One Hundred Years of the ANC

van Kessel, Ineke, Southall, Roger, Soudien, Crain, Soske, Jon, Shubin, Vladimir, Saul, John, Nieftagodien, Noor, Netshitenzhe, Joel, Macmillan, Hugh, Lissoni, Arianna, Gunner, Liz, Etherington, Norman, Erlank, Natasha, Booysen, Susan, Bonner, Phil, Barchiesi, Franco, Badsha, Omar, April, Thozama

Published by Wits University Press

Kessel, Ineke, et al.
One Hundred Years of the ANC: Debating liberation histories today.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/50563.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/50563

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1944464
Second Keynote Address

A CONTINUING SEARCH FOR IDENTITY:
CARRYING THE BURDEN OF HISTORY

Joel Netshitenzhe

Populations that are multiply wounded as a product of permanent stress lose their capacity to make decisions and plan for the future due to the excess suffering they have lived through and not processed … Reconstructing the sense of our national and personal histories … allows us to go forward in life. But going forward is only possible if people can find new energy.¹

The centenary of the African National Congress (ANC) presents a unique opportunity to interrogate the ideals that spawned and sustained a movement that has assumed the status of a towering giant in the consciousness of South African society and humanists further afield. Whilst our reflections are about history, the subliminal question exercising our minds is whether there should be, and indeed whether there will be, another hundred years. Are South Africans able, in the words of Nicaraguan psychologist Martha Cabrera, to transcend the ‘excess suffering’ and ‘find new energy’?

Historians are better able to organise and articulate the detailed facts about the evolution of the movement and their significance. Out of such disciplined scholarship we will be able to understand the ANC’s historical narrative and how it is intertwined with the evolution of South African society. However, in the discourse on the centenary, we should be inspired by more than just inquisitiveness about the mysteries of the past. Though that in itself is a noble undertaking, this exercise should help us draw lessons that will help South African democrats find new energy.

This address tries to examine some of the current challenges facing the ANC against the backdrop of relevant developments in its evolution. The fact that the ANC is able to reach the one hundred-year milestone with its organisational integrity intact – a feat that few political organisations have attained – is deserving of serious intellectual reflection. The central argument in this brief treatise is that survival and success are the product of a continuing search for identity and thus a healthy
uncertainty. A few themes in current debates which intersect with the ANC historical narrative have been selected here. The choice of these themes is subjective and has been inspired by the following question: how, in its theory and praxis, should the ANC define its identity and project itself into the future?

THE MOVEMENT, THE PARTY AND THE NATION

The very challenge of how to celebrate the centenary brings out in bold relief the current posture of the organisation in relation to its history and how this relates to its status as the ruling party. Over the years, the organisation projected itself as a parliament, first, of the African people and it later sought recognition as the legitimate representative of all the people of South Africa. As a liberation movement with the greatest reach, the widest presence and the most effective leadership capacity, it came to be recognised by friend and foe alike as the primary agent of change and the central protagonist in the processes towards the resolution of the antagonisms in our society. This was confirmed in broad terms in the elections of 1994 and again in subsequent ones. In this light, it can be asserted that the history of the ANC is, in essence, that of the struggle of the South African people for self-determination to achieve a united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous society – ideals that are now codified in the country’s Constitution and are part of South African society’s DNA.

Yet, in assuming the status of an equal participant in elections and the leading force in government – and proceeding from the perspective that, under democracy, all the other parties reflect legitimate opinions within the bounds of the Constitution – the ANC also diminishes its status somewhat, becoming just ‘another party’ in a democratic dispensation. Outside of a noble history, to which it should legitimately lay claim, and its electoral performance and track record in government, it cannot, in an electoral democracy, formally, assert legitimacy above the status of others.

How, then, should the ANC, and society at large, address this tension both in relation to the commemoration of the organisation’s centenary and in the formal teaching of history? This question arises out of the following two challenges. Firstly, most events of national importance in the country’s history are associated with the ANC’s own history. The ANC itself seeks to attach its current ‘brand’ to these historical moments and this tends to confound the relationship between the movement, the party and the state. Quite often its electoral opponents shun some national commemorative events for fear of promoting an adversary, or adopt some
of the ANC’s historical symbols and personalities in a manner that the ANC deems opportunistic and offensive, as reflected quite intensely in the discourse around the Congress of the People (COPE) in the 2009 general election and the Democratic Alliance (DA) during the 2011 local government polls. Secondly, partly because of this tension there has been ambivalence in the development of history curricula over the years. A studious attempt is made to avoid definitive moral judgements, especially about the liberation movement as a whole, and we resort to sophistry to evade issues about the critical role that the ANC – now the ‘ruling party’ – has played in the evolution of the South African nation.

This is a tension that requires continuing reflection – both in terms of professional management of the teaching of history and in relation to the ANC’s own psychology about whether it should cede to all of society a part of itself in order to win ‘non-partisan’ allegiance to its long-term ideals. In other words, are the ANC’s pre-1994 historical milestones and their celebration the property of ‘the ruling party’ or of the nation as a whole?

Related to this is the question of how the fate of the ANC today is intertwined with that of the nation at large. Having evolved over time from being a repository of the interests of the African people to reflecting non-racialism in its outlook and organisational structures, the ANC became a symbol of national unity as an antithesis to the ideology and praxis of colonialism and apartheid. It strove consciously to transcend and, indeed, largely succeeded in transcending the fault lines of race, ethnicity and geography. Similarly, it mobilised and articulated the interests of, all classes and social strata among the oppressed. Compared to any other political party in South Africa today, the ANC still reflects these attributes in large measure.

Combined with its electoral preponderance, these traits bestow on the ANC the responsibility to be a critical ingredient of the glue that holds the South African nation together. Whatever view one may have about its policies as a party, the quality of its current leadership and the problems that attend its internal dynamics today, this mantle is a function both of history and of its objective place and role in the present.

This does not subtract from the emphasis the ANC has placed on the hierarchy of oppression and super-exploitation over the years: its assertion that the main content of the struggle is the liberation of Africans in particular and blacks in general, and its recognition of the central role of the working class. This emphasis, and the appreciation of gender equality, are informed by the logic that freedom should have as its core content attention to those who were the most marginalised and largely remain so.
In a society with deep divisions and the ever-present danger of fracturing along a variety of fault lines – be they ethnic, geographic or racial – the thinning of that glue would present a real danger to South African society. This assertion arises not because one holds a brief for the ANC but rather to emphasise that, for the foreseeable future, an ANC that in theory and practice evinces deep cracks in matters of race, ethnicity, gender and geography, would in fact imperil the whole project of nation-building, reconstruction and development.

THE PRINCIPLE AND THE DISCOMFORT OF A FOUNDING SETTLEMENT

These challenges are closely intertwined with the narrative of South Africa’s founding settlement of the early 1990s. At one extreme, everything in that settlement is portrayed as a manifestation of a leadership that overly compromised in negotiations, thus constraining possibilities for faster social transformation. At the other, the extent of the compromise is underplayed, thus evading the central issue of the mutual responsibility that is demanded of the leadership of the historically contending forces.

At the risk of oversimplification, it can be argued that a critical element of that settlement, from the point of view of the ANC, was the logic of capturing a bridgehead: to codify basic rights and use these as a basis for more thoroughgoing transformation of South African society. From the Interim Constitution to the Government of National Unity and all kinds of acts of accommodation to ensure a smooth transition, there were compromises galore. However, the final Constitution, with its assertion of various generations of rights – civil and political, social and economic, resources and the environment, as well as gender and communication (what some refer to as Fourth Generation rights) – provided the space for policies and programmes to effect such transformation. This understanding is critical from three perspectives.

Firstly, unique in the 1994 settlement was an acceptance on the part of the leadership of the majority that there would be an orderly transition and a process of transformation based on legitimate legality; that transformation would not entail grabbing from whites even the material privileges illegitimately accumulated under apartheid. The political leadership of the black community, in large measure located in the ANC, thus committed to counsel caution and patience in pursuit of social transformation that would take longer than preferred – beyond the sheer logic of
sustainability of the transformation project. In the same vein, the white community was expected to reciprocate with an acknowledgement of the historical grievance and a commitment to contribute actively to righting the historical injustice. The political leadership of the white community, located mainly in the National Party and the Democratic Party, was meant to promote this among the white community. Again at the risk of oversimplification, the evolution of party politics within the white community post-1994 reflects patent failure in this regard, with a race to the bottom during the second half of the 1990s. This found expression in the appeal to base sentiments, as in the ‘fight back’ campaign of the Democratic Party and an attempt by the New National Party to compete in that space, which ultimately led to the party’s demise. The question today then is whether the ANC should join that race to the bottom in frustration at what many may perceive as a lack of reciprocity, which they view as largely responsible for the slow pace of change.

Secondly, it is critical also to understand the transition from the point of view of the theoretical approaches of the ANC to leadership of the nation and the role of the African majority in this regard. Former secretary-general and deputy president of the ANC Walter Sisulu captured this succinctly in his assertion that ‘non-racialism is a leitmotif in the programme’ of the liberation movement and, further, that the liberation of Africans is ‘a necessary condition for removing the oppression of all other national groups.’ Rather than lowering themselves to a warped and populist approach, Africans – and blacks in general – need to rise above the constraints suffered by most whites, who ‘put blinkers on their vision and thereby confine their outlook to their short-term interest.’

Thirdly, experiences of the transition do pose the challenge of confounding principle on the one hand and compromise on the other. This arises mainly as a result of impatience at leading and governing in a law-governed society, especially in relation to the judiciary. And so, while the ANC accepts ‘the doctrine of separation of powers’ as part of the achievements of human civilisation and commits to ‘encourage mutual respect among the three arms of the state – the legislature, the executive and the judiciary’ – suggestions are falsely made that these principles are, in fact, compromises that should be disposed of. This ignores the principled positions adopted many years before negotiations, and elaborated in detail in the 1992 ‘Ready to Govern’ document:

The Bill of Rights will be enforced by the courts, headed by a separate newly created Constitutional Court, which will have the task of upholding the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens against
the state or any body or person seeking to deny those rights. The judges will be independent, and will consist of men and women drawn from all sections of the community on the basis of their integrity, skills, life experience and wisdom.  

In other words, one of the core principles informing our Constitution, that there ‘shall be a separation of powers between the legislature, executive and judiciary, with appropriate checks and balances to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness’ and that no one branch should wield more power than other branches, is a matter of conviction on the part of the ANC and not the convenience of political compromise.  

Many countries, including India, have had intense debates on these matters. On the one hand, some argue that judges should be insulated ‘against vulnerability to public criticism and [should] preserve their image of neutrality, which is regarded as necessary for enhancing their credibility.’ Others view this approach as helping ‘judges escape accountability for what they decide. They can plead helplessness by saying that it is a law made by the legislature and they have no choice but to give effect to it,’ thus finding ‘plenty of dignified exits from the agony of self-conscious wielding of power.’  

While there will always be tension among the three branches of the state – at times deriving from a grievance in the executive or legislature about perceived judicial activism that encroaches on the powers of other branches or from perceived threats to the judiciary issuing from the executive or the legislature – this should not be attended to in a manner that questions the very principle of the separation of powers.  

Perhaps it is appropriate here to comment on a current issue that is exercising the minds of many South Africans – the recent ruling on the singing of the song Dubul’ihunu (‘Shoot the Boer’) as constituting hate speech. In my view, the matter is about judicial banning of an historical expression, which, as others have said, cannot be correct. However, as a society, by avoiding giving leadership through discussions about political sensibilities, we are on the slippery slope of what Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke calls ‘lawfare’: expecting the judiciary to resolve matters of political reason on behalf of the political leadership. We need to differentiate between a right on the one hand and sensibility on the other. In other words, even if we have the right to sing the song, is it politically sensible to do so? On the other hand, was it correct in the first instance to take this matter to the courts if there were opportunities to resolve it through dialogue?
THE REFRACTING IMPACT OF DISTORTED LENSES: 
THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP

Martha Cabrera bemoans the challenge of leadership faced by the people of Nicaragua thus:

Our leadership model has traditionally generated problems rather than resolving them as our leaders feed off political polarization and foment it. This is currently a very relevant problem: we recycle political and social leaders and they recycle ideas. Meanwhile, organizations don't know how to confront such leadership, whether out of a lack of capacity or exhaustion.¹⁹

In the past 15 years the ANC has been grappling with this challenge of leadership. In essence, the issue has been how to encourage and deepen internal organisational democracy while, at the same time, ensuring that it is not practised in a manner that undermines the outlook and character of the movement. The celebrated 2001 ANC document, ‘Through the Eye of the Needle,’ on how to manage this issue, poses the challenges of the new environment quite starkly:

How do we deal with individual ambition, lobbying, promotion of friends and pursuit of selfish interests? How do we ensure that electoral processes do not tear the movement apart? How do we prevent attempts to use the movement as a step-ladder towards self-enrichment? Besides, the door can be left open for corrupt individuals and even enemies of change, to exploit the movement’s internal democracy to sabotage the struggle and create their own ANC. Further, those who fail in positions of authority can use all kinds of excuses to cling to power, when the time for change has come.¹⁰

The document spoke to the depth of the ‘sins of incumbency’ – that the efforts to contain these problems have not been entirely successful, to say the least. As the problems deepened, especially at sub-national level, there was a realisation that what was required was an overarching organisational review that addressed fundamental questions about recruitment, the relationship between structures in the organisational hierarchy, political education, political management of leadership contestation, more precise criteria for leadership, discipline and so on.

Yet these attempts have suffered from three interrelated challenges. The first is the ‘rising bubbles of deviation.’ In 2001, when ‘Through the Eye of the Needle’ was drafted, the problem seemed somewhat distant from the national leadership: it was ‘down there’ and needed to be nipped in the bud. But such is the nature of
political organisation that the bubbles of deviation always rise to the top. This is in part because of the challenge of electoral politics, where a party steadily comes to depend on mediators – who enjoy the status of leadership at the local level – to interact with constituencies that it desperately needs for electoral success or for support in intra-party contestations. Instead of the party ensuring that its culture permeates to this level, as should normally be the case, this dependence creates a sense of impunity where provincial and national leaders start to turn a blind eye to deviant conduct at local level. Unbecoming conduct becomes the norm and generations of new members internalise this as the ‘new culture.’

The second challenge is timing, coincidence and self-interest. In the nature of the ANC’s decision-making cycles, grave matters such as organisational re-engineering are decided upon at national conferences or general councils. However, inserted into the maelstrom of electoral contest in the build-up to elective conferences, these issues can hardly be dealt with objectively. While mid-term national general councils can ameliorate this challenge, the intensity and immediacy of leadership contestation has become such that the movement is virtually in permanent electoral mode. The 2005 National General Council, where comprehensive reflection on these issues was meant to take place, was the starkest manifestation of this failing.

The third challenge, which is even more relevant to our understanding of history, is the tendency to confine the definition of the ‘culture of the movement’ to periods not entirely suitable to the management of the present. There is much that can and should be extracted from the difficult years of illegality and underground organisation, in relation to appropriate doses of democracy and centralism. But the history of the ANC in the period before its banning, and the experience of other progressive parties, is also replete with profound lessons in addressing this issue.

It is important to appreciate that political ambition cannot be eliminated, it needs to be managed. Besides the stories recounted by former president Nelson Mandela and others about the 1949 ANC National Conference and how Dr James Moroka was plucked from his home to become ANC president, the late Joe Matthews thus recalled the 1952 Conference that elected Chief Albert Luthuli:

On the issue of elections, the leaders were completely divided about who should replace Dr Moroka. Some said Mandela must replace Moroka; others backed Dr Njongwe, who had become very famous because of the success of the Defiance Campaign in Port Elizabeth; and then you had Chief Luthuli. When the leaders couldn't agree, nominations were put
to the floor and over 50 nominations for president were proposed. Chief Luthuli … was elected in the end …\textsuperscript{11}

Of course today, the ANC, with profound responsibilities for social transformation, cannot afford this level of disorganisation. But if there is any lesson to draw from this, it is the fact that competition and contestation should be handled in good spirit and not become a ‘make-or-break’ issue for the unity and integrity of the organisation. Parties such as Chama Cha Mapinduzi in Tanzania and Frelimo in Mozambique, among others, have undertaken processes, which variously include:

- open declarations by those interested in standing for the presidency, and interviews by an electoral structure made up of senior and impartial cadres;
- campaigns within party structures fairly organised and regulated by the party itself;
- systems of disqualification if regulations are broken, for instance through the use of money or external platforms in campaigning.

Quite clearly, the ANC has to come back to this question of leadership contestation and find an open, fair and properly regulated system of managing leadership elections. Appeals to notions of ‘culture,’ which conveniently ignore the very history of the movement and the experiences of fraternal parties, can, in fact, be as destructive as the maladies they seek to eliminate.

**SEARCHING FOR A HIGHER LEVEL OF ABSTRACTION:
THE JOY OF FAILURE IN SUCCESS**

In the discourse that attaches to social transformation and electoral politics, matters of performance in government, particularly so-called ‘service delivery,’ assume special significance. Quantitative measures of provision of services such as subsidised housing, water, electricity, access to education and health – and sometimes even qualitative assessments – are utilised to demonstrate progress. This has been the case for the past seventeen years and was especially evident during the 2011 local government elections. It is appropriate and understandable to focus on these issues, for the practical realisation of the ideal of a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa should manifest in concrete progress in improving the human condition. The issue, though, is whether in the clamour for bean counting, the inspiration of a higher calling and a transcendental ideal is not being sacrificed.
In the ANC’s history, the best among its leaders have always asserted what constitutes a common golden thread: the emergence of a new civilisation in South Africa and the African continent as a whole. To quote just two examples, Pixley ka Isaka Seme argued that:

The regeneration of Africa means that a new and unique civilization is soon to be added to the world … The most essential departure of this new civilization is that it shall be thoroughly spiritual and humanistic – indeed a regeneration, moral and eternal!\(^\text{12}\)

In his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech Chief Albert Luthuli predicted:

Somewhere ahead there beckons a civilisation which will take its place in God’s history with other great human syntheses: Chinese, Egyptian, Jewish, European. It will not necessarily be all black: but it will be African.\(^\text{13}\)

This high level of political abstraction challenges the current ANC discourse, the conduct of leaders and the articulation of mission. While an attempt is made in the 2007 ‘Strategy and Tactics’ document to resuscitate the idea of change as the pursuit of a ‘new civilisation,’ it can indeed be argued that the ANC is not adequately evincing that sense of an overarching vision – articulated so eloquently by Seme and Luthuli – which should inspire the nation to greater heights. On the contrary, it is precisely at this moment – when there seems to be a convergence of views that South Africans need to unite and attend to socio-economic issues in the same manner we did with the political settlement – that the ANC is least prepared to rise to the occasion, as it is being consumed by its own internal battles.

Related to this is a failure to appreciate the responsibility of the ANC to lead all sectors of society, while emphasising the needs of those on the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder. This is a failure, more critically, to define an identity in a changing macrosocial environment. That changing environment, including greater interracial interaction and interracial class solidarity, reflects the success of the ANC in building a national democratic society. Yet the driver of such progress may be caught in a time warp, not nimble enough at adapting to changing circumstances.

The 2007 ‘Strategy and Tactics’ document described this joy of failure in success quite instructively, if rather too obliquely:

Much clearer than before, the concentric circles of united action are taking shape, with Black workers at the core and Black communities broadly as the motive forces.
Unlike before, when white support for non-racial democracy and social transformation was an exception to the rule, large sections within this community accept at least the imperatives of the National Constitution. As such, tapering off towards the outer edges of the concentric circles of drivers of change is the balance of the nation's majority – made up of all races – steadily forging a social compact of common interest. Across these circles the intertwining of Black and white interests is taking shape, with the definitions of the past starting to fade. As these circles intertwine and the currents across them flow into one another, so will the objectives of the NDR [National Democratic Revolution] be reaching maturity. Common interests will increasingly be forged across the racial divide within the various social classes and strata. And so, other defining issues in pursuit of other strategic objectives may become the paramount driving forces for continuing change.\textsuperscript{14}

This is an injunction for the ANC to heed Cabrera's warning: rather than feeding off social polarisation and fomenting it, the movement should, to use a famous phrase used by a notorious personality, ‘adapt or die’!

ESCHEWING THE SHAPELESSNESS OF FORM AND CONTENT

Historically, the ANC has always defined the character of the democracy it pursues as having profound social content. In the discourse on some of the earlier policy documents, this fact is usually under-emphasised. The Bill of Rights contained in the 1943 ‘Africans’ Claims in South Africa,’ drafted by then ANC president Alfred Xuma and others, makes interesting reading in the context of today’s debates about social rights and specific policies on workers’ rights, health and education.

In listing the ‘Full Citizen Rights and Demands,’ the Bill of Rights contained in ‘Africans’ Claims,’ which was adopted by the ANC Conference of December 1943, called, among other things, for: ‘The right of every child to free and compulsory education and of admission to technical schools, universities, and other institutions of higher education’ which ‘must be financed from the General Revenue on a per capita basis.’ On matters of health, the Bill of Rights urged: ‘the establishment of free medical and health services for all sections of the population’; ‘a drastic overhauling and reorganisation of the health services of the country with due emphasis on preventative medicine with all that implies in modern public health sense’ and emphasised the importance of ‘a substantial and immediate improvement in the economic position of the African.’ With regard to ‘industry and labour’ issues, the Bill
demanded, in addition to the right to collective bargaining, that ‘the African worker shall be insured against sickness, unemployment, accidents ...; the contributions to such insurance should be borne entirely by the government and the employers’; and ‘the extension of all industrial welfare legislation to Africans engaged in Agriculture, Domestic Service and in Public institutions or bodies.’

What this illustrates is the persistence of a profound social humanism in the ANC’s approach over virtually the entire history of its existence. The 1955 Freedom Charter takes the matter of socio-economic rights further in terms of economic policy and the role of the state in this regard.

As is widely appreciated in the context of the current debate about ‘nationalisation,’ there have, over the years, been varied interpretations of the ‘economic clauses’ of the Freedom Charter. However framed, these interpretations, in essence, boil down to the dynamic of the relationship between means and ends, mechanism and outcome. As the ‘Africans’ Claims’ and the Freedom Charter assert, the professed outcome of social policy is the continuing improvement of the human condition, with state resources deployed to this end. And so, the issue is whether the main or sole mechanism of attaining those ends should be state ownership of productive assets, or whether this should be informed by the ‘balance of evidence.’ This deserves separate comprehensive treatment, but sheer logic suggests that the former would be too simplistic an approach.

In this context, the 52nd National Conference of the ANC in 2007 adopted an approach premised on consistently high rates of economic growth, as experienced in developmental states. But unlike some of these states, especially those in Southeast Asia, the ANC qualified this by asserting, firstly, that ours should be a democratic developmental state and, secondly, that it should reflect elements of the best traditions of social democracy, which include: a system which places the needs of the poor and social issues such as health care, education and a social safety net at the top of the national agenda; the intense role of the state in economic life; pursuit of full employment; quest for equality; strong partnership with the trade union movement and promotion of international solidarity.

As the ANC positions itself in this way – tentatively starting to nail its colours to the mast of more definitive ‘ideological trademarks’ – the question arises whether such adaptation should not include a redefinition of the form of the Tripartite Alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African
Trade Unions (Cosatu). The historical ebbs and flows in the relationship between the ANC and the SACP (or, as it was called until its banning in 1950, the Communist Party of South Africa) had to do with the recognition of a common strategic interest in destroying colonialism and apartheid and with adept management of interpersonal dynamics among the leaders. In many respects, similar subtleties (over and above the appreciation on the part of the ANC of the role of the working class and of the indivisibility of black workers’ rights and national liberation) influenced the development of the relationship between the ANC and Cosatu (and its predecessor, the South African Congress of Trade Unions). The multidirectional osmosis of ideas strengthened the allies individually and collectively. Indeed, the management of this chemistry in forging and sustaining alliances is one of the unique contributions of the South African left to the theory and practice of broad fronts.

However, in the past seventeen years, with the SACP operating as a mass party and in the context of democratic governance, and with a governing ANC as both employer and ally of the working class, new challenges have emerged. The recurrent tensions, as well as periodic threats by both the SACP and Cosatu of a messy parting of the ways, reflect this challenge. And so does the danger of co-option and even self-liquidation from too intimate an embrace with a governing party. More often than not, the tensions seem to be informed largely by personal chemistry rather than by fundamental ideological issues.

Is this informal arrangement still appropriate, and is it sustainable? Is it not time, as part of the adaptation to the future, for the allies to codify their relationship in a formal pact with clear objectives and programmes? Whatever the answer to this question, it is patently clear that an appeal to history and tradition cannot be sustained as the underlying motivation for the current arrangement.

WHERE ARE THE ANGELS?

An attempt has been made in this treatise to demonstrate the depth of the ANC’s historical narrative and its relevance to the evolution of the South African nation. These experiences in many respects carry over to the present, and they will continue to manifest well into the future. Yet it would be instrumentalist in the extreme to interpret that history as the playing out of static attributes imposing themselves inexorably on each epoch. Rather, these are one hundred years of
continuing adaptation to changing circumstances, a continuing search for identity, the uncertainty of which drives innovation.

Will there be another hundred years of a dominant ANC? The answer lies partly in whether the ANC develops appropriate responses to the challenges posed above and, indeed, many other questions thrown up by a changing political, socio-economic and demographic reality. A critical element of this reality are the positive and negative effects of ‘colonialism of a special type’ – a concept the ANC borrowed from the SACP – on the evolution of post-apartheid South Africa. The existence of the colony and the metropolis in one geographical entity means, among other things, that:

- the metropolis evinces many attributes of a sophisticated economy, integrated into global markets, which can be used as a launching pad for inclusive growth and development;
- the existence of a large and autonomous private sector can serve as an inhibitor to ‘developmentalism’ of the Southeast Asian type;
- unlike in most African countries, this advanced private sector can also provide a cushion as an alternative centre of accumulation for sections of the political elite that fall from grace, somewhat dampening the desperation that can attach to political contestation;
- the diversity of a population with unique backgrounds, cultures, languages and races can be a source of strength but also of weakness and paralysis;
- massive inequalities inherited from the past persist, with few from among the oppressed co-opted onto higher socio-economic rungs;
- so ubiquitous and so profound are the culture and lifestyles of the metropolis that those charged with leading the transformation effort can easily be sidetracked by the allure of its dazzling lights.

These factors will be fundamental in defining South Africa’s future course and, indeed, that of the ANC. In these circumstances, that higher level of abstraction, that sense of an overarching vision so eloquently articulated by Pixley ka Isaka Seme and Chief Albert Luthuli, become critical in pondering the ANC’s future trajectory. The attainment of that vision is the task of all South Africans. And so, in answering whether there will be another hundred years, one can argue that the organisational forms or names that will continue to give expression to the pursuit
of that vision are – in the larger scheme of the logic of social development – a secondary question. What we do know is that this trajectory will not be handed down from above. It will depend on whether the ANC and South African society at large continue to produce and reproduce the angels here on earth to build the heaven to which we aspire, or whether we fall into the rut of a recurrent rise and fall of cadres who are transformed by the very system they seek to change.

CONCLUSION

Through the lens of the various sub-themes outlined above, it emerges that the ANC has always sought to adapt its identity to concrete circumstances, while maintaining its overall vision to better lead South African society towards a new social order of democracy, non-racialism and prosperity.

Because of its role in the liberation struggle and its electoral preponderance, the organisation remains critical to the definition of the nation’s future trajectory. This depends largely on how it navigates the complex terrain of political incumbency – responding to the stubborn legacy of colonialism of a special type, the manner in which it handled the transition and the impact of political office on its organisational systems and practices. Critical in this regard is the manner in which it handles leadership contestation within its ranks, taking into account the organisational identities shaped by the period of open mass operation before its banning, the period of underground work and the post-1994 phase.

The articulation of the ANC’s mission by some of its more visionary leaders suggests an approach that, in time, should transcend the detail of statistical bean counting and emphasis on race and explicitly incorporate the desire to contribute to the evolution of human civilisation. At the foundation of this should be democracy with a social content, excellence in the acquisition of knowledge and the utilisation of science and a profound humanism. Whether the ANC succeeds in pursuing that vision will depend, among other issues, on the quality of its current ideas and its cadres in relation to the ultimate vision.
Endnotes


8. See *Mail & Guardian*, 12 September 2011.


18. ANC, ‘Building a National Democratic Society.’