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## BATTLE FOR THE SOUL OF SOUTH AFRICA



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The battle for the soul of the ANC is reaching its climax.

And the stakes couldn't be higher – the winner is likely to go on to become the next President of South Africa after President Jacob Zuma steps down in 2019.

Two heavyweight candidates have been criss-crossing the country in search of votes from the ANC branches. Both candidates promise new directions for a South Africa which has staggered from scandal to scandal under President Zuma who has presided over a declining economy hovering between recession and around 1% growth, a stubborn unemployment rate of more than 25% and hard evidence of state corruption.

South Africa today is a far cry from those heady days more than twenty years ago when Nelson Mandela campaigned under the slogan "Now Is The Time" and "A Better Life For All". Then South Africa had the respect of the world as Archbishop Tutu's miraculous Rainbow Nation.

I remember the great optimism of those days and I have watched as disappointment and frustration have slowly embraced the country. Unemployment is still too high, there is abject poverty particularly in the rural areas and President Zuma and his acolytes have given South Africa a sleazy and corrupt image which has undoubtedly hampered foreign investment.

South Africa's tragedy is that big strides have been made in the provision of social grants, clean running water, electrification and house-building for the poor but those achievements have often been lost sight of under the weight of state corruption, political infighting inside the ANC, and the politics of race hate.

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Whoever emerges as Zuma's successor next week will face a major task to turn around the country and rediscover the road that Mandela and his generation dreamed of during their long walk to freedom.

The battle is between Cyril Ramaphosa the current Deputy President, and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the ex wife of President Jacob Zuma and mother of four of his twenty-two children.

To be fair to Ms Dlamini-Zuma she is also a formidable politician in her own right. She's been South Africa's International Relations Minister and has just stepped down as Chair of the African Union Commission. She's a qualified doctor who trained at Bristol University in the United Kingdom when she was in exile from the old Apartheid regime in South Africa.

Her rival Cyril Ramaphosa has an equally long ANC history. He was leader of the Mineworkers Union in the 1980s and a key anti-apartheid campaigner. He led the committee that prepared for Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1991. And he headed the ANC negotiating team in the long months of CODESA talks that eventually led to South Africa's first all-race democratic elections which were won by Nelson Mandela in 1994

Ramaphosa would've been South Africa's President years ago were it not for Nelson Mandela's decision to choose Thabo Mbeki over him as his Deputy and successor. It was a decision which President Mandela is said to have come to regret.

Ramaphosa turned his back on politics and became a leading businessman and one of the richest people in the country. In addition to mining and livestock interests, at one stage he owned the McDonalds fast food franchise in South Africa. He is married to Tshepo Motsepe, the sister of the country's richest black business leader Patrice Motsepe.

This makes him the business community's favoured candidate. He has promised to implement the much-praised National Development Plan which has been stalled under President Zuma and he has business-friendly policies which he refers to as a New Deal with job creation as its top priority. However in racially divided and very unequal South Africa this is also his weakness – he is considered in some quarters as a stooge of so-called "white minority capital" and a "fat-cat" out of touch with ordinary South Africans.

He is tarnished by his failed attempt to buy a prize buffalo and calf at a cattle auction for £1.4 million --- a move which has brought him much ridicule and bolstered his "fat-cat" credentials. He is also deemed to have behaved badly in the lead up to the Marakana massacre when thirty-four mine-workers were shot dead by police. Then Ramaphosa was a Director of Lonmin the mine owners and stands accused of encouraging the police to crackdown on the striking miners.

Ms Dlamini-Zuma is equally tarnished. She calls for "radical economic transformation" but is unclear about what that entails. She remains close to her ex-husband and has failed to squash suggestions he wants her to win because she'd grant him immunity from the two hundred plus corruption charges he faces.

On the campaign trail she has been reluctant to discuss the Nkandla issue when President Zuma was heavily criticised and drew censure from the Public Protector for a lavish building

extension at his private residence in his home village of Nkandla which was paid for from public funds. Many observers say this shows she is at ease with her ex- husband's corrupt behaviour.

The showdown comes this weekend when ANC delegates will cast their votes. To date Mr Ramaphosa is thought to be leading by a short head. He has the pledges of 1,861 branches, while Ms Dlamini-Zuma has 1,309. But all that can change – delegates have been known to switch their voting intentions in spite of the mandate from the branches they represent – don't rule out officials paying bribes and using their power and patronage to change delegates' voting intentions.

And don't rule out President Zuma's ability to seemingly hold the ANC in an iron fist and his uncanny knack of winning support even when faced with scandals, no confidence motions and firm evidence of corruption.

But Zuma's ANC lacks the popularity of Mandela's ANC. In the last elections the party lost majority control of three of the biggest conurbations in Cape Town, Joburg and Pretoria. Defeats that would've been unthinkable in Mandela's time. Its famed Triple Alliance with the South African Communist Party and the Trade Unions has split, and the party itself seems riven by factions and infighting.

As the ANC fiddles, South Africa burns. Voters express mounting anger over rising unemployment, failing schools, corrupt ANC officials, poor delivery of services and a stagnating economy that has been reduced to junk status by two of the major rating agencies.

Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown wrote Shakespeare. The bard is now dismissed as a colonial import on some South African campuses in this race-obsessed society, but his words will ring true for whoever wins this election.

Whether it's Ramaphosa or Dlamini-Zuma, the winner has a big job to do to keep the ANC, Africa's oldest liberation movement, in power and to prevent South Africa from falling into further decline.

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## Insightful Reading

*The President's Keepers: Those Keeping Zuma in power and out of prison* by the legendary South African journalist Jacques Pauw. For those who want to know more about the industrial scale kleptocracy perpetrated by South Africa's President Zuma.

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