Culture(s) of the African National Congress of South Africa: Imprint of Exile Experiences

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When the African National Congress (ANC) was unbanned in 1990 a number of ideological, inter-generational and organisational strands that had broadly, and in varying ways considered themselves part of the liberation movement, came together as members. By "broadly" reference is made particularly to affiliates of the United Democratic Front (UDF, formed in 1983). These in turn comprised a variety of tendencies and organisational formations (Seekings 2000; Lodge and Nasson 1991; Van Kessel 2000). In these organisations, it was common to hear coded references and indications of affiliation to the ANC. In addition, there were a variety of other people who wanted to join the ANC once it became legal. Just over a year after unbanning, half a million people were signed up (Rantete 1998:12–15).[2]

Unsurprisingly, there were complexities attached to post-1990 integration of these various elements, since the organisations that now were "one" had distinct styles of work and historical experiences informing their practice. Yet these differences were outweighed by the overall euphoria surrounding unbanning. Continuing state harassment of the organisation demanded unity. Consequently, the complexity of combining the component parts may not have been given adequate weight. In efforts to stress unity in the face of state attempts to undermine the ANC and the broader liberation movement, commonality was understandably emphasised, often at the expense of difference.

ANC: One Organisation Comprising Multiple Identities

It is only possible to understand some of the mass activities of the late 1970s and 1980s by virtue of the survival of traditions of support for the ANC or what it was believed the ANC represented. These traditions persisted in varying degrees and forms in different places and times. The bearers may have been old

grannies in isolated townships or ANC activists banished to remote villages or located in well-known townships (Frederickse 1990:157; Mochele interview 1992). At other times it was newly released political prisoners (e.g. Mati in Coetzee *et al* 2002:53; Seekings 2000:30; Serache interview 2002). But the "traditions" that survived and survive are diverse in character. Members of any organisation not only have distinct political experiences that may have preceded their joining, but often religious beliefs of a variety of kinds, including "traditional" ones. They may, as part of these belief systems, observe various practices and rituals. These exist in a space both outside and at times overlapping with the organisation. There has been little discussion of how these belief systems interact, and what systems inform which decisions or actions for various people within the ANC (see Niehaus *et al* 2001).

It is important to appreciate the various components of the ANC in their own right since they represent distinct understandings of what it means to be in the organisation. Different experiences are likely to inform divergent conceptions of democracy within the ANC and in the society at large. Unless one appreciates these different cultural experiences, the distinct and multiple identities within a common identity, it will not be possible to understand the character of some of the differences and tensions that have emerged and may still emerge.

The various components also represent distinct practices and expectations of what it means to be an ANC member and what different people hope to derive from such membership. It may also define what describing the ANC as a "broad church" means, and what may be included or excluded from that concept at different times and under diverse conditions.

We can identify distinct overall characteristics attaching to various phases of the organisation's history, features whose relevance to this study lies in the extent to which they are an enduring part of organisational character or at least appear to be well established within the contemporary ANC. It is necessary for this emphasis because *the focus in this study is on the present*, though that can only be understood as part of a broader, complex history.

This raises controversial questions. One may ask whether the expectations and practices of an ANC member recruited in the dark days of the 1960s or 1970s were the same as those of a person joining in 1994 or afterwards. And can one always say that the expectations of persons recruited in difficult times, and that understandings of what it means to be part of the ANC, remain the same today?

What are expectations in this period when ANC membership may mean more in the way of benefits for some and next to nothing in terms of experiencing repression?

What is continuing in ANC traditions and what is new? What has disappeared and what continues to survive and why? On what basis, for example, are people designated or not designated as heroes, and what social purpose does this serve within ANC culture? (see Kriger 1995 on Zimbabwe). What aspects of a person's political life are singled out (and what downplayed) where there is such selection?

What elements of an organisation's traditions are celebrated and who is revered also have gender implications. If the organisation mainly celebrates activities in which males are predominant, such as military leaders, what implications does this have for gender equality?[3]

It may be that the character of the ANC is suffused with a masculine idiom (Erlank 2001 unpub.; Unterhalter 2000). The content and mode of construction of these masculinities over time needs to be unpacked. Related to this masculine and sometimes macho idiom may be the impact of conceptions of the "revolution" or being a "revolutionary" and their relation to "the personal". It needs to be asked to what extent people may have thought it necessary to suppress personal intimacy, or had this required of them, in the interests of a broader comradeship. If there is some validity in this question, how it impacts on concepts of parenthood, love and other questions of intimacy also needs interrogation (see Reddy and Katerud 1995 and Serache interview 2002, which represent conflicting experiences). If this tendency was present formerly, how does it play itself out today?

Relevance to the Unfolding Trajectory of South African Democracy

The various experiences, expectations and practices that make up the ANC may have significance for the type of democracy that unfolds in South Africa in the future.

This culture refers to a variety of phases and experiences, none of which has supplanted or totally displaced all others. Which cultural influence becomes dominant may well have consequences for conceptions and practice of

democracy in South African society as a whole. This is because some types of experiences may tend towards greater popular involvement than others, greater internal democracy or more or less centralisation.

This chapter represents early work in progress. It outlines one aspect of these cultural experiences that is particularly influential in the development and present character of the ANC – that of exile and *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (the Spear of the Nation, popularly known as MK). This study also raises, in a limited way, the intersection between identity and belief systems that go with being in the ANC and systems that are part of wider identities of many of its members.

Exile and *Umkhonto we Sizwe*

With the banning of the ANC and initiation of armed struggle, in 1961, military and security considerations came to overlay organisational practice. Military and underground struggle cannot be based on the same organisational principles as open democratic activities. Security and secrecy are essential. Hierarchy is generally needed in an army and to a substantial extent underground. While these units could discuss and debate, opportunities for filtering through diverse opinions were obviously not as plentiful as were found in the open situations of the 1950s and 1980s onwards. Secrecy, as opposed to open discussion, became dominant. What was made public tended to conceal what diversity there may have been, behind official statements presenting a face of unity to the public.

It is not clear what the full impact was on the culture of democracy that had been developing in the period immediately before the banning of the ANC. The 1950s had seen its transformation into a mass organisation and campaigns that enhanced democracy, non-racialism and to a limited extent non-sexism (Lodge 1983; Suttner and Cronin 1986). Did conditions of exile, underground and armed struggle mean these emerging traditions were snuffed out? The answer may be quite varied and dependent on where people were placed and what type of work they did. Also, consideration must be given to new forms of cultural expression that conditions of exile gave rise to, the impact they have had and how enduring these proved to be.

Experience of exile in London was quite different from that in Angola, Zambia, Tanzania, Lesotho or Botswana, and the type of activities that people engaged in differed in the various centres, creating different norms and styles of work, and distinct relationships between members of the organisation (cf. Bernstein

1994; Israel 1999; Serache interview 2002). A person engaged in intelligence or security work would be more fully disposed to secrecy than someone promoting the ANC in public meetings or newspaper articles in London. But even in London, many people who "ran" underground operatives within the country, had to operate in "cloak and dagger" fashion (Suttner 2001:chs.2–3). These could not be open operations, since working conditions required conspiratorial methods and hierarchical structures whereby one section of the organisation (primarily based outside) communicated what had to be done inside the country. The outside/inside division was, of course, partially broken by incursions of Chris Hani after 1974 and Operation *Vula* in the late 1980s (Barrell:1990:29, 69) as well as by other lesser-known individuals (Serache interview 2002). In the case of Hani, it was an incursion by a leading official of the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP), just as Operation *Vula* also included leading officials of both organisations, Mac Maharaj and Ronnie Kasrils. All three had previously been "handlers" of other operatives within the country from outside.

The ANC of the 1960s was fighting for survival after reversals it had suffered. It confronted an enemy killing people in detention, and prepared to cross borders to chase after them. That enemy was able to infiltrate its agents into MK camps, where food was sometimes poisoned.

That this atmosphere was not always conducive to openness does not mean debate was excluded. It was constrained by these conditions, but it may be that the Morogoro consultative conference of 1969 and the Kabwe conference of 1985 resulted from debates, arguments and complaints amongst membership (Shubin 1999:84ff; Barrell 1990:26 regarding Morogoro; Williams 1994:29 regarding Kabwe).

It may well be that the level, character and intensity of debate depended on the type of work individuals were doing, whether they were in the military or not. But it would be a mistake to conclude that military discipline and structures necessarily precluded political discussion and debate. While these had to operate as disciplined forces, there appears to have been widespread political discussion in some situations in the camps, especially in political education courses (Sparg *et al* 2001; Moche interview 2002).

Exile was a vast and complex phenomenon extending over three decades and embracing a variety of experiences. Within the liberation movement it evokes

contrasting emotions. Amongst those who were together outside, there are bonds forged over many decades and in difficult times, and sometimes a sense of veteranism compared with internal activists. Internal activists are sometimes seen as having only recently come to the movement and lacking the level of discipline provided in the militarily organised exiled movement (see quotation from Frene Ginwala in Hassim 2002:205–6 unpub.).

But, on the side of many internal activists, there is sometimes inadequate appreciation of exile experience, a sense that those from outside are out of touch with what is happening on the ground or without a feel for mass struggle. There is also often a sense that those who were inside faced the guns, while, implicitly, those in exile had an easy life.

What this research has revealed so far has been that the exile experience was extremely difficult, not only in the obvious hardships of MK camps. The very path to get there in the first place was often filled with pain and trauma of various kinds (Bernstein 1994; Moche interview 2002). This relates first to the consequence of the decision to leave that remained with people over the long period of separation from their country. Many had to leave behind lovers, husbands, wives or children, often without any explanation (Bernstein 1994; Duka 1974:chs.5–6). The conditions of exile often created fresh conditions of stress, that led to a variety of psychological and social difficulties relating to dislocation (Morrow 1998:509–10, 513; Said 2000:173 and ch.17 generally). It is all too easy to forget the physical hurdles generally encountered simply in getting to MK or into exiled structures, crossing hostile borders, sometimes facing arrest and interrogation in numerous countries along the way (Moche interview 2002). Similar logistical difficulties often confronted transport of MK for training in the early years (Shubin 1999:30). Some of this was related to the very qualified degree of support the ANC received from African states in its early years of exile, when many leaders preferred the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) (see Mandela 1994; Shubin 1999:131; Sellstrom 2002:408ff, 582).

Many of the people who arrived in exile were suffering the effects of multiple traumas, not least being the impact of assaults and tortures by apartheid authorities before they left. Obviously the conditions of exile made it very difficult, except for those based in major Western cities, to receive adequate treatment or counselling. The facilities available in many situations of exile made this hard to treat or even sometimes difficult to recognise the presence of such trauma (Pampallis interview 2002). It does seem, however, that some

systems for treatment were in place in the camps, though the extent of their reach is not clear (Reddy and Katerud 1995). It appears, also, that the ANC Women's section made some effort to provide a measure of support (Hassim 2002:ch.3 unpub.).

In this chapter I refer to only three elements of the exile experience, that of the first MK recruits of the early 1960s, the generation of 1976, and some of the bureaucratic consequences of running a huge organisation in exile. Finally, I return to the question of survival of "traditional" belief systems that informed practices of some in MK in certain situations.

The First MK Recruits

These people (whom I understand were almost entirely men, though many women were recruited later, Hassim 2002:ch.3 unpub.; Cock 1991:162) were mainly products of ANC of the 1950s and early 1960s. In the strategic calculations of the time, it was expected that many would be out of the country for a few months and then return to train others. But the situation after the arrest of the top leadership at Rivonia in 1964 made this impossible and confronted the ANC with a long-term exile population.

Routes to MK were diverse and not all those who followed them were necessarily members of the ANC until then. Motivations were diverse, some seeking revenge, others being more seasoned in ANC politics and some escaping South Africa to avoid criminal prosecution. Still others were infiltrators sent by the apartheid regime. The ANC had to sort out the various categories and decide how best to train or restrain where necessary (see Reddy and Katerud 1995).

Many received training in the Soviet Union, others in China. Some lived for long periods in the Soviet Union and in various parts of Africa. The impact of all these external experiences on ways of thinking needs to be examined. To what extent and how did different political values and institutions of the countries where they were based impact on practices within ANC and organisational conceptions of the members concerned? What influence did these veterans come to have in the organisation as a whole? There was limited activity by some in the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns in the late 1960s, when MK made attempts to reach South Africa via the then-Rhodesia together with ZAPU (the Zimbabwe African People's Union). What was their role in the

organisation in subsequent years, particularly as they grew older? To what extent did they remain in the military and with what role and impact? Did their status as "veterans" confer any special authority on them?

Who were these early recruits to MK? It is well known that many were seasoned ANC cadres or members of the SACP and there was an overwhelmingly urban basis (Barrell 1990:12,13). While this may have been true, it seems that the rural component may not have been given adequate attention. Victor Moche (interview 2002) relates the conditions under which a Zeerust community committed each family to send one of their sons to MK. He first learnt this when he met the chief of the community who was visiting Dar-es-Salaam for an extensive period to check on the condition of his subjects.

> Apparently in their neighbourhood in Western Transvaal, the chiefs who were under pressure had decided they would support the movement, the struggle. So they had set up underground structures, which they linked to MK and its recruitment machineries. But being chiefs they had then called village councils, *lekgotla* as it is called. After persuading villagers that this was the right thing to do, they then levied a "head tax" on each household in terms of providing human power to join MK. So if you had a family of four young men, the eldest would be told, you will go to Gauteng to work for the family and you will send number 2 to school, number 3 is too young so he will stay at home and he will look after his parents and the cattle and number 4 will go to MK. So he [the chief] had been mandated to go out and see how they were doing. So he landed up with us [in Dar-es-Salaam] because he was not MK but a civilian.

The exact area from which these recruits came was Dinokana, around Zeerust. Many of the recruits were completely illiterate and "learnt their ABC in MK. Learnt everything they know in MK."

It appears that the process of joining MK was not an individual commitment at first. But it was not simply the chief ordering the villagers to provide men:

> There was a discussion among the elders to start with; within families there was discussion, so [those who joined MK] came out aware of what they had been assigned to do. But this was an assignment not so much by their selection, because they were

> politically conscious and wanted to be in the ANC. It was an assignment because your family expected you to do this, your community expected you to do this. Now if that community just happened to be ANC, then you were ANC. So the politics of the community brought you into ANC politics.

Because of the illiteracy of these villagers, during infantry training in the Soviet Union, there had first to be translation from Russian into English and then also into Tswana. According to Moche (interview 2002) there was always re-translation during training, into at least two African languages. This lack of literacy in English did not signify anything about their level of political commitment. They "were involved in continuous discussion in the village and in MK they got other training in adult basic education, which combined with political education" (ibid).

This contingent of rural recruits was related not only to ongoing conflict between the government, seeking to implement Bantu Authorities and depose those chiefs that resisted (Moche interview 2002). It was also connected to the collision between the regime and Zeerust women resisting passes. The level of resistance supported by many of the chiefs of the area increased tension between them and the government (Lodge 1983:274; Hooper 1989; Walker 1991:205; Mbeki 1984:112).

The reference to the relationship between specific chiefdoms in Zeerust and MK is not meant to imply it represented a broad trend, though it may be wider than is generally acknowledged. I am also not implying that the overall social character of MK was fundamentally different from the conventional characterisation as primarily urban-based. The evidence presented here nevertheless points to some of the complexities in the social roles played by communities and specific actors, such as chiefs, in varying conditions.

The Generation of 1976

These youngsters left the country after the Soweto uprising. It is common to record that most "chose" to join the ANC. Exactly what considerations influenced this choice? In what sense was it a political decision, based on relatively sophisticated understanding? To what extent was it opting for the movement that seemed better organised, in particular more likely to ensure subsistence of such individuals outside the country?

One answer received, in a recent interview, appears to suggest that the average young person who left the country was unaware of the relatively better capacity of the ANC to support its cadres, compared with the PAC. The basis, on which youth were recruited to the ANC, if that was not already their choice, was through ideological discussion, often using black consciousness (BC) documents as a basis of debate (Serache interview 2002, who operated in Botswana in the 1970s). Obviously more interviews will need to be conducted, but there seems some logic in the assumption that most young people would not have known of the capacity of each organisation, being deprived of such information inside the country.

Many writers have suggested this group of youngsters were relatively unpoliticised, that many believed they were the first to take on the apartheid regime, and had little sense of South African political history (Bernstein 1994:xvii; Thandi Modise in Curnow 2000:36–7; Morrow 1998:499). Thus Hilda Bernstein writes:

> Each wave brought out its own type of people. Those who left in the late fifties and early sixties were mainly adult, often middle-aged, and highly political, with a history of engaging in public political struggle. Those of the seventies, and specifically of the huge exile wave after 1976, were overwhelmingly young, largely male; and though fired with political passion, they were often without real ideology or political programmes. They were of a generation who had been cut off from access to information about their own country, their own history, and from political theory and the history of struggle. The "elders" who might have passed on this knowledge were either themselves in exile, or on Robben Island or Pretoria Central prison. Or perhaps keeping discreetly quiet. ... The 1976 Soweto rebels came out with no history in their heads. They believed themselves to be the first revolutionaries, the first to confront the apartheid state; and their anger was often without political objective. They learned the history of their country only when they had left it – the long story of struggle, oppression and resistance. (1994:xvii-xviii)

This may well be exaggerated. The ANC did live on in the minds of very many people, even where it did not have an extensive organised presence. Also, some released political prisoners, such as the late Joe Gqabi played a formative

influence in the political education of many young people (see Seekings 2000; Serache interview 2002). Nevertheless, much of the political development of these youngsters became the responsibility of the ANC, mainly in MK training and various political education classes (Davis 1987:59). An extensive component of the goals of the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College was the provision of political education, in accordance with the perspectives of the ANC (Serote 1992; Pampallis interview 2002).

But the character of this induction into the ANC needs to be interrogated. To what extent were these youngsters imbued with a critical understanding of politics, as appears to have been the objective in the political education classes of Jack Simons (Sparg *et al* 2001:54)? To what extent was it primarily a politics of hierarchy where "the line" was conveyed from top to bottom and more or less compulsorily communicated? The answer is important in considering its implications for democratic development today and in the future. If it was primarily a "politics of hierarchy" it is more likely that what leadership says is what is believed, and dissent and even healthy discussion may be discouraged.

A further question that needs to be asked is in what way these youth impacted on and changed the ANC. What impact did BC have, through them, on the ANC thinking? Or must we treat this as an overwhelmingly one-way process of influence?

All of this needs to be located within a historical framework, the global climate of the time. Where young people were sent for training in former socialist countries, they usually went through courses in the brand of Marxism–Leninism then the official ideology of these countries. This has had considerable impact on the mode of analysis adopted by the students concerned and concepts of state and transition that have informed the organisation. And some of the discourse is still very much part of the ANC today (Moleketi and Jele 2002).

While someone like Jack Simons stressed a critical approach, the type of methodology deployed and the Marxism generally absorbed in the wider experience of members of the ANC may have been a barrier to critical thinking. Classical Marxism stresses the need to look at each problem afresh and that Marxism is not a dogma to be learnt by rote (as in Marx and Engels 1968:679). But being equipped directly or indirectly with Soviet-type Marxist training may often have been treated as a methodology ensuring "inevitable victory". These

were referred to as the "tools of analysis". It needs to be asked whether this version of Marxist categories closed rather than opened or encouraged enquiry. (Obviously some would argue that Marxism is basically a "closed system" under any condition).

Furthermore, while someone like Simons used a Socratic method, encouraging classes to come to their own conclusions, that method requires some confidence and depth of knowledge on the part of the teacher. It means the instructor had to be ready for a variety of answers quite different from what he or she may have anticipated. The instructor had to be prepared to respond in a manner that encouraged diversity instead of stamping it into some mould of conformity with established policies and thinking. Someone with less depth and breadth of knowledge and confidence than Simons may easily have been tempted to shut discussion prematurely.

But the character of political education may have varied significantly. According to Victor Moche, political education conducted while he was in a camp in the Soviet Union was not only communicating Marxist views on the world. The main thrust of political discussion would be analyses of news bulletins. He did not see anything dogmatic in how people were taught and how they argued. They had to find ways of making sense of what they learnt was happening in various parts of the world (interview 2002). Thandi Modise's account of political education in camps in Angola at a later phase seems to confirm this: "Political education focused on events in Africa, and the history of the ANC. There wasn't too much about communism. I never met anyone who hated churches" (Cock 1991:152). Nat Serache, in contrast, reports that the political education he received in the ANC in Angola in the 1970s was "straight Marxism–Leninism", based on classical Marxist and contemporary Soviet texts (interview 2002). Also, as mentioned in regard to the earliest exiles, later ones were exposed to the modes of government and social orders of a variety of countries that acted as their hosts. What impact did this have on their ways of viewing and expectations from politics? It also needs to be asked how ANC concepts of collective leadership interfaced with different concepts of African culture and styles of leadership (Mandela 1994:20–1).

In addition, we need to examine to what extent concepts of organisation and relations between members of the organisation continue to be suffused with military concepts, long after the period of democracy has opened. Current ANC discourse is full of words carrying military connotations, including,

"deploy", "marching orders", "line of march", willingness to "take orders from the organisation", the latter being a quality that evokes praise.

The ANC Bureaucracy

While not formally constituted as a government, the ANC in exile exercised many of the functions of a state in relation to its members. In many ways, the relationship between the national executive committee and membership had characteristics of dependency rather than active membership.

To carry out extensive welfare, military, educational, political and other tasks, an extensive bureaucracy was developed. Many members of the ANC in exile were primarily formed in this environment and had little experience of political activity within the country (Lodge 1983, 1988; Ottaway 1993). Ottaway writes (at 45–6:)

> The exiled ANC consisted of an informal government – the National Executive Committee – a military wing in the form of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, and a bureaucracy manning the various departments. In Zambia and Tanzania, the ANC's bureaucracy ran farms, schools, and workshops; and in Angola, *Umkhonto* ran training camps. The Congress had diplomatic offices in London and representatives in many capitals around the world. What the external organisation did not have on a significant scale was a membership, that is, people belonging to the ANC and supporting its political goals but not directly working for it or being supported by it. Many ANC members in exile, particularly those in African countries, depended on the organisation for their survival. They were employees of a government bureaucracy, personnel of an army, or clients of a welfare state, not members of a political party.

In order to execute its tasks the ANC amassed substantial properties in a number of countries (Rantete 1998:4–6; Davis 1987:ch.2). In Africa, these sites were devoted to a variety of functions related to maintenance of official and military structures, provisioning of the membership and educational, welfare and health functions of various types. It has been noted that failure of other liberation movements to secure their means of subsistence for members resident in African states, especially Zambia, had been a source of tension (Davis 1987:38). The ANC sought to avoid this by provision of members'

requirements through extensive agricultural developments as well as some small manufacturing and maintenance structures. This was achieved (with varying degrees of success), through considerable foreign funding and the development of skills of its members in the activities concerned (Sellstrom 2002; Morrow 1998).

Related to welfare functions is the question of what determined "career paths" in the organisation. Who obtained scholarships to which countries and how? On what basis was this decided? Who or what structures were able to access which resources and how were these dispensed? To what extent did ANC bureaucratic networks establish patron/client relationships, and if they did, have these relationships continued into the present, and with what consequences? According to John Pampallis, who taught at Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania for eight years, there was little evidence of people "jumping the queue" for scholarships. The key issue that determined whether or not someone secured an educational opportunity was whether they acquired the necessary qualifications (interview 2002). Whether or not this was a general experience or impression needs further research.

To what extent was SACP membership a path to these opportunities as well as a "route to greatness" within the ANC during the exile period (Suttner 2002)? A recent study on the SACP in exile, based on previously unavailable archival material, throws little light on these questions (Maloka 2002).

Part of the bureaucracy was ANC security. It is now acknowledged that there were substantial abuses by some ANC security personnel (see ANC 1996). Has this matter been fully aired (Ellis and Sechaba 1992; Ellis 1994)? Have all perpetrators been brought to book and to what extent have those wrongly abused or arrested received official and public acknowledgement? If there is a residue of bitterness due to some matters being concealed from the public and even family of the (wrongly) accused, it has implications not only for the ANC but for building a human rights culture today. It also means that some ANC security personnel may not have brought something qualitatively different into the relationship with their "partners" in the reconstructed security forces.

MK and the Combination of Belief Systems

In joining the ANC, receiving advanced military training and political education, many acquired skills never open to them inside the country. They

had access to ideas and scientific proficiency generally the preserve of whites. But very often these new skills and beliefs coexisted with a variety of cosmologies and belief systems preceding their involvement in the ANC.

How people related to various activities of the organisation may have been mediated by how they interpreted and related to their own cultural experiences prior to joining the ANC. These belief systems, of a variety of kinds, resurfaced at distinct times. In more than one interview, the question has arisen of access to healers to strengthen combatants or reduce prison sentences.

General Sandi Sijake relates how the MK group with whom he travelled in 1962 met with the late Elias Motsoaledi, who later became a Rivonia trialist. In preparing for the safety of their journey Motsoaledi would "take a broom and put some medication inside a bucket so that the combi would not be apprehended. Comrade Motsoaledi was one of the great communist leaders, but at the same time he still believed in his medicine".

> It was a bucket with some water. He would dip in a broom, a special medical broom, spray and put in, dip in and sprinkle around, dip in, sprinkle around saying whatever words people say to ensure that bad luck does not befall us. That was the basic thing he did with our combi before heading for Zeerust. (Sijake interview 2001; see also Mochele interview 1992)

These practices re-emerged in 1967, when there was talk of returning home as fighters. They were in a camp near Morogoro in Tanzania:

> People started to look around for traditional healers. There was a local chap, one of the Tanzanians, who was said to be able to treat a person and once treated a bullet would turn into water. A number of people, because they did not have money ... would trade some of their clothing [from the Soviet Union] for this medicine. (Sijake interview 2001)

This claim to turn bullets into water is, of course, a fairly common phenomenon, found amongst others, with Mlanjeni in the mid-nineteenth century in the Eastern Cape (Mostert 1992:1000), in the Maji Maji war against German occupation of Tanganyika (Iliffe 1995:196), amongst the Mbunda in pre-nationalist resistance in Angola (Davidson 1972:28–9) and in Che Guevara's experiences during his campaign in the Congo in the mid-1960s (Guevara 2001:14).

But the question arose again when the group met up with ZAPU comrades in Zambia:

> When we met with the Zimbabweans ... they insisted before going into Zimbabwe they needed to be strengthened with medication, ... while in Zambia. And also when they arrived home they would need to go to a traditional healer.... This would be someone who, when you arrive, you report to, "I have come back, I have returned home."
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> Before we arrived [in Zambia] we didn't want this. Most of us dismissed this as rubbish. Then the leadership including OR [Tambo] and JB Marks said: "Look guys you are the ones who said you want to go home and you want to explore the route through Zimbabwe. To go through Zimbabwe we believe it is better for you to go through with people who are in the Zimbabwean liberation army ... you go through together with these people. This is their tradition. If you are to go with them you have to respect their tradition. Otherwise there is no way you can have a working relationship with them."
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> As a result, we then had to go through this whole process ... You find one evening they make a fire, they prepare some food in front of one of the tents. There will be a string and a pot here with food without salt, corn in a small pot, the size of a meatball without corn bread, salt, piece of meat without salt and then some *mqombothi* [a traditional brew made for ceremonial purposes]. When you come there is this guy with a *big* tummy, *African personality*. Also this medicine in a bowl with water, he dips a broom and sprinkles you with this broom and then you jump, you walk over the string, and once you walk over, there is an incision here [points to chest] then he applies some medicine, then you get a piece of corn ball bread like and a piece of meat and go under a specific big tree, with a specific name which is said, usually, it is good for ancestors. In the old days they used to sit under that type of a tree. There is a lot of *mqombothi*, then you are ready to cross. (Sijake interview 2001)

Sijake argues that one should distinguish two types of access to "medicine". In the first case, individuals sought to strengthen themselves in order to prepare for battle. The second was an organisational agreement between ZAPU and

ANC. "It was formal, unlike if I just take my coat and approach a traditional healer and swop it for medicine". But performance of rituals associated with "traditional" beliefs and access to healers *(sangomas* or *inyangas*) may have been an accepted part of MK life and to some extent, exile life in general (Moche interview 2002; Morrow 1998:509).

These examples do not represent displacement of science by pre-scientific belief systems. It is, in reality, coexistence of more than one belief system. Resort to healers in order to strengthen combatants does not seem to have been regarded as a substitute for the deployment of firepower in the manner in which they had been trained.

Some time ago Jack Simons wrote that magic "begins where scientific knowledge ends" (1957:90). Many others indicate that notions of cause and effect that inform rituals in societies practising forms of magic are complex, and do not necessarily mean the denial of conventional scientific conceptions of cause and effect (Lienhardt 1961; Douglas 1966:59). In many cases, there is a coexistence of magical and scientific modes of belief and causation, one dealing with one sphere of existence and the other dealing with another realm.

Furthermore, too much can be made of the extent to which a scientific culture is in fact diffused within "science-based societies". Charlotte Seymour-Smith (1986:175) argues:

> In modern "scientific" cultures a large proportion of the population "believe" in scientific or technological phenomena without understanding them, a belief which is perhaps as magical or as religious as that held by a member of a simple society in the knowledge which the ritual specialists of the group possess. The scientific knowledge for which we all tend to take credit is in fact only understood and created by a very small proportion of the population.

With MK fighters (who used such resources), we are talking of something supplementary to scientific knowledge. This is not the same as individuals relying solely on the power of medicine. Medicine was seen as supplementing what they learnt in formal military training, with what some (though not all) regarded as an important additional source of strength. This is also quite different from a millenarian type movement, relying almost exclusively on the power of their beliefs as with the Israelites prior to the Bulhoek massacre (Edgar 1988).

Conclusion

This chapter represents an early attempt to extract qualities that may represent cultural traits of or throw light on the character of the ANC today. It has tried to show that beneath media reports alleging conflicts between different strands of the ANC lie complex cultural experiences which inform or condition the practices and expectations of members from a variety of backgrounds. But within each of these experiences there are many variations. The exile experience cannot be summarily categorised as militaristic, top-down and bureaucratic. It contains some diversity within a common experience. Likewise the internal experience, which is not covered in this chapter, cannot be simply typified as a golden era of popular democracy. Within each of these experiences or cultures there are many variants that qualify what may be seen as the general character of the period or the tradition it generated.

What will have to be further interrogated, as this research unfolds, is the extent to which cultures referred to, close off or open up certain options and what impact this has on the future development of South African democracy.

The chapter has also raised a wider issue relating to "non-political" or apparently non-political identities that nevertheless have a bearing on political practice. This is where access to multiple belief systems impact on political practice. This is not something whose significance has disappeared. It survives in numerous spheres of South African society, including trade unions and pre-match preparations of football teams, as well as popular discourse generally. While the question of access to healers has been referred to, the issues form part of much wider questions concerning the recognition of distinct identities and understanding how these relate to an over-arching loyalty to a national liberation movement.[4]

Notes

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Krista Johnson have been very helpful. Not all will agree with the arguments now presented. Naturally I bear responsibility.

2 It is not clear how many were actually paid up. That was more strictly considered in later years.

3 This is not to say that all military figures are revered or treated with respect. Many former combatants are living in situations of great hardship and poverty (see Lamb and Mokalobe 2002 unpub. especially at 5; Xaba 2001:195).

4 Another form of the same phenomenon, dealt with in Suttner 2002, is that of initiation ceremonies performed on Robben Island.

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