



ANNALES SCIENTIA POLITICA

VOLUME 14, NUMBER 1, 2025

ANNALES SCIENTIA POLITICA

Vol. 14, No. 1, 2025

KGOBE, F. K. L. – LETSOALO, K. S.: Contesting power, reclaiming identity: the political identity formation of the Economic Freedom Fighters in post-colonial South Africa. *Annales Scientia Politica*, Vol. 14, No. 1, (2025), pp. 5–15.

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Keywords:

African Unity, Economic Freedom Fighters, Identity Formation, Identity Politics, Land & South Africa, Post-Colonial Theory.

CONTESTING POWER, RECLAIMING IDENTITY: THE POLITICAL IDENTITY FORMATION OF THE ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS IN POST-COLONIAL SOUTH AFRICA

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Introduction and background

Post-colonial South Africa reflects a complex landscape shaped by its colonial and apartheid legacies, profoundly influencing its path to democracy and unique challenges progress. The transition from apartheid to democracy marked a pivotal change, initially seen as unprecedented but increasingly aligning with conventional post-colonial narratives (Greffrath, 2016). The African National Congress (ANC) has played a central role in navigating the socio-political landscape, addressing

the myriad issues arising from a radicalised and discontented populace (Greffrath, 2016). The reconstruction of the post-apartheid state necessitated engagement with territorial reorganisation and nation-building challenges often associated with the trajectories of post-colonial nations across Africa (Ramutsindela, 2011). The Country's political landscape grapples with pervasive corruption, political instability, and governance crises that hinder inclusive growth and exacerbate unemployment, inequality, and poverty (Mlambo, Mubecua & Mlambo, 2023). The lingering imprints of racial capitalism, a remnant of colonial and apartheid systems, continue to influence socio-economic conditions, with manifestations of racism particularly prominent within the working class (Motaung, 2021). The colonial narrative of South Africa encompasses various forms of colonialism and migration, which have significantly impacted the nation's cultural and social constructs (Warnes, 2012). The literary corpus of the nation often encapsulates these intricate relationships, frequently foregrounding themes of identity and landscape (Warnes, 2012). Historical injustices, including racial and gender disparities, continue to undermine social cohesion, prompting efforts to address these issues through both legal and social frameworks (Baboolal-Frank & Bekker, 2020). The persistent socio-political and economic challenges define the ongoing post-colonial state in South Africa, often depicted in literature as a quest for dignity and hope in the face of governance failures and corruption (Mavengano & Nkamta, 2022).

The imposition of colonial powers and apartheid policies in South Africa engendered rigid ethnic identities through strategies such as divide and rule, transforming previously fluid pre-colonial identities into detrimental classifications that continue to resonate in contemporary society (Motaung, 2021; Mokhine & Motaung, 2021). In the post-apartheid context, the exacerbation of identity crises is facilitated by legal documents enforcing racial and ethnic categorisations, thereby perpetuating the separations rooted in apartheid (Sauti, 2020). Dominant narratives of White supremacy and Black inferiority had influenced identity construction and power dynamics in social, political, economic and institutional structures in South Africa (Metcalf, 2022).

The emerging of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in 2014 election marked a significant change in the South African political sphere. Led by the former president of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), Julius Malema, the party captured the public imagination and transformed the political landscape. The EFF positioned itself as a leftist alternative to the ANC, with an emphasis on populism, black liberation, and economic justice, but has faced criticism for its militarised image and perceived fascist tendencies (Mbetse, 2016). It could be argued that the EFF's emergence in the political arena was a primarily response to the ANC's perceived inadequacies in addressing economic inequality and social justice concerns that have persisted since the end of apartheid (Maritz & Venter, 2022). The EFF identifies itself as a party that advocates for radical economic transformation initiatives, including land expropriation without compensation and the nationalisation of strategic economic sectors. This approach, particularly its commitment to land reform and job creation, particularly resonates with younger black voters in urban regions (Maritz & Venter, 2022). The party employs populist messaging and maintains a visually striking, militarised brand to differentiate itself from other political entities and manage internal organisational challenges (Fölscher, De Jager & Nyenhuis, 2021; Pauwels, 2022). This strategic approach has led to extensive discourse regarding whether the EFF exhibits characteristics reminiscent of fascism; however, some scholars contend that it should be evaluated based on its ideology and actions, rather than through the lens of historical fascism (Satgar, 2019; Van Der Westhuizen, 2023). The relationship between the EFF and the ANC is complex, as the former seeks to position itself as the authentic champion of black economic freedom, often reframing narratives surrounding the South African struggle to attract disenchanted ANC supporters (Maritz & Venter, 2022). Despite its rapid ascent in the political arena, the EFF faces several challenges, including accusations of racialised populism and scepticism about its long-term viability as a political movement (Nyenhuus & Schulz-Herzenberg, 2023). Therefore, this study explores the identity formation of the EFF and how the colonial-apartheid lega-

cies influenced the party's identity and political approaches.

This paper focuses on the formation of the EFF's political identity within the context of post-colonial South Africa. It examines how the party constructs its identity through ideology, symbolism, discourse, and policy positions, drawing on post-colonial theory to analyse the enduring legacies of colonialism and apartheid in shaping political narratives. The paper is structured into key sections, including an introduction and background, a literature review on identity politics and the EFF, a discussion of the theoretical framework, a methodology section detailing the use of qualitative analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, findings presented thematically, and a concluding discussion. It explores how the EFF positions itself as a radical alternative to the ruling ANC, appealing particularly to marginalised and disillusioned Black communities.

Research methods

To explore the identity formation of the EFF, this study employed a qualitative research design grounded in a post-colonial theoretical framework. The data consisted of purposively selected media texts including news articles, political commentary and the EFF's official campaign manifestos, from the period between January 2019 and December 2024. This data were chosen based on their relevance to the construction of political identity, particularly those addressing the ideological positions, symbolic representations, and rhetorical strategies used by the party to construct its political identity. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was applied to explore how language and visual symbolism are used to frame and contest identities within the post-apartheid South African context. The analysis followed four interrelated phases: contextual analysis, which situated the discourse within the country's socio-political landscape; textual analysis, which explored linguistic patterns and recurring themes; interpretive analysis, which examined the construction and negotiation of identity within the selected texts; and critical evaluation, which reflected on the broader implications of the EFF's identity formation strategies in challenging dominant power structures and advancing radical political discourse. This ap-

proach enabled a nuanced understanding of how the EFF leverages ideology and symbolism, rather than public speeches, to establish itself as a political force representing marginalised communities in South Africa.

Theoretical framing – postcolonial theory

This paper applies Postcolonial Theory to analyse how the EFF contributes to the politics of identity formation. Post-colonial theory constitutes a critical framework that has emerged to scrutinise and engage with the cultural legacies spawned by colonialism and imperialism. This theoretical paradigm examines the lasting impact of colonial governance on former colonies and explores the enduring influence of colonial ideologies in contemporary societies. Over time, post-colonial theory has expanded to encompass a diverse array of disciplines, including literature, history, anthropology, and political science. The ascendancy of post-colonial theory was significantly marked by the publication of Edward Said's seminal work, "Orientalism", in 1978. Said's analysis elucidated the intricate connections between knowledge and power in colonial contexts, illustrating how cultural representations were inextricably linked to the mechanisms of colonial domination. This foundational text paved the way for a broader exploration of the cultural consequences of political and economic control (Azim, 2001).

Since its inception, the field of postcolonial studies has broadened to address a range of subjects, encompassing anti-colonial movements and the processes of nation formation following independence. Consequently, it has evolved into a vast academic discipline characterised by its interdisciplinary nature (Azim, 2001). The designation "post-colonial" itself remains a contentious term, with some scholars critiquing its potential to homogenise the diverse experiences of colonialism while obscuring the persistent influences of colonial legacies. Notably, critics such as Hall (1992a) and Rattansi (1994) have cautioned against the risks associated with using the term to describe profoundly different historical and cultural contexts, such as those about settler colonies contrasted with nations that achieved independence in the aftermath of World War II (Kandiyoti, 2022). Despite these critiques, the

concept remains relevant in framing the transition from colonial empires to post-colonial societies (Kandiyoti, 2002). The methodologies employed within post-colonial theory are diverse, incorporating approaches derived from European cultural theories to analyse colonial systems of representation and cultural production (Kandiyoti, 2002). Furthermore, the theory explores themes such as language appropriation, hybrid identity, and the reconfiguration of power dynamics within postcolonial contexts (Fox, 1991).

One of the principal challenges facing post-colonial theory lies in its potential propensity to depoliticise discourses by prioritising cultural critiques over geopolitical analysis. This has spurred ongoing debates regarding the term's efficacy in addressing contemporary phenomena, including neo-colonialism and imperialism (Shohat, 1992). Future research may yield fruitful insights by integrating post-colonial theory with other disciplines, such as socio-psychological studies, to elucidate the long-term ramifications of colonialism (Leone, 2018). Moreover, expanding the corpus of post-colonial studies to encompass non-English languages and interdisciplinary methodologies could foster a more nuanced understanding of the complex legacies of colonial rule (Leone, 2018). Post-colonial theory critically examines colonialism and imperialism's cultural, political, and economic effects. It seeks to understand and deconstruct the enduring impacts of colonial rule on former colonies and their populations. Key figures in post-colonial theory include Edward Said, whose seminal work "Orientalism" critiques Western perceptions of the East, and Frantz Fanon, who explored the psychological ramifications of colonisation (Hamadi, 2014). This theoretical framework emphasises the importance of reclaiming and reinterpreting the histories and identities of colonised peoples (Hamadi, 2014). The theory also delves into the concept of the "Other", analysing how identities are shaped about those of the colonisers (Radhakrishnan, 1993; Upadhyaya, 2023).

In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid has profoundly influenced identity formation. The transition to a post-apartheid society necessitated a redefinition of national identity, addressing the inequalities and divisions caused by decades of institutionalised racism (Carmo-

dy, 2023). The end of apartheid in 1994 marked a significant shift in South Africa's political landscape, with the ANC emerging as the dominant political force and Nelson Mandela assuming the role of the nation's first Black president. The post-apartheid era has focused on addressing the socio-economic disparities and racial inequalities that apartheid perpetuated. However, corruption, economic inequality, and social unrest continue to affect the political environment. The EFF has become a prominent political party in South Africa, known for its radical leftist stance and commitment to economic freedom and land reform. Research on the EFF highlights its strategic use of identity politics to rally support, particularly among young, disenfranchised Black South Africans. The party's rhetoric often underscores the ANC's shortcomings in addressing economic inequality and the lingering effects of colonialism and apartheid.

Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF): Ideology, symbols and discourse

When the EFF joined the political mainstream in 2013, its ideological framework was grounded in the black consciousness rhetoric inspired by Steve Biko, Pan-Africanism inspired by Robert Sobukwe, and the critique of the postcolonial comprador state inspired by Frantz Fanon (Mbeti, 2016). With its advocacy for radical economic transformation, the expropriation of land without compensation and nationalisation of key sectors of the economy. The influence of Fanon's (1968) work, "The wretched of the earth", is evident in the EFF's assertion for a complete decolonisation, that includes both material and psychological transformation. Additionally, the EFF draws its inspiration from African revolutionaries such as Robert Sobukwe and Thomas Sankara, invoking their legacies to position the party as part of a broader pan-African struggle for black dignity and sovereignty (Ndletyana, 2015; Folscher et al., 2021). Moreover, the EFF constructs its identity through symbolism and political performance, with the party's red berets, military-style overalls, and parliamentary disruptions serving as visual and performative expressions of the party's political message. These symbols and visuals represent solidarity with the working class and a clear rejection of

the Eurocentric political culture embedded in political institutions. This visual rhetoric constitutes a key component of the EFF's populist appeal, differentiating them from other political entities within South Africa.

Political movements as a vehicle of identity

Political movements have historically played a significant role in shaping the identities of individuals in South Africa and paved the way for the emergence of new political parties. The assertive stance of the EFF has compelled the ruling ANC to reevaluate its policy on land redistribution, reflecting a growing urgency to address these critical issues more effectively (Xaba, 2020). Moreover, the EFF's platform advocates for the nationalisation of key industries, aligning with a leftist ideological framework that seeks to redistribute wealth and resources, thereby aiming to diminish economic inequality and enhance state control over essential sectors. This economic strategy positions the EFF as a leftist alternative to the ANC, particularly appealing to younger demographics and those disillusioned by the existing economic architecture (Mtimka & Prevost, 2023). The party's embrace of African socialism underscores their commitment to collective ownership and resource redistribution, which forms part of a broader strategy to engage working-class and marginalised communities while advocating for substantive social change and self-determination. The EFF positions itself as the authentic successor to South Africa's liberation struggle, strategically employing political mythology and collective memory to contest the legitimacy of the ANC. This recontextualization of historical narratives shifts the focus from the ANC's commitment to multi-racialism toward the EFF's explicit Black nationalism. The party's rhetoric not only revives historical themes, such as Pan-Africanism and the anti-apartheid struggle, but also integrates these elements with militant populism, thereby resonating with younger voters who feel disenfranchised by the perceived "incomplete transition" to social and economic equality (Makhulu, 2016). The EFF garners its most substantial support from unemployed Black youth, residents of townships, and other marginalised populations. However, recent research indica-

tes a surprising fluidity in its appeal, extending across various income and educational levels. This trait positions the EFF as a "gateway party", attracting both disenfranchised individuals and those who are upwardly mobile (Bekker, 2023). Such fluidity complicates the characterisation of the EFF as solely focused on the working class, illuminating its ability to adapt and mobilise support across a broader socioeconomic spectrum (Bekker, 2023). The party's tactics and rhetorical style have incited vigorous debates regarding the dichotomy between democratic and authoritarian governance. While some critics label their militant and populist approach as indicative of authoritarianism or proto-fascism, others argue that these strategies serve as pragmatic tools designed to destabilise entrenched power structures (Van Der Westhuizen, 2023). The internal contradictions within the EFF's identity such as the juxtaposition of revolutionary populism with ostentatious displays of wealth pose significant challenges to maintaining ideological coherence (Makhulu, 2023).

Through the creation of a unique and impactful political identity that blends bold visual and rhetorical symbols with radical leftist policy promotion and aspects of liberation-era mythology, the EFF stands out as a powerful advocate for marginalised communities groups. Nevertheless, the contradictions regarding class appeal, ideological clarity, and critiques of authoritarianism highlight the complexities and evolving nature of their political identity. Scholars increasingly view the EFF as both a disruptor of South Africa's political landscape and a pivotal force in advancing left-wing discourse, even as debates about their long-term impact and governance feasibility continue to unfold. The EFF's strategies of identity formation are multifaceted, blending policy proposals with symbolic representations to craft a unique political identity. Their emphasis on land reform, nationalisation, and African socialism, alongside evocative symbolism, positions them as a formidable presence in South African politics, actively challenging the status quo while appealing to a diverse constituency of supporters.

Economic Freedom Fighters' Impact on South African Identity Politics

The EFF has played a pivotal role in the evolution of identity politics within South Africa by directly challenging the hegemonic position of the ANC and transforming the dynamics of political discourse. The party's influence is multifaceted, reflecting significant shifts in voter demographics, policy implications, and the aesthetics of political representation. Notably, the EFF has garnered substantial support among younger black voters, particularly in urban townships, by foregrounding critical issues such as land reform and employment. This position directly challenges the ANC's longstanding dominance (Mtimka & Prevost, 2023). The EFF's base of support is characterised by a relatively educated demographic, including a considerable proportion of high earners, thus underscoring the party's diverse appeal (Bekker, 2023). The EFF's presence has catalysed policy adjustments within the ANC, particularly concerning land expropriation without compensation and the provision of free higher education. This highlights the EFF's role in shaping national policy directives from an opposition perspective (Batsani-Ncube, 2021).

Despite its populist discourse, the radical approach and racialised populism espoused by the EFF have at times, limited its electoral success, primarily due to prevailing public mistrust and strategic countermeasures employed by the ANC (Nyenhuis & Schulz-Herzenberg, 2023). Furthermore, the populist rhetoric of the EFF exerts pressure on mainstream political entities such as the ANC and

the Democratic Alliance (DA) to recalibrate their policy positions while striving to maintain their foundational narratives (Folscher et al., 2021). The party's distinct political aesthetic, characterised by a militarised and revolutionary style, sets it apart ideologically, albeit drawing critique regarding its potential fascist inclinations (Pauwels, 2022; Van Der Westhuizen, 2023). The EFF actively reinterprets the mythology surrounding the South African struggle, positioning itself as the faithful advocate for freedom and contesting the ANC's established historical narrative, which may influence prospective political coalitions (Maritz & Venter, 2022). Additionally, the EFF adeptly employs social media as a platform for disseminating its populist messages, engaging the public directly and shaping public opinion through assertive communication (Mathe, 2022). Collectively, the EFF has significantly reshaped South African identity politics by confronting the ANC's influence, impacting policy formation, and altering the political discourse through its populist and aesthetic strategies. Nonetheless, the radical methodologies employed by the EFF may, at times, constrict its electoral prospects for success.

Findings

The following table presents the key findings of the study on the identity formation of the EFF, highlighting how the party constructs and performs its political identity through symbols, discourse, policy positions, and historical narratives, as supported by relevant examples and sources from the literature.

Table 1 Main findings of the study on the identity formation of the EFF

Finding	Example(s)	In-text Citation(s)
1. The EFF constructs its identity through visual and symbolic performance.	The party uses red berets, military-style overalls, and parliamentary disruptions to represent solidarity with the working class and reject Eurocentric political culture.	(Fölscher, De Jager & Nyenhuis, 2021; Pauwels, 2022)
2. The EFF positions itself ideologically within black consciousness, Pan-Africanism, and Fanonism.	Inspired by Steve Biko and Robert Sobukwe, the EFF draws from Frantz Fanon's <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> to argue for psychological and material decolonisation.	(Mbete, 2016; Ndletyana, 2015; Fanon, 1963)
3. The EFF appeals particularly to disillusioned Black youth.	The EFF garners strong support from unemployed Black youth and township residents who feel alienated by the ANC's failure to deliver economic transformation.	(Mtimka & Prevost, 2023; Bekker, 2023)
4. The EFF uses historical memory and mythology to reframe liberation narratives.	The party challenges ANC's non-racialism by promoting Black nationalism and associating itself with the anti-apartheid struggle.	(Maritz & Venter, 2022; Makhu-lu, 2016)
5. The party influences ANC policy through radical opposition tactics.	EFF's push for land expropriation and free education pressured the ANC to adjust its policies on these issues.	(Xaba, 2020; Batsani-Ncube,

		2021)
6. The EFF's identity is shaped by populist and militant rhetoric.	Its confrontational and revolutionary style draws criticism for being authoritarian or proto-fascist, yet it resonates as a tool to dismantle power hierarchies.	(Satgar, 2019; Van Der Westhuizen, 2023)
7. The EFF's class appeal is fluid, extending beyond the working class.	Although it appeals to the unemployed, it also draws support from high earners and the upwardly mobile, becoming a "gateway party."	(Bekker, 2023)
8. The EFF relies heavily on social media to establish its identity and disseminate its message.	The party's use of Twitter and other platforms helps amplify its populist messaging and shape public discourse.	(Mathe, 2022)
9. EFF identity thrives on opposition to neoliberalism and racial capitalism.	The party promotes the nationalisation of key sectors and land redistribution to challenge capitalist structures rooted in colonial legacies.	(Motaung, 2021; Mtimka & Prevost, 2023)
10. Internal contradictions weaken the EFF's ideological coherence.	The combination of revolutionary rhetoric with ostentatious displays of wealth creates tension in the party's image.	(Makhulu 2023)

Source: Author's own elaboration

Discussion

This study set out to explore how the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) construct a political identity in post-apartheid South Africa, using a post-colonial theoretical lens to examine the party's use of visual, symbolic, and rhetorical tools. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, and post-colonial critics such as Shohat and Radhakrishnan, the study's findings show that the EFF presents itself as a radical alternative to dominant political discourses shaped by colonial and apartheid legacies. This identity construction is rooted in the party's strategic use of aesthetics, populist performance, and economic discourse, which together reflect and respond to South Africa's unfinished decolonisation project.

As discussed in the literature review, post-colonial identity is often articulated through oppositional narratives that challenge inherited systems of dominance. The EFF reflects this trend by adopting highly visual forms of political expression such as red berets, military-style uniforms, and parliamentary disruptions which operate as symbolic rejections of Eurocentric decorum and elite respectability (Folscher, De Jager & Nyenhuis, 2021). This is consistent with Fanon's (1963) argument that decolonisation must involve both material transformation and psychological liberation. By reimagining political conduct and appearance, the EFF performs what Hamadi (2014) calls the "reclamation of indigenous political space", placing emphasis on Black dignity and militancy as forms of resistance. These symbolic strategies are not performed in a vacuum

but resonate deeply with the lived experiences of the party's core supporters, predominantly Black, working-class youth from marginalised communities (Mtimka & Prevost, 2023). As shown in the findings, the EFF's rhetoric of economic justice, land redistribution, and anti-capitalist policy is central to its appeal. This aligns with the theoretical argument that post-colonial movements often emerge in contexts where neoliberalism has intensified historical inequality (Azim, 2001; Kandiyoti, 2002). The party's critique of the ANC's economic policies as an extension of racial capitalism supports this post-colonial framing and demonstrates how political identity is constructed in response to both material deprivation and symbolic exclusion.

The findings reveals that the EFF constructs its identity in continuity with liberation ideologies, particularly Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanism. As argued by Mbete (2016) and Ndletyana (2015), the EFF positions itself as the ideological heir of anti-apartheid movements, invoking the legacies of Biko and Sobukwe to critique the ANC's perceived betrayal of the liberation project. This rhetorical move mirrors a common post-colonial pattern, in which opposition movements rearticulate nationalist discourses to reclaim political authenticity and ideological purity (Shohat, 1992; Radhakrishnan, 1993). The findings affirm that the EFF uses historical memory not only as a mobilising tool, but also as a framework through which political legitimacy is asserted. Importantly, the EFF's strategic use of social media and disruptive populism represents a contemporary extension of post-colonial resistance. As shown in the findings and reinforced by Mathe

(2022), digital platforms enable the EFF to construct and perform a counter-hegemonic identity that extends beyond formal political spaces. These performances, whether online or in parliamentary settings, function as symbolic contests over visibility, voice, and representation. This resonates with Van Der Westhuizen's (2023) critique of how post-apartheid institutions often mask ongoing power asymmetries under the guise of liberal democracy.

However, the findings also point to contradictions that complicate the EFF's post-colonial identity. While the party foregrounds working-class struggle and economic radicalism, it also attracts upwardly mobile individuals and has faced criticism for internal elitism and authoritarian tendencies (Bekker, 2023; Satgar, 2019). These tensions reflect Leone's (2018) warning that post-colonial resistance movements may reproduce the hierarchical structures they oppose. Furthermore, the class fluidity within the EFF's support base reveals the fragility of a unified political identity in a society where economic and racial fault lines intersect in complex ways.

Taken together, the findings show that the EFF's political identity is both disruptive and adaptive, grounded in historical grievances yet responsive to contemporary political and economic challenges. By explicitly linking the party's strategies to broader post-colonial debates on race, class, and representation, this discussion integrates the empirical findings with the conceptual framework outlined earlier. In doing so, it affirms that identity formation in post-apartheid South Africa is not static but continuously negotiated through symbols, memory, and policy. The EFF illustrates the evolving nature of political identity in transitional democracies, highlighting how parties can function simultaneously as agents of resistance and contradiction.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the Economic Freedom Fighters strategically constructs a political identity rooted in post-colonial resistance, which resonates strongly with youth and marginalised Black communities in South Africa. Drawing on the legacies of Fanon and Biko, the party positions itself as

the ideological successor to the liberation struggle, critiquing the failures and contradictions of the post-apartheid state under ANC rule. Through its rhetoric and strategic communication, the party underscores the persistence of colonial legacies within contemporary economic and cultural power structures and seeks to address these issues through radical policy proposals, and Black self-determination. This identity, however, is complex and layered, shaped not only by resistance rhetoric, symbolic performance and confrontational politics that seek to centre historically excluded voices on the national conversation. The EFF deliberately situates itself as the vanguard of a second liberation, one that goes beyond political freedom to demand justice. Through its language, attire and public demonstrations, the party evokes powerful imagery of resistance and solidarity, drawing in the disillusioned by the unfulfilled promises of the democratic transition. It is this framing of unfinished liberation and ongoing struggles that enables the EFF to actively contest the dominant post-apartheid narrative promoted by government, offering an alternative vision how a post-colonial state should operate. However, this radical positioning is not without any contradictions, the party critiques the capitalist elitism and portrays itself as a grassroots movement, while engaging in populist spectacle and centralised leadership practices, raising questions about ideological consistency and class representation. These contradictions reflect broader complexities inherent in post-colonial identity formation, where movements must balance revolutionary rhetoric with the realities of electoral politics and institutional participation.

Theoretically, the research affirms the values of postcolonial theory for understanding contemporary political identity in south Africa. It shows how political actors such as the EFF function simultaneously as disruptors of the state quo and as participants within the very system they seek to transform. Therefore, identity in this context is not static, but dynamic, fragmented, and shaped by competing historical narratives, lived experiences, and socio-political aspirations. In conclusion, the EFF has refined the terms of political engagement in South Africa by foregrounding issues of race, memory, land and economic justice. Its influ-

ence on public discourse and policy debates underscores its role as a political disruptor in post-apartheid landscape. This study contributes to the broader scholarship on post-colonial identity and populism by offering a nuanced account of how radical political movements construct identity within complex democratic settings. Future research should build on these insights by conducting comparative studies, with similar movements across the global South. Such work will illuminate how radical identities evolve in response to institutional pressures, public expectations and the unfinished projects of decolonisation.

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