M.M. Hala: Memoirs of an Umkhonto WeSizwe Cadre

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

at

Rhodes University

by

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August 2022

ABSTRACT

Born in Komani (Queenstown) in 1959 and detained for Congress of South African Students (COSAS) activities while still at school, Mzimasi Mike Hala departed South Africa via Swaziland in 1981 and joined uMkhonto WeSizwe (MK). Trained in Angola, Cuba and East Germany, he commanded Cacuso camp in Angola, until redeployed to South Africa in 1987 to work underground in Venda and Cape Town. Following the unbanning of the liberation movements in 1990, he was appointed Commander of MK's Transkei Region, where he was in charge of Chris Hani's personal security. For reasons of space, the memoir does not proceed beyond his integration into the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and second-in-command of SANDF Group 46 in Mthatha. Besides its value as a primary source of previously undocumented information, the thesis seeks to bridge the gap between the academic literature on MK and the lived experience of MK soldiers. Having considered both the academic literature and the published MK memoirs in Chapter One, the thesis refers back to the literature in narrative chapters Two to Five. Consolidating its findings in its conclusion, the final chapter is divided into three sections: the political culture of MK, MK gender dynamics and the consequences of the political merger of the "exiles," including MK, and the "inziles" who subsequently came to dominate the ANC.

Chronology of Events

Date	MM Hala	Significant Events
1959	Born Komani	Hendrik Verwoerd apartheid Prime Minister
		Independence of Angola Civil War: MPLA vs UNITA
1976		Soweto Uprising
1979	Continue Studies in Mdantsane: Politicised. Detained	
January 1981	Join MK via Eswatini	Matola Raid by Apartheid Defence Forces
March 1981	Arrive Angola. Madenoga Detachment	
Sept 1982	Training East Germany	
Feb 1983	Return to Angola as Commander at Cacuso	
Aug 1983		Malanje. MK "Eastern Front" against UNITA
Dec 1983 May 1984		Mutiny
		Nkomati Accord
Dec 1984	Special Forces Unit training in Cuba	
July 1986	Return from Cuba. 5 months training MK in Angola	
Jan/Feb 1987	Hatfield, Harare. Awaiting deployment to South Africa	
March 1987	Venda – 5 months	
Sept 1987 – Oct. 1988	Cape Town	Dec. 1987. General Holomisa comes to power in Transkei
1989	Three weeks specialized training "Military Combat Work," Moscow.	
Feb 1990	Deployed to Mthatha after De Klerk speech	De Klerk unbans political organisations
July/August	Appointed Regional Commander in Transkei	Chris Hani arrives Mthatha. Suspension of armed struggle
Nov 1990		Craig Duli Attempted coup
June 1991	Tried in KZN for smuggling arms from Transkei	
Aug/Sept 1992		Bhisho Massacre Record of Understanding
May 1994	New South Africa	

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PREFACE

Reading the books written by fellow-comrades who have contributed to the liberation of South Africa, I felt that I too had a story to tell. Much as we were all trained in the camps of Angola, our stories cannot always be the same. Unlike many others, I was fortunate to be selected for advanced military training in other countries, and my experiences in Venda, in Cape Town and, as Regional Commander, in the former Transkei, were also in many ways unique and deserving of record.

I moreover wished to shed light on some aspects of MK history, especially that related by people who were never in our camps. This motivated me to interact at university level in search of more primary material, but also to expose myself to academic writing, enabling me to make an informed comparison with other material, whether written by my comrades or by others who claim knowledge of the ANC and MK.

Many thanks to Professor Robert. Van Niekerk of the Institute for Social and Economic Research, who first introduced me to Rhodes University, and to his successor, Professor Nhlanhla Mbatha, who availed me its staff and its resources, not forgetting Bulelani Mothlabane, whom I could even call after hours. Extra special thanks are also due to my home office colleague, Ms. Nokuthula Ngcenge, who ensured that my assignments were typed neatly, accurately and submitted on time, even at the cost of her own weekends. I thank her so much.

That I have today managed to submit my thesis is not a miracle, but due to the two co-supervisors who have made this a reality, Professor J. Peires and Dr S. Magadla. They truly complemented each other: Prof Peires, my old friend from Mthatha, clarifying and contextualizing the historiography of the past, and Dr Magadla, sensitizing me to gender and social aspects, opening my eyes to the historiography of the future. I would not be where I am had they not devoted their time in trying to help me.

To my comrades with whom I stayed in the bushes of Angola: you have helped me so much, sharing memories and advice. Many of the things we did, I had forgotten, but you always reminded me. Thank you very much comrades, T. Dukumbana, D. Hatto, L.Hlekani, V. Makeke, P. Matikinca, M. Mtimkhulu, M. Musi, Mfanelo Ndlela, P. Ngqumba, Z. Ngwetsheni, and P.Ximiya.

In remembering our fallen and deceased comrades, I can assure you that everything I have written here bears true witness to the things we achieved together. Some of you died before we attained

our freedom, others by the deadly Covid-19. To all my dear comrades, I say we all made our sacrifices to free the people of South Africa, black and white. What we see today is not what we fought for. I salute you all my comrades.

When I started this degree, I was not sure if I could finish it. The support I got throughout from my family, my wife, Nikiwe Nokuphumla, my son Thandolwethu, and my daughter, Sinovuyo, was amazing. Time and again they would ask about my progress, and if I needed any help, proof-reading for example, they were always ready to assist. Thanks very much, my good family, for all your support.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Academic and Secondary Sources

The earliest effort to document the armed struggle of uMkhonto WeSizwe before 1990 was most probably the relevant chapters of the first volumes of the SADET [South African Democracy Education Trust] project *The Road to Democracy in South Africa* , published between 2004 and 2010.[1] Although the SADET project was initiated by President Thabo Mbeki, it made every effort to be non-partisan and inclusive, giving adequate space to Pan-African Congress, Black Consciousness and the mostly white Liberal Party. The SADET chapters on MK were written by Bernard Magubane, an ANC exile from the University of Connecticut, USA, and Greg Houston, a former colleague of Comrade Mzolisi Mabude in the Political Science Department of the University of Transkei. Neither of these writers, though well-regarded and connected in ANC circles, had personally participated in underground activities much less in the armed struggle itself. As a result, their chapters, although based on solid information and livened up by personal interviews, concentrated on establishing the basic facts of MK history – who did what, where and when? – laying a strong foundation, rather than providing an interpretation of their own.[2]

In 2009 appeared James Vumile Ngculu's landmark book, *The Honour to Serve: Recollections of an Umkhonto Soldier*, published by David Philip, one of the mainstream publishing houses in South Africa, and still regarded by MK veterans, including myself, as the gold standard compared to which all other MK writings should be judged.[3] Even before the appearance of his book, Comrade Ngculu was known to all of us as a very senior and trustworthy MK commander. Grown up in Cape Town, he departed South Africa after the youth uprising of 1976, headed for the Novo

[1] The first informed academic writing on MK was most probably that of Lusaka-based journalist and ANC member Howard Barrell in his Oxford University thesis, "Conscripts to their Age: African National Congress Operational Strategy, 1976-1986" (D Phil, Oxford 1993). As its sub-title indicates, it considers MK from the perspective of Lusaka-based National Executive rather than that of the MK soldiers themselves.

[2] SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa* , Volumes 1,2,4 (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1904-1910); Volume I, Chapters 2, 7; Volume 2, Chapter 9; Volume 4,Chapter 20.

[3] James Ngculu, *The Honour to Serve: Recollections of an Umkhonto Soldier* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2009).

Catengue and Fazenda camps in Angola, trained in the German Democratic Republic, eventually appointed District Commissar of Luanda, the Angolan capital. He left Angola in 1982 to join Military Intelligence in Maputo, Mozambique, after which he based in Botswana with responsibility for the Western Cape. His book, however, deals mostly with his experiences in Angola, and all we MK soldiers, who shared these experiences, can confirm that Comrade Ngculu knows exactly what he is talking about. As someone who served together with him both in Angola and the Western Cape, I can personally testify as to the respect in which he is generally held.

The Honour to Serve is much more than a personal memoir. With chapters on the Soviet Union, the Communist Party, Strategy and Tactics, the Commissariat, Life in the Camps and the Role of Women, he seeks to provide a comprehensive and complete overview of MK in exile, not even neglecting – for the sake of transparency – such sensitive topics as the Shishita in Zambia and the Mutiny in Angola, although he himself was in Mozambique at the time. It is important to note, therefore, that though not an academic book or aimed at academics, Ngculu adopted academic methodology in terms of researching primary materials such as *African Communist* and referencing his sources. His pioneering work was amplified and supplemented on the one hand by the "pocket history" of Janet Cherry and, on the other hand, by the monumental research of Thula Simpson, highly reputable academic historians who largely shared Comrade Ngculu's perspective.[4]

One thing however that Ngculu does not do, is to openly confront the negative stereotypes of MK already emerging in the academic field. He was certainly well aware of these and, throughout his book, especially in Chapter 11, "From Shishita to Mutiny," he clearly attempted to contextualise the negativities and to set the record straight. Writing for the general public, however he quite possibly thought it best to concentrate on the positives and the master narrative of the MK story, rather than taking issue with the specific allegations of specific writers, an approach which has allowed these critiques to flourish and take control of the academic space. Writing this thesis for academic purposes, however, provides me with the opportunity to assess these critiques in the light

[4] J. Cherry, *Umkhonto weSizwe* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011); T. Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe: the ANC's Armed Struggle* (Cape Town: Penguin, 2016); J Cherry, T Lodge, Reviews of Thula Simpson in *South African Historical Journal,* 70,1 (2018), 291-300.

of my own personal experiences, which I most certainly will do in the chapters that follow but, for the sake of literature review, it is important to discuss them here before proceeding further.

The credibility of the negative critique of MK is enhanced by the fact that it comes from the two opposite directions of both the ultra-left and the ultra-right. By ultra-left, I refer to the influence of Baruch Hirson and Paul Trewhela, former members of the Congress of Democrats, the white Congress allied with the ANC at the time of the Freedom Charter.[5] Both served prison sentences for sabotage and treason, Hirson for nine years (1964-1973) and Trewhela for three (1964-1967). Arriving in England after their release from prison, their Trotskyist inclinations led them to support the "City of London" anti-apartheid, allied with the "Revolutionary Communist" group in their confrontation with the mainstream Anti-Apartheid Movement, which was supportive of the ANC. Their political beliefs led them to the conclusion that the South African Communist Party was not only Stalinist but the "eminence grise" of the ANC.[6] They published their views in *Searchlight South Africa*, sub-titled "*A Marxist Journal of South African Studies*, which they circulated with some success until, in 1992, the dominance of the ANC in the negotiating process marginalized their support base. *Searchlight*'s editors welcomed a group of former Quatro detainees who arrived in London from Nairobi, publishing their article, "A Miscarriage of Democracy" by B Ketelo, A Maxongo, Z Tshona, R Masango and L Mbengo in *Searchlight South Africa*, Volume 2 (July 1990). Following Hirson's death in 1999, Trewhela published a selection of *Searchlight* articles in a book entitled *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the exile history of the ANC and SWAPO,* which appeared in 2009.[7]

One must indeed confirm the importance of "A Miscarriage of Democracy," which will be considered and judged on its merits in the paragraphs below. From the viewpoint of MK historiography however, the work of Hirson and Trewhela was important for a more negative reason. Though they were never themselves members of MK and never themselves visited any MK camp, their status as Marxists and ex-political prisoners lent credibility to the attack on MK from a much more devious and right-wing source, namely Stephen Ellis in *Comrades Against*

[5] For details of Hirson's political activity, see SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: Volume I (1960-1970)*, 2nd ed (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2010), 205-6.
[6] *Searchlight South Africa* , 5 (July 1990)
[7] P Trewhela, *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the exile history of the ANC and SWAPO (*Johannesburg: Jacana, 2009)

Apartheid (1992) and *External Mission* (2012).[8] Ellis, originally a Madagascar specialist, became familiarized with South Africa and South African exiles, through the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. He subsequently edited *African Confidential*, a newssheet many believe to be sourced from the British intelligence services and which, before the fall of the Soviet Union, energetically set out to portray the ANC as a front for the Communist Party.[9] *Comrades Against Apartheid* was co-authored by former cadre "Tsepo Sechaba" (real name: Oyama Mabandla), who was, according to Vladimir Shubin, investigated by the ANC for "financial irregularities involving thousands of Zimbabwean dollars" before taking refuge in the Canadian Embassy in Harare.[10]

Academic circles found Ellis's narrative credible and persuasive. He maintained for instance that Nelson Mandela was a member of the Central Committee of the SACP, and the decision of the 1969 Morogoro Conference to open the ANC to non-Africans was manipulated by white and Indian communists to pave the way for Communist domination of the ANC and its military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe. Not only his arguments but the data on which it was based have been exposed, not only by Vladimir Shubin but, more recently, the American scholar Paul Landau.[11] The MK experience in Angola slotted neatly into Ellis's political line: the 1984-5 Mutiny, for example, being seen as the inevitable outcome of a brutal Security apparatus, trained in East Germany to enforce Communist control of the ANC. As he put it, in an article of 1994, "the nature of the ANC in exile changed markedly in the period due to the organisation's militarization under the guidance of the South African Communist Party (SACP), which after 1969 became the dominant force within the ANC's exiled leadership."[12] To sustain such arguments, Ellis inevitably demonises not only Joe Slovo but great African communists such as Moses Mabhida and Chris

[8] S Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile* (London: James Currey, 1992); S Ellis, *External Mission: the ANC in Exile* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2012). For more details on Ellis, see his obituary in *Mail and Guardian*, 30 July 2015. Accessed on 6/7/22, via https://mg.co.za/article/2015-07-30-leading-historian--of-africa-stephen-ellis-dies/

[9] Information from Prof Jeff Peires, specifically citing a February *African Confidential* news item on Communist domination of the Transkei ANC Regional Executive, of which he was a member at the time. See JB Peires, "The Implosion of Transkei and Ciskei," in *African Affairs* 91 (1992), 373 fn 28.

[10] V Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow,* 2nd edition (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2008) 243. For more details, C Nqakula, *The People's War: Reflections of an ANC Cadre* [[Johannesburg: Mutloatse Heritage Trust, 2017),215-6

[11] Shubin, *ANC* , 70-1, 139, 208, 243-5, 262-3. PS Landau, "Controlled by Communists? (Re) Assessing the ANC in Exilic Decades," *South African Historical Journal* 67, 2 (2015), 222-241.

[12] S Ellis, "Mbokodo: Security in ANC Camps1961-1990", *African Affairs* 93, (1994), 279.

Hani. As former MK cadre, who fought in Angola and was trained in East Germany and Cuba, I trust that this thesis, more especially Chapters Three and Four, will help to set the record straight.

Among other academic writings on MK, the unfortunately neglected MA thesis of Lynda Von den Steinen certainly stands out.[13] Written even earlier than James Ngculu's *Honour to Serve*, Von der Steinem, who modestly describes herself as "a young white American girl" ransacked the archives of the University of the Western Cape's Mayibuye Centre and unearthed transcripts of nearly forty valuable interviews with MK veterans, to which she added eleven interviews of her own. Three of these were MK women, one of whom, Weziwe Ncame - is personally known to me. While the entire thesis is worthy of note, I must especially draw attention to Chapter Six, "Women in MK," relevant details of which will feature in my Chapter Three.

Overseas academics Daniel Douek and Timothy Gibbs have published articles respecting the history of MK in Transkei during my time as Regional Commander.[14] Though they certainly researched a lot of information and took trouble to interview several other comrades, they nevertheless committed glaring errors, more especially in their final conclusions. The very title of Douek's article, "They Became Afraid When They Saw Us," alleges that the Transkei Defence Force retreated from MK on the day of Craig Duli's attempted coup whereas, as Chapter Five will show, TDF worked hand in glove with MK to defeat the invaders. In "Chris Hani's Country Bumpkins," and again in his book, *Mandela's Kinsmen,* Timothy Gibbs goes to great lengths to align MK recruitment to St Johns College in Mthatha. Yet Chris Hani himself never attended St Johns, and myself, the Regional Commander of Transkei, was educated in Mdantsane and never even finished school!

These errors are typical of researchers who, with limited access to the veterans themselves, are forced to depend on books and other printed materials. Exactly the same criticism applies to Thula Simpson who, on pages 477-8 of his book relates an incident in which I, along with Mzwandile Vena, was personally involved. Unfortunately, he has unquestioningly accepted a newspaper

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[13] L Von der Steinen, "Soldiers in the Struggle: aspects of the experiences of Umkhonto we Siswe's [*sic*] rank and file soldiers – the Soweto generation and after," (MA (History), University of Cape Town, 1999).
[14] D Douek, " 'They Became Afraid When They Saw Us': MK Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in the Bantustan of Transkei, 1988-1994,' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39,1 (2013); T Gibbs, "Chris Hani's 'Country Bumpkins': Regional Networks in the African National Congress underground, 1974-94"," *Journal of Southern African Studies* , 37, 4 (2011); T Gibbs, *Mandela's Kinsmen: Nationalist Elites & Apartheid's First Bantustan* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2014), Chapters 4, 6.

report of our court appearance, whereas – I can now reveal – we deliberately misled the (apartheid) court.[15]

1.2 MK Memoirs: A New Departure

An entirely new dimension was added by the appearance of the first MK memoirs, starting with the appearance of Wonga Welile Bottoman's *The Making of an MK Cadre*, self-published in 2010 and marketed by himself.[16] It is significant that, except for *The Honour to Serve*, which is not entirely personal, none of the MK memoirs discussed in this thesis have been produced by a mainstream publisher. Even though Bottoman gratefully appreciates an "additional sponsorship from Nasou Via Afrika," this is also an indication that Nasou Via Afrika was given an opportunity but declined to publish. Much as this situation is regrettable, it does have the positive aspect that our MK authors were free to write whatever they liked, regardless of outside editorial interference. Despite the commonality of their experiences, each of these memoirs is very different from the others, reflecting the individual experiences of each comrade, and giving the lie to Ellis's perception that MK cadres were nothing but puppets of towing the SACP line. Although it is not possible to summarise and critique every memoir, I will briefly discuss four whose experiences are directly relevant to mine.

Let me begin with Bottoman who, like myself, crossed the border into Swaziland and, offered the choice between military training and continuing his studies, chose to join the army. He was in Maputo when the apartheid forces raided Matola, after which, again like myself, he fought in Angola and trained in East Germany. Unlike myself, however, he caught malaria and invalided out of military duties. Stationed in Viana during the mutiny, his account is especially valuable, as an ordinary soldier: though critical of the Security and supportive of the Committee of Ten, he utterly rejected the shootings at Pango, and assisted the administration to fortify his camp against possible attack from the mutineers. Bottoman's book also touches only many other aspects of camp life, including gender relations.

[15] Simpson, 477-8.
[16] WW Bottoman *The Making of an MK Cadre* (Pretoria: LiNc, 2010).

The next important memoir was that of Fanele Mbali, *In Transit*: *Autobiography of a South African Freedom Fighter*, first published in 2012.[17] Mbali was of an earlier generation to mine, a student at Fort Hare before the apartheid takeover, recruited in Port Elizabeth by Govan Mbeki, trained in engineering and navigation at Baku in the former Soviet Union. His memoir sheds light on such important aspects of MK/ANC history as the 1969 Morogoro Conference, and the *Aventura* ship which he captained in its unsuccessful attempts to land MK cadres on the Transkei Wild Coast. Though Mbali was trained at Kongwa in Tanzania, rather than Angola, his memoir added depth and perspective which become even more relevant with the passage of time. Fluent in Russian, for example, he was the first to point out the strained relations between Russia and Ukraine which, even in that early date, possessed a "strong sense of Ukrainian nationalism among its leaders" (page 103)

Different again is Mzwakhe Ndlela's *For the Fallen: Honouring the Unsung Heroes and Heroines of the Liberation Struggle* (2013).[18] Unlike the other memoirs, this is not a straightforward chronological narrative, but a series of linked chapters, each dealing with a different topic. As the name of the book indicates, Ndlela''s main objective is to memorialise fallen comrades, especially his mentor, Dr Norman "Totose" Ngciphe, who perished in the 1985 Maseru Massacre. Most of the other chapters cover his struggle as MK Commander in Alice, and his subsequent imprisonment. Only one chapter, Chapter V, deals with Angola, and, even there, only with select incidents. Though his writing is vivid and of a high standard, it is no part of his purpose to paint a broader picture.

Among the MK memoirs, Stanley Manong's *If We Must Die*: *an Autobiography of a former Commander of uMkhonto weSizwe* (2015) stands out.[19] Unlike Ngculu's *The Honour to Serve*, which provides a comprehensive overview, *If We Must Die* deals exclusively with Manong's own personal experiences. He must have had a photographic memory, because his total recall of personalities, events, details and dates is truly extraordinary. In a book of 270 pages, 190 are devoted to his time in Angola, and his thick descriptions of, for example, his training by Zimbabwe

[17] F Mbali, *In Transit*: *Autobiography of a South African Freedom Fighter (*3rd edition, no place given, 2015)
[18] M Ndlela*, For the Fallen: Honouring the Unsung Heroes and Heroines of the Liberation Struggle* (Johannesburg: KMM Review Publishing Company, 2013).
[19] S Manong, *If We Must Die*: *An Autobiography of a former Commander of uMkhonto weSizwe* [Place not given: Nkululeko Publishers, 2015)

People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), the educational programmes of Mark Shope and Jack Simons, and the firefights with União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) are quite outstanding. Here I can only touch on his attitude to the controversial issue of MK Security. Manong's first deployment was to the Botswana front where, still an idealist, he reported the illegal smuggling of stolen cars for private benefit, to higher authority. Viewed as a troublemaker, he was removed, before the time of the mutiny, to a security establishment in Angola known as "Iran," where he witnessed and experienced much cruelty. Redeployed to the "Eastern Front" to fight against UNITA, he was stationed at Quibaxe camp during the chaos at Viana and the mutiny at Pango. Although he was not therefore an observer of the events themselves, many of the participants passed through Quibaxe, including the Stuart Commission and those involved in the uproar at Viana but not the mutiny at Pango. He was directly involved at the Kabwe conference, where he was again frustrated by the security establishment, leading indirectly to his decision to quit the military and train as an engineer in Hungary. He returned to South Africa in 1993, but never again entered politics. As a comrade who sympathized with the causes of the mutiny, though not the mutiny itself, his account can be regarded as impartial and reliable. His personal interactions with OR Tambo, Mzwai Piliso and Chris Hani are highly illuminating and it can safely be said that such revelations as the argument between Chris Hani and Joe Modise after news broke of the Pango mutiny sheds new light on these tragic events. [20]

The experience of Charles Nqakula, as related in *The People's War: Reflections of an ANC Cadre* [21](2017) differs from the other memoirs in that, unlike the other writers discussed, he never took the conscious decision to be a soldier. As an esteemed journalist, he formed part of what would later become known as the MDM (Mass Democratic Movement) and departed South Africa on a Transkei passport during the 1984 apartheid crackdown which followed the murders of the Cradock Four. Charles had good networks and provides much interesting information on certain comrades such as Ellis's collaborator, Oyama Mabandla. He was earmarked for political leadership after the Kabwe conference, and his time in Moscow gave him far more insight into the inner workings of the Communist Party than I could experience as a military trainee at Teterow in East Germany. On the other hand, though Nqakula did receive military training in Angola, his special skills were more usefully employed in Information and Publicity, often in Lusaka, and his

[20] Manong, 209.
[21] C Nqakula, *The People's War: Reflections of an ANC Cadre* [Johannesburg: Mutloatse Heritage Trust, 2017).

book conveys little of the taste of bad food, the buzz of mosquitoes and the threat of enemy fire which marked our time in Angola.

"A Miscarriage of Democracy: The ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in Umkhonto We Sizwe" by Bandile Ketelo and others, already mentioned, is not a memoir of the same type as those just discussed. It was written in the heat of politics, and published in a journal, *Searchlight South Africa*, with a political axe to grind. Normally, it would only be discussed in the same context as other political polemics from a more mainstream perspective, for example the articles by Mzala and K Migwe which appeared in *Africa Communist* and *Sechaba.* But since it has been published in Paul Trewhela's book and has apparently gained some academic recognition, it cannot be ignored at this point.[22] Although I was not personally present at the events which they describe, I have had many discussions with others who had first-hand knowledge, and I think I can say with confidence that they are telling the truth when it comes to the facts of these matters. It is only too true that there was no rehabilitation done at Quatro, where daily beatings were the order of the day, and that the worst excesses of the Security were hushed up at the Kabwe conference, and even after 1994.

On the other hand, the article must be read with due awareness of its authors' personal political histories, especially when it comes to their attitude towards Chris Hani. If one compares their paragraph on the events at Viana (p.47),[23] with my discussion of these same events in Chapter 3, one will see that we do not differ with regard to fact. But whereas I interpret Chris's input as an extremely brave move to calm the situation and avert bloodshed, they interpret it as a "boastful address." Again, on page 51, they refer to Chris's "treacherous role" and that he was "ashamed of himself." Later, on page 65, they say Chris "howled from the rostrum." Such words cannot be taken as statements of fact, but are reflective only of their political opinions at the time. The truth would seem to be that, knowing Chris understood and shared their grievances against the Security, they had expected him to join their mutiny and were disappointed that he declined to do so. They do not take into account that MK was an army in very difficult circumstances, and that no army could have tolerated the chaos that prevailed at Viana without completely falling apart. The actual mutiny at Pango camp, whereby certain comrades shot and killed other comrades, crossed another

[22] See footnotes 4 and 5.
[23] Page references are to the initial publication in *Searchlight South Africa*.

line which turned even those, like Bottoman and Manong, who fully shared their grievances against the mutineers.

Again, while confirming the essential truthfulness of the article, one must also be cautious with regard to possible interventions by the editors, Hirson and Trewhela. Such are not obvious but do show up in sub-heading "In the hands of the SACP" (page 55), whereas there is no mention whatsoever of the SACP or any other Communist Party in the paragraphs which follow. Again, the paragraph stating that Morris Seabelo "mysteriously lost his life … none of those he was with … was spared to relate the story" (page 54) is very strange. It implies that Morris and the others were killed in some sort of inter-party purge, whereas, as is very well-known, these comrades were blatantly murdered by the Eugene De Kock death squad in the Maseru Massacre of 1985. It would seem from these examples that the truthful account of Ketelo and his comrades has been manipulated by the Trotskyists Hirson and Trewhela to serve the purposes of anti-Communists such as Stephen Ellis.

Very different and much to be welcomed is Ruth Mantile's *I Survived*: *Evolved against all the odds* (2019).[24] Whereas the MK female voice was otherwise heard only through the medium of an interview, Ruth Mantile relates her story according to her own priorities and in her own way. Ruth began her Angola training only three months earlier than myself. She was in the first company of the Madenoga Detachment, while I was in the second company. Her instructors became my instructors, her camp commanders became my camp commanders. We shared the same sickbays, the same kitchen, the same library. And yet, being a woman, she was subject to harassments of which males like myself were seemingly unaware, the worst of which was being raped by the Officer on Duty, as a result of which she became pregnant (pages 206-7). When I communicated with Ruth and asked her why she had kept silent for so long, her reply echoed the words she wrote on page 208 of her book:

> My predicament was that although I wanted to report him, I did not know if the comrades will believe me or think I'm a counter-revolutionary who wanted to destroy another comrade.

[24] R Mantile, *I Survived: Evolved against all the odds* [no place given: Kwarts Publishers, 2019)

Both retired Brigadier-General Zodwa Bobelo and interviewee Weziwe Ncame gave me similar explanations for women's reticence in coming forward, and both expressed the feeling that the time had come for women veterans to open up as frankly as Ruth Mantile has done. Ruth kindly informed me that she will be continuing her story in a forthcoming book, and one can only hope that it will find the publisher and the audience it will surely deserve.

The most recent of the memoirs, that of Luthando Dyasop, *Out of Quatro: From Exile to Exoneration* (2021) touches a raw nerve and makes sad reading. It provides details of two significant incidents of which I have personal knowledge: the deaths of Sipho Bam (MK name: Skhumbuzo), in Angola in 1983, and of Sipho Phungulwa, in Mthatha in 1990.[25] I will deal with both these incidents in relevant chapters Three and Five which I trust will show that, although never less than honest, Dyasop's memoir is not automatically free from errors of fact and personal perspective. The fundamental political mistake made by Dyasop and his comrades was that, in their understandable eagerness to get home, they took a short cut via Malawi rather than waiting with their fellow-comrades in Nairobi for a properly negotiated return. Those in Nairobi, who returned with Tokyo Sexwale as comrades in good standing, included Bandile Ketelo, who eventually became Mayor at Fort Beaufort. Dyasop and Phungulwa, however, arrived home at a time of great political upheaval (April 1990) when rumours were flying about askaris and a Third Force. This is not to blame them for the tragedy which befell, but only to provide a context for the sad events which followed.

Let me postpone the incidents themselves to their proper place in this thesis, but for purposes of Literature Review it is relevant to comment on one aspect of the *Out of Quatro*. As I have already pointed out, ever since James Ngculu's *Honour to Serve* (2009), no MK comrade has managed to get his memoir published by a mainstream publisher, but mostly publish at his own risk and expense, with limited marketing and circulation. Although I do not question Dyasop's integrity or the authenticity of his memoir, it seems legitimate to question the way in which it has been packaged. The blurb on the back cover maintains that Dyasop was "implicated in a comrade's suicide attempt, then suspected of mutiny," whereas Skhumbuzo's death was not on account of a suicide attempt, and Dyasop, by his own narrative, actively participated in the violent protests at Viana, which were, in any case, not a mutiny. More significant perhaps is the way in which the

[25] L Dyasop, *Out of Quatro* {Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2021], Chapters 16,26.

blurb frames in terms of the ANC, precisely at a time (2021) when the ANC government is being widely questioned. One critic, prominently quoted on the back cover, calls *Out of Quatro* a "harrowing account of the ANC's heart of darkness," whereas it is an MK memoir of limited relevance to the ANC as a political organization. It seems clear from Chapter 25 that Dyasop's return home was weaponized by others for political purposes, and one would not like to see the credibility of his memoir similarly undermined.

1.3 Gender and the Social Dimension

Only one memoir discussed above is authored by a woman who was in MK. Although the heroic roles played by individual women are indeed touched upon in the memoirs, especially that of Ndlela and Nqakula, gender relations as such are not analysed in any depth, even in the "Women in the ANC and MK" chapter of Ngculu's *The Honour to Serve*. Important debates have opened up more recently in the academic space, debates of which I myself was ignorant before commencing my studies at Rhodes and of which many of my male comrades are still unaware.[26]

As far as I am informed, no women ex-combatants have committed their experiences to paper. The gap, however, has to a considerable extent filled by interviews such as the one provided to Raymond Suttner by Dipuo Mvelase [27] and the 38 who participated in the research conducted by Siphokazi Magadla in 2013-14.[28] Beginning in 1991 with Jacklyn Cock's *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa*, feminists have argued that war itself is gendered, and that the exclusion of women from combat roles is typical of women's under-representation in the leadership of the ANC more generally. Debate has raged as to whether or not the vital role of women in such aspects as communication and healthcare should be categorized as equivalent to "combat."[29] Siphokazi Magadla has more recently argued that not only the "guerilla girls" in the

[26] For detailed discussion, see S Magadla, "Demobilisaton and the civilian reintegration of women ex-combatants in post-apartheid South Africa: The aftermath of transnational guerilla girls, combative mothers and in-betweeners in the shadows of a late twentieth-century war," (Ph d. thesis, Rhodes University, 2017), especially pages 74-81.
[27] Conducted by Raymond Suttner, 29 June 1993, kindly brought to my attention by Dr S Magadla.
[28] Magadla, "Demobilisation," 129-38.
[29] J Cock, *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1991). Magadla, "Demobilisation," 74-81

MK camps, but likewise the "combative mothers" and "in-betweeners" of the urban South African townships were active participants in the liberation struggle.

By comparison with the impressive progress made in women's studies, however, little has been written on the male perspective. Elaine Unterhalter's "The Work of the Nation: Heroic Masculinity in South African Autobiographical Writing of the Anti-Apartheid Struggle," while raising important questions about "Heroic Masculinity," includes only two MK memoirs, that of Ronnie Kasrils and Archie Sibeko, neither of them typical. Raymond Suttner's "Masculinities in the African National Congress-led liberation movement: the underground period" is much better informed due to his close friendship with many MK veterans during his work at Luthuli House prior to 1994. Most unfortunately, despite his many years in apartheid prisons, Suttner was never in any MK camp, or else he could never have written something so unbelievable as that "MK soldiers continually asked that Angolan women be allowed to visit the camp with their children so that they could have children around them."[30]

Despite being sensitized to these debates, I cannot hope to replicate meticulous and systematic research such as that of Siphokazi Magadla on female combatants, and my contribution is necessarily anecdotal. I hope however that as a struggle comrade of MK women both in the camps (Chapter Three) and the South African underground (Chapter Four) I can add value to these debates, and that, by my discussion of "brotherhood and other aspects of gender, I can carry them forward.

1.4 Oral Interviews and Thesis structure

In Chapter One, this thesis has examined both the academic literature and the published MK memoirs. The thesis refers back to the literature in narrative chapters Two to Five. Consolidating its findings in its conclusion, the final chapter is divided into three sections: the political culture of MK, MK gender dynamics and the consequences of the political merger of the "exiles," including MK, and the "inziles" who subsequently came to dominate the ANC.

[30] R Suttner, "Masculinities in the African National Congress-let liberation movement: the underground period," *Kleio* , 37 (2005), 94.

This thesis has been immeasurably enriched by constant and ongoing discussions with fellow-combatants, who shared the same hardships and dangers which I myself experienced. These were mostly informal, funerals, veterans' gatherings, social occasions and even tea-breaks at government seminars. I was sometimes approached by comrades who had heard of my research, and often made use of my cellphone to check a specific name or place, the details of which had eluded me. It was never possible to document such casual exchanges according to the stringent ethics of the academy, and I have had no option but to assume personal responsibility for the accuracy of all the information presented here.

On two occasions however, once in 2015 at the very beginning of my research, and again, in 2021, I deliberately set time aside for formal interviews conducted in strict compliance with my Ethics Clearance application as finally approved by the Rhodes Ethics Review Committee in 2020. The 2015 sessions prioritized informants beyond my usual circle of acquaintance, such as APLA Commissar Lawrence Vumile Ntikinca and Mrs Nomonde Gazi, who secretly hosted Chris Hani while he was residing in Mthatha. The 2021 sessions were primarily formalisations of private discussions which I wished to document, not only for my personal use but for that of future researchers. All interviews took place either at my own private home or else at the home of the informant, and were conducted in English, a language with which we were all comfortable. Relatively few questions were asked and, being informed of the purpose, the interviewees narrated freely and according to their own inclinations. They often delved into topics beyond the scope of this thesis – especially with regard to MK's integration in to the South African National Defence Force – but which have been retained for sake of the historical record. The interviews were taped and transcribed, and will be compiled into a single document, to be deposited into the Cory Library, Rhodes University at the same time as this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: YOUTH AND RECRUITMENT

My home town is now officially called by its African name of Komani, but in those days it was known as Queenstown.[1] Within Queenstown itself, there were in fact two Queenstowns, one black and one white. Or, perhaps, even three if we include the so-called 'coloured' areas whose quality of facilities and services lies somewhere between the two extremes). Historically the physical infrastructure (water, sewerage, roads etc.) and social infrastructure (housing, schools, health facilities, sports facilities etc.) for white residents in Queenstown has been very good, comparable with standards anywhere else in South Africa. Facilities and services for Mlungisi (where the majority of the black population lived) were hopelessly inadequate. Mlungisi can be described as an overcrowded slum. This was deliberate and no error as it was exactly in line with apartheid development planning such as the Group Areas Act of 1950, which was intended to discourage the influx of Africans from impoverished rural hinterland districts such as Glen Grey (now Cacadu) and Whittlesea (now Hewu).

Queenstown was founded in 1853 as a military outpost designed to protect the British subjects from attack during the time of the Frontier wars. The town was laid out around a central hexagon, which was to be the lager to which the white citizens would flee in time of trouble. Although still a distinguishing feature of the town today, the hexagon was never used for its intended purpose. Instead, it became a service town for the farmers in the district, including also black farmers. Writing about black farmers in Queenstown district in 1880, the white magistrate recorded that "they are the largest producers of grain in the division: without them the trade of Queenstown would not be anything like it is at present".[2] That was before the discovery of gold in Johannesburg. After 1886, the prosperous black farmers of Queenstown and other Eastern Cape districts were reduced to poverty and migrant labour.

[1] Unfortunately, there is no good history of Komani/Queenstown, not even from the settler point of view. The best source is E.W. Holliday, *Queenstown, 1824-1994*, published by the Queenstown and Frontier Historical Society in February 1995.

[2] Quoted in C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London, 1979), page 65. I thank Prof J. Peires for this reference

The situation got much worse after the victory of the apartheid National Party in 1948. Verwoerd's policy of "separate development" impacted very badly on Queenstown, which was positioned between two homelands, Ciskei on the one side, and Transkei on the other side. Many white farms were expropriated for these homelands but, instead of being allocated to black farmers, they were used as dumping-grounds for isiXhosa-speakers from all over South Africa, forcibly removed to such notorious places as Sada, Ilinge and Thornhill.[3] In Queenstown itself, Mlungisi township was scheduled for removal to the new town of Zibeleni, which was set up to attract industrial development. People applying for houses in Mlungisi found themselves transported to Zibeleni, and Mlungisi facilities, already insufficient, were deliberately run down to encourage people to move. But the promised factories never arrived, and Mlungisi continued to be flooded with starving people in search of work. It was only in 1984, that the Government gave up its plans to remove Mlungisi. Meanwhile, its poverty had turned it into a training ground for political activists, well known also for the dedication and commitment of its school teachers.[4] Many of the leaders of the present government have had links with the town through its political connections over the years. The political clout of Mlungisi was demonstrated by the great consumer boycott of 1985, resulting in the Queenstown Massacre of 17 November 1985. But, by that time, I had long departed South Africa.

2.1 Family Background

I was born on 15 February 1959 in the Newtown sub-location of Mlungisi, Queenstown. Mlungisi, situated adjacent to Queenstown city centre, is the very oldest of Queenstown's locations, and is divided into a number of sub-locations such as Newtown, New Brighton, Sidikidiki, Bhede, Thulandivile, Bulawayo, Bongweni, Zwelitsha, and White City (Kwamasipala). Whichever the sub-location, we all shared communal taps, standing in line to get water, and relieving ourselves in communal toilets. These were very unhygienic, being for public use. Both young and old were forced to use these facilities and the dignity of the old people was compromised a lot by this treatment; but they had no alternative. During weekends the toilets

[3] For details of forced removals, see Surplus People Project, *Forced Removals in South Africa, Vol 2, the Eastern Cape,* printed by the University of Cape Town, January 1983; and Chris Hani District Municipality, *Icon Site Guide*, (Queenstown, no date, about 2010), pages 29-30, 33.

[4] For details, unfortunately covering only the period after my departure from Queenstown, S. Dunn, '" It cost so much blood and suffering to get something so natural": A study of the struggle in Queenstown: 1984-1986" (BA Honours thesis, Department of History, Rhodes University, 1997).

would be so dirty and full of faeces on the floor, that it was very difficult for one to enter and relieve oneself. People had to tip-toe and use whatever little space available to help themselves. These were really hard times for us blacks and our living standards were poor.

I was the fifth of nine children, only three of whom, including myself are alive today. My father came from Gqebenya Administrative Area in the Cacadu (former Lady Frere) area of Emalahleni Municipality. Thembu Gqebenya was the Great Place (*komkhulu*) of hero Queen Nonesi, who was exiled by the colonial government about 1865 for defending the land of abaThembu against the white settlers of Queenstown. It is also the site of the grave of King Mthikrakra, who died in 1848. My father, and therefore myself, was by clan-name (*isiduko*) Hala Madiba, the royal clan of abaThembu, although I cannot say exactly how I am related to the kings and chiefs of the present day. My grandfather, who was blind, used to tell us about abaThembu when we visited Gqebenya in the school holidays. He taught us our genealogy, that we are Dhlomo Hala, Madiba, Tato, Zondwa, Ndaba, Ngubengcuka, Mthikrakra, Ngangelizwe, Dalindyebo up to the present king Buyelekhaya A! Zwelibanzi!

My father was the first-born of six children, and was educated up to Standard Four. After leaving school, he was employed by the South African Railways (now PRASA) until he retired. At some point, he moved from the rural area to Mlungisi township, where he met my mother. My mother came from the white farming area of Hewu (Whittlesea), the first-born of five children. She was educated at the farm schools until she passed Standard Two. She too moved to town, working as a "kitchen maid" for white families. The employers were Afrikaners, but my parents' neighbours in Mlungisi were coloureds, so they found Afrikaans easy to speak, although not to write. Although they were not well educated, they were very God-fearing. As we children grew up, they made it a point that we say grace before we eat, and that we pray before we go to bed, and pray again when we wake up in the morning. My parents were good Christians and they influenced me strongly. They always told us as children that, to get what you want, you must first work and earn. As I was growing up, I used to getting piece jobs, either gardening or caddying at the golf club, which was the easiest way to make money. Caddying for English-speaking golfers was better because they used to tip us more than Afrikaners. Sundays were set aside to attend church.

2.2 Politicisation

Unfortunately, while people aspired for good things like education, better paying jobs and the likes, the environment was not conducive and encouraging. During those apartheid years, suppression and harassment was meted to all, young and old. Even I was once arrested for so-called "loitering" when, in Standard Four, I was sent by my parents in school uniform to buy something from OK Bazaars. I was detained on a Friday afternoon and released on a Sunday without a word of explanation from the police. Life in the township was unbearable and continuing with education whilst being aware that the prospects of getting employment were zero, forced many promising young lives to end-up in jail. The harshness of these conditions often led some of our people succumbing to this pressure and cooperating with the colonialists, whilst on the other hand, those who stood firm were jailed, banished or kept in solitary confinement.

My primary education, like that of other black youngsters, was only made possible by church leaders who made their churches available to black children, as the white National Party regime did not build schools for us in the townships. I was fortunate to commence my life journey in the school associated with Rev. Mqoboli who, together with Dr W.B. Rubusana, established the South African National Native Congress, which later became the African National Congress. This was located in the Methodist Church at Scanlen Street, the same street where the prominent composer Michael Moseu Moerane used to live, and where he mentored such prominent jazz maestros as Todd and Pat Matshikiza. Moerane was brother Epainette Mbeki, the mother of Thabo Mbeki, who used to visit their home during the school holidays.[5] Also in Scanlen Street was the Anglican Church of Reverend Gawe, who should have succeeded Professor Z.K. Matthews as Cape President of the ANC, except that, on the day of the election, he was arrested for the treason trial before he could make his acceptance speech. Even though I may not have been aware of this at the time, it is clear that the African National Congress tradition and culture was deeply embedded in my home town.

In those days, however, the majority of the young men in Mlungisi were unemployed, to such an extent that gangsterism was the order of the day. There were gangs such as the Ngxola Boys, Black

[5] There is a good picture of Michael Moerane and the Queenstown of his time in Chapter 6 of M. Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: the Dream Deferred* (Johannesburg, 2007).

Powers, AmaBhubesi and Iintsara. Each section of the community had its own gangsters, and young people saw such activities as important to emulate them. Realistically, one needed to ensure that one fitted into the scheme of things, or you would become a victim. It was a question of the survival of the fittest. Week-in week-out the gangs killed each other, from which the only benefit was to be feared in the community.

Thing start to change from 1977 onwards, when peaceful and unarmed students protesting against Bantu Education were brutally killed by police.[6] All these gangs started to vanish when the youth of Mlungisi started to be involved, so that even the gangsters ended up joining the students. Influenced by Mr Vusumzi Takane and Mr Bubele Mfenyana, my history teachers at Nkwankca Junior Secondary School in Mlungisi, I had already joined the Congress of South African Students (COSAS). COSAS was indeed the greatest influence on my early political thinking. Although originally orientated towards Black Consciousness, COSAS declared its support for the Freedom Charter only one year after its formation. Its first president, Ephrahim Mogale was actually a clandestine member of the ANC. It was a COSAS guiding principle that the ANC was the authentic liberation movement of South Africa.[7] As a prominent member of COSAS, I soon attracted the attention of Queenstown's Special Branch: Captain SJM Venter, and his subordinates, who worked hand in glove with the Ciskei Special Police Branch.

Like others of their generation, my parents did not openly approve of my involvement. But when things started to change, one could see and hear them beginning to talk. Since we Africans were not allowed to register at Maria Louw High in the Coloured area, my parents sent me to complete my education at Mzomhle High in Mdantsane, where I stayed with my sister and her husband. That helped me inasmuch as it enabled me to become even more active in school politics. Once arrived at Mzomhle, I met Dali Mpofu (later Advocate Mpofu), Mfundo Ngxamngxa (whom I later met up with in Angola), Mphathi Webile, Mthembeli Sifingo amongst others. My History teacher in Mzomhle was a certain Mr. Lalendle, who provided us with insights regarding the

[6] Leonare Moerane and Danisile Nokepeyi, two of those killed in 1977, were learners at Nkwankca, my old school. *Icon Site Guide*, page 31.

[7] For more on COSAS, see Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane, "The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s," in South African Development Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, Volume II, pages 447-8.

Zimbabwe freedom struggle, though he was reluctant to express himself openly for fear of informers.

We also had contact with the then South African Allied Workers' Union (SAAWU) led by the late Thozamile Gqweta. School boycotts usually coincided with Trade Union strikes; where we also learnt about Trade Unionism from Comrades like Humphrey Maxhegwana, Bangumzi Sifingo, Dlaki Vani, Mandla Gxanyana and the late Ryan Mapisa. I also met Comrade Bonisile Qabaka, a Fort Hare student, who advised me to listen to Radio Freedom, and supplied me with copies of the Freedom Charter, *Sechaba, African Communist* and *Dawn*. Acting on his advice, I formed a Cell Unit[8], composed of Dali Mpofu, Mfundo Ngxamngxa, Mphathi Webile, Thembile Sifingo and myself. We were introduced to late underground MK operatives, Comrade Ndikho Myute and Mtyanti Msauli, who encouraged us to join uMkhonto weSizwe.

My decision to leave was facilitated by the fact that I had undergone the ceremony of circumcision in June 1980. This was contrary to custom inasmuch as my two older brothers had not yet been circumcised. My brother-in-law arranged everything for me, without telling my parents who were very angry and annoyed when he informed them. During our three weeks in circumcision school, we learned how to function in society, how to behave ourselves and respect each other. Most important, we were taught to be defenders of women, to protect and love them, irrespective of their status in society.

By this time, I had been incarcerated and tortured by the Ciskei Security Police on no fewer than three occasions, more especially by the notorious Willie Ncoko and Mkhuseli Mcanyangwa, assisted by Vuyani Genda and Fikile Zibi. The first time I was held for about six months in the police cells of N1 Mdantsane, accused of organizing the schools boycott, including an arson attack on Mzomhle High. From time to time, we were taken to Security Police offices in Zwelitsha to be tortured and interrogated. There were photographs of comrades on the walls, comparing their appearance before and after they were detained. We were stripped naked behind an office desk,

[8] Mandela explains that a Cell Unit "consisted of roughly ten houses on a street" (cited in Suttner, R. (2003). The African National Congress (ANC) Underground: From the M-Plan to Rivonia. South African Historical Journal, 49(1), 123-146.

then they slammed a drawer shut on our private parts. For interrogation purposes, one was tortured with a tyre tube around my neck, inflating it until one could not breathe. Then one was supposed to bang on the floor to indicate that one was ready to talk. They were most anxious to know how the ANC was linking with COSAS and the school boycotts. But there was nothing to tell, we in COSAS were acting on our own initiative. The only way I survived was by telling myself that sooner or later I will be released, and continue the fight until these people are brought to justice.

When we were due to be released, we were addressed by General Charles Sebe, the head of the Ciskei Special Branch. He spoke to us, almost as a parent, pleading with us to get education and not to burn down schools. But we continued to work underground. I was detained a second time, though not for so very long. While still schooling in Mdantsane, I sometimes used to visit my family in Queenstown. On one occasion, a Community Councillor's house was attacked, and my name was mentioned. They came to get me in Mdantsane, and I was taken to Queenstown where I was interrogated by Captain SJM Venter and other South African Security Policemen. Eventually I was moved to solitary confinement at the Henderson Police Station among the farms of Cathcart. It was a very small police station with a white sergeant and three black policemen. I was not so badly treated; the black policemen were quite friendly and I got my meals on time. I was locked up alone in the cell all day with only two small windows very high up but, by standing on my toilet bucket, I could see out. The one window was into the yard of the white sergeant's house, but through the other window I used to watch the monkeys playing in the bush. All the time, I was encouraged by the thought of one day being free and going to fight.

2.3 Into Exile

When I was released, myself and others went to our principal, Mr Tengimfene, a former Robben Islander, then he told us he did not want us in his school. Many years later, he was part of a delegation to Lusaka, then he asked to see me and apologized. We were four of us altogether, myself together with Cekiso Hoyi, Luvuyo Lerumo and Madenyuka. We decided on our own initiative to leave South Africa to join MK. Cekiso and Luvuyo were working at Mercedes-Benz, and they managed to save enough money for our travel expenses. We took the train to Queenstown, and from there to Johannesburg, where we stayed in Dobsonville with Mlungwana, my father's younger brother. We told him that we were boxers, and that we were going to

Swaziland to get *muti*. He even gave us R 300 out of his own pocket to assist. We were able to contact our old school acquaintance Zimele Mbambo, who resided in Piet Retief on the Swaziland border.

Zimele took us to a crossing-point at night, and even walked with us about 10 kilometres into Swaziland. From there we took a bus into Manzini. We did not know anybody in Swaziland, and had no option but to go to the Swazi police and tell them that we wanted to join the ANC. Fortunately, they were friendly, and they allowed us to sleep in their cells until ANC comrades came to fetch us. While in Manzini, we stayed in the ANC flats at Mabele Heights until were interrogated by Mbokodo, the ANC Security Department. The first thing they did was to ask us to write our biographies. It was too much like what we had experienced in South Africa, but we complied. Then they asked us whether we wanted to go to school, or to train for the military. Cekiso said, no, we come from school, we have had enough school, we want to fight.

After about a month, they told us we must be ready to leave, and they took us by car to the Mozambique border, arriving at Matola shortly after the South African raid of 30 January 1981. There we found quite a few other comrades whom we knew from home, and were provided with basic training, such as guarding, politics and revolutionary songs. We only met Chris Hani and Joe Modise much later, in Angola. After about another month, we were taken from Mozambique to Angola in a Soviet cargo plane. It was my first flight.

To gain a clearer perspective on my upbringing and my progress towards MK, I consulted two recent autobiographies of comrades like myself, who began life in small country towns before joining forces with MK and training in Angola, that is Manong and Nqakula.[9] Nqakula, born Cradock 1942, was much older, and Manong, born Victoria West 1954, a little older, than myself, born Queenstown 1959. Yet we all had much in common: parents from the farms, daily exposure to poverty and oppression, educated through the church before proceeding to larger centres. Our mothers worked as washerwomen or kitchen maids, and all of us took piece jobs quite young to supplement the family income, Nqakula by tailoring, Manong and I on the golf course. Nqakula and I both came from towns with strong ANC traditions; Manong got nothing in Victoria West,

[9] S. Manong, *If We Must Die* (Cape Town: Nkululeko Publishers, 2015); and Charles Nqakula's *The People's War* (Johannesburg: Mutloatse, 2017).

but was politicised in Cradock where he spent four years at school. All of us got our first political education from our school-teachers. Nqakula and myself were early exposed to political organisations and learned much from trade-unionists. Our road to MK was facilitated through these organisations by our political contacts.

Manong's road was somewhat different. He had a natural talent for mathematics, and was completely fluent in Afrikaans. Educated through government bursaries, he was employed by the Ciskei Department of the Interior at Zwelitsha. At some point, he was even recruited for the Ciskei Security Police but, rather than accept, he went off to Pietersburg (now Polokwane) to study engineering. He was motivated, according to his autobiography, by the sacrifices of the first Cradock Four, Ghandi Hlekani and others, who fell in the Wankie/Sipholilo campaigns of 1968. While studying engineering in Pietersburg, he was inspired by Radio Freedom and, acting on his own initiative, he and a friend crossed the border to Swaziland (now Eswatini).

It can be seen from this short summary that the life-paths of Nqakula, Manong and myself could easily have diverged. Manong, as we have seen, was well on the way to joining the homeland elite; Nqakula, being a journalist, could have been classified as an intellectual; myself, at that time, was still a youth. And yet we all originated from the same poor, black rural backgrounds, via towns with established ANC traditions. In joining MK, we were in reality returning to our roots. [10]

[10] This was not necessarily always the case. Phila Ngqumba, for example, grew up in the PAC stronghold of Cala where ANC was simply not known. Once he moved to King Williams Town to further his studies, however, he immediately involved himself with ANC. Interview with Phila Ngqumba, March 2021.

CHAPTER THREE: ANGOLA

By the time I arrived in Angola, MK had been in existence for nearly twenty years, having suffered many setbacks and gained much wisdom and experience. Although the Morogoro Conference of April/May 1969 had revitalized MK, following the setbacks of the Wankie/Sipolilo campaigns and the Hani memorandum, it was followed soon thereafter, in July 1969, by the Tanzanian government's order to leave their country at short notice. MK was thereafter relocated to the Soviet Union when "not a single African country was ready to house the remaining core of MK". [1]

It was only after the independence of Angola and Mozambique in 1975 that these former Portuguese colonies were able to offer MK a home, and only after the Soweto uprising of 1976 that the first MK recruits arrived, hence the name of their detachment – June 16th. By that time, the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola – Partido do Trabalho (MPLA) government of Angola, assisted by Cuba, was already engaged in a civil war with the UNITA forces of Jonas Savimbi, assisted by apartheid South Africa.[2] Hence Moncada, the name of the next MK detachment, honouring a barracks stormed by Fidel Castro in Cuba's liberation war. By the time that I arrived, together with the others who later graduated as the Madinoga detachment, MK facilities and military routines were already well in place.

3.1 "You cease to be yourself": Becoming Mike Mokoetsi

Mzimasi Hala is my birthname, a regular civilian, with no military experience or training I arrived in Angola in March 1981. I found myself in awe on the very first night, the atmosphere was a complete culture shock, the "bush life" was like nothing I had ever imagined. When we arrived, it was in the middle of the night, one of the darkest skies I had ever laid my eyes on. Imagine trying to "navigate" through a foreign land with nothing in hand but your "instincts". We were later supplied with combat uniforms. These we were given to make us easily identifiable as we all came

[1] For a summary of these events, see V. Shubin, *ANC*, Chapters 6 and 7.
[2] For a full discussion of the situation in Angola at that time, see J. Hanlon, *Beggar Your Neighbours* (London: James Currey, 1986), especially Chapter 13. V Shubin, *The Hot "Cold War"* (UKZN Press: Scottsville, 2008), Part One.

from different parts of South Africa, however, we all shared one common goal and that was to liberate and transform South Africa to be a better country for all.

"You cease to be yourself" was a saying that was said regularly. This stemmed from the fact that the last time you probably were as close to being yourself was the day that one left home. So much that we were given new names. Allow me to reintroduce myself, I am Mike Moeketsi. Mzimasi? The last of him was when I crossed the border. The first instruction that was presided over us was that it was prohibited to ask a comrade their birthname, the primary goal for this was to ensure that we were a united front by avoiding discrepancies such as tribalism amongst us comrades. As we progressed with our training, new friendships developed. It became easier to understand other languages and to guess where other comrades came from, especially those from KwaZulu-Natal. We generally conversed in isiZulu, although we naturally sometimes dropped into our home languages the Zulus however were staunch on not even attempting to converse in other languages. Towards the end of our training I established an especially close friendship with the late comrade Reggie Mokgotsi from Botshabelo Township in Bloemfontein. When talking to me, he would use SeSotho and I would use isiXhosa and, in this way, we learnt and understood each other's languages.

Speaking isiXhosa would gravely remind me about home, it was not that I missed the comfort of being home having grown in an extremely poverty-stricken family. It was the reality of the fact that I might never have the opportunity again to share a loaf of bread with my eight siblings in a one room house. But then again, the minute I crossed the border, it stopped being personal, it became about the people of South Africa and their liberation. The love and comradeship for one another which we experienced in the camps is unforgettable. Our lowest moments were when we started losing some comrades, some succumbed to malaria whilst others were ambushed by the UNITA forces of Jonas Savimbi.

3.2 Life in the camps

Our training camp was Caculama in Malanje Province in the east of Angola, which was previously occupied by the ZIPRA Forces of Joshua Nkomo. My first close comrades were, naturally, those

with whom I left South Africa: Cekiso Hoyi, Vuyo Madenyuka and Luvuyo Lerumo - may their souls rest in eternal peace. With the exception of Cekiso Hoyi who was placed in a different platoon, the rest of us were in the same platoon but different sections during our training. Each platoon was composed of thirty comrades, divided into sections of ten comrades. As our training progressed, new friendships developed. All four provinces and their associated homelands were represented because apartheid repressed the entire South Africa. It was not too difficult to recognise the languages of other comrades or to guess where they came from. The easiest comrades to establish their origin were from KwaZulu-Natal as did not mix their language when talking. As already explained, however, it was not allowed to know or ask the about the origin of any comrade.

Caculama had twenty-one bases, full of hills where most of training took place. We slept in tents or dugouts which were built by ourselves, we ensured that these were not visible to spotter aircrafts as we knew that we were being hunted. Basic training lasted for six months, and we were fortunate that there were no diseases in this camp except for malaria on account of the mosquitoes. As new recruits, at first, we were not allowed to carry any weapons and trained with replicas only and dummy grenades. From the fourth month onwards, we commenced practical training with live ammunition. After completing basics, our intake was formalized as the Madenoga detachment, named after a heroine of the women's struggles in the 1950s. We were assigned duties such as guard duty, but we were always fully prepared to be assigned different duties at very short notice, including transfer to another camp. Comrades were organized into sections of ten soldiers, three sections into a platoon, and two platoons into a company of sixty men altogether. Each section had its own commander which was responsible for military and logistics, and a commissar, responsible for education and politics. Vuyo, Luvuyo and I were placed in different sections of the same platoon while Cekiso was placed in a different platoon entirely. This brought us much joy because I considered them to be my homeboys, this was as close to home as one could get.

Comrades who arrived prior to us such as James Ngculu and Stanley Manong, trained at Novo Catengue may have also possibly received their training from Russians and/or Cubans and "encountered" People's Armed Forces of Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) units, detachments stationed at Caculama, were trained by MK comrades, and never saw Russians or Cubans until we

visited their countries.[3] Our instructors were MK soldiers who were trained by ZIPRA instructors prior to the liberation of Zimbabwe. "Toyi-toyi" was originally the motivational song and dance of the ZIPRA cadres. We, as MK continued with it during our training more especially during Physical and Tactics exercises. Our basic training covered the following: The training was for six months *viz*: Physical training, Tactics, Topography, Marching Drill, Engineering, Firearms, Artillery, Politics, and First Aid[4]. It also provided sufficient opportunity for our seniors to assess each recruit as an individual, not so much in terms of gender, but in terms of physical and mental capacity, so that each could be most effectively deployed. Some, for example, became commissars, others became military commanders. The leadership qualities that were most highly valued were, on the one hand, discipline, and commitment, and, on the other, good relations and respect for other comrades.

Our daily routine began at 5:00 am, we were awakened by a bell. It was our duty to move at the speed of lighting; getting dressed rushing to report for roll call. By 6:00 am we had breakfast, and by 7:00 am training commenced. Mornings were spent on military training while afternoons on performing duties such as fetching food and water or digging trenches and dugouts. After dinner, we had political classes, except for Monday evenings those were known as "jazz hour" evenings but utilized for cultural activities more generally. These nights served as a sweet escape from our reality. Classes on Saturdays stopped at 13:00, and Sundays were mostly dedicated to sports. These sporadic activities allowed for us to grow our bonds too. Rugby was not so popular as one would assume based on the physical training that goes into it, we however played "friendlier" sports such as soccer and volleyball, and divided into teams like Santos, Callies and Bolsheviks. One would think that we were far from reality because we were so far from home however, we celebrated these following days even though the rest of the world didn't; 21 March (Sharpeville Massacre Day), 16 June (Soweto Uprisings), 26 June (South African Freedom Day), 09 August (Woman's Day), 07 November (Socialist Revolution) and 16 December (uMkhonto we Sizwe).

[3] Ngculu; Manong.

[4] Also see: Further Submissions and Responses by the African National Congress to Questions Raised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 12 May 1997: https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/submit/anc2.htm

Going to town was a privilege which only happened when we accompanied trucks to collect our supplies at the dock. Our clothing was supplied by friendly countries, military uniform and boots from the socialist block, civilian clothes and takkies from Scandinavia. Our food supplies were limited but, understanding our situation, we appreciated whatever we could get. At camps like Quibaxe, it was also possible to exchange tinned food for fresh fruit and vegetables produced by the Angolan peasantry. Malaria and other illnesses were also a problem at first, but these were increasingly better managed with the help of a white doctor, known as Dr Hugo Nkabinde, he too was a comrade, and just like everyone else the last of his real name was left at the border.

Discipline was a constant challenge because of dagga-like plants found in the bush and a home-brew called *kaproto* made by in the neighboring Angolan peasant villages. Many comrades would experiment with these. Because discipline was a primary goal[5], punishments for minor offences such as stealing or getting intoxicated included frog-jumping, standing on a drum in the heat of the day, pushing a tyre, or running with loaded knapsacks. Serious cases, such as the rape of an Angolan peasant woman, merited the death sentence (see code of conduct[6]). In such a case, execution was by means of firing-squad, picked at random from among the comrades present. Questions of discipline involved our Security (*iMbokodo)*, which I will address later.

3.3 Role of women

My entire understanding of the proper relationship between men and women was indelibly shaped at a very early age by the gender relations within our family home in Komani where I grew up. As related in Chapter Two, both of my parents worked as breadwinners, and both were inspired by their Christian faith. Although they sometimes disagreed and disputed with each other, they never seriously quarreled, or questioned the division of labour and responsibilities within the household. In accordance with Xhosa culture, both men and women were expected to be diligent in the cause of building up the family homestead (*ukwakha umzi*).[7] My elder sister, the second-born of us nine

[5] See uMkhonto we Sizwe Code of Conduct - African National Congress: Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,August 1996: https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/submit/anctruth.htm#mkcode https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02424/04lv02730/05lv02918/06lv02984.htm

[6] See uMkhonto we Sizwe Code of Conduct - African National Congress: Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,August 1996: https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/submit/anctruth.htm#mkcode

[7] See S Magadla, "Matrilocality and shared motherhood," *Mail and Guardian*, 25 August 2017, for more on the importance of *ukukhuthula* (diligence) in traditional Xhosa culture.

children, played to perfection the role of *umafungwashe* (first daughter). All of us younger siblings looked up to her exactly as we would have looked up to an older brother.

My earliest political activities, in COSAS, were shared by female comrades, of whom I would like to name three. All three sharing the same background and political activism, the different paths taken later in their lives show how difficult it is to generalize about female roles, showing that female comrades, like male comrades, are not all the same. Phumeza Ngxane, to start with, was so badly beaten up by the Ciskei Security Police that she never recovered her strength and was physically unfit for military purposes. When she left South Africa, she took the educational route to the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in Tanzania. Bulelwa Shosha, on the other hand, was fully trained as an MK soldier but was turned by the regime and, having become an askari, was killed in Mdantsane. Tamara Waka, our third COSAS comrade, remained behind in South Africa and eventually dropped out of politics.

When we four male comrades left South Africa together, as related in Chapter Two, we saw no women, not even in the ANC accommodations in Swaziland, until we reached Angola. When we started our basic training at Caculuma camp, women comrades shared the same training with us, and were deployed on the same duties. Women, like men, stood guard. Men, like women, did cooking. Both men and women fetched water in the afternoons. And, as the memoir of Ruth Mantile vividly relates, women too fought and died.[8] Later, however, when comrades were redeployed according to their personal capacities, gender differences did play a part. When I was base commander at Cacuso, for example, our unit was all-male, since the facilities were extremely rudimentary, food and medical supplies insufficient and, apart from fighting, the physical labour such as digging trenches and dug-outs, very hard. As Raymond Suttner reminds us, however, "it is important that we do not fetishise a narrow conception of combat as meaning direct physical fighting."[9]

In the major urban centres, as I observed during my time in Cape Town to be described in the next chapter, women comrades played many more varied roles as spies, couriers, undercover agents and even planters of bombs, the operations were different and more complex than those in Angola

[8] Mantile, 249-52.
[9] R Suttner, "Women in the ANC-led Underground," in N.Gasa (ed), *Women in South African History*, (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2007), 243.

which was more like "direct physical fighting." The principle of deployment, however, remained the same for both women and men. By the time you had finished your six months basic training, your seniors had well managed to assess your qualities and capacities as an individual, and to deploy you wherever you could best serve the organization.

At the larger camps like Caculuma, women comrades were numerous although probably not as numerous as the men. But, outside of love relationships, males and females related to each other more as fellow comrades, not so much as men and women. Personal relationships depended partly on shared experiences, but also partly on rank and seniority within MK structures. For example, I always looked up to Thenjiwe Mtintso as my senior whereas woman comrades trained by me, even those who are today of much greater political significance than myself, often address me on social occasions as "commander."

James Ngculu has devoted an entire chapter to the subject of women in MK, which I need not repeat but can only endorse. I can however confirm, to my personal knowledge of cases where more senior-ranking men took advantage of young women, and of young male comrades driven almost crazy when losing their long-term girlfriends to camp commanders. Such abuses were among those strongly exposed by the Stuart Commission and condemned at the Kabwe conference. Actual rape was however not supposed to be tolerated, and I know of one male soldier, guilty of raping an Angolan peasant woman, who was executed by firing squad.[10] Woman leaders such as Gertrude Shope visited much more often, and attended to specific grievances, while Chris Hani, especially, made a point of sensitizing male comrades regarding gender issues.

I should also say that, despite equality of status, women comrades never ceased to be women. One could see this especially during cultural events, and in the way, some dressed when out of uniform over weekends. Women and men, longing for the stability of family life, did get married, as well described by James Ngculu who was himself married in the camp.[11] The leadership itself made every effort to contact both sets of parents to inform them of the happy event and ask their blessings. Women who became pregnant left for Tanzania, as there were simply no suitable facilities in Angola. When they were transferred, for example, to Lusaka, it was often possible for

[10] Ruth Mantile's memoir (pages 206-7) shows that this rule was not upheld. The culture of silence, however, extended even to male comrades such as myself. Even now, I have difficulty understanding why the guilty male was sentenced to Quatro, rather than being executed.
[11] Ngculu, 152. Also Von den Steinen, 195.

their husbands to join them. I must admit that I was surprised by the allegation, quoted in Hassim, that women felt a "slight horror" of spending "long months" in Tanzania whereas they would have preferred to "be flung back into the actively fighting ranks so that childbirth does not become the devastating route to demobilization."[12]

Ever since the publication of Jacklyn Cock's pioneering *Colonels and Cadres* (1991), increasing attention has been paid to the role of women in MK by academics such as Elaine Unterhalter, Shireen Hassim and Siphokazi Magadla to name but a few.[13] Such writings have opened my eyes to many aspects of which I had been insufficiently aware, perhaps taking them for granted. Some of the topics covered are either beyond the range of my own personal experience, for example Hassim's discussion of the internal affairs of the Women's League; or else beyond the time frame of this thesis, for example, Magadla's discussion of the experience of demobilization after 1994. As a man, moreover, I am not in a position to comment on Thandi Modise's revelation that women combatants "faced the burden of proving themselves as equal soldiers by taking on more tasks than their male comrades."[14] Nor can I very well add to the intimate details of medical problems and sexual harassment revealed in the interviews shared by Von den Steinen. [15] I can only appreciate the words spoken in Angola by President OR Tambo on Women's Day, 1981, urging women to "liberate us men from antique concepts and attitudes about the place and role of women in society and in the development and direction of our revolutionary struggle."

From the perspective of my own experience, I would like to comment on the concepts of "patriarchy" and "heroic masculinity" which are new to me. Elaine Unterhalter's model of "heroic masculinity" certainly does fit some aspects of the MK personality as it emerged in the camps of Angola, more especially the willingness to sacrifice one's normal family life in the interests of the struggle. But this, and other characteristics of what Unterhalter calls "heroic masculinity" was equally true of female MK as well. As Suttner explains, MK and the liberation struggle in general, was a space to enact heroic and (s)he projects.[16] One must also point out that Unterhalter is looking

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[12] Quoted S Hassim, "Nationalism, Feminism and Autonomy: the ANC in Exile and the Question of Women, *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 30, 3 (2004), 436-7. For further discussion on this point, see Von den Steinen, 204-5.

[13] E.Unterhalter, "The work of the nation: Heroic masculinity in South African autobiographical writing of the anti-apartheid struggle," *European Journal of Development Research* 12 (2), (2000).157-78.

[14] Quoted Magadla, 115.

[15] Von den Steinen, 193-202.

[16] Suttner, "Masculinities," 71-106.

at the anti-apartheid struggle in general, mostly political struggles and those above ground. She has only considered the writings of two MK males, Ronnie Kasrils and Archie Sibeko, as pointed out in Chapter One, neither of whom was in any way typical.

Unterhalter has therefore missed the extent to which the conditions of our life in Angola contributed to what Raymond Suttner calls the "negation of intimacy," arising out of "overriding demands for sacrifice and loyalty to something greater than oneself."[17] This was however as true of women as it was of men.

This is not to deny that despite being disapproved in principle, the selfish and exploitative culture of patriarchy found its way into the Angolan camps. I would be the first to agree that many female comrades were shamefully abused by individual camp commanders, the very ones who also abused male comrades in other ways for other reasons, and that many, especially of the older comrades, shared very old-fashioned and patriarchal views of the place of women in the struggle and the home. But that was never the MK culture or even the ANC culture, as expressed from the first not only by Gertrude Shope, but by enlightened comrades like Chris Hani, more especially after the Kabwe conference of 1985. As Dipuo Mvelase recalls:[18]

> Comrade Chris, he made me feel, I am a soldier, and I shouldn't allow a situation where people misuse the fact that I am a woman to put me in a position where women in society are generally treated … we were all comrades, we were all new recruits into the army, and he treated us the same.

Let me conclude this section by emphasizing that the sentiments expressed by Comrade Dipuo were not those of Chris Hani alone, but shared by almost all MK in Angola, male and female, that regardless of the way in which "women in society are generally treated," that, in the process of the liberation struggle, we were building a new society in which, despite differences of gender, language and race, we would all be "treated the same."

[17] R Suttner, "Masculinity in the African National Congress-led liberation movement: The underground period," *KLEIO*, 37 (2005), page 94.
[18] Raymond Suttner Interview with Dipuo Catherine Mvelase, 29 June 1993. Raymond Suttner Private Collection.

3.4 CACUSO: Fighting UNITA

Following my return from training in East Germany [to be discussed in Chapter Four], I was appointed base commander at Cacuso in eastern Angola. This placed us in the frontline of the Angolan war between our allies (MPLA/FAPLA) and the UNITA forces of Jonas Savimbi, armed by Pretoria. The memoirs of Stanley Manong record the breakdown of trust between his unit and that of FAPLA to the extent of voicing the suspicion that the local FAPLA commander misled MK comrades into the ambushes of UNITA. [19] Comrades involved in the events at Viana are understandably angry at the part played by FAPLA in crushing their protest.[20] Although I am not sufficiently informed to comment on this aspect, I can confirm that the actions of our unit were not co-ordinated with FAPLA. We were careful to build good relationships with the Angolan peasants in our neighbourhood, but we only saw FAPLA (and SWAPO) soldiers when our team played football against them.

Our alliance with FAPLA and our participation in the Angolan civil war was forced on us by our logistics, all our supplies were trucked in from the Angolan capital of Luanda, 440 km from Caculama, going through dense forests. The journey took a whole day and night due to the slow speed of the heavy military trucks, backed up by Land Rovers for additional security. Several comrades were nevertheless wounded or killed in UNITA ambushes, which truthfully undermined our morale. We were not afraid to die, but we were fearful of dying in Angola. We never forgot to think about our families at home. They did not know where we were, or even if we were still among the living. We knew that they would not be able to bury us if we perished in Angola. These thoughts were never openly discussed, but we expressed them in such songs as:

Sobashiya abazali ekhaya
Saphuma saye kwamanye mazwe
Apho kungazi khona umama nobaba

[We left our parents at home
We came out among other nations
Which were not knowable to our mothers and fathers]

These ambushes by UNITA were one of the main causes which led to the 1984 mutiny, called Mkatashinga in the language of Angola.

[19] Manong, 201-3. Also Mantile, 235-9, 249-252.
[20] Ketelo et al,.46-7. Also Manong, 211.

3.5 ANC Leadership in the camps

The personal and political leadership of the ANC in the camps of Angola has been heavily criticized not only in certain of the academic literature discussed in Chapter One, but in some of the MK memoirs as well. Joe Modise, Andrew Masondo, Mzwai Piliso and Chris Hani are all frequently mentioned in this respect. Before discussing the controversial aspects of Security and Discipline, it is therefore relevant to add some comments of my own, inasmuch as the conduct of these comrades came within my personal knowledge. I should however caution that the political culture of ANC is one of collective decision-making and collective responsibility. Being a movement of the nation as a whole (*umbutho wesizwe*), the ANC is obliged to accommodate many differences of opinion, not of principle but of strategy and tactics, responsible between National Conferences to the National Executive and the wise, tolerant and patient leadership of Comrade OR Tambo. With regard to Angola specifically, it must also be remembered that the national leadership based in Lusaka, and with important responsibilities elsewhere (Chris Hani in Maseru, for instance), could not easily impose day-to-day control over a big country like Angola, always at war with the common enemy, and with poor communications.

The national leadership was always most visible on the national days such as 16 December, in addition to the cultural events and other forms of celebration, such days occasioned visits from the ANC national leadership. The morale of comrades would be high and tightened because the leadership would brief us about the situation and political developments at home and abroad. When the leadership visited us, there would always be time for questions and comrades would take the opportunity to ask questions, sometimes pushing leadership into a corner, thus resulting in false hope at the time.

Leaders like Army Commander Joe Modise and National Commissar Andrew Masondo were not favourites among the rank and file. Joe Modise was almost always in Lusaka, his leadership style was hands-off and top-down, and he had a reputation for corruption. The big Yellow House in Lusaka, where we sometimes stayed, was owned not by ANC but by Joe Modise personally. He was driving a very smart car, a Mazda XR 6, the first one ever seen in Lusaka. Comrades had been complaining about Joe Modise to OR Tambo ever since the Wankie Campaign,[21] but it was the

[21] H Macmillan, "The Hani Memorandum: Introduced and Annotated," *Transformation* [Durban], 69 (2009). For a vivid description of Joe Modise, Mantile 246

great wisdom of OR to take account of the balance of forces within the organization. Joe Modise undoubtedly commanded support in certain quarters, and OR was desirous, at all costs, to avoid any suspicion of tribalism [Xhosa versus Tswana].

National Commisar Andrew Masondo was always boasting of his achievements as a mathematics lecturer at Fort Hare, prior to his imprisonment on Robben Island. He was very good at chess and draughts, and he used to sometimes join comrades in training, even sprinting the 100 metres. But some comrades did not like to be around him too much, because he often demanded of a person to recite the Freedom Charter. He also had a reputation of abusing female comrades, but no one would say that in the open for fear of Mbokodo. Following the mutiny, he was counted as one of the leaderships that was the most hated by the comrades, resulting in his demotion to be a school principal at SOMAFCO in Tanzania.[22]

Mzwayi Piliso was very different to Andrew Masondo. While other senior comrades expected to be addressed according to their rank, Mzwayi always insisted on being addressed as "Tata." According to Vladimir Shubin, it was he who protected Chris Hani and his comrades from the death sentence following the submission of the "Hani memorandum."[23] Shubin also documents the many achievements of Mzwayi in terms of the building of the organization, including the camps network of Angola and the training facilities availed from East Germany. Mzwayi was the only senior comrade who spent all his time in Angola until he was called to Lusaka to take charge of Security. He was indeed a strict disciplinarian but neither he nor we saw any contradiction between being a father-figure and being a strict disciplinarian. As James Ngculu has correctly pointed out, Mzwayi's departure in 1981 opened a gap between the Comrades and the Security which only got worse. While he cannot escape responsibility for the abuses of iMbokodo, it is also important to highlight that he never attempted to deny that responsibility. Those who unthinkingly condemn Mzwayi should not neglect to consider the "sincere and genuine .. remorse" shared with Comrade Manong after Kabwe, or the empathy he displayed for Ruth Mantile after learning she was pregnant through rape [24] Accepting the principle of collective responsibility, Mzwayi showed himself prepared to "carry the can" for the misdeeds of others, and Lutha ndo

[22] For an excellent description of Masondo's arrogance, see Mantile, 145.
[23] V. Shubin, "Comrade Mzwai,"in A. Lissoni et al, *One Hundred Years of the ANC* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012) ; Manong, 60
[24] Manong, 248-9, Mantile, 276-7.

Dyasop himself calls it "ludicrous .. that all the blame for atrocities was heaped on one person, Mzwandile Piliso, thus exonerating the rest."[25]

But when Commander-in-Chief Oliver Reginald Tambo and Army Chief of Staff Chris Hani visited the camp, the comrades would be happy. Primarily since they fulfilled all the requirements one would place on a leader. Comrade Chris Hani knew almost all of us by our real names and places of origin, he had his way, even though this was not allowed, he took it upon himself to create these personal relations. He was a good listener, and always made time for comrades with personal problems to express their concerns and get solutions. He never hesitated to criticize the camp command when things were not done properly. And yet, when he had to call comrades into order, he was able to do that without compromising military discipline. For such reasons, he was given the new name of "Messiah" by both MK soldiers and ANC civilian comrades.[26]

3.6 MK Discipline: The Death of MK Skhumbuzo

The tragic death of Sipho Bam (MK Skhumbuzo) , narrated by Luthando Dyasop (2021: 100-103), has been narrated twice before, once by Stanley Manong on pages 197-198 of *If We Must Die* (2015) and once, privately, by myself to Professor Robbie Van Niekerk of Rhodes University on 22 August 2017.[27] The dates are important inasmuch as they prove that Manong's version and my own, which do differ slightly in detail, were recorded before that of Dyasop and are therefore entirely independent. Let me also emphasise that the incident is not relevant to Skhumbuzo only, but as a significant example of the challenges of discipline in the Angolan camps.

I can say that I am in a position to know what happened because I was the officer on duty at Cacuso camp throughout. For the sake of clarity, let me first provide a verbatim copy of the text I shared with Prof Van Niekerk in August 2017, after which I will undertake a comparison with the version provided by Luthando Dyasop in *Out of Quatro*:

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[25] Shubin, "Comrade Mzwai," 270; Dyasop, 223.
[26] So much has been written on Chris Hani, that it seems unnecessary to repeat it here. See, for example, Ngculu p.166-8; T Mali, *Chris Hani: the Sun that set before Dawn* (Johannesburg: SACHED Trust, 1993); J Smith and B Tromp, *Hani: a Life Too Short* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2009). For more detail on Chris Hani's years in former Transkei, where I worked very closely with him, see Chapter Five.
[27] Informal Interview with Mzimasi Mike Hala, 22/08/17. ISER Grahamstown. Transcript in possession of Prof Jeff Peires, copy to be deposited in Cory Library, Rhodes University.

The comrade was based in [name of his base camp].[28] They came to [Cacuso] to deliver the groceries. But [Cacuso] has got everything, has got a village, so it's easy to go and meet women at night or during the day. It's easy to get liquor. So when the time arrived [16.00] whereby they were supposed to go back to their [base camp], he was drunk and refused to board the truck. And fortunately that day I was the officer on duty. I pleaded with him, because I knew him from home [Eastern Cape]. "Skhumbuzo, please go back to your base, your truck is waiting for you." He refused and refused and refused.

We were next to a big barracks, and it started getting dark and we heard fired shots. And comrades started deploying, there was an exchange of fire. Then after thirty minutes or so, we find that it's this comrade [Skhumbuzo] that I was telling to go back to his camp that started the firing. And unfortunately, whilst exchanging fire, one innocent comrade was killed.

And a military tribunal had to be set up, chaired by Comrade Lennox [Lagu] from PE. Comrade Lennox was a [veteran of] the Wankie campaign, Chief of Staff to Chris Hani. then the decision was taken that, because this comrade is the one that started the shooting that led to the killing of that one, so he must face the firing squad. That decision was taken at night, and the firing squad was to be in the following morning. Remember that I was the officer on duty from [6am to 6pm].[29] So I had to keep him in chains the whole night, then, before I knocked off, we had to execute him.

Then we took him to, not even a hill, an open place, veld, we dug just a shallow grave. We took him there, blindfolded him,[30] and he was asked by Comrade Lennox to say his last words. Because he's the one who led to the death of this other comrade. And he told me before we could fire, his last words were that, referring to me, that if I happened to get back to South Africa, I must go and tell his mother, how did he die. Then I said, no, I will. Then, we were ten, all armed with AKs, cocked our weapons, opened the safety aim, and the order was issued: Fire!

We killed him, pulled him into this grave. As I said, the grave was shallow. His knee was not flat, and Comrade Lennox asked me to press or push that knee, and I had to push it. Again, the head was not flat, and again the same instruction. I don't know whether Comrade Lennox was giving me these instructions because [Skhumbuzo] had addressed his last words to me.

Reflecting on this matter, I am sure that Comrade Lennox was testing my discipline, choosing me myself to implement his instruction because he knew, from Skhumbuzo's last words, that we were

[28] Square brackets indicative of mistakes in the transcript.
[29] A mistake was made in the transcript. I was on duty 6am to 6 pm, and the incident occurred about 4pm. Due to its serious nature, my period of duty was extended by another 12 hours.
[30] Another mistake on my part. He was only blindfolded after he had said his last words.

friends from home, whether I had sufficient determination to put my commitment to MK ahead of my natural human feelings. Because, for me, the lesson to be learned from Skhumbuzo's tragedy, is that MK had no option except to enforce the necessary discipline. It must always be remembered that MK was an army, we were not playing soldiers, this was not a holiday camp. We were highly trained soldiers carrying highly dangerous automatic weapons. It could not be allowed for any soldier to defy the officer on duty and shoot off his weapon at random, endangering everybody, more especially in this case where an innocent comrade was accidentally shot dead. A military tribunal is not a kangaroo court and the sentence, imposed for causing the death of another comrade, although harsh, was the only one possible.

It would seem from the text of Luthando Dyasop that he was in the group drinking liquor with Skhumbuzo in the village, but he returned to base earlier than Skhumbuzo, and was fast asleep when the shooting started. He did not himself see what happened, and a close reading of page 102 indicates that it was based on hearsay of what he was afterwards informed. The shooting happened during daylight hours, there was no threat of a UNITA attack and nowhere near a railway station. Nothing that Skhumbuzo might have said about the ANC leadership in any way contributed to his death. It was the drunkenness itself, which caused him to refuse to board the waiting truck and open fire. If he had not been so drunk, he may well have been alive today. As for Dyasop's suggestion that Skhumbuzo was attempting suicide, I must say that Skhumbuzo was a trained soldier, and that if he had truly wished to commit suicide, he could have done it, not merely managing "to graze his cheek."

Dyasop correctly describes the scene whereby Skhumbuzo's verdict was announced to the whole detachment, but he is quite wrong to state that it was delivered by Chris Hani, because it was Lennox Lagu, not Chris, who conducted the entire proceedings. The process whereby he and the other drinkers were sentenced to a month's hard labour is credible, but it must have happened on another occasion as I have no direct knowledge of it. Although he does not fail to mention Comrade Lagu, Manong (p.198) also mentions Chris as being present. I can only explain this by thinking that memory does play tricks, and that Chris Hani was such a dominant figure that he must always feature in any recollection of those days. This is not to suggest that Chris would have come to any other conclusion. Comrade Lennox was Chris's Chief of Staff, both were veterans of the Wankie campaign, and both understood very well that without the necessary

discipline, MK would be hopelessly lost. It is that very same principle that guided Chris's actions during the period of the mutiny, a principle which Luthando Dyasop – with due respect – was seemingly never able to fully grasp.

3.7 Security and Discipline

When I arrived in Angola, the process known as "Shishita" was already under way. Shishita started in Zambia in October 1980, after the Zambian security forces discovered weapons at an ANC farm, cached by MK comrades formerly with ZIPRA who had entered Zambia without permission. This linked MK members with car theft smuggling and dagga abuse. At some stage, an MK guard even shot at a Zambian policeman, severely embarrassing the ANC with their hosts, and exposing the fact that MK had been infiltrated by agents provocateurs from the apartheid state. On 25 January 1981, President Tambo publicly blamed "indiscipline, drunkenness and abuse of weapons" for the crisis. The security department had clearly failed the movement, and its then leadership was replaced by Mzwai Piliso, until then the head of military training and personnel in Angola.[31]

Shishita was completed by 1 July 1981, the details of which were submitted by the ANC to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in May 1997. Let me fully support the view of James Ngculu in *The Honour to Serve* where he frankly admits that mistakes were made and wrong things were done, As he puts it, "fear gripped the ranks of the organization" and "harsh methods of punishment excited some young members of the Security Department and they applied them excessively."[32] Stephen Ellis, however, has gone much further by continual references to "Shishita" as a "purge," effectively comparing MK Security to the Stalinists who purged the Old Bolsheviks in the 1930s, and quoting Moses Mabhida's strong condemnation of dagga-smokers without putting it into context as Comrade Ngculu has done.[33]

The starting point of any assessment must be that, infiltrated as we were by enemy agents and askaris "turned" by the apartheid regime, our army could not have survived without a Security Department. Second, that no army can function without discipline and respect for the chain of

[31] H. Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years: the ANC in Exile in Zambia* (Johannesburg: Jacana,2013), Chapter 10,
[32] Ngculu, 158-60.
[33] Compare Ngculu, 102-3 with Ellis, 172, 177,

command. There can be no such thing as half-disciplined; an army which is not completely disciplined will in time become completely undisciplined, more especially with the hardships and frustrations which we suffered. By committing ourselves to MK – "you cease to be yourself" – you also commit yourself to the discipline of MK. We had moreover been issued with lethal weapons and live ammunition, and comrades well knew that the abuse of such merited the most severe of punishments.

That there were problems within our Security Department, no one would deny. Comrades from Security would abuse their positions to gain preferential access to supplies and privileges such as visits to Luanda, not stopping short of the abuse of female comrades. Personal jealousies also entered the picture, comrades were falsely accused, and some, even to this day, are still not aware of the true reasons for their arrest and detention. Such problems were not, of course, new, and began even before the establishment of iMbokodo, as the case of the Hani memorandum of 1969 makes clear. And there was no internal grievance procedure or institutional channel of appeal.

Being at the time base commander of Cacuso camp in the heart of UNITA territory, I was not personally present during the events of the mutiny but will briefly relate my understanding of these events for the purpose of drawing some lessons and conclusions.[34] Matters reached a boiling-point in December 1983 when an MK unit of seventeen soldiers from Kangandala camp was ambushed by UNITA with the loss of five comrades.[35] As already explained, comrades were prepared to die, but not in Angola. Added to that were the harsh punishments unfairly handed out by iMbokodo, especially being tied to trees. MK comrades from Kangandala expressed their dissatisfaction by firing into the air and, joined by comrades from other camps around Malanje commandeered trucks and gathered at Viana transit camp, close to the Angolan capital of Luanda, demanding to see the leadership. They elected a "Committee of Ten" to represent them, but the

[34] For an overview of the Mutiny, its causes, and its consequences, see Ngculu, *Honour to Serve*, Chapter 11 and L. Callinicos, "Oliver Tambo and the Dilemma of the Camp Mutinies in Angola in the Eighties," South *African Historical Journal* 64, 3 2012), 591-600. For the bitter version of the ex-mutineers, see Bandile Ketelo et al, "A Miscarriage of Democracy: the ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in Umkhonto Wesizwe," *Searchlight South Africa* 5, July 1990 reprinted in P Trewhela, *Inside Quatro* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2009), 8-45. For personal reminiscences of MK members caught in the middle, see Manong, Chapter 17; Bottoman, .139-154.
[35] Manong, 206

scene was one of chaos, random firing of weapons, open smoking of dagga and even looting. Joe Modise was prepared to meet them but was warned by his driver not to proceed.

It was at this point that Chris Hani showed his greatness.[36] Unarmed, he entered a hall filled with over-excited and heavily armed comrades. He told them that he expected every true Umkhonto soldier to leave his weapons outside. Respecting Chris as they did, they finally agreed and Chris promised to take their complaints to OR Tambo.[37] As is well known, a commission of senior comrades headed by "James Stuart"/ Manie Loots quickly arrived in Angola, interviewing every one of us, including myself, on an individual basis. The Commission's report, confirming that the grievances were genuine, not the work of enemy agents, ultimately led to the resolutions of the 1985 Kabwe conference, and the recall of Mzwai Piliso and Andrew Masondo, who had made themselves unpopular due to their strictness.[38]

Unfortunately, the progress being made was not timeously reported back to the activists who had protested in Viana. Some, including the "Committee of Ten" were sent to Quatro, while others were disarmed and sent to Pango camp. The situation remained tense and again boiled over when the security resumed the bad practice of tying disobedient comrades to the trees. This triggered the second and most tragic phase of the mutiny in which disarmed protestors stormed the armory and shot the camp commanders dead. As Wonga Bottoman put it, "the barbarous murder of comrades made it difficult to see a clean connection between the dastardly acts and the wholesome demands for a consultative conference made at Viana."[39] As a result, many of those who had previously sympathized with the Viana protest had no option but to back the restoration of discipline and authority. Close comrades found themselves on opposite sides of the fence, including myself against Cekiso Hoyi, the very comrade who had accompanied me on my journey into exile.[40]

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[36] This view is contested by ex-mutineers Ketelo et al, especially pages 18-26. Their bitterness, in my view, is caused by the fact that they had expected Chris Hani to join them which, as a disciplined member of MK, he refused to do. As Wonga Bottoman puts it in his independent description of these events, "Up to that point, Cde Chris was the hoped for patron of the rebellion. In his address, he outlined his position: he was no part of a misguided rebellion." (page 147).

[37] Ngculu, 168-70.

[38] See especially Manong, chapters 18-19.

[39] Bottoman, 152.

[40] On the Mutiny itself, compare Ngculu, 169-70, Bottoman, 139-154 with Ellis, 190-2.

As is well known, the report of the Stuart Commission led directly to the Kabwe (Zambia) conference of 1985, where grievances came out into the open and resolutions taken. Following Kabwe, conditions did indeed improve as the leadership attended more closely to the condition of the camps and visited more often. In addition to which, the armed struggle inside South Africa was finally taking off, and more and more comrades were deployed home or sent to the socialist countries for advanced training.

But it is not as if the tensions expressed in the mutiny could simply disappear into thin air. There was something like a pushback by elements who persisted in maintaining that the grievances were not real, but the work of enemy agents.[41] This mindset resulted in the treatment of those detained at Quatro, which has been widely publicized to the discredit of MK and the ANC as a whole. "Quatro" was in fact a nickname for Camp 32, which was originally established as the "Morris Seabelo Rehabilitation Centre." One might have hoped that the Quatro personnel would have received special training in rehabilitation processes but, unfortunately this was not the case. Many of them were relatively young, newly appointed as securities and trained in East Germany, treated the detainees as nothing other than askaris. Even certain older securities had absorbed anti-intellectual prejudices from ZIPRA veterans and were negative towards those who were better-educated or spoke English too well. According to Vladimir Shubin, Oliver Tambo was so concerned about the situation that he, personally, requested the Soviet Union to send experts to advise *iMbokodo* but unfortunately this never seemed to have happened.[42]

3.8 Ideology

The first and most important point which proponents of the counter-narrative always overlook is that ANC/MK was at war with the apartheid regime. Cuba and the Soviet Union, Communist states, were our friends while such so-called democracies as the USA were covertly supporting our enemies. They supported us based on their ideology, international worker solidarity against capitalism, which were inclined to respect, not out of love for Karl Marx, but from our experience of conditions back in South Africa. But above all, it was a military alliance. We respected Joe Slovo, a military veteran of the Second World War, not so much because he was a Communist but

[41] Manong, 246-50.
[42] Shubin, *ANC*, 244

because he was a military strategist of the highest order. He had nothing to do with security matters. The SACP of those days included many diverse elements, including even the "Gang of Eight" who were later expelled from the ANC. Thabo Mbeki himself was a member of the SACP Politburo when it was established in 1977.[43]

The relationship between the ANC and the SACP goes back a long time, before even the launch of the armed struggle. According to Soviet historian Vladimir Shubin, it was in 1965, after the ANC underground had been smashed at Rivonia, that the SACP deliberately resolved to refrain from recruiting its members from among the ranks of MK.[44] Even after MK's expulsion from Tanzania, when MK was wholly dependent on the Soviet Union, the SACP Politburo meeting in Moscow in 1978, adopted guidelines that SACP comrades should never "impose" the party line "but rather strengthen unity and revolutionary policy by example and open persuasion." Indeed, the SACP did not have its own structures in the camps, nor was there any SACP authority or administrative entity responsible for the affairs of the camp. Authority in the camps followed military practices, the highest command being the regional military structure that was responsible for all MK issues in Angola.

The former socialist countries offered scholarships to many ANC students, also to the other liberation movements, and to students from other developing countries. All students were trained in academic and technical institutions. The ANC students were never targeted for ideological education, nor were they subjected to "ideological assessment" of sorts. The students received classes from academic or technical instructors like the rest of the students who were in the country. In East Germany, as part of the formal curriculum, history was imparted which would have had ideological biases toward communism, and that would be as far as ideological "influence" would go. It is conceivable, however, that if a student went out of her/his way to propagate against the status quo, he/she might end up in trouble with one of the authorities.

Those who were sent to Party Schools in the former socialist countries were indeed instructed in Marxist-Leninist ideology and party organisation. But no ideological line was imparted to MK

[43] Gevisser, Chapter 30.
[44] Shubin, *ANC*, 58-9, 89-92, 145.

military like myself when sent to East Germany for further training. The Germans who interacted with us were all military instructors. Politically speaking, we were trained only in our own camps or in other ANC institutions, the policies of which were based on the political aspirations expressed in the Freedom Charter, most immediately the liberation of the people of South Africa from the apartheid government.

3.9 Conclusion

Everybody in the camps lived in hope of going back to South Africa to fight. Even the freedom songs we sang songs like "*siyaya ePitoli*" and "*sikhumbula eSouth Africa*" were constantly motivating us. When Land Rovers or V8's from Luanda arrived, the rumor would spread like wildfire that comrade "so and so" is returning to South Africa. We had our own terminology such as "*ufikile umtshayina*," signaling the moment when you are called to the administration block to be told by Mbokodo and the camp commander that you must give back all your uniforms, boots, and weapons, put on civilian clothes, you will be leaving for Luanda and Zambia. Those being called would find themselves surrounded by other comrades bidding them farewell.

My turn arrived and I was called. I did not know when or where I would be infiltrated inside the country. I did not even know with which people I was to form a unit, though I hoped it would be with the Special Forces unit I had commanded in Cuba. Much as we had never had time to pray, I had always prayed that I should not die in Angola or exile, but inside South Africa, not alone but having taken with me members of the enemy forces. I was happy too because I was to exchange the military life for something more civilian. No more taking orders, to be told when to sing, eat, and sleep. I was going to be free from mosquito bites, free from listening too carefully to the birds in the trees, in case their change of note sounded an alarm.

Much as I was excited, I also thought about some of those comrades who had trained before me, some were of the June 16 detachment. As to why they were not deployed inside the country, only the Mbokodo department would know. Again, I also thought of Cekiso Hoyi, Luvuyo Lerumo, Vuyo Madenyuka, with whom I had left the country. Cekiso had died in the Mutiny. Luvuyo was in one of the frontline states, awaiting infiltration. Vuyo Madenyuka was still deployed in the main kitchens.

Although I was yet to be deployed further, my years in Angola had transformed me into a new person. My mind had been opened to understanding the challenges of life, respect, love, and comradeship, learning lessons which guide me now even now in civilian life. As the last survivor of the four comrades who arrived together in February 1981, it made me happy to speak at the event when a high school in Komani my hometown was renamed "Luvuyo Lerumo" in memory of my fallen comrade. I'm more than happy that the country we fought for attained its freedom in 1994, even though most of its wealth still belongs to a minority. South Africa now belongs to all who live in it, and there's no government who can claim authority unless it is based on the will of people.

CHAPTER FOUR:

UNDERGROUND: CUBA, VENDA AND CAPE TOWN

About eighteen months after my arrival in Angola, I was selected for further training in the German Democratic Republic (DDR/ East Germany). For purposes of selection, suitable comrades were first identified by the camp command, then checked by the security structure (Mbokodo) who made the final decision. For one to be chosen, discipline, loyalty, and unquestionable personal behaviour were prioritized. Those of us, who thought we could advance ourselves by doing thing to impress the leadership, ended up nowhere. When comrade Chris Hani and other leaders visited our camps, I was always appointed to lead the security unit appointed by Mbokodo, most probably because I had a record of discipline, loyalty, and good behaviour amongst comrades.

Our political classes in Angola had placed most emphasis on understanding the ANC itself, its history and its policies. Communism and international politics were also taught, more especially the difference between the socialist, and imperialist countries. The eastern block contribution to our struggle was frequently mentioned. In the eastern bloc countries, we were informed, governments prioritized the provision of basic human necessities to their people: shelter, food, clothes, education and access to medical facilities. The philosophy of the Imperialists, that being the highest stage of capitalism, was "every one for himself," leaving God to take care of everything else. Religion, in their view, was a weapon used by the imperialists to oppress Third World peoples in general and Africans in particular. Religious observances, grace before meals for example, were not actually forbidden but nevertheless disapproved of.

As a guerrilla army, physical training was necessary and important. In Angola, we were privileged to be trained by MK comrades who had fought with ZAPU during the Zimbabwe liberation war, and joined us straight from the assembly points after Zimbabwe gained its independence. That training was very harsh because those comrades were fresh from armed struggle. The training of the Special Force Units was far more complex though, indeed, one needed to be focused and fit. In East Germany, we were trained for urban guerrilla warfare, which was also physically tough. Comrades were sent there in groups of forty at a time, almost always males. The overall

commander of each group was always a veteran of a previous group, recommended by the German instructors,

In East Germany we stayed in a remote area called Teterow, where it was very difficult to meet with local people.[1] Our training was conducted indoors and conducted our practicals in the nearby bush. As far as we could see, we were being very warmly received. All our basic human needs were provided and the people themselves seemed happy about their living conditions. We could not see the standard of living in West Germany because the television was restricted, and were not interacting with the ordinary people to the extent of hearing about their challenges. What we saw during our stay satisfied us that Communism was the best approach to the achievement of socialism.

4.1 Cuba

When the first Special Forces Unit was created in 1984, I had the distinction of being appointed its first commander. We were twenty comrades altogether, including two women, receiving specialized training in rural and urban warfare, and reporting directly to Commander in Chief, OR Tambo. We were the very first such Special Forces Unit to be trained since the establishment of Umkhonto weSizwe on 16 December 1961, and were much respected by the Cuban comrades because of our positions.

We had already met Cuban soldiers in Angola, where they were based in Malanje Province, visiting our camps time and again to instruct the comrades in communications and artillery. When we had first encountered Russian instructors in Angola, they looked so much like Boers.[2] Training under Cubans was very interesting and enjoyable, more especially because we knew we were being trained by people with lots of combat experience. But we only met the Cuban people themselves sometime after our arrival. During our time there, we had a translator who spoke English very well, and some of us could speak Portuguese which is in a way similar to Spanish. While there, we were not restricted from moving around. Our first six months were spent in Havana, the capital, where most of students from African countries also stayed. We went into town almost every day,

[1] V. Shubin, "Comrade Mzwai," 264.
[2] Interview with Madoda Daki, March 2015.

being provided with monthly allowances for clothes, social activities and so on. Cubans are a nation of whites, blacks, mulatos (Coloureds) and American Indians. There is no racial segregation in Cuba, they are all united as Cubans. We so much that such a society could be implemented in a free South Africa. It was in Cuba that I fully realized that we are all God's creation, regardless of the colour of our skin.

Before starting military, we were trained in security, intelligence and counter-intelligence at Antonia Briones Montolo College in Santiago de Cuba. Political training was always merged with military, it being a principle that our people are our forests. Urban warfare training was not new to me, as I had experienced it in East Germany. Rural warfare training was more demanding, especially preparing secret, concealed dugouts within a very short space of time. Our training was specifically directed towards attacks on military targets and government installations. Unfortunately, we were never called upon to implement these specialisations, as we were variously deployed on our return, rather than as a single unit. I did however have the honour to report our progress to O.R. Tambo and Fidel Castro in person on the occasion of a battle simulation delivered on the occasion of their visit to our Special Forces Training Camp.

I can say without fear of contradiction that the Cuban people loved their country. They were satisfied with their standard of living, though they suffered from shortages, even sometimes of bread and often had to wait in long queues. They well understood that the conditions they lived under were due to the brutality of America, and they all identified imperialism as the enemy of the people. Fidel Castro was their darling, father figure, comparable with Mandela. Even in restaurants, the name of Fidel Castro Ruz was the talk of the town. From birth onwards, children are told and taught about Fidel, their Commander in Chief and how he liberated them with his brother Raul, and his comrades in arms such as Che Guevara. That is why, when they communicating to each other they use the word, "Companero," meaning comrade. Whereas in South Africa we only say "comrade" to other members of our political party, otherwise we call each other by name.

Returning from Cuba in 1986, our team was deployed to train commandos at Cacuso village in eastern Angola. We were asked to teach MK comrades from Tanzania how to construct secret dugouts, a task which requires time and fitness. To make matters worse, the situation around our camps was beginning to deteriorate. Logistics were becoming a challenge to the extent that our

base was in crisis. Our only available food, besides condensed milk, was maize from the fields, which we fried or cooked with water and condensed milk. We ate this maize for almost three months without change of diet. We had a chant which we used to keep our spirits up, namely, "Whom do we serve, comrades?" to which we responded, "We serve the people of South Africa."

As the saying goes, Christmas comes only once a year. Our camp was in the mountains, with an Angolan peasant village not far from us, about two kilometres away. One morning we were called by our neighbours, and found this big, long snake, a python. We shot the head and cut it off. When we started to slaughter it, we found a buck swallowed inside, not yet digested. I call that Christmas day because after three months without proper food we now had a Buck to eat. Though python meat taste like fish, we celebrated that day and morale was very high. Unfortunately, the morale of comrades in other camps was beginning to deteriorate, leading to a lack of discipline.

4.2 Venda

Even before the June 1985 consultative conference of the ANC at Kabwe in Zambia, comrades were complaining that those of us who had been trained in sophisticated weapons were not being infiltrated into South Africa.[3] The Kabwe conference opened the door, and O.R. Tambo used the opportunity of the 8 January statement to declare 1986 "the Year of Umkhonto WeSizwe," calling for "a military offensive that would put the enemy into a strategic retreat." A regional structure for the Northern Transvaal (now Limpopo Province) was established for the very first time, based in Hatfield, Harare, Zimbabwe under comrade "Manchecker" (Julius Maliba). We had formerly suffered heavy casualties in the Transvaal region, due perhaps to the activities of enemy agents but by this time, we had begun to sense that the "Boers" were losing their willingness to fight, and that they no longer believed that MK were nothing but agents of the Soviet Union.[4]

Reggie Mokgotsi and his Unit were to be deployed to South Africa via Zimbabwe, while our unit was briefed by Comrade Manchecker to infiltrate the Venda homeland for the purpose of reconnaissance and the identification of possible targets. We were five altogether, under myself as commander, four of us being trained Special Forces (Madoda Daki, Thabang Maja, "Ïke" and

[3] For Kabwe Conference, see G Houston in SADET IV, pp 201-208; Manong, Chapter 18; Callinicos, 617-18;
[4] Interview with Lungisa Mlomo, Mbizana, March 2015.

myself) and the other a Venda-speaker known as "Kruschev" on whom we were entirely dependent.

Two days before we were due to infiltrate, comrade Chris Hani brought us our fake passports and asked us to confirm our details. To our surprise, we found that they had been printed incorrectly; and that they did not align with our physical appearance or year of birth. I myself was 28 years old in 1987 but according to the passport details, I should have been four years only. These errors made comrade Chris Hani furious as he felt that it was not carelessness but sabotage. Any police officer at the border gate would have easily spotted so glaring an error. It took two weeks for our new passports to arrive, but Chris took it upon himself to make sure that the errors were not repeated, and this time they were correct.

We left Harare for Masvingo where another safe house was occupied by ANC soldiers. That very same night, we crossed the Limpopo River by *denghi* (a small rubber boat) exposed to the deadly creatures of both river (hippos, crocodiles), and land (buffalos and lions). Reggie and his comrades, however were attacked by a hippo in the middle of the Zambesi River and drowned. Zambian Police divers managed to recover their bodies which were buried in Livingstone, Zambia. The National Prosecuting Authority Unit is in the process of exhuming and returning their bodies to the places of their birth. On the day of their reburial, I strongly believe that I will go to his home to pay my last respects.

Fortunately for us, the Venda comrade knew all the short cuts and dangerous areas through which we had to pass. We were carrying tinned food, hand grenades, AK47, limpet mines and R500 each worth of fake notes.[5] It seemed about twelve kilometres, although we had no way of knowing for sure because it was so dark. We walked the whole night until we reached a white farming area called Folovhodwe. Khruschev, the Venda comrade, guided us to a safe house where we stayed for a while, preparing our mission.

This would be my first experience infiltrating South Africa as a trained soldier. I was indeed eager to fight for liberation, against the white domination which had oppressed and belittled black people for so many years. Fear of the unknown was constantly resident in my mind, however my

[5] Counterfeit Rand notes were printed in DDR, and distributed only to MK soldiers deployed underground within South Africa. Ellis, 148, 169.

determination was sufficient to trump such thoughts. As their commander, it would have been an unjust to the comrades of my unit to nurse such fears. I had to be strong enough to urge and encourage my unit every day. I needed to ensure that we did not lose focus.

After Folovhodwe, we had to hide the knapsacks carrying our food and other material, though each of us retained two hand grenades. We changed our clothes when we approached the town of Tshilamba, where we caught a bus to Thohoyandou, the capital of the Venda homeland, arriving there about 08:00 in the morning. The Venda comrade took us to a local restaurant, though we did not sit at the same table because we always had to maintain a reasonable distance from each other. After that, we took a taxi to the University of Venda where our comrade had a contact person working underground. The two Venda comrades had not met for more than a year, and we had to rely on trust, but this was a risk we were all willing to take.

The underground comrade organised accommodation for us. For reasons of security, we had to separate as a unit and reside in different residences of the University. There were different ethnic groups at the university, so the medium of instruction was English. We each had a different cover story, mine being that I was a student from KZN. We were also provided with student cards to allow us to blend in. At no point during our stay did we encounter informers or enemy agents. Instead, we were able to recruit students to join the movement, taking it upon ourselves to teach them aspects of military combat.

Nevertheless, we never lost sight of our primary objective in Venda, which was the identification of possible enemy targets, such as police stations and homeland installations, perhaps even the Venda Parliament. Once we had settled in, transport was organised to fetch the materials which we had hidden and kept safe We were able to identify police stations and the movements of informants and soldiers patrolling the border gates. It would have been easy for any responsible MK unit to plant limpet mines from across the border. We were not in any way involved with the land-mine campaign which, as Janet Cherry has pointed out, was ineffective and politically counter-productive.[6]

[6] J.Cherry, *Umkhonto*, 76-84; Review, 292. I should take this opportunity to point out that mine is the first account of our unit's activities in Venda to be made public anywhere.

Nevertheless, we encountered big challenges. None of us could drive, and we were therefore dependent on public transport. Our money was risky, being counterfeit, and was in any case soon exhausted. We were entirely dependent on the underground operative, already mentioned, for communications between ourselves and Harare, and it started becoming almost impossible to contact our commander. This frustrated us and we did not take it kindly. Eventually, we received a message from comrade Chris Hani that the entire unit was recalled.

4.3 Cape Town

We were staying at the "Yellow House" in Chunga township in Lusaka. A property known to be owned by army commander; Joe Modise. Among the comrades who resided with me were comrade Madoda Daki (Enos), whom I had commanded in the Special Forces Unit, and comrade Monde Ntobongwana (Lincoln). We were called by comrades Cassius Make and Chris Hani. to brief O.R. Tambo about our training in Cuba. I had already once briefed Comrade O.R. on the occasion of his visit to Cuba, and I was honoured to find that he did indeed remember my presentation when we arrived at his offices. He briefed us about the developments inside the country and referred us to comrade Chris Hani, who revealed to us that our destination was Cape Town.

From Lusaka we drove to Livingstone where we crossed secretly into Zimbabwe, MK relations with the ZANU-PF ruling party still being affected by our former alliance with ZAPU. The Zambezi River, river was infested with hippos, crocodiles and many other life threatening water creatures. This was not the only challenge we encountered in Zimbabwe where wild life could be hiding anywhere. Hyenas, buffalos, elephants and lions were part and parcel of our trip but we managed to come through unscathed.

From Harare, we were taken back to the wild to cross over to Gaborone, Botswana, where we met comrade James Ngculu, who briefed us concerning the popular uprising in Cape Town. Self-defense units had been formed, police vehicles and apartheid councillors were under attack. The MK high command had therefore decided to form a Western Cape Provincial Command under comrade Tony Yengeni. Unfortunately, neither of the two units we had tried to establish there had succeeded, and all our underground trained comrades had been arrested. Our mission was to form new units, and to boost the morale of the local communities and the captured comrades. more

especially since Tony Yengeni's unit had been arrested in September 1987, a year after his predecessor, Lizo Ngqungwana, had suffered a similar fate.[7]

James informed us that everything was prepared and that a responsible comrade would meet us on our arrival. He assured us of the reliability of this comrade, who had recently visited him in Gaborone, providing us with her description, and the time and place where we were to meet. This time, the passports were printed correctly and I was given another name, Linda Mabona. I was quite comfortable with this arrangement unlike that of Venda because, at the very least, Cape Town was mostly occupied by Xhosa, Afrikaans and English-speaking individuals. We were placed to stay in the townships, and being a township boy, it would feel a little like home.

From Gaborone we were taken to a secret house near the border of Mahikeng. We later learned that, this was the very same house which had been once attacked by the SADF. Six comrades were killed in that house. Till this day no one knows why we were exposed to such but fortunately during our one week stay nothing happened.

We were given R500 each for our survival. This came with no pistols, nor hand grenades. Comrade James told us that we would get arms inside the country. At about 02:00am we crossed over a swamp, led by a guide that was working with the Botswana command. On the other side of the border we reached the town of Taung, where we dispersed to purchase new clothes since we were drenched in wetness from our trousers to our shoes. We managed to make the purchases and threw our swampy clothes in the dust bins. We always had to keep a reasonable distance between each other, not even sharing a meal together after buying food.

From Taung, we took a taxi to Kimberley. I occupied the second seat, comrade Madoda the fourth seat, and comrade Monde the last seat. We had been informed that the taxi rank where we boarded the taxi was regularly patrolled by Askaris, fortunately for us they were not there on that day. When we arrived in Kimberly in the afternoon where we had to wait for the train to Cape Town. At the taxi rank we befriended a sociable fellow, informing him we that were professional boxers from Natal, looking for promoters. We all ended up at a local tavern to while away time until the train was due to arrive. His friends later joined us, and we were all communicating in Zulu to

[7] Simpson, 374-6, 412-14.

maintain the consistency. They even accompanied us to the railway station to go board our train, which duly arrived at 21:00.

Coincidentally, the train was full of South African Police recruits, quite drunk and singing up and down the carriages. Fortunately, we were occupying separate compartments. We had a little liquor with us, allowing us to blend easily with the recruits, more especially because we did not have our pistols with us. Comrade Madoda, however, mistakenly forgot to take his money off his person when he went to the restroom, and it all disappeared. We transited the whole night, arriving in the afternoon. From Cape Town station we took a taxi to a certain shop in Nyanga East, where we were expecting to meet our contact person. After waiting for five minutes, we began to feel exposed. I was new to Cape Town, but comrades Madoda and Monde were from Langa and Gugulethu respectively. It started getting dark. We became desperate and ended up violating our security precautions. Comrade Monde attempted to contact his brother but, to our dismay, he could not find him. We went to a local tavern and, after it closed, we took a taxi to Gugulethu.

It was a cold winters day and only a few locals were on the streets. We ended up sleeping in a cemetery, identifying recently dug graves, the loose soil of which was warmer in that had been exposed to the sun. Early in the morning we woke up and brushed the soil off each other's clothes and headed to a nearby public toilet to freshen up before heading off to catch a bus. When we arrived at the last stop, we got off the bus and caught another one. We managed to contact comrade James from a telephone booth, informing him that we had not met our contact person, but whilst still trying to elaborate, the phone disconnected. It transpired that our contact person, a journalist, had been detained six months prior to our arrival in Cape Town. This was a serious setback, in that when we had been briefed in Gabarone that she had prepared the ground for us. We had no other plan, and struggled for quite some time to get settled.

Eventually, comrade James put us in touch with Mncedisi Twala from NY1 12 who was to become our contact person going forward. Comrade Twala organized a place for me in Nyanga East. I stayed in a shack at the back of the house, along with the owner's son who was only two weeks from initiation school. There were only two beds, one for him and one for me. I used to go out every evening at 22H00 to meet my comrades and the new recruits. I must say that this *ikrwala* (young man) had no respect for me. It used to get dark early because of winter and, without waiting

for me to leave the shack, my roommate would go out and fetch his girlfriend to make love whilst I was still inside the house. But I never complained even to the guy himself.

Comrade Mncedisi organized better venues for the other two comrades, comrade Monde in Bonteheuwel at the house of Mr Mike Weeder, a lecturer at the University of the Western Cape, and comrade Madoda at the house of Mr Weeder's parents in Elsies River. Because of desperation I ended up staying at NY56, home area of Madoda, who had left the country in 1979. This was breach of security of the highest order but by God's grace I survived without detection until I was forced to leave following Madoda's arrest, to be explained below. We were introduced to FAWU organizer, comrade Nomvuyo Mtyekisana, who provided us with vital help, bringing and collecting information. We also made contact with this tall, hefty looking rugby player, Ngconde Balfour, later Minister of Correctional Services but then executive secretary to Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Ngconde was able to organise safe houses for us, but not together. I stayed in Gugulethu, Madoda in Khayelitsha and Monde in Bishop Lavis. Comrade Ngconde brought us a detailed sketch, enabling us to find pistols, hand grenades, AK47 rifles and other ammunition.

We recruited comrades to form street committees with the assistance of Monde's brother, comrade Ngconde and comrade Bulelani Ngcuka. I was advised to go and stay in a shop because, although police frequently made raids, it was unlikely that they would raid a shop. We conducted reconnaissance to identify possible targets such as patrolling police vans which we had no challenge attacking. After each operation, we would purchase newspapers and send them to comrade James through comrade Ngconde. One one particular Friday before the Monday on which comrade Tony and his group were due to appear, we planted a limpet mine inside the court, which detonated that very evening. Next day, disguised in a reverends gown borrowed from comrade Ngconde. I drove to town with one of our new comrades to assess the damage. We again purchased newspapers and cut out the article reporting the attack and sent it as proof of the successful operation.

Things started to deteriorate because we lacked funds. We were planning to attack Koeberg Power Station, but unfortunately our informant was apparently a loose talker. This led to the arrest of comrade Madoda, as our informant was the person who dropped him off at his safe place. One Monday morning I was woken up by comrade Ngconde, who had heard it from the neighbours. saying that Madoda had been arrested. I quickly took my material, and we left my safe house to

fetch comrade Monde in Bishop Lavis. We proceeded to drive to a house owned by a white couple, known only to Ngconde, seemingly connected to the Australian Embassy. The husband approached us and guaranteed our safety after which Ngconde left. We got more comfortable, and where still touching base on Madoda's arrest, when the white man came and informed us that Ngconde had been arrested whilst driving back, and comrade Bulelani as well.

We started to panic as we did not know this white couple. They were hospitable and brought us food, but we could not eat as we were unsettled as to what was going to happen next. We quickly freshened up and started to plan our next move. We agreed that we would not contact Monde's brother, nor try and make use of our newly established MK cells. During our conversation with the white couple, we had established that they would soon be heading to Mahikeng for holidays but were prepared to leave us in their house. We requested however that they organise us a trip to the border of Botswana. We suspected that they were internal operatives of the ANC, though we this was never confirmed. They agreed to take us concealed in their caravan, leaving our weapons and other materials behind us in Cape Town. There were stop overs at which the couple would open the caravan and give us food. We eventually arrived in the evening, at a border post called Rramatlabama.

We crossed over the fence and said our goodbyes to the couple. We did not know where we were going to, we were just so delighted to be on Botswana soil. We walked for about three hours till we could see the lights of a village. As we approached the rondavels, we met an old man who asked us who we were. To our surprise he was Xhosa speaking. We opted to be transparent with him and told him we were looking for directions to Gaborone. He informed us that most of the villagers were Xhosa speaking and that the area was very quiet, no police or soldiers. The old man accompanied us for a distance and showed us a short cut to Gaborone. We walked for hours. Blisters were now the norm. We often worried about detained comrades especially Madoda.

At the next village we boarded a bus to Gaborone. We had no suspicion of being spotted as we had changed clothes and our knapsacks were neatly packed. But when we arrived in Gaborone taxi rank, we were approached by a slim light in complexion middle aged man. He asked us where we were from and before we could answer, he produced his card and told us that he was from Botswana intelligence. Whilst talking to him, we saw others approaching us. They searched us and told us we are under arrest for entering Botswana without permits.

They separated us into different cars and took us to their headquarters, where we were interrogated, not however subjected to beatings. They threatened to take us back to South Africa if we did not inform them of the whereabouts of other comrades. The story we told them was that we were from Zimbabwe and not South Africa. We were adamant. We were detained in a prison for almost two months. The living conditions were not that dire and we had been exposed to far worse. Whilst in detention we found one comrade from APLA, Letlapa Mpahlele and another four other comrades which were three males and one female, all from Mthatha. They had been arrested for transporting weapons and had been sentenced to ten years.

The comrades from Mthatha made contact with the ANC office in Gaborone and we were visited by Oupa Makou, the ANC's Chief Representative in Botswana, who promised to negotiate our release. Indeed, after two months we were released and handed over to ANC Chief Representative. On arriving in Zambia, we were fetched by comrades and taken back to the "Yellow House" in Chunga where we had stayed before. The military high command came for debriefing and we told them everything starting from the day we entered South Africa, missing our contact person, our financial challenges, our successes, the weapons we had left behind and the support we had received from the white couple.

Soon afterwards, I was redeployed to the Soviet Union for "Military Combat Work," together with five other Umkhonto we Sizwe soldiers.[8] It was a three months intensive course at a secret house in Moscow, where the living conditions were quite exceptional. The training, through the medium of English, concentrated on leadership skills and internal and international politics. The Soviet instructors were mostly supportive of the new changes, such as *perestroika* being introduced by President Gorbachev, though some of them seemed reluctant to discuss these.

[8] Arising from a meeting between Presidents Tambo and Gorbachev in November 1986. Shubin, *ANC*, 242 ff.

CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSKEI

In his annual address of January 1984, ANC President Tambo defined the "four pillars" of our liberation strategy as follows: underground political leadership, mass action, armed struggle and international solidarity.[1] Sustained pressure in terms of these four pillars eventually forced the apartheid government to the negotiating table and, four years later, to its ultimate defeat in the democratic elections of April 1994. As the military wing, we were kept generally informed about the progress of the "talks about talks," but we were nevertheless surprised by FW De Klerk's speech of 2 February 1990, as we were not expecting any formal announcement so soon. At that point in time, I was staying in the Chunga township of Lusaka. Earlier that morning, we had been alerted to watch the news but, just as we gathered, the electricity went off and the whole of Chunga was plunged into darkness. We were devastated and angry but there was nothing we could do. We were all speculating about Mandela's appearance after so many years in prison, and how our people would react to his release. The following morning the leadership came bringing us newspapers, and it was an emotional moment when first we were able to see the old man. Leadership cautioned us, however, not to get over-excited, the armed struggle was still set to continue.

At this time, the Transkei "independent homeland" was being ruled by a Military Council headed by General Bantu Holomisa. Although the military takeover of December 1987 had been accepted by the apartheid government, Pretoria was then unaware of the General's sympathetic attitude towards the ANC. By 1989, he began to show himself, notably with the reburial of King Sabatha Dalindyebo on 1 October 1989, where the General shared the platform with ANC leaders and the ANC flag was, for the first time, on public display. On 7 November 1989, he formally unbanned the ANC and the PAC, nearly two months earlier than South Africa itself. President De Klerk himself visited Mthatha just three weeks before his famous announcement of 2 February 1990, in company with Pik Botha, his foreign minister. They failed to persuade Holomisa to toe their line,

[1] SM Ndlovu, "The African National Congress and negotiations," in SADET, *The Road to Democracy,* Volume 4 (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2010), 64.

and it has been argued that their loss of Transkei was one of the key factors influencing De Klerk's decision to make concessions to the ANC and the other liberation movements.[2]

5.1 Confusion in Transkei: the death of Sipho Phungulwa

De Klerk's surprise announcement of 2 February 1990 caught local structures unprepared, in Transkei as in everywhere else. To meet the immediate need, the National Executive in Lusaka quickly appointed interim executives in South Africa's different ANC regions of which Transkei was one. They selected the individuals they knew which, in the case of Transkei, were mainly aging ex-Robben Islanders including its chairperson, the highly respected AS Xobololo. The real powers within the executive, however, were Prince Madikizela, a lawyer from Mbizana, and the interim secretary, Reverend Harris Majeke, neither of whom were trusted by everybody. Although the interim executive was by no means dysfunctional, the distrust was such that only five members of the interim, excluding both Madikizela and Majeke, were voted in when the first elective regional conference was convened in September 1990.[3] The first elected chairperson was Rev Ezra Sigwela, an ex-Robben Islander, and the first Regional Secretary, Phumzile Mayaphi of MK.

MK structures were still evolving, some such as myself being only lately returned from a long exile and others recently released from Wellington Prison in Mthatha. It was only after Chris Hani's expulsion from South Africa returned him to Transkei that the MK structure, explained above, was initiated in September 1990 and, working closely with Comrade Mayaphi on the political side, established an effective and coherent leadership for the region.

It was on 13 June 1990, at the height of this period of relative disorganization that ex-Quatro detainees, Sipho Phungulwa and Luthando Dyasop arrived in Mthatha and reported themselves to Kaiser Mbethe, the Region's Office Manager. The tragic events which followed have been well described in Chapter 26 of Dyasop's book, *Out of Quatro*, resulting in MK member Mfanelo Matshaya shooting Comrade Phungulwa dead, an act for which he requested and was granted indemnity by the TRC. The facts of the matter are not in dispute, but the question of responsibility

[2] J B Peires, "The Implosion of Transkei and Ciskei," *African Affairs,* 91 (1992), 367. For this paragraph, see also E Naki, *Bantu Holomisa: The Game Changer* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2017), Part Three.

[3] Information in this paragraph from Prof Jeff Peires, who was one of those elected in September 1990. The five voted back in were Comrades Xobololo though not as Chairperson, Zoleka Langa from Flagstaff, Mabona Duna from Centane, Dr Zola Dubula, and Chief Phatekile Holomisa)

remains. Matshaya told the TRC that he acted on his own responsibility which Dyasop, at the same hearing, dismissed as "abstract," and demanded, unsuccessfully, that Matshaya name names.[4] Dyasop maintains in his book that "anyone in a lower position than Hani could not have ordered Sipho's death" (pp.210-211), although later on (p.261) he also seems to blame Kaiser Mbethe.

While Dyasop blames Chris Hani, Matshaya told the TRC that Phungula and himself were regarded as askaris because they had not cleared their visit with the MK structures ahead of time. When Dyasop pointed out that they had been well received in Port Elizabeth, Phungula's home town, Matshaya responded that, unlike in Port Elizabeth, MK structures were well set up in Transkei, and that this was something that the two "askaris" must have known.

It is my considered opinion that neither is correct. On the one hand, Phungula and Dyasop did nothing wrong in approaching the local ANC, although it is a pity that they did not do this informally as they had done in Port Elizabeth (p.204). It is not clear whether or why Kaiser Mbethe called in MK rather than the ANC. Kaiser could not, in any case, have given any order. He was nothing more than an office manager, he was neither an MK member or a political heavyweight. There is no reason whatsoever to doubt that Matshaya and the others with him acted on their own responsibility. I can say with assurance that Chris Hani was never involved. The tragic event of 13 June took place just as Operation Vula was unravelling at the national level and less than two weeks before Chris was booted out of South Africa. His return, after 25 June, ushered in a new era of stability for Transkei in general and MK in specific.

5.2 The arrival of Chris Hani

On 4 May 1990, the ANC agreed the "Groote Schuur minute" with the apartheid government providing the ANC leadership "temporary immunity from prosecution." MK felt safe in Transkei, though we did not trust the Boers and we ourselves had not suspended the armed struggle, which was secretly continuing through Operation Vula led by Simphiwe Nyanda and Mac Maharaj. On 25 July 1990, the apartheid government arrested most of the Vula operatives, and revoked the indemnity of Chris Hani among others. Chris was warmly received by General Holomisa against the wishes of the apartheid government and immediately and energetically set about establishing

[4] Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 20 April 1998. Amnesty Hearing: Umtata: Mfanelo Matshaya and Luthando Dyasop.

Transkei as an MK safe haven.[5] Although officially residing at Enkululekweni, the government guest house from which he operated, he usually overnighted, for security reasons, at different safe houses belonging to very highly respected Transkeians such as Cabinet Minister Mzwandile Titus, businessman Dan Pasiya and, especially, Mr Somtunzi and Mrs Nomonde Gazi of the Department of Education. As Mrs Gazi put it:[6]

> We knew that if those against him knew where he stayed, our house could be bombed and everybody killed. This did not deter us … We had heard of his bravery and his dedication to liberate our country .. All of them were our heroes and we were prepared to die for them as they left the country to fight and/or die for us if it needed be. This was our contribution to the liberation struggle, and, given the chance, we would do it again.

I was with Comrade Chris at Mr Gazi's house, when the news came through that the ANC executive had suspended the armed struggle. This was a great shock to Comrade Chris as he had always told us that the leadership could do no such thing without first consulting him as army of chief of staff. I must say that Chris was very, very angry as we sat there with no one talking. He stood up and walked outside, myself following him without saying a word. Provincial Commander Dumisani Mafu arrived, and he could see the mood was very bad. After sometime comrade Chris returned, and we began to discuss what had just happened. Not much later, the telephone rang, and I picked up, as we were using landline then.

The caller identified himself and told me that Mandela wants to speak to Chris. He spoke with Mandela for almost thirty minutes, coming back to the sitting room where we were all waiting for him, not showing any anger. When Mandela next visited Mthatha, all MK soldiers in Transkei were summoned to meet him at Nkululekweni. He explained to us that, as the leadership, they had decided to suspend the armed struggle and to disband MK, also that he had come to fetch comrade Chris. Some of us asked Mandela what would happen if the Boers decided to arrest him. Mandela boldly told us that nothing bad would happen to Chris, which was true enough until his assassination in April 1993.

[5] See Naki, 122-6, for details.
[6] Interview Mrs N Gazi, March 2015

I had first met Chris Hani soon after my arrival at Viana Transit Camp in Angola. Even then, at our very first meeting, he amazed me by greeting with my real surname. Chris had this striking ability to remember each and every person who had passed through him in Lesotho. He knew the real name of every person, where they came from, and all their personal traits. This meant so much to the comrades, in particular those who were getting disillusioned on account of waiting in the camps for such a very long time. Personal concern for every subordinate was a hallmark of Chris throughout his life and made him the darling of the rank and file. We used call him *"Yesu wasemhlabeni"* which, freely translated, means "the Jesus of the (sons and daughters of) the soil." He was a fitness fanatic and, whenever he visited our camp at Caculama, being a physio instructor, I used to take him through his morning exercises.

I myself had infiltrated Mthatha following De Klerk's announcement of February 1990, and after Chris relocated to Mthatha, among other appointments, he appointed me Regional Commander for Transkei. As the months passed, we became pretty close, primarily because I was responsible for his security detail and also because we spent so much time together. In 1992 I even spent Christmas Day with him and his family: his parents Mama' Nomayise; Tata' Daflane; ubhuti wakhe u-Mbuyiselo nomntakwabo u-Nkosana (the real Christopher from whom he borrowed the name "Chris") at his birth place, Sabalele ku-Cofimvaba. Arising from this close comradeship, it is proper that I set the record straight with regard to misrepresentations of Chris's character from both left and right. On the left, we have the attacks of the former mutineers, published in "Searchlight South Africa" in 1990 and reprinted in Trewhela's *Inside Quatro* (2009), and, on the right, Stephen Ellis's *External Mission: the ANC in Exile* (2012). These authors have already been discussed in my Literature Review, so I here limit my discussion to their comments on Chris Hani personally.

With regard to the ex-mutineers, they go too far when the refer to Chris as "suddenly thrown into confusion" by the mutiny.[7] When he told the mutineers that "You are pushing us down the cliff," this was not a sign of "bewilderment" as they say, but his correct view of the need to maintain military discipline despite the existence of justifiable grievances. Even worse are the aspersions of the ex-mutineers on the personal character of Chris, that his heroic exploits were exaggerated, that his address was "boastful", that his role in suppressing the mutiny was "treacherous" and that he

[7] Ketelo and others in *Searchlight*, 36, 46, 47, 51.

was "ashamed of himself.". As already explained in the Literature Review, the ex-mutineers, knowing that Chris sympathized with their grievances, had expected him to endorse their actions, and became embittered when he refused to do so.

Nobody could excel Chris Hani in terms of personal bravery. Not only did he cross the Zambezi river with the Luthuli Brigade in 1967, but later, while in Angola, he crossed the Kwanza river into UNITA territory, and, even later, he crossed the Limpopo river to plan the landmine campaign in the northern Transvaal. But it is for the love of his solders, that MK veterans will always exalt the memory of Chris above all others. He shared everything he had with his subordinates, even – as I personally experienced when I returned from Cuba - his underwear as well. He attended the personal and family problems of the soldiers, right down to their love-lives. While in Transkei, he attended my wedding and the weddings of comrades, Mzwandile Vena and Phumzile Mayaphi, a further demonstration of his genuine kindness and compassion. He had an external hard-drive on which was recorded the fate of each and every deceased exile, and, while in Transkei, despite his busy schedule, he always made time to visit the families of fallen cadres, explaining how and where their family member had died, assist their parents to find closure and make peace with their loss.

With regard to the allegations of rightwing commentators like Stephen Ellis who maintains that Chris was a tribalist who gave preference to cadres of Transkei origin, and alludes to "ethnic tensions caused by Hani's blatant championing of Xhosa-speakers;" also that, on the basis of an "unpublished manuscript," that Chris "adroitly manipulated the young cadres' instinctive Xhosa loyalty."[8] Such accusations are blatantly untrue. Far from being a tribalist, Chris was a true internationalist and spoke many languages including Russian and German. He spent many years in different African countries, especially Lesotho, and was married to a Sotho woman. He was fluent in Sesotho and Setswana, and spoke most South African languages so well that a new arrival would never realise that his home language was isiXhosa. There was no MK soldier, of whatever place of origin, who was not touched by Chris's warm heart.[9]

[8] Ellis, *External Mission*, 220; 348, fn 53.
[9] In chapter one, I refer to Dipuo Mvelase's interview with Suttner, which she talks about Chris' impact in her life as a soldier and a woman.

After Chris was so brutally gunned down on 10 April 1993, it was rumoured that the white rightwingers would not rest but intended to attack the mortuary in which his body lay. Generals Holomisa, Mgwebi and TT Mathanzima authorized six TDF special forces to join MK comrades Mafu, Vena and myself, and we protected the funeral procession every step of the way from his home to the cemetery. Days before, we three MK comrades had dressed his body for burial in his MK uniform. It was only then that I realized that Comrade Chris was no more.

5.3 Reorganisation of MK in Transkei

Returning to the situation in Transkei in 1990, Canadian academic Daniel Douek is absolutely correct when he states that "under MK chief-of-staff Chris Hani, the Transkei became MK's centre of gravity even as the onset of negotiations saw the ANC move its headquarters to Johannesburg."[10] Lesotho, it should remembered, had been closed to MK after the second Maseru massacre of December 1985, and the installation of apartheid puppet General Lekhanya the following month. Some MK did indeed return to Lusaka but I well remember the deafening applause at the MK meeting in Malanje, Angola, when Dumisani Mafu and Attwell Maqekeza declared that they would die at home rather than retreat. Timothy Gibbs is too academic when he divides MK and the elite network of St Johns College graduates studying at the University of Transkei in the later 1980s. True enough, there was sometimes talk of ""*moegoes*" and ""clevers," but the ANC regarded such tendencies as counter-revolutionary, emphasizing revolutionary commitment through action, not posturing, which was often viewed as unwitting collaboration with the enemy. I never having finished school and nevertheless appointed by Chris as Regional Commander for Transkei, am sufficient refutation of Gibbs's baseless assertion that "Chris Hani recruited his leading MK commanders ... from a small pool of young men who had been educated in the most prestigious mission schools in the Transkei and earmarked for senior posts in the Bantustan bureaucracy".[11]

The truth is that even before the Mathanzima regime lost all credibility, the people of Transkei regarded such heroes as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki as their fathers. On the other hand, MK soldiers, knowing the poverty of the people, never regarded recruitment to the

[10] Douek, 208.
[11] Gibbs, "Chris Hani's 'Country Bumpkins,' 679.

Transkei Defence Force [TDF] as counter-revolutionary. Chris Hani himself, while in Angola, sometimes asked newly-arrived MK recruits why they had not joined the TDF, and the question was often the subject of deep debate between comrades. Even before the unbanning of the organisations, members of the TDF were asking underground operative Mzolisi Mabude, how they might become a "people's army." The TDF was a ticking time bomb waiting to explode, and we realized that, when the time came, it would shift over to the side of the revolution. Nor were we disappointed. MK leadership and the Military Council jelled like water and cement to form a united front against apartheid.

General Holomisa welcomed MK (and APLA, its PAC counterpart) "almost unconditionally," according to journalist Eric Naki. "The only instruction I gave them was that there must be no faction fights among themselves, and that they must avoid using Transkei as a springboard to launch attacks against South Africa." [12] Generals TT Matanzima and Derrick Mgwebi were made responsible for liaison with the TDF, and MK were given facilities at the special forces base in Port St Johns and at Silaka Nature Reserve. The Regional Command was personally introduced to the Military Council by Comrade Chris. Especially at the very beginning, the Military Council assisted us with venues and transport through Colonel Sibango. Whenever national leaders visited, MK always consulted Transkei Military Intelligence with regard to their security, from which discussions the Transkei police security branch were excluded.

In addition to providing security for Chris Hani and such eminent visiting dignitaries as Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, MK were principally occupied in providing training and military supplies for MK members and self-defence units throughout South Africa, especially during the hot war against Inkatha in KZN. Mineworkers arrived from fighting the hostel-dwellers in Gauteng, asking us not only for training but for arms as well. Underground MK from all over South Africa travelled to Mthatha by bus in order to replenish their AK ammunition, smuggled, 300 rounds at a time, in cooked chickens purchased from the supermarket. Even Siyabonga Cwele and Nathi Mthethwa, members of the present Cabinet, were armed and trained by us in Transkei. Douek is again entirely justified when he highlights "MK's important – and thus far largely

[12] Naki, 117.

unrecognized - role in resisting the apartheid regime's counterinsurgency operations at a critical juncture during South Africa's transition to apartheid."[13]

5.4 MK Operations in Transkei, 1990-1994

The MK Eastern Cape Provincial Command was made up of three Regions (Transkei, Border and Western) under Provincial Commander Dumisani Mafu. I was Regional Commander in Transkei, together with Fani Jiba/ Mthuthuzeli Mzamo as Commissars, Mlungisi Tyelingane as Chief of Staff, Simbongile Nangu as Head of Intelligence and Cweba Dukada as Head of Ordinance. We were further assisted by the fact that, in addition to Dumisani Mafu, many of the Provincial Command, including Pumzile Mayaphi, Mandisi Mpahlwa and Mzwandile Vena, were also of Transkei origin. Transkei Region was further sub-divided into Mthatha, Butterworth, Mpondo and Matatiele sub-regions, each with the same sub-regional structure. Sub-regions were entrusted with recruitment, assisted by Transkei police with regard to verification of criminal records. During that period of 1990-1994, everybody was rushing to join the ANC, to the extent that it was impossible to screen or vet all potential members. In certain areas, however, such as Makomorende in Mount Fletcher, we had a problem with comrades seemingly antagonistic to certain local individuals. Another problem was comrades, especially those associated with SANCO, wanting to do away with chiefs, the conflict in Flagstaff between Chief Nonkonyana and Nomazele Bala, for example. Such tendencies had to be corrected by the leadership because, since its birth in 1912, ANC has always had a strong relationship with traditional leaders.[14] ANC veterans like Comrades Kati, Buka, Fadana and Duna played an important part in identifying promising recruits, and ANC was responsible for the care of returning exiles, including badly injured MK comrades Zeph and Mthimkulu Otherwise, although MK assigned a specific comrade, Joe Jongile, to safeguard the security the ANC Regional Executive, MK played no part in local Transkei politics.[15]

Our operations were entirely independent of APLA, with whom we had no formal relationship, depending entirely on informal personal understandings rather than mutually agreed strategy and tactics. APLA Commissar Vumankosi Ntikinca has gone so far as to express the opinion that General Holomisa's military regime did much, "overtly or covertly" to avert armed confrontation,

[13] Douek, 208-209.
[14] For details, see T Gibbs, *Mandela's Kinsmen* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2014), 164-5.
[15] Confirmed by Prof Jeff Peires, who was a member of the Transkei ANC Regional Executive at that time.

more especially since some individual members of the TDF adhered to either the one or the other side.[16] Officially speaking, we, as MK, had very little to do with them except on one occasion when both organisations participated in a talkshow on Radio Transkei. The APLA spokesperson criticized MK for giving up the armed struggle, to which Mlungisi Tyelingane, our representative, responded by saying "All the years we were fighting, you were not fighting. Now we are not fighting, but you say you want to fight. For what purpose?" According to APLA Commissar Vumankosi Ntikinca, their relations with the TDF deteriorated further when they resolved to disrupt the negotiations process supported both by the ANC and the Transkei Military Government, resulting, on one occasion, in an armed confrontation between APLA members and the TDF on a privately-owned farm in Port St Johns district used by APLA for training purposes.

MK and the TDF, by contrast, always worked well together, despite the serious problem was that of undisciplined ex-MK members or self-appointed self-defence units misusing the name or reputation of the ANC as a cover for unauthorized operations such as local disputes, bank robberies and the killing of white civilians. Such incidents were managed through the ANC Regional Executive.[17]

5.5 Attempted Coup of 22 November 1991

The events of Craig Duli's coup attempt of 22 November 1991 have been related by History Jeff Peires and journalist Eric Naki, and praised by Douek, who described MK's involvement as "a rare military victory in MK's history of armed struggle against apartheid.[18] The written record is, however, incomplete, particularly with regard to the manner in which Craig Duli met his death, and it is proper that myself, as one who was personally present, should fill in the gaps. Let me first sketch the background, derived from secondary sources, after which I will proceed with my own narrative.

Craig Duli had been a close associate of Bantu Homisa in his early struggles against the Selous Scouts and in the military takeover of Transkei in December 1987. But he also remained close to

[16] Interview with Lawrence Vumankosi Ntikinca, APLA Internal Commissar, Mthatha, March 2015.
[17] Information from Prof Jeff Peires
[18] Peires, 374-6; Naki, Chapter 12; Douek, 216-19.

KD Mathanzima, as a result of which Holomisa dropped him from the Military Council in April 1989. Collaborating with apartheid Military Intelligence through Queenstown/Komani businessman Chris Van Rensburg, Duli and a small group of askaris arrived at Ncise military base just before dawn on 22 November 1991. Duli's plan was to march the TDF soldiers to the Botha Sigcawu administrative complex in Mthatha, on pretence of conducting a military exercise, and, having accessed Holomisa's offices on the top floor, announce that he had taken over. Several other senior TDF officers were complicit but, on arrival at Ncise, Duli was met by one of these officers and told that he should not proceed because the TDF rank-and-file had discovered the plot. Duli, however, was quite determined. Entering the base, he called the army to the parade ground, provoking armed resistance from the soldiers. Despite this setback, he proceeded to the Botha Sigcawu building, calculating that if he and his small band could only hold out for long enough, apartheid special forces would come to his aid. Once in General Holomisa's office on the top floor, he tried to phone Chris Van Rensburg and Pik Botha but, once Transkei Security cut off his communications, Duli was left isolated in deep confusion. Faced with concerted military opposition from MK and the TDF, the white South Africans lost their nerve and left him there to die.

Let me continue in my own words.

> We were still engaged in our morning physical exercises when we received a call from TT Mathanzima. Chris Hani was out of town, attending an ANC meeting in Johannesburg, so Dumisani Mafu and myself quickly drove into town to assess the situation. It was very quiet in town. We drove next to Botha Sigcawu and saw TDF soldiers surrounding the building. We quickly went to TT Matanzima's house to get a proper briefing. He told us that Colonel Duli is responsible. We drove back to our secret house to prepare for war.
>
> We managed to inform some MK soldiers. They came to join us near Botha Sigcawu building. The safest place was the corner of the Mthatha Post Office. When Dumisani Mafu launched his RPG7 Rocket through Holomisa's office, Duli's men were still returning fire sporadically. As the day grew old, their fire gradually died down. Comrades Mafu, Vena and myself remained while the rest of the MK soldiers joined with the TDF in search of enemy positions around Mthatha, Ngcobo and Cedarville.
>
> The battle culminated with the occupation of General Holomisa's office by TDF troops led by General Mgwebi together with three of us from uMkhonto WeSizwe. This was about three o'clock in the afternoon. When we got to the tenth floor, we found Boetie Davis, Craig Duli's bodyguard, dead on the steps, seemingly having committed suicide with a

> bullet to his head. We continued to General Holomisa's office on the eleventh floor, where we found Craig Duli severely wounded but far from dead, saying "Don't kill me, don't kill me, I'll talk." We phoned Holomisa, and Holomisa said not to kill him, we need him to tell us everything. We put him in a car, and drove him straight to Ncise Military Base for medical treatment. But when he got out of the car, Colonel Sobuwa drew a gun and shot him dead. We said, "Why did you kill him? He was going to talk! " Sobuwa said nothing, he just shrugged and walked away.

Eric Naki, who is in a position to know the truth, tactfully declines to commit himself but, as some have alleged that Holomisa himself ordered Craig Duli to be killed, and since Mrs Duli herself got no clarity from the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission),[19] it seems important to put the facts on the table. Colonel Sobuwa has since passed away, but he most probably acted to protect not only himself but other senior officers associated with Duli and South African Military Intelligence. The attempted coup was, in some ways, a blessing in disguise for the TDF and the liberation struggle more generally. Not only did it provide MK with a significant and morale-boosting military victory, but it united the entire TDF behind the Military Council's alliance with the ANC, equipping the national leadership with a trump card in the political negotiations. Douek goes too far, however, in attributing the entire victory to MK, suggesting that MK alone was responsible for frightening off askari elements within the TDF. Craig Duli was already defeated by TDF soldiers at Ncise before he seized control of Botha Sigcawu.

5.6 Bhisho Massacre, 7 September 1992

Apart from my role in Craig Duli's attempted coup, my other direct confrontation with the apartheid state occurred on 7 September 1992, the day of the Bhisho massacre. Although my personal part in the events of that day were of lesser significance, my input will add value to the historical record and further clarify the relationship between ANC and MK during a critical period of the transition to democracy.

Let me begin by drawing attention to the unpublished Masters thesis of the late Judge Colin White then of the Ciskei Supreme Court, entitled "The Rule of Brigadier Oupa Gqozo in Ciskei: 4 March 1990 to 22 March 1994."[20] Although personally sympathetic to Gqozo, Judge White has consulted

[19] Naki, 152-4.
[20] CS White, "The Rule of Brigadier Oupa Gqozo in Ciskei, 4 March 1990 to 22 March 1994," (MA thesis, Rhodes University, October 2008).

all the documentation presented to the TRC, and comes to the conclusion that the apartheid regime deliberately led the ANC marchers into a carefully laid trap. Beginning with a quick background, I will resume my narrative on 6 September, the day before the massacre when I personally arrived in Qonce (former King Williams Town).

By the time of the Bhisho massacre, the CODESA negotiations at national level had reached a dead end. Many in the ANC had long believed, in any case, that negotiations were only a trick of the apartheid regime to flush out MK and the MDM (Mass Democratic Movement) out into the open so as to destroy it by means of the "Third Force," most especially Inkatha. The breakdown was triggered by the Boipatong massacre in the Vaal Triangle, where Inkatha-supporting hostel dwellers, openly assisted by apartheid army and police, attacked and murdered innocent community members. ANC leadership decided on what was called the "Leipzig option" (named after events in East Germany) whereby "rolling mass action" would sweep aside an oppressive regime, already rotting from the inside. Political analysis identified Ciskei as the weakest of the so-called "independent homelands," the masses were well mobilized throughout the Border Region, and it was expected that when our people marched into Bhisho, the Gqozo regime would simply fade away and disappear. Such a political calculation was blind to the military realities on the ground. Gqozo had long been a mere figurehead, and effective power in Ciskei was wielded by the apartheid military, including the white officers of the Ciskei Defence Force, especially its Deputy Commander Dirk van der Bank.[21]

What I can personally attest is that we were summoned, as Transkei MK, to mobilise all available forces and proceed to King Williams Town, which we did, about twenty of us altogether. We were not prepared for any military confrontation, there was no consultation as to strategy, we were there simply as bodyguards to the political leaders, in our case that was Chris Hani. The day before the march, we gathered for a briefing at the stadium in town, and we were specifically told by our informers from within the CDF that there would be a gap in the fence at the Bhisho stadium, and that we were by no means to go through it. We recognized, from our training in East Germany,

[21] Factual details are confirmed in White, 135 –41, though I by no means agree with his interpretation that it was a straightforward clash between ANC and Ciskei, and especially not with his statement that "it does not appear that the South African government, or the SADF, or any third force was behind the tragedy" (page 139).

that this was the tactic called a "luring ambush." It should certainly have been avoided but, as is well known, Ronnie Kasrils inexplicably led his people through the gap. The CDF opened fire, killing 28 marchers and wounding hundreds more. When the matter was brought before the TRC, the two accused Ciskei soldiers, Africans, were those who had been face to face with the marchers. But, as the research of Judge White has demonstrated, it was not they who were responsible for the deaths but other well-prepared CDF soldiers, not in the line of the march, but well placed to open fire on the marchers from alongside, as they rushed through the gap in the fence.

Looking at it objectively from the purely political angle, the march on Bhisho was not unsuccessful. Public condemnation of the massacre played a big part in bringing the apartheid government back to the negotiating table. On 26 September, only three weeks after the massacre, the ANC and the government signed a "Record of Understanding" which dampened down the "third force" terror and paved the way to a more sincere negotiation. But looking at it from a strictly military angle, the Bhisho massacre was an avoidable disaster, and a clear example of the tragedies that can happen when political leaders take decisions which have military implications without receiving military guidance and advice.

5.7 Conclusion

Apart from the attempted coup of November 1991 and the Bhisho massacre of September 1992, there occurred no further military incident worthy of note. I myself was detained in Port Shepstone for transporting weapons, as mentioned by Thula Simpson, but, fortunately, the state had gaps in its case, and I escaped with a suspended sentence. [22] Apartheid intelligence on Transkei reduced almost to zero following the failure of the Duli coup. The tragic deaths of the Mpendulo children in the October 1993 SADF raid on a PAC house in Northcrest was entirely due to their criminal ignorance. If their intelligence had been up to standard, they would surely have attacked off-duty MK where they often socialized, at a safe house in Norwood.

In conclusion, I would like to clarify Douek's argument that MK's armed struggle in Transkei between 1990 and 1994 was "primarily a defensive response … rather than an offensive

[22] Simpson, 477.

strategy."[23] The several attacks MK launched during the Mathanzima years – the fuel depot, for example, or the York Road police station – often by the very soldiers still active with us in the 1990s – fully demonstrate MK's offensive capabilities. But that was the time of the "Armed Propaganda," designed to undermine rather than overthrow the homeland regime. By the 1990s, however, ANC had formulated a political strategy for the taking of power, a political strategy in which each component was expected to play its part. We, as Transkei MK, played a vital role in provisioning and training MK units in such battlegrounds as KZN, Ciskei and the Vaal Triangle. We never felt free to develop a strategy of our own, independent of the political strategy of the ANC. As already mentioned in my discussions of the Angolan legacy and the Bhisho massacre, we, as a military, were subject to the political line, rather than the other way around.

[23] Douek, 207.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

When commencing this thesis, I had two objectives in mind. First to tell my story and share my experiences by providing brand new historical material never recorded anywhere else, as in Chapter Four on Venda and Cape Town, for example. Secondly, to set the record straight where overseas academics had got it wrong, as in Chapter Five on Transkei, for example. My story itself cannot easily be summarized. I trust that the readers wanting to share my experiences will take time to read Chapters Two to Five.

This concluding chapter will therefore concentrate on my second objective, which is to bridge the gap between the academic literature on MK and the lived experience of MK soldiers as expressed in their memoirs. As I explained in the Literature Review, James Ngculu was well aware of the negative critique of MK published by academics such as Stephen Ellis. He surely did his best to clarify the MK experience in his chapters on, for example, "Women in the ANC and MK" and "From Shishita to Mutiny." Having surveyed the literature, however, I feel that James's book, *The Honour to Serve* is no longer sufficient to counter this negative critique, especially in academic circles. Not being himself an academic, his book seems to have been generally overlooked, besides which, in his praiseworthy efforts to be positive, when dealing with the critique, he did not confront it head-on, naming names and citing page numbers. Second, because his book was published in 2009, he was not able to take advantage of the MK memoirs appearing later on, as related in Chapter One. Although I have referred to these debates from time to time throughout this thesis, this concluding chapter offers me an opportunity to sum them up and to state my own position.

The first critique, in the extreme formulation of Stephen Ellis, is that the ANC itself was controlled by the SACP since the time of the Morogoro Conference in 1969, and that the Communist methods of the *iMbokodo* security, trained in East Germany, were utilized to crush the genuine nationalists in MK and enforce the SACP line. Even when stripped of its anti-Communism, unfortunately, this line of argument has largely succeeded in placing the admitted brutalities and corruptions of several senior comrades centre stage of the MK narrative, as if these abuses were the MK norm, whereas the truth is that these abuses were the exception and not the rule. The ideology of MK receives attention in my first section, entitled "MK and the Freedom Struggle." Abuse of women is often cited as typical of the oppressions inflicted by the alleged iMbokodo camp regime, in

addition to which the most recent literature has raised questions deserving of consideration with regard the status of women in the structure of MK. Since gender relations do not concern females only, the lack of discussion on "masculinities" has also been seen as a gap in MK studies. The debate is ongoing and may never end, but my provisional assessment is provided in the second section, "Sisters and Brothers"

Finally, one has become aware of a negative critique, comparing the political culture of the returning exiles with that of the mass democratic movement inside South Africa prior to 1990 ("inziles"). So many of the problems experienced since 1994 are thereby attributed to the selfish and undemocratic practices of the "exiles" being imposed, so it is argued, on the popular and democratic aspirations of the "inziles." This debate is again ongoing and, in the final section, on the basis of my personal experiences, I will attribute the weaknesses of the ANC government post-1994, not to the return of the exiles, but to the marginalization of MK during the period of transition

6.1 MK and the Freedom Struggle

Since the negative aspects of iMbokodo have been thoroughly aired by the ANC-appointed Motsuenyane commission and by the evidence presented by the ANC to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, besides the memoirs of MK comrades including myself, it is a pity that this aspect continues to dominate academic writing to an extent which undermines the positive, indeed heroic, aspects of MK training and operations in Angola. Worse, commentators of both the extreme right and the extreme left have combined to draw exaggerated political conclusions from these negativities for their purposes of condemning the political culture of the ANC, as if these admitted wrongdoings were typical of the ANC's political culture rather than exceptions to it. As Luli Callinicos has pointed out, the version of such commentators amounts to a "counter-narrative," which she summarises as follows:[1]

> The counter-narrative … proposes that the root of the calamity of the mutinies lay with the ANC's alliance with the SACP and the Stalinist political culture instilled in the KGB-trained camp commanders, which was embodied in the entire liberation movement.

[1] Callinicos, 620.

Stephen Ellis, for example, bluntly stated that "the Morogoro conference was the point at which the SACP could be said to have gained decisive influence over the whole of the ANC in exile."[2] From there, he moved on to the *Strategy and Tactics* document drafted by Joe Slovo and the ANC leadership 1978 visit to Vietnam. These milestones in our struggle are well documented, but they have nothing to do with the problems at iMbokodo which contributed to the mutiny of 1984.

The policies of the African National Congress (ANC) were based on the political aspirations expressed in the Freedom Charter, most immediately the removal of the apartheid government, which was constituted against the will of the vast majority of the South African people. To this, the Morogoro consultative conference added the Strategy and Tactics document which outlined the main objectives of the ANC going forward. These strategic objectives constituted what could be viewed, informally speaking, as ANC ideology. ANC political spokespersons were assigned responsibilities according to their capacity to articulate the ANC message. MK members, on the other hand, were trained primarily for the purpose of advancing the ANC's military objectives. It was well understood that political education came first, even before military training. It is a mistake, therefore, to think that ANC thinking was contaminated by a military culture bred up in the Angolan camps. It was not the military who were guiding the ANC, but the ANC which was guiding the military.

MK members were expected to be members also of the ANC, disciplined and selfless, ready to take up any tasks they were given and to conduct themselves in a comradely manner when relating to the community and other members of the movement. Such were the values that were instilled and expected of MK recruits. They were never expected to be members of the SACP although, let me be clear, the values of the SACP were never contradictory to those of the ANC. Throughout the history of the struggle both the ANC and MK had many leaders of high calibre, some communist and others non-communist. MK soldiers were never assessed according to their communist inclination or affiliation. Comrades were not in trouble if they did not accept communist views or did not have a good understanding of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. OR Tambo himself never propagated Marxist Leninist ideology in the ranks of the ANC or to the other world-wide organisations that supported the ANC.

[2] S Ellis, "Mbokodo: Security in ANC Camps, 1961-1990," *African Affairs* 93 (1994), 287.

The life of MK soldiers in exile was entirely devoted to the political goals of the liberation struggle politically expressed by the ANC. Whether in the rear or in the forward areas, MK members saw themselves as deployed in accordance with the needs of the ANC liberation struggle. There were no salaries paid for services rendered. The ANC was responsible for the basic needs of MK members in terms of their survival. Food clothing and shelter were handled by the different departments of the ANC. Comrades were literally dependent on the ANC, which bore the burden of ensuring the livelihood of its soldiers, despite all the challenges.

MK members were, in return, expected to be selflessly dedicated to the ideals of the National Democratic Revolution. Although they were indeed expected to fulfill the tasks and accept the discipline of MK, no recruit had ever been forced to join the organization in the first place. The very decision to join was a personal decision. Even after new recruits arrived in exile, they were again offered the choice between going for military training or continuing with school, since both were viewed as very important and necessary. Chris Hani himself, while in Maseru, encouraged the younger comrades to go to school, although – probably due to their experiences in the Ciskei and Transkei homelands – the majority rejected his advice.

Discipline, respect and humility were amongst the very first values that were inculcated into cadres of the movement. Which is not to say that MK members were intellectually passive or that there were never any differences of opinion. Competing viewpoints were freely debated and canvassed at the grassroots, and escalated through the different levels of the organization. Joe Slovo's obituary for JB Marks, emphasized by Manong, is a case in point.[3] Political discussions and news analysis were held regularly to develop political consciousness and to ensure that there were no huge gaps in the sharing of information and common understanding of how things ought to be at a particular juncture. But, on the other hand, comrades were expected to subordinate themselves to the views of the majority.

After the highest decision making-body came to a decision, everybody else would be expected to get behind that decision. Such indeed was also the view of those who supported the demands

[3] Manong, 199-200.

expressed at Viana in 1984. Even more than the specific grievances, they demanded that a National Conference be convened.

6.2 Sisters and Brothers

I can say with assurance that my understanding and relationship with women was positively influenced by my experiences within MK, away from the traditional, perhaps "patriarchal," male-female relationships of the townships, and towards the relationship of fellow-comrades, based on equality and mutual respect. Informally raising these matters in casual conversations with three female MK veterans, I discovered that, although each had her own story, they all seemed to feel the same way. All three had grown up with brothers of their own, and yet they found that working with males on a 24-hour basis was, for them something new. Retired Brigadier-General Zodwa Bobelo remembered that her experiences as commander of an MK unit taught her to disregard differences not only of gender, but of race, class and language as well, enabling her to rise to her later rank in the SANDF. Cebokazi Nqabeni, on the other hand, describing herself as a "rough girl" before joining MK, related that MK values had provided her with the self-confidence to think independently and to stand up to "patriarchy" among men. All paid tribute to the political education they received in MK, especially the discipline of complying first and complaining afterwards.[4]

Against this background, I find the challenge proposed by Raymond Suttner to "uncover elements of the formation of and manifestations of masculinities within the ANC and its allies,"[5] by no means an easy task. Taking the distinction between "violent" and "heroic" masculinities as my starting point: I can recognize elements of "violent" masculinity among those abusers of women in the Angolan camps, the very same ones who also abused male comrades in other ways for other reasons, and I can confirm that many, among the older comrades, shared very old-fashioned and patriarchal views of the place of women in the struggle and the home. But that was never the MK culture or even the ANC culture, as expressed from the first not only by Gertrude Shope, but by enlightened comrades like Chris Hani, more especially after the Kabwe conference of 1985.

[4] Conversations with Zuziwe Mndunene, Young Lions Detachment, Ngqushwa; Zodwa Bobelo, Moncada Detachment, New Brighton; Cebokazi Nqabeni, Barney Molokoane Detachment, Hamburg; April-June 2022.
[5] Suttner, "Masculinities", 71

"Heroic" masculinity, characterized by such aspects as living for the struggle even at the cost of one's private life, comes much closer to the MK standard but here too, I would argue, it falls short.[6]

In my view, one cannot have a concept of "masculinity" independent of and divorced from one's concept of "femininity," the proper relationship of which goes back to the family, and the division of labour and responsibilities which the family implies. But whereas the home family is automatically bonded together by the blood or biological relationships like husband/wife and parents/children, the comrades of MK, though coming from so many different origins, nevertheless relate to each other as a family, bonded together not by blood or biology but by their common dedication to the national liberation struggle.

As soon as one is accepted into MK, as happened to me when I reached Swaziland, one is given a new name and a new identity. This is not something done for security purposes only. It is a sign that, like your old name, you have left your old life behind you. You have given up your personal ambitions regarding job, money, house, family and even your life itself, and sacrificed all to the cause of the liberation of the people of South Africa. You can be black or white or Indian; you can be Xhosa or Zulu or Sotho; you can be man or woman. Whoever you were before, you are now nothing more or less than a MK soldier, accepting the structures and the discipline of MK, and willing to deploy wherever MK would like to send you. As far as this aspect is concerned, I think that the experience of being an MK soldier is very similar to the experience of freedom fighters in other countries, from China to Spain, according to Raymond Suttner:[7]

> In essence, a revolutionary is taken to be an individual who expects nothing personally, and is prepared to sacrifice all personal needs in order to ensure success of the struggle. Consequently, there is no sacrifice too great, nor any situation in which personal needs may supplant those of the organization. The heroic legacy of party cadres is constantly communicated to members.

The question of "masculinities" raises also the question of whether "brotherhood," equivalent to "sisterhood," existed in MK. Brotherhood is, of course, a very strong concept, found in the Holy Bible, and in Xhosa culture, where it is expressed as "*amafela ndawonye"* (people who die

[6] Unterhalter, 158.

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[7] Suttner, 'Masculinities,' 95.

together, in the same place). It is something deeper than "comrade", because a person might belong to the same political organization, but not to the extent that he will give up his own life to save yours. The problem with "brotherhood" is that, by its meaning, it excludes females. Perhaps this is a problem of the English language, that the language itself is gender-insensitive. I am informed of the English word "siblings," meaning both brothers and sisters together, but, as far as I am aware, "siblings" is used only in academic analysis, it lacks the emotional and psychological implications of "brother" or "sister."

Let me end this section with a message from Nelson Mandela, as communicated by his daughter Zindzi at Orlando Stadium in 1985, shortly after it became rumoured that Mandela had been removed to Pollsmoor Prison to make a private peace deal with the Boers:

> I am a member of the ANC, I have always been a member of the ANC and I will remain a member of the ANC until the day I die. Oliver Tambo is much more than a brother to me, he is my greatest friend for nearly fifty years. If there is anyone amongst you who cherishes my freedom – Oliver Tambo cherishes it more and I know that he would give his life to see me free. There is no difference between his views and mine.

In calling OR Tambo "much more than a brother," a comrade who "would give his life to set me free," Mandela here correctly elevates the liberation struggle as an inspirational goal transcending any personal consideration, even of life itself, while at the same time highlighting the depth of the comradeship which the struggle itself inspired. Sharing in that struggle, brothers were made equal with sisters, and if – as certainly did happen – individual males fell short of the MK ideal, that by no means refutes the ideal itself.

6.3 Exiles and Inziles

Another misleading argument produced by the "counter-narrative" is that MK Culture, as formulated in the camps during the period of exile, negatively impacted on ANC governance after 1994, at the expense of the more democratic culture of the "inziles" of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). While it may be true that, after nearly thirty years in government, the ANC is at a crossroads and facing a real possibility of terminal decline, it would be extremely wrong and misleading to assign responsibility to something simplistically labelled as an "exile" culture.

The ANC in exile used to be respected by the leadership inside the country. Those inside would time and again secretly go to the exiles to seek clarities and get instructions with regard to the next step in pursuing the struggle inside the country. Comrades on Robben Island, including NR Mandela, would find means to consult OR Tambo and the leadership in exile. Churches, academics and even white business would also seek their advice. The return of the exiles in 1990 was embraced by the masses of our people, being seen as those with a better understanding of the ANC.

Many of the objective weaknesses of the ANC in government must be explained not by the culture of exile but by the nature of South Africa's democratic transition. MK had been formed as the spear and shield of our people. If the struggle had been pursued to a victorious conclusion, MK would have been the nucleus/basis of the new order. But, contrary to our expectations of a victorious 'peoples war,' MK returned to South Africa in the context of negotiations for a democratic transition. These long drawn out negotiations marginalized MK as a revolutionary force. Not only were we militarily demoralized by the process of the integration of forces, but our political input was increasingly overlooked, although some MK veterans did indeed lead commissions when the CODESA negotiations began. Prior to CODESA, MK had always been in the forward trench of the liberation struggle, in the runup to the Morogoro and Kabwe conferences, for example. It had always been accurately reflective of the historical social forces which had created the ANC in 1912: intellectuals; traditional leaders; workers, landless peasants and, in later years youth and women. But even the deployments which followed the 1994 transition did not fully appreciate the political potential of MK leadership. It was as if the right to vote was, by itself, sufficient to solve each and every problem arising. But political democracy alone could never have been a panacea for all the historical inequalities and social problems of South Africa.

Looking back, it would seem that the exiles were too trusting that the structures designed for the previously vote less masses would advance the National Democratic Revolution to a successful conclusion. Perhaps the exiles themselves were partly responsible for the gap which emerged, because they were missing their families, and that, little-by-little, they lowered their vigilance in guarding the gains of the revolution because they were in a celebratory mood. This opened a

vacuum which was effectively used by some individuals to drive un-ANC programmes through illicit accumulations and purging whoever was thought to threaten their sinister agendas. The ease with which ANC branches were established made MK an irrelevant contingent. Once supplies and donations from the Eastern Block and the Scandinavian countries had dried up, financial considerations came to the fore. In many instances ANC membership became a commodity to be bought and sold. The capture of the revolution by such inziles thus foreshadowed the later capture of the democratic state.

The inziles who occupied the space left vacant by the exiles ensured that they would entrench themselves. During exile years, we had what was termed a 'tried and tested' whose footprint in the revolution is mostly known by everyone. In essence the influence of exiles got eroded over time. Even when they wanted to come and impart revolutionary knowledge to the communities, they found the ranks already closed by the inziles. Exiles and inziles failed to complement one another for the good of the organization. Discipline and respect started to deteriorate in ANC ranks. I suspect that when the ANC came to power, money became the divider of the movement. This is where comrades were bought by certain individuals to favour and vote for certain cliques within the movement. The tripartite alliance started to be divided. in that, for instance, the SACP ceased to be the vanguard of the working class. When the SACP comrades lost their means of support from the Soviet Union, they wanted to join the ANC- led government in order to get employment. It was therefore no longer able to criticize the ANC openly and honestly, as its first duty was to protect the appointments and the jobs of its individual members. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) started to sing the same tune. All of them wanted positions so that they might become government ministers when their COSATU terms of office expired.

By the time of the 2007 ANC National Conference, the percentage of former exiles participating had shrunk to less than a single decimal point. It was precisely then that lack of discipline and respect started to become clearly visible. The inziles managed to push back the exiles and only elected those whom they knew they could manipulate. The ANC-led government is now deeply in crisis because of its involvement in corrupt activities. As my journey ends, I am painfully reminded of something Chris Hani once said in the days before we attained our political freedom, as if he knew what would happen once we became the governing party: "What I fear is that the

liberators emerge as elitists, who drive around Mercedes Benz and use the resources of this country to live in palaces and to gather riches." Surely Comrade Chris was a prophet indeed.

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April 2015

Daki, Madoda Keith	Cape Town/ Middledrift
Gazi, Nomonde	Mthatha
Ntikinca, Vumankosi	Mthatha

March 2021

Makeka, Vuma	New Brighton, Gqeberha
Mlomo, Lungisa	Ludeke, Mbizana
Limba, Vuyani	Ntselamanzi, Alice
Ngqumba, Phila	Cala
Ngwetsheni, Zamubuntu	Mlungisi, Komani

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