

THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS YOUTH LEAGUE'S (ANCYL'S) ROLE AS THE "KINGMAKER": A MOMENT OF POST- POLOKWANE BLUES?

Chitja Twala¹

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, the impact of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) has been involved, and in other instances, strongly instrumental in shaping the thinking and approach of the African National Congress (ANC). Although the ANCYL had made some headlines before the ANC's (Polokwane) Limpopo Conference of December 2007,² it may be argued that throughout the history of the liberation struggle and defiance, the league was instrumental in giving direction to the mother body, namely, the ANC. Its impact was countrywide, with various degrees of influence in almost all spheres of the ANC's government. The ANCYL intended to play a major role in the election of the ANC's leadership and its influence proved important in the previous ANC conferences.³ It was therefore not surprising that it took the centre stage before the Limpopo Conference in influencing the proceedings as to who becomes the President of the ANC. The ANCYL's rise to significance was a phenomenon dating largely from the Mbeki era. It was during that era that the organisation felt sidelined.

Without doubt, the history of the ANCYL as the "kingmaker" within the ANC is clouded in the mystique of liberation discourse. On many occasions, the ANCYL's history was credited with acts of heroism, advancing platforms of open debates and the implementation of powerful mass-based strategies of resistance. The "kingmaker" role of the ANCYL to a certain extent defines its identity as being different from the

¹ Department of History, University of the Free State. E-mail: twalacm.hum@ufs.ac.za

² Polokwane has a special place in the African National Congress Youth League's (ANCYL's) history, having been the home turf of Peter Mokaba, the leader of the militant youth. So it was perhaps fitting that Mokaba's heirs were the self-appointed storm troops in the Polokwane Conference. Mokaba more than anyone epitomised the South African Youth Congress slogan of "Freedom or death, victory is certain" and later the ANCYL at their militant zenith. He could get the crowds moving with his "Kill the boer, kill the farmer" version of *uMshini Wami*. At some stage in the mid-1990s there were allegations that the firebrand Mokaba was a police informer. In the Limpopo Conference the legacy of the ANCYL under the leadership of Fikile Mbalula, continued to exhibit itself as the "kingmaker".

³ For more information see T Lodge, "The ANC and the development of party politics in modern South Africa", *Journal of Modern African Studies* 42(2), June 2004, pp. 189-219.

ANC as the mother body. Over the years, the ANCYL has pronounced that the ANC is rich with leaders of particular qualities and competencies from whom it selects a “king”.

The ANCYL has since its formation in 1944 and during the exile years as the ANC Youth Section⁴ and presently as an autonomous organisation had a profound impact on the operations of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) and on the ANC itself. It produced a number of leaders who later occupied senior positions in the ANC. Those leaders played an influential role in shaping the political thinking of the ANC which impacted significantly on the political landscape of South Africa at different stages of the transformation processes. Although the ANCYL does influence the decisions of the ANC, there has as yet not been any comprehensive study undertaken on its work and its impact on the ANC as the “mother body”. Mokoditloa Eliakim Moemi, one of the ANCYL leaders prior to the Limpopo Conference, wrote the following about the organisation:

“The organization has been described as a reservoir of leadership for the ANC as many of the great leaders were drawn from among the ranks of the ANCYL. It has also been considered as a preparatory school for the ANC because most leaders were trained and prepared in the traditions, as well as practices, of the ANC within the ANCYL before they were ready to assume the leadership reins of the ANC itself... The ANCYL changed the political approach of the ANC in the mid 1940s and also assumed the role of ‘king maker’ in the ANC during the 1949 conference of the ANC by successfully lobbying for its chosen candidate to become ANC President against a popular incumbent.”⁵

It is not the intention of the author to discuss the role played by the “old ANCYL” of the 1940s in this article, but reference to its experience in the development of the ANCYL after its unbanning in 1990 could shed some valuable insight into its

⁴ The ANCYL was banned with all other political organisations and could not operate legally during the period 1960 to 1990. With the 1976 Soweto uprising and other related youth uprisings and the subsequent repression of these groups by the government, many young people went into exile and committed themselves to fighting against the government. The NEC of the ANC in exile realised the need to form the ANC Youth Section in 1978 which was to ensure that popular youth struggles would not be lost and the vibrancy brought by the youth would not be snuffed out. The ANC Youth Section was to ensure that political education would filter down to the youth and that underground structures of the ANCYL would be organised within South Africa. With the influx of the 1976 detachment of youth who swelled the ranks of the ANC in exile, the ANC upgraded its youth structures outside the country. It held its second National Youth Conference in exile in Tanzania in 1985. The ANC Youth Section was staffed with young people in exile and formed part of the ANC's strategy to ensure a greater mobilisation of young people. It was also expected of this youth section to forge links with the international youth movements such as the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), the Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF) and the newly formed Pan African Youth Movement (PAYM) and to act as a preparatory school and reservoir for leadership of the ANC in the future. The ANC Youth Section was also instrumental in the establishment of the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in exile which provided proper education for young people who thus did not only acquire combat skills, but were taught self-discipline and what it meant to be a cadre of the ANC. For more information see S Morrow, B Maaba and L Pulumani, *Education in Exile SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992* (Cape Town, 2004), pp. 13-40.

⁵ ME Moemi, *The African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) in South Africa: An assessment of the political strategies and approaches within the Mass Democratic Movement (1944-2006)*, Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 2007, p. 1.

"kingmaker" role. The above statement by Moemi was clearly exhibited at the Limpopo Conference where the ANCYL supported Jacob Zuma at the expense of Thabo Mbeki for the Presidency of the ANC. Supporting Zuma, who was being prosecuted for corruption but who was undoubtedly among the favourites for Mbeki's succession, could be considered as an opportunistic decision by the ANCYL.⁶ In essence the ANCYL wanted to show Mbeki that they are the "kingmaker" in as far as influencing the choice of the ANC's leadership. Amongst the current large pool of the ANC's international and local leadership, the league has yet to explain Zuma's distinct leadership qualities. How does Zuma stand above the rest in the ANC and country? Musa Ndlovu, a lecturer in Media Studies at the University of Cape Town, contends that the league's tendency to explain itself only within the ANC structures while it wished Zuma's leadership to extend beyond those structures was irrational and motivated by anxiety that its candidate might not be approved by the majority of South Africans.⁷

Prior to the Limpopo Conference, the ANCYL, as a youth organization, refused to be reduced to a subaltern component of the ANC, but wanted to be recognized as an autonomous body which has an influence within the ANC. To show its autonomous status the youth league holds its own conferences, elects its leaders, produces its resolutions, and establishes its programme. Therefore, by its nature, the youth league is meant to adopt a critical approach in relation to the ANC, but in a constructive way. With its role as the "kingmaker", the author argues that it carries its own political identity. Its identity is sometimes distinct from that of the ANC. The ANC's inclinations toward dominating the ANCYL were sometimes successful but prior to the Limpopo Conference the youth league decided to go aloof. The issue of independence and autonomy *vis-à-vis* the mother body represents a major feature of the interaction between these two organisations and also reveals an important aspect of the ANCYL's identity. A million-dollar question asked was to whether Mbeki would accept the outcomes of the Limpopo Conference and would work together with Zuma if chosen as President of the ANC or not. It was during this period that the might of this organisation was felt when it vigorously campaigned for Zuma. It was clear that the long standing of the ANCYL of being the "kingmaker" was in continuance. It would seem risky to argue that a component of a political organisation, like the ANCYL, was insignificant while it was able to provide a potentially crucial support base in the race for leading positions in the ANC. The article seeks to answer the following questions:

⁶ Zuma was suspended by the ANC leadership, following his removal from cabinet as Deputy President on account of allegations that, among others, he had received a bribe from an arms manufacturing company, through the Durban-based businessman, Shabir Shaik, in return for ensuring that the company gets the tender to sell arms to the South African government.

⁷ *Cape Times*, 4 July 2008.

- Given the history of the ANCYL, was it its tradition to push for its candidate for the presidential position of the ANC or did this only happen during the Limpopo Conference in order to spite Mbeki who appeared to have been at loggerheads with the league?
- Which strategies were employed by the ANCYL in an attempt to position Zuma as the preferred candidate for the ANC's presidency despite the fact that he had corruption cases hovering around his head?
- What are the weaknesses of the ANCYL in the post-Limpopo Conference period?
- Prior to and after the Limpopo Conference of the ANC, was the ANCYL not overshadowed by its militaristic approach in handling the leadership question within the ANC?
- After the Limpopo Conference, due to the influences of the ANCYL, numerous changes were seen in the organisation structure of the ANC. This ultimately led to the recalling of Mbeki as the President of South Africa in September 2008. What were the reasons that propelled this organisation to call for the "recalling" of Mbeki?
- Did the ANCYL's role as the "kingmaker" play any healing role to the problems of factionalism facing the ANC?

In order to understand and answer the questions raised above, a brief historical background to the formation of the ANCYL could help in tracing as to why this organisation is mainly referred to as the "kingmaker" within the ANC circles. The influence of the ANCYL is shown here through individual stories, newspaper clippings as well as some secondary sources on the history of the league. It should however be noted that for its 65 years of existence, the ANCYL was not in all instances portrayed as the "kingmaker" because at some point it was organisationally weak, hence marginalised.

2. A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE FORMATION OF THE ANCYL

In the 1940s with the intensification of the policies of segregation in South Africa and the marginalisation of the ANC, there emerged a new breed of members from the ANC, who were younger and more militant. In the history of the ANC, the ANCYL is a legend that rhymes with "radicalism" and "militancy".⁸ This younger generation had observed that the ANC was not making any impact on the successive regimes and that all forms of peaceful protest available to the ANC were not producing the desired results as per their expectations. Therefore, the formation of the ANCYL

⁸ R Botiveau, "The ANC Youth League or the invention of a South African youth political organization", *Politique Africaine* 104, December 2006, p. 8.

in 1944 changed the ANC from the organisation it was in the 1930s to the mass movement it became in the 1950s.⁹ According to these young and militant leaders, it was necessary to adopt new tactics and new ways of pursuing the struggle for the rights and freedom for majority of the oppressed masses in South Africa. There were many leaders who gave their support to the formation of the ANCYL. Most notable of these leaders were MA Lembede, W Sisulu, NR Mandela, OR Tambo, AP Mda, MR Sobukwe and N Mokhele. These leaders had become dissatisfied with the forms and tactics used by the ANC in advancing the course of the struggle but their political approach was of internal dimension and they considered themselves an integral part of the ANC.¹⁰ Their militant stance in dealing with all forms of oppression led these leaders to be regarded as the out-of-line hotheads by their elders.¹¹

The formation of the ANCYL was in response to the resolution of the ANC's Annual Conference of 21 December 1942 which indicated: "This annual conference of the African National Congress authorizes the Executive to institute a Youth League of the African National Congress to include students at Fort Hare."¹² The 1943 annual conference also adopted a similar resolution. In the light of the above-mentioned conferences on the formation of the ANCYL, Xuma was faced with no option except to support its formation. Although Xuma agreed to its formation, this posed a great challenge to his leadership.¹³ The formation of the ANCYL was instrumental in reforming the ANC as the mother body from within.¹⁴

After several preparatory meetings and consultations with the ANC leadership, especially Dr AB Xuma who was the President, the ANCYL was formally formed at the meeting held at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg in April 1944. The organisation was opened to all Africans between the ages of 12 and 40. It aimed at promoting national consciousness and unity among African youth, assisting and reinforcing the ANC and, finally, promoting education, culture and moral values among African youth. In that meeting Lembede became the first President of the

⁹ I Liebenberg, "Resistance by the SANNC and the ANC, 1912-1960", in I Liebenberg, B Nel, F Nortan and G van der Westhuizen (eds), *The long march – The story of the struggle for liberation in South Africa* (Pretoria, 1994), pp. 12-14.

¹⁰ DT McKinley, *The ANC and the liberation struggle* (London, 1997), pp. 16-17. See also R Suttner, *The ANC underground in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2008), pp. 19 and 43.

¹¹ *Saturday Star*, 22 December 2007. For more information see N Mandela, *Long walk to freedom The autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (London, 1994), pp. 111-114. See also L Mathebe, *Bound by the tradition The world of Thabo Mbeki* (Pretoria, 2001), pp. 79-80.

¹² T Karis and GM Carter (eds), *From protest to challenge A documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882-1964 2* (California, 1973), pp. 199-205.

¹³ SD Gish, *Alfred B. Xuma African, American, South African* (London, 2000), p. 130.

¹⁴ For more information see M Benson, *The African patriot The story of the African National Congress of South Africa* (London, 1963), pp. 102-118.

ANCYL¹⁵ and Mandela was elected Secretary. The ANCYL sought to infuse the black ideology in its members. It expressed its views that “freedom, democracy, Christianity and human decency could not be attained until all ‘races’ in South Africa participated therein”.¹⁶ Its developing philosophy of “Africanism” revolved around the concepts of race-pride, self-reliance and “Africa for Africans”.¹⁷

It was the 1944 generation of the ANCYL that discarded the pacifist methods of the struggle employed by the ANC until then. It brought about a change in the ideological conceptualisation of the ANC itself, particularly on tactical issues relating to the advancement of the liberation struggle. These younger activists were impatient with moderate tactics and the failure of the ANC to develop into a mass movement.¹⁸ It was however surprising that Xuma later became less willing to embrace the vision of the ANCYL as well as its developing autonomous powers and viewed it as a pressure group. He realised that the newly formed organisation wanted to push the ANC in a more militant direction. He sometimes referred to its leaders as “kindergartens”.¹⁹ This belittling of its leadership was not viewed favourably by the ANCYL members. Rather than encouraging break-aways, Xuma felt compelled to allow criticisms from within, even if it came from colleagues whom he deemed politically inexperienced.²⁰

Through the influence of the league which exercised its “kingmaker” status, Xuma was later replaced by Dr JS Moroka. It was under Moroka’s leadership that the ANC undertook militant struggle tactics which were underscored by the 1952 Defiance Campaign Against Unjust Laws. In that campaign, yet another member of the ANCYL from the 1944 generation, Mandela, was charged with leading it as “Volunteer in Chief”. As the ANC got more radical and militant, the apartheid government tightened the screws of oppression. This, however, led to the 1956 Treason Trial and later in 1963 the Rivonia Trial. By the time the Rivonia Trial started,

¹⁵ The main instigator of the ANCYL was Anton Lembede. Inspired by the ideologies that were spreading elsewhere in Africa and North America, he developed an ideology known as “Africanism”. He intended to break with the tradition of the liberal and integrationist ideology of the ANC’s founding fathers. See E Feit, “Generational conflict and African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress, 1949-1959”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5(2), 1972, pp. 181-202.

¹⁶ M Motlhabi, *The theory and practice of resistance to apartheid a social-ethical analysis* (1985), p. 41.

¹⁷ The ANCYL also differentiated between what it called the “two streams of African Nationalism”. It argued that the first stream centred around Marcus Garvey’s slogan of “Africa for the Africans” which was based on the “Quit Africa” slogan and on the cry “Hurl the white man into the sea”. The other stream of African Nationalism was said to be “moderate” and was which the ANCYL professed. The ANCYL took account of the situation in South Africa and realised that the different racial groups were permanently based in Africa.

¹⁸ T Lodge and B Nasson, *All, here, and now Black politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (Cape Town, 1991), p. 5.

¹⁹ <http://amandlandawonye.wikispaces.com/History+Has+Affirmed+The+Role+Of+ANC>, consulted on 16 October 2008, p. 3.

²⁰ Moemi, p. 27.

the ANC and ANCYL had already been amongst the banned organisations. Here another member of the 1944 generation, OR Tambo, was charged with international mobilisation in his capacity as ANC President.²¹

The above description of the ANCYL is an indication that it was capable of giving direction to the mother body, namely the ANC, influencing the decisions as to who would become the President of the ANC. It was therefore not surprising that in December 2007, during the Limpopo Conference of the ANC, the ANCYL became instrumental in directing the presidential election, whereby Zuma was elected as the organisation's President. Long before the conference, the ANCYL had declared its support of Zuma ahead of Mbeki.

In an interview with Daniel "Oupa" Khoabane, a one-time youth activist in Thabong (Welkom) during the 1980s, he had the following to say about the "kingmaker" status of the ANCYL:

"It should be noted that even if Mandela and company managed to remove Dr Xuma from his position as President of the ANC, that was done with respect and there was a consultation with other stakeholders to do that. I don't think they claimed the 'kingmaker' status for having done that. This thing of 'kingmaker' should therefore be understood within a certain context and period in the history of the ANC. There is little relationship between what was done by the ANCYL in the 1940s and what is happening today."²²

3. THE ANCYL AND THE QUESTION OF SUCCESSION WITHIN THE ANC

As indicated in the introduction, the ANCYL is long accustomed to being the "kingmaker" in the ANC succession debates. Its involvement in the election process of the ANC's President did not start only some months before the Limpopo Conference. This tradition may be traced back to its early years. For example, in 1949 the ANCYL, armed with the new Programme of Action, lobbied extensively for the programme to be accepted within the ANC so that it could exert its influence in the affairs of the organisation. During this period, Xuma was approached by the ANCYL to accept and support the programme that aimed at radically changing the character of the ANC. Xuma was, however, hesitant and not in favour of this new Programme of Action. The leadership of the ANC under Xuma was of the opinion that the forms of protest proposed by the ANCYL were radical and that the masses of African people were not ready for such forms of protest which included mass boycotts, stay-aways, and the defiance of unjust laws.²³

At about the same time, there was a congress of the All Africans Convention and Dr JS Moroka had just been elected as its President. The ANCYL approached Moroka and pressured him to accept the Programme of Action and in return, he would

²¹ Karis and Carter, pp. 151-153.

²² *Twala collection*. Interview with Mr MD Khoabane, Bloemfontein, 5 November 2008.

²³ Liebenberg, p. 13.

be supported in his bid for the Presidency of the ANC. Moroka therefore supported the Programme of Action and it was also accepted by the 1949 Annual Conference of the ANC. In return for Moroka's support, the ANCYL supported him and lobbied extensively for his election as President of the ANC.²⁴ Having succeeded in that, it was clear that the ANCYL had assumed the role of the "kingmaker" in determining who becomes the President of the ANC. In later years the ANCYL became a potent force in succession debates in the entire history of the ANC until the banning orders were issued. Therefore, the last conference of the ANC held inside the country was in 1959.

After the unbanning of the liberation movements in 1990, the ANCYL continued where it had left off. Mokaba, at the time president of the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO),²⁵ chaired the rally held in a Soweto stadium on 24 February 1990 to celebrate Mandela's release. He had this to say: "Comrade President, here are your people, gathered to pay tribute to their messiah, their saviour whom the apartheid regime failed dismally to silence. These are the comrades and the combatants that fought tooth and nail in the wilderness... they toiled in the valley of darkness, and now that their messiah and saviour is released, they want to be shown the way to freedom."²⁶ On 2-6 July 1991, the ANC held its first conference inside the country in Durban. At this conference also, after lengthy deliberations, the ANCYL supported Mandela as the most favoured candidate for the ANC's Presidency.²⁷ Although it initially proposed that Tambo should be President, a compromise was later reached that Mandela should take over. Tambo, who served as President from 1969 to 1991, was elected the National Chairperson.²⁸ This was the only ANC Conference since the formation of the ANCYL that its chosen candidate was not considered, forcing it to compromise.

At another ANC National Conference held in 1994 at Bloemfontein, the ANCYL showed its might again by successfully lobbying for Mbeki to become the Deputy President of the ANC and later Executive Deputy President of the country in the Government of National Unity (GNU). The ANCYL viewed him as a matured candidate who could unite the various factions and who had the right credentials to

²⁴ A Luthuli, *Let my people go The autobiography of Albert Luthuli* (Cape Town, 2006), pp. 100-101.

²⁵ The ANCYL was relaunched in October 1990, marking the merger of the exile-based Youth Section with SAYCO. The ANCYL's leadership included SAYCO leaders in key positions, including Peter Mokaba as President. Provincial youth committees were established at regional and branch level to prepare the revival of youth structures. For more information see J Seekings, *Heroes or villains? Youth politics in the 1980s* (Johannesburg, 2007), p. 89.

²⁶ T Lodge, *Politics in South Africa From Mandela to Mbeki* (Cape Town, 2002), p. 11.

²⁷ *Twala collection*. Interview with Mr MD Khoabane, Bloemfontein, 5 November 2008.

²⁸ The ANCYL originally moved that Tambo should be made President owing to his life-long commitment and contribution to the liberation struggle. This did not mean that it had never supported Mandela. It also supported Chris Hani to be the Deputy President but the contention from the ANC's leadership was that Mandela should be made President and Thabo Mbeki Deputy President.

lead the ANC after the Mandela Presidency.²⁹ In the 1997 Mafikeng Conference, the ANCYL realised that the transition from Mandela to Mbeki should be a smooth process. It was therefore not surprising that during the run up to the 1997 conference the ANCYL nominated and supported Mbeki, despite the fact that Mandela as President had made it clear that he wanted Cyril Ramaphosa, the Secretary General of the ANC, to succeed him as President. William Mervin Gumede argued in his book, *Thabo Mbeki and the battle for the soul of the ANC*, that Mbeki would have loved it if the succession to him could be as relatively smooth as the transition from Mandela to him and that the next president would be a candidate who would preserve his legacy. That legacy included a competitive economy, the creation of a large black business class, and the repositioning of South Africa as the champion of poor nations and the driving force behind continental renewal.³⁰ According to Mbeki's supporters it was clear that Zuma was not the right candidate to pursue that.

Mbeki appointed Zuma as Deputy President in 1999 because he was not considered to be presidential material and he had confessed that he had no presidential ambitions. What Mbeki missed was that Zuma started working on his image as a statesman almost as soon as he took office. Because Mbeki was seen as inaccessible and unapproachable, rank-and-file ANC members took their problems to his deputy, who was almost always available. When Mbeki fell out with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1999 and refused to meet with trade union leaders for more than a year, Zuma acted as a conduit between them and the ANC. At the height of tensions between the partners in the tripartite alliance, Zuma was the point of contact for the SACP leadership to get their message across to Mbeki.³¹ The ANCYL also exploited that opportunity.

Before the ANC's National Conference in 2002 held in Stellenbosch, there had been talks of change in leadership. The alliance partners, COSATU and the South African Communist Party (SACP), were the ones who were vocal and calling for change in the leadership. Some sections within the ANCYL had, prior to the Stellenbosch Conference, raised the issue of supporting and nominating Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma for the position of National Chairperson to replace Terror Mosioua Lekota. This section of the ANCYL perceived Lekota as sowing division within the ANC by alleging tribal bias in favour of the Xhosas and Zulus. It was alleged that Lekota argued that representation at government level were skewed in favour of the Xhosas and Zulus, despite the bulk of the votes for the ANC coming from traditionally non-Xhosa and non-Zulu provinces. This allegation was duly discussed and dismissed by the ANCYL National Executive Committee.³²

²⁹ Twala collection. Interview with Mr MD Khoabane, Bloemfontein, 5 November 2008.

³⁰ WM Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the battle for the soul of the ANC* (Cape Town, 2005), p. 309.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

³² Moemi, pp. 67-68.

Confirming the role played by the ANCYL in supporting Mbeki during the succession debates in 2006, Zuma recalls the following:

“At the time the ANCYL under Peter Mokaba said Thabo Mbeki would be the next President. The ANCWL under Winnie Madikizela-Mandela said, yes, Thabo will be the next President.”³³

The above statement by Zuma attests to the fact that the ANCYL was instrumental in making Mbeki the President of the ANC. This gave the league more control powers in directing the leadership positions within the ANC. Analysing the succession race within the ANC, Aubrey Matshiqi refers to it as the battle of the “mind share”. He argued that when debates about succession between Zuma and Mbeki supporters intensified, supporters of Zuma, like the ANCYL, tried to create a candidate who was to be seen in contradistinction to Mbeki. Those who supported Mbeki did the same. When Zuma supporters were saying Mbeki was distant, aloof, intellectually dismissive, an alienating figure, and that power had become too centralised around him, they were saying that in order to portray Zuma as different from Mbeki. This head to head scenario of the leadership contest between Zuma and Mbeki was viewed as divisive by Matshiqi.³⁴ Following Matshiqi’s analysis, it may be argued that political conspiracy was one of the main drivers of the ANC’s succession battle but it is ironic that evidence to support that conspiracy theory is lacking.

As early as in 2004, the Gauteng Provincial Executive Committee of the ANC issued a media statement after its regular meeting to call for a debate on the succession of Mbeki. This call by the ANC in Gauteng sparked a furore, when it openly and publicly, for the first time in the history of the ANC, called for a leadership succession debate. The ANCYL, through its President, Mbalula, publicly argued that those who were calling for the succession debate were treating Mbeki unfairly since the Mafikeng and Stellenbosch Conferences had dealt with the matter of succession. The ANCYL further argued that there had not been a major shift in policy or politics to warrant a change in the current trajectory the ANC was taking. It therefore argued that it was clear that Zuma should be the next President of the ANC, and later the President of the country. This bold public declaration by the ANCYL forced the Gauteng Provincial Executive Committee to withdraw its call, stating that it was premature. However, other organs such as COSATU and the SACP, continued to pontificate on this matter.

On 31 May 2005, after its annual “lekgotla”, the ANCYL declared, through its President, Mbalula, that it would support Zuma as the successor of Mbeki. Less than a month later, the ANCYL condemned Mbeki’s supposed plans to remain at the head of the ANC in 2007. It was often said that Mbeki had the ambition of placing an ally in the race for his succession in order to continue to govern from “behind

³³ *Business Day*, 19 September 2006.

³⁴ A Matshiqi, *Development dialogues Monograph 9* (Isandla Institute, 2007), pp. 5-6.

the scenes". According to Mbalula, it was logical for Zuma to succeed Mbeki. On 14 June 2005 Mbeki relieved Zuma as South Africa's Deputy President. This was viewed as a political conspiracy against Zuma by Mbeki and his supporters. To remove him was an attempt to prevent him from being the President of the ANC and later President of the country. Zuma was said to have received a bribe from a French arms company.³⁵ Judge Hillary Squires stated that there was a generally corrupt relationship between Schabir Shaik and Zuma. The ANCYL pledged its support for Zuma and indicated that his right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty by a Court of Law should have been respected. After Zuma's sacking, the ANCYL provided a number of platforms for his fight-back campaign. The platforms included inviting Zuma and not Mbeki to the ANCYL's commemoration rally of the National Youth Day in 2005 and 2006.³⁶

One of the justifications for Zuma's support advanced by the ANCYL was the fact that his impeccable struggle credentials and personal sacrifices in the context of the ANC's history qualify him for the presidential post. It may be argued that such an argument was obvious and embarrassing to come from an organisation such as the ANCYL. Nobody disputed Zuma's noble and gallant fight against apartheid. It was also a known factor that this came at the expense of himself and his family. The question was how this experience differed from that of other anti-apartheid heroes. Why were the other leaders in the ANC not selected and campaigned for on that basis? The other reason for supporting Zuma was that the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) had mistreated him for a long time. The ANCYL argued that Zuma's image and reputation was tarnished by the NPA ahead of the Limpopo Conference in an attempt to thwart his chances of becoming the country's President. The league however failed to explain how Zuma's treatment by the NPA was different to the way other people were handled by the same agency. The league also failed to indicate how Zuma was strategically and ideologically different from Mbeki.

It became clear that the ANCYL's radical mobilisation for Zuma was also propelled by an announcement made by Mbeki in 2006 that he would be willing to stand for a third term as ANC President if the membership wanted him to stay on after the Limpopo Conference. The league opposed this move. Both leaders of the ANCYL, Mbalula and Zizi Kodwa, co-authored a position paper entitled *Two centres of power: Not a solution to our challenge*.³⁷ In this paper, it was argued that if Zuma should be elected President of South Africa and Mbeki retained the

³⁵ *Statement at the joint sitting of Parliament on the release of Hon. Jacob Zuma from his responsibilities as Deputy President*, Cape Town, 14 June 2005.

³⁶ *Twala collection*. Interview with Mr ME Moemi, Bloemfontein, 24 April 2008.

³⁷ The "two centres of power" theory pointed to a situation where the President of the ANC was not the President of the country. Therefore, in the case of the ANC, power would rest with the President of the ANC at Luthuli House on one hand and with the President of the country at the Union Building on the other.

position of President of the ANC, it would effectively grant Mbeki real power. The document argued that this could cause an unprecedented power struggle between the two and cause a good deal of conflict within the ANC. The paper further suggested that Zuma as the Deputy President of the ANC should succeed Mbeki as President of the ANC and that would pave his way to be the country's President.³⁸ The ANCYL regarded Mbeki as the main source of Zuma's problems as he availed himself for the nomination as the President of the ANC for a third term.

It was surprising that Mbalula's deputy, Reuben Motlaloga, broke ranks with Mbalula when he wrote a paper countering the one by Mbalula and Kodwa. In his article he argued that the views expressed by these two leaders were not discussed by the ANCYL. He further stated that the position paper did not deal with the issues of principle, but at its core, dealt with Mbeki's character.³⁹ Motlaloga's stance was an indication that not everybody within the ANCYL agreed with the intention of having Zuma as President of the ANC. Therefore, the question of being the "kingmakers" was also challenged by some members like Motlaloga who were within the organisation. Motlaloga was later expelled from the ANCYL after he had disowned the organisation's decision about the "two centres of power". It may be argued that the ANCYL used its militaristic approach and its status as the "kingmaker" in the handling of the leadership question before the Limpopo Conference.

On 6 September 2007, the ANCYL announced its latest election list at the Luthuli House, the ANC headquarters. It was not surprising to find that they had nominated Zuma ahead of Mbeki as President. In this meeting Mbalula speaking on behalf of the ANCYL, indicated that Zuma was their preferred candidate as the President of the ANC and of the country. Other leadership candidates included Kgalema Motlanthe for Deputy President; Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma for National Chairperson; Gwede Mantashe for Secretary General; Baleka Mbete for Deputy Secretary General and Mathews Phosa as Treasurer General.⁴⁰ This list of the ANCYL clearly indicated that Mbeki was no more trusted by the ANC's leadership. Aubrey Matshiqi, a political analyst at the Centre for Policy Studies in Johannesburg, stated that with this list the ANCYL was exercising its "kingmaker" power. He further indicated that if the League would not get all its candidates into the positions they desired, many would make it into the top six and the National Executive Committee (NEC).⁴¹

While the ANCYL in several provinces split because of the contest between Mbeki and Zuma, it was clear that Zuma would face an uphill battle in winning the support of the broader ANC structures in the run-up to the party's Limpopo Conference. The ANCYL revisited some of its older tactics and strategies and

³⁸ *City Press*, 11 September 2005.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Sowetan*, 7 September 2007; *Beeld*, 7 September 2007.

⁴¹ *Business Day*, 7 September 2007.

decided to vigorously lobby provinces, regions and influential branches of the ANC in preparation for the Limpopo Conference and to consolidate the work it had undertaken, namely that of making Zuma the President of the party. With the help of the ANCYL Zuma embarked on the road shows in the provinces in order to win the hearts and the minds of the ANC members. In many of these road shows, Zuma would use the issue of his corruption charges as having been politically motivated. In most cases these road shows were accompanied by incidents of tension between the Zuma and the Mbeki groups. The provinces which nominated Zuma as the ANC presidential candidate were the Free State, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. The provinces which nominated Mbeki included the Western Cape, North West, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape.⁴² Even if the Youth League leaders like Mbalula were sometimes accused of rhetoric speeches in campaigning for Zuma, the table below shows how they did their spadework in winning some important provinces in the nomination process:

PROVINCE	MBEKI	ZUMA
1. Western Cape	142	87
2. Free State	76	287
3. North West	186	88
4. Mpumalanga	37	263
5. Limpopo	224	210
6. Northern Cape	106	137
7. Eastern Cape	520	322
8. KwaZulu-Natal	9	580
9. Gauteng	94	262

Source: *Mail and Guardian*, 6 December 2007

Long before the announcement of the nomination results, the ANCYL in the Northern Cape placed an advertisement in the local newspaper declaring Zuma the winner. It said in the advertisement that the intention was to thank the ANC branches for their overwhelming nomination support for Zuma. This caused tensions in the province as other ANC members said the ANCYL's actions were a desperate bid to influence the outcome of the elections.⁴³

Addressing the media at Luthuli House on 28 November 2007 immediately after the provincial nominations, Mbalula boldly echoed the ANCYL's support for Zuma when he indicated:

"Even if the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) can again continue charging Zuma, we would not be discouraged from supporting our preferred candidate. There is nothing wrong

⁴² *Mail and Guardian*, 6 December 2007.

⁴³ *Sunday Times*, 25 November 2007.

with our position because it is principled. ANC structures have spoken both in quantity and quality in favour of our position. The arms deals against Zuma were ‘fictitious’ work ‘cooked up’ by some individuals over the past seven years. Only Zuma’s death will change our votes, and as the ANCYL we are not worried about a market reaction to a Zuma presidency.⁴⁴

In their strategies to support Zuma, the leadership of the ANCYL blasted Mbeki and criticised him for intentionally dividing the ANC further by continuing to contest the election when it was evident that the majority of party members did not want him to return as President. According to Mbalula, Zuma received 322 votes to Mbeki’s 520 in the Eastern Cape, a province where the Mbeki lobbyists had predicted that he (Mbeki) would win 90 % of the votes. He further argued that it would be difficult for the Mbeki group to convince ANC members who had supported Zuma during the nomination process. He stated that the secret behind Zuma’s successful campaigns was that he was more accessible to ordinary ANC members, something that Mbeki failed to do. Another strategy which worked for the ANCYL and Zuma was the ethnicisation of his candidature. Musa Ndlovu argued that Zuma used the Zulu royal house, not as an institutional custodian of culture and history, but as a platform from which to mobilise ethnic support.⁴⁵

Although there were criticisms against Zuma and the leadership of the ANC, the ANCYL threw its entire support to him. Mbalula indicated the following about their strategies:

“We monitored all their moves. We knew all their moves, where they met on a daily basis, their strategies and tactics. In fact, some of the people who they thought were in their camp, were actually our own people. We knew all the people who supported Mbeki and those who supported Zuma. That, for us, made things easier in terms of lobbying. We knew they were going to target Gauteng, but they didn’t have any chance... We would have expected the President to play a role that unifies rather than him being at the centre of the contest. We always thought there was a general understanding in the movement that the President must rise above all of us. He can’t impose himself as the leader of the ANC. It should rather be the members of the ANC who call for him to stand again. It is clear members have had enough of him and now want Zuma to lead the party. People say he has brains and experience, but we believe no leader is indispensable in the ANC. We had produced giants in this movement. This is the ANC of Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu. Mbeki and Zuma are not the first leaders and will not be the last. That is the point we must understand. If we inculcate the mentality that they (Mbeki and Zuma) are the alpha and omega, we are killing the organisation and misleading society.⁴⁶

Although publicly the ANCYL appeared to be firmly behind Zuma, party insiders were of the opinion that more than half of the league’s national executive committee did not support Zuma’s ambitions, and would rather see Mbeki remaining party leader.⁴⁷ Perhaps that was one of the reasons why Mbeki never pulled out

⁴⁴ *Citizen*, 29 November 2007.

⁴⁵ *Cape Times*, 4 July 2008.

⁴⁶ *Mail and Guardian*, 6 December 2007.

⁴⁷ *The Weekender*, 13 October 2007.

of the presidential race. Kodwa, the ANCYL spokesperson, denied that there were divisions. He stated the following about the perceived divisions:

"The fact that maybe one or two people had a difference of opinion during debates does not mean we are not united behind Zuma. If someone raises a different opinion, and that opinion does not coincide with the majority, then it's not the decision."⁴⁸

Molebatsi Masedi, a local chairperson of the ANC's Mokwape Edwin Malatji branch, wrote the following in the *Citizen* about Zuma being nominated by the majority for the ANC's Presidency:

"Now some of our leaders who are democrats are shocked, surprised and angry at this overwhelming support for Jacob Zuma by branches of the ANC and its leagues. Acting out of shock, surprise and anger, some of our leaders are taking to the streets to protest against the democratic choice. What is this, if not an anti-democracy march? Others, like National Chairperson Terror Lekota, all of a sudden remember that there is some truth that needs to be told about Zuma ahead of the conference... There is no way that we will allow the elite, with their unlimited access to the national media and other resources, to subvert the will of the majority of branches. We therefore are going to Limpopo to make the 'Zuma-gevaar' real by voting Jacob Zuma and Kgalema Motlanthe to the presidency."⁴⁹

4. THE ANCYL AND THE POST-POLOKWANE ERA

It was also clear after the defeat of Mbeki at the Limpopo Conference in 2007 that he was not trusted by the ANCYL. The President of the ANCYL, Mbalula stated:

"President Mbeki was made by the Youth League and was removed by the Youth League. That's how powerful we are."⁵⁰

Under Mbalula's leadership, the ANCYL had regained its status of being the "kingmaker". The Secretary General of the ANCYL, Vuyiswa Tulelo, stated the following long after the Limpopo Conference:

"If he (Zuma) does not listen to us or fails to do that, then like all others that we have done before, we will take him to his door step and say *tata* (father), we think you have done enough; the time has come for you to move on."⁵¹

In an article in the *Mail and Guardian* entitled "ANCYL: The kingmakers confirmed the 'kingmaker' role of the ANCYL", Matuma Letsoalo quoted Mbalula as saying:

"People did not believe us when we told them we were going to rewrite history at this conference. It was war. To have Jacob Zuma elected as the President of the ANC in this conference was war. And we won. This demonstrated the power the youth league now holds within the former liberation movement."⁵²

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Citizen*, 11 December 2007.

⁵⁰ *City Press*, 23 December 2007.

⁵¹ *Cape Argus*, 20 June 2008.

⁵² *Mail and Guardian*, 3 January 2008.

After the victory at the Limpopo Conference and the announcement by the NPA, the ANCYL further argued that there was a political conspiracy against Zuma and his victory as the ANC's President. Mbalula stated that the decision to charge Zuma was not a decision by the judiciary but by the state and that the campaign was being led by Mbeki. This meant that Mbeki had unscrupulously forged, fabricated, and invented the case against Zuma. Mervyn Bennun, an honorary research associate in the Faculty of Law at the University of Cape Town, wrote in *Business Day* that Mbalula's statement was divisive and dangerous because it was undermining the independence of organs like the NPA. Bennun argues that in terms of Section 179, the Constitution established the NPA for the task of instituting criminal proceedings on behalf of the state, and prescribes that it must exercise these functions without fear, favour or prejudice.⁵³ Bennun noted the following about the Zuma question:

"The ANC does not own South Africa, but it appears its NWC [National Working Committee] and the ANCYL are determined to confuse themselves with the state. This is aggravated by their claim that Zuma would not get justice; combined with the accusations against Mbeki, it appears the only possible definition of 'justice' that would satisfy them is one that exonerates Zuma without even a trial and regardless of the evidence against him. Unless they bring their accusations against Mbeki into the realm of our law, the manner of their making has the effect of denying Mbeki what they are demanding for Zuma."⁵⁴

From Bennun's statements it is clear that Mbeki could not have influenced the NPA to open charges against Zuma. The ANCYL's statement purely lied about the functioning of the NPA. Mbalula's claim could, however, suggest the following: the Constitution was being subverted; and attempts were made to defeat or obstruct the course of justice. It is important that the ANCYL and in particular Mbalula, should have brought the matters about Zuma's political conspiracy to the relevant stakeholders like the NPA rather than making rhetoric statements which could incite people against Mbeki as well as the NPA.

The ANCYL through its President, Malema, pledged it would take up arms and kill for Zuma. This was announced during the Youth Day rally held at the Thaba

⁵³ *Business Day*, 8 January 2008. The NPA Act 32 of 1998 states the following: The National Director of Public Prosecutions must advise the Minister and may make recommendations on all matters relating to the NPA and the administration of the criminal justice as a whole. To enable the Minister to exercise final responsibility over the prosecuting authority, the act provides that the National Director shall, at the request of the Minister (a) furnish the Minister with information or a report with regard to any case, matter or subject dealt with by the National Director or a Director in the exercise of their powers, the carrying out of their duties and the performance of their functions; and (b) provide the Minister with reasons for any decision taken by a Director in the exercise of his or her powers, the carrying out of his or her duties or the performance of his or her functions. Furthermore, the act states that the NPA shall be accountable to Parliament in respect of its powers, functions and duties under this act, including decisions regarding the institution of prosecutions. For more information on the NPA Act of 1998 see <http://www.doj.gov.za/legislation/act>, consulted on 17 October 2008.

⁵⁴ *Business Day*, 8 January 2008; *Cape Times*, 23 January 2008.

Nchu Stadium on 16 June 2008.⁵⁵ Malema delivered his speech in the presence of Zuma, therefore Zuma could be expected to call him to order for inciting people, but he did not. When he ascended the podium, Zuma's speech started well. He spoke out against the ANCYL's indiscipline, hooliganism and violence that prevailed in its national conference in Mangaung (Bloemfontein). The ANC's initial anodyne response was that the ANCYL was an autonomous body entitled to articulate its own policies and positions.⁵⁶ In an open letter to Zuma which leaked to the media, Mbeki stated: "I find it strange in the extreme that today cadres of our movement publicly declare a determination 'to kill' to defend your own cause, the personal interests of 'the personality', Jacob Zuma."⁵⁷ With the above statement to Zuma, Mbeki was reminding him of the respect that the youth members should show. This was usually done by the ANC leaders when the youth members went astray. Mandela, for example, called Peter Mokaba to order about the "Kill the Boer, kill the farmer" slogan. Mandela reminded him that the ANC was older and bigger than him. He instructed him to stop it and Mokaba listened.

Eventually, following a public outcry of the statement made by Malema, the ANC cautioned loftily against statements that might inflame emotions or undermine the position of the party which preached unity. The Human Rights Commission (HRC) threatened to take Malema to court if he would not apologise. The Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) also laid charges against Malema. Like other political analysts Matshiqi thought that the question of "kingmaker" was taken too far by Malema's statement. He was hardly impressed with Malema and stated:

"Malema's comment was disappointing, stupid and uncalled for. I think he is using this language because it's the only way he can sustain his position. In a sense, that kind of language will alienate some young people."⁵⁸

Not all members of the newly elected ANC leadership were impressed with Malema's statements. Kgalema Motlanthe who had been elected Deputy President of the ANC during the Limpopo Conference publicly reprimanded Malema and distanced himself from the statements he had made during the Youth Day Commemoration. Motlanthe indicated that Malema's statement to "kill for Zuma" was reckless.⁵⁹ The ANCYL, exhibiting its might as the "kingmaker", confronted Motlanthe and said that he should stop to differ with people in party positions in public. It was surprising

⁵⁵ Malema faced outrage and a potential lawsuit after his comments on Youth Day. The Human Rights Commission threatened legal action if he did not apologise within 14 days. Malema refused to retreat from his comments to "kill for Zuma". On 25 June 2008, he told the press conference that: "for sensitive ears, in future I will no longer use the word 'kill'. I will never say to any gathering people must be killed. After this exercise, I will never repeat the word kill. It was a lesson that when you operate under a particular political environment, you have to be careful."

⁵⁶ *Saturday Weekend Argus*, 21 June 2008.

⁵⁷ *The Star*, 31 October 2008.

⁵⁸ *City Press*, 22 June 2008.

⁵⁹ *The Star*, 30 June 2008.

that other leadership members like Gwede Mantashe, Secretary General of the ANC, defended Malema and argued that it would be wrong for the party leadership to condemn him. Mantashe issued the following statement:

“We refuse to condemn him because if we do that, we risk destroying him at this young stage. We should guide him through this phase until he is confident. It is people who do not take responsibility to nurture young people who will jump to the Human Rights Commission.”⁶⁰

One tends to disagree with the above sentiments by Mantashe on the basis that Malema, as the youth leader, should have known that such statements could be interpreted differently. Therefore, to argue that he is still young is a naïve excuse from a national leader of Mantashe’s stature. The Deputy Secretary General, Thandi Modise, also defended Malema by indicating:

“As a youth league leader Malema was attempting to express what the youth league feel about Zuma. It is unfortunate that everybody takes it [Malema’s comments] very literally.”⁶¹

Instead of condemning Malema, many leaders of the tripartite alliance advanced the following reasons in his defence: Malema’s remarks merely symbolised discontent with the way Zuma has been dealt with by the state institutions; Malema’s comments were a warning against state apparatus which wanted to destroy Zuma; people should look at his intentions rather than to look at the words he said; those who were condemning Malema were trying to spite Zuma; Malema’s comments were not out of context with what the ANCYL has been saying over the past few years; and people are pushing Malema to retreat so that there must no longer be a voice to defend Zuma.⁶² All the above utterances were an indication that for some people the ANC and the alliance partners, Malema’s comments were justified. However, this had a negative impact on the image of the ANCYL which Malema represented as its President.

Motlanthe was also at loggerheads with the ANCYL when he co-opted Trevor Manuel, who was perceived to be a Mbeki loyalist, on the deployment committee which was tasked to make decisions on the candidate lists. Motlanthe defended his stance by cautioning that the deployment committee should not be turned into a jobs-for-pals agency, but the ANCYL viewed that inclusive approach as providing refuge for Mbeki sympathisers.⁶³

Since the Limpopo Conference of the ANC, the ANCYL’s role and influence within the ANC has been growing from strength to strength. The ANCYL remained the strongest link within the ANC family. When the current ANCYL President, Julius Malema, announced that the league would mobilise the National Executive

⁶⁰ *Mail and Guardian*, 26 June 2008.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Sunday Independent*, 31 August 2008.

Committee (NEC) of the ANC to axe Mbeki, it became clear that Mbeki's days as the country's President were numbered. An endorsement of this decision by the NEC came as no surprise and proved that the ANCYL remains a pillar of strength within the ANC. It proved the ANCYL's stance of being the "kingmaker" in as far as the politics of the ANC are concerned. On 22 September 2008, Mbeki was asked by the ANC to step down as the country's President. This political crisis was sparked by a judgement in Pietermaritzburg by Judge Chris Nicholson that Mbeki's political rival, Zuma, would not be prosecuted for allegations of corruption as it had been invalidated on procedural grounds. Nicholson gave a damning judgement implicating Mbeki in a political conspiracy to thwart Zuma's presidential ambitions. It took courage, commitment, conviction, loyalty and discipline for Mbeki to accept a command from his party without resistance and contestation. It was also unfortunate that some of his cabinet ministers resigned in protest. Ironically, when these people assumed responsibilities as cabinet ministers, they took an oath to serve the country's citizens and not to worship Mbeki. Part of the reasons for the recall of Mbeki as the country's President was that the presidency was in crisis. With the "kingmaker" powers possessed by the ANCYL, it may be argued that the league contributed to the crisis that was said to be in existence.

5. CONCLUSION

The ANCYL is a mass-based organisation and in its 64 years of existence, it has become a renowned political and organisational preparatory school of the ANC. With its "kingmaker" approach, the ANCYL changed the character of the ANC. In some instances it managed to challenge its existing traditions and practices. This article therefore attempted to provide a broad understanding of the range and complexities of the history of the ANCYL. It also illustrated the ANC's predicament in dealing with the ANCYL. The article traces the reasons behind the ANCYL being regarded as the "kingmaker". To justify that, several examples were used in the article. The author argues that this became more evident prior and after the Limpopo Conference in December 2007. Although the ANCYL played such a significant role, one question asked is to whether it is the dominant force rather than Luthuli House or the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in as far as giving direction to the ANC. It also remains to be seen whether the ANCYL is an autonomous actor or used as a "political weapon" by other senior members of the party.