

OPINION | Generational change and its impact on South Africa's politics

ONE

NEW GENERATION, OLD POLITICS

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Introduction

Many South Africans fervently believe that the quality of our political discourse – and the business of governing the country – will improve as people with apartheid memory die out and make way for a new generation, who have spent their formative years growing up in the post-apartheid era. Those who do so are likely to be disappointed. This article reflects on why the current character of our party-political contestation – a dominant but divided African National Congress (ANC), on the one hand, which covers up weak governance and corruption with fuzzy historicism, and the Democratic Alliance (DA), on the other, which compromises its support with approaches that are devoid of any historicism – is unlikely to be transformed by the replacement of stalwarts with more youthful faces. In both, party discipline trumps the fresh thinking that is required to challenge the status quo, and, until this changes, they will continue to reproduce a present that is stuck in a contested past.

The status quo: lazy historicism, overactive ahistoricism

To evaluate the prospects for political renewal accompanied by generational change, it is important to have a sense of the nature of current political contestation, the thinking that underpins it and the leadership that guides it. Given the steady demise of smaller political parties in successive elections, I will restrict myself here to the two major contenders, the ruling ANC and the DA, which seems to have absorbed much of the drift away from smaller parties.

Almost two decades after the country's political transition, the shine of the ANC's public image as a liberator, moral paragon and people's movement is gradually wearing off. Current president, Jacob Zuma, once famously remarked that the party would rule until Jesus Christ returns. Yet, today it increasingly has to contemplate its political mortality, as it comes to terms as a party with fierce and debilitating leader-

ship battles, and as a government with rampant corruption, skills deficits and weak implementation capacity. To counter the erosion of its social capital, the ANC has resorted to lazy historicism that it hopes will cover up for its shortcomings. For example, in his medium-term budget statement in October, Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan pointed out that South Africa's stunted economic performance, in comparison to booming African peers, is due to the global economic crisis impacting on South Africa more than it has on other developing economies. In other words, a recent historic structural factor is cited to soften underachievement by the state. (Gordhan did also mention weaknesses internal to the state but reference to historic structural factors is too often the more immediate explanatory narrative chosen by many ANC politicians.) The frequent citation of the longer political and socio-economic shadow cast by a history of colonialism and apartheid has become an enduring feature of government briefings on why targets have not been met. In many instances this has been done legitimately, but in others the cynical incantation of history, such as the president's recent attempt to absolve the government for its role in the Limpopo textbook crisis, has been opportunistic. In simple terms, this strategy suggests a sense of historical entitlement to be excused for underperformance.

Here is the problem with this historicism. While it appears empirically sound and politically coherent – some 20 years of democratic governance could not reasonably be considered an adequate time frame to fully undo the legacy of centuries of social, political and economic subjugation – the ruling party has become the architect of its own misery by failing to manage citizen expectations. Instead of asking for patience with gradual steps, it has postured – often for short-term electoral gain – in ways suggesting the capability of making gigantic leaps. Once looming deadlines appear on the horizon, sudden panic erupts about the message that has to be crafted in response to the visceral disappointment of its mainly black African constituency. While there is indeed a sense in which



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present challenges can and must be historically situated, this has frequently been done in an irresponsible way.

Too often, this historicism is lazily trotted out to mask non-historic realities, such as the cadre deployment policy, and corrupt behaviour on the part of politicians and public servants. History might explain the desire to live well for the first time. It does not explain why some, but not others, loot the state. The fact that not every liberation movement here is corrupt is evidence that some politicians simply choose to exercise their political agency in ways that are self-serving and often illegal. Instead of rooting out these rogue elements from the system, lazy historicism redeems their actions and allows them to continue stripping the state of its resources. In effect, this adds insult to injury to a state bureaucracy that is already limping along as a result of skills deficits.

The media chooses to focus frequently on titillating personality squabbles and, occasionally, on ideological debates, such as whether 'to privatise or to nationalise'. Rarely, however, does it ponder the impact of such stories on the institutional character of the state. While it may be more boring, our intellectual energies need to be directed towards building a bureaucracy that works. Without it, all policy and ideological battles of this generation and the ones to follow will be pointless. As far as personalities are concerned, it is naturally true that we are more likely to build a functioning bureaucracy if we have skilled political principals leading state departments and parastatals. However, there are thousands of men and women within the state who never meet a director-general or a minister in the course of their careers. We, therefore, cannot reduce the challenge of building a bureaucracy to the identity of top leaders of the ruling party, or who they appoint to act as the political heads of state departments. This is not to underestimate these appointments; it is rather to caution against an exclusive public focus on the most prominent positions within the ANC and the state at the risk of institutional meltdown.

Where does this leave us in terms of political leadership within the ANC? Too many current ANC leaders do not grasp this insight. They trade on struggle credentials. They hide behind lazy historicism to mask choices they make that have no foundation in history. Moreover, they are short on ideas about how to move from ideological and personality battles to pragmatic leadership focused on building a state that has men and women who are technically able to improve citizens' lives.

If the ANC suffers from the reflex historicism, the DA has the opposite problem – overactive ahistoricism. The DA's core philosophical belief is that equal opportunities ought to be created for all South Africans to have a shot at living fulfilling lives. While it may sound innocuous – spot-on, even – it is far

from that. Political philosophers have wrestled with many different conceptions of equality over the centuries, and the DA's neat repetition of the idea of 'equal opportunities' not only masks deep conceptual differences between philosophers, it also almost masks the ahistoricism behind their chosen philosophical foundation.

Countless classic texts have been written on equality. A critical engagement with that literature is beyond the scope of this article, but there are intuitive differences between various conceptions of equality that are relatively easy to make sense of, and which will suffice to show up the need for conceptual rigour in the DA's foundational principle. One interpretation of equal opportunities is to simply give every person the right to start a race, for example by placing everyone at the beginning of a marathon race, say. There is nothing stopping you from competing. You have an equal chance, in that sense, of winning the race. Of course, the problem is that in reality being allowed to enter the race does not mean that all have the same shot at winning. There are many other determinants of success, ranging from genetic luck (some are born with greater capacity to excel on the sports field) to environmental luck (including a range of fortuitous factors, such as diet consumed over the years, prior opportunities to practise, etc.) Once we flesh out the more complex array of determinants of athletic achievement, it is clear that a 'fair race' cannot be reduced simply to 'a race in which everyone is allowed to participate'.

That is precisely the problem with a basic, formalistic conception of equality: it takes inadequate account of the histories of individuals and communities. It is, in that regard, typically ahistorical, and it is this kind of conception of equality that the DA is infatuated with, and which leads to its overactive ahistoricism in how it analyses contemporary challenges in South Africa. It is almost as if merely placing everyone at the beginning of a race will suffice to guarantee a more just and equitable society. That is not just naïve; it is irresponsible and poorly thought through from an intellectual and political viewpoint.

How does this bear on the leadership challenges within the DA? The DA's challenge is to find leaders who do not let the ANC get away with lazy historicism, without becoming ahistorical themselves. That is very difficult: many older white leaders within the DA find comfort in conceptions of equality – like 'equality of opportunity' – that de-emphasise history's reach. This does not play well with the vast majority of black Africans, who still experience the structural impact of our ugly past. At the same time, one is tempted at least to empathise with the desire on the part of DA leaders to sketch a genuine post-democratic alternative vision for the country,

one that lets go of the past. Strategically, however, the DA makes the mistake of not engaging voters' current psychologies because it is so enamoured with the *ideal* of a colour-blind society founded on equal opportunities for all. Thus, the question for the DA is whether a new generation of leadership can take sufficient account of this balance between selling the electorate an ideal society not held hostage by our past and, simultaneously, embracing practical solutions to achieve a just society that take effective account of history.

This, then, is the party political backdrop to the generational question. The leadership challenges in our two largest political parties run deep, and the question is whether the mere fact that younger political leaders are younger, born into a new democracy rather than into a system of racial apartheid, should give us hope of a successful changing of the guard? I believe this is wishful thinking. I will first outline why in each party there is evidence that many of the younger politicians are inheriting the political sins of their mentors. Then, I will conclude with reflections on what it will take for the situation to change for the better.

New ANC generation, old politics

Inside the ANC, there is little visible talent in the under-40 age group. The most prominent exponent of the ANC Youth League in recent years, of course, has been Julius Malema. The fiery leader from Limpopo lives a lavish lifestyle that is near impossible to achieve, unless you are a trust-fund baby or *the* business whiz kid of your generation. Neither of these applies to Malema, and after persistent allegations of wrongdoing and excellent investigative journalism, the law caught up with him and he is currently being investigated for corruption, money laundering and tax evasion.

The point of the Malema example is this: he is not the first ANC leader that has fallen victim to the trappings of money in politics, and he will certainly not be the last. Its tentacles have spread from the older generations down to the youngest; hence, the assumption that political leaders under the age of 35 will be more responsive to the needs of South Africans than their elders have been is based on wishful thinking rather than grounded in reality.

Of course, Malema does not a winter maketh, one might say. The truth is, firstly, that he did not rise to senior positions within the Youth League structures by himself. Many of his contemporaries supported him and, consequently, their ability to judge quality leadership is also implicated; secondly, many of the Youth League leaders less prominent than Malema have also grossly underperformed. His sidekick and former spokesperson for the League, Floyd Shivambu, is a case in point. His insight on issues of national importance is limited and he routinely pronounces on them with stunning factual inaccuracy. At times, these flippant statements on crucial issues of national concern such as nationalisation encroach on some of the basic normative features of the constitutional

democracy the country has developed. Even the stand-in leader of the Youth League, Ronald Lamola, often gives the impression that he is (worse, in this regard) deliberately underplaying his formal education in law, glibly articulating views about policy issues such as land reform and nationalisation of the mines. (The most intellectually and politically impressive ANC Youth League leader I have met in recent years is undoubtedly its former secretary general, Vuyiswa Tulelo, who fortunately appears not to be lost to the state, at least, as a possible career diplomat.)

Not only is there a dearth of talent within the Youth League's top leadership structure, there is also an irritating habit of many talented young politicians – perhaps rationally so – doing what they need to in order to ensure career progress, rather than stirring the pot through more honest engagement with their elders. Take Buti Manamela, the Young Communist League boss. He is undoubtedly one of the most talented political brains among the younger politicians, but his slavish defence of the Zuma administration's weaknesses – including its bungling of the education system in Limpopo – is so spectacularly at odds with his more honest critiques of the status quo prior to his becoming a parliamentarian that one cannot help suspecting that, rather than being motivated by sheer intellectual and political integrity, career politicking is the more potent determinant of how he engaged political issues ahead of Mangaung. That, of course, is true of most politicians, but the point is that if you were hoping to find *a new kind of politics* among younger politicians, then you need to think again. Old habits die hard. As with all children who end up repeating their parents' mistakes, despite swearing that they will do better, so too young politicians often repeat the political sins of their leaders. A new politics in the ANC will clearly take more than a *mere* generational shift.

New DA generation, old politics

The DA has a better leadership incubation programme than that of the ANC. It produces young leaders that are well versed in the essentials of political communication, the basic philosophical foundations of the DA (or, at least, its 'core value') and some of the main policy debates in the country.

However, as with the ANC, older politicians in the DA often create clones of themselves, rather than nurturing a new generation of leaders who are inherently critical and sceptical – in a philosophical sense – of received wisdoms within the party. In public, many young DA leaders struggle to justify the party's de-emphasis of race in its policy prescriptions. In private, some are willing to confide their discomfort with this approach, which I have critiqued elsewhere in a *Mail & Guardian* essay that has caused a stir among DA politicians.¹

Yet, when pressed to explain publicly why they agree with these criticisms, there is awkward silence. The implication is clear: they do not feel up to the task of adopting a critical posture towards their political mentors and principals. How

much hope is there then of a different kind of DA leader emerging if this space for deep, open disagreement about even the fundamental positions within the party is smaller than many realise?

This is why it is difficult to draw an ideological wedge between the younger politicians and the older ones within the DA. In a sense, despite their insensitivity to evidence, it is easier to map out policy and value differences between ANC Youth League leaders and their 'elders' than it is to do so between young leaders within the DA and the older ones.

This is not to deny that there are differences among the leaders of the DA. Indeed, a leader like Athol Trollip has a very different take on how to grow the DA than does the party's leader, Helen Zille. The point, rather, is that there is no sharp break between these leaders' dialectic and what you would hear and see among those politicians under the age of 40. As with the ANC, this is suggestive of the truth that a mere change in demographics cannot be guaranteed to deliver a better quality of political leader than is currently the case.

It is surprising, for example, that the same ahistoricism and class-obsession (as a crude substitute for race-based analysis) in the politics of senior DA leaders should be found in the speeches of younger leaders. Where is the visible minority of young leaders with a different conception of what economic justice entails? Where, for that matter, is the visible minority of young DA leaders with alternative conceptions of equality, ones that are not formalistic at the core? Where, one wonders, are the young leaders who challenge policies unrelated to race – on social questions such as sex work, say – and who are fighting for a classic brand of liberalism, as opposed to the liberalism-lite of many older DA politicians (white *and* black)? The absence of these strands of alternative thinking about the DA and its future in younger DA politicians bears evidence of the fact that, like their ANC counterparts, too many young DA politicians simply inherit the political sins of their elders.

Where to from here?

The main insight of this article may not be particularly ground-breaking: a generational shift in demographics does not guarantee a positive transformation in the quality of political leadership in South Africa. It is, however, an insight worth reflecting on, because so many of us pin our hopes for a more responsive government on young people. We often straightforwardly assume that children born in the dying days of apartheid or, even better, during democracy, will naturally be endowed with great empathetic capacity to feel for those worse off than themselves. We conclude this hopeful projection by also imagining that they are, in practise, likely to actually demonstrate greater political leadership. The

tentative evidence, based on the performance of the current crop of young political leaders, is that such hopes are misplaced. The basic reason is simple: we reproduce, all too often, the worst weaknesses of those who have role-modelled leadership to us. This leaves us with a very difficult challenge: where to from here?

Most importantly, there needs to be an improvement in the quality of political mentorship. In theory, this should not be a massive challenge for the DA; it simply needs to tweak content on their cadet programme to orient those who undergo such training to engage the material critically. One gets the sense, however, that the DA's core philosophical value is taught as an ideological *fait accompli*, rather than presented in the context of a range of competing accounts of equality. The bigger challenge for the DA will be to attract a wider range of young people to the party's youth structures, beyond the self-selection that currently happens at tertiary institutions, which feed into the youth training programmes. South Africa is not going to be a colour-blind society in our lifetime (if ever), and indifference to the look and sound of the public faces and voices of the party is a losing political non-strategy.

Equally, inside the ANC and its alliance structures, political mentors have the near impossible task of mentoring younger politicians to stand up to them (the mentors), to not repeat their mistakes and to learn to be comfortable with the demands of a competitive, liberal democracy. This is 'near impossible' because it requires political mentors to have the capacity to step back from their own performances within the political space, and to selflessly instil a different style and approach to politics in their mentees. There is little reason to be optimistic that political players, who underperform grossly in their own careers, can still be brilliant private mentors to future generations of leaders.

Ultimately, we might have to look at leadership outside the formal space of party politics in order to sustain optimism about whether or not we, as a country, will turn around our dismal rankings on global poverty, inequality, unemployment and education indices. Here, fortunately, there is good news, which is criminally underreported – there are (despite enduring weaknesses in the sector) some excellent, vigorous and effective civil society organisations and young leaders within the civil society sector. It might be worth devoting more energy to reflect on this sector, rather than focusing solely on the more depressing reality that the younger politicians inside the main political parties look and sound uncannily like their elders.

Notes:

1. See <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-04-26-more-hugs-less-zille-will-help-the-da-to-grow>.

CONTINUITY AT THE EXPENSE OF NEW POLITICS

Mzukisi Qobo

The false imagery of liberation

Almost two decades have passed since South Africa became a democracy. It has been an uneasy journey. In part, it has been filled with a sense of idealism, driven by the promise of change and a better life, but, with time, hope has gradually made way for brutal realism. The honeymoon is long over and impatience with unfulfilled expectations and inept governance is increasingly bubbling to the surface.

The surplus social capital that the African National Congress (ANC) possessed during the early years of the transition is in deficit. The goodwill that excited and propelled the ruling party when it assumed power in 1994 has dissipated. Fragmented and politically compromised institutions are trembling under the weight of growing demands that range from jobs, education and quality healthcare to the provision of minimum basic services. As a result, trust in political leaders, the political custodians of these institutions, is at a nadir. Unlike in the earlier stages of the political transition, it is no longer possible to simply implore people to be patient. A change in leadership and the embracing of progressive values are what would bring healing to the country.

While the plight of the government must be viewed sympathetically against the backdrop of resource constraints, induced by a volatile global economic environment, there can be no excuse for the way in which weak governance compounds the problem. Every year, reports from the offices of the Special Investigating Unit and the Auditor-General paint a grim picture of maladministration and corruption that affect critical spheres of government. Their frequency and the seemingly lukewarm response from the authorities serve to deflate the hopes of citizens, as well as their confidence in the current political leadership to deliver the future that they have been promised.

South Africa's leadership transitions and national priorities

The challenges that confront South Africa today are the product of a volatile present, largely induced by factors related to globalisation; importantly, however, these have been superimposed upon an ugly past that fragmented the country along racial and economic lines. The traces of apartheid's social architecture are still evident in human settlement, educational

attainment, capacity for resilience in the face of economic adversity, access to opportunities for betterment that life has to offer, and the extent of participation in economic activity.

There is no doubt that the ruling party has had some notable achievements in reducing the socio-economic deficits created by the apartheid system, but these have not been consistent or of the required quality. According to data published by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR 2012), there were improvements in the delivery of key services between 1996 and 2010. The number of South African households living in formal houses increased from 5.8 million to 11 million, with the proportion of all households living in formal housing increasing from 64 to 76 per cent. The SAIRR (2012) study further noted that the number of South African households with access to electricity had increased from 58 to 83 per cent. Equally important gains were made with regard to access to clean tap water.

These absolute gains in service delivery, however, must not be regarded as something out of the ordinary. Given the promises that were made, South Africans expected nothing less than access to the most basic of services. With enhanced political awareness and a better sense of what is rightfully due to them, citizens have gained more confidence to demand better public services. They are also less inclined to tolerate gaps and inconsistencies in public service delivery. They know that they are living in a democracy and that it should deliver more effectively than in the past.

In fact, much of what has been achieved by way of public service delivery since democracy arguably falls short of expectations. Millions have benefitted, but millions also feel aggrieved. When bureaucrats parade their statistical gains in presentations to show progress, most fail to grasp that aggregated data do not soften the real day-to-day experiences of those who have not benefitted yet from healthcare services, access to education, public transport and policing, and still experience the trials of being unemployed and poor. What aggravates their sense of betrayal is the dysfunction of public institutions that interface with them at the local level. In the 2010/11 financial year, only 13 of 343 municipalities received clean audits from the Auditor-General, with capital budget underspending of 30 per cent during the same period. This is



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a sign of poor institutional capabilities and underperformance in meeting the reasonable expectations of citizens. In its recent downgrade of South Africa, Moody's rating agency underlined weak institutional capacity as one of the reasons for the downgrade, with political instability in the future as one of the major risks for the country.

Thus, despite the numerous percentage improvements that are often trumpeted by the ruling party, income levels and the quality of material well-being are perceived to be stagnating. Inequality is exacerbated by an underperforming education system that sustains the stark imbalance between the supply of and demand for better-paid skilled positions. Even with the continued improvement of services, the fact that the ruling party started off on a very low base means that it will become increasingly difficult to meet expectations. The dwindling fiscal resources will certainly add to social strain and fuel the cauldron of social discontent.

To avert implosion under the weight of rising expectations and constrained fiscal room, South Africa will have to develop a different kind of leadership, which can tackle current socio-economic difficulties and is ready to confront the coming economic battles. Such leadership would have to be in tune with the needs of the country's citizens – not only to regain their trust, but also to understand and act upon their expectations.

This raises important questions about the possibilities of change emerging from within a new, younger generation of leaders. Is there hope for a different ethos and approach within a younger generation of leaders that can shift the political discourse to become more inclusive and responsive? If not, where does the hope for change lie?

Generational change and a new kind of politics

Slowly but surely, new faces, which were too young to participate in the politics of the transitional years, are emerging on all sides of our political spectrum. They have lived most of their adult lives in a democratic South Africa, and while the remnants of the apartheid legacy are still there for everybody to see, their realities have been and are being shaped by a country in which the divisions of the past are increasingly blurred and where new social contradictions are constantly emerging.

South African politics, however, have become too static to respond with urgency to the demands that a fluid society imposes. This lack of responsiveness is underpinned by fragmentation and polarisation within and between political parties. The cost of concession seems too high, and factions,

parties and lobby groups have adopted an all-or-nothing approach as their way of conducting politics. This has come at the expense of the interests of citizens. The country desperately needs visionary leadership that is capable of navigating the realities and demands of an emerging society. As such, we need to ask whether and how these new leaders can work towards a more inclusive and just society that is informed, but not defined, by the experiences of generations before it. We need to ask this of the ruling ANC, but also of those that present themselves as an alternative government, the DA.

A major obstacle to more visionary leadership emerging from the ruling party is that its view of the future is deeply premised on an interpretation of the past that emphasises victims and villains, scripted on a black and white canvass. The ANC's definition of the future is limited to a negative discourse that seeks to construct a South Africa that is *anything* but apartheid. As such, the ANC sees itself as the ultimate bulwark against the return of the past, and uses history, memory and symbolism of the struggle as an ultimate mobilising tool. Because traces of our racial past are ever present, and marked in patterns of unemployment, human settlement, differential educational standards and participation in economic activity, the ruling party frames the present as a continuity of the apartheid social legacy. It insists that its character as a liberation movement remains relevant to remove all vestiges of the past.

Left unexamined is the ANC's own role in failing not only to create conditions that reduce the social legacy of apartheid but also to facilitate a continuation of a genuine and healthy dialogue, beyond the rhetoric of non-racialism, to allow for the healing of the scars of the past. Accordingly, it is only a step better than apartheid, and it wallows in such comparisons. So, there are no new minimum standards of what is acceptable to secure good governance and human dignity. For the ANC, the barometer is the apartheid past. In this way, the ruling party can deflect its own culpability for the current state of affairs by portraying it solely as a historical legacy, and by emphasising its historically bestowed task of delivering the economic spoils of freedom alongside political liberation. The reality, though, is that inequalities have deepened under the ruling party.

In rationalising its governance failures of the past 18 years, the ANC has presented a picture of itself as shackled by the post-1994 political compromise expressed in the country's liberal constitutional order. Some in the party, with President Jacob Zuma a vocal advocate, have pushed strongly for the adoption of a 'second transition' – a view suggesting that what has gone wrong in the past 18 years has little to do with the

internally degenerative state of the ANC, but much to do with the deformity of a political order that has imposed strictures on economic transformation (ANC 2012).

This perspective conveniently overlooks the fact that the ANC's political mandate entailed authority to manage economic transformation, which is why it was able in October 1998 to put in place a black economic empowerment (BEE) programme, and this goes through cycles of review by the Department of Trade and Industry. Further, the ANC has presided over government machinery and designed a welter of other economic policy instruments that could have been better shaped and directed towards improving the quality of services and producing better economic outcomes for the majority of citizens. That has not happened.

Ignoring the intricate linkage of the political and economic mandate, the ANC has argued, from its 'second transition' perspective, that an explicitly economic mandate would reposition it better as an economic liberator. This view misrepresents the complexity and causes of the country's socio-economic challenges, of which the youth carry a disproportionate burden with the unemployment rate in this category at 50 per cent. There is keen awareness in the ANC that the swelling of the ranks of the unemployed, the growing inequalities, the rise in crime and the sporadic incidents of public service delivery protest signal a weakening in the legitimacy of the ANC.

Improbabilities of generational shift in the ANC

Against this backdrop, it is inconceivable that generational change within the ANC will translate automatically into a change in the conduct of its politics. The younger generation that is currently coming through the ANC's ranks has been socialised too deeply into its culture and ideology to offer any hope of a clean break that would lead to the emergence of a new kind of politics. At the leadership level, the ANC Youth League is caught up in the web of the party's factional battles and is a product of the malaise rather than its cure. The breeding ground for a new layer of leadership in the ANC includes its youth league, branch structures and, to some extent, the student bodies at both high school (Congress of South African Students) and higher education levels (South African Students Congress). Such structures do not depart from the ANC's philosophy and practices. Not only do they continue its chaotic existence, they exacerbate it.

Given the limited extent to which generational shift within the ANC could bring about organisational renewal and a repositioning of the party and the state, prospects for change are more likely to emerge from two other sources. The first traces its origins from within the ANC, and has a potentially

populist-nationalistic character. It may take the form of a party that splits from the ANC, exploiting existing disaffection with the leadership, and presenting itself as a new hope for the poor. This may gain traction in the current climate of discontent over public service delivery and the wave of industrial strikes.

The second could be driven by a new breed of younger politicians, with the mobilising framework created by the existing opposition parties, and drawing upon active, politically inclined professionals who want to reverse the tidal drift experienced under the ruling party. The advantage of this possibility would lie not only in the youthfulness of its make-up, but in the ability to find a better balance between the interests of the middle classes and the underprivileged.

Possibilities of generational shift in the DA

The DA, the official opposition, faces different, but equally complex, challenges in ensuring that generational succession also brings with it the kind of renewal that will make it appeal to a broader range of voters. One of the things that gives succour to the ANC is the framing of the DA as a party representing the aspirations of those who benefitted from apartheid or whose interests exclude the poor. As such, the ANC constituency strongly associates the DA brand with being anti-poor and anti-black. What has lent credence to this view is the sense that the DA does not seem to consider itself as having a shared responsibility to offer meaningful solutions to the complex challenges of race and socio-economic inequality in a way that transcends ideology. As such, the ANC exploits this weakness of the DA and uses its lack of progress in overcoming racial and socio-economic divides in the Western Cape to frame it as a party of the rich, clamouring for a return to the past.

Perceptions have a greater force than reality, especially when one stacks these up against the fact that 57 per cent of the DA's total budget in Cape Town is spent on underprivileged black communities. Its public administration is run far better than municipalities and provinces under ANC control, which regularly receive qualified audits. Significantly, the DA's membership is also more racially diverse than any other party, including the ruling party. It has made serious inroads in traditional ANC constituencies, such as townships, some rural villages and predominantly black university campuses through its student movement, the DA Students Organisation. Its leadership mix at the top is also diverse, dynamic and youthful.

However, the DA has significant self-imposed limitations. Beyond the nitty-gritty of managing public administration and getting budgetary allocations right, the kind of leadership that is equal to the weight of the country's racial past is absent.

The country desperately needs visionary leadership that is capable of navigating the realities and demands of an emerging society.



Social mobility is happening at too slow a pace to make any significant dent in racially configured social inequalities.

There are no meaningful conversations within the DA on issues of race and socio-economic cohesiveness. Instead, it resorts to standard philosophical explanations leaning on liberalism, in particular placing emphasis on the phoney notion of an equal-opportunity society, without so much as an attempt to identify the root causes of inequalities in the first place and to address them vigorously at the core. This is made trickier by the strong association of social inequalities with the politics of race, even in the light of the growing middle class. You will encounter more blacks than whites amongst the poor, and more whites than blacks in the richer segments of our society.

The DA leaves answers to socio-economic inequalities to the trickle-down effects of GDP growth, according to which growing aggregate output leads to a levelling of social inequalities. Essentially, the DA has failed to hone a genuine transformational narrative that connects the aspirations of black communities and expectations of the well-off in the Western Cape. The DA does not need to adopt the ANC's or any populist thesis on race, but should have a deep internal conversation about it. Moreover, it should evolve its own philosophy, which it can present as more fluent and credible, and with more substance than anything we have had in the past. Being transformational does not mean looking more like the ANC; it entails taking the necessary step to connect deeply with social reality from the standpoint of legitimate social purpose, principle and a broadly supported governing programme.

In addition, to establish solid legitimacy, the DA will need to go beyond finesse in public administration and showcase a better picture of the future in the province it currently runs. That it has failed to capture hearts and minds in a sufficiently broad-based manner undermines any claim that it can be an alternative party of the future. It would also need to deal decisively with its own legacy challenges of being identified as a party pandering to a core constituency that has deep financial pockets, and is middle-aged and white, which restrains it from experimenting with fundamental and progressive change.

One of the biggest challenges that the current DA leader, Helen Zille has is to use her political capital with the white core constituency of the DA to challenge and persuade it to embrace an inclusive political and economic future for South Africa. The DA leader could play a role similar to Nelson Mandela's promotion of reconciliation by managing the expectations of the black majority. In this case, it would be challenging the DA's core constituency to buy into a new and well-defined compact that reflects active support by the

white sections of society for policies aimed at redressing the legacy of the past, their involvement in and support of a social dialogue about tackling the challenges of the present and painting an inclusive future, and their contribution as active citizens who participate in efforts or pioneer initiatives aimed at enhancing the well-being of the country beyond just politics.

Granted, there is a case to be made that most of these efforts and initiatives are not limited to the white community but are applicable to anyone who has the capacity to make a contribution towards the country's well-being. In the context where there remains a deep resentment around race and inequalities, and a growing sense amongst sections of the black community that Mandela's rainbow vision was an unreciprocated gesture to reassure the white population at the expense of black aspirations, positive gestures inspired by the leadership of the opposition could help promote better race relations and rebuild the platform of nation-building. The DA's core constituencies would have to be challenged to embrace such a vision, and if they cannot buy into it, they must be shown the door.

Elements of change in the DA's internal character would entail a radical shift in leadership at the top to broaden and deepen diversity in leadership across various structures. This would have to be undertaken authentically rather than through superficial means of merely co-opting black leaders as tokens. Secondly, the party would need to reframe its philosophical core with relevance to South Africa's unique social challenges. This would require tempering liberalism with an emphasis on social redress. As such, the party would need to locate its ideological commitments in the political centre – championing the politics of liberalism, while seizing ground on tackling social inequities. Finally, the party would need to rebrand, focusing strongly on presenting itself as an inclusive party, and a party of the present and the future. Skilful and empathetic management of diversity, rather than assimilation of new entrants, would enable the party to transcend its past and reposition it better in a changing social context. It cannot hope to remain culturally and philosophically the same and still have a moral claim to being a party for change.

Conclusion

There is a generational shift within the ANC, but this does not provide much comfort that there will be substantive change in how the party manages its affairs and governs the country. Its youth are deeply socialised in the party's culture from branch to national level. A hallmark of the ANC's succession processes is that it entrenches continuity.

While four of the top six office-bearers of the ANC are aged 60 years or more, there is a generational mix in the rest of the National Executive Committee (NEC) and various regional and provincial executive committees. This will continue to be the case as the Youth League pushes for more generational shift, but also as an adaptation to the demographic realities of a youthful country. There is a clear directional change in the ANC pointing towards a more youthful but radicalised leadership in future.

Leadership succession within the ANC may appear disorderly with respect to the top six NEC positions; however, there is a loosely structured internal succession process from branch to provincial to national that seems to signal a seamless passing of the baton. Most of the youth that the ANC draws its membership from, and who make the transition from its youth league to the mother body, are from tough conditions in the townships. They can draw parallels between their socio-economic circumstances and the relatively privileged existence of their peers across the colour line.

Given the low success rate of matriculants and that there are few who transition to a middle class life via higher education or commercial enterprise amongst black youth, this segment may be more ideologically inclined to the ANC or a radicalised alternative than to a party in the shape of the DA or similar option. Even though the average ANC Youth League member or sympathiser today would have been born a few years before the country became a democracy in 1994, the social legacy of apartheid is reproduced in the patterns of human settlement, educational attainment and participation in economic activity.

Even amongst those who successfully go through higher education, their socio-economic background remains the reference point of their political and ideological orientation,

and they are likely to be drawn towards ideas that promote radical change in society. Conditions of social inequality are reproduced by poor educational outcomes amongst the black population. Social mobility is happening at too slow a pace to make any significant dent in racially configured social inequalities. This lends the ANC greater appeal for those who see it as the ultimate liberator, on the strength of its liberationist rhetoric. Under the current social conditions, the ANC may even locate itself not just as a bulwark against the imaginary resurgence of apartheid, but also as a bulwark against a more radical alternative. Generational shift within the ANC is unlikely to deliver a society that overcomes the divides of the past, reduces social inequalities and improves quality of life.

While the ANC is showing signs of decline, the DA is not yet the party of the future. The future movement for change would be comprised largely of the black middle class, but would seek to reach for the kind of politics that could secure a stable future for generations to come, and that would be sensitive to the systemic political risks posed by deep socio-economic inequalities in society. Persisting inequalities, unemployment and poor standards of education undermine social stability. The effects of instability would be borne by the poor and middle classes alike, so it is in the interests of the middle classes to strive for a socio-political framework that is inclusive.

It must be stressed that it is not just good policies, in the technocratic sense, as important as these are, that would guarantee stability; transformational leadership that has legitimacy across society is also required. The ANC seized the centre-ground in 1994 not on the basis of coherent policies but on the promise of its moral leadership. The betrayal of this promise is symptomatic in governance failures, and it is this that needs to be seized and recast.