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TRUTH OR LIES? SELECTIVE MEMORIES, IMAGINGS, AND REPRESENTATIONS OF CHIEF ALBERT JOHN LUTHULI IN RECENT POLITICAL DISCOURSES¹

JABULANI SITHOLE AND SIBONGISENI MKHIZE

ABSTRACT

Individuals, organizations, and institutions adopt prominent people as political symbols for a variety of reasons. They then produce conflicting memories and images of their chosen symbols. In this article we argue that multiple representations of celebrated public figures should not only be viewed in terms of a choice between “truths” and “lies.” Using the case of Chief Albert Luthuli, the president of the African National Congress from 1952 to 1967, we show that secrets and silences about aspects of his political life would make it difficult for anyone to establish the veracity of competing memories which have been produced around his name since his death in 1967. We argue that many “Luthulis” were produced for different purposes and at different times during this period. We therefore suggest that to understand the motives for the making of the various images of Luthuli we need to explore in some depth the contexts in which they were made.

I. INTRODUCTION

Chief Albert Luthuli² was a democratically elected chief of the *Amakholwa* (Christian converts) in Groutville in Natal from 1936 to 1952. The South African government deposed him from this chieftaincy in November 1952 when he refused to withdraw from anti-apartheid politics. He joined the African National Congress (hereafter ANC) in 1945 and soon rose to become a part of its provincial and national leadership. He was elected the Natal President of the ANC in 1951, and its National President in December 1952. He held this position until his mysterious death in Groutville on 21 July 1967. Luthuli is well known today as a key exponent of nonviolent resistance, non-racialism, and alliance politics in

1. We owe a special debt of gratitude to John Wright, Tim Nuttall, John Laband, Bill Guest, and Julie Parle for discussions which profoundly affected the shape and content of this article, and for their invaluable comments and constructive criticism on preliminary drafts. Many thanks to Nduduzo and Zanele for their patience and understanding over the time we spent writing this article. None of the individuals mentioned above necessarily agrees with or endorses the views expressed in this article, responsibility for which rests squarely with its authors.

2. Orthographical and terminological notes: Luthuli preferred the spelling “Lutuli” in his writings. In this article we use the “modern version” which is spelled with an “h”: “Luthuli.” The “Bantu Authorities” system refers to a system that was introduced by the South African government in the 1950s. The 1951 Bantu Authorities Act allowed the government to give chiefs more power over their subjects. By the 1960s, the system had produced ten ethnic homelands which threatened to deny black people South African citizenship.

South Africa during the period from the late 1940s to the 1960s. He was also the first recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in Africa. He was awarded the prize in 1960 and traveled to Oslo to receive it in 1961.

The memory of Chief Luthuli has been, and continues to be, a site of fiercely contested struggle in South Africa. Since Luthuli was a major figure in South African politics, those with different political tendencies began to produce competing images and representations of who he was long before his death. In this article we will focus on the memories which emerged after his death. While many authors have written about Luthuli, few of them have dealt critically with the memories, images, and appropriations of Luthuli that were subsequently made to justify political actions and programs.³ We hope to contribute to the study of the appropriation of Luthuli as a political symbol in recent political discourses.

Our approach is premised on the assumption that history is different from the past. History is a particular form of socially created knowledge, while the past is everything that happened or was experienced.⁴ History is shaped by the preoccupations, circumstances, and ideologies of the historians producing it, and by the kinds of questions and arguments authors choose to employ. It is therefore a contested terrain with many possible makers, both in the academy and in the wider society.⁵ Moreover, since very little critical research has been conducted on the life and politics of Luthuli, we feel that we cannot simply dismiss some of the images and representations of him as “lies” and accept others as “truths.” We therefore analyze the memories of Luthuli around the notions of “selective remembering,” “imagings,” and “representations.” We will show that organizations like the former state Security Police (or Special Branch), Inkatha, and the outlawed liberation movements (the ANC and South African Communist Party [hereafter SACP]), appropriated Luthuli to justify their political actions and programs because they realized that his political stature continued to grow in the minds of the members of the broader public locally, nationally, and internationally after his death.

We have divided the history of the appropriation of Luthuli into three periods. The first runs from 1967 to 1975, the second from 1975 to 1988, and the third from 1988 to the present. The first period covers promotions of public memories of Luthuli by members of the public, the Security Police, and the SACP. The two periods from 1975 to the present cover the making of memories of Luthuli by the predominantly black political organizations, Inkatha, the SACP, and the ANC.⁶

3. R. Cook, “Awake, the Beloved Country: A Comparative Perspective on the Visionary Leadership of Martin Luther King Junior and Albert Luthuli,” *South African Historical Journal* 36 (May 1997), 113-135; and G. Pillay, *Voices of Liberation—Albert Luthuli, Volume 1* (Pretoria, 1993). Only Maré’s and Hamilton’s 1987 work on Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Inkatha has analyzed how Inkatha used Luthuli to further its political objectives. G. Maré and G. Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power: Buthelezi’s Inkatha and South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1987), 41, and 137-139.

4. T. A. Nuttall and K. Luckett, “Teaching and Learning History as an Academic Discourse,” *South African Historical Journal* 33 (November 1995), 94-95.

5. *Ibid.*

6. We draw insights for this article from biographies and autobiographies of the leaders of the ANC, SACP, and Inkatha. The first is the biography of Moses Kotane, the longest-serving general secretary of the SACP. It was written by Brian Bunting, a member of the SACP’s Central Committee (B. Bunting,

II. UNCOMPROMISING REVOLUTIONARY MARTYR OR OPPONENT OF
COMMUNISM AND RADICAL RESISTANCE?
THE CONTEXTS AND MEMORIES OF LUTHULI, 1967 TO 1975

It is quite easy to lose sight of why major political organizations choose certain people as their political symbols if one focuses exclusively on the images and representations which these organizations produce and ignores the contexts in which this representation takes place. We begin our exploration of the making of the various images of Luthuli against the background of the mysterious circumstances of his death in 1967.

The official inquest concluded that he died from head injuries which he sustained when a goods train struck him accidentally near the Umvoti bridge,⁷ but the circumstances of his death were shrouded in suspicion. His family was never satisfied with the findings of the inquest. They maintained that he was deliberately rather than accidentally killed. Luthuli's widow, Nokukhanya, was convinced that the agents of the former South African state killed him. She insisted that Luthuli "was struck by a long object like a fork used for stoking the fire (*intshumentshu*). This left a small hole in the back of his head."⁸ Mrs Luthuli also argued that her husband was a victim of the same apartheid "death squads" which had murdered a member of the ANC Youth League, Nkosinathi Yengwa, a month before Luthuli's death.⁹ Her children corroborated her views.¹⁰

The ANC shared the family's version of Luthuli's death. Its members secretly distributed pamphlets countrywide which also alleged that Luthuli was killed by the apartheid death squads. These allegations prompted the head of the Security Branch, General H. J. van den Bergh, to convene a press conference in which he put forth the state's views on who Luthuli was and what he stood for.¹¹ The lead-

Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary, A Political Biography [London, 1975]. The second set of sources are the biographies of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the Chief Minister of the KwaZulu bantustan and the president of the homeland-based movement, Inkatha, since 1975. They are Ben Temkin, *Gatsha Buthelezi-Zulu Statesman: A Biography* (Cape Town, 1976); Wessel De Kock, *Usuthu! Cry Peace! Inkatha and the Fight for a Just South Africa* (Cape Town, 1986); and J. S. Smith, *Buthelezi: The Biography* (Melville, S.A., 1988). The third is a critical biography of Buthelezi that was written by a member of the ANC named Mzala (Mzala, *Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a Double Agenda* [London and Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1988]). The fourth is Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston, 1994), which he co-authored with Richard Stengel of *Time* magazine. It was published within the context of negotiations over the future of South Africa. Finally, we will take a look at Joe Slovo's posthumously published autobiography, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography* (London, 1995). We contrast the representations of Luthuli made in these biographies with the self-made images which emerged in his autobiography in 1961 (A. J. Lutuli, *Let My People Go: The Autobiography of the Great South African Leader* [Glasgow, 1961], 139). Luthuli wrote this autobiography with the help of a priest named Charles Hooper and his wife Sheila Hooper, who had undertaken to be his amanuenses. It was published in the context of growing government repression, which was characterized by the banning of the ANC and SACP, and against the background of the award of the Peace Prize to Luthuli.

7. P. Rule *et al.*, *Nokukhanya: Mother of Light* (Braamfontein, 1993), 143.

8. *Ibid.*, 144.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 144-145 and Dr. Albertinah Luthuli, *Star* (16 September 1982).

11. Reports of General van den Bergh's press release, *Ilanga* (12 August 1967).

ership of the outlawed SACP responded by means of a hard-hitting statement which they issued from exile in London. The statement appeared in the SACP's quarterly journal, *The African Communist*, in 1967.¹² The leadership of the SACP disputed van den Bergh's press statement; their responses in turn led to the production of more counter-claims as to who Luthuli was.

Controversy over the role that Luthuli played in the formulation of the decision to set up the ANC's and SACP's armed wing, *Umkhonto Wesizwe* (hereafter MK), in 1961 had been going on for more than five years at the time of Luthuli's death.¹³ The working relationship between the ANC and South African Communists had been another area of heated debate for almost two decades by 1967.¹⁴ This debate involved members of the ANC and Communist Party, on the one hand, and the Africanists, predominantly white liberals and agents of the apartheid state, on the other. The Security Police was aware of this. Its head, General van den Bergh, focused on the two issues in his press statement about Luthuli in August 1967. He characterized Luthuli as a willing collaborator who was on the verge of embracing the policies of apartheid at the time of his death, and as a staunch opponent of communism and violence. He told the South African press that Chief Luthuli was about to disown communism and publicly renounce violence when he died. He also alleged that Luthuli had developed a very close friendship with the Security Police.¹⁵ Luthuli's widow was the first to deny that her husband had changed his views at the time of his death.¹⁶ She challenged van den Bergh to explain why the state had never lifted the ban on Luthuli if he had changed his views on apartheid. She argued that Luthuli had declined several attempts by the state to persuade him to endorse the homeland system in return for the lifting of his ban.

In its counter-tribute to Luthuli the SACP rejected van den Bergh's claims that Luthuli had condemned the armed struggle, and that he had problems with cooperating with the SACP. The Communist Party portrayed Luthuli as an uncompromising and non-collaborating revolutionary leader. It argued that as a leader and a spokesperson of the ANC, Luthuli shared a view that the nature of struggle, "whether it should be violent or nonviolent, was a matter of policy to be decided from time to time by the leadership in each country."¹⁷ It also maintained that he was a part of the ANC leadership collective that unanimously came to the conclusion that the time had come for armed resistance to be added to other meth-

12. Document 122, "Chief Albert Lutuli: A Tribute to the Late President General of the African National Congress," in *South African Communists Speak* (London, 1981), 357-362.

13. For more on this, see "Report of the Trial of Dr. Pascal Ngakane," *Contact* (July 1962); De Kock, *Usuthu!*, 72; and V. Shubin, *ANC: A View From Moscow* (Bellville, S.A., 1999), 17-53.

14. For examples of the debate, see Document 24, "Wreckers at Work," Editorial of *Liberation* (18 April 1956), in *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, Volume Two 1934-1964*, ed. A. Drew (Cape Town, 1997), 124-130; and David Evans, "Liberal Leader Jordan Ngubane," *Contact* (28 January 1961).

15. Van den Bergh's press release, *Ilanga* (12 August 1967). Document 122, "Chief Albert Lutuli: A Tribute," in *South African Communists Speak*, 361.

16. See *Ilanga* (19 August 1967).

17. "Chief Albert Lutuli: A Tribute," in *South African Communists Speak*, 360.

ods of struggle.¹⁸ On the working relationship between itself and the ANC, the Communist Party said that while Luthuli held views and philosophical beliefs which did not always agree with those of the Communists, he was always convinced that there was a need to promote a united non-racial front of all freedom-loving people in the fight against apartheid. The SACP dismissed van den Bergh's claim that Luthuli was a collaborator as a slander that sought to belittle his enormous contribution to the liberation struggle. It further argued that no slanders could ever efface the tremendous contribution that Luthuli made in the fight for freedom.¹⁹ In a 1971 publication of the history of the Communist Party of South Africa, Michael Harmel, a member of the SACP's Central Committee, also portrayed Luthuli as "the symbol of African courage, militancy and resistance."²⁰

The SACP's position on Luthuli's role in the decision to embark on the armed struggle appears to have changed by the middle of the 1970s. Brian Bunting was the first to articulate the Party's new view which held that Luthuli did not know of, and never participated in, the discussions to adopt the armed struggle.²¹ In the 1975 biography of Moses Kotane, Bunting said that not all members of the ANC leadership had participated in the decision to form MK. Kotane had told him that there was a delay in informing Luthuli about the decision to adopt the armed struggle for three reasons. First, Luthuli was living under restrictions in Groutville and kept in touch only intermittently with the ANC leadership which was based in the Transvaal. Second, he was preoccupied with the preparations for his visit to Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize during the crucial months when the decision to set up MK was formulated. Third, the ANC leadership feared that Luthuli would veto the plan if it were revealed to him at an inappropriate time.²² It was only after the armed operations had begun that the ANC leadership, at Luthuli's behest, sent Kotane to Groutville to explain the decision. Bunting claims that after a lengthy discussion with Kotane, Luthuli expressed the view that the ANC leadership was supposed to conduct discussions to formulate the new strategy through the usual channels. But as a leader of the ANC he felt obliged not to condemn the ANC members who were participating in armed actions, though he himself could not advocate violence.²³

Bunting also paints an image of Luthuli as a key pioneer of non-racialism and alliance politics in South Africa. Luthuli defended non-racialism and cooperation between the ANC and Communists during the 1950s and 1960s in the face of criticism by the Africanists, virulent anti-Communists like Patrick Duncan of the Liberal Party, and agents of the South African government and the Central Intelligence Agency.²⁴ He maintains that Luthuli's firm support for cooperation

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, 361-362.

20. A. Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years: The Communist Party of South Africa* [1971] (London, 1987), 87.

21. Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 268-269.

22. *Ibid.*, 268.

23. *Ibid.*, 268-269.

24. *Ibid.*, 237-240.

among the various anti-apartheid organizations, including the Communists, stemmed from the close political and personal relationship that developed between him and Moses Kotane during the treason trial in the late 1950s.²⁵

What should we make of these contradictory images of Luthuli? First, they seem to be products of a serious bid by both the Security Police and the SACP to justify their political actions and programs by discrediting opposing views on the leadership and role of Luthuli in the anti-apartheid struggle. Second, they pose a challenge to those of us who view the past in terms of “truths” and “lies.” For example, should we dismiss some of these representations as total “lies” and accept others as “truths”? If we choose to do this, what criteria do we use?

General van den Bergh’s characterization of Luthuli as a willing collaborator and a staunch opponent of communism and violence should be understood against the background of an ideological struggle between the apartheid state and its opponents for the hearts and minds of the oppressed people in South Africa, and within the context of increasing international calls for the economic and political isolation of South Africa during the 1960s. It seems plausible that the apartheid state tried to lure credible and respected black leaders of Luthuli’s caliber to support some of its policies, especially the newly emerging homeland system. The state hoped to win more support for these policies from the country’s black population because Luthuli was highly respected in these communities. The regime also hoped to win credibility abroad, as Luthuli was by then known internationally as a champion of nonviolent opposition to apartheid, and as the most influential moderate and non-Communist black leader to have emerged in South Africa. The government’s ultimate aim was no doubt to persuade economically powerful Western powers like the United States and Britain to soften their criticism of its policies. It is quite unlikely that Luthuli had capitulated to the state’s pressure at the time of his death. Van den Bergh’s statements seem to be a matter of deliberate misinformation. We can think of at least two possible explanations for why van den Bergh chose to misinform the public about Luthuli. First, it could have been an attempt to ward off the criticism that was leveled at the Security Police shortly after Luthuli’s death. Second, he probably seized what he saw as an opportunity to sow confusion and doubts in the minds of black people by portraying Luthuli as a collaborator.

Van den Bergh’s claim that Luthuli was hostile to communism ignored Luthuli’s views on cooperation between the ANC and SACP in the struggle against apartheid. In his autobiography Luthuli stated that when he cooperated with the Communists in the Congress affairs, he was not cooperating with communism. But he said that the ANC could not afford to be sidetracked by ideological clashes and witch-hunts. Its primary concern was liberation, and when freedom-loving people cooperated in the struggle against oppression they put their political theories aside until the day after liberation.²⁶ We doubt that Luthuli had abandoned this resolve to collaborate with the Communists and to work in a

25. *Ibid.*, 229.

26. *Ibid.*, 137-138.

broad front in the struggle against apartheid during the 1960s. Van den Bergh's claims are clearly inconsistent with the self-made images of Luthuli which emerge in his autobiography.

The Communist Party's responses to van den Bergh can also be seen as controversial. The SACP ignored Luthuli's comments on the proceedings of the All in Africa Conference that was held in Accra in 1958 when it claimed that he viewed nonviolence as a policy which could be changed from time to time. The SACP's claim was based on a speech made by an unnamed representative of the ANC to this conference. But as Luthuli stated in his autobiography, "conditions in South Africa prevented us from sending delegates to Accra. We had to rely on a delegation of people who were by chance already out of the country and who did not ever return to report back."²⁷ We find it difficult to regard this as an endorsement of the position on violence which that delegate enunciated at the Accra Conference. At best the SACP's claims regarding Luthuli's view of violence were speculative. They also appear to have been products of a lack of clear lines of communication between the SACP and Luthuli, especially after its general secretary, Moses Kotane, had gone into exile in 1962. There is no doubt in our minds that the SACP's claim was aimed primarily at contradicting and discrediting whatever van den Bergh had to say, regardless of whether the claim was justified.

As to Bunting, in 1967 he approved a statement which claimed that Luthuli participated actively in the decision to turn to violence. By 1974, he had flatly denied that Luthuli knew of and endorsed the decision to embark on the armed struggle. This marked the shift in the SACP's interpretation of Luthuli's role in the adoption of the armed struggle. This shift, however, provided fertile ground for new representations of who he was from the late 1970s onwards.

III. POLITICAL MENTOR OR TOOL FOR POLITICAL LEGITIMATION? INKATHA AND THE MEMORIES OF LUTHULI

The former Chief Minister of the KwaZulu bantustan, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, launched Inkatha as a Zulu mass-based movement in March 1975. Inkatha was to serve as the ruling party in the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly, and it also provided Buthelezi with a political constituency. The way Buthelezi and Inkatha have subsequently used the past (especially the Zulu past) to justify their political actions has attracted the attention of several academics.²⁸ In a 1992 article on Buthelezi's use of history, Forsyth has identified five main phases into which Buthelezi's political career can be divided during the period from 1951 to 1991; each one of these phases corresponds to Buthelezi's appeal to, and reliance upon, different sets of historical traditions.²⁹ Not surprisingly, Buthelezi's and

27. *Ibid.*, 188.

28. Maré and Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, chapter 2; D. Golan, "Inkatha and its Use of the Zulu Past," *History in Africa* 18 (1991), 113-136; and P. Forsyth, "The Past in the Service of the Present: The Political Use of History by Chief M. G. Buthelezi, 1951-1991," *South African Historical Journal* 26 (1992), 74-92.

29. Forsyth, "The Past in the Service of the Present," 75.

Inkatha's uses of their representations of Luthuli changed during the period 1975–1988. These changes corresponded to new developments in resistance politics in South Africa. We explore the uses of the memories of Luthuli by Buthelezi and Inkatha in three phases: the first from 1975 to 1979, the second from 1980 to 1983, and the third from 1983 to 1988.

Buthelezi and Inkatha used their representations of Luthuli in at least two ways during the period between 1975 and 1979–1980. First, they used Luthuli to bolster their claim that there was continuity in resistance struggles from the pre-colonial Zulu kings, through the ANC, to Inkatha. In 1975, Buthelezi stressed that there was continuity between Inkatha and the ANC by portraying Inkatha as the ANC reincarnated after fifteen years of being banned.³⁰ With the tacit approval of the exiled ANC leadership, he presented the establishment of Inkatha as the fulfillment of the ANC's history of resistance to apartheid.³¹ He then publicly embraced the ANC, adopted its symbols, and made public pronouncements which served to bolster his credibility as a leader in the broad liberation movement.³² In this way, he presented the ANC as the "ANC Mission in Exile," and Inkatha as the "ANC Mission in South Africa." Buthelezi's aim was to ensure that Inkatha was designed not only to mobilize a Zulu ethnic following within the KwaZulu bantustan, but also to provide him with a platform from which he could address a national audience.³³ In a bid to broaden his support base, Buthelezi portrayed himself as a leader in the same tradition as prominent former ANC leaders like Luthuli and Professor Z. K. Mathews.

Second, Buthelezi used his own representations of Luthuli as a political shield when his political adversaries questioned his credibility as an anti-apartheid leader. For example, when members of the black consciousness organizations (hereafter BC) dismissed him as a puppet of the apartheid state during the 1970s, he demanded of them whether Luthuli and other ANC leaders were puppets of the United Party government when they participated in the Native Representative Council during the 1940s.³⁴ He claimed during the 1970s that Luthuli and other ANC leaders had encouraged him to participate in bantustan politics.³⁵

Why was Buthelezi not challenged when he claimed that Inkatha represented the revival of the ANC within South Africa during the 1970s? Inkatha emerged in South Africa at a time when the exiled leadership of the ANC was seeking ways to encourage as many people as possible to join the struggle against apartheid and to oppose the independence of bantustans. The ANC leaders were even prepared to encourage homeland leaders like Buthelezi to use "the opportunities provided by the bantustan program to participate in the mass mobiliza-

30. Maré and Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, 137.

31. Forsyth, "The Past in the Service of the Present," 84.

32. *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882–1990*, ed. Thomas Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, 5 vols. (Stanford, 1972–), V, 257; and see Smith, *Buthelezi: The Biography*, 121 and 126.

33. Forsyth, "The Past in the Service of the Present," 84.

34. Mzala, *Gatsha Buthelezi*, 81, 86–87.

35. Karis and Gerhart, ed., *From Protest to Challenge*, V, 255.

tion of the oppressed people” against apartheid.³⁶ The ANC president, Oliver Tambo, later stated that their aim was to establish links with mass-based organizations like Inkatha in order to prepare ground for the intensification of the ANC’s armed operations.³⁷ However, this alliance between the ANC and Buthelezi did not last long. It came to an end in 1979–1980, due in part to Buthelezi’s changing politics, and as a result of new political developments in the country after the 1976–1977 student uprisings.

Tension was mounting between the ANC and Inkatha for several months before their meeting in London on 30–31 October 1979. Karis and Gerhart have said that “throughout the decade of the 1970s, Buthelezi embraced the ANC and the ideals of its “founding fathers” while seeking ways to marginalize its leadership in exile.”³⁸ As Buthelezi’s own internal support grew between 1975 and 1979, a conviction developed between Buthelezi and his advisers that the ANC as represented by those in exile really did not exist in South Africa. They were also convinced that “the true heir to the ANC” was Buthelezi himself.³⁹ Buthelezi subsequently believed that Inkatha was a match for the ANC in terms of popularity, and that he therefore could challenge its leadership in exile.

Tension between the ANC and Inkatha should also be understood against the background of the government’s responses to the Soweto student uprisings of 1976–1977. The government responded through repression and reform to the uprisings. It banned the black consciousness organizations on 19 October 1977. Inkatha was the main beneficiary of the government’s crackdown on BC organizations. Their banning eliminated all open competition to Inkatha in the black political arena. This deepened Buthelezi’s conviction that Inkatha was the largest and most popular organization operating legally within the country. Reformists within the National Party also began to press for new policies to control large numbers of urban Africans in South Africa after the uprisings. The subsequent reform policies of P. W. Botha’s government created new political openings for conservative black leaders who were gradually coopted into a multiracial alliance through the system of local councils and homelands, and later, the tricameral system. The new developments marked a shift away from purely race politics toward class politics. Buthelezi was quick to grasp the political opportunities opened up by the government’s search for a strategy of reform.⁴⁰ He could mobilize support from the national and international business sector by presenting Inkatha and himself as alternatives to the ANC. Karis and Gerhart have said that by the late 1970s Buthelezi had already decided to promote his image as a leader who could command popular support while also publicly opposing foreign economic sanctions and condemning the ANC’s pursuit of the armed struggle.⁴¹

36. O. R. Tambo, “Buthelezi and Inkatha,” in *Preparing for Power: Tambo Speaks*, ed. A. Tambo (London, 1987), 146.

37. Karis and Gerhart, ed., *From Protest to Challenge*, V, 271.

38. *Ibid.*, 251.

39. *Ibid.*, 258.

40. *Ibid.*, 267–268.

41. *Ibid.*

At the end of 1979 Buthelezi and Inkatha met with the leadership of the ANC in London. Buthelezi's comments immediately after the meeting showed that there had been significant political disagreement and antagonism between himself and the ANC leadership.⁴² A period of more than seven months elapsed before the ANC publicly denounced Buthelezi and Inkatha as enemies of the oppressed people in South Africa.⁴³ Buthelezi's repudiation by the ANC dented his image as a national political leader. It also rendered questionable his claim that he was a genuine anti-apartheid leader. These developments forced him to retreat to a reliance upon his KwaZulu bantustan constituency and upon an ethnic Zulu historical discourse. Significantly, he tried to take Luthuli along with him into his ethnic politics. He did this in two ways. First, he tried to monopolize the annual commemoration services for Chief Luthuli. Second, Buthelezi reformulated his version of the history of the struggle in such a way that it denied the ANC any tradition of political resistance.

Inkatha and Buthelezi attempted to turn Luthuli into an exclusively Inkatha symbol by trying to monopolize his annual commemoration services between 1980 and 1983. Buthelezi persuaded Mrs. Luthuli to allow him to organize Luthuli's Memorial Service as an Inkatha rally in 1982.⁴⁴ He launched a scathing attack at the ANC during the rally that was subsequently held in Groutville in August 1982.⁴⁵ Luthuli's eldest daughter, Dr. Albertinah Luthuli, did not take kindly to Buthelezi's criticism of the ANC leadership. She issued a press statement from Zimbabwe in September 1982 in which she criticized Buthelezi for using her father's name to further his political objectives. She also accused him of manipulating her mother to give him permission to hold a rival memorial service for her father.⁴⁶ Buthelezi's response to her was that he did not need Mrs. Luthuli as a "political prop."⁴⁷

The break with the ANC also forced Buthelezi to reappraise his version of the history of the struggle. Up until 1979, Buthelezi had portrayed his actions as being informed by the principles of the ANC. After the London meeting he abruptly ceased to present himself as an anti-apartheid leader in the same tradition as the ANC, which he had begun to call the ANC's "Mission in Exile." In his new version of the history of resistance he no longer depicted continuity between precolonial Zulu kings and the ANC. Instead, his new version discerned an abrupt break in 1960, the year the ANC was banned.⁴⁸ After this point in history, Buthelezi claimed, the ANC no longer served the principles of its founders. In its place he inserted Inkatha.⁴⁹ Forsyth says that Buthelezi's aim was to reclaim the

42. *Sunday Tribune* (4 November 1979); and *Natal Mercury* (5 November 1979).

43. Alfred Nzo, "Statement to the June 26th Freedom Day Meeting," *Sechaba* (September 1980), 6; and Karis and Gerhart, ed., *From Protest to Challenge*, V, 274.

44. Reports in *Ilanga* (2-4 September 1982).

45. *Ilanga* (2-4 September 1982); and Buthelezi, "Address at a Prayer Meeting," Groutville, 29 August 1982.

46. *Star* (16 September 1982); and Maré and Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, 41.

47. Maré and Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, 41, and Smith, *Buthelezi*, 258.

48. Forsyth, "The Past in the Service of the Present," 87; and Maré and Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, 137.

49. Forsyth, "The Past in the Service of the Present," 87; and Maré and Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, 137.

traditions of resistance from the ANC and accredit himself with them.⁵⁰ The reformulated history brought with it more direct claims that Buthelezi inherited the mantle of leadership from Luthuli. In 1983, for example, Inkatha circulated a document with a brief section on the history of the relationship between Inkatha and the ANC. A direct claim was made in this document that “in a symbolic meeting between Chief Luthuli and the Honourable Chief M. G. Buthelezi in the 1960s, the heritage of the leadership of the struggle was passed on to the Honourable Chief Buthelezi.”⁵¹ The document also argued that Inkatha was “as much a descendant of the old ANC as the present external mission.”⁵²

Anti-apartheid resistance had begun to assume a populist character by the second half of 1983. The formation of the United Democratic Front (hereafter UDF), a loose alliance of more than 600 ANC-aligned community organizations, in August 1983 posed a new challenge to Buthelezi’s and Inkatha’s version of history which denied the ANC a tradition of resistance in South Africa. The very existence of the UDF threatened Buthelezi’s and Inkatha’s support base in Natal and KwaZulu homeland. The first major test came with the outbreak in 1983 of rent boycotts and resistance to the system of local councils in the African townships of Hambanathi near Stanger, Lamontville, and Chesterville in Durban. This resistance soon spread to other African townships throughout Natal and KwaZulu. Local councils in the African townships of Natal were dominated by Inkatha members and sympathizers. This meant that the struggle against the local council system was essentially a struggle against Inkatha and the KwaZulu bantustan. Confrontation between Inkatha and the Natal affiliates of the UDF developed. This further destroyed the myth that Inkatha was an anti-apartheid organization. The affiliates of the UDF began to dismiss the KwaZulu bantustan as an apartheid creation, and Buthelezi as a puppet of the apartheid state.

Buthelezi and Inkatha did not immediately change their post-1979–1980 version of the history of resistance in South Africa in the face of the new challenge. They continued to stress the Zulu origins of resistance in South Africa and to present Buthelezi’s leadership as politically significant. Buthelezi and Inkatha continued to claim that there was an unbroken line of succession in the leadership of the struggle from Luthuli to Buthelezi. They argued that there was discontinuity between Luthuli’s ANC and the ANC’s “Mission in Exile” when the latter embarked on the armed struggle in 1961. During a July 1984 interview, Oscar Dhlomo, the secretary-general of Inkatha, made a distinction between the ANC of the “founding fathers” and ANC’s “Mission in Exile.”⁵³ The former had operated legally in South Africa between 1912 and 1960. It had waged a nonviolent struggle. The latter was outlawed in 1960, and its exiled leadership pursued the armed struggle from outside South Africa. Writing for *Leadership South Africa* in 1984, Oscar Dhlomo again stated that in Inkatha circles the “so-called ANC is

50. Forsyth, “The Past in the Service of the Present,” 87.

51. Maré and Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, 138.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, 137.

officially referred to as the 'External Mission of the ANC'; because according to recorded history the external mission . . . was sent overseas by the last constitutionally elected President of the ANC, the late Chief Albert Luthuli, to drum up support for the liberation of black people inside South Africa. There was never any intention that the external mission would eventually develop into a completely autonomous movement that would be free to decide on any liberatory strategies. . . ."⁵⁴ Dhlomo's comments implied that the exiled ANC was an "unconstitutional" offshoot of the ANC that was reincarnated in Inkatha. He said that Buthelezi called the ANC "the proverbial tail that wags the dog."⁵⁵

Buthelezi endorsed Dhlomo's views. During a 1985 interview with Hugh Murray, the editor of *Leadership South Africa*, he reiterated the view that the ANC was "an external mission" because Luthuli had established it to conduct international diplomacy for the "movement" within South Africa.⁵⁶ Buthelezi claimed that the "external mission" had deviated from the tradition and principles of the ANC that was led by Luthuli when "later they decided to opt for violence."⁵⁷ He also implied that the decision to embark on the armed struggle was taken outside South Africa. In his 1988 biography, he said that the ANC Mission in Exile "only adopted the armed struggle as the primary means of bringing about change once they were in exile."⁵⁸ He also suggested that Luthuli once contemplated dissociating himself from the ANC "if it were to resort to violence."⁵⁹ Buthelezi also argued that both the state and the ANC had isolated Luthuli from 1961 until his death in 1967. Buthelezi claimed that he had continued to have direct dealings with Luthuli during this period.

In a 1984 interview with Graham Watts of the *Sunday Express* Buthelezi also rejected the suggestions that KwaZulu was an apartheid creation and that he was a government puppet. He reiterated the claim that he once made during the 1970s, that it was Luthuli, Mandela, Sisulu and many others who advised him to participate in homeland politics.⁶⁰ Buthelezi repeated this claim during Inkatha's Annual General Meeting at Ulundi in June 1985,⁶¹ during an interview with his second biographer, Wessel De Kock, in 1986,⁶² and through his third biographer, Jack Smith in 1988.⁶³ Buthelezi presented the image of a persuasive Luthuli pleading with him to take up the position of chief minister of the KwaZulu bantustan, and of his reluctantly heeding the advice.

Buthelezi's story of who advised him to participate in bantustan politics had changed over time. In the late 1970s Buthelezi had said that Luthuli, Mandela, and Sisulu had advised him to take up the Buthelezi chieftaincy.⁶⁴ From the mid-

54. O. Dhlomo, "Inkatha and the ANC," *Leadership South Africa* 3, no. 1 (1984), 47.

55. *Ibid.*, 47.

56. Buthelezi, "Interview with Murray," *Leadership South Africa* 4, no. 4 (1985), 26.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Smith, *Buthelezi*, 113.

59. De Kock, *Usuthu!*, 72.

60. Maré and Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, 41.

61. *Ibid.*, 220.

62. De Kock, *Usuthu!*, 41.

63. Smith, *Buthelezi*, 47.

64. Mzala, *Gatsha Buthelezi*, 65-66.

dle of the 1980s onwards he had replaced “the Buthelezi chieftaincy” with “chief minister of the Zulus.”⁶⁵ Significantly, he also replaced Luthuli with Mandela in the order of importance of the ANC leaders who advised him to accept the position as chief minister of “KwaZulu.” During a 1985 interview with Hugh Murray, Buthelezi said that he took the position as the KwaZulu homeland leader because of “a decision that was taken at a high level by Mandela himself, Chief Luthuli, Tambo, Joe Matthews and others.”⁶⁶ It seems likely that Buthelezi emphasized Mandela’s leading role in the alleged incident out of political expediency. He possibly realized that Mandela was becoming a more popular political figure than Luthuli in South African politics during the 1980s. The popularity and memory of Luthuli was fading fast in the minds of the younger generation that had become involved in politics. It is also significant that Buthelezi did not mention that Luthuli referred to the bantustan system as a “huge deceit . . . whose political aim was to wipe Africans off the South African political map.”⁶⁷ It is unthinkable that someone with such a negative view of the homeland system could have encouraged a “friend” to participate in it.

What should we make of Buthelezi’s and Inkatha’s representations of Luthuli? It seems clear that they focused much attention on the alleged relationship between Luthuli and Buthelezi to counter accusations by other political organizations that Buthelezi was not a genuine anti-apartheid leader. Buthelezi referred to this relationship when he defended his participation in the homeland system. He also gave the impression that he was carrying forward Luthuli’s wishes when he condemned the ANC’s pursuit of the armed struggle. Buthelezi did not make any reference to, or challenge, the claim that was made by Mrs. Luthuli in her 1993 biography, that Chief Luthuli used the money he got from the Nobel Peace Prize to buy two farms in Swaziland for the South African refugees.⁶⁸ Luthuli’s decision to buy farms for the refugees raises questions about suggestions that he was totally opposed to what the exiled leadership of the ANC was doing after December 1961.

Moreover, there is no reference to the alleged relationship between Luthuli and Buthelezi in Luthuli’s autobiography, *Let My People Go*. Prominent national and Natal-based leaders of the ANC are mentioned. They include, for example, Oliver Tambo, who was the National Deputy President of the ANC until 1967; M. B. Yengwa, who was Luthuli’s closest friend and the Natal secretary of the ANC; Dr. Z. Conco; and many others.⁶⁹ The omission of Buthelezi’s name in Luthuli’s autobiography could mean two possible things. First, it could mean that Buthelezi was politically so insignificant during the 1950s and early 1960s that he did not warrant any mention in Luthuli’s autobiography. Second, it could

65. Maré and Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, 41; and De Kock, *Usuthu!*, 41.

66. Buthelezi, “Interview with Murray,” *Leadership South Africa* 4, no. 4 (1985), 26.

67. Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, chapter 19.

68. Rule *et al.*, *Nokukhanya*, 131-133.

69. Buthelezi is only mentioned as a family friend in Nokukhanya’s 1993 biography. This biography was written at a time when Buthelezi had become a prominent political figure in South Africa, and after he had mentioned the significance of his association with Luthuli on numerous occasions. This could have influenced Mrs. Luthuli to view the friendship as politically significant.

mean that the alleged relationship with the Luthuli family developed through Buthelezi's initiative. We cannot think of any reason why an influential and prominent political figure like Luthuli would have objected to such friendship with his family. But friendship with his family does not necessarily suggest that Luthuli's views on the bantustan system had changed.

IV. A MILITANT AND UNCOMPROMISING FIGHTER:
THE ANC'S AND SACP'S RECENT MEMORIES OF LUTHULI

The ANC seems to have been reluctant to respond to Inkatha's charges that it deviated from the traditions of its "founding fathers" during the period before 1988. At a time when Inkatha and Buthelezi were publicly appropriating Luthuli through commemoration rallies and press statements, the ANC's response was dead silence. But when its leaders and members finally broke that silence, especially on Luthuli's role in the formulation of the strategy to resort to violent resistance, a contradictory picture which reigned supreme during the 1970s resurfaced.

Mzala, a member of the ANC, was the first to produce a critical biography of Buthelezi in 1988 which paid attention to the memories of Luthuli. He represented Luthuli as a principled fighter who had chosen to be deposed from the *Amakholwa* chieftaincy rather than become a servant of the apartheid government.⁷⁰ In this way, he contended, Luthuli had taught the ANC activists and leaders the lesson that real leaders must be ready to sacrifice all for the freedom of their people. Mzala also disputed the view that Luthuli had advised Buthelezi to participate in the bantustan system. He said that the policy of the ANC in the 1950s was to encourage chiefs to resist Bantu Authorities. There was therefore no reason for Luthuli to make an exception to that policy for Buthelezi's sake.⁷¹ Mzala also represented Luthuli as the pioneer of the ANC's sanctions campaign which had gained momentum during the late 1980s.⁷² He used this to highlight the fact that Buthelezi's opposition to the sanctions campaign against apartheid was running contrary to what Luthuli stood for before his death.

After it had been unbanned in 1990, the ANC also produced its representations of Luthuli on its web page, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/lutuli>. These memories of Luthuli emerged in the context of the peace initiatives between Inkatha and the ANC, and of negotiations over the future of South Africa between the ANC and its alliance partners on the one hand, and the South African government and its allies, on the other. The ANC portrayed Luthuli as a militant, disciplined, and uncompromising fighter who led people who, like himself, honored and respected the decisions and resolutions of their conferences.⁷³ The ANC also said that Luthuli was a profound thinker, a courageous fighter, a statesman, a man of principle, and a leader of unquestionable integrity who defended the policy entrusted to him by his organization, and saw that it was implemented.

70. Mzala, *Gatsha Buthelezi*, 5.

71. *Ibid.*, 65-67.

72. *Ibid.*, 190-193.

73. "Lutuli Speaks," <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/lutuli>.

Nelson Mandela, the president of the ANC from 1991 to 1997, remembers Luthuli as a teacher, a devout Christian, and a proud Zulu chief in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*.⁷⁴ Mandela describes Luthuli as a fairly tall, heavy-set, dark-skinned man with a broad smile, who combined an air of humility with deep-seated confidence. Luthuli was a man of patience and fortitude, who spoke slowly and clearly as though every word was of equal importance.⁷⁵ Mandela shared Mzala's view that Luthuli demonstrated deep commitment to the liberation struggle when he defiantly refused to resign from the ANC, preferring deposition from his position as a chief. Mandela appears to be the only senior ANC leader to challenge Buthelezi's claim that he inherited the mantle of leadership of the struggle from Luthuli. He says that Oliver Tambo was the one who inherited the mantle of Luthuli's leadership. He argues that although Luthuli left a huge political vacuum and was irreplaceable when he died, the ANC found in Tambo just the man who could fill the Chief's shoes. "Like Luthuli, he was articulate yet not showy, confident but humble. He too epitomized Chief Luthuli's precept: 'Let your courage rise with danger.'"⁷⁶

A contradictory picture emerges when the ANC explains the role that Luthuli played in the discussions to formulate a decision to set up *Umkhonto Wesizwe*. In two of its sources which emerged during the 1990s, the ANC has constantly contradicted the Communist Party view that Luthuli did not know about the formation of MK and that he never endorsed the armed struggle. On its web page, the ANC has denied that Luthuli was an apostle of nonviolence. It said that the policy of nonviolence that is often associated with Luthuli was formulated and adopted by national conferences of the ANC long before he was elected its president.⁷⁷ In *Long Walk to Freedom* Mandela insists that Luthuli knew and participated in the meetings which formulated the decision to set up MK.⁷⁸ Mandela says that the rumor that Luthuli did not know about the processes leading to the formation of MK originate in part from Luthuli's deteriorating health during the 1960s. He says that "the Chief was not well and his memory was not what it had once been. He chastised me for not consulting with him about the formation of MK. I attempted to remind the chief of the discussions that we had in Durban about taking up violence, but he did not recall them."⁷⁹ While it is very difficult to question what Mandela has said on the matter, especially because, as the first Commander-in-Chief of MK, he was well placed to know what happened, the manner in which he explains why Luthuli chastised him about the formation of MK sounds too convenient. This explanation raises questions about the image of Luthuli the outstanding hero with a sharp intellect, and promotes an image of Luthuli the unstable and ineffective figure long before his death.

74. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 125.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*, 383-384.

77. "Luthuli Speaks," <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/lutuli>.

78. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 237.

79. *Ibid.*, 250.

In his 1995 autobiography *Slovo: The Unfinished Biography*, Joe Slovo, who was the co-leader of MK when it was formed in 1961 and later its Chief of Staff, reiterated what seems to have become the official SACP position on the matter. Like Bunting before him, Slovo denied that Luthuli participated in the decision to turn to the armed struggle or that he ever endorsed it.⁸⁰ Slovo felt that it was the measure of his greatness that despite his deep Christian commitment to non-violence, he never forbade or condemned the new path, but instead blamed it on the intransigence of the regime.⁸¹

What should we make of these contradictory memories of Luthuli's role in the decision to turn to armed struggle? The best that we can do in the absence of an official ANC explanation of why it never responded to Inkatha's argument that it ceased to be the leader of the liberation struggle when it adopted the armed struggle is to speculate. It is possible that the ANC did not want to dignify Buthelezi's and the state's claims that the source of political violence that ripped the country apart during the 1980s were the differences between Inkatha and the ANC on issues such as the armed struggle.⁸² It is also possible that the ANC chose not to respond because for as long as the issue of Luthuli's role in the adoption of the armed struggle was not adequately clarified it could conveniently maintain its dual image as an organization with peaceful intentions, but which was simultaneously waging the armed struggle. But the level at which the decision to adopt the armed struggle was formulated and taken remains controversial. The contradictory picture that has emerged around the formation of MK serves to show that secrecy breeds uncertainty and gives rise to speculation. What we cannot comprehend is why the matter has not been clarified a decade after the unbanning of the SACP and the ANC.

V. CONCLUSION

Different individuals and organizations have produced numerous images of Luthuli since his death in 1967. The Security Police portrayed him as a willing collaborator and strong anti-Communist. The Communist Party's view of who Luthuli was changed over time. During the 1960s it represented Luthuli as a symbol of African courage, militancy, and hope. It also implied that he was involved in the discussions which led to the adoption of the armed struggle. From the middle of the 1970s onwards, one senior official of the Communist Party after another denied that Luthuli had known about the decision to turn to violence as a form of resistance and that he had ever endorsed the decision. Inkatha, like the Communist Party, denied that Luthuli knew anything about the armed struggle. It went so far as to say that the exiled ANC leadership deviated from what Luthuli stood for when they took up arms against apartheid. The view that has gained currency within the ANC is that Luthuli knew of and participated in the discus-

80. Slovo, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*, 147.

81. *Ibid.*

82. Smith, *Buthelezi*, 113-119.

sions to form MK. But the ANC has given contradictory images of who Luthuli was. The dominant view is that he was a disciplined leader of the ANC with a very sharp intellect; Mandela's explanation of why Luthuli chastised him over the processes leading to the formation of MK provides an image of Luthuli as a feeble old man who suffered memory lapses.

We have endeavored to show that the multiple and conflicting memories of Luthuli should be understood within their distinct political contexts. The various organizations had specific political preoccupations at the time of producing their images of Luthuli. We can best appreciate why there were various images of Luthuli in the first place through explorations of the circumstances which produced them. The intensity of political conflict in South Africa since the 1960s provided fertile ground for the production of multiple and contested versions of the past. Celebrated political and iconic figures like Luthuli could not escape from this contest. This explains why conflicting representations of who Luthuli was continue unabated. There has also been much speculation about his role in the beginnings of the armed struggle, which in turn deepens the controversy.

Finally, we have maintained throughout the article that the approach which views the past in terms of a narrow choice between truths and lies is not useful, in that we often cannot state with certainty which aspects of any chosen past should be regarded as "truth" and which ones should be dismissed as "lies." In the case of Luthuli we have noted that he meant different things to different people. But even if we cannot at this point know the truth about Luthuli—after all, it is possible that even Luthuli did not know the "truth" about himself—we can still uncover and examine the multiple meanings of who he was as long as we know what circumstances gave rise to their production.

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