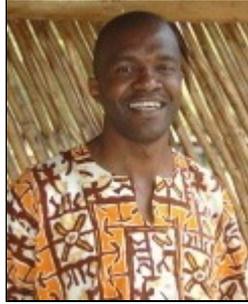


## Opinion: ANC's demise should begin in our consciousness

By Mzukisi Qobo

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The reality is that the ANC established its credibility on the back of power borrowed from the people, writes UP Political Sciences lecturer and *Business Day* columnist, Dr Mzukisi Qobo.

Many reasons are offered to explain why it is impossible to envision a South Africa without the African National Congress (ANC). It is pointed out that this is the party that defeated apartheid and created the new SA. We are also reminded by its apologists that the ANC gave us our freedom and without it the return of the past is possible.

There is no doubt the ANC played a central role in defeating apartheid. It marshalled its intellectual capacity and appealed to the international community to support the struggle. It earned a place of pride in the hearts and minds of the black majority and sections of the white population who took a stand on the side of the oppressed. Quite appropriately in the context of the liberation struggle, the ANC saw itself as an embodiment of the hopes and aspirations of the people.

The memory of dispossession, repression and institutionalised racism has always been used by the ANC to reinforce its legitimacy.

Accordingly, it is in this light seen as a guarantor of freedom in a negative sense, that is, to keep in check the possibility of the return of apartheid. It is as if it has no other purpose beyond obsessing about apartheid.

When it waged the struggle against apartheid, the ANC connected deeply with various organised and sporadic popular uprisings that emerged from the grassroots. However, the fundamental reality is that the ANC established its credibility on the back of power borrowed from the people.

Given the context of the liberation struggle, there were limited choices for political affiliations among black people, since the ANC was better organised. Forging unity behind the idea of African nationalism was seen as imperative for building political resilience and offering a formidable challenge to apartheid rule.

What also counted strongly in its favour was the fact that the ANC cast its ideology in broadly universalist terms, emphasising non racialism and non sexism. It was therefore easier for it, from this unifying proposition, to gain a broader legitimacy across race and class and gain support internationally.

Beyond acknowledging the remarkable ability of the ANC in the past to mobilise on a large scale, it should be recognised that it was ultimately the people, and not the ANC strictly, that liberated SA.

Further, although the South African people were ready to trust the ANC as a leader during the liberation struggle, they did not know it intimately.

The party operated largely from exile and for the most part in secrecy. Very few were privy to its organisational culture and possible defects in aspects of its leadership. Possibly, the ANC was an unformed mass and a Tower of Babel.

The notion of the "people" has always been deployed by the ANC to present its legitimacy as unquestionable.

To probe the ANC's incompetence is viewed by its leaders as an attack on the "people". When pointing to the growing cancer of corruption in the ruling party, one risks being reminded of how terrible corruption or maladministration was under the rule of the National Party.

It does not matter that graft undermines SA's potential greatness, as long as the ruling party's corruption compares favourably with that of successive apartheid governments — the ultimate objective of the struggle has been sufficiently achieved.

If you persist in your interrogation of the ANC's failure to govern, you will be put in your place and told : "If it was not because of the ANC, you would not even say the things you are saying today. Be content that we guarantee you there will be no return of the past." The ANC has tied itself so tightly to the idea of the past that there is very little hope that it can establish a new and better standard of leadership, political culture and governance. It sees itself as a bulwark against the past.

To a considerable extent, when people vote for the ANC they are mainly voting for the ANC's promise that SA will never return to the days of apartheid, rather than their belief in the ANC's capacity to frame a different future.

Sentimental identification with the ANC on the basis of past memories will at some point disappear, especially since the country's demographics are changing. The youth born after 1994 have weaker ties with the party.

These young people do not believe that the ANC holds some divine right to rule forever, as its leaders like to believe. They are more inspired by the possibilities that lie in the future than comparisons with the past.

It is from them that we should take our cue — to put to death the consciousness of the ANC in our minds as the final death knell of the past. It is then that we can fully reclaim power from the ANC, and realise that we are our own liberators.

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