Sethulego Matebesi
Senior Lecturer and Head of Department, Department of Sociology, University of the Free State. E-mail: matebsz@ufs.ac.za

"A HUNGRY STOMACH KNOWS NO ALLEGIANCE": TRANSACTIONAL ACTIVISM IN COMMUNITY PROTESTS IN FICKSBURG

Abstract

Over the past few years, there has been a renewed focus on leadership in social movements. While leadership is central in creating organisational capacity for collective action, not many studies focus on leadership engagement practices – a crucial element for movement goal attainment. Utilising the concept of "transactional activism" – the process whereby state actors manage challengers by providing benefits and a myriad of other opportunities to selected leaders – this article examines how the engagement practices of civic group leaders influence community protests. It does so by drawing on an extensive case study of the nature and patterns of engagements between the leaders of the Meqheleng Concerned Citizens (MCC) civic group and state actors, as well as community perceptions about such engagements during three community protests in Ficksburg during 2011. The analysis reveals that transactional activism generates substantial problems for civic organisations engaged in community protests. The complex engagements between civic group leaders and state actors reflect a value shift from attaining collective benefits for the groups towards protest leaders that are inherently predisposed to pursuing their own interests. The study generates several conclusions about how transactional activism derails opportunities to deal with the fundamental grievances of communities. These unresolved grievances are one of the reasons for the high prevalence of recurrent and violent community protests in different parts of South Africa.

Keywords: *C*ommunity protests; leadership; service delivery; social movement organisations; state-citizen engagement; transactional activism; Ficksburg.

Sleutelwoorde: Gemeenskapsprotesaksies; leierskap; dienslewering; sosiale beweging-organisasies; staat-burger-interaksie; transaksionele aktivisme; Ficksburg.
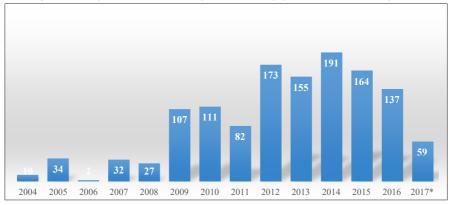
1.   INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, there has been a renewed focus on leadership in social movements (Andrews *et al.* 2010; Ganz 2010; Ahlquist and Levi 2013; Staggenborg 2015).

Leadership is central to creating the organisational capacity for collective action, as well as in facilitating subsequent collective action by members (Morris and Staggenborg 2004:171). However, scholars have increasingly sought to understand how leadership transforms individual resources into collective power. One of the central mechanisms through which leaders in social movements achieve movement goals is by interacting with targets like state actors (Kalykas 2003; 2006; Brosché 2014:6). In this regard, Petrova and Tarrow (2007) proposed two types of activism that illustrate the mezzo-level networking between social movement organisations and state actors.

The first type is participatory activism, which refers to the mobilisation capacity of movement activists (Petrova and Tarrow 2007). This is a more traditional type of activism linked to organisations like trade unions where large membership numbers and mass participation are essential (Císař 2015). The second type of activism is transactional activism, which describes the capacity of movement activists to network, cooperate and communicate with others, including state actors (Petrova and Tarrow 2007). The primary focus of this article is to contribute to the understanding of the transactional type of activism, which broadly denotes the sustained direct engagement between social movement activists and state actors. Transactional activism is not a new phenomenon. It is linked to classical resource mobilisation theories (McCarthy and Zald 1997; Jenkins 1983; Edward and McCarthy 2004), and studies on leadership and the critical role of agency in social movements. Empirically, this article is based on the community protests in Ficksburg in 2011, led by the civic group Meqheleng Concerned Citizens (MCC).

The article proceeds as follows. Firstly, it provides an overview of community protests in South Africa, followed by a conceptual clarification of transactional activism. Since transactional activism may be confused with the notion of co-optation, a brief discussion of the distinction between the two concepts precedes the conceptual clarification section. The focus here is an attempt to highlight to what extent the concept of co-optation is used incorrectly. The next sections then demonstrate why the concept of transactional activism is more appropriate in the context of this article than participatory activism. The last two sections focus on the research design and presentation of the case study.

2. OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY PROTESTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

For over a decade, since the outbreak of the first community protests in post-apartheid South Africa in 2004, the South African local government system has experienced widespread protests related to basic service delivery. The first community protests erupted in Diepsloot (a densely populated area in Gauteng Province) and Harrismith (a typical small town in the Free State Province) in

September 2004. These protests represent what Alexander (2010:25) and Booysen (2009:104) refer to as defining moments in the history of the highly localised community protests. At the time, these protests were characterised as being "spontaneous" (Ngwane 2012:126). Since then, South Africa witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of grassroots organisations involved in fomenting community protests in South Africa. These protests have become pervasive and redefined the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of communities in South Africa (Matebesi 2017:1).

Figure 1: Major service delivery protests, by year (2004 – 15 May 2017)

Source: Municipal IQ 2017

According to Figure 1, community protests in South Africa increased substantially from ten in 2004 to more than 100 in 2009 and 2010, and subsequently reached unprecedented levels in both 2012 and 2014, with 173 and 194 protest episodes respectively (Municipal IQ 2017). Furthermore, an assessment of the provincial protests statistics by the Municipal IQ (2017), an organisation that monitors and assesses the performance of municipalities, reveals that the Free State Province have had an average of between 2% to 4% of the total number of protests in South Africa since 2004. As noted above, the Free State Province featured prominently in the early stages of community protests over lack of services in Harrismith and, later, Warden, Vrede and Memel. These cases illuminate how service delivery was used as a proxy for intra-political battles in the African National Congress (ANC) for the control of the Free State Province (*Mail and Guardian* 2004).

    A simple historical analysis of these protests, commonly known as service delivery protests, reveals that they are regarded as a, "rebellion of the poor" (Alexander 2010:25), "people's protest" (Duncan 2014), "insurgent citizenship" (Brown 2015:6; Langa and Von Holdt 2012:81; Runciman 2014:29) and "civil strife against local governance" (Matebesi 2017:2). However, a universal

definition of the concept "community protest" is still elusive. The notion of "service delivery protests" blurs the debate, ignores the wider context of the issue (Friedman 2009; Pithouse 2011:6) and is not universally defined. What is known though, is that the different conceptions of the protest action are grounded in the precarious living conditions of black South Africans (Matebesi 2017:7). A recent contribution defines community protests as, "collective action taken by a group of community members that is *directed against* a local municipality over poor or inadequate provision of basic services, and a wider spectrum of concerns including, for example, housing, infrastructural developments, and corruption" (Matebesi 2017:v).

Historically, civic organisations in South Africa have integrated mobilisation to secure short-term gains and to shape the political landscape, making broader transformative change possible. In post-apartheid South Africa, these community protests are one of the many responses to the new democratic institutional and political context. These protests, in particular, were a response to the effects of the neoliberal socio-economic policies adopted by the ANC (Runciman 2014:30). It is therefore not surprising that a range of scholars have analysed the causes, nature and impact of the phenomenon (Ballard *et al*. 2006; Brow 2015; Gibson 2006; Zuern 2011; Langa and Von Holdt 2012; Dawson and Sinwell 2012; Runciman 2014; Matebesi 2017). However, despite the fact that leaders are central to social movements (Nepstad and Bob 2006:1) and their engagement with state actors, South African scholars have devoted little attention to understanding the nature of civic group leadership engagement with state actors.

3. TRANSACTIONAL ACTIVISM AS A CONCEPT

Transactional activism has its roots in the notion of co-optation. This point needs some further clarification. The following two subsections deal firstly with an attempt to clarify the concept of co-optation, followed by describing notions of transactional activism in the context of the community protests in South Africa.

3.1 Co-optation

Scholarly focus on the concept of co-optation has a long and varied history extending across a range of scholars (Selznick 1949; Schwartz 1976; Piven and Cloward 1979; McAdam 1982; Ho 2010; Jaffe 2012). In this regard, Selznick's (1949:13) notion of co-optation, which he describes as, "the process of absorbing new elements into leadership or policy-determining structure of an organisation as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence", is widely viewed as an important precursor for the different strands of this concept. When thinking of co-optation in Selznick's terms, it unravels the dilemma for both state actors and

civil society organisations at large about how to deal with such democratic ideals as local or public participation.

In a more recent contribution titled *Pitfalls of co-optation*, Lapegna (2014) provides a useful exposition of how the concept has been used in two different contexts. In the first context, he argues, co-optation has traditionally been associated with social movements co-operating with state actors and state institutions, or its leaders have become part of the polity. The latter implies the appointment of social movement leaders to administration and admitted as members of a polity that was previously closed to them. Advocates of this notion of co-optation associate it with undesirable outcomes for a social movement, such as losing its transformative spirit, undermining its radical potential (Melucci 1989:139; Schwartz 1976: 4), "reducing its effectiveness as a force for social change" (McAdam 1982:55), or the neutralisation of challengers (Ho 2010:448; Jaffee 2012:95). More broadly, these engagement processes with established institutions of power and authority are seen as the institutionalisation of social movements, which ultimately leads to the end of their challenging potential (Meyer 1993; Meyer and Tarrow 1998). According to Coy and Heeden (2005:417), "determining whether the inclusion/participation is a positive step forward for the movement's long-range goals is a difficult and delicate task". In the second context of co-optation, scholars such as McCarthy and Wolfson (1992:274) show how social movements use pre-existing networks to pursue their transformative agenda. Such an agenda is linked to the primary goal of social movements, which primarily intends to effect social change.

3.2 Towards an understanding of transactional activism and leadership in social movements

Petrova and Tarrow (2007:79), the advocates of the notion of transactional activism, question the intense emphasis on the significance of individual and group activism. They argue that such an emphasis ignores, "the actual relations among civil society groups, between them and political parties, and their relations with public officials". Transactional activism is thus a dimension of the relational aspects of activism which focuses on, "whether and how voluntary associations and advocacy groups interact with one another, with political parties, and with power holders" (Petrova and Tarrow 2007:79).

Transactional activism is defined in this article as the process whereby state actors manage challengers by providing benefits and a myriad of other opportunities to all, or to selected leaders of civic groups involved in community protests. In exchange for the rewards, the leaders are expected to divert and defuse anti-state sentiments among residents. It is this context of the definition of transactional activism that underlies this article. This definition is closely related to the definition used by Petrova and Tarrow (2007:79), "the ties – enduring and

temporary – among organised non-state actors and between them and political parties, power holders, and other institutions".

Despite being associated with advocacy organisations (Císař 2011:51), transactional activism can also be applied to the relational aspects of the leaders of social movements or civic groups. In this regard, transactional activism involves strategic networking between leaders of civic groups and state actors. The enabling aspects of this type of engagement create an opportunity for state actors to defuse protests, albeit by offering incentives to a few strategic leaders of the group (Císař 2015:66). These leaders, on the other hand, typically remain conspicuously silent about these incentives when providing feedback to rank-and-file members.

Theoretically, the notion of transactional activism is also associated with the resource mobilisation paradigm. According to Gamson, Fireman and Rytina (1982:23) resources refer to, "those objects which can be used by the group to achieve its collective goals". On the other hand, mobilisation describes, "the activities of a movement organization or of an individual actor to gain more control over goods that contribute to achieve the goals of the movement organization or the individual actor" (Opp 2009:140). Thus, political activism is based on the availability of resources like leadership (McCharthy and Zald 1977:1213). But once the strategic capacity of the group is concentrated in a few leaders, far removed from members (Ganz 2000:104), it becomes a resource constraint for the group.

The notion of transactional activism provides important contexts for analyses of community protests in South Africa. In this regard, several assumptions about the relational aspects of transactional activism are noted. Firstly, transactional activism is linked to the realities of social movement engagement with state actors. Since the wave of change across the world, civil society actors, at large, have the opportunity to engage directly with the institutions of representative democracy and the ability to access them or act in relation to them (Khanna *et al*. 2013). In South Africa, the creation of conditions for more constructive engagement between the state and local communities (Piper and Nadvi 2010:213) has not necessarily led to fewer adversarial relations between the state and civil society. For example, Integrated Development Programme (IDP) review processes and ward committees have become highly politicised (Mubungizi and Dassah 2014:276). Perhaps this is one of the crucial reasons why many South Africans have expressed a sense of lost faith in local state actors and local institutions by taking to the streets (Matebesi 2017:3).

The second issue involves the conduct of movement leadership and its engagement with state actors. Kalyva's (2003, 2006) theory provides astute insights on elite engagement and the benefits and challenges it brings. According to Kalyvas (2006:391), personal considerations are more critical for social movement leaders than the desire to contribute to collective success.

Here, the classical theories of Harding's (1968) Common-Pool Resources help us understand that actors should be viewed as rational and driven by self-interests. It is generally expected of social movement leaders to inspire commitment, mobilise resources, create and recognise opportunities, frame demands, devise strategies and influence outcomes (Klandermans 1989:2; Melucci 1996:43). However, since the engagements between state actors and social movement leaders encompass a delicate web of power relations, actors often favour net benefits for themselves. Once transactional spaces, defined as places that have legitimacy (Buselich 2005:306), have been created for the challengers and state actors to engage, the latter may respond to movement claims by either accommodating challengers or maintaining the *status quo* (McAdam 1982). Since there are, "porous and fluid boundaries between state and non-state actors" (Pettinchio 2017:1), movement leaders are able to transit between negotiators, protestors and benefactors.

Existing literature on the role of leadership in social movements illustrate how transactional activism is a microcosm of the South African political and social space. The literature demonstrates how historical conditions (a repressive political environment) and contemporary pressures (a country that is grappling with measures to counter corruption and the abuse of power) have in the past, and continue to strain state-citizen engagement. For example, Van Vuuren (2013:1) argues that the nature and degree of corruption in South Africa, "should not be seen as a phenomenon of individual scandals but rather the outcome of corrupted networks that have morphed and changed over three decades and four unique periods of governance". On the other hand, a study by Langa and Von Holdt (2012:80) has shown that the most striking feature of some protests in post-apartheid South Africa is their dual nature. This dual nature refers to the, "factional struggles on the part of some protest leaders to shift the power relations within the local ANC [which] were combined with the struggles of the poor for the provision of public goods" (Langa and Von Holdt 2012:94). Such factional struggles within the ANC provide sufficient grounds for some state actors to make certain deals with protest leaders in exchange for personal rewards.

The actions of individual leaders in social movements or groups in the furtherance of their own interests (whether deliberate or not) have important implications for state-civil society engagement and the management of community protests in South Africa. In *Civil strife against local governance,* Matebesi (2017) illustrates how transactional activists in Ganyesa, Grabouw and Kuruman have contributed to a series of recurrent community protests. For example, one of the protest leaders of the so-called "No road, no school" protest, which led to the closure of schools for more than eight months in 2014, noted, "Where is the protest leader who led the community in 2012? He is now working at the municipality. We want the same […]" (Matebesi 2017:88).

This key shift that emerges in community protests implies that, while transactional activists in South Africa have shown remarkable skills at rent-seeking and harnessing the resources available to the polity, their actions may induce civic group failure. This also allows state actors to keep on making commitments, but to continue to renege upon them. In fact, several South African scholars have confirmed that unfulfilled promises serve as an impetus for community protests (Centre for Development and Enterprise 2007:17; Jain 2010:1; Managa 2012:2).

4.   CONTEXT OF FICKSBURG AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Ficksburg is situated in the Free State Province of South Africa at the national border between South Africa and Lesotho. Ficksburg forms part of the Setsoto Local Municipality which has a collective executive with a ward participatory system, and the town is also an administrative centre. The town's economy is primarily based on mixed agriculture, concentrating mainly on asparagus, cherries and deciduous fruit (Setsoto Local Municipality 2015). It has a total population of 5 400 people, with a dependency ratio of 41,5 and the entire municipal area has an unemployment rate of 35,7%. In respect of service provision, 97,7% of the households have a flush toilet connected to sewerage, 94,9% have weekly refuse removal, 94,1% have piped water inside their dwellings, and 97,7% have electricity for lighting (Statistics South Africa 2011).

Empirically, this article is based on a three-year research project, which focused on eight cases from four different provinces in South Africa. A qualitative phenomenological research method was used for the study. The data was collected by means of unstructured one-on-one in-depth interviews with 60 randomly selected community members and five leaders of the MCC. The purpose of this interview method was to allow participants to describe their experiences during the three community protests in Ficksburg in 2011.

5.   THE CASE OF FICKSBURG: THE MEQHELENG CONCERNED RESIDENTS

In respect of the community protests in post-apartheid South Africa, the Meqheleng protest ranks as one of the most notable ones. A major contributing factor could be the image of a dying protest leader – Andries Tatane – which was broadcast on television during the prime time evening news of the national broadcaster. Tatane was shot and killed by members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) during a community protest on 13 April 2011 (*Mail and Guardian* 2011; *Monster and Critics* 2011; *The Times* 2011). The protest followed after several failed attempts to engage peacefully with the Setsoto Local Municipality over the erratic water supply to Meqheleng and other grievances (Matebesi

2017:67). Other protest actions took place a month before and a month after Tatane's death on 21 March 2011 and on 13 May 2011 respectively.

While the larger study focused on several aspects related to the different stages of the protests in the selected cases, in this section the focus is on how perceptions of transactional activism were framed among the community members of Meqheleng. Firstly, a close look at the initial stages of mobilisation and the engagement of the MCC with state actors and state institutions is made. Secondly, the focus shifts to the aftermath of the protests.

5.1   MCC mobilisation efforts

According to Swain (2010:34), existing social networks provide a significant platform to the aggrieved to share their frustrations. The availability of dense social networks with frequent engagements allows individual residents to share their grievances with relatives, friends and colleagues, among others. In Meqheleng, the MCC, a typical grassroots organisation without any form of formal organisation, serves as a platform for residents to engage with the local municipality. Three local teachers and three other residents, who had the rhetorical task of mobilising and sustaining community participation, led the MCC. As one leader noted, "We have failed to affect the desired action from our local municipality by participating in local participatory structures, hence the formation of MCC" (MCC leader 2013). This statement indicates that the MCC, or its individual leaders, already had some form of experience in engaging with the local municipality through the local participatory structures. This statement is supported by Newton (2001:343) who reports that there is hardly any society in the world that does not have a form of experience in engaging with its government. He asserts that the level of political trust citizens have, is largely a response to their circumstances, knowledge and experience.

Residents and the leaders of the MCC confirmed that they had four central grievances: erratic supply of household water; maladministration of municipal funds, sewerage spillage along roads, and the high unemployment rate in the area. The latter was compounded by the municipality's tendency to hire people from distant areas, while locals who possess the requisite skills and experience were overlooked (MCC leader 2013). However, arguably the erratic water supply and the municipality's failure to inform residents about water closures in time was the single most critical grievance for the residents of Meqheleng (Matebesi 2017).

Thus far, the grievances of the MCC provide an analytical advantage as to why the civic group was formed. An analysis of the forms of engagement used by the MCC in engaging with state actors reveals that the community, following a no response from the municipality, regarded it as, "a series of back-and-forth" submissions of letters. It later became clear to the MCC that the tactic of writing letters to the Setsoto Municipality was not effective enough; hence the decision to embark on protest action. In summing up the disappointment of the

community, one resident remarked, "We were tired of being tired with the attitude of our local leaders". He continued, "I thought the time and energy we spent on this collective cause may, in time, help us all, but it seemed our efforts were in vain" (Resident 2014).

The first protest in Ficksburg took place on 21 March 2011. As is typical of protests across the world, a memorandum was handed over to the Setsoto Municipality. The municipality was given 14 days to respond to the grievances. On the 15th day, the leaders of the MCC were called to a meeting with the Municipal Manager. The municipality's response that most of the water challenges, "are caused by the historical infrastructural development policies of the apartheid government" was rejected (MCC leader 2013). Tatane then used Setsoto FM, a community radio station, as a platform to openly criticise councillors and the municipality about poor service delivery (*City Press* 2011). Indeed, several studies have confirmed the significant role of the media in the mobilisation efforts of protestors around the world (Enjolras *et al*. 2013:1; Neyazi *et al*. 2016; Serafeim 2012:165).

As stated before, protests are by nature transactional. However, during this early stage of the protests in Ficksburg, the civic group may have faced resource constraints. Under such resource constraints (getting people to take action, and build and enhance relations among residents), it may be difficult for state actors to engage in any transactional activities with protest leaders for several reasons. Firstly, in the South African context, studies have shown that the reconfiguration of power relations within the ANC serves as a primary motivation for many protest leaders (Langa and Von Holdt 2012:89). Thus, if the intentions of protest leaders are known, arguably, then it will be much easier for state actors to engage in some form of transaction with them in order to defuse the protest. However, in any other circumstances it will take time for state actors to identify potential leaders who pose a threat to the image and interests of the local elite. Additionally, it would have been highly unlikely that the core leaders of the MCC, who at the time were teachers, would not have acted empathetically to the challenges faced by the community at that early stage of the protests.

In fact, it is evident that the social status of some of the core leaders of the MCC served as an important impetus to mobilise the community against the municipality. For example, one resident remarked, "I joined the mass meetings and marches organised by the MCC because they were organised by respectable citizens. I am unemployed and do not have the time to get involved in activities that could potentially curb the chances of me ever getting employment" (Resident 2014). Another one pointed out that the message and mobilisation tactics used by the MCC leaders in rallying the community behind the slogan, "a powerful, united and fearless community" played a significant role in bringing hope to the residents of Meqheleng (Resident 2014).

A month after the first protest in 2011 in Ficksburg, local residents again took to the streets. The protest action of 13 April 2011 was sparked by several

factors. At that time, the initial 15 grievances had grown to a list of 29 items. On top of the grievance list was the alleged impunity of local leaders involved in corruption (MCC leader 2013). Strong sentiments about the intransigent attitude of the municipality also came to the fore in interviews with community leaders. For instance, one local pastor said, "a local councillor was going around telling residents that they could complain until they turned blue, no one would ever listen to them" (Local pastor 2014).

Other enduring attempts to engage with the local municipality became evident in the interviews with residents (2014), "I am an active and vocal citizen. However, this is often misconstrued as misplaced ambition by our local leaders". He continued, "The whole Tatane mess started when we questioned the ANC about the food parcels that are handed out to community members a few months before each election. The more you asked, the more you were labelled as 'wanting to destroy the community'." A month later, on 13 May 2011, another protest erupted in Ficksburg. This was followed by constant engagements by various government entities which tried to resolve the animosity between the residents and the municipality. For instance, renewed protests broke out in the area when the report of an investigation, undertaken by the Free State Provincial Government into corruption at the Setsoto Municipality, was released (*Mail and Guardian* 2011). In the following section, the focus is on the aftermath of the protests and the perceptions of transactional activism created.

5.2   Aftermath of the protests – perceptions of transactional activism

The aftermath of violent protests, Langa and Von Holdt (2012:90) note, "is as important for understanding the protests and the social forces that shape them as the origins and dynamics of the protests themselves". After three months of protests and engagements between the leaders of the MCC and state actors, the Free State Provincial Government seconded a senior official to act as municipal manager at the municipality in Ficksburg. Many interviewees hailed this as, "a step in the right direction" and, "hoped that it would usher in a period of equitable service delivery" (Resident 2014). In fact, the newly appointed Municipal Manager took it upon himself and initiated a process of engaging with the Ficksburg community. He informed residents that three directors and a manager from the municipality had been placed on special leave, following allegations of corruption. The MCC insisted that they also wanted the mayor of the municipality to be put on special leave (Mail and Guardian 2011). This marked a significant shift in the attitude of the local municipality towards local residents.

One consequence of Tatane's death, which is qualified as a critical event in social movement literature (Opp 2009:65), is that the attitude of the Ficksburg residents towards the leaders changed drastically. This was predominantly marked by two significant changes: changes in the attitude of the municipality towards the grievances of the community, and the community towards the

leaders of the MCC. Firstly, the event received a considerable amount of publicity in the local (national) and international media, increasing its potential impact on framing public opinion and exerting pressure on political actors to deal with the crisis. The widespread media coverage further thrust upon the municipality a greater responsibility in that it then had to deal with various external stakeholders, including provincial and national departments, visiting it frequently (Matebesi 2017).

An analysis of the community perceptions in the aftermath of the 2011 protests in Ficksburg reveals that the belief among many community participants was that the leaders of the MCC were "traitors". In fact, the purported rewards and opportunities provided to MCC leaders by the local municipality and the Free State Provincial Government underlie much of the anger of the Meqheleng residents. For instance, a self-described vocal 27-year-old male protestor referred to how the anger and frustration of the community against the local municipality and its officials shifted towards the leaders of the MCC. He cited several incidents, confirmed by other participants, which made the community believe that they had been "sold out" by their leaders. One of the reasons for this perception was, "the frequent visits of MCC leaders to meet government officials in Bloemfontein" (Resident 2014). Another protestor stated that, "suddenly our leaders were part of the official events hosted by the province and the municipality. Residents then started to believe that the MCC leaders used the private meetings with government for personal glory at the expense of our collective challenge for efficient service delivery" (Resident 2014). Furthermore, a 34-year-old resident who identified herself as an activist with the welfare of Meqheleng at heart, noted that the MCC leaders had been very selfish. Her frustrations are captured as follows, "We are not fools. How do you explain the sudden turn in the fortune of the MCC leaders? One was given a tender by the municipality at the peak of the protest. Another one is now working for the provincial government and two others at the local municipality. The others are now serving as ward committee members and have both received money from the province (Female resident 2014).

The following statement of a local businessman sums up the dominant perception of the community towards the MCC leader, "We all trusted the MCC leaders […] They were respectable. But we also have to blame our government. Forcing community leaders to be subservient is helping an already powerful state to acquire much more control and gradually destroy South Africa's civil society. But I do not understand the coincidence between the cozy meetings between the MCC leaders with government officials and the sudden golden opportunities such as jobs at the local municipality and province, and even business deals for some of the leaders. Do you think we can make up such rumours […]? Since we raised these allegations with the MCC leaders, why did they not at least try to craft credible responses (rather) than the lame excuse that 'South Africa is a

democratic country and everyone is free to benefit from available opportunities'. How did they [MCC leaders] obtain these opportunities? I just cannot believe that Tatane, who had placed community interests above his own, had to lose his life for the benefit of others" (Local businessman 2014).

The apparent opportunities availed to the MCC were confirmed by one protest leader who declared that, "indeed we had several meetings with local and provincial government officials who told us to defuse the protests and join existing local structures of public participation" (MCC leader 2014). When asked what incentives were offered in exchange for the request to stop the protest action, the leader reluctantly responded, "A hungry stomach knows no allegiance. Does the community really expect us to refuse the offers presented to us? Yes, I got a job at the municipality and I am grateful that my activist role was not in vain" (MCC leader 2014).

While local politicians were labelled as the, "biggest traitors of all time" by some residents, the conduct of the municipality was described as a, "deliberate attempt to dilute the challenge of residents against an inept local authority". However, almost all the other MCC leaders interviewed regarded the accusations as flimsy defamation campaigns launched by jealous residents. They further maintained that the MCC is still functional, but they are also serving in ward committees in an attempt to influence local decision-making processes more effectively. When asked why this strategy was not utilised prior to the protests, one leader responded as follows, "We are all called names now. The trouble for me began when I started to renovate my house. I applied for a loan at my bank. I still do not understand where the perception that the MCC leaders got R50 000 each originates. Another leader who has always been in business was allocated a site for his sandstone business. But he applied for the site several years ago. I cannot really respond to the allegation of the other two who got jobs from some provincial government department. What is wrong with that in any case? These silly remarks by some community members are malicious and harm our reputations" (MCC leader 2013).

6.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article reveals that there is growing attention to leadership in social movements. In South Africa, the proliferation of community protests provides several opportunities for state actors and social movements to engage. An emerging trend in these engagements, as exemplified by the article, is that some of these engagements are transactional practices.

This article provides some insight into the leadership of a civic group engaged in community protests in post-apartheid South Africa. It further illustrates the type of engagements that could possibly emerge between state actors and civic group leaders. The Ficksburg protests attracted both vast

national and international attention due to the alleged police brutality. There is no denying that the central role played by the MCC leaders was a significant factor in mobilising the community of Meqheleng to participate in the rolling protests actions of 2011. Examined closely, and as confirmed by Han (2014:5), four critical factors mattered for the successful campaign of the protest leaders: their experience and willingness, the organisational narratives they created, their understanding about power, and the network structures that were already in place. Thus, the MCC managed to leverage the latent power of the Meqheleng community to build power and effect change.

Which possible aspects of civic groups allow their leaders to engage in different ways with state actors? In *Theories of political protest and social movements*, Opp (2009:80) noted that much of the answer lies within the structures of social movements. Firstly, leaders require co-ordination and restraint, which only a highly structured group can provide. This kind of structure makes communication, mutual encouragement and sanctioning easy. Conversely, spontaneous and highly fragmented groups have weak authority structures and, thus, fail to constrain their leaders. Secondly, in highly structured groups, the leaders and members of the groups meet regularly to discuss activities. This approach renders the protest action as a collective effort organised through a sanctioning system consisting of strict norms requiring co-operation (Opp 2009:66). Thus, one can argue that leaders of less structured groups may undermine rank-and-file members and engage in personal trade-offs with state actors.

The above discussion reflects on one aspect of the debate. Cognisance must be taken of the fact that a great possibility exists for transactional activism to occur during community protests in South Africa due to the frequent behind-the-scene engagements between protests leaders and state actors. However, it should be noted that not all such engagements should be viewed negatively. In fact, engagements between protest leaders and state actors are crucial for civic groups to achieve their goals. It is difficult to describe what could possibly have led to the sudden change in the approach of the MCC leaders in the aftermath of the protests in Ficksburg in 2011. The decisions made by the protest leaders should have been complicated. However, even more difficult to grapple is to what extent the actions of these leaders were deliberate. To a certain extent, though, the article sheds some light on the possible reasons why the community of Meqheleng believed that the leaders of the MCC had engaged in transactional activism and that the residents had served as vendors for personal interests.

Broadly, transactional activism has several implications for post-apartheid South African state-citizen engagement. Firstly, it can be viewed as a new and convenient way for the state to exercise power and defuse potentially volatile situations. Secondly, a much wider implication is that such tactics used by the state only serve to temporarily marginalise protesting communities. Thirdly,

both the tactics of state actors and the rent-seeking behaviour of protest leaders have the potential to radicalise other protestors who may feel the need to organise outside of ineffective civic groups. It is therefore not surprising that recurrent and violent community protests in South Africa are highly prevalent. It is recommended that future research on community protests should focus on a more encompassing understanding of transactional activism.

LIST OF SOURCES

Alexander, P 2010. "Rebellion of the poor: South Africa's service delivery protests – A preliminary analysi", *Review of African Political Economy* 37(123), March:25-40, https://doi.org/10.1080/03056241003637870

Alexander, P, C Runciman and T Ngwane 2014. "Community protests 2004-2013: Some research findings". Media briefing, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/Public-violence-13March2014-Peter-Alexander.pdf>, accessed 16 June 2017.

Almeida, PD 2003. "Opportunity organizations and threat-induced contention: Protest waves in authoritarian settings", *The American Journal of Sociology* 109(2), September:345-400, https://doi.org/10.1086/378395

Andrews, KT, M Ganz, M Baggetta, H Hahn and C Lim 2010. "Leadership, membership, and voice: Civic associations that work", *American Journal of Sociology* (114)4, January:1191-1242, https://doi.org/10.1086/649060

Booysen, S 2009. "Beyond the ballot and the brick: Continuous dual repertoires in the politics of attaining service delivery in South Africa?". In: A McLennan and B Munslow (eds), *The politics of service delivery*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp.104-136.

Braun, R 2016. "Historical legacies of contention and clandestine resistance to violence", *Mobilizing Ideas*, <https://mobilizingideas.wo-rdpress.com/2016/02/10/ historical-legacies-of-contention-and-clandestine-resistance-to-violence/#more-8754>, accessed 24 March 2017.

Brown, J 2015. *South Africa's insurgent citizens: On dissident and the possibility of politics*. Pretoria: Jacana.

Buselich, K 2007. "Transactional space: A transformative process for sustainability deliberation piloted with the western Australian collaboration". In: W Filho (ed.), *Handbook of sustainability research*. Peter Lang, Frankfurt, pp. 297- 325.

Centre for Development Enterprise 2007. "Voices of anger. Phumelela and Khutsong: Protest and conflict in two municipalities", *CDE Focus*, <http://www.cde.org.za/voices-of-anger-phumelela-and-khutsong-protest-and-conflict-in-two-municipalities/>, accessed 24 March 2017.

Císař, O 2011. "Externally sponsored contention: The channeling of environmental movement organisations in the Czech Rep after the fall of Communism". In: A Fagam and J Carmin (eds), *Green activism in post-socialist Europe and the former Soviet Union*. New York: Routledge, pp. 48-67.

Císař, O 2015. "The diffusion of public interest mobilisation: A historical sociology perspective on advocates without members in the post-communist Czech Republic". In: K Jacobsson and S Saxonberg (eds), *Social movements in post-communist Europe*. New York: Routledge, pp. 65-78.

City Press 2011. "Tatane's death a hit", <http://www.news24.com/Archives/City-Press/Tatanes-death-was-a-hit-2015042-9>, accessed 02 June 2017.

Coy, PG and T Hedeen 2005. "A stage model of social movement co-optation: Community mediation in the United States", *The Sociological Quarterly* 46(3), Summer:405-443.

Duncan, J 2014. "People's protest is being criminalised," *Mail and Guardian*, <http://mg.co.za/print/2014-05-01-peoples-protest-is-being-criminalised>, accessed 14 May 2017.

Enjolras, B, K Steen-Johnsen and D Wollebaek 2013. "Social media and mobilization to offline demonstrations: Transcending participatory divides?", *New Media and Society* 15(6), September:890-908, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812462844

Female resident 2014. Interview: Author with female resident 30 May.

Friedman, S 2009. "People are demanding public service, not service delivery", *Business Day Live*, <http://www.bdlive.co.-za/articles/2009/07/29/people-are-demanding-public-service-not-service-delivery>, accessed 12 May 2017.

Gamson, WB, B Fireman and S Rytina 1982. *Encounters with unjust authority.* Hounwood, IL: Dorsey Press.

Ganz, M 2000. "Resources and resourcefulness: Strategic capacity in the unionization of California agriculture (1959-1967)", *American Journal of Sociology* 105(4), January:1003-1062, https://doi.org/10.1086/210398

Han, H 2014. *How organizations develop activists: Civic associations and leadership in the 21st century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199336760.001.0001

Ho, M 2010. "Co-opting social ties: How the Taiwanese Petrochemical Industry neutralized environmental opposition", *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 15(4), December:447-463.

Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa 2015. "2016 Municipal elections handbook", <www.elections.org.za/%2Fcontent%2FDocuments%2FPublications%2- F2016-Municipal-Elections>, accessed 14 May 2017.

Jaffee, D 2012. "Weak coffee: Certification and co-optation in the Fair Trade Movement", *Social Problems* 59(1), February:94-116, https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2012.59.1.94

Jain, H 2010. "Community protests in South Africa: Trends, analysis and explanations", <https://www.sajr.co.za/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ 14-community-protests.pdf?sfvrsn=2>, accessed 13 May 2017.

Kalyvas, SN 2003. "The ontology of political violence", *Perspectives on Politics* 1(3), September:475-494, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592703000355

Kalyvas, SN 2006. *The logic of violence in civil war*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511818462

Klandermans, B (ed.) 1989. *Organizing for change: Social movement organizations in Europe and the United States*, International Social Movement Research, Volume 2. Greenwhich: JAI Press.

Langa, M and K von Holdt 2012. "Insurgent citizenship, class formation and the dual nature of a community protests: A case study of 'Kungcatsha'". In: M Dawson and L Sinwell (eds), *Contesting transformation: Popular resistance in twenty-first century South Africa*. London: Pluto, pp.80-100.

Lapegna, P 2014. "Pitfalls of 'co-optation'", <http://participationanditsdiscontents.tumblr.com/post/77071378901/pitfalls-of-cooptation>, accessed 14 May 2017.

Local businessman 2014. Interview: Author with local businessman, 29 May.

Local pastor 2014. Interview: Author with local pastor, 31 May.

Mail and Guardian 2004. "We toyi-toyi to get attention", <https://mg.co.za/article/2004-10-01-we-toyitoyi-to-get-attention>, accessed 12 May 2017.

Mail and Guardian 2011. "Police crack down as new protests rock Ficksburg", <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-05-13-police-crack-down-as-new-protests-rock-ficksburg>, accessed 14 May 2017.

Managa, A 2012. "Unfulfilled promises and their consequences: A reflection on local government performance and the critical issue of poor service delivery in South Africa", *Africa Institute of South Africa Policy Brief* 76, <http://www.ai.org.za/wp-content/uploads /downloads /2012 /05/No.-76>, accessed 14 May 2017.

Matebesi SZ 2017. *Civil strife against local governance: Dynamics of community protests in contemporary South Africa*. Berlin and Toronto: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

McAdam, D 1982. *Political process and the development of black insurgency*, *1930-1970*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

MCC leader 2013. Interview: Author with MCC leader, 15 March.

McCammon, HJ and KE Campbell 2002. "Allies on the road to victory: Coalition formation between the suffragists and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union", *Mobilization* 7(3), January:231-251.

McCarthy, JD and MN Zald 1977. "Resource mobilisation: A partial theory", *American Journal of Sociology* 82(6):1212-1241, https://doi.org/10.1086/226464

McCarthy, JD and M Wolfson 1992. "Consensus movements, conflict movements, and the cooptation of civic and state infrastructures". In: AD Morris and CM Muller (eds), *Frontiers in social movement theory*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, pp. 273-297.

Melucci, A 1989. *Nomads of the present: Social movements and individual needs in contemporary society*. London: Hutchinson Radius, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520891

Melucci, A 1996. *Challenging codes: Collective action in the Information Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meyer, DS 1993. "Institutionalising dissent: The United States structure of political opportunity and the end of the nuclear freeze movement", *Sociological Forum* 8, June:157-179, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01115488

Meyer, DS and SG Tarrow 1998. "A movement society: Contentious politics for a new century". In: DS Meyer and SG Tarrow (eds), *The social movement society: Contentious politics for a new century.* Littlefield: Rowman and Lanham, pp. 1-28.

Morris AD and S Staggenborg 2004. "Leadership in social movements". In: DA Snow, SA Soule and H Kriesi (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to social movements*. London: Blackwell, pp. 171-196, https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470999103.ch8

Mubungizi, BC and MC Dassah 2014. "Public participation in South Africa: Is intervention by the courts the answer?", *Journal of Social Science* 39(3):275- 284, https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2014.11893290

Nepstad, S and C Bob 2006. "When do leaders matter? Hypotheses on leadership dynamics in social movements", *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 11(2), February:1-22.

Newton K 1999. "Social and political trust". In: N Pippa (ed.), *Critical citizens: Global support for democratic government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.342-361, https://doi.org/10.1093/0198295685.003.0008

Neyazi, TA, A Kumar and HA Semetko 2016. "Campaigns, digital media, and mobilization in India", *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 21(3), July:398- 416, https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161216645336

Ngwane, T 2012. "Labour strikes and community protests: Is there a basis for unity in post-apartheid South Africa". In: M Dawson and L Sinwell (eds), *Contesting transformation: Popular resistance in twenty-first-century South Africa*. London: Pluto, pp.125-142.

Opp, K 2009. Theories of political protest and social movements: A multidisciplinary introduction, critique, and synthesis. New York: Routledge.

Paret, M 2015. "Violence and democracy in South Africa's community protests", *Review of African Political Economy* 42(143), June:107-123, https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2014.995163

Petrova, T and S Tarrow 2007. "Transactional and participatory activism in the emerging European polity: The puzzle of East-Central Europe", *Comparative Political Studies* 40(1), January:74-94, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006291189

Pettinicchio, D 2017. "Elites, policy and social movements". In: B Wejnert and P Parigi (eds), *Research in political sociology*, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2886842>, accessed 14 May 2017.

Piper, L and L Nadvi 2010. "Popular mobilisation, party dominance and participatory governance in South Africa". In: L Tompson and C Tapscott (eds), *Citizenship, mobilisation and social movements in the South: Perspectives from the global South*. London: Zed Books, pp.212-238.

Piven, FF and FA Cloward 1979. *Poor people's movements: Why they succeed, how they fail*. New York: Vintage Books.

Resident 2014. Interview: Author with resident(s), 30 May.

Runciman, C 2014. "Mobilising insurgent citizenship: Forging local authority and everyday policing in Protea Court", *South African Review of Sociology* 45(1), April:29-44, https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2014.887913

Santoro, WA and GM McGuire 1997. "Social movement insiders: The impact of institutional activists on affirmative action and comparable worth policies", *Social Problems* 44(1), November:503-519, https://doi.org/10.2307/3097220

Schwartz, M 1976. *Radical protest and social structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Selznick, P 1949. *TVA and the grass roots: A study in the sociology of formal organization. Berkeley: University of California Press.*

Serafeim, K 2012. "The impact of social media on press freedom in Greece: Benefits, challenges and limitations", *Essachess* 5(9), November:163-192.

Setsoto Local Municipality 2015. "About us", <http://www.setsoto.info/content.php?7-about-us>, accessed 10 May 2017.

Staggenborg, S 1986. "Coalition work in the Pro-Choice Movement: Organizational and environmental opportunities and obstacles", *Social Problems* 33(5), June:374-390, https://doi.org/10.2307/800657

Staggenborg, S 2016. *Social movements*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tarrow, S 1998. *Power in movement*, 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University. Press, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511813245

Van Vuuren, H 2013. "South Africa, democracy, corruption and conflict management". Paper delivered at the Democracy Works Projects Seminar, Johannesburg, 20 April.

Visser, J, D Powell, K Staples and S Gilliland 2012. "MLGI Protest Barometer", *Local Government Bulletin* 14(3), October:4-7.

Von Holdt, K 2013. "South Africa: The transition to violent democracy", *Review of African Political Economy* 40(138), December:589-604, https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2013.854040

Zuern, E 2011. *The politics of necessity: Community organizing and democracy in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.