

The ANC and its use of history to build its brand

ABSTRACT

The African National Congress, South Africa's ruling party since its liberation from apartheid in 1994, has one of the most compelling stories in modern political history. Few political parties in the world have such a momentous, historically moving narrative; and few have used it to such effect. The party has specialised in associating itself with the "collective memory" of the South African people, ensuring that the ANC has been strongly associated with the South African struggle narrative of the twentieth century. This is the heart of the "good story" that has kept the ruling party in power since 1994 and made it very difficult for other political groupings to claim to have played a major role in the struggle for freedom in South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The African National Congress (ANC), South Africa's ruling party since its liberation from apartheid in 1994, is one of the country's – and perhaps the world's – most valuable and interesting political brands. Over 100 years old, the brand has been called "bulletproof" and according to Robertson (2015:540), it "serves as a risk-management strategy by creating relations of loyalty with consumers, designed to secure forgiveness for possible transgressions on the part of the brand and thus protect brand equity". Indeed, Rushil Ranchod's (2013) monograph, *A kind of magic: The political marketing of the ANC*, traces the ANC's branding strategy from the 1950s onward, and presents its marketing and savvy brand management as central to the party's longevity and success. The ANC's brand functions in a similar manner to a commercial, consumer-centric brand that relies on a strong narrative for recognition by voters. Voters, in this analogy, may be regarded as the "consumers" of the brand, who build the brand through their loyalty to it. Consumer brand loyalty, of course, is the cornerstone of a brand's value (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

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This paper discusses how the ANC has crafted a compelling brand narrative. In much the same way that brands utilise unique and compelling histories (Reeves et al., 2006), the ANC has used its authentic history, as well as important historical events in the South African liberation struggle, to create loyalty and excitement. Furthermore, as a brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Maurya & Mishra, 2012) the ANC has one of the most compelling stories of underdog revolutionaries pitted against an implacable, repressive government in modern political history. Few political parties in the world have such a momentous, historically moving struggle narrative; and few have used it to such effect.

The story of the African National Congress fighting minority rule in South Africa from 1912 until 1994 is as resonant to most people both inside and outside of the country as the rise of the United Party of the Cuban socialist revolution under the charismatic leadership of Castro. The Landless People's Movement in Brazil (Knijnik, 1998), and closer to home, the liberation of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) from white rule, as well as the people's movements in Southwest Africa and Mozambique against white minority rule (Gibson, 1972) resonate as stories of "passion politics" (Fernández, 2000). But perhaps, none of these narratives or stories of "passion politics" have the worldwide appeal of the struggle of the ANC against the odious system of apartheid. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, the collective imagination of people around the world was captured. This South African political narrative led to numerous pop concerts, repeated media representations, and numerous popular protests (Bethlehem & Zalmanovich, 2020). Such events ultimately helped to construct Nelson Mandela as a universally recognisable political struggle icon (Louw, 2020); someone who is arguably, as big an international brand as Che Guevara (Carter, 2012; Casey, 2012).

Chitja Twala's article "The African National Congress (ANC) and the construction of collective memory and its impact in the post-apartheid era" (2014) posits that throughout "its entire history of existence, the African National Congress (ANC) has been using collective memory in reminding its members of the history of the organisation, firstly as a liberation movement and secondly in the democratisation period as the ruling party in South Africa" (Twala, 2014:151). The impact of this collective memory mirrors the impact of the ANC's narrative: the creation of a so-called "collective memory" of an organisation is also the creation of a shared narrative that is, in Twala's assessment, an "active, non-stop procedure" (2014:151). Twala notes that the "invocations of history, symbolism, memory and tradition are a strategic part of the African National Congress's political history. The party's "public representations pivot on the way in which it uses memory for strategic political ends" (2014:151).

This is a brand that offers a true David and Goliath story: a tale of erstwhile freedom fighters struggling against one of the most oppressive regimes in the second half of the twentieth century. It is a story that ends not only in success, but also in freedom, forgiveness, and a new beginning. It is a tale that has no losers. It is indeed an uplifting story that gives the ANC brand an international recognisability, and a great deal of goodwill from abroad. As one observer pointed out in *African Business Magazine*, the ANC's victory in the 7 May 2014 elections was a triumph for the "ANC brand" (Nevin 2014).

This is not by any means meant to suggest that the ANC has provided those loyal to it with a dishonest or purely manufactured representation of its brand identity. As with any political brand with broad appeal, the ANC has found fit to tell its own story in certain ways to attract new voters and stakeholders. The ANC has a long history in South Africa, and by necessity it uses familiar branding tropes to attract people who may be unfamiliar with that struggle history, or who may come from a purely ahistorical background. According to the recent MPYE report (available from: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=12362>), provided by STATS SA, South Africa has an extremely youthful population. As of mid-year 2019, almost one third of this population of 59.58 million (17.34 million) is aged 18-34. The party has the ongoing challenge of educating young people about its identity, its history, and its collective memory, including via the use of the ANC Youth League (Glaser, 2012; Posel, 2013). By necessity, they have turned to exactly the same kind of narrative branding techniques used by political parties and indeed consumer brands around the world.

Tom Nevin, in *African Business Magazine*, wrote the following about the party's 2014 election victory: "Despite widespread disaffection with the country's political top leaders, money-wasting scandals, dwindling social delivery, rising crime and an Education Ministry in tatters, Africa's oldest political party pocketed 62% of the votes cast against the second-placed Democratic Alliance with 22%" (Nevin, 2014). It is not the aim of this article to discuss the various *political* challenges that have been faced by the ANC, nor to cast any kind of political judgement on the party and its record. Instead, the intention is to explore the way in which the ANC, operating like a brand, has captured the loyalty of voters in South Africa through telling a good story about itself, clearly, often, and over many different media channels. As we have seen within the last few decades of its history, storytelling – and in this particular case, historical storytelling and its related, manufactured narrative – is at the heart of the ANC's narrative branding methodology.

Carlos Alberto Scolari points out that from a semiotic perspective, a brand is a "device that can produce discourse, give it meaning, and communicate this to an audience" (2009:599). Scolari concludes that "brands appear as narrative or possible worlds", since they constitute complex discourse universes with a "strong narrative imprint". And so, "Semioticians consider brands as narrative worlds that can be analysed by applying theoretical tools developed for fictional texts" (Scolari, 2009:599).

Using Scolari's work in an analysis of the ANC's use of collective memory, therefore, is most useful. The party, functioning as a brand, has diligently and purposefully fostered a vibrant historical narrative that might best be seen as what Scolari terms "brand fiction" (2009:600). Of course, the history that the ANC alludes to in its various communications to stakeholders has its roots in reality. However, the *story* it tells can be deconstructed, essentially, as a narrative that has been constructed from real events, retold, and often reformed to suit present needs. This, according to Scolari, is the key means of understanding transmedia (often referred to as "multi-modal") storytelling as it applies to brands, where "the brand is expressed by the characters, topics and aesthetic style of the fictional world" (2009:600). Most importantly, "this set of distinctive attributes can be translated into different languages and media: it is a moveable set of properties that can be applied to different forms of expression" (Scolari, 2009:600). With the rise of struggle stalwart

Cyril Ramaphosa as the new President of the ANC, and the resultant so-called “Ramaphoria” (da Silva, 2018), the ANC brand seems set to continue its brand narrative of positive representation and collective memory into the near future despite some deep challenges presented during the tenure of former President Jacob Zuma.

The use of a brand's history as a key component of the attractive narrative it tells consumers is well documented in the literature, whether the brand relies on a fictional or nostalgic history to tell its story (Schroeder, 2009; Zimmer et al., 1999). Olins (2002) notes that some consumers and observers are uncomfortable with a historical narrative being used to build a brand and thus resist the idea. However, it is clearly a tried method of building resonance for the ANC brand, which not only acts as a brand name, but is also trademarked and thus is vigorously protected (Robertson 2018; Stilwell 2018). Additionally, historical branding is a key aspect of what is sometimes called “nation branding” (Fan, 2006).

The story that the ANC tells about itself might even be further broken down into the morphology that Vladimir Propp expounded in *Morphology of the folktale* (2003). If the ANC has a compelling story and history – one based on real people, real events, real struggle – then that story must conform to the kind of analysis of stories that brands present to consumers. These kinds of stories include the kinds of fictions and folktales favoured by Propp, for all of these are imbued with the collective identities shared by the storytellers and the listeners.

1. THE ANC AND THE USE OF HISTORY IN BRAND BUILDING

The ANC is certainly aware of the power of its story and uses it to attract the attention and loyalty of those who engage with it. In this way the ANC brand is developed and mythologised. Taking Scolari's (2009) lead, one may posit that the transmedial strategy, used by the ANC to communicate its part in the history of South African struggle politics, acts exactly like a “brand fiction” designed to entice and allure its consumers.

Since its founding one hundred years ago, the ANC has developed a rich representational stock from which it is able to construct and develop its brand. Its public identity is deeply invested in its history. The symbols, images and rhetoric that punctuated its past continue to resonate today. Their meaning has shifted, sometimes substantially. But their impact remain [sic] consistent. How the ANC markets itself explains much about its political behaviour (Ranchod, 2013:1).

William Mervin Gumede traces the ANC's beginning to 8 January 1912, “a date that would be etched in the memory of all South Africans as the founding day of the African National Congress, known at the time as the South African Native National Congress” (2007:2). Gumede (2007) traces the history of the movement through the 1964 imprisonment of Nelson Mandela alongside Govan Mbeki, Walter Sisulu, Denis Goldberg, Ahmed Kathrada, Raymond Mhlaba, Andrew Mlangeni and Elias Motsoaledi. Nelson Mandela, for reasons briefly discussed below, would emerge as the most well-known leader (worldwide) of the ANC in its years before his 1990 release, despite the

fact that Mandela himself (for most of his twenty-seven year imprisonment) felt that Oliver Tambo was his leader. The history of the ANC, however, became far more popularised and enmeshed in the ANC brand after the pivotal year of 1976. This was the year when uprisings in South Africa “caused the apartheid government to change its strategy and introduce limited reforms aimed at winning support of some sections of the black community and placating the outside world” (Gumede, 2007:29).

2. THE ANC AS BRAND AND ITS USE OF HISTORY

2.1 *The ANC and the story of 1976*

Gary Baines, in his paper titled “The master narrative of South Africa’s liberation struggle: Remembering and forgetting June 16, 1976”, offers a concise framing of the narrative that the ANC has used. Baines was writing from the vantage point of 2006 (the thirtieth anniversary of the Soweto Uprising), when the press was recording the fact that the so-called “Class of ’76” was far more politically educated and aware than the so called “born frees”. This lack of political knowledge was especially disturbing to the “self-appointed custodians of the struggle” (Baines, 2007:283). Baines (2007) contends that, the historiography of the event aside, the Soweto Uprising as a *story* has laid the foundation for how the ANC presents its story to the world. The famous picture of Hector Pieterse (photographed by Sam Nzima in 1976) enjoys a “privileged status among the victims of June 16, 1976” (Baines, 2007:283). It was published in *The World* on 17 June 1976 and the negatives have since been lost (or, more likely, destroyed by the apartheid police). Baines points out that “the picture has become iconic” (Baines, 2007:286) in that it is commonly used to illustrate the tragic events of that day. So, one of the cornerstones of the narrative of the ANC brand rests on a picture that, while emotionally shocking, “imparts little information and has little or no referential value” (Baines, 2007:286). The meaning must be ascribed by the viewer. Baines also contends that there are four elements to the ANC “master narrative” that are kept in the public memory through “images, sites and ritual re-enactments of the past, as well as in written texts” (Baines, 2007:285). These he refers to as “memory texts” (Baines, 2007:285). They are, firstly, the photograph of Hector Pieterse by Sam Nzima, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) “rehearsal of the events of June 16”, the Hector Pieterse Museum, and the commemoration of Youth (Soweto) Day across South Africa. These, of course, are not the only elements of the ANC narrative, but they are a useful starting point.

Baines (2007) indicates that it is the dramatic image of Pieterse that is central to the ANC story. There are inconsistencies of this name that has been most useful as the record of the ANC struggle during the time, but not what Pieterse was or what he *did*. As tragic and needless (and dramatic) as the loss of his life was, Pieterse himself was not even meant to be at the uprising where he was killed. Baines notes that Nzima himself had no idea how powerful the image would become. Pieterse’s sister’s testimony to the TRC, Baines notes, illustrates that Pieterse is an unlikely struggle icon. According to Baines:

She also recalled that he was not a member of any organization that had mobilized the students to join in the demonstration. She attributed the presence of Pieterse and other younger pupils at the march to curiosity rather than involvement in student protest politics. Indeed, Antoinette testified that her brother was uneducated in the issues that had occasioned the demonstration and that he was not an activist (Baines, 2007:290).

Baines concludes that there is “something of an irony in the appropriation of Pieterse as a struggle hero”, given his sister’s testimony (2007:290). To add further irony to the events, the boy carrying the lifeless body of Pieterse, Mbuyisa Makhubo, was also apolitical – he aspired to be a priest – but the notoriety he attained from Nzima’s photograph meant that he would be harassed by the police and forced to flee the country (2007:291). Despite these testimonies, the photograph’s power, and its role as a symbol of uprising remain due to the efforts of the ANC itself:

But there was also a screening or gate-keeping process whereby the public record was mediated into an officially sanctioned narrative of the Soweto uprising by community leaders, cultural entrepreneurs, and the political elite. Because the community became an embodiment of the (imagined) nation, the ANC-approved narrative came to be integrated into a newly created national master narrative. Thus, the story of the Soweto uprising became part of the triumphalist grand narrative of the liberation struggle, which is the foundation myth of the post-apartheid state (Baines, 2007:291).

The TRC would in fact conclude that the ANC’s role in the 1976 uprisings was minimal at best, with only a “limited number of ANC underground activists” involved in what was essentially a protest based on Black Consciousness and an assortment of legitimate grievances held by the students (Baines, 2007:292). Nonetheless, the ANC has claimed ownership of the image and the uprising itself. Argues Baines: “Still, the TRC report provided a vehicle for the ANC as the ruling party to appropriate the story of the Soweto uprising at the expense of other liberation movements” (2007:293). The naming of Youth Day, according to Baines, serves to allow the ANC complete ownership of the actual day of the uprising. The Hector Pieterse Memorial is now the locus where the ANC remembers an uprising it had very little part in. Politicians and city elders, as well as survivors of the event, ritually gather at the memorial every June 16th. “In this way, June 16 has been accorded the status of a public ceremony in which the country pays tribute to struggle heroes. Such ritualized remembering tends to drown out multiple voices in favour of a singular privileged one” (Baines, 2007:300). That voice, of course, is the ANC’s. The efforts the ANC makes to commemorate the day are in line with the efforts the ANC takes to insert itself into the entire struggle narrative of the country, which is, in turn, the backbone of its own brand narrative. It is a “multi-layered process involving iconization, theatrical storytelling, memorialization, and ritualized remembrance” (Baines, 2007:302). This multi-faceted method of telling the story of the brand is clearly the basis of multi-modal, narrative branding of any sort; where multiple platforms and techniques are used to emphasise the emotionalism and excitement of the brand’s story (constructed or not), especially in the case of “heritage identity” such as that of the ANC (Burghausen & Balmer, 2014:2311).

The emotive events of the 1976 uprising deserve to be commemorated as important parts of South Africa's history. The picture of Pieterse in the arms of a weeping Makhubo carries real emotion, and not the staged emotion of corporate branding. Yet the effect is much the same from the distance of history and from the perspective of millions of voters who were not alive in 1976, and who are only slightly aware of the events that transpired. The way in which the ANC has carefully co-opted that very real emotion of that day into its own political narrative, speaks to the power of the ANC's brand name. Today, the association that image has with the ANC is unmistakable. It is part of what Baines calls the "ANC's unilinear tale of heroism" (Baines, 2007:301). To argue against the ANC's sole ownership of that tale is to sound either reactionary or cynical. The pain of children is not to be trifled with. This is why the ANC has taken such care to own the image and the day, and to associate itself with the concerns of the youth in the abstract.

And yet this is a highly constructed narrative, part of a grander narrative built by the ANC using the most dramatic events of the struggle in South Africa. The image is now idealised to the point that to suggest that it had far more to do with the Black Consciousness movement or the failures of the apartheid schooling system, or the brutality of the police, or even the propensity of innocent bystanders to be swept into the violence of political change, rather than the valiant efforts of the ANC to fight against an unjust system, is to sound anti-historical. This, of course, is the power of narrative branding: to continually direct emotion into images that otherwise are narrative-free. From a branding perspective, it would be irresponsible for the ANC to ignore the power of this one image, to fail to incorporate these tragic but non-ANC affiliated children into its "good story", its sweeping narrative of struggle. To vote for the ANC is to become part of that struggle narrative, just as buying an Apple computer is to become part of that company's narrative of bootstrap idealism, to "think different" (Shields, 2001:202).

Manning indicates that "brands can align themselves with respect to social imaginaries such as the nation by situating themselves within local or global trajectories of circulation" and this is indeed a semiotic pursuit whereby a political brand like the ANC can become an "index" (Manning, 2010:38). But we might keep in mind that a political brand like the ANC, which acts as an index in regard to its illustrious characters, struggle narrative and history, in fact works (like any political brand) like what Fan calls a "nation brand" (2006:7). As he points out:

A nation brand offers no tangible product or service; instead, it represents and encompasses a wide variety of factors and associations:

- place – geography, tourist attractions;
- natural resources, local products;
- people – race, ethnic groups; history;
- culture;
- language;
- political and economic systems;
- social institutions;

- infrastructure;
- famous persons (the face);
- picture or image (Fan, 2006:7).

Furthermore, nation brands and political brands differ greatly in terms of what they offer their audiences, as the following table shows:

Table 1: Differences between nation brands and product brands

	Nation brand	Product brand
Offer	Nothing on offer	A product or service on offer
Attributes	Difficult to define	Well defined
Benefits	Purely emotional	Functional and emotional
Image	Complicated, various, vague	Simple, clear
Associations	Secondary, numerous and diverse	Primary and secondary; relatively few and more specific
Purpose	To promote national image?	To help sales and develop relationships
Ownership	Unclear, multiple stakeholders	Sole ownership
Audience	Diverse, hard to define	Targeted segment

Source: Fan, 2006:7

Mary Robertson (2015) points out in her article titled “The ANC brand is bulletproof: Accountability and the logic of the brand in South African politics” that the very intangibility of the ANC brand (or any political brand) is part of what enables stakeholders to remain loyal to it.

[T]he brand is detachable from the material elements that allow consumers to access its intangible benefits and form relationships with it. Not only is the brand and brand loyalty separable from purchasable commodities, it is separable from the people that represent the brand, and from the policies of the company or the political party. (Robertson, 2015:544).

Taking Robertson’s research into the ANC brand as above, we see how important it is that “intangibles” such as “history” and “memory” can be used to build real value for the ANC brand itself. The ANC’s efforts to build a collective memory of itself is part of a strategy that it has followed since its unbanning in 1990, according to Chitja Twala (2014). Twala

defines the concept of “collective memory” as “a set of ideas, images, feelings about the past” (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994:4, cited in Twala, 2014:152). He posits that “[s]uch memories are often socially constructed to meet contemporary social, psychological, and political needs” (Twala, 2014:152). It is, in many ways, a deliberate usage of objective information about South Africa’s past. It could be suggested that the struggle/liberation story is really “owned” by the ANC. No other political party has gone to such lengths to ensure that this narrative of “struggle” continues in the minds of voters, even though the struggle as it was before 1994 is over, and the party has been in power for over two decades. Twala says, “Collective memory signifies narratives of past experiences constituted by and on behalf of specific groups within which they find meaningful forms of identification that may empower them” (Twala, 2014:153). Twala quotes Wood (1999) in saying that there is a distinct political usage for collective memory from a political point of view: “[m]emories of the past are reconstructed with regard to the demands of the present and then performatively expressed through ‘vehicles of memory’; memories can be mutated in such a way that suits the interests of those who are recalling them”. The ANC, for its part, has what Twala refers to as a “selective” memory”, drawing on and publicising a nuanced recollection of the past (Twala, 2014:153); it is a “triumphalist” memory, he says. He supports this notion of how the liberation struggle has been remembered and indeed woven into the daily language of the ANC itself, to tell a story of on-going liberation. He notes, for instance, that pre-liberation slogans such as “an injustice to one is an injury to all” or “pass one pass all” emanated from “collectivism” within the ANC, an assumed inclusiveness that shifted slightly over time (Twala, 2014:154). The Freedom Charter, for example, uses the term “we” in its preamble and all key statements, further entrenching an aura of inclusiveness.

Jan Hofmeyr and Butch Rice (2000), in their book *Commitment-led marketing: The key to brand profits in the customer’s mind*, discuss in depth the work they did on the ANC election campaigns of 1994 and 1999. The ANC’s goal at the time was to attract as many voters as possible from across the entire political spectrum. “Discussions within the ANC were lively around this issue: should the elections be about liberation from the past, or should they focus on hope for the future?” (Hofmeyr & Rice, 2000:249). The country was deeply polarised along racial lines, and the ANC hoped to convert some voters with a message that was powerful, but not negative. The campaign would have to offer a non-racial theme, “despite the fact that coloured and white voters were mostly unavailable to the ANC” (Hofmeyr & Rice, 2000:250). The researchers established that “black South Africans wanted to look forward, not back” (2000:250). Crucially, Hofmeyr and Rice felt that the black electorate was looking for a forward-facing vision on the part of the ANC: “It was if they were saying ‘at last, now the history of our country can really begin [...] we trust you, the ANC, to have a vision that will take us forward. Now show us that vision in your campaign’” (Hofmeyr & Rice, 2000:250). The tagline that was chosen was simple: “A Better Life for All”, which of course is forward facing but uses the same kind of collectivist language the ANC had used in its revolutionary past. “The campaign was simple, positive, almost mundane”, write Hofmeyr and Rice (2000:250). The ANC held on to this slogan through the 1999 elections and onward, despite the “sombre” mood of the country in 1999 that had experienced a recession and slow service delivery from

the ruling party. The ANC's theme for that year was "Fighting for change – and a better life for all". The ANC's ability to remind voters of the fight it had to attain power is a crucial part of its political profile, and a crucial part of the story it has to tell.

2.2 *The entwined stories of the ANC and Nelson Mandela*

The ANC has been careful to support the image of Nelson Mandela as what Twala refers to as "its guarantor" (2014:155) – continually invoking his name and image to the younger generations of voters. Nelson Mandela, the great man that he was, is also the ANC's overarching brand icon, the figure who represents the party's narrative of struggle, victory and forgiveness. Twala points out that it was only in the 1980s that the ANC broke with its "tradition of promoting only a collective leadership and launched a Free Mandela campaign" (2014:155). Mandela became a symbol for the party, and his ascension from imprisonment to President of South Africa is an important part of the party's narrative. Mandela became symbolic of the party's efforts towards liberation. "Resistance, especially against the apartheid regime, to date holds a special place in the collective memory of mostly black South Africans" (Twala, 2014:155). However, Twala is quick to note that the reality of that resistance is slightly different from how the ANC portrays it. "Although the ANC claims to have delivered the African masses from bondage, no single political party or individual delivered the people of South Africa from the slavery of colonialism and apartheid" (Twala, 2014:155). Once again, the collective memory of the ANC is selective. Its efforts to maintain the image of itself as sole liberator of the country from apartheid and of its great leader Nelson Mandela as the prime mover of that experience is, in Twala's words, "tantamount to the manipulation of history and the shifting of historiographical interest from ideology to imagery and from meaning to manipulation" (2014:156). Twala as an academic may not approve of this, but this is, in fact, the basis of building a narrative brand, where historical fact gives way to the needs of the dramatic narrative. The simple story that needs to be told over many media platforms, and by necessity becomes condensed, overdramatised, and oversimplified.

On the other hand, Robertson (2015), in her analysis of the ANC brand and its ability to endure over time, points out that the ANC has been careful to maintain its own identity separate from the individuals who form the party and indeed its collective memory.

... within the ideology of branding, brands both draw value from the individuals that are associated with them, and must guard against the threat posed by these individuals' own brands. In the invocation of branding in relation to Mandela and the ANC, we see this logic at play: a simultaneous dependence on the aura of an individual party member and an attempt to harness the trust and loyalty voters feel for him, together with a denial of that dependence and an assertion of the transcendence of the ANC identity beyond any individual member (Robertson, 2015:547).

2.3 The substantive power of the ANC's "good story"

To be clear, political marketing is not "spin". Nor is it mere propaganda. Rather, it is viewed as an "orientation" in which a distinct "consciousness" of and for marketing, which "circulates in the strategic thinking of the political actors" (O'Shaughnessy, 1990:2). Understood in this way, political marketing is used to extend beyond the definitional constraints to include activities such as promotion, publicity, and propaganda. The ANC has been infused with a deep "marketing consciousness" (Ranchod, 2013:7). For much of its history, however, "marketing" did not exist in its political vocabulary. Movements propagandise, but propaganda's "didacticism" is insufficient in explaining the full extent of the "interactive" practices which the ANC utilised in its public presentation (2013:8). These interactive elements spoke to the larger processes of exchange that occurred between the ANC, the public and other actors in the political sphere.

The July 2013 Bulletin issued by the ANC after that year's NEC Lekgotla (one of the party's regular consultation processes where matters of political import are discussed among party stakeholders) was headed with "We Have a Good Story To Tell" (2013). The article reminded readers of the "positive" elements of the ANC story (2013:1). However, it was that phrase "good story to tell" that stuck with political commentators and would redefine the way the ANC presented itself to voters, emphasising the "story" or narrative of the party as much as possible. In President Jacob Zuma's 2014 State of the Nation address, the phrase "good story to tell" featured twice: "We have a good story to tell in higher education" and "we have a good story to tell in the improvement of health care too" (Zuma, 2014). This was soon followed by a column that was placed on the online news website www.news24.com entitled "The ANC has a good story to tell", written by Molebatsi Masedi, ANC Media Liaison from Limpopo Province. It ends with this injunction:

The ANC has a good story to tell about the past 20 years of freedom and democracy. This is the story that conveys the strides made in the past two decades. It is a story that must be told and retold (Masedi, 2014).

Of course, telling and re-telling a "good story" is exactly what the ANC excels at, and it lies at the heart of narrative branding. Apple, Budweiser, Coke and thousands, perhaps millions, of other brands do the same thing daily. The ANC has clearly seen the power of telling a good story and has stuck to the concept of having a "good story to tell" in 2015.

The purposeful way in which the concept of a "good story to tell" is repeated by the ANC bears its own power. The "story" is an ever-evolving one. It started as the historical story of the ANC and its progress since 1994 and, as each year goes by, further events are added to the story. The story therefore has a beginning and is malleable. This is a subtle, but effective, form of marketing of the ANC brand: "Marketing in itself can be read as a form of story-selling. A story told/sold to the market, which, even though it might contain some feed-back seeking elements (cf. Dutton and Dukerich, 1991), [it] most often appears to be a monologue" (Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård, 2004:229). The story, in this case, has a storyteller (President

Zuma, an icon for the ANC brand itself) and innumerable receivers who hear the story in person, on television, in print and online. When the President says, “it is a very good story to tell indeed”, this is not offered for debate. The statistic “12.4 billion rand of private sector investment” could be considered either a good or bad part of the tale by a disinterested observer: is this an increase over the previous year? Has this figure met any target set by the ANC? Does the country need yet more investment to sustain needed growth? These questions are not addressed, merely the fact is presented. However, the President, through the one-way orientation of the State of the Nation Address, instructs us to see this as a good fact, and, more importantly, as part of an ever-evolving story that might hearken back all the way to 1976 or perhaps even before. Moreover, in this framework, positive news about the economy is taken to be part of the ANC’s story, not the story of South Africa, and not the story of the Southern African economy. Whether this is a good fact or a bad fact, or part of a good story or not, is difficult to distinguish. It is also immaterial. It has been co-opted into the ANC’s “good story” that includes Hector Pieterse, Nelson Mandela, and indeed President Jacob Zuma. The “selective memory” of the storyteller is seen here at work, when the most positive sounding events of the year are added to the “good story”, a story that becomes better in the telling.

One of the bulwarks of the ANC’s “good story” must surely be the story of Nelson Mandela. Shortly before Mandela’s death, Jackson Mthembu, the former National Spokesman for the ANC, defended the party’s decision to use an ailing Nelson Mandela in a photo opportunity with Jacob Zuma. Mthembu noted that “Mandela belongs to the ANC first, and then to the whole country” (Harris, 2013: para 7). This statement describes the ownership that the ANC claimed over the man and his image. Shortly after Mandela’s death, Monwabisi Thete, a brand consultant and editor-at-large of the South African men’s magazine *Blaque* noted that “the ANC will want to claim the [Mandela] brand, because it will bring them more votes in the polls” (cited in Harris, 2013: para 8). The Mandela name has now increased in value:

He added that the reason there’s so much jockeying for position now is that the death of Mandela the man signals a whole new era for Mandela the brand. While the leader’s life span was finite, the brand could be timeless – and ownership of it a potential source of both enduring prestige and enduring financial gain (cited in Harris, 2013: para 9).

It is exactly this “timelessness” that is part of the narrative power of the ANC brand name. Deborah Posel’s chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Nelson Mandela*, titled “Madiba magic: Politics as enchantment”, captures the “magic” of Mandela which was, in her words, “a matrix of thought and sentiment governed by the imaginary of Mandela” (Posel, 2014:72). She contends that Mandela was part of an “unprecedented habitus of hopefulness that spanned the old chasms of race”, and that Mandela’s magic was part of a story of “enchantment” shared by the entire country, if not the world (2014:72). According to Posel (2014), it was precisely Mandela’s enchantment (which was partly manufactured despite the man’s imposing and inspirational example) that elicited the unification of the nascent constitution itself.

Posel states that in the “script” that was authored by the Nationalist Party about the transition of power in South Africa after 1985, Nelson Mandela was the “leading dramatis persona” (2014:75). His release, which was partly “choreographed” (2014:79) to increase the levels of enchantment observers might have about Mandela, was also the continuation of a myth that was developed about Mandela before the world could even see him. And so, “the mythic Mandela contributed a particular valence to the idea of human rights, hitching it to a narrative of suffering and vulnerability, and then the courage and wisdom to transcend it” (2014:79). This “suffering and vulnerability” linked to a certain kind of transcendence, of course, was co-opted by the ANC itself.

Mandela became, in effect, an embodiment of the values the ANC needed to communicate to its electorate. Mandela became a true brand icon who singlehandedly was able to change the perception of the ANC as a previously outlawed group of resistance (and possible armed resistance), to a political party of reconciliation that would offer “a better life for all”. Mandela was able to provide a far more compelling image, a certain “magic” that would usher in a “rainbow nation”. South Africa could rise above petty hatred because it was living a new, miraculous, chapter in its own story via Nelson Mandela.

2.4 The ANC brand story beyond Mandela

The ANC brand story is compelling insofar as it relates to Mandela. However, there are many other elements to the ANC story, and by extension, South Africa’s story, that ought to be considered. A brand narrative should change over time, and the ANC would benefit greatly if they could add many more positive elements to its “good story”. Janis van der Westhuizen, in her article “Beyond Mandelamania? Imaging, Branding and Marketing South Africa”, points out that in terms of global brand reputation, countries from the so called “South” or developing world have to overcome the negative opinions of the “ill-informed” in regard to generalisations “applied to geographical clusters” (2003:3) to which South Africa belongs.

Ultimately, the ANC has to move beyond “the use of presidential personalities and political symbolism to create a consolidated South African brand” (van der Westhuizen, 2003:2). In other words, a “good story” is simply not enough in the long run. It is an integral part of the ANC brand, but other elements threaten the value of the brand, and indeed the narrative itself. The struggle of the ANC and the richness and diversity of South African culture have benefitted the country’s image overseas greatly. Nonetheless, van der Westhuizen warns that “unlike commercial marketing, nation branding does not require the slow, pain-staking construction of consumer perceptions and expectations that ultimately emerge in a brand” (2003:5). The ANC has had to manage their story and the events following its elections. When bad news arises due to the unpredictable nature of nation building, the brand suffers: “unless a country can build its culture as a body of understanding – a powerful brand – in the mind of its worldwide audience, then it faces a daunting and costly process of constantly re-establishing its right to be noticed and remembered” (Anholt, 2002, cited in van der Westhuizen, 2003:9). South Africa’s ANC has had a remarkable boon in being able to claim (tacit) ownership of the

story of Nelson Mandela, leading it to practice a kind of “exceptionalism” with regard to its brand image overseas, argues van der Westhuizen (2003:9). The story was so well-known, and the man so well-respected, that South Africa could use its victory at the Rugby World Cup as a nation-building as well as a brand-building experience: “No moment captured the essence and the triumph of the nascent, post-apartheid South African identity as vividly as Nelson Mandela dressed in a no. 6 Springbok rugby shirt holding the Rugby World Cup trophy aloft” (2003:14). Despite the death of Mandela, the value of his image and brand has remained strong. He is, however, no longer part of the ANC’s continuing narrative. He is now firmly part of its history. But, as we have seen, historical leaders tend to loom large in the branding landscape, their memory infused into present day activities, claims and propositions that the brand makes to prospective consumers.

Nonetheless, one of the problems the ANC has in managing its brand is that it “doesn’t actually differentiate between the role of liberator and that of governor” (McCarthy, 2012: para 6). The ANC has a powerful and emotive tale of liberation to tell, but it might be that it now needs to have a story of good governance to tell as well. The most moving elements of the ANC story lie in its ability to present itself as a liberator, and because this is so emotive to so many people, the ANC has been slow to move the story into covering its role as governor. Neil Lazarus discusses why this might be so in his essay entitled “The South African ideology: The myth of exceptionalism, the idea of renaissance” (2004). He argues that:

Inside the anti-apartheid movement ... time was decidedly on the side of “the people”. The future was theirs – ours. Even the narratives of suffering and subjugation were in these terms concretely utopian in their imagining of the freedom that would inevitably come, if not tomorrow or even the day after that, then at least the day after that (Lazarus, 2004:609).

It is an immensely powerful narrative, what Lazarus calls “*our* narrative”, a narrative that is based upon the idea that “when the future becomes the present, then that narrative will enable us to reclaim the past also” (Lazarus, 2004:609). The future is that future emancipation; that future when the ANC would take power over the old regime. And the ANC, because it is indeed exceptional, so utterly different from other liberation movements in a country that saw itself as part of Africa but not of Africa, would be able to triumph over the dangers of that emancipation. The deliverance from apartheid would be truly exceptional when it arrived.

And so the ANC may have been forced to remain true to this narrative. Even though the liberation has passed politically and historically, the liberation as it was *expected to come* has *yet to come* for millions of South Africans, who must still look to the master narrative of the country over two decades later and ask “when?” Could it be that the narrative of emancipation at the hands of an all-powerful and beneficent messiah prophesies bad news for those who have nurtured it, once that emancipation has come and gone? On 6 June 2015, Gareth Van Onselen wrote a critique of the ANC’s handling of its story in an article posted on the *Business Day Live* website titled “Why the ANC is media illiterate”. This story goes far in assisting

media observers to understand why the “good story” of the ANC is becoming less and less resonant. The ANC Treasurer-General, Zweli Mkhize, criticised the press on the grounds of its “unwarranted” and “unfair” coverage; and that there were many “wrong translation[s]” of political statements made by people within the ANC. In response to this, Van Onselen (2015) says that despite the knee-jerk reaction, there is “precious little” in terms of success stories to tell. The ANC faces a deeper problem:

But let us assume, for argument’s sake, there are a great many significant government achievements that the media, unfairly, does not report on. Implicit in that is some fault with the media. Just as implicit, however, is the government’s own culpability. Its communications, particularly of its achievements, are so profoundly weak and ineffective that if they are not originally sourced you would struggle to find them anywhere, if at all (Van Onselen, 2015: para 4).

Van Onselen (2015) posits that the government’s tactic is merely “listing” its achievements since 1994, in President Zuma’s State of the Nation Address. Furthermore, Van Onselen (2015) indicates that many of the points that the party lists are indeed “good news”, but the good news is repeated so often that it loses resonance. The ANC’s media strategy, argues Van Onselen (2015: para 16 ff.), is “stuck in the 70s”, in that it simply does not communicate its achievements well. Additionally, what the ANC does extremely badly is, in fact, the core issue of this article. According to Van Onselen, it fails to send a congruent message across multiple media channels. It does not “tailor” the news to different media channels, it has “poor representatives” who present the news to the media, it is not “social media savvy”, it shows a “lack of innovation” in communicating its story and, most alarmingly, has “no discernible brand strategy”. This is in terms of the fact that “it seems convinced it is a never-ending revolutionary movement, not the custodian of a modern, sophisticated government machine. Its language is antiquated, verbose and vague. Its communication is dry and lifeless, and lacks emotion” (Van Onselen, 2015: para 26).

This is, at a practical level, the heart of the problem that the ANC faces in communicating its “good story” and its “good news”. Any narrative depends on the right media to communicate it, and Van Onselen’s (exasperated) list of these failings says much about why the “good story” that ANC has to tell about itself is becoming truncated. Yet, from one perspective, the failure of the ANC to tell its “good story” effectively is evidence that no matter how compelling the story is, if it is not told well; in an emotional and engaging manner; the story loses its efficacy, its resonance and its meaning. The ANC’s political future is not the focus of this article; rather the focus is how the ANC has come to depend upon telling a good story, even at a self-conscious level. The party seems aware of the power of its story, but seems unwilling to tell it properly, in many different ways, across numerous platforms, in order to reach out to a new generation of voters with this compelling story. Journalists covering the party have been seen as “hostile” and “reckless” (Marrian, 2015) by Secretary General Gwede Mantashe, who lashed out at the media during a conference about the Marikana Massacre in May 2015, saying (somewhat disjointedly) “Continue with your hostile stance, that’s not patronising, it’s reality in life” (2015).

The problem all brands face is that each narrative they present must end and should flow into a new narrative. Commercial brands may move on to a new narrative, but when a narrative is bound to history and mortality (as Nelson Mandela was; as all of us are), then the end of a narrative might mean the end of the ANC itself – or at least the end of the ANC brand as we know it. So, the ANC brand narrative might be waiting for the next emancipation, or the real emancipation, and it might be that this narrative is a weaker narrative.

The story that the ANC has to tell, according to Jonny Steinberg (2015), is also a story of transition, or liberation from one narrative and entry into another. On 27 May 2015, Mmusi Maimane, who was the leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA), one of the ANC's chief rivals, stood in Parliament in Cape Town and countered President Zuma's "good story to tell" with a list of facts that deflated the "good story" the ANC wished to communicate to the country:

It should make us all angry that over the past five years our economy has grown at less than 2%. To be exact, Honorable Mr. President, 1.3%. Despite our position in the global trading world, our membership in BRICS, and our vast pool of natural resources, one in three South Africans cannot find a job. Our economy is energy insecure – ultimately the fault of this particular government. Honourable Speaker, this is a disaster on a global scale. In fact, Mr. President, I would like to call it a horror story to tell (Paper Screen – Digital News, 2015)

Nonetheless, the choice of these last words indicates how deeply the concept of the ANC's "good story to tell" resonates with South Africans, and with the opposition, who are fully aware of the story's power. That power emanates from the story that the ANC has to tell, its history, and the idea that the ANC is going to bring deliverance to the people of South Africa.

It might be no surprise then, when ANC President Jacob Zuma finally stepped down on 14 February 2018, it was noted in numerous sources that his leadership had done damage to the reputation of the ANC and indeed to the country (see Grootes, 2017; Mattes, 2018b; Umraw, 2018b). In writing for *foreignpolicy.com*, Sisonke Msimang (2018) was scathing about Zuma's rule: "Under Zuma's watch, the economy shrank, unemployment spiraled, and violent crime surged. His nine years in office were disastrous for South Africa's international reputation." Robert Mattes (2018a) wrote an article for *Media Online*, entitled "Brand ANC damaged by Zuma and the party's mutual dance to the bottom". It offered an assessment of just how damaging Zuma had been to the ANC brand, showing that only 32% of those surveyed "felt close the ANC" a result that was the ANC's lowest measure since 1994 (Mattes, 2018a). Citizens polled holding a "positive view" of the ANC had dropped from 61% in 2016 to just 37% (Mattes, 2018a).

It appears that the ANC's careful curatorship of its brand above and beyond its members will enable it to rise above the damage done by its outgoing leader. Soon after Zuma stepped down, the country seemed seized with enthusiasm for his replacement, Cyril Ramaphosa (see Hogg, 2018; Manyathela, 2018; Moeng, 2018; Umraw, 2018a). Ramaphosa, a colleague

of Nelson Mandela's, a well-known struggle figure as well as businessman, seemed to easily brush aside the negative associations of his predecessor (Mathekga, 2018). Ramaphosa, the former Secretary General of the ANC, had given a November 1995 speech titled "Swords into ploughshares: The challenge of effective governance in a democratic South Africa", where he outlines the processes of good governance that the ANC hoped to accomplish in its fledgling democracy (Ramaphosa, 1996). He immediately became known for his morning walks where he greeted people in different areas of South Africa, leading one commentator to posit "Cyril talks the walk for new ANC brand" and that he was "finishing Madiba's long walk" by making himself so accessible (Abarder, 2018). Indeed, his friendly morning walks quickly made him a brand icon, hearkening back to the pre-Zuma identity of the ANC as well as the character of its legendary leader.

One section of Ramaphosa's ebullient State of the Nation Speech, given only two days after Zuma had stepped down, has been widely quoted in the media (see Harvey, 2018; Motshekga, 2018; Mpikasho, 2018):

We should put all the negativity that has dogged our country behind us because a new dawn is upon us. It is a new dawn that is inspired by our collective memory of Nelson Mandela and the changes that are unfolding (Ramaphosa, 2018).

Here, Ramaphosa invokes the Mandela name. Later in the same speech he invokes Nelson Mandela's "Walk to Freedom" as well as ANC leader Albertina Nontsikelelo Sisulu's name, and he dismisses the errors of the recent past – many of which were created by the man whose office he now occupies. The willingness of the public to embrace the ANC's new leader after so many years of disappointment under Zuma may be proof that, despite many challenges, there is a deep belief in the "good story" of the ANC, and a willingness to embrace each new chapter as a "new dawn".

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