

"IN THE TWILIGHT OF THE AZANIAN REVOLUTION". LEADERSHIP DIVERSITY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PAC DURING THE EXILE PERIOD (1962-1990)

KKM Kondlo*

1. INTRODUCTION

During the exile period (1960-1990) the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) of Azania was an organisation continuously in a state of crisis. The crisis in the PAC was a result of internal squabbles which were a manifestation of the crisis of leadership. With Robert Sobukwe under house arrest and banishment inside South Africa, the organisation lacked a unifying symbolic figure at the helm. It was only in 1981 that a leader with the level of capabilities that approximated those of Sobukwe was identified and he was Nyathi John Pokela. Otherwise, for the first sixteen years PAC members "nursed hopes that one day Sobukwe will escape from banishment to come and save the PAC in exile".¹ The Acting President of the PAC, PK Leballo, was regarded as a temporary replacement. The reality that the PAC had to find a leader only dawned after Sobukwe's death in 1978. It took the organisation two years to eventually appoint Pokela as the leader of the exiled organisation. His stint was also short as he died in 1985 in Zimbabwe after a short illness. What this points to is that the PAC never had stable leadership during the exile period. Between the years 1962-1990, the PAC had four chairpersons who led the organisation at different times. Their leadership styles were different and this had an impact on the organisation.

The singular defining element of the PAC's organisational crisis was that the leadership had lost credibility and had failed to restore it throughout the exile period. The seventeen years of leadership of PK Leballo (1962-1979) created an organisational mode of perpetual instability, internal conflict and lack of focus on what really mattered, i.e. waging a war of liberation against the Apartheid state inside South Africa. Even though the crisis of leadership did not apply uniformly throughout the various periods, the overall picture remained the same. Dominant

* Rand Afrikaans University.

¹ Interview with DDD Mantshontsho, Umtata, 12 February, 1995.

trends of organisational conflict and relations of power did not change.

The article focuses only on the political leadership of the PAC as represented by the National Executive Committee and the leadership styles of the various chairmen of the organisation. An exclusive focus on the political leadership during the exile period is important given the enormous difficulties the PAC experienced. This is a subject of compelling academic interest, especially in the light of the assumption enunciated by Tom Lodge that the "quality of political leadership" is important for political systems and more so for young political organisations, especially because their institutions "are still fluid and more susceptible to being shaped by dominant personalities".² This assumption befits the analysis of the situation in the PAC. As an organisation, the PAC was not only young (formed in April 1959 and banned in April 1960), but was thrown into the environment of exile, which even the most well-established movements would experience as precarious, despite the marginal benefits it offered. An examination of the impact of leadership diversity in the PAC becomes important in order to enrich the perspectives on the organisation's overall standing during the exile period. The state of health and vulnerability of the 'body' (i.e. the organisation) depended on the quality of leadership as *conditio sine quanon*.

My discussion covers the following issues: Firstly it develops a concept of leadership as a frame of reference. Secondly it provides a sketchy background on the origins and formation of the PAC and how it re-established itself in exile. Thirdly the article examines leadership styles in the PAC starting with the period of Leballo and ending with the period of Johnson Mlambo. The penultimate section compresses together the insights derived from the previous sections to show the diversity of leadership in the PAC during the exile period.

2. CONCEPT MAPPING

The concept of 'leadership' is used in this article to infer a variety of attributes such as political management, vision, strategic thinking, ideological prowess and policy approaches. In essence the article adopts the view that leadership is about the building of consensus, and permitting apparent contradictions to be harmonised within a compromise solution.³ The article moves from the perspective that leadership of an organisation is not entrusted to a single vision bearer but is a corporate effort. This tallies with the 'collective' approach to leadership expressed

² T Lodge, **South African politics since 1994** (Cape Town, David Philips, 1999), p. 4.

³ This is adopted from Sean Jacobs and Richard Calland (eds), **Thabo Mbeki's world - The politics and ideology of the South African President** (University of Natal Press, 2002), p. 21.

in various PAC internal documents.⁴ Be that as it may, the article is alert to the fact that leadership as a concept, whether understood retrospectively, is far more eclectic than the definition would suppose.

This article examines the period from 1962, when a formal PAC structure was established in exile under the leadership of PK Leballo, to 1990, when the PAC was unbanned.

3. BACKGROUND: THE ORIGINS, FORMATION AND BANISHMENT OF THE PAC

The PAC was formed at a national conference of Africanists held in Orlando township in Johannesburg from 4 to 6 April 1959. The formation of the PAC was the result of a long-drawn-out political process which began with ideological debates within the ANC Youth League. The result of the ideological debates was the formation of an 'Africanist' faction within the ANC. The faction gradually consolidated itself following the 1949 ANC Programme of Action and eventually launched its official organisation, the Pan Africanist Congress of South Africa in 1959. In 1968 the exiled PAC adopted the name 'Azania' instead of South Africa and then called itself the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania.

"Almost before the ink was dry on the document signed in 1959 which created the formation of the Pan Africanist Congress, there were already signs of internal conflict", Mahlongu wrote.⁵ The main issue was who should be at the helm of the organisational hierarchy. Competing factions emerged and this resulted in tensions between what was regarded as the 'party intellegensia' led by RM Sobukwe, and the non-intellectual faction led by Josia Madzunya. The latter failed to secure a position in the first PAC National Executive and subsequently resigned from the organisation. These early internal squabbles, even though relatively minor, set the mood for what was later to become a trend in PAC internal politics. The tendency emerged in exile and dominated PAC internal relations.

The banishment of the PAC occurred on 8 April 1960. A leadership crisis developed in the organisation as its entire leadership was taken into custody and convicted to serve jail terms of varying lengths. The only layer of leadership which remained outside custody included people like Nanha Mahomo and Peter Molotsi who had left the country on 20 March 1960 with the instruction that they should

⁴ See the foundational documents of the PAC such as the Azanian People's Manifesto, Disciplinary Code and the PAC Constitution.

⁵ DAB Mahlongu, "From South Africa to Azania", BA (Hons) Paper, University of Cape Town, 1991, pp. 81-2.

mobilise the international community, including the rest of Africa, against Apartheid and also generate resources for the establishment of PAC bases outside South Africa. It seems as if Sobukwe knew what was going to happen as he appointed ZB Molete as Acting President shortly after the state of emergency had been declared. He acted in terms of the Presidential Decree adopted in December 1959.⁶ Molete acted as president until August 1962 when he relinquished the acting presidency to Potlake Leballo who had been released by the South African government from banishment in Northern Natal to go to Lesotho, his native land. Already a significant presence of PAC membership had established itself in Maseru (Lesotho). PAC members in Maseru were a loose grouping interspersed among the native Basotho population who out of goodwill and sympathy with the political situation of black South Africans, accommodated them.

Leballo's term was the longest and the most eventful in the PAC. It was followed by the short period of Vusumzi Make, thereafter that of John Nyathi Pokela and lastly of Johnson Mlambo.

4. A CONTESTED LEADERSHIP

4.1. Leballo's term

This section seeks to demonstrate the maneuverings of Leballo to assume uncontested authority and complete control of the PAC. It began in September 1962 when he constituted the 'official' external leadership of the PAC. Leballo convened a Presidential Council consisting of himself as Acting President, JN Pokela, MPL Gqobose, ZB Molete, EMfafa, NM Ntantala and TT Letlaka".⁷ From the very outset, it appears that appointments to the Presidential Council were not conducted in a democratic manner. This was indicated by Lekaje in his submission to the African Liberation Committee (ALC) of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). He stated that Leballo "appointed his admirers, to be members of the Presidential Council. This Council then assumed the duties of the National Executive Committee."⁸ According to Lekaje's submission, Leballo knew that the designations were unconstitutional but he proceeded because of his greed for power. The submission also made reference to Leballo's press conference of 1963 after which he used the powers derived from his position of leadership in the National Executive

⁶ PAC Archives, Fort Hare. Background to official appointments and policy statement, 20 June 1964, p. 1.

⁷ B Leeman, **Lesotho and the struggle for Azania, Africanist political movements in Lesotho and Azania, the origins of the BCP and the PAC**, Volumes 1, 2 and 3 (London, 1985), p. 178.

⁸ PAC Archives. 'Confidential - A statement concerning the disputes within the Pan Africanist Congress (SA) to the African Liberation Committee, p. 2.

Committee (NEC) to shield himself from a possible commission of enquiry into the 1963 'deadly fiasco'.⁹ The Presidential Council (NEC) which Leballo constituted consisted of JN Pokela as Secretary, M Gqobose as member of the Presidential Council, TM Ntantala, also a member, ZB Molete as Secretary of Publicity and Information, Zeph Motopeng as Acting National Treasurer and Elliot Mfafa as National Organiser.¹⁰

What can be inferred from Lekaje's submission is that Leballo undermined the organisation's tradition of democratic consultation; he did not consult with the general membership of the PAC and even members of the NEC in running the official business of the PAC. As Elliot Mfafa indicated the NEC was just a formality because "Leballo did things by himself with only a few handpicked individuals from the National Executive".¹¹ In other words, one may describe Leballo's style of leadership as both authoritarian and manipulative in the sense that he worked with a few individuals who did not question his approach to the exclusion of the NEC as an official organ. He never followed a systematic approach as indicated in the basic founding documents of the PAC, as will be shown later in the discussion of a few isolated incidents.¹² He undermined the PAC's principle of collective leadership which emphasised the importance of generating consensus within the leadership team before decisions are implemented. Leballo, even though inadvertently, set a leadership trend which survived all the innovations made by PAC chairmen who followed him. In the three post-Leballo leadership periods, despite the leadership styles of the presiding chairmen, the leadership tradition left behind by Leballo had crystallised into an organisational culture where the leadership could take decisions which affected the general membership without consulting them. Most of the times the decisions taken were not communicated to the general membership of the PAC. The members of the military wing, APLA, were the first to complain about this tendency.¹³ This occurred during the time of Vusumzi Make, who became chairman after Leballo had been deposed.

Leballo's authoritarian leadership style depleted morale in the organisation and created an impression that one survived either because of fitness and wit or of being well-connected. After 1967 the morale was particularly low in the PAC camps in Lesotho. This emanated from the fact that between 1962 and 1967 the NEC, led by PK Leballo, sanctioned activities by PAC members which were divisive within the

⁹ **Ibid.**

¹⁰ PAC Archives. Background to official appointments, pp. 2-3.

¹¹ Interview with Elliot Mfafa, 21 July 1998.

¹² The PAC had developed standard procedures; some of which were designed during the conditions of legality inside South Africa. See the PAC Constitution, Oath of Allegiance and the PAC Manifesto.

¹³ PAC Archives: PAC/Tanzania/1/164/9: Minutes of the Administrative Committee of the PAC, April 30, 1979, pp. 1-20.

organisation. A case in point was the involvement of PAC members in the affairs of the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP). The latter was a nationalist movement for the liberation of Lesotho from British colonial rule. It competed with the moderately conservative Basutoland National Party (BNP). Leballo, being a Basutoland national, was instrumental in the formation of the BCP and contributed to its Pan-Africanist outlook. When the PAC was formed, "fraternal and solidarity ties with the Basutoland Congress Party" were developed.¹⁴ "However during Leballo's administration he encouraged participation by the PAC members in the activities of the said Basutoland Congress Party, which culminated in the PAC members being involved in Basutoland politics. Leballo as a Mosotho (citizen of Lesotho) had every right to do so. In fact on a number of occasions he addressed BCP gatherings there without consulting the National Executive Committee. As a result of this involvement, one PAC man was killed in the Rotho ambush in the company of the BCP, where the latter held a rally."¹⁵ Some members of the PAC in exile felt that Leballo was using the PAC, including its resources, as a ladder to a possible position of power in case the BCP was to be the government of Lesotho. This strained the relations within the PAC, but the situation continued unresolved until Leballo was deposed from leadership in 1979.

The period 1962 to 1964 could have been used for establishing systems and procedures to mould the PAC into an effective exile liberation movement; instead the foundations for disorder were laid. Leballo's greed for "absolute personal power over both the whole Party and the entire army, as opposed to the PAC's founding principles of collective leadership, common responsibility and democratic centralism", prevented him from living up to the challenges of his leadership role.¹⁶

A few important documents setting out the basic organisational systems and procedures were generated during his leadership period. It needed a visionary leadership to manage their implementation. The Lesotho group, for instance, produced a concept document about "self-reliance and the mobilisation of resources in the PAC".¹⁷ This particular document addressed a wide-ranging number of issues regarding how the PAC should operate in a co-ordinated fashion in exile. It addressed issues such as the functions of the departments within the PAC and also identified common objectives and collective responsibilities of certain departments. By implication the document suggested the development of 'departmental clusters'

¹⁴ PAC Archives: CJ Lekaje: "Confidential - A statement concerning the disputes within the Pan Africanist Congress (SA) to the African Liberation Committee", p. 3.

¹⁵ **Ibid.**

¹⁶ PAC Archives, Fort Hare. TM Ntantala (Deputy Chairman of the Central Committee), "The crisis in the PAC", 4 April 1978, p. 12.

¹⁷ PAC Archives, Fort Hare. M Gqobose, "Self-reliance and the mobilization of resources in PAC", undated.

on the basis of identified common objectives. The National Organiser's Department, the Foreign Affairs's Department, the Publicity and Information Department and the Economic Affairs Department, for instance, were among the departments that were recommended to collaborate closely in order to make the PAC viable in exile.¹⁸ In addition to this, "Guidelines on PAC cells abroad" were developed during this formative period but only found their way to becoming official policy in the 1980s, the post-Leballo period.

The early draft policy or procedure documents of the PAC were all remarkably slim on the issue of co-ordination and control of funds. In this area, Leballo failed as a leader to provide direction, but instead, exploited the situation in his personal favour. This was a reflection of the untrustworthy, unstable personality described in JEH Grobler's article, "PK Leballo: Opportunistiese swendelaar of koersvaste knoeier?".¹⁹ The PAC received money from a variety of sources such as the international solidarity groups, trade unions, the African Liberation Committee of the OAU and sympathetic governments and church organisations.²⁰ Leballo's dishonest character was manifested in the way he lied about funds received and what he had used them for, but never produced the necessary records to prove to the organisation and the Treasurer-General, in particular, what the amount of money had been and how he had used it. Without policies on how to manage donor funds, Leballo exploited the situation and was able to get away with numerous financial irregularities. A list of instances were enumerated by AB Ngcobo, the Treasurer-General of the PAC, in his report to the Moshi Unity Conference, summoned at the insistence of the OAU, to mend the simmering split and conflict in the PAC in 1967.²¹ The Moshi Conference could not solve the situation. Leballo used it, instead, as a forum in which to enunciate his Maoist theory of the liberation struggle in South Africa and also to eliminate his political opponents. These included people such as Ngcobo.

Leballo's manipulative and divisive leadership style came to light once again in 1976. He enlisted the support of new recruits in the PAC's military wing, the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA). He used their support to oust the APLA military High Command headed by TM Ntantala at the Arusha Conference,

¹⁸ PAC Archives, Fort Hare. M Gqobose, "Self-reliance and the mobilization of resources in PAC", undated, pp. 7-9.

¹⁹ JEH Grobler, "PK Leballo: Opportunistiese swendelaar of koersvaste knoeier?", *Journal for Contemporary History*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1993, pp. 88-113.

²⁰ This is covered elaborately in Tor Sellstrom, *Sweden and national liberation in Southern Africa, Vol. II, Solidarity and assistance, 1970-1994* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 2002), pp. 494-512; PAC Archives. CJ Lekaje, Confidential, pp. 1-6; PAC Archives. AB Ngcobo, Report of the Treasurer-General, Moshi Conference, September, 1967, pp. 1-4.

²¹ PAC Archives. AB Ngcobo: Report of the Treasurer-General, Moshi Conference, September, 1967, pp. 1-7.

in Tanzania, in 1978. Ntantala and his group formed the Azanian People's Revolutionary Party in 1979 and were based in Zimbabwe from 1980. Leballo hoped that with Ntantala and his High Command out of the picture, he would be able to enlist the unwavering support of the army and direct the organisation in the direction he wanted it to go. All along, he enjoyed the support of both the Tanzania-based African Liberation Committee (ALC) as well as the Tanzanian government. Hence it was difficult for his opponents to find a neutral body to assist in resolving the crisis in the PAC.²² The coup d' état which Leballo incited in the army in November 1977, and the subsequent expulsion of Ntantala and the High Command, were the last straws of his maneuverings because the Tanzanian government decided to intervene and literally deposed him as Chairman of the PAC on 1 May 1979.

What can be regarded, in broad terms, as the formative period of the PAC in exile ended without any consolidation of achievements made. Members of the PAC were still loosely scattered all over the world. Some had completed military training but were not deployed anywhere. According to CJ Lekaje, "the upheavals in the PAC forced them to look elsewhere".²³ Some decided to pursue academic careers but expressed their preparedness to return to the PAC once the party machinery was streamlined.²⁴ Among the rank-and-file membership of the PAC, "confidence in the revolutionary integrity of their leadership was shaken".²⁵ The leadership style of Leballo disclosed his personal insecurity and his inability to separate personal interests from those of the liberation movement. He accumulated power illegitimately and as a result he was unable to generate and benefit from the collective wisdom of members of his NEC. The dissatisfaction with his activities was widespread. He offered no space for ordinary PAC members to vent their grievances regarding the direction the organisation was going. More often than not, members of the PAC who openly questioned and criticized Leballo "would just disappear" and the Leballo administration would spread rumours that persons had deserted and "had gone back to their masters in South Africa", because they were "political renegades who were South African police informers".²⁶ The tendency of myth-making and labelling opponents as internal enemies was started by Leballo and it outlived his period of leadership. During his period of leadership, this meant that grievances and complaints were never attended to in a manner befitting any well-run administration.

²² A good example to demonstrate this is the appeal to the ALC made by JD Nyaose regarding his expulsion from the party in August 1965. The ALC dismissed the issue as an internal PAC matter which should be resolved by Leballo and his leadership team. See PAC Archives. Circular Letter No. 1: Pan Africanist Congress of South Africa at home and abroad, p. 3.

²³ PAC Archives, Fort Hare. CJ Lekaje - Confidential: p. 7.

²⁴ **Ibid.**

²⁵ An informal conversation with Z Mchiteka of the PAC, Langa, Cape Town, 16 December 2000.

²⁶ PAC Archives. CJ Lekaje: Confidential, p. 3.

After Leballo had been deposed with the intervention of the Tanzanian authorities, matters in the PAC got worse. The trio which was appointed by the Tanzanian government to run the PAC (consisting of Vusumzi Make, David Sibeko and Ellias Ntloedibe) had no support of rank-and-file PAC members, let alone the army which had new recruits (the post-1976 Soweto uprisings group) who were still loyal to Leballo. The period of the trio was very short and hardly constitute a historical period. Vusumzi Make was formally appointed as the new chairman of the PAC in August 1979.

4.2 Make's term

Make's leadership style was completely different from that of Leballo. Be that as it may, some of the traditions left behind by Leballo continued during Make's period which lasted until January 1981. Like his predecessor, he did not consult the membership of the organisation in the constitution of his NEC. Hence the demands from the rank-and-file members of APLA that he should remove certain members of the NEC. These included DDD Mantshontsho and Ellias Ntloedibe who were perceived as being failures in their roles in the NEC.²⁷

However, Make was different from Leballo in terms of his leadership style. He allowed ordinary PAC members to voice their grievances without any fears of intimidation, suspension or dismissal from the Party. For the first time in the PAC, Make made all-round New Year visits to members of the PAC in the camps in which he addressed the needs of ordinary PAC members. By so doing he set the standard for his successor, Nyathi John Pokela, who also routinely visited PAC camps. On the negative, his tenure was dominated by "indecision, corruption, factionalism and cliquism".²⁸ He never acted on complaints raised by PAC members. Make was too hands-off in his style of leadership of the PAC. This could be attributed to three issues. Firstly, the fact that he knew that he was implicated in the murder of David Sibeko, a member of the trio which had led the PAC after Leballo in 1979, made him very cautious about the way he responded to internal conflicts in the PAC.²⁹ Secondly, Make was well-known for his tendency to save skin and always play it safe in PAC crises. It seems that he was careful to read the balance of forces and quickly determine where to stand. Besides that, Make tended to be involved in his own personal businesses, outside the affairs of the PAC. Hence there were complaints by the APLA members that besides the fact that Make

²⁷ PAC Archives. PAC/Tan/1/164/9. Minutes of the Administrative Committee of the PAC, April 30, 1979, p. 2.

²⁸ ANC Archives, Fort Hare. Henry Isaacs: Memorandum: To all representatives, offices and branches of the PAC, re guidelines of the Department of Foreign Affairs, New York, 17 February 1982, p. 4.

²⁹ **Daily News**, Tanzania, 28 April 1984.

was "not fully resident where the Headquarters of the movement" were, he was "never available at one place whenever the outside world and members of the Party wanted to see him through correct channels".³⁰ In other words, he was an absent chairman of the PAC. Besides his regular absence from Tanzania, "globe-trotting using organisational funds", Make also had personal habits which made his leadership not respectable.³¹ "He was an excessive wine-drinker who ate lavishly and insisted on a comfortable life-style beyond what the organisation could afford."³² This, combined with his lack of time for PAC matters, meant that he could not address the concerns raised by members of the PAC. The issues raised by members of the PAC, especially cadres in the army, were varied and broad but very important for the reconstruction of the PAC into a viable liberation movement.

Make addressed none of the complaints from the rank-and-file PAC members during his term. By the time his term of office came to an end, the organisation was "lawless and in disarray. Members of the NEC did what they liked, soldiers were gaining an upper hand in the organisation" and most importantly, the organisation was suffering a two-way ideological split.³³ Besides the fact that Make could not provide ideological leadership to the organisation, his regular absence from the Party led to the rise of what Isaacs calls "militarism" in the PAC.³⁴ This refers to the initiatives of the cadres in the organisation. The death of Sobukwe in 1978, the absence of Make and the fact that the entire NEC was widely dispersed all over the world, made the cadres to see themselves as the only backbone and last hope for the salvation of the PAC. As the Vusumzi Make's term approached its end, "rather than there be direction, organisation and cohesion", the Central Committee of the PAC under his leadership became even more indecisive and corrupt, as was reflected in the inability of the Director of Finance to account for almost a quarter of a million dollars which had disappeared from the funds of the organisation.³⁵

The lack of direction from the Chairman of the Central Committee was the outstanding characteristic of this period. The fact that ordinary members of the PAC had enough time to ponder over the problems of the organisation during the

³⁰ PAC Archives: PAC/Tan/1/164/9: Minutes of the Administrative Committee of the PAC, April 30, 1979, p. 2.

³¹ Interview with DDD Mantshontsho, Umtata, June, 1995. The complaint about his excessive drinking is made by the rank-and-file members of APLA. See PAC Archives. PAC/Tan/1/164/9: Minutes of the Administrative Committee of the PAC, April 30, 1979, p. 14.

³² Interview with DDD Mantshontsho, Umtata, June, 1995.

³³ APLA Notes,

³⁴ ANC Archives, Fort Hare. Henry Isaacs: Memorandum: To all representatives, offices and branches of the PAC, re guidelines of the Department of Foreign Affairs, New York, 17 February 1982, p. 15.

³⁵ **Ibid.**, p. 4.

Make period, meant that the burden of expectations about what should happen during the Pokela period, was high and somewhat unrealistic.

Make's hands-off leadership style had its positive spin-offs for the PAC. The fact that he lacked the demagogue stature and self-imposing dictatorial predisposition of his predecessor meant that his leadership period was a time of collective introspection, hence the long list of issues which were brought before him for resolution.

4.3 Nyathi John Pokela's term

Nyathi John Pokela took over the leadership of the PAC from Vusumzi Make in January 1981. He was the "only person of stature available who had not been tarnished by the earlier internecine squabbles which characterized the leadership of the deposed and expelled former Chairman Potlake Leballo".³⁶

Pokela's style was different from that of his predecessors. He was hands-on and task-oriented, but very modest and approachable. Hence ordinary PAC members affectionately called him 'Poks'.³⁷ He identified two key areas that had to be dealt with during his leadership phase. These were the role and functions of the National Executive Committee in dealing with corruption and making APLA fulfil its revolutionary mission. Pokela's leadership period was the only period in the PAC's exile history during which the issue about the clarification of roles and definition of goals were given special attention.

He started his leadership period with a planning session which involved members of the NEC. It was held in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania in February 1981. He made new appointments to the NEC and he enlarged it to make it more inclusive of all critical functions within the organisation. The new NEC included the positions of Chief Representatives and their deputies. He appointed Vusumzi Make, former Chairman, as his Deputy Chairman.

At another plenary session of the NEC held in Dar-es-Salaam on 1-7 December 1981, Pokela made additional appointments to the NEC. He appointed a Secretary for Defence, Sabelo Phama, and representatives to the United Kingdom and Ireland, a permanent Observer Representative to the United Nations and a Chief Representative to the United States of America, Caribbean and Iraq. The structure of the NEC which Pokela established covered a wide range of areas of diplomatic and

³⁶ PAC Archives: **Feature: South Africa**, undated

³⁷ L Mphahlele, **Child of this soil - My life as freedom fighter** (Kwela Books, Cape Town, 2002), p. 53.

strategic significance. The only problem was that the criteria for the appointment of members of the NEC were never clarified with the general membership of the PAC and the cadres in APLA. Hence the rift between the leadership and the general membership of the Party remained a problem even during the most promising period of Pokela.

After establishing the organisational leadership structure, Pokela paid attention to the functioning of departments. A task team led by Ike Mafole was appointed by Pokela. It came up with a document entitled "Proposals for organisation and re-organisation of the PAC".³⁸ The document identified the lack of organisation as a major problem in the PAC in exile. It contended that the "starting point of the re-organisation process should be a clear definition or determination of functions and tasks of existing departments or functional units. This should be based on departmental and organisational goals."³⁹ The document also suggested the need for the centralisation of the leading organs or departments within the PAC. Its conception of centralisation was premised on geographical and physical convenience. This means that the leading organs of the party were to be brought within the same geographical area or under the same roof or within a geographical radius that would facilitate or enable constant consultation between different heads of departments and the Chief Executive or Chairman of the PAC.

However, the document also suggested controversial arrangements which placed Pokela in a difficult position when he started implementing them to the letter. These included the idea of strengthening the chairmanship by conceding to it "executive prerogatives of demoting and dismissing unpopular or inefficient or ineffective members of the Central Committee".⁴⁰ The Chairman would have the powers to reshuffle the Central Committee whenever the need arose. In addition to that the Chairman would have his "own staff which should constitute the Chairman's inner-circle or brain-trust or advisers".⁴¹ All these views were adopted and an implementation schedule was agreed upon despite the fact that the army and the rank-and-file membership of the PAC were not prepared to detract from the maxim they adopted during the era of Vusumzi Make, that consultation at all times was a necessity, before major decisions affecting the organisation were adopted and implemented.

³⁸ PAC Archives. Proposals for organisation and re-organisation of the PAC, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, July 1981.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ PAC Archives. Proposal for organisation and re-organisation of the PAC, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, July 1981, p. 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

In attempts to meet the concerns of ordinary PAC members, Pokela started a programme of monthly meetings with the cadres and PAC general membership. He also suggested that a quarterly report on the activities of the PAC at home and abroad be compiled in order to keep PAC members informed of what was happening in the organisation. It was the visits to the camps and monthly meetings with cadres which made Pokela an icon in the PAC exile history.

Among the important decisions Pokela made based on the discussions held during the plenary session of the NEC in February 1981, was the re-incorporation of TM Ntantala and his group (expelled by Leballo at the Arusha conference in 1978) into the fold of the PAC. This was an important landmark of the Pokela period. The widespread perception that Pokela united the PAC in exile stemmed from this important intervention. It is summed up in a document called "Work in Progress" (WIP), in which it is stated that the "early 1980s saw greater stability in the PAC, with low-key and modest Pokela assuming leadership after a long prison sentence on Robben Island. Pokela was able to bring Ntantala and the military breakaway back into the PAC fold".⁴²

Pokela's hands-on approach, even though it benefited the PAC, had problems to contend with. First there was opposition to his innovations by some members of the NEC. A faction within the NEC, led by Henry Isaacs and Mike Muendane, emerged. They opposed the decision to centralise the control of donor funds and that all NEC members should be located where the headquarters were. This split the NEC in the middle. Some NEC members supported Isaacs for other reasons. Pokela had established a commission of enquiry, led by Pearce Gqobose, to investigate all cases of alleged corruption by members of the NEC and come up with recommendations.⁴³ Among the people investigated by the Commission was Vusumzi Make who by then was the Deputy Chairman. Given this scenario, it was likely that a number of PAC leaders were going to be implicated. Hence there was resistance to support the implementation of Pokela's initiatives. As a result of the conflict at Central Committee level, Isaacs decided to resign from the Central Committee in 1982. Mike Muendane also made similar threats but eventually did not resign.

The fact that there were dissenting voices within the ranks of the leadership, meant that Pokela had no team to work with. The root cause of his problems was that he used old bricks to lay the foundations of a new edifice. The tendency within the Central Committee which Pokela led was that the arrangements of his era were read

⁴² PAC Archives. WIP (47), The Pan Africanist Congress, April 1987, p. 16.

⁴³ PAC Archives. Minutes of the plenary session of the Central Committee, Dar-es-Salaam, December 1-7, 1982, p. 2.

through the glasses of past experiences. Even though he enjoyed popular support among the rank-and-file membership of the organisation, he had firm opponents within the Central Committee. This resulted in the management layers of the organisation finding it difficult to implement systems which the leadership did not agree on. One example was the decision to centralise all funds received from donors or raised during the fundraising activities of PAC missions abroad. Only one PAC mission adhered to that and that was the Australian mission led by Maxwell Nemadzivhanani.⁴⁴

Pokela initiated a process which culminated in the formulation of a leadership code for the PAC in exile. The code was formulated in stages and the beginning of 1984 was the time when the code was intended for implementation. The code aimed at "regulating relations between and among the members of the Central Committee and the delegations of power in the event of the absence of the Chairman".⁴⁵ He also developed a yearly programme of action for the organisation and this became a tradition within the PAC leadership since 1982.

Pokela's period marked the transition from the old ways to the new, the conflict between entrenched leadership traditions and organisational culture and an ascendant but fragile outlook. On the whole, the balance of forces between continuities and discontinuities favoured the former, hence it makes sense to describe the era of Pokela as symbolising a besieged transition to the new era. What is very important is that during this period systems and processes necessary to run the organisation were conceptualised and agreed upon, despite the few dissenting voices from within the ranks of the leadership. The sudden death of Pokela in June 1985 disrupted an interesting developmental process in the PAC. He was succeeded by Johnson Mlambo. His appointment raised controversies within the PAC as ordinary members complained about the fact that they were never consulted. It seems as though it was tradition within the PAC to limit the decision of who was to be the new chairman of the PAC to a few élites within the Party.

4.4 Johnson Mlambo's term

Mlambo's leadership followed the course indicated by Pokela. He was also directly involved, but unlike Pokela, he was externally focused. He placed little emphasis on what was happening internally in the PAC. He focused more on the diplomatic and military fronts. His rationale was that it was important to strengthen diplomatic ties with countries which had supported the PAC in order to make it possible to

⁴⁴ Interview with Pearce Gqobose, Port Elizabeth,

⁴⁵ PAC Archives. PAC/Tan/1/164/3: On the need of a new pattern and style of work; rational use of funds and care of party personnel, 10 January, 1982.

generate funds and other resources needed by the PAC. His focus on the military was motivated by the fact that his predecessor had initiated what was called the 'home-going' programme for APLA but could not realise it due to his untimely death.

Mlambo's prioritisation of only two areas during his leadership period meant that a number of innovations introduced during the time of Pokela were to suffer. These included the implementation of the leadership code of conduct in the Central Committee, the monthly visits to the camps to address the concerns of ordinary PAC members, the centralisation of control of all donor funds coming to the PAC, the location of all members of the Central Committee in Dar-es-Salaam, the investigations into allegations of corruption by members of the Central Committee and the implementation of guidelines developed for the various departments and functional units in the PAC.

One cannot easily conclude that Mlambo did not attend to all these issues deliberately. Developments inside South Africa were such that urgent PAC response and active involvement were necessary. The developments included the Uitenhage massacre of protesters by the South African police on 21 March 1985. When Mlambo assumed the position of leadership, political initiatives, especially by the rival ANC, were focused on what was happening in South Africa. The PAC under Mlambo's leadership followed suit. The political mood of the time was dominated by competition among exile liberation movements for visibility and popular support inside South Africa. The ANC responded to the developments inside South Africa, since the 1983 tri-cameral elections, with the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF).⁴⁶ The left-wing political groups led by the Azanian People's Organisation (a formation of the Black Consciousness Movement), formed the National Forum which the exiled PAC embraced as articulating the aspirations of the 'Azanian masses' and the ideological standpoint of the PAC.⁴⁷ Mlambo's priority was to establish a recognisable presence of the PAC both in the media and among the people of South Africa.

A month after his appointment, Mlambo headed a PAC deligation to China from 22 September to 4 October 1985.⁴⁸ After that he attended a United Nations' conference in Paris and then proceeded to Belgrade to attend the Party Congress of

⁴⁶ Indians and Coloureds, the minority ethnic groups in South Africa, were allowed to participate in the whites only parliament, hence the tri-cameral parliament. Africans were expected to participate in the various homeland parliaments.

⁴⁷ See Pokela's comments on the unity with the Black Consciousness Movement in PAC Archives: Minutes of the plenary session of the Central Committee meeting at External Headquarters, Dar-es-Salaam, December 1-7, 1982, pp. 3-7.

⁴⁸ See PAC Archives. PAC/Tan/1/85/1: Letter from Johnson Mlambo to Mengistu Haile Mariam, 1987.

the League of Yugoslav Communists. Immediately after his return he led other PAC delegations to Uganda, Nigeria, Yugoslavia, Libya, Zimbabwe and Iran.⁴⁹ It was only after April 1986, almost a year after his appointment, that he started focusing on PAC internal matters. By that time internal problems had piled up, new factions had emerged and the two-way ideological split which had begun during the period of Vusumzi Make and subsided during the period of Pokela, had re-emerged and had taken a completely different form which threatened to split the organisation in the middle.

Other problems which confronted Mlambo were how to deal with cases of internal corruption involving members of the NEC (Central Committee) against whom Pokela had initiated investigations. The resolution of the issue was demanded by the general membership of the PAC. One of the cases involved Vusumzi Make, the Deputy Chairman of the Party. The NEC, after an enquiry into the matter, suspended Make from all party activities. A faction of PAC members still loyal to Vusumzi Make had already developed within the organisation. Members of this faction were mostly "people with high education qualifications, the so-called 'professors' of the organisation".⁵⁰ To deal with the situation, Mlambo's majority faction forced the implementation of the Central Committee decision and as a result Make was not invited or allowed to attend official PAC activities. Other NEC members who were dealt with in a manner similar to Make were Count Peterson, Edwin Makoti and Mike Muendane.⁵¹ The latter was later absolved on the basis of new evidence which was brought to the Commission.⁵²

What this shows is that Mlambo's leadership style was based on consolidating the support of his majority faction in order to get decisions implemented. He could not rise above the factional splits and project himself as focal point of unity and organisational integration. Mutual mistrust within the PAC survived well into the end of the Mlambo period with the result that when the ban on the PAC was lifted in 1990, the internal factional squabbles and divisions had not been sorted out.

Complaints from the general membership of the PAC about not being consulted by Mlambo's leadership on the appointments and reshuffles within the NEC, continued to abound. The monthly visits to the camps initiated by Pokela were not continued by Mlambo. His external focus on what was happening inside South Africa and in the diplomatic front meant that he had no time to deal with mounting dissatisfac-

⁴⁹ PAC Archives. PAC/Tan/1/85/8: Report of the PAC Chairman, Johnson Mlambo, 1985.

⁵⁰ APLA Notes: 21 December 2001, Pretoria.

⁵¹ PAC Archives. Decisions of the plenary session of the Central Committee held in Iringa, Tanzania, 1985.

⁵² **Ibid.**

tion, which was part historical and partly based on his performance as Chairman of the PAC.

Mlambo neglected the simmering ideological split in the PAC led by a faction which had emerged within the organisation. The faction was comprised of elements within the Party leadership and rank-and-file membership who detested the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist rhetoric which dominated the PAC in exile. It included members of the PAC mission in London and New York as well as longstanding African Nationalists in Tanzania under the leadership of AB Ngcobo. They formed themselves into a loose-knit but very influential organisation called the Sobukwe Forum.⁵³ The Forum demanded the reinstatement of Africanists and PAC leaders who had been expelled from the Party and advocated a return to the basic doctrines of Pan Africanism as enunciated by AP Mda and Robert Sobukwe.

To deal with these problems, Mlambo promised to implement the recommendation made during Make's period and also endorsed by Pokela, that a consultative conference should be summoned to address the internal problems in the PAC. An ad hoc committee was set up and it consisted of Philip Kgosana (a PAC stalwart from the 1960s), Sydney Mabusela, Ike Mafole and Moss Palweni.⁵⁴ The conference was finally held in 1990 but the major focus was not on internal party problems. The prospects of a negotiated settlement in South Africa dominated the agenda. The question about the position and role the PAC should play divided the Party into the left and center factions. The latter group advocated a moderate and pragmatic stance while the former emphasised a revolutionary and no to negotiations position. It was those positions which won majority support in the PAC. As a result the PAC was a late-comer in the negotiations and also participated half-heartedly in the April 1994 elections.

The period of Mlambo ended without major successes in improving the leadership crisis which had dominated and characterised the exile history of the PAC. He failed to ensure that the leadership code, developed during the time of Pokela, was implemented and followed. He also failed to get his leadership team to function collectively and did not implement Pokela's programme of consultation with ordinary PAC members. Hence some members of the PAC felt that all members of Mlambo's Central Committee "stand accused individually and collectively as leaders" for the failures of the PAC.⁵⁵ Mlambo's selective hands-on approach, with

⁵³ APLA Notes: 20 December 2002, Umtata.

⁵⁴ PAC Archives: Re-activation of Party branches/cells and preparations for the Consultative Conference, 21 February 1989, p.2.

⁵⁵ PAC Archives. Letter from Ezekiel K Mothupi to the Chairman of the PAC, 27 January 1987.

its external focus, did not benefit the PAC. As a result, when it was unbanned it was far from recovering from the traumatic exile experience.

5. CONCLUSION

The PAC emerged from the four leadership periods weakened and incapable of comprehending and adjusting to the dynamic landscape of the politics of national liberation in South Africa. Hence, by the time the PAC was unbanned, it was not able to assert itself as the sole and authentic representative of the people of South Africa before the eyes of the world. Yet the ANC, having been exposed to similar conditions of exile, was able to elevate itself and project an image as the authentic representative of its people before the international community. This is not without regard to the fact that the four periods of leadership were different, each coloured by the style, political outlook and personality of the chairman at the helm of the organisation during this period.

The longest leadership period in the PAC was that of PK Leballo, starting from 1962 and persisting to 1979. During this period, his power imposed itself as a totality which dominated all PAC structures and conferred on them their meaning. It was during this period that the foundations and initial impressions of the PAC were portrayed to the international community. The initial impressions as discussed in the article, were not beneficial to the organisation. Leballo, together with a few executive members closely associated with him, generated a type of organisational ethos and psyche which was later difficult to amend and emerged and was nurtured over the 17 years of Leballo's leadership. The ethos which germinated and crystallised during this era was based on the twin concepts of 'divide and rule'. These concepts found realisation during the leadership period of Leballo, in their crudest meaning. The priority during this period was Leballo, the person and his position as Chairman of the PAC; everything else was secondary. The PAC was important only in so far as he remained its leader. As a result an authoritarian political culture, a "typical case of liberation without democracy", rank-and-file alienation from the leadership, mutual mistrust, and political blackmail developed and by the time Leballo was ousted, they had crystallised into a solid political tradition of the exiled PAC.⁵⁶ What this shows is that the PAC in exile failed to start on a solid footing.

The period of Vusumzi Make was in many respects supposed to be a period of transition to a more just period within the PAC, but it was a short, very delicate and confused time. It was delicate in the sense that without the Tanzanian authorities

⁵⁶ The concept is used by Colin Leys and John S Saul in their book, **The two-edged sword - Namibia's liberation struggle** (Athens, 1995), p. 43.

constantly on guard, the PAC army would probably have taken over the running of the affairs of the PAC. Nothing dramatic occurred during this period but its significance was that it created a fairly safer space for the exchange of ideas about the nature of re-organisation needed to get the PAC to function as a viable liberation movement.

The Pokela period of leadership of the PAC was the most promising one, primarily because of his political reputation as an ex-Robben Island stalwart, completely untouched by the internal conflicts of the PAC and his charisma and knowledge of the PAC-thinking and goals from the time it had been founded. Indeed, Pokela had all the qualities which earned him the respect of leaders of Frontline states and liberation organisations. His period ended before it could bear tangible fruits. He died in June 1985 and was succeeded by Johnson Mlambo, another ex-Robben Island prisoner.

The period of Mlambo was one of political expediency. Unfortunately the organisation was not ready for that. Internal conflicts in the PAC did not subside but continued, hence the formation of an organisation within an organisation in 1989, i.e. the Sobukwe Forum, led by AB Ngcobo in exile and Selby Ngendane inside South Africa. The case of the PAC under the leadership of Mlambo was one instance in which the expression, 'learning to fly before acquiring the basic walking skills', applied. Age-old questions about leadership accountability and mutual mistrust remained unresolved.

On the whole, in all four of the periods identified, organisational structures, policy formulation procedures, management of organisational resources, financial planning and internal controls in the PAC, were either very rudimentary and poor or non-existent. Ideological conflicts, power struggles and political blackmail, which occurred, could have been minimised if organisational systems and procedures were solid.