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Elke Zuern. *The Politics of Necessity: Community Organizing and Democracy in South Africa.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011. 264 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-299-25014-0; ISBN 978-0-299-25013-3.

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In 2006, an edited volume entitled *Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-apartheid South Africa* was published by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. That book had been the result of a several-year collaborative research project, and represented perhaps the first comprehensive attempt to understand an emergent phenomenon of widespread and seemingly uncoordinated protest action against service delivery failures and infrastructure backlogs within poor communities, less than a decade after democracy. The author of *The Politics of Necessity*, Elke Zuern, was among the researchers and authors who contributed to that original volume, evidencing a personal engagement with the messy and sometimes opaque politics of social movement mobilization that spans nearly a decade. The depth of Zuern's knowledge about the scope, scale, and internal dynamics of what is a constantly changing micropolitical landscape–influenced as it is by the local manifestations of material conditions, local personality dynamics, broader political allegiances, as well as grassroots debates about and experiments with alternative forms of democracy–is clearly evident in *The Politics of Necessity*. More importantly, perhaps, whereas the original edited volume represented an initial attempt to map out an emergent phenomenon, providing some tentative theorization about the political economy of the post-apartheid state, in *The Politics of Necessity* Zuern makes a far more empirically and theoretically rigorous argument about the emergence and endurance of social movements in post-apartheid South Africa.

In short, Zuern argues that within both the anti-apartheid movement and the post-apartheid "social contract," and influenced by a range of historical and international precedents, there resides an implicit link between articulations of socioeconomic equality and democratic political rights. Quite opposed to the ways in which the media or institutions of the state frequently portray social movements as protesting material conditions, Zuern suggests that "protests aim to challenge, and by doing so, to destabilise authority" (p. 4). The extent to which social protest mobilization serves to reinforce democratic citizenship or to be shut down as counterrevolutionary or causing social instability, is ultimately contingent on historical outcomes. Nevertheless, in tracing the linked discourses of inequality and democracy from the anti-apartheid movement, Zuern is able to locate contemporary social movement protests within broader contestation about democracy, and not only material concerns.

In addition to the breadth of Zuern's empirical detail, therefore, the second great strength of her book is the quite simple, but theoretically very significant, move of linking the emergence of social movement protest with a longer history of protest in South Africa. This is no doubt a potentially contentious and fraught move, in the context of very powerful claims made over South Africa's struggle history. But Zuern's is not a nostalgic reappropriation of a heroic history, even as some movement leaders have drawn upon this narrative as part of their repertoire. Rather, Zuern wants to trace by way of an investigation of social movement protest the shifting meaning of democracy in the context of inequality in the present moment, having emerged out of a very particular history of nondemocratic state power. As Zuern argues, "most academic analyses of democratisation employ liberal and procedural definitions of democracy that focus on civil and political rights. [This definition] stands in stark contrast to the understandings of democracy that often inspire ordinary people to protest" (p. 17). To do this, Zuern takes her reader through a history that spans both apartheid and post-apartheid protest, as well as a geography that spans far more than the boundaries of South Africa. The attempt at linking the South African experience into those of other contexts does not always seem appropriate. In part, the reader is left somewhat unconvinced by the seemingly superficial comparisons that Zuern is compelled to make. The brevity of these excursions is of course understandable, and I am convinced

that Zuern has anyway had to make difficult editorial decisions about how to include a vast volume of empirical material for her primary case study. Nevertheless, the very compelling link that is drawn between past and present is not always complimented by the tangential reference to other places. This, though, is a very minor criticism of what is an otherwise compellingly written and historically comprehensive argument, and other readers may find that these excursions in fact add something to the broader relevance of Zuern's argument.

In the first two chapters, Zuern covers an apparently familiar history, that of the rise of the civic movements in the townships in the 1970s and 1980s. Covering an impressively wide array of sources, Zuern tracks in the first chapter not only the gradual convergence of particular articulations of democracy with political and socioeconomic demands made through the anti-apartheid movement, but also the contingent and contested nature of this process. As she suggests, the form of democracy that would emerge after apartheid was at no point in clear view, and was the result of contested political events and circumstances that were not restricted to the borders of South Africa. In chapter 2 Zuern draws on Arjun Appadurai's notion of the "capacity to aspire," and focuses on the role of community leaders in conscientizing communities, linking immediate deprivation to a broader structural critique of the apartheid system. She traces a shifting of relations between protest leaders and state institutions, arriving at moment of the post-apartheid social movement protests, and posing questions about the discourses of democracy that have traction within the post-apartheid state. Zuern is primarily concerned in this history with the persistence of particular forms of civic action, which continue to circulate in townships and marginal areas of the country thirty or forty years after they first emerged in the anti-apartheid movement. It is not always clear how the anti-apartheid civics and the post-apartheid social movements are linked in this argument, beyond the continuing social marginalization and deprivation that many communities experience. Her argument, however, is not first and foremost that protest has emerged at the coalface of the failed dream of the post-apartheid developmental state. While Zuern is no doubt critical of the failure of the state to live up to the expectations of 1994, she is nevertheless concerned primarily with how the experience of this interrupted dream is located within the circulating meanings through time and space of democracy embedded in a history of protest action.

In the next three chapters Zuern attempts to periodize articulations of democracy within protest movements from the apartheid to the post-apartheid era. Broadly, Zuern moves from the apartheid era, to the transition, to the post-apartheid era, and asks from each of these periods what the possibilities and limits of democratic engagement might be, from the perspective of community-based organizations and protest movements. She considers to what extent protest movements were instrumental in bringing about democratic transition, their role in defining a new social contract, and their continued role in deepening or undermining democracy. In the final chapter (chapter 6), and based on a very thorough and deliberate procession through a very rich history, Zuern attempts to read the articulations of democracy made by ordinary people in protest action against the dominant theories of democracy. She argues compellingly once again that protest against material inequality is also about articulating alternative visions of democracy, suggesting finally that democracy withers when ordinary people stop questioning it.

Perhaps the biggest gap readers might note in Zuern's work is its tentative and hesitant engagement with theories of social movement mobilization. Given that her argument is about the link between articulations of democracy and demands for material equality, Zuern is reluctant to be drawn into theoretical debates about social movement mobilization. The theoretical energy of the volume is directed towards theories of democracy, the efficacy for different social groupings of mobilizing constitutional versus direct democratic practices, and the role of social movement protest in bringing about democratic regime change, or of deepening democratic institutions. Those looking to understand the emergence of social movements in post-apartheid South Africa at the particular juncture in history ten years after the end of apartheid may be disappointed by the incompleteness of Zuern's argument about the intersection of deprivation and the work needed to connect this to broader institutional power. Certainly, there is very limited engagement with the classical social movement literature. This critique would, however, be an unjust criticism of a book whose aim is arguably something quite different. In my assessment, Zuern is not attempting to theorize the emergence of social movements. Rather, she is attempting and indeed succeeds convincingly to demonstrate how social movements, in and through their repertoires of protest against material inequality, pose radical questions about the nature of democracy so painfully won in South Africa. *The Politics of Necessity* is essential reading for those interested in the changing landscape of state, political participation, and discourses of rights in post-apartheid South Africa.

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