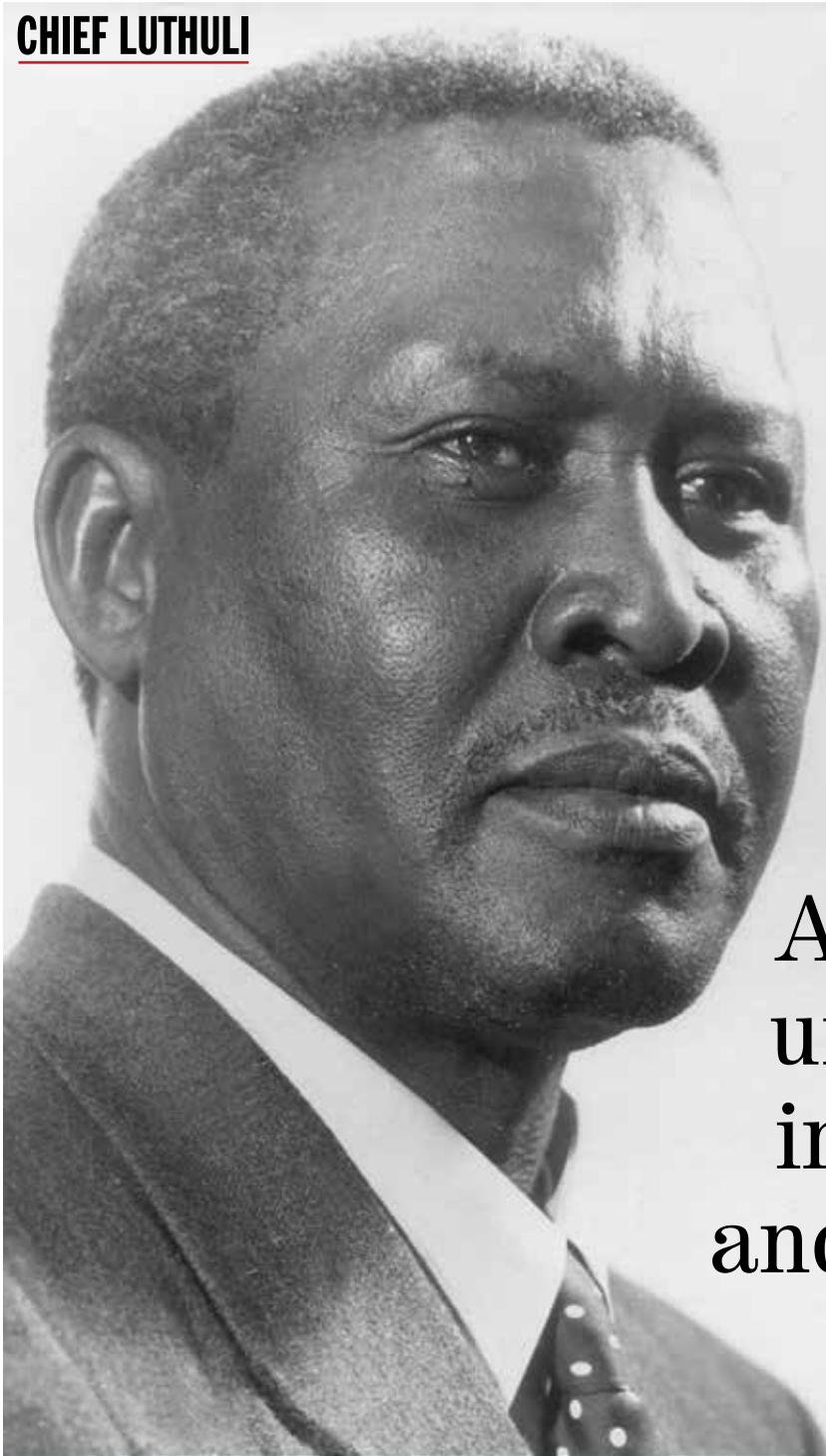


## CHIEF LUTHULI



A man who  
understood  
intellectual  
and spiritual  
strength

I am suggesting here, that after two decades of the most applauded constitution of our country, we may have entered a new period which necessitates its review.

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By Mongane Wally Serote

The historic meeting of the Veterans and Stalwarts of the ANC and the ANC National Working Committee (ANC NWC) held in Johannesburg in November 2016 put us face to face, eye ball to eye ball, with Chief Albert Luthuli's brave and breathless spirituality. I am suggesting here, that if anything, it would be absolutely correct for both the veterans and the ANC NWC to say: let us emulate Chief Albert Luthuli. It was at a time when the ANC was in deep crisis, when the then President of the of the organisation, John Dube, was ill, in the forties, that Luthuli took a step forward away from local politics towards national politics. He defeated Selby Msimang in a by-election. He was backed by Natal when he defeated AWB Champion and became the Natal Provincial representative of the ANC. In 1952, together with OR Tambo, he supported the Defiance Campaign and many other popular boycotts like the Alexandra bus boycott, the potato boycott, and in the process became closely allied to leading unionists like JB Marks and Moses Kotane of the Communist Party. He was elected to become the President-General of the ANC in 1952.

He was one of the most outstanding leaders of the South African liberation struggle. His fifteen year tenure as President-General of the ANC was a period which laid a firm basis for various qualitative leaps of the liberation struggle. Through these leaps and bounds, the ANC was able to mobilise the masses across rural and urban areas; the spectre of tribalism was transformed to become the defining process for the spectrum of being African. During his tenure, he, together with other leaders of the alliance, ensured that being African eventually crossed race and cultural divides, and offered all citizens of this country called South Africa a possibility for the formulation of the Freedom Charter.

When there was an attempt by the regime to suppress the will of the people through violent force, oppression and the exploitation of people by people, ordinary people, South Africans, within the non-racial context, led by the ANC at whose helm

was Luthuli, mounted the Defiance Campaign to oppose the enforcement of the apartheid laws and system. It is this defiance campaign, which mobilised a large number of people, men and women, across the colour line, to be prepared to go to jail, to face torture, to withstand detention without trial, face exile, go underground and to pick up arms against the violent actions of the regime.

The regime was hell-bent on defending and enforcing the apartheid system. In other words, all of these efforts, which translated to conviction, commitment and sacrifices, prepared citizens to be ready to even pay the ultimate price for freedom. After the

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passing of Chief Luthuli, decades later, in May 1996, a most unprecedented event happened, not only in South Africa, but the world over, as we all witnessed. This was the birth to one of the most progressive Constitutions in the world, born of struggle and sacrifice, a precious gift to our country and people, but also to humanity. Who was this man whose collective leadership laid the basis for this unprecedented gift, from the struggle, to the struggling masses?

Chief Albert Luthuli was born in the then Rhodesia in 1898. He was sent from Bulawayo to live with his Malome in South Africa. It is Bantu culture for a child to be nurtured in the context of the so called extended family, especially by a Malome, a male mother (maternal uncle) or a R Kagadi, a female father

(paternal aunt), to the child. Instead of talking about an extended family, I would like to say, the African Primary Institution (API) whose constitution is the philosophy and institution whose basis is: *Motho ke Motho ka Batho/Umuntu ngu Muntu nga Bantu*. In this context, the child will be brought up by many people, men and women, who are cultured in this institution of Botho/Ubuntu. From a tender age, the child will learn to negotiate relations, different characters and demands or offerings, and to live collectively. These institutions prepare the child, a man or woman later, through a myriad of other institutions: example Koma (initiation), Bongaka, (holistic African healing systems) Dikgosi (African rulers). Luthuli was brought up within this context. He later became an Inkosi within this context. He was to live for 17 years within this context hair to hair with his people.

He founded his being an African in Christianity, and Christianity found African spirituality through him – the two being married into one. Both contexts are still being lived in without contradiction by millions of Bantu South Africans, although it is most fragile now. It was most abused by the colonial and apartheid systems. Therefore, this marriage is navigated with great skill by the people. It is so, because its cultural context, which has to be interpreted from a Bantu and African context, may not be so interpreted in the context of western values and culture. There are conflicts and contradictions within it. Botho/Ubuntu, as a philosophy and institution, is, through Chief Luthuli, articulated as not being dissimilar to the Christian institution and philosophy. He became a lay preacher of the Methodist Church. He went for a higher teacher's training at Adams College. There he focused on his studies and he said: it was a world of its own “one in which we were too busy with our profession to pay more than passing attention to what happened elsewhere...”.

That “elsewhere” soon caught up with him, and stared him in the eye. When he was 30 years old, he joined the Natal Teachers' Union. He soon organised boycotts, he negotiated with white authorities. He became

the secretary and supervisor of the Adam's College Football team called the Shooting Stars. Like the Stars which claim the sky as their domain, Luthuli was able to spread the football idea, which educates, entertains and disciplines and encourages competition, throughout Natal and later throughout South Africa. It was, as the English saying goes: a moment when he cut his teeth in politics. It was also around this time that he spoke of a 'Muscular Mind', meaning, a healthy mind must be in a healthy body.

I dare to say that Chief Albert Luthuli – his upbringing, his being handed over to be brought up by his uMalome, the village context in which he was nurtured, and eventually his having to accept to be Inkosi at Groutville in 1935 – must assist us to ask the question: how did his primary nurturing and training, and later experiences, as Inkosi for 17 years, impact on his being, his experiences and later in his being a national leader of the oppressed?

All Bantu languages have formulated the philosophy, and created the institution which we call: Botho/Ubuntu. In isiXhosa or in Setswana, there is a concept of Udadu'bao/Rakgadi and uMalume/Malome respectively. Both are concepts and institutions which are similar. UMalume is a bearer of traditions, culture, customs, heritage, protocols and procedures within what I call the African Primary Institution (API). So also, is Rakgadi. Both concepts transform these individuals to become institutions, bearers and bedrocks of the API – male and female. They buttress the API, which is the foundation and base of communities. The life and times of Chief Albert Luthuli make demands on African intellectuals. They ask us: if being an intellectual means the instinct and training to study and to organise knowledge and to use that organised knowledge to further gather more knowledge, and to transform that knowledge and apply it; consciously and deliberately to seek to innovate it with the objective of breaking barriers and creating possibilities for the improvement of life and the further understanding of the universe as our environment; how have we done so,

with African knowledge as African intellectuals?

When, "in the 1980s pressure mounted on the ANC to put forward concrete proposals for a post apartheid constitutional order" (Kader Asmal) how was the "post apartheid" defined? Was it defined in African or Western terms? This question must be asked because South Africa is not a western country. It is an African country. African must mean that South Africa is part of the African continent, and therefore it must forever be wrenched from that past, where it was the colonial outpost of the west, to become part and parcel of the African Renaissance context. "Post apartheid" must also mean that the context of being African contradicts not only the colonial or apartheid interpretation of Africa, but

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that while on the one hand it must mean the life experiences of those who were oppressed by the system of apartheid, on the other hand, attention must also be paid to the fact that there was a life for this black majority, before colonialism and before the apartheid system. And therefore that the question must then be asked: what were the constitutional references of that life – before a people were alienated from who they were?

Of course, the devil here is in the detail within this context. How have the parts of the context been understood to become a collective which creates the Bantu and black context which must be a contribution to the diverseness of our Nation? If the primary context is the African Primary Institution, this by way of example, what is the reference

used to constitutionalise the myriad formations of the API, communities emanating from it and the other myriad of institutions around it?

I raise this issue in this manner for a reason. The reason is, even from a lay person's point of view: what is Roman Dutch law? Could it have been a Bantu South African law? Could it have posed the question: what is a Bantu in South Africa? Could it have been, as a philosophy emanating from an institution, part of which is the API? How does South Africa become a context of the Bantu, but also, how does the Bantu become the context of South Africa in the context of the non-racial African context?

This is not to undermine the current constitution of our country, but it is to ask how is it informed by the life experiences, knowledge, culture, heritage, protocols and procedures which are Bantu and non-racial African informed? The issue here is how is a Bantu African within the cultural diverse context of being South African defined? Could it be that, if this question is not answered, there is a possibility that Bantu Africans live a schizophrenic life? If an individual within a Bantu African culture, is a collective, and can be of either gender, does this define the experience of being Bantu as a subculture, or is Bantu culture a culture? Must this experience be ignored by the constitution and will those who have and still do experience it ignore it as a culture but live it as a subculture? I come to this detail to illustrate, from a lay person's point of view that the possibility exists, that Bantu South Africans may not feel an obligation to the constitution. That is possible, even as it not only protects their rights, but also gives expression and practice to their rights.

I am asking the question how was this institution – the API – founded, and what other institutions buttressed it? But also what is its current status as it was targeted by both the colonial and apartheid systems? Also, as it has shown immense resilience against the greatest odds, in its current state, can it be innovated to carry its contents and bestow its qualities of life in the 21st century, which is challenged by a need to create liveable conditions for all

forms of life, even as the constitution defends their rights, to be so bound by it.

A research which is currently at the initial stages and process of being conducted on the African Primary Institution, by an NPO called iARi, and funded by both the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and the Department of Traditional Affairs (DTA) has yielded, from 3 provinces, namely, Limpopo, Gauteng and Mpumalanga, what I call a complex reality for the Bantu's understanding of our constitution.

That 'reality' is expressed in terms which state that the constitution has empowered English and Afrikaner South Africans to own land which they stole from blacks and to retain it; that while English and Afrikaner South Africans use the constitution to strengthen white supremacy in a non-racial defined context, through the economic power they gained through the apartheid system, Bantu South Africans are becoming victims of the constitution and therefore have a tendency to reject it. If culture is politics, and politics is culture and can be the art of perceptions, does this augur well for the country? What happened? What is it which needs to be done to bring the Bantu Africans close to the constitution and the constitution close to them? I state categorically, that the constitution of our country is birthed by the struggle for freedom in our country; thus it does state that:

1. There is a common South African citizenship
2. All citizens are-
  - a. Equally entitled to the rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship
  - b. Equally subject to the duties and responsibilities of citizenship
3. National legislation must provide for the acquisition, loss and restoration of citizenship.

How is a common citizenship defined in the context of diversity, within which the majority experienced what Amilcar Cabral defines as having been "close to genocide", where that possibility was only curtailed because those who were to be genocided so to speak, were then transformed to

become the beasts of labour? What that means is that a great attempt was exercised to denude, but completely, anything of the cultural context of the beasts of labour, which would have defined them with a possibility that they were human. If it is so, how was that culture restored by the constitution?

Let me pursue this matter. If a people have been denuded of all human rights, and have been rendered beasts of labour, because everything which is them has not only been denied, but everything possible was done, short of decimating them, to ensure that they have no reference point about themselves but that which the oppressor and exploiter designates as them – if this has happened over three centuries, how is it possible that twenty years into their freedom, which was gained through utter sacrifice including through paying the ultimate

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price – death – that we can declare, without it being an extremely cruel mockery, that: All Citizens are “equally entitled to the rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship” and that they are “equally subject to the duties and responsibilities of citizenship”?

Where do these claims begin and how are they realised if who they have been before their cultural demise was achieved, has not been considered as factors which must determine whether they are citizens or not? What should have formalised its being mandatory, so that whatever happens, it is addressed; so that from a non-racial reference, systems are rolled out to create one Nation – a South African Nation – defined by its diversity? If in fact, there are no material systems put in place through non-racial activities, which express non-racialism; when who they

became by escalating who they were before being colonised, by engaging in protracted struggle, sacrifice and living the slogan: “Freedom or Death” is not practically expressed so that “National legislation must provide for the acquisition, loss and restoration of citizenship”?

18 years ago, President Mbeki put on the National agenda the agenda item that: there exists two nations in one state in our country: one black one white – and the late president, Nelson Mandela, had, in the early nineties, put on the national agenda, the issue of the Reconstruction and Development Programme of the Soul of the South African Nation. Both these postulations depend on material conditions for their expression and their becoming a reality. One, the former, can be measured by how in its expression it transforms the economic quality of the life of the people, especially of the oppressed; and the latter contributes to transform the quality base of the diverseness of the nation by ensuring National cohesion, and letting emerge a non-racial, non-sexist society; and both, if, in my view were postulations empowered by tenants of the constitution which translate into National legislation would have contributed to a fundamental change in the South African society and Nation.

What killed the discourse which should have emerged from the agenda set by Mbeki? How is it that the RDP of the soul of the country, even as it was stated by a person of the stature of Mandela, shrivelled and died? Can it be that it is because the issues have no context within the constitution? Could it be that the constitution was founded within the context where the justice which was meted out through the constitution neglected the fact that Bantu South Africans entered the freedom arena carrying baggage of no fruit from freedom? And these Bantu South Africans have not been able, through the constitution, bill of rights or no bill of rights, to determine how the negative history they carried from a past of oppression and exploitation would be permanently and as soon as possible eliminated?

That period emerged when everything then came to a halt

and became an issue for distortion, denial and destruction; as also an era dawned immediately afterwards, when whatever they were and did was a total focus on how to undo their long and unending present where they had to undo the intricate knots which bound them by being dehumanised, to servitude and being exploited and being held almost permanently hostage through state power and violence; as also, one day freedom was an event beginning to be a process, which had to be studied and understood – are these not issues of the constitution?

I am suggesting here, that after two decades of the most applauded constitution of our country, we may have entered a new period which necessitates its review. The objective must be to ensure that equality has a material base, as also the basis for that fundamental base is to further enrich the letter and spirit of the constitution by empowering the Nation not only to specifically create material advantage for the majority who were disadvantaged, but to also specifically address the RDP of the soul of the Bantu South Africans whose context and content will complete the diverse expression of the South African Nation.

There is no diversity, if the RDP of the Soul is not part and parcel of the diverseness of South Africa. But also, more important, there is no diversity if that diversity is not material based. Otherwise all other voices of the diversity are part of the expression of the people and country, but that of the Bantu South African is muted. The nation can enter this space, from its diversity and, empower the constitution to emancipate the Bantu African voice. This would enable and empower the nation to engage and seek expression and resolve the issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and the expression of the Bantu South African voice. What are the values, traditions, customs, culture, institutions which must express this emancipation, which were trampled upon, marginalised and in certain cases, an attempt made to destroy them? How, if this is known, must these be factored in tenants of the constitution so that the possibility of their being real and lived is emancipated?

I am also asking something else. Should it be a constitutional requirement, or amendment, which must empower the nation to roll out processes which destroy the two Nation state, and which let the expression of the RDP of the soul of the Bantu South African find expression? What is the container which must be created in the nation, which will allow for the content which must express in full, the missing part of our diverseness? In other words, is that container the constitution? How must the processes, programmes, institutions and projects which must articulate the Bantu South African part of the diverseness of our people and country be formulated

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as policy, legislated for, empowered both intellectually and materially? Here is where the elders and the youth must #.

The last time when I was at the Luthuli Museum, for a symposium, I left this place with a heavy heart. I had asked the question: Do we as a Nation, know how the President-General of the ANC, the late Albert Luthuli, who was one of the most outstanding leaders of the liberation struggle was killed by a train? Besides the many speculations which came forth, no one knew how it exactly happened. We know that he lived here, most of his life. We must know from that, that he was very

familiar with this terrain and the train – when it passed, where it passed, at what speed, how long it was and so on. He was the son of this place where he became one of the leaders who forged and let emerge a non-racial context. This man who, we as a nation, do not know how a train killed him in his home terrain received a Nobel Peace Prize in 1960. The world knew who he was.

It is Albert Luthuli who declared that “the road to freedom is via the cross”. Has this mighty burden, especially the political, heritage, cultural, economic, RDP of the Soul – disappeared since when the constitution of the land became the supreme law of our country in 1996 – in other words, since 20 years ago?

If not, and this is my way of going back to where I began, the veterans and stalwarts, together with the constitutional structures of the ANC, and also through the constitution of the country, must now put these matters high on the agenda of our Nation and country. We must put those items under stringent scrutiny. The veterans and stalwarts must now create the processes and programmes which must ensure that *# the cross must fall!*

It is an obligation which the generation of Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, together with the elders and youth of the country, must ensure that when they hand over the ANC to the next generation, renewed, anchored on the traditions, values, customs and culture which were forged in the struggle for freedom, it must be a renewed ANC, alive in the 21st century, part and parcel with progressive movements on the continent and the world. They must also ensure that South Africa is the motive force for the renewal of the African Continent, and that the continent will also have declared that *# the burden of slave mentality must fall*. Given the track record of the world and our continent – as the sun sets in the west – using the gains of our struggle for freedom, when history repeats itself within very different contexts, we must begin with a strong API which thrives within the diverse context of our nation anchored on both, our export to the world, as a continent. ■