally:

Everybody just arrives in our townships and rural areas and set up businesses without licences and permits. We are going to bring this to an end. And those who are operating illegally, wherever they come from, must now know (Ramaphosa, cited in Ankomah, 2019).

The EFF were, however, clear on their stance. Malema argued that his party was not a home for Afrophobes and xenophobes. Malema’s statement is worth quoting as it highlights some underlying challenges with the understanding of “outsiders” and “insiders” in South Africa. Also, it partly ventures into some contributory factors to foreign-local relations in South Africa:

You call them all sorts of names. Those people are ... Africans like you... These borders were not created by us. Africa is not a continent, Africa is a country. From Cairo to Cape Town, Madagascar to Morocco ... We don’t want votes from people who are xenophobic (Malema, cited in Tandwa, 2019).

The narrative presented above casts light on the multifaceted nature of South Africa’s economic challenges as steeped in the legacies of apartheid. Politicians shy away from addressing the root causes. In addition, Malema’s argument helps clarify who or what a foreigner is: black African. Of course, this has led to politicians, especially former president Mbeki and now Ramaphosa, arguing that it is not Afrophobia or xenophobia since only blacks are attacked. This speaks to political failures and convenient use of the foreigner as a political object around which to canvass for votes.

The DA has been the only party which clearly spelt out the anti-African immigrant narrative on its official electoral campaign posters. The party’s former Johannesburg mayor, Herman Mashaba, whose mayoral campaign was expressly xenophobic, is recorded as having said: “All illegal foreigners to leave my city” (*Sowetan*, 2 December 2016). The *Sowetan* story further records him thus:

Illegal immigrants got here criminally and should be treated as such ... You see, for me, when I call these criminals, I want them to understand that they are criminals ... They are holding our country to ransom and I am going to be the last South African to allow it.

We therefore contend that the DAs “Secure Our Borders – One South Africa for All” campaign poster in Figure 3 speaks to the exclusion of black immigrants from African countries. This became a populist approach to electoral campaigns and it led to ANC heavyweights like David Makhura making unverified claims during the campaign period:

I think some specific crimes [are committed] by some specific nationalities or foreign nationals are involved. Drugs, there's specific nationalities involved. Violent crimes and murders, including cash-in-transit heists, there is specific nationalities involved (AFP, 2019).

It seems that the election was partly contested on the basis that the foreigner is the main problem leading to South Africans not getting satisfactory service delivery and economic opportunities, leading to current levels of poverty and unemployment. The word "foreigner" not only demarcates difference, it undermines, differentiates humans from nonhumans, and justifies extermination as a solution. Thus, this brings about South Africa's perceived exceptionalism and that "South Africans are not quite Africans ... complemented by the dominant perception that indigeneity is the only way to acquire resources, jobs, and all other goodies that should be reserved for native peoples only" (Neocosmos 2008:591). Notice how no sanction is given to locals, assuming, if we suspend reason for once, that foreigners are the ones who bring in drugs, for consuming these drugs and acting as drug mules for the same foreigners. From this, it becomes logical for one to easily see how politicians are quick to resort to xenophobic electoral campaigns as a panacea for a better South Africa.

4.4 ELECTIONS AND THE SALIENCY OF THE CITIZENSHIP QUESTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

"Let's Grow South Africa Together" (ANC, 2019).

"To Build One South Africa for All" (DA, 2019).

"Son of the Soil", "Our Land" (EFF, 2019).

Analytically it would appear that one of the dominant themes that the major political parties in South Africa focused on through their various posters and campaign messages was the broader question of citizenship. Here we make use of the notion of "citizenship" to connote an idea of both membership (national belonging) and identity. The question is: why and how these became instrumental or salient in the 2019 elections for the three political parties? Our analysis tends to suggest that an embrace of campaign messages aimed at fostering feelings of membership and identity stems from the way the three selected political parties sought to create an imagery of a "universal" (common identity) which makes their respective parties appeal to wider sections of the voting population in South Africa. This is happening at a time when the question of race remains hugely contentious and unresolved. For each party in the election (ANC, DA and EFF), it was crucial to create an image of inclusivity that centred on "togetherness" (ANC), "oneness" (DA) and "our land" (EFF). It is this focus on the idea of inclusivity which in our view is suggestive of the way the 2019 election in South Africa reinvigorated the citizenship debate.

The timing of such a question or debate remains a subject of further scrutiny, but we want to argue here that such was the case because, since the demise of apartheid, South Africa has not successfully managed to make significant progress in realising the vision of national cohesiveness across all races as was intended at the dawn of democracy. In South Africa, the coming of each election therefore presents a window for political parties to appeal to the conscience of voters by focusing on issues that have remained at the centre of public debate. It is therefore not surprising that in the 2019 election, the saliency of ideas that centred on inclusivity (citizenship) was largely pronounced in the campaign posters and messages of the three largest political parties. Given this, we make the claim in this article that the 2019 election in South Africa for these political parties was largely about “unresolved questions”. This was happening against a background where the three parties have been criticised for failing to decisively tackle the issue of race, as reflected in the racial make-up of their membership or through public utterances attributed to senior party officials¹.

In a much more extreme case, the DA in one of its campaign posters appeared to have adopted what appeared to be an exclusionary stance. The DA’s message on “securing borders” could be interpreted not only as an indictment of the government’s failure to address illegal immigration and porous borders but also, the message pointed to existing levels of ambivalence towards foreign (African) immigrants in South Africa. There is no doubt that such a message resonated quite profoundly with existing sentiments shared by many sections of South African society regarding the presence of foreign immigrants in South Africa. The observation we make is that although the campaign messages in a number of posters of the ANC, DA and the EFF were largely about building or reinforcing a particular form of citizenship (identity), some messages ended up being more exclusionary as was the case with DA’s stance on “securing borders”. This could have been a strategy of the DA to tap into an emotive issue that resonated with some sections of the voting population.

4.5 THE PRIMACY OF THE “ECONOMY” IN SA ELECTIONS: TYING UP THE ARGUMENT

Apart from the various issues that were at stake for political parties in the 2019 election in South Africa, the election was also contested on matters of economic policy. This is not unique to South Africa as this has been the case in many elections across the world (see for example, Vavreck, 2009). In crafting their campaign messages for the 2019 election in South Africa, the issue of the economy was more germane. In such messages, the focus was largely on the everyday economic challenges confronting South African society. Among these, unemployment,

¹ For the DA, Helen Zille’s Twitter remarks, where she was implicitly making a case for a need to appreciate the positive side of colonialism in South Africa is a good example. In its posture and rhetoric, the EFF has also been accused in some circles of riding on a racist discourse, particularly when it comes to its stance on the land question in South Africa. On a number of occasions, its leader, Julius Malema, has been singled out as being “anti-white”. Within the same breadth, the ANC has faced similar accusations. Its secretary-general, Ace Magashule while on a campaign trail in the Western Cape urged voters not to vote for “umlungu” – a white person (Goba, 2019).

electricity supply, and corruption predominate. Overall, the ANC's campaign was largely a passionate plea for the electorate to join the party in "growing" South Africa. The message "Let's grow South Africa together", carried in most of its campaign posters, was mostly to do with the economy. Analytically, to "grow South Africa" connotes the way the ANC focused a great deal of attention on the need to improve South Africa's economic growth prospects against a background of a weak outlook, as reflected earlier. Such a message was crucial because South Africa has not managed to grow its economy for the past few years, owing to a number of both domestic and global challenges. If achieved, economic growth would entail the creation of much-needed jobs for mostly the youth who are increasingly finding it difficult to get jobs.

Compared to the ANC, both the DA and the EFF were more explicit in their poster messages on the subject of the economy (especially as it relates to jobs):

"Jobs Not Corruption" (DA, 2019).

"Our Land & Jobs Now" (EFF, 2019).

Despite speaking to matters that resonated with a larger voting audience, by being more explicit on the subject of "jobs", the DA and EFF appeared to have introduced a temporal dimension to the subject. The immediacy of such is however much more nuanced in the EFF's message where there is an emphasis on the "now". The focus on the economy was crucial for the EFF given the way in which the party since its formation has embraced the idea of "economic freedom" as part of its philosophy. For the party, the reasoning is that the ANC has done very little since 1994 to liberate and empower South Africans. This claim feeds well into the narrative that in South Africa, what was achieved in 1994 was "political" not "economic" liberation (Clarke & Bassett, 2016). There is some merit in this observation as evidenced by glaring racial disparities in property ownership, and growing levels of poverty and inequality within the broader society (see, Seekings & Nattrass, 2015). In turn, what has happened in South Africa is the emergence of overwhelmingly high numbers of distributional conflicts emanating from a host of socioeconomic challenges that a large segment of the population experiences. Therefore, for any party to win an election, it has to put across a message that has the potential of attracting the "economic vote". Such being the case, we cannot say with certainty that the 2019 election in South Africa was won purely on the basis of the economic vote. Suffice to say that matters of the economy were noticeable and crucial during the campaign period, but there might have been a number of other factors that determined the outcome of the election. Among these, we argue, the economy had a huge influence. This is not novel as it tends to support the longstanding view by orthodox Marxists that the "economic base of society" is key in determining what happens elsewhere within the "superstructure" (politics, law or the family).

5. CONCLUSION

This study has concluded that the three leading political parties in South Africa used posters to help entrench their overarching campaign messages to the hearts and minds of the voters. In their posters, the parties prioritised the anchor messages carrying the tone which they believed would resonate with the target audience. The study found that the general tone used by the EFF in their political rallies and mainstream media found expression in their posters. They used radical, strong messages depicting urgency, such as “Our Land & Jobs Now”. The ANC used undertones which resonated with the party’s drive towards renewal. The DA’s campaign was largely about exposing what the party considered were the ANC’s failures in government.

Crucially, our findings show that campaign posters remain durable outlets of political communication where issues that dominate public debate find expression in the periods leading to an election. This “durability” aspect is also complemented by the affective appeal that campaign posters possess. In the 2019 South African election, such posters carried messages that touched on unresolved issues of the economy, land, and immigration. These issues, we argue, will continue to dictate the conduct of future electoral campaigns in South Africa.

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