

**Richard Calland**, *The Zuma years: South Africa's changing face of power*. Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-1-77022-088-1. 505 pages

Following his “*Anatomy of South Africa: Who holds the power?*”, published in 2006, Calland’s new publication, which, in the author’s own words, can be described as a “sequel”, is a welcome addition to the literature on contemporary South Africa. *The Zuma years* is a rather grim reflection on South Africa in 2013, yet it serves as an important record that will aid any researcher or layperson towards a better grasp of the fundamental challenges facing the South African state in 2013.

According to Calland, *The Zuma years* can be described as a reflection on “a period of intense social transformation in South Africa’s history” (p. xiii), “Yet, this is not a history book” (p. 4). A great emphasis is placed on the readability of the text. Key in this regard is the inclusion of endnotes in favour of footnotes, striking a good balance between academic credibility and the accessibility of the work for the layman.

Richard Calland starts his exploration with the question of leadership, comparing the Zuma administration to that of former president Thabo Mbeki. In this, there is little else but disdain on the part of Calland towards South Africa’s serving president. Although Thabo Mbeki is being described by Calland as “difficult to like”, he subsequently notes that as he researched on Mbeki, his “respect for him grew the more I got to know him” (p. 28). The Mbeki administration is sketched as one with a more hands-on approach as opposed to that of president Zuma. In short, it can be summarized that Calland criticizes the Zuma presidency for not taking the lead more often in governance.

South Africa’s Westminster style parliament has always been one worthy of scrutiny, and is not spared from criticism in *The Zuma years*. “Parliament”, Calland rightly notes, “will always be there, come hell or high water” (p. 155), but it is an institution that remains haunted by “innate structural flaws”. The gravest criticism is that it does not really allocate significant amounts of influence to those parties that do not form part of the ruling party. Yet, even in this, Calland succeeds nuancing the grim picture, pointing towards role players, such as parliamentary researchers, who continue to critically influence committees in their decisions.

Of particular interest is the chapter on the African National Congress (ANC). There seems to be a lack of insight into this mighty role player that is the ANC in South Africa – a lack that the media often portrays powerfully. The main thrust of Calland’s argument comes to the fore in his chapter on the ANC, namely “that this period, 2007 to 2009, was a pivotal time in the ANC’s history, one in which old certainties were vanquished and new uncertainties cast long shadows into the future” (pp. 159-160). However, this observation does not hinder the author to draw a much nuanced picture of the ANC. A careful exploration of the most powerful forces inside the ANC follows, with particular reference to the social democratic

*vis-à-viz* the African nationalist and communist influence, all vying for power. According to Calland, the average ANC supporter of today is very different to that of the pre-Polokwane era in that they are “more assertive, and less obedient to the leadership” (p. 187).

The question of traditional leadership is another welcome addition to this study. The role of traditional leadership is not often calculated in a fitting manner when South African politics is being analysed. There could be a number of reasons for this, but the transformation of the South African media could well serve as one of the most important factors contributing to the limited public debate on the role of traditional leadership in the democratic dispensation.

Of great concern is Calland’s analysis of the transformation of the legal profession. The legal profession, according to the author, is one of the least representative professions in South Africa. In some ways, it can be considered as a relic from days gone by. Given the central role that the judiciary plays in maintaining the balance of power in democracy, the accusation that the legal profession remains one where social connections and historical privileges continue to proliferate, is one of which note should be taken.

The addition of the two appendixes, detailing brief biographic information on the ministers serving in the Zuma cabinet, as well as that of the constitutional judges, should also be noted. The addition of these turns *The Zuma years* into more than just a useful analysis of contemporary South Africa, it also serves as a credible reference guide to those interested in contemporary South African affairs, while at the same time struggle to keep up to speed with the credentials of president Zuma’s extended cabinet.

Writing a comprehensive analysis of contemporary South Africa is a challenging undertaking – one of which many worthy researchers would not see themselves fit to do. *The Zuma years* is a work that succeed in its stated aims. Its final conclusion, that the South Africa of 2013 should be considered as the “anatomy of a crisis”, may not fit well with every reader, yet the concerned challenge that it poses is to some extent indisputable.

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