

FILM REVIEW

Rehad Desai and Jabulani Mzozo, directors. *The Giant is Falling*. 2016. English and Xhosa with English subtitles. 77 minutes. South Africa. Icarus Films. \$390.

The Giant is Falling, director Rehad Desai's follow-up film to his critically acclaimed documentary *Miners Shot Down* (2014), reflects on South Africa's first two decades of democracy. Desai, who narrates the film, asks "where did it all go wrong?" as the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), plagued by numerous corruption scandals and struggling to deliver on its promises of "a better life for all," begins to lose its grip on power. With the election of Nelson Mandela as president in 1994 and the implementation of a progressive constitution in 1996, South Africa, which was dubbed a "rainbow nation," came to represent the possibilities of racial reconciliation and a more equitable future after decades of apartheid rule. However, soon after assuming power and under pressure from international capital, the ANC abandoned its plans to nationalize various sectors of the economy, along with other policies which had been aimed at redistributing wealth and improving infrastructure, in favor of neoliberal economic policies. The Black Economic Empowerment program implemented by Mandela's successor, President Thabo Mbeki, as a mechanism for contending with racial inequality, created a class of "comprador bourgeoisie," but their newfound wealth failed to trickle down to the masses. Taken together, these policies have limited the effects of liberation, especially for the majority of South Africans who are black and poor, even as the ranks of the elite class have grown more diverse. The idea of South Africa as a rainbow nation has always been more myth than reality, but as *The Giant is Falling* makes clear, any remaining notion of rainbowism is unraveling as evidenced in the increasing number of "service delivery" protests, demands for the decolonization of education across the country, and the state massacre of striking mineworkers at Marikana in 2012.

Combining news and archival footage with interviews of important players and analysts such as head of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) Julius Malema, former Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, former ANC cabinet minister Ronnie Kasrils, former head of the Congress of South African Trade Unions Zwelinzima Vavi, student activist Vuyani Pambo, political theorist Achille Mbembe, and political commentator Moeletsi Mbeki, Desai and his co-director Jabulani Mzozo highlight key moments in the

ANC's decline. This includes Thabo Mbeki's ouster as president, his replacement by Jacob Zuma, and ANC Youth League President and one-time Zuma ally Julius Malema's expulsion from the ANC. It also addresses the various scandals that plagued Zuma, including his acquittal on charges of rape as well as allegations of corruption in connection with an arms deal, misuse of public funds to improve his private home in Nkandla, and "state capture" based on his close relationship with the Gupta family. During his tenure as president, Zuma, despite his populist rhetoric, was unable to effectuate change, and South Africans grew increasingly weary of his scandal-ridden administration. As the film shows, disillusionment with Zuma was evident at Mandela's state memorial service, where he was booed by the crowd. However, Desai identifies the Marikana massacre as the moment when "things fell apart," as the masses of ordinary South Africans who had long been loyal to the ANC as the party of liberation lost confidence in their leadership. One year later, Malema started a new political party, the EFF. This development, which was followed by stinging losses to the EFF and the Democratic Alliance in the general election held in 2014, along with an uptick in land occupations by poor people and the onset of student protests associated with #FeesMustFall, destabilized the political landscape. The film was released before Zuma was forced to resign from office in 2018.

Desai describes *The Giant is Falling* as "an intervention in the public debate that is happening in South Africa" (Kemp 2016), but the film acts more as a recap of events, especially for audiences outside of South Africa, and lacks important nuance. As in Desai's earlier film, *Miners Shot Down*, black women have been rendered invisible in *The Giant is Falling*. Their contributions to the struggles against the ANC and the persistence of inequality, and their perspectives on the first two decades of democracy are absent. Indeed, the only woman interviewed in the film, Fiona Forde, is white. This is a glaring omission that has been noted also by South African critics (Dlakavu 2016). Desai is enthusiastic about the changing political landscape, and he seems to pin his hopes for the future on the disruptive activism of the "born free" generation who are unwilling to wait patiently for transformation (they are the subject of his 2018 film *Everything Must Fall*) and the rise of the EFF, which Desai describes as "captur[ing] the imagination of those who have absolutely nothing to lose." Though Desai wonders if the people can trust Malema, a charismatic firebrand, the film fails to acknowledge that he too has been accused of corruption, and that the EFF's rhetoric and practices are often steeped in misogyny. That Desai invokes William Butler Yeats' poem *The Second Coming* and Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* is fitting, as it is increasingly clear that the status quo can no longer hold, but what lies ahead for South Africa is not yet clear.

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