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Party politics, civil society and local democracy – Reflections from Johannesburg

Claire Bénit-Gbaffou

Abstract
Party politics is generally absent from urban governance or urban politics theories or debates, or present only anecdotally or as a 'black box', whilst they are more and more described, especially in Cities of the South, as central to urban societies, access to resources and social dynamics. This paper attempts, through the case of the role of the ANC in civil society in Johannesburg, to uncover some of the place of political parties in urban governance. It first argues that the party local branch is often crucial as a platform of mobilization, expression and debates around local needs, being more structured and able to access channels of decision than other civil society organizations or local government participatory structures. However, its strong embededness in urban local societies also means a form of social control restricting the ability of civil society to revolt and challenge urban policies more radically.

Key words
Political parties; urban governance; urban politics; local democracy; accountability; participation; clientelism; ANC; Johannesburg.

1. Introduction

The 2009 attack of the social movement Abahlali baseMjondolo[1], violently driven out of their eThekwini stronghold, Kennedy Road informal settlement, by African National Congress (ANC) local branch activists, with the support of the police and the Provincial government, indicates how much local party politics matters in neighborhood dynamics, civil society structure and local democracy more broadly. It raises the question of the ANC's commitment to democracy, as indicated by Steven Friedman (2009), and of its ability to tolerate different, oppositional views, especially in low-income areas where the number of service delivery protests keeps increasing[2].

Academic debates in the last decade have raged on the nature of South African democracy, given the ANC dominant position (Gilliomee and Simkins 1999, Southall 2001). Some researchers suggest that ANC dominance might be a necessary, temporary condition for state stability and reconstruction (Butler 2000), and that ANC dominance does not prevent democratic debate, within the ANC on the one hand; outside of the ANC with civil society, on the other (Friedman 2003). This paper attempts to look at those spaces for democratic debate at the local level, using five neighborhoods in Johannesburg as case studies of different political contexts (see **Table 1**), by unraveling the ways in which a mass political party such as the ANC[3] deploys its strategy locally.

[1] Abahlali baseMjondolo (Zulu meaning "The people who live in shacks") is a social movement born in eThekwini (former Durban) in 2005, in opposition to the municipal policies of "eradication" of informal settlements. It has recently won a court case declaring unconstitutional the provincial act on 'Slum Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums' (Huchzermeyer, 2009).

[2] "Service delivery protests" are mass urban protests from low-income residents demanding better (material, but also political) access to urban basic services (Friedman 2010). They are being followed closely by central government, especially in the context of upcoming 2011 local elections. See COGTA (2010).

[3] A mass party not only entails the mass of its affiliates, but also the role members are supposed to play in the party, and how the party structures reflect the importance of members' participation (Darracq, 2008).

Table 1: Characteristics of Case Study Neighborhoods

	Location	Political leadership	Other observations
Area A	Inner city	ANC led	-
Area B	Inner city	Non-ANC	Two wards B1 & B2
Area C	Township	ANC & non-ANC	Ward C1 ANC-led; Ward C2 non-ANC-led
Area D	Low-income surburban	Non-ANC	Includes an ANC-dominated hostel
Area E	Township	ANC dominated	-

The paper is based on in-depth ethnographic research conducted since 2006, complemented with observations gathered as an activist engaging locally around issues of xenophobia. Research included in-depth interviews with key local leaders (ward committee members, councilors, party branch executive members, community policing, street committee and community-based organization leaders) and participant observation in many public and collective meetings, at the local and municipal levels.

The paper argues that the ANC is key in brokering the relationship between low income-residents and the state. It examines the way in which the party plays this brokerage role, and the consequences it has for local democracy. After exploring the existing (scarce) literature on the topic, the paper unfolds in two main directions. Firstly, it analyses how local party branches animate collective and social life, and allows for residents' expression of local needs, which are otherwise not heard by the often dysfunctional participatory structures of local government. Secondly, the paper reflects on ways in which local party branches interact with other civil society organizations, and shows how they are able to exert an important social control over local public debates.

2. Preamble

Literature on party politics has mainly focused on politics at national level, and has seldom paid attention to local politics, especially urban politics. While there is a vast literature on urban politics - constructed as a sub-discipline on its own (Sapotichne et al. 2007)- it mostly focuses on the relationship between urban government and non-state actors such as business lobbies and civil society organizations. Party politics is generally absent, only anecdotal, and in any case vastly under-theorized, in understanding "who governs" the city. For example, classic theories of urban regimes (Stone 1989) and their avatars[4] state that party politics hardly matters, as growth or neoliberal coalitions persist in time and outlast, at least in their strategic direction if not in their specific agents, electoral change. Studies in terms of "political machines", which were central in early approaches of American urban politics (Callow 1976), do not seem to have been pursued as a research field – possibly because political machines were seen as ephemeral, a testimony of traditional politics that would be swept away by the consolidation of democracy. While broader studies on clientelism have contested this understanding (Briquet and Sawicki 1998, Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007), they seldom come down to the urban, local level. Contemporary studies on *urban* clientelism remain scarce, except in some of the Latin American literature

[4] See debates on the rescaling of the state, neoliberalism and the city (Brenner and Theodore 2005).

on cities (see Gay 1998 for a good summary; Auyero 1999, Auyero et al 2009); and, increasingly, in Indian literature (Benjamin 2004, Chatterjee 2004).

Chatterjee offers in this respect a useful conceptual dichotomy, opposing "civil society" to "political society". He argues that the notion of civil society, resting on a universal conception of citizenship, individual rights and relationship with the State, is limited to a narrow socio-economic elite in cities of the South. In contrast, he argues that the majority of residents, whose lives can at least partly be characterized by informality (housing, employment), constitute the "political society" – engaging the state not with a full citizen's status (due to the "illegal" position they are in) but on more flexible, blurred and precarious terms. The informality of their position leads them constantly to *have to* engage in informal arrangements with party politics, local politicians, councilors and administrations. This is a permanent feature of low income residents' relationship with the state: it is not, for him, a temporary step towards full citizenship, as it would be argued by other, more optimistic, scholars (see literature on "insurgent citizenships", or "degrees" of citizenship envisaged as steps towards full recognition of the marginalized or disenfranchised by state and society: Holston 2008; Miraftab 2009). In particular, while collective resistance and mobilization might yield temporary successes (against eviction, for access to certain urban goods and services, etc.), Chatterjee does not glorify them as a possible revolutionary movements, but places them in the existing power structure, and stresses the constant need for renegotiation, depending on shifts in political alliances, opportunities and contexts. Whilst this view is limited and limiting in enabling one to understand social change, it also seems closer to the everyday realities of urban governance in a majority of low-income neighborhoods – where radical social or political change is not what is at stake.

This framework is helpful in carving a key role for party politics in cities of the South: however, Chatterjee's analysis does not focus on party politics per se – their place, roles and strategies at a local or metropolitan level. And yet, many African cities specialists call for a better understanding of party politics in urban governance (Tostensen et al. 2001, Simone 2004a, Lindell 2008, Pieterse and Van Donk 2008). Understanding the politics of a place and more precisely political parties' strategies is crucial for unraveling the dynamics of urban violence (ethnic or religious riots for instance: Dorier-Apprill 1997); the persistence of groups of thugs and militias, important agents of daily urban management, that have often been supported and structured, at least at a stage of their development, by political parties (Fourchard and Albert 2003, Anderson 2002, Kagwanja 2006); everyday access to resources and livelihood strategies of low-income residents, for which the local party leader is a patron as much as the traditional healer, local chief or youth representative can be (Simone 2004b); and the African specificities of urban governance, such as the importance of ethnic linkages, contributing to the ethnicization of party politics (Tostensen et al 2001, Rakodi 2002).

Why is it then, that this area of research is relatively unexplored? Low (2007) explains it by the fact that, within the discipline of political studies, broader scales of analysis (international, national, sometimes regional) are more prestigious, falling into the field of international

relations or nation-state building. On the contrary, party politics at the local scale are considered unimportant as they seldom change the face of the world. To this lack of prestige, one can add the moral discredit attached to local party politics: it is considered, not only in popular discourse, corrupt, the realm of personal interest and of quest for power or financial gain, in opposition to the supposedly more "authentic" politics of the people, as studied by the vast literature on social movements (McAdam 1996, Tarrow 1998). The relationship between "high politics" and "petty politics" is seen as antagonistic rather than as two faces of the same coin[5]. In African contexts more specifically, this absence can also be explained by the political dangers of unraveling and exposing parties' strategies in authoritarian countries, or countries in which state and party violence remains a usual if not legitimate way of fighting political opposition. This silence might also be attributed to the fact that, relative to Latin American or Indian contexts, the existence of multiparty political systems is recent in Africa[6], as well as the rise of urbanization and the emergence of large metropolitan areas.

3. ANC local branches as spaces of local democracy

Coming back to South Africa, Friedman (2003) argues, in the controversy on the nature of South African democracy in a dominant party system, that the ANC provides a space for internal (democratic) debate. Debates are firstly occurring within the ANC structures – although it is not clear whether factionalism[7] has opened more space for debate or on the contrary made debate more difficult (Friedman 2010). There is also a level of debate between different scales or levels of the party – local (ward), zonal (comprising several wards, often reflecting functional regions), regional (corresponding to metropolitan boundaries), provincial and national. Darracq (2008) has shown how local branches were given more political weight in the party in the context of Polokwane political battle between the Mbeki and the Zuma factions, since they were sending delegates who ultimately had the voting power.

These are the two dimensions of democratic, participatory spaces (that one might call horizontal and vertical respectively) that I would like to explore, in relation to local urban issues confronted by residents. The horizontal dimension refers to the debates within the branch; the vertical dimension relies on the possible ability of local branches to bring issues up the ANC hierarchy, in a bottom-up movement, and to actually get answers from this hierarchy.

3.1. The party branch, more accountable to local residents than the ward committee?

Not all the branches are functional at all times, but in some places, the local ANC

[5] This absence of theoretical articulation is highly problematic, both in principle and in practice, as experienced when doing fieldwork (Bénit-Gbaffou 2010).

[6] I am grateful to René Otayek for this suggestion.

[7] Factionalism (battles within the party) has been increasing in the ANC since the mid-2000s. Battles for power crystallized in what is referred to as 'Polowkane'- the 52nd ANC national conference held in 2007 in Polokwane, opposing two candidates for party leadership: Thabo Mbeki (then South African president) and Jacob Zuma (current President). The victory of the Zuma faction led to the creation of a new party, seceding from the ANC (COPE, Congress of the People); to the election of Zuma as the South African president in 2009; and to ongoing factional divisions at all levels of the party and state structures.

branch constitutes the *only* structured organization holding regular, well-attended meetings. The ability of the ANC to attract masses relies possibly on political deeply entrenched loyalties, but also pragmatically on members' strategies for access to resources[8]. Indeed, the ANC, as the dominant party and the party in power, is seen as able to deliver, to get members access to information and to resources.

The party is certainly not the only space where people fish for opportunities (Mbembe and Roitman 2002, Simone 2004a); but it is a crucial one. Significant is the question raised by a member in such an ANC branch general meeting (area B1, 15.04.09): "If I am not an ANC member, can I access this [social] service?", as well as the answer he obtained – that it was a government service, so he could; but that of course, ANC might help. While such an answer is directly building up clientelist relationships, it is also probably true: the ANC often acts as a broker between low-income residents and the state, by virtue of being accessible, "on the ground", aware of the different public opportunities on offer, and able to navigate the complexities of the South African state apparatus (Bénit-Gbaffou forthcoming).

In many ways, ANC local branches are competing with local government participatory structures[9]. For instance, they mimic the structures and functions of ward committees. In Area B1, the branch created several sub-committees around the key functions theoretically performed by the ward committee: Housing, Safety and Security, Environment, Job and Training, etc. In a ward led by an opposition party, doubling up the (opposition-dominated) ward committee might be an explicit strategy to overtake the functions of the ward committee. But it also reflects the needs to deal with the most pressing urban local issues; it allows for building membership and mobilizing members, for instance through organizing weekly local housing surveys, encouraging participation in street patrols, etc. It is not always unproblematic: in area A, the ANC Youth League, led by a few turbulent young men, regularly proposes (in public and in ANC meetings) to tackle the question of "hijacked buildings"[10]: they call for local youth to carry out surveys of the hijacked buildings in the area, and chase away the "foreigners" (migrants from the rest of the African continent) who they consider responsible for local social ills.

The ward committee structure has been shown (Bénit-Gbaffou 2008) to be dysfunctional as a means to bring residents' issues at a higher, for instance metropolitan, level. Ward councilors indeed do not have much power, nor much say in Council (with obvious variations according to each councilor's personal political network), whilst they have huge responsibilities: they are presented as the

[8] As theorized by Gaxie (1977) in his analysis of activism: individuals join a party for "collective incentives" (ideology, identity, solidarity) and/or for "selective incentives" (material – money, contract, resources, or symbolic - social status, recognition, network).

[9] The post-apartheid state is committed to both redistribution (to correct the ills of the past) and participation (as form of exercise of democratic rights that the majority has been deprived of for decades) – sometimes conflicting objectives. Participation at the local level is organized mainly through ward committees: elected representatives working with the ward councilor to facilitate communication between voters and the municipality.

[10] "Hijacked buildings" are buildings which have been taken over by a group of residents (chasing away legitimate owners or tenants, or using the fact that the building is vacant or the owner absent). They can be, when the building hijackers are running criminal activities, crime "hot spots" – but it is not always the case, as the situation mainly reflects the housing crisis.

agents of service delivery as well as the channel of communication between the Council and residents. Their lack of power is due to several factors: first, in Johannesburg especially, the Council does not offer spatial portfolios, but rather thematic committees[11]. Secondly, councilors often do not have a direct interest in bringing issues from the bottom-up, especially issues that might challenge public policies adopted by the ANC municipal or national government: they are less accountable to their voters than to the party regional hierarchy, which will decide, in the last resort, which ANC member is to be the ANC candidate for the ward. There is evidence that locally-grounded leaders have often been discarded in favor of candidates less locally legitimate but more powerful in the party[12] (**Box 1**; **Box 10**; see also Low et al. 2007).

Box 1 - The grounded activist versus the party animal

There were two possible ANC candidates for the 2006 municipal election: one (female) active, grounded social worker in the area; and one (male) outsider (actually not living in the neighbourhood), qualified by others as a "party animal". The latter was chosen eventually. The former, maybe as compensation, was appointed Community Development Worker (CDW) by the Gauteng Provincial Government – a position that structurally competes with the councillor's as its function is very similar: to help residents accessing public services and liaising with local government. In an opposition-led ward like Area B2 (as the ANC candidate was defeated), competition between the councilor and the CDW is even more obvious.

Within the branch, competition continues between the two types of ANC leaders (on-the-ground versus politically-astute). It takes the form of constant debates on the branch's activities and strategies - to be focused on social or on political activities. Such a debate arose when it was time for the ANC to choose ANC candidates for the election of ward committee members – the local activist wanted to nominate local leaders according to their skills (for instance the CPF chair, also an ANC executive member, for the portfolio of Safety and Security); while the party animal rather wanted to nominate the most loyal and active ANC members.

The grounded activist/ party-animal dichotomy is not the only one that features in ANC internal debates. Representation of different sub-constituencies in the branch can reflect social and spatial diversity within the ward, and therefore help shape collective debate around local issues, urban governance, and policy priorities (Gervais-Lambony 2008). *A contrario*, failure to recognize this diversity is a matter of debate (**Box 2**):

Box 2 - Diversity within the party branch – accommodate difference, or else…

(Fieldwork diary, 12.07.2006)

I had expected with great impatience the day of the ward committee elections in [area C2]. Won by a Democratic Alliance (DA)[13] councillor in 2006, the ward was to be the ground of a political battle, and the ANC local branch had been actively preparing a take-over strategy, selecting its candidates to stand as ward committee members.
The local community hall was surprisingly packed. The ANC local branch leader was in heated discussion with a group brought by collective taxi from a nearby Black informal settlement. As this settlement (included in 2005 in ward C2) represented the ANC stronghold in this traditionally DA township, the ANC branch had made sure the ANC members from the informal settlement were present at the election – although they were marginalised in the branch executive

[11] With two exceptions (a Soweto and an Inner City committee), but which limited power.

[12] Decisions by regional ANC structures can overturn local branches' nominations, using several types of arguments (like the rule for gender equity, or racial representativeness, for instance). However it does not have a total freedom to appoint a candidate (Darracq 2008).

[13] The main opposition party in South Africa.

committee, dominated by middle-class Coloured residents. The branch executive had attributed them some positions as candidates, but not the ones considered the most important (environment, corporate services – not housing, infrastructures).
The invited members (50 to 60 people) went into the hall, waited for the DA councillor to open the session, and then left the hall, leaving their seat empty: as if saying "we are not voting cattle!". Subsequently, the ANC candidates were all defeated.

This revolt by a fraction of the ANC branch, leading to a political defeat for the ANC, showcased the power of differing groups to be heard and eventually shift power balances within the branch. Beyond mere political factionalism, different living conditions, different racial groups, different urban challenges experienced by ANC leaders and their group can therefore inform internal debates and positions: there is some scope within the branch for difference and competition – making the branch a space for democratic debate, permeated by local urban issues.
ANC members are indeed, often more than councilors or ward committee members, in contact with everyday residents' needs and challenges. In electoral times, and as the ANC is a mass party and (functional) local branches carry door-to-door campaigns, ANC members are directly confronted by residents demanding answers and accounts on promises made. Outside election times, the need for the branch to constantly recruit and mobilize members[14] leads it to try and develop answers to residents' concerns.

3.2. Party hierarchies: providing more efficient bottom-up channels than local government?

Simultaneously, it seems[15] that the ANC hierarchized structure (ward, zone, region, province) and party networks offer quite efficient channels for information and requests to go from the ground to the top (whatever "the top" may be, for different types of urban issues). To an extent that remains to be defined, ANC caucuses are places of debate on urban issues (Low et al 2007), whereby, in particular, individual councilors raise issues pertaining to their ward– and they seem to do so more efficiently than in Council structures, where voting discipline is too crucial to be publically jeopardized by contradictory debates within the ranks of ANC councilors.
Indeed, the ANC structure includes different scales of representation offering functional platforms for locally-specific concerns to be raised: ward and zonal committees regroup wards of a similar urban and social profile and therefore define functional geographical zones: inner city, Soweto, Alexandra, etc. This is not the case in Johannesburg council structure, which has been shaped to avoid regional representation beyond the ward level[16], in order to distance it from former apartheid segregated local government structures. Secondly, even if one should not overestimate party control over lower

[14] In order to be able to send delegates to higher level decision-making structures in the ANC, a branch has to be "functional", e.g. to have more than 100 members (Darracq 2008).

[15] While research on ANC branches has been engaged with since 2006 through the study of civil society and participation dynamics, I have only recently focused on the ANC internal dynamics. The evidence I have gathered so far stems mostly from the local level, and observations at council municipal and committee levels; I have only indirect evidence on vertical accountability within the ANC, and on decision-making processes at supra-local levels within the ANC.

[16] Except for administrative regions whose power remains to be tested: Mabin 2009.

party structures such as branches[17], there is a quite efficient and rapid procedure to have information transferred from the branch level to the zone, to the region and sometimes to the provincial level of the party: in contrast with the way municipal council works, which is far from being that simple and clear, especially since its restructuring according to New Public Management principles, leading to a high level of fragmentation (Bénit-Gbaffou 2008).

Outside the ANC quite hierarchical procedure, there are also possible shortcuts used by ANC members, using their personal ANC network to have their view considered at higher scales and levels of power. This is well illustrated in **Box 3**, where local residents succeeded in having their voice heard through the brokerage of the ANC local branch, which used its political connections to have the Mayoral Committee pressuring irresponsive local municipal structures.

Box 3 - ANC group sidelining the municipal hostel manager to access the Mayor

In Area D hostel[18], conflicts are rife between the hostel's management (Joshco, Johannesburg Social Housing Company – a municipal entity) and tenants' organizations. Joshco works with a local Tenants Committee, which lacks local legitimacy – considered too cooperative with Joshco, never holding public meetings nor conducting elections. In contrast, ANC and SANCO (South African National Civics Organisation)[19] ward structures are holding well-attended public meetings and are collecting tenants' grievances on a number of issues (rent level, electricity rates, issues of rental lease, etc.).

One of such grievances is the high electricity tariffs charged by Joshco's chosen subcontractor. The Alliance's complaint to Joshco has fallen onto deaf ears. While SANCO has used intimidating and violent tactics, the ANC branch has rather attempted to side-line Joshco and pressurize it from the top. It has used both ANC and trade unions networks (the hostel is reserved for municipal employees, all unionized) to bring the issues at the Mayoral Committee level[20]. Joshco has subsequently changed its subcontractor, and electricity tariffs have been revised.

Using one's political networks is often efficient in finding pragmatic solutions and forcing unresponsive local authorities or entities to listen to residents' claims. However, these networks are fragile. Zuma's election in May 2009 has for instance led to the restructuring of the ANC regional executive[21], and, as a consequence, to the reshuffling of Johannesburg Mayoral Committee. For Area D ANC branch, who had established working relationships with the previous Mayoral Committee (**Box 3**), this has

[17] There is often a gap between the ANC elite's vision and that of local ANC representatives (councilors or ANC branch executives), as reflected by the disjuncture experienced during the May 2008 xenophobic attacks. Whilst the ANC national leadership condemned xenophobia, local councilors and members of ANC local branches (confronted more directly by the pressure of their voting base) sometimes participated in fueling the conflict (Misago 2009).

[18] Hostels were part of the apartheid migrant labor system. Laborers were sent to urban areas without their families, on a supposedly temporary basis. Hostels were managed by traditional chiefs, collaborating with apartheid authorities to maintain these rural linkages.

[19] Civics are local residents associations (usually in low-income areas). The term emerged in the 1980s where local resistance to apartheid gained visibility in urban townships, in the form of rent boycott, attempts to render townships ungovernable, etc. A national federation of civics, SANCO, was subsequently created. Since 1994 it has forged an alliance with the ANC, depriving it to some extent of its necessary critical distance towards the (now democratic) government.

[20] The Mayoral committee is the Council's executive branch, consisting of ten ANC councillors appointed by the Mayor, under the advice of the ANC region.

[21] Mayor Amos Masondo, belonging to the Mbeki faction, has been reelected as the ANC Regional Chair, but with a very slim majority, and therefore saw his mayoral power weakened.

meant they had to start again their networking process. Personal political networks are more fragile and difficult to maintain than public anonymous departments and functions (Chatterjee 2004).

These political networks, often built during the struggle[22], are binding people from diverse social origins and positions within the ANC[23]. In this respect, and in the context of factionalism, ANC members are often playing one type of network, or ANC or government structure, versus another. **Box 4** shows how different types of networks within government and the party can be played by different local agents in their competition for public resources.

Box 4 - How a former bank robber connects to a top rank official in Gauteng Provincial Legislature

In a public housing complex within area C2, two local civics are competing to appear as "the" legitimate residents representative body by local government, in order to be the better positioned to get public resources (e.g. contracts for the renovation of the flats).

The most established civic has a long-standing working relationship with the Provincial Housing Department (which manages the complex) – and gets most of the contracts for its constituency. The second one, newly established, is gaining power through the ANC. Led by a former ANC activist (who claims he used to rob banks to fill the coffers of the ANC underground), the civic runs the ANC campaigns in the complex, an opposition party stronghold. Through his network established during the struggle, the former bank robber also has linkages with top ANC leaders and is able to access the Provincial Legislature (which has a section dealing with community participation) to put pressure on the Provincial Housing Department and marginalize the more established civic.

What is apparent in these stories is the intricacies of ANC and state structures and networks, and the fact that the former are used extensively to access the state at its decision-making levels – in order to avoid being stuck at the lower level of the municipal administration or political power (ward committee and councilor). It is partly explained by the inability of such ground-level state structures or representatives to provide answers to local requests or needs, and the necessity of scale-jumping in order to reach decision-making levels of the state. The ANC structure and networks provide a useful, possibly efficient, bridge to those higher levels of government. In a way it shows the invention of a new space of participation, in response to the failure of the municipal participatory spaces. But it also relies on, and entertains, a confusion between the state and the party that the rise of factionalism within the ANC has probably recently increased.

3.3. Limits to discussions and challenges to urban policies

If belonging to the ANC local branch offers a space to raise local issues, it has obvious limitations in the extent to which existing public / ANC policies can be questioned. This varies from branch to branch, and the extent to which local leaders can be critical or turbulent within the ANC depends on many factors. In any case, the party does not tolerate criticism made by party-members outside of the party, in particular in newspapers – following its political culture marked by democratic centralism (Johnson 2003). The most famous example is the case of

[22] 'The struggle' in a South African context refers to the broad area of opposition to the apartheid state. 'Belonging to the struggle', or having belonged to it, is still a key element in legitimizing positions of power within the state or the ANC – it defines the credentials of an individual.

[23] Such socially heterogeneous networks might gradually lose their importance, possibly replaced by others, more socially homogeneous.

Trevor Ngwane, former ANC councilor in Soweto: after having publicly expressed his opposition to the municipal strategy of commodification of water, he had no choice but to leave the party. Other local ANC activists, also impressed by some devastating effects of this policy on the ground, prefer to keep quiet: "personally I am not favorable to [the commodification of water]; but politically I am supporting it" (ANC branch executive member, area C2). Challenges from ANC local branches to municipal/ANC policies are limited to questions relating to a specific project, or to its implementation – it is seldom a challenge over a policy direction, or an input on a possible new one.

This however is not very different from other existing channels of collective action – low-income residents' voices in urban governance are seldom able to intervene at policy level. In African cities, their strength often resides in their possible opposition to policy or project *implementation* through active or passive resistance, using their mass to possibly block a project, a site, an access point (Fox 1969; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2001). Gay (1999) also argues, from a Brazilian urban perspective, that some clientelist exchanges are delivering more collective goods to the poor than generous but never implemented pro-poor policies. Without denying that social movements can impact the fate of the poor in cities of the South through policy change, it is worth considering the small improvements and interventions that low-income residents are able to achieve, through, in particular, their local party branch affiliation. It might be that these small changes are only consolidating existing power structures; but the outcomes of these engagements between residents and the party/state are never fixed or predetermined (Williams, 2004; Corbridge et al. 2005; Cornwall, 2007). Such tiny improvement (thanks to the ANC branch), failing to challenge the overall City "global city" policy but certainly meaningful for residents, are illustrated in **Box 5**:

Box 5 - The fate of a community soccer field: local ANC branch the only force challenging the municipal project

Preparing for the 2010 Soccer World Cup, Area B1 was undergoing rapid change: the local community soccer field was being converted, under the auspices of the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA: a municipal structure managed independently), into a Cricket Club.

The project raised residents' outrage, on several bases. First, as soccer is still considered a sport 'for' Blacks and cricket a sport 'for' Indians, Black residents (a majority in the area, also generally poorer than local Indian residents) felt marginalized from what used to be 'their' space. Secondly, the conversion entrenches a shift from a community facility to a (global?) select 'club', possibly excluding local residents. Thirdly, in the soccer frenzy for the 2010 Cup, depriving local residents of the opportunity to play soccer is unfortunate – there is no alternative soccer field in the area.

Residents raised the issue in a JDA meeting, in vain. They wrote a petition that they sent to JDA, in vain. They did not approach their (opposition party) councilor, because of their ANC loyalty; instead, they brought the issue to their local ANC branch, which obtained a meeting with JDA. Worried that the ANC leaders could block the project, JDA agreed to build an alternative community soccer field in the area – an outcome that residents alone had not managed to get.

As is the case with this community soccer field, low-income residents systematically engage with the ANC local branch in order to get a collective good, and ANC leaders take the lead. They act as a civic structure would, bargaining and putting pressure on the municipality. Branches can be efficient thanks to their potential political power, that City officials or agencies fear all the more that it is rather undefined: which

ANC networks are branch members able to mobilize? At what level? How powerful? The structure of organized residents' relationships with the ANC is however different from what has been described in Brazilian cities as collective clientelism (Gay 1998) – whereby a group of residents offers its collective political support to the politician who will provide them with a collective good (electrification of the area, recreation center, etc.). In Johannesburg, competition between political parties is limited, even in wards led by opposition parties, as in area B1 just mentioned: there, political loyalty towards the ANC was still too strong for residents to have considered approaching the opposition councilor, although she might have been supportive, especially as it was election times. The two stories below (**Box 6**) reflect the fact that "clients" are still quite shy in their use of bargaining tactics with their "patrons", in South African cities:

Box 6 - Individual versus collective clientelism – still learning the rules of the game?

Teresa, the ward committee member for health in 2000-2005, was awarded a contract by the City of Johannesburg to carry out a survey on HIV/AIDS in Area C1 informal settlements. She left her job at a local clinic to run the project. On the eve of the 2006 local elections, the ID[24] approached her to stand as their candidate in a neighbouring ward (Area C2), which she accepted: but she lost the elections. In the meantime her contract was terminated by the City– accusing her of using her survey in Area C1 to campaign for the ID (even though she was standing in another ward). She lost everything: her job, her contract, her political position and credibility; because she did not understand the nature (clientelist/ personal) of the "contract".

Alvina, leader of an informal settlement in Area C1 and chair of the Area C Development Forum (gathering a number of local civics), used to be an ANC member. When a DA councillor was elected in her ward in 2000, she cooperated with her –"I just want development to take place". Subsequently she was expelled from the ANC. She was approached by the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)[25] which requested her to help organise a meeting with all informal settlements residents. It was not an organized deal, though; it could have been the case, since Alvina reckons that "those people can deliver! […] They can have their voice heard! They just bring people from the hostels and have them *toyi-toyi* [protest], and get they what they want". However she did not bargain her support nor did she discuss possible political support from the area to the IFP, in exchange for IFP provision of collective goods.

Time has come (yet) for collective clientelism, whereby groups of residents have enough political astuteness (or cynicism) to bargain with a variety of politicians to get local collective benefits– limiting for the moment Gay's argument about clientelism as form of accountability. In any case, whilst the ANC branches are offering a platform for local debate, democratic participation, and even some accountability, it is important to stress the limitations of such platforms. They cannot engage meaningfully with residents' deeper criticisms on broader ANC or municipal policies, such as the urban growth and renewal agenda that is affecting lower-income residents mostly negatively, especially in the inner city (through evictions; rising rents; frustration

[24] The Independent Democrats (ID) is a party created in 2003 and popular especially in Coloured areas. It formed an alliance with the Democratic Alliance (DA) in 2010, to try and consolidate a credible opposition to the ANC.

[25] Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) is an opposition party defending the Zulu traditional and cultural values. Its basis is found mostly in rural areas in the Province of KwaZulu Natal, but also in urban hostels where migrant workers (often originating from this region) are concentrated. IFP-dominated hostels were often at the core of urban conflict in the 1990s within the townships, in violent confrontation with ANC-dominated township residents.

to see public funding being spent without it benefiting local residents; etc.). The understanding of these limitations is clearly displayed in **Box 7**, narrating the ANC branch reaction to a massive public expression of xenophobia.

Box 7- Condemning xenophobia, but not deconstructing the scape-goating process – How could the ANC say, 'It is not them, it's us!'

(Fieldwork diary, 01.04.09)

It is pre-election time, and the ANC local branch in [Area B1] is actively campaigning for Zuma, the ANC national candidate for Presidency. An ANC meeting is called. It is packed, mainly with Black residents (although the area is mixed, with poor Whites, Coloured and Indian residents): we are expecting the Mayor of Johannesburg, who happens to live in the ward and therefore belongs to the branch.

I am wondering what he will say to praise the ANC in this specific ward, which has seen evictions as the result of the municipal urban renewal policy. A skilled politician, he avoids as much as possible talking about the ward, rather praising ANC national policies and highlighting general urban policies.

Questions burst out: what are you doing about foreigners taking our houses, our jobs, our wives, our social services, bringing crime into the country?

The Mayor is embarrassed, as well as the ANC local leadership. He condemns xenophobia, reminds the audience that we do not want another outburst of violence after last year's events (exactly one year ago), and asks the residents to be understanding. He states that not much can be done ("migration cannot be stopped, it can be managed"), and reminds that thousands of South Africans live abroad – what would happen if they were chased away? And that is all.

And *in petto*, I think… of course. The ANC can't say "it is not them [the foreigners], it is us [government / the ANC], who are evicting you, not providing enough affordable houses, social services, access to basic services". It would be suicidal for the party. But as they can't say that, they cannot efficiently fight xenophobia, other than with abstract arguments that cannot answer the question: "why can't I find a decent and affordable house?" Educating the masses… but not to criticize the party.

4. The relationships between the ANC and other civil society organizations – from subtle social control to intolerance for opposition?

ANC local branches, when active, are providing a space for local democracy – space of debate, space of engagement between residents and the state. But this space is not autonomous from the rest of civil society: the ANC has an important influence in other civil society organizations, directly and indirectly. It is shaping to some extent their strategies and their access to resource and to voice, at least in two respects. First, the ANC deploys its cadres, more or less explicitly, to the main other social structures implemented locally. Secondly, there are few local civic leaders who do not belong to, or at least sympathize with, the ANC. This intricate relationship between non-ANC local organizations and ANC branches is understandable; but it leads to a form of social control inhibiting criticism towards the party and government policies.

4.1. Party strategy – different forms and degrees of deployment into civil society organizations and participatory structures

ANC local branches actively deploy their local cadres into various civil society organizations. This is not necessarily illegitimate – the ANC often represents a major organization locally, and as such can have representatives in forums aiming at representing civil society in its diversity. It is only logical that ANC members end up numerous in other civic organizations – and sometimes it is not the result of any specific strategy. There is however a difference between deploying an ANC

cadre as representing the ANC in a structure (with other stakeholders' representatives), and deploying an ANC cadre to become the (supposedly non-partisan) executive member of another structure. It is often the case in heavily politicized ward committees (Deacon and Piper 2008), even though they have limited powers. It is also common to see Community Policing Forums[26] (CPFs) chaired by ANC members deployed by the party: it is the case in all of the 5 case studies.

Depending on the personality and local legitimacy of the ANC deployed member, and the fierceness of local competition, ANC presence in the executive committee of those two participatory bodies (ward committee and CPF) can happen peacefully and almost un-noticed, or become a political battle. In Area A, the ANC Youth League bussed supporters to take over the CPF leadership, and succeeded in doing so. During ward committee elections, especially in wards won by opposition parties, the game is for each party to mobilize as many supporters as possible. The ANC being the only mass party able to mobilize members in big numbers, often ends up the winner in such games. These strategies and counter-strategies to win over elected structures are well illustrated by the shifts in the ways ward committees members have been elected over time – in an incremental path towards democracy (**Box 8**):

Box 8 - From secrecy to democratization to technicization – local battles for the ward committee

After the 2000 municipal elections came the time to elect the first ward committees in Johannesburg. No one knew really how this was to happen. Often it was the councilor who called local residents to stand as candidates – and sometimes residents' participation was minimal. Other times, especially in opposition-parties' strongholds, the ANC mobilized its members *en masse*, to be part of the meeting and be elected as ward committee members. This sometimes led to highly dysfunctional ward committees – where the purpose was to block the councilor and the committee rather than to work with her (Mohamed 2006).

After the 2006 municipal elections, Area B1 DA councilor, in order to prevent the local ANC to take over the ward committee, had to mobilize her supporters and, more broadly (as the DA is not a mass party), publicize the election widely in the ward. She requested each candidate to campaign on the spot, and tell the audience why they stood for their specific portfolio and how they would contribute. While some candidates were obviously elected according to party affiliation and racial profile, some managed to convince a great majority of voters across party, race and class.

In area B2, an IFP ward, both IFP and ANC had nominated their candidates for ward committee positions. Both parties managed to mobilize their constituencies equally, and there were fears of clashes, as there is a history of IFP-ANC violence in the area[27]. In order to defuse tension, the IFP councilor and the ANC branch chair struck a deal: the ward committee members were to be nominated equally by each party (5 for the IFP, 5 for the ANC). Non-aligned civics or residents might have been frustrated, but they were not sufficiently organized to raise the issue.

In 2009, mid-term ward committee elections, however, the election process had become more bureaucratic – in order to avoid outsiders to be brought in to vote. Candidates had to register much in advance, and voters had to be checked on the ward list. Moreover, the vote did not take place in a public meeting: voters just came, voted and went away – the voting office, supervised by the Independent Electoral Commission, was open the whole day. Paradoxically therefore, this tightening of rules has limited public debate and engagement between residents, the councilor and the ward committee candidates.

[26] Community Policing Forums are statutory bodies, where residents and police officers meet regularly around local security issues.

[27] See note 22.

Even with more sophisticated electoral or organizational systems, the ANC has a comparative advantage on other political parties and on civil society organizations – in its mass character; its ability to mobilize; its organization skills and political training. Although some civic organizations have developed specific constitutional or electoral measures to avoid being "hijacked" by ANC members, in some cases they appear relatively powerless when the ANC has decided either to block their relationship with the state; or to take over the leadership of the organization. When political strategies do not work, and in specific cases of high local tensions, physical violence can also be resorted to as a means to weaken or delegitimise oppositional organizations, as seen in Abahlali baseMjondolo mentioned above. In the absence of spaces of public debate that can accommodate strongly opposed views, violence might be the only way the ANC can address a movement that is gaining power outside of the control of the party.

4.2. Civil society organizations' leaders – engagements with political parties

It would be wrong however to think that civic organizations are purely "victims" of ANC strategies of "entry". Some organizations fiercely fight to remain independent from any political affiliations, and even refuse to engage in elections (such is the case with most social movements: Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Anti Eviction Campaign, the Landless People's Movement). The call for a boycott does not mean a lack of engagement with political parties, even if it is conflict-driven; even radical movements adopt a variety of strategies ranging from cooperation to confrontation, depending on shifts in opportunities (Oldfield 2008). Other social movements criticize election boycotts, considering them a renouncing of the will to transform society positively. They more directly engage in the electoral game, presenting candidates in local elections, as independent or part of new local political parties - such as the OKM, Operation Khanyisa Movement[28], emanating from the Anti Privatisation Forum.

But apart from this radical fraction of civil society, the majority of small, locally-based, problem-oriented civil society organizations are much more intertwined with the dominant party. Local leaders are generally also ANC members – not because they have been deployed in the organization by the ANC, but in order to maximize access to information, resource and opportunities. This is well illustrated by Thabiseng's story (**Box 9**) – representative of many local activists.

Box 9 - Multiple belongings and access to state resources

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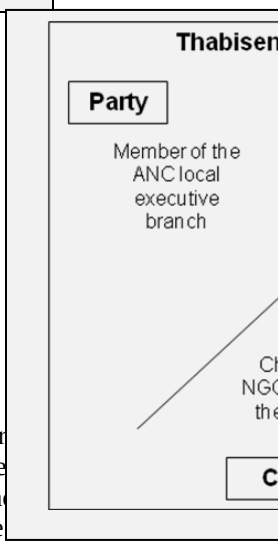

[28] Khanyisa means 'switch the light on', reference to the Anti Privatisation Forum operations in Soweto: reconnecting reside whose electricity has been cut off due to n payment. OKM did not manage to raise significant number of votes in the 2006 local elections (enough though it gained one PR seat in Council), first because of the lack of geographical concentration of its supporters (failing to win a ward), and because it is seen as too radical and too confrontational with the ANC by township residents (Ndletyana 2007).

has a long past of involvement in "the community" through different, more or less formalized, NGO experiences. N

ot a prominent struggle activist, her links with the ANC developed in the mid-1990s, and she was elected to the

local ANC branch executive. She then joined different participatory bodies, such as the Community Policing Forum

(where she was elected chair, deployed by the ANC), and

LETU (school district body involving parents, teachers

and public officials), where she holds the position of Deputy Chair. Her involvement, supported by the ANC, in t

these semi-public bodies, has allowed her to strengthen linkages with the City of Johannesburg, which awarded her

NGO several contracts.

Thabiseng's ability to display different identities in different contexts is analyzed by Simone (2004a) as a rewarding tactics in times of uncertainty and scarce opportunities; and also as a sign of the "fluidity" of power positions in contemporary African cities. This latter analysis however can be debated: tactics such as Thabiseng's require time and commitment. One needs to build one's networks and sustain it through a constant reminding of one's presence and loyalty (Auyero 1999). If positions within each field of power are fragile and easily contested, they are not easy to obtain, and not everybody can find themselves enjoying the benefits of these intertwined linkages. In other words, power patterns are not fluid, and rather tend to consolidate themselves – from a position of power it is possible to build other positions of power in different, although connected, networks. Fluidity however exists in political affiliations and loyalties, according to political opportunities – even if the ease with which one changes political affiliation ("political transhumance") might not yet be as strong in the South African ANC as in many other African parties (Erdmann 2004; Gazibo 2006). In an ANC-dominated party system, in an ANC government and after a political struggle that consolidated powerful networks, the price of political volatility might still be too high, as seen above when stressing the limited use of collective clientelist strategies (**Box 6**). Only in some specific contexts, where there seems to be little to lose (for instance in Coloured townships where the ANC political investment has traditionally been low), do local leaders seek affiliation with any political party willing to adopt them: see **Box 10**.

Box 10- Civic leaders' struggles – becoming councilor, no matter for what party

Most ward candidates for ward C1 and C2 (Table 2) are former civic leaders, standing for non-ANC parties – as independent, but more often for opposition parties such as DA, ID, and even Nadeco[29]. Interestingly (but not exceptionally) the candidates chosen by the ANC have very limited grounding in local activism.

Profiles of ward candidates in Area D (divided into two wards, D1 and D2)

Ward candidate 2006	Former political activity
Ward C1 ANC	No former civic nor political activity (ANC branch member)
Ward C1 DA	Former leader of civic, former ID Party regional secretary
Ward C1 ID	Ward committee member in WC1
Ward C1 Independent	Civic activist: Community Independent Development Forum (CIDF)
Ward C2 ANC	Councillor (elected as DA in 2000, crossed the floor; no previous civic involvement)
Ward C2 ID	Ward committee member in ward C1 (had been the ID candidate in ward C1 in previous elections)
Ward C2 Nadeco	Civic activist: Sowejoca*. Linked with IFP but IFP chose another, Zulu, candidate
Ward X (Melville) ID	Civic leader (wanted to stand as the ID candidate for ward C2 but the ID had already appointed a candidate there– the ID deployed him to Melville)

*Sowejoca was a radical civic during the struggle with a strong cultural dimension – arguing for the promotion of the Coloured identity. This dimension created the basis for an alliance with the IFP, around the need to actively recognize and advance the rights of various cultural groups.

The very same civic leaders who have been strongly arguing for access to free basic services are now standing for the DA or the IFP (whose ideologies and policies are not sympathetic to those ideas), or busy marketing or implementing pre-paid meters for the City. Sometimes, individual political aspiration even overcomes commitment to the area (as one leader accepted to stand for the ID in Melville, a middle class suburban area). Their nomination as (any) party representatives constitutes a way to get power, recognition, and maybe (if they are elected local councilor) a salary.

Such political fluidity remains uncommon, at least in Johannesburg where the ANC is locally dominant, as residents or local leaders have more interests in showing persistent loyalty to the ANC – on top of personal histories and identities that also might make it difficult to part from the liberation party, no matter how much one disagrees with its current policies (Matlala 2009).

4.3. Forms of social control and intolerance for organized opposition

These intertwined belongings, multiplying the chances of getting access to information and resource, however have

[illegible] have certainly led to tensions in public space.

Box 11 - Collective social control and limitations to local debates in public participatory spaces

In area A, a forum has been established to serve as a platform for residents' local concerns – gathering a number of local civics (including political parties such as the ANC and COPE), and attempting to trigger debates on local issues. Although its chair is an executive ANC member, as well as his founder, this forum has been fighting to keep its

[29] Nadeco was formed in 2005, splitting from the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).

[30] COPE is a splinter-group from the ANC. It was formed after the ANC Polokwane conference in 2007 which elected Zuma at the head of the party and defeated the Mbeki faction (see note 7). Relying on similar struggle credentials as the ANC, as manifested through its contested name (COPE: Congress of the People, one of the key moments in the ANC history), COPE has been seen in several Black townships as a serious threat to the ANC hegemony.

independence, both from the ANC and from the councilor, who sees in this forum a direct competitor to her ward committee. The matter has been aggravated by the recent award to the forum of a substantial grant to develop a community strategic vision for the area.
During the forum 2009 annual general meeting, COPE representative questions the position of the forum regarding municipal policies: couldn't the forum push for the City to be more accountable to residents, about several promises that have been made and not fulfilled (the provision of more opportunities for traders; the completion of the community center, etc.)? Immediately, a member of the forum (also ANC Youth League activist) jumps out and starts discarding this proposal, saying it is out of order, that "we are not here to make political statements: [our forum] is neutral, not a political body". Although the chair protests and asserts that every forum member is allowed to mention its organization, including political ones, the discussion stops there – it won't take place.

Not knowing to what extent one is being watched by the others in those public spaces, and if one's discourse will be reported to the ANC, participants in public meetings are generally very careful not to associate themselves, or even be perceived as associating themselves, with the political "enemy"- which varies according to local contexts. In some places, the enemy is COPE (area A, area E); in others (area C1, area E), it is radical social movements like the Anti Privatisation Forum (**Box 12**). Inviting them to public meetings or to forums, engaging with them publically is seen as a betrayal, and their members are fled and ostracized like contagious disease carrying people, even if other organizations might be sympathetic to their struggle.

Box 12 – Organizing a Pan-African carnival in Area E

Notes from an activist perspective

During the xenophobic violence occurring in May 2008, I was part of the creation of a non-profit organization aimed at consolidating an integrated South African society: the African Diaspora Forum, a forum gathering a number of African migrants' organizations.
One of our first endeavors was to work in areas where xenophobic violence had been rife. This was the case for area E, where we were approached by the local CPF to help healing the wounds – we thought of jointly organizing a Pan-African Carnival in the township, based on deep engagement with local schools, with the official support of local councilors and the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). While workshops within the schools worked beautifully for a couple of months, local politics came into the way and eventually prevented the event taking place.
One week before the planned carnival, the dominant (ANC aligned) teachers union pretended not to have been properly consulted and threatened to halt the process violently. They called for an urgent meeting, inviting selected local civics. We went in with our local partners, the CPF, but also the local branch of the Anti Privatisation Forum (APF) - we had been working with them and they were the only local organization to openly include foreigners. As soon as the APF entered the meeting room, our partner the CPF withdrew its support and said they were not responsible for their coming. Even if it was obviously a pretext, the teachers union as well as the CPF explained the failure of the negotiation by APF presence (although APF representatives did not utter a word).
The carnival was cancelled for many reasons: misconception that much money was involved in the event, in which civics and unions wanted their share; political rivalry within the ANC between the trade union and the GDE leaders; deeply-entrenched xenophobic feelings. Significant to me however, is the fact that it was commonly accepted that the APF is not an organization one can or should talk to, not to say work with.

This form of light but permanent social control by party members on who is showing loyal support and who is more dubious or mild in her party credentials, is at the basis of clientelism in many low-income areas of cities of the South (Auyero 1999). In democratic societies where the vote ballot is secret and elections are relatively free and fair, patrons' control over the political loyalty

of their constituencies rests on this high degree of interconnectedness and collective social control – not necessarily articulated and manipulated from the top, but occurring through the individual competition for access to resources, in which a good relationship with the dominant party is key. In this sense, the ANC is not very different from other parties in Africa and in the global South, where public resources are scarce compared to the scale of social needs, and where the efficiency of state bureaucracy in delivering access is limited – rendering the mediation of the party crucial to access public resources (Khan 2005, Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). The relative solidity of South African administration, and the existence of a welfare state policy in some respects (existence of a national pension scheme, a child grant scheme, etc.), however make the extent of political clientelism possibly less important than in most countries of the South.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a rise in the role of the party in civil society, possibly to be linked to the rising politicization of the state apparatus, in a context of party factionalism. It remains to be explored whether factionalism opens new arenas for internal party debates by increasing competition within the party (as suggested by Darracq 2008), or creates more political opacity for common residents and party members. Party factionalism is possibly a transitional phase, if South African is to follow the Indian example (Reddy 2005); or the end of South African exceptionalism in Africa, if one is more pessimistic (Gazibo 2006). On the way towards the 2011 local elections, one can stress the growing intolerance, and apparently more brutal repression, of dissent and opposition in civil society. This "new" political intolerance for dissent, or the "rising" penetration of the ANC into civil society structures, however needs to be questioned historically. As much as there is a strong internal democratic culture within the ANC, there has been a historical intolerance of the underground ANC against other anti-apartheid struggle movements like the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) for instance - a splinter movement from the ANC that could appear also as a legitimate anti-apartheid movement and therefore was seen as a competitor, both in exile and in South Africa (Kondlo 2008). Similarly, and again in the context of the struggle against apartheid where the ANC was banned, the ANC has often been establishing a political monopoly over local space and social control of residents' political loyalties during the 1980s townships resistance, to the point of sometimes using violent or even criminal practices (see Marks 2001 on the political youth in Diepkloof, Soweto, for instance). Such a culture might be reappearing in the current intolerance for radical social movements; or even in the current "reinvention", under an ANC banner, of independent struggle movements such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) (see Fouchard's paper in this issue). But the 2011 elections might also be a way of consolidating or even deepening the internal ANC democratic culture – in the way the choices of party candidates are chosen, which involved broad local debates beyond the branch itself (Polile 2011), raising a number of other issues but at least acknowledging that ANC ward candidates should somehow reflect local preferences. Rising political opposition at the local level (the most "dangerous" politically for the ANC), fear of rising local protests, might have led to such openings.

5. Concluding thoughts

The ANC, a mass organization and still a dominant party a decade after the liberation, is strongly embedded in civil society in urban low-income areas. Its presence, broad and deep, both opens channels of resident participation and access to a remote and opaque state apparatus; and closes opportunities for strong opposition and radical debates. This paper has shown that the party seems to be more responsive than local government structures to residents' requests or claims, both individual and (sometimes) collective. The party is indeed more concerned with maintaining a mass support in its popular constituencies – to keep a functional party branch that will grant it a say in party decisions- than local councilors more or less ensured by the brand (ANC) that they will be elected. The party is also more efficient in some instances to address residents' issues, through networked channels of access to powerful politicians, as opposed to the red-tape and fragmentation of the current local government system. A second important argument of this paper is that the ANC secures and reproduces its presence in low-income areas, and in its community based and local organizations, through deployment into the various forms and instances of civil society; but also because of civil society's leaders own agency, having an interest in showing sympathy or loyalty to the dominant and ruling party. This presence allows for subtle or less subtle forms of social control exerted locally, at least in areas showing some urban stability.

These conclusions partly resonate with the Chatterjeean concept of "political society", where the poor's (the "majority of the people") multiple relationships with the state are generally mediated through local arrangements with local leaders, politicians and junior officials. This mediation helps filling gaps (broad especially in Cities of the South) between unrealistic urban laws and regulations and existing urban realities characterized by mass poverty (Benjamin 2004; Roy 2005); and between broad welfare policies and lack of administrative or financial capacities to implement them (Gay 1999; Khan 2005). But this mediation also contributes to reproduce existing power structures by limiting the expression of different or opposing views to the dominant ones, on the one hand; and by limiting, to some extent, broader policy changes that could directly benefit the poor, on the other.

The paper resonates only *partly* with Chatterjee's political society, because the paper here has focused on the relationship between the poor, their local leaders, and party politics: putting aside –for now- the third pole of the "political society": local administration, an important element in the relationship between the poor and the State (accessed directly or lobbied by local politicians for delivery of various goods), well documented in Indian cities (Benjamin 2004; Bawa forthcoming) and starting to become the focus of attention elsewhere (Rubin forthcoming; Smith forthcoming). By focusing on party politics "only", the paper has brought depth into the understanding of everyday arrangements between voters and politicians, and has uncovered some forms of accountability to the poor, unpacking its different dimensions – responsiveness (the politicians' ability not only to hear their constituencies' requests but to deliver on them); and questionability (the ability of constituencies to question politicians' action – this requires both a level of transparency and visibility of this action, and the capacity to oppose and sanction this action) (see Bénit-Gbaffou

forthcoming for a further elaboration). While this paper has illustrated a degree of politicians' responsiveness to low-income residents' demands, they are certainly not easy to question and sanction, in the South African current democratic system.

These statements open to two larger questions. Firstly, what are the conditions in which the party becomes irreplaceable a mediator between residents and the state? Informality and the lack of access to rights for a big part of the population are certainly, as outlined by Chatterjee, a sufficient structural explanation; but they hardly explain changes and shifts within a given society; and, as seen in our case studies, not all voters obtaining individual or collective favours from a politicians (from food parcel to access to housing to the creation of a community soccer field...) are characterized by this form of informal, 'incomplete' citizenship. Could it be also linked to a dysfunctional, opaque or fragmented local government system, possibly aggravated by the new public management principles adopted to restructure local government in South Africa? Or by an incomplete decentralization, giving huge responsibilities to local councilors without the political and financial means of acting upon them?

Secondly, when one assesses local clientelism as a rising form of relationship between voters and the state, it is important to ask what the conditions are for an increased *collective* clientelism – where a group of residents, or a local leader, is able to negotiate collective goods against mass support. This has been analysed in Latin American cities (Gay 1999) as the main form of political accountability to the poor. Conditions for collective clientelism to develop (in contrast to individual clientelism) certainly revolve around increased political competition, a strong and structured civil society (able to bargain and mobilize supporters), and, in the South African context, a distance from political belonging as based on racial and historical identities, towards a more functionalist use of party politics. As we move further away from 1994, there are certainly more and more local areas where these conditions are met – leading either to a degree of violence, or to an increased collective agency.

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