

effect on the lofty brand of the ANC. When we suggest the fall of the ANC, we mean that in popular psychology the redemptive image of the party has withered away due to the widespread venality within its ranks. It has gotten to the point where ordinary South Africans draw a distinction between Nelson Mandela and the ANC they see today.

Mandela is generally understood to represent a different ANC, the ANC before the fall of the party. The ANC after the fall is a party of ordinariness, stripped of the extraordinariness of Oliver Tambo and his generation, or at least those who were not corrupted by access to state resources. The ANC of today makes observers wonder: what does this mean for the future of South Africa? Posed differently, the question is: after the fall of the ANC – what next?

Exile, where the rot began

Where did all this begin? Much of the ANC's history in exile is couched in mythology. The party's propagandists would be very happy for posterity to believe the myth of a righteous party, populated by human angels, harmoniously drinking milk and honey in exile. As we have already observed, this image is a lie the cadres feed on. The ANC is simply perpetuating what Eric Hobsbawm calls the politico-ideological abuse of history. This abuse finds expression in the reconstruction of history to perpetuate the myth that the liberation movement possessed messianic properties, and fought a heroic battle, unsullied by acts of corruption.

There is a view that in the ANC's liberation struggle there were no abuses, apart from negligible aberrations in some camps in exile. If we believe this piece of historical revisionism, the contemporary character of the ANC as, in our opinion, a corrupt organisation, or as an Alleged National Criminal organisation, would not make sense. Nobody must fall into this trap. In his most recent work, *External Mission*, a study

of the ANC's existence in exile from the early 1960s to the early 1990s, Stephen Ellis recounts incidents of ill-discipline, factionalism and corruption in the top command of various ANC MK camps. This was a period when the ANC existed largely outside of the country after it was banned in 1960. It was a period of turmoil, a chapter in human history that sane people wouldn't like to see reopened.

The only known facts about the ANC in exile were through propaganda channels designed to fit the preferred script of the party's leadership, to portray the party as being in good health. Very few people would know about the compromising activities of the ANC in exile. Many deliberately don't want to know the truth because it would hurt too much or call into question their own identity, an identity constructed out of an image of the party, an image embellished with ideological dogma and propaganda that might be false. Because ordinary black South Africans were yearning for heroes, they were prone to believe the ANC's version of truth – truth according to the party. At the time, it was blasphemous to take a critical stand against the ANC because it was regarded widely as a legitimate vehicle to carry the aspirations of the black majority. Tactically, this was good for the ANC.

It did not matter that people were far from the ANC's real experience in exile, and that they did not really know its leaders. Sentiment alone was sufficient to create the connection. They felt a part of the ANC's world. Its rhetoric appealed to them. The organisation's existence in exile was in their name. Living under apartheid, ruled by the most vicious government, examining the ANC's deficiencies under a microscope would have been inconceivable and extremely difficult to do anyway. Much of this history is superbly summarised by the works of Vladimir Shubin, who offers a sympathetic account,¹⁰ and Stephen Ellis, who offers a dispassionate reflection.¹¹

Corruption and factionalism have a much deeper lineage in the ANC than is sometimes acknowledged. In *External Mission*, Ellis details deeply entrenched factional tensions in the ANC's exile missions,

promotion of cadres on grounds of loyalty rather than on merit, existence of corruption, and the tenuous leadership of Oliver Tambo, who preferred to avoid conflict by establishing special committees of inquiry to tackle problems in MK camp life. These would yield no satisfactory outcome, but would magnify the image of Tambo as a reconciler and consummate diplomat. Yet the problems would continue to fester beneath the surface, and Tambo would be long gone, hoisting his proverbial trophy as a reconciler of note.

The reality was that the ANC in exile was a disparate organisation, engaged in internecine factional battles. It had an uneasy relationship with the SACP, and it was bedevilled by ill-discipline amongst its cadres. According to Ellis, tensions between groups would sometimes take on a 'worrying ethnic dimension', at times escalating to confrontations amongst the rank-and-file within MK. Factional manoeuvres and the building of close-knit circles of loyalists were some of the ANC's hallmarks in exile. As Ellis further observes, this virus included financial corruption, illicit car trade, and drug smuggling and illicit diamond dealings becoming commonplace in some camps.¹² This was not just amongst the ordinary members of MK; it was a practice in which some in the leadership participated.

This state of affairs prompted the ANC's national working committee to establish a sub-committee in September 1980 specifically to look into corruption. Inertia was the best survival mechanism. After all, there was a much bigger enemy to battle with than to raise controversy about the conduct of the leadership in exile. The ANC being steeped in African nationalism as an embodiment of the struggle of the oppressed African masses made it difficult for blacks to be critical of it without coming across as betraying a grand struggle and working to promote the counter-revolutionary objectives of the enemy.

Those who had raised their voice against the leadership in exile were either thrown into jail, as was the case with Chris Hani and his group when they criticised poor leadership in the wake of the failed Wankie

Campaign in 1968, or the 'Gang of Eight' which was expelled in the 1970s for being critical and exhibiting ideological discordance. In some instances, the very same tactics used by the National Party security forces against freedom fighters would be deployed by the ANC against its own operatives if it suspected them of misdeeds.

As it ascended to power, the ANC never took time to reflect on the likely impact of its dirty past on the character of the party going forward. It never had a moment of reflection on its time in exile, the excesses that were committed during this period, and the corrupt practices that became a part of its lifeblood. The failure to do so and the predisposition to defend the leadership at all costs has become the bane of the ANC today. Without understanding the ANC's rot in exile, it would be impossible to trace the seeds of its degeneracy in our time.

A mafia state in the making

There is a rise of transactional leadership on the back of the growing corruption and factionalism within the ANC. The unseemly bonds between the ruling party and factions of business post-apartheid bear a striking resemblance in our view to the mafia state that evolved in post-communist Russia under Boris Yeltsin. Stark parallels include preference by the ruling party for acquiescent business elite who are in search of tickets to prosperity. A transactional leadership is a central feature of this reality. In a transactional leadership, the relations between the state and business are not based on a shared vision about a better future, but in order to share the spoils of patronage.

In his book, *Endgame*, Willie Esterhuyse cautions against transactional leadership:

It is self-evident that transactional leadership opens the door to corruption and promotes the possibility of opportunistic compromises.

*It is transactional leaders that convert fragile states and uncertain democracies into criminal states.*¹³

In both countries, access to state-sanctioned commercial opportunities is given to a few elites in exchange for their loyalty to the ruling party. In return, they are guaranteed commercial prosperity. Because of their close proximity to the ruling party, these businessmen are expected to overlook institutional failures of the state.

In the current environment, this means more than just loyalty to the party, but willingness to safeguard the material welfare of its leaders and family members. The hideous umbilical cord between the ruling party and factions of business was exposed recently in President Jacob Zuma's admonition to business during an ANC's anniversary gala dinner: 'I have always said that a wise businessman will support the ANC, because supporting the ANC means you're investing very well in your business.'¹⁴ He might as well have added: 'If you go a step further to support me and my family, you will reap a richer harvest.'

In Russia, especially after Yeltsin's second term in office from July 1996, there was a coterie of highly influential and self-serving businessmen whose success was aided by the chaotic privatisation programme that bankrupted the state and stifled genuine entrepreneurship. At the same time, many Russians became poorer and the country's infrastructure was fast collapsing.

Russia's oligarchs had no interest in contributing to the renewal of the nation's spirit or in the economic welfare of the citizens who had suffered many decades of devastation under communist rule. These elites possessed no shared social purpose, apart from enriching themselves. Oligarchs such as Anatoly Chubais, the then chairman of the agency responsible for privatisation, witnessed instantaneous change in fortunes; they amassed wealth at the expense of the country's economic stability.¹⁵ Despite being implicated in sleazy deals, Chubais was handsomely rewarded with a cushy position as Yeltsin's chief-of-staff,

thereby giving him access to vast political influence, which he used to augment his wealth further.

Many other oligarchs prospered through a web of lucrative commercial interests in media, real estate and natural resources. Some, such as Boris Berezovsky, once a leading media mogul in the country, also enjoyed the favoured status of being part of Yeltsin's inner family circle. His political proximity landed him an influential position in Russia's security council. Yeltsin's weakness as a leader made him a menace to the nation's security. His smile and affability belied a vicious core.

In her book, *Sale of the Century*, Chrystia Freeland paints a picture of Yeltsin in the words of one of the oligarchs:

He is an interesting personality – dangerous, but interesting. He is like a bear: he seems always to have such a good-natured smile, but it is known that the bear is the most dangerous beast for its trainers.¹⁶

Indeed, Yeltsin sold his country's precious jewels to a coterie of robber capitalists, and allowed it to sink deeper into misery. Consideration of his personal survival trumped everything else.

Zuma is Yeltsin incarnate. His presidency signals a security threat for the country – economic and political. South Africa's equivalents of Russia's oligarchs are men of influence such as members of the Gupta family. They represent a tiny but growing layer of business elite whose informal power reaches to the highest echelons of the state, allegedly extending influence on just about everything – from the conduct of the police force to the deployment of associates to state-owned entities. Their choreographed public image is at odds with their conduct and their deeply ingrained sense of entitlement.

The danger for society is that these incestuous bonds breed cynicism. They open up the state to corrupt influences of businessmen with no interest in the vitality of the country. In this culture, other corporates will lose the will to champion progressive economic change and

South Africa could find itself becoming a mafia state in the mould of Yeltsin's Russia. But, then, the ANC cares little about public opinion. It lives under the illusion that the majority of South Africans will continue to vote for it no matter what. It views itself as occupying an unassailable position in the psyche of the black majority, and so it continues to ride the crest of the wave of its fading historical glory and symbols. It is the notion that the ANC is a benefactor that brought liberation that deepens its arrogance.

Hero-worshipping amongst the majority of the population makes it harder to hold elites accountable. Leaders are seen to possess a monopoly on wisdom and are thereby over-celebrated. Political leaders, especially ministers, lack humility and are possessed of an inflated sense of grandeur. The notion that they are servants is completely foreign to them. Amongst politicians it is often forgotten that the Latin root meaning for the word 'minister', simply stated, is servant or attendant. In South Africa, it has prima donna connotations. To question a minister who is involved in some act of corruption, or who has committed an irregularity, is viewed by those in power as a sign of disrespect. It hardly occurs to them that by their actions they disrespect the public.

It is the two dangerous forces of corruption and factionalism that are hastening the ANC's demise. This hideous image of the party as tolerant of corruption and faction-ridden might have its origins in the early years of democracy but this has worsened under Jacob Zuma. When the ANC came to power in 1994, amidst the euphoria that accompanied its ascendance, the party did not imagine that its support base could one day erode, with the real possibility of losing power. While this may not happen in a Big Bang fashion, trends since the 2009 elections suggest a downward spiral. The reality is that, on the African continent, liberation movements that go down never rise again. The ANC is unlikely to regain the electoral losses it is incrementally making.

As *Financial Times* news editor Alec Russell points out:

As the ANC settled into government in April 1994, its leaders bridled when commentators compared their beloved party to other liberation movements or even predicted they too might lose their way.¹⁷

Today the ANC's loss of moral compass is commonplace. It is a new normality that the party faithful would want us to adjust to. The ANC's leadership bench is becoming thinner as the dough of corruption rises. The political culture of the party and the character of its leadership go a long way to explaining the morass the country finds itself in today.

In the era of Nelson Mandela, it was difficult sharply to point to incidents of corruption, yet spaces for these were widening even then. The massive Arms Deal happened on Mandela's watch. He was president at the time. This dodgy arms procurement and the corruption that underpinned it has now become public knowledge, and has revealed the extent of the corruptibility of some leading figures within the ANC.

The view of leaders as heroes has helped to facilitate the growth of corruption and its terrifying continuity under Jacob Zuma. There is no sign that this will abate any time soon. In fact, we contend that the idea of Zuma serving another term as president of South Africa raises the spectre of a mafia state *à la* Russia under Boris Yeltsin.

Society, be vigilant

The damage of the ANC's political hegemony is that it has wrought destruction on the nascent trust that was under construction in the early years of democracy. It has also weakened the legitimacy of public leadership in the eyes of society, even of those who might well be clean and committed to good governance. The cynicism that the ANC's poor political leadership has bred has torn asunder the framework of trust

between citizens and public leadership. When virtues of governance are no longer seen in a favourable light, it is much more difficult for citizens to trust any politician or public authority figure.

When there is no trust between those who hold political office and the country's citizens, the legitimacy of those who govern becomes shallow. Trust is a soft infrastructure which helps to solidify the threads that hold society together and form the pillar to which institutions that regulate political behaviour are anchored. American political scientist Francis Fukuyama suggests that high-trust societies tend to have higher institutional reliability as opposed to low-trust societies which are marked by corruption and high administrative costs. Indeed, as he points out, trust helps to create certainty in how individuals and institutions function.¹⁸

The disintegration of trust in societies often begins with the failure of integrity in public leadership. Transitional societies such as South Africa need more, not less, integrity from their political leaders. Trust is the most critical capital that helps sustain progress. In transitional societies, institutional foundations which regulate political behaviour and guarantee accountability tend to be fragile, which is why trust is important to such societies.

Advanced countries that have had time to create and entrench solid institutions depend less on individual politicians to facilitate social progress. In such cases, institutions have an independent agency power and contain in-built disciplinary mechanisms that are triggered when politicians act contrary to acceptable norms. This is why Austro-British philosopher Karl Popper declared the following as the most important question of politics: 'How can we organise political institutions so that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?'¹⁹ The fragility of institutions in transitional societies means that political leaders, depending on whether they are transactional or transformational leaders, could make or break their societies. This is why South Africans must be vigilant.

Generally, institutions that mediate the relationship between leaders and citizens are founded on a social contract that has both formal and informal constraints designed to limit the excesses of public office holders. Formal constraints would, for example, be in the form of independent agencies that act decisively against acts of corruption. These constraining mechanisms would assume the form of a transparent and enforceable sets of rules that circumscribe or prescribe behaviour on the part of those who hold public office.

Informal constraints are expressed in the shape of certain codes of conduct, norms of behaviour, and conventions about what is acceptable and not acceptable. These may not necessarily be written down, but it would be assumed that those who hold public office are motivated, for example, by a sense of honour, and that their motivation is primarily to improve the quality of public institutions, and therefore that of citizens. Together these constraints, formal and informal, constitute a significant part of what is referred to as political culture, or the character of a nation's politics.

The power of informal constraints means that if wrongdoing is detected, politicians do not wait for commissions of inquiry, but act honourably and resign from their positions. At the point at which trust between them and citizens is compromised, their ability to enhance the ethical value of institutions comes under question. Their legitimacy, too, comes under a critical spotlight. Accordingly, public trust and substantive legitimacy is more important than their egos. For example, when it is suspected that someone who holds public office has knowingly deceived the public regarding the use of public funds, as was the case in Nkandlagate, it should not be necessary to wait for a formal investigation to reveal this. A sense of honour should dictate resignation. The implications for non-action are that the formal institutions which have to be deployed to investigate the many misdemeanours of the president become weakened.

Such a political culture is all but impossible to establish under the

ANC's rule. The party has drowned deep in allegations of corruption, and has a wrong-headed view of its power relations with the rest of society. It has lost the capacity to construct a framework for a high-trust society. Believing that the ANC can establish such a framework is not different from entrusting serial criminals with the honourable responsibility of developing a penal code.

As Robert Rotberg, a frequent commentator on conflict in the developing world, reminds us: 'without legitimacy, effective government is impossible.'²⁰ It is trust-based legitimacy that lends authority its source of power. Currently, the governing party does not enjoy substantive legitimacy because there has been a failure of trust, occasioned by the many acts of corruption that go unpunished and the inability of its leadership to connect meaningfully with the public.

The norms of trust-based institutions and bureaucratic efficiency are not fully embedded in the South African state. We have leaped from one system under apartheid which promoted mediocrity and corruption to another which does just the same. Thus we have what Chabal and Daloz characterise as a hybrid system, which contains elements of both informality, as found in other African states, and a façade of modern institutional features associated with modern Western states to give an impression of a commitment to some legal-bureaucratic framework.²¹ Africa's elites like to be called democratic, even when democratic norms are shallow and authoritarianism or an oligarchy are deeply entrenched.

This should be unsurprising in South Africa today, given that Jacob Zuma's socio-cultural orientation is that of a traditionalist who easily mixes formal requirements of a head of state with the informality of giving his kith and kin access to the state, as if the state were an extension of his household. His philosophy of the state – if his tendencies can be called a philosophy – is a very rudimentary form of governance, an archaic conception of the state as an extension of the local setting, defined narrowly as his village – Nkandla. He runs the state by relying

on a close-knit band of friends who support him financially, in the true style of patrimonial traditional authority. The totality of his purpose can be summed up as a struggle to secure personal survival.

This turns the state into what Chabal and Daloz call a 'façade masking the realities of deeply personalised political relations'.²² If South Africa is to avoid a situation where the Big Man reigns supreme, and where the citizens are disempowered, the public would need to be vigilant and insist on strengthening the institutions that guarantee transparency and promote greater accountability.

What we have pointed out in this chapter casts the ANC as a party languishing in the throes of political death. The fall of the ANC is no longer something fanciful, but a reality waiting to happen. The depth of factionalism and the extent of corruption in the party and its government, have reached a dangerous, cancerous stage. There does not appear to be any possibility of resuscitating the ANC. The party is on its deathbed. It is understandable for observers to ask: what next?