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Experiencing the Armed Struggle: The Soweto Generation and After

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Abstract

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Lynda von den Steinen
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This study explores the experiences of the rank-and-file soldiers of Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Azanian People's Liberation Army. Extensive interviews by the author and other researchers reveal the voices of the soldiers themselves. The African National Congress and Pan African Congress archives at the University of the Western Cape and the University of Fort Hare supplement and verify these oral testimonies, as do some published sources.

Most previously published materials about the armed struggle against apartheid have already focused on diplomacy, strategy and tactics, operations, leadership, and human rights abuses to the neglect of the soldiers' actual experiences. This study complements these with significant new oral history materials from the Soweto generation of soldiers and their successors. When dealing with MK, many authors have documented issues of the camp structure in Angola, and operations inside South Africa, so much of this detail is only addressed briefly, leaving space to explore the soldiers' experiences. In the case of APLA, very little has been written on its history, and more detail is provided on these subjects.

This study therefore deals with the soldiers' politicisation and motivation for joining the armed struggle, their experiences in leaving South Africa and training in exile, the crises in exile which limited their effectiveness for a time, their return to fight in South Africa, and their difficulties in the "new" South Africa. These materials reveal that vast problems remain facing these veterans of the struggle against apartheid, and that they have the potential, if properly supported and employed, to contribute substantially to the development of present day South Africa. Conversely, if their neglect continues, they also have the potential to bring vast harm to the country. Further use of the investigative tools of oral history, especially if extended to the former soldiers' vernacular languages, is necessary to augment the history of South Africa, and these soldiers' contributions.

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List of Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
APLA	Azanian People's Liberation Army
AZANYU	Azanian Youth Unity
AZAPO	Azanian Peoples' Organisation
AZASM	Azanian Student Movement
BCP	Basotholand Congress Party
BNP	Basotholand National Party
CAYCO	Cape Youth Congress
COREMO	Comité Revolucionário de Moçambique
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
CRADORA	Cradock Residents' Association
DLB	Dead Letter Box
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
FAPLA	Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique
GDR	German Democratic Republic
MCW	Military and Combat Work
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
NAT	ANC Department of Intelligence and Security
NAYO	National Youth Organisation
NCCR	National Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NP	National Party
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania
PASO	Pan-African Student Organisation
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACTU	South African Council of Trade Unions
SADET	South African Democracy Education Trust
SADF	South African Defence Force
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SASM	South African Students' Movement
SASO	South African Students' Organisation
SDU	Self Defence Unit
SRC	Student Representative Council
SWAPO	South West African Peoples Organisation
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola
USS	Union of Self Study
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African Peoples Union

Introduction

Wars are often summed up as the decisions of leaders and the movements of armies. It is often forgotten that these depend on ordinary soldiers, who make personal sacrifices to achieve advances and victories, and who suffer the consequences of retreats and defeats physically. But their experiences are usually obliterated in the manufacture of histories and may even be lost to popular memory. The result is the propagation of an official mythology of war, with heavy emphasis on its abstract and glorious aspects.¹

The History of Liberation Struggles

With the dawning of the 'New South Africa', many avenues opened up in the study of South African history. One such opportunity came in writing the history of the liberation struggle against the system of apartheid. Many works had been written on this subject already, but due to the constraints of researching while the struggle was going on, they often told only pieces of the story. Also, in their focus on certain aspects of the liberation struggle that were key concerns at the time, such as political structures, diplomacy, and ideology, these works neglect other aspects of the history, such as the story of the 'ordinary people' involved in the struggle.

Many problems arose in past works focusing on liberation movements in Southern Africa. One major restraint on research has been the lack of source material on which to base a study. Until the release of Nelson Mandela and unbanning of the liberation movements in 1990, and even beyond until the election of the Government of National Unity in April of 1994, utmost secrecy was necessary to the survival of the liberation movements both inside the country and in exile. This condition made it extremely difficult for researchers to gain access to detailed and accurate information. Often information came only from official sources in South Africa, which were

¹ Barnes, Teresa A. (1995). *The Heroes' Struggle: Life after the Liberation War for Four Ex-combatants in Zimbabwe*. In Bhebe and Ranger, (eds), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 118.

notoriously biased against the liberation movements, or from defectors or police agents. Even if these testimonies were true, which was not always the case, one person's story or one group of people's stories, especially the case of those who had been 'turned' by the South African police, is rarely representative of the entire group he or she comes from. Information also came through the liberation movements themselves, in the form of recruitment material, pamphlets, and journals, which were usually biased towards the liberation movements. Furthermore, even if it had been possible to obtain accurate and detailed intelligence of the operations of the liberation movements, many scholars would have hesitated to use this information as its publication could have endangered the liberation movements and jeopardised their efforts. In his book on Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC), Howard Barrell acknowledges that: "the story this book tells remains only a sketch. . . ANC and MK security remains an issue at the time of writing."² Indeed, many people who were involved in the struggle took the issue of security so seriously that they still hesitate to reveal anything today. While there is little doubt that many of the writers involved in documenting the history and workings of the liberation struggle in South Africa had good intentions to do as much justice to the topic as possible, it is impossible to ignore the circumstances that restrained them from successfully accomplishing this.

Beyond the issue of scarcity of sources as a problem in writing the history of liberation struggles came the question of loyalties. While the struggle against apartheid was going on, the loyalties of the authors had a major effect on the products they produced. Colin Leys and John S. Saul discuss this problem in relation to the history of the liberation struggle in Namibia:

² Barrell, H. (1990). *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*. London: Penguin, vii.

The history of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), the liberation movement that came to lead that struggle, has been particularly prone to either demonization or canonization. For South African historians of the struggle SWAPO have been 'terrorists,' 'communists,' 'hapless bunglers', while too much of the solidarity literature presents a SWAPO incapable of error and free of all shortcomings.³

This problem also arises in the literature about the liberation struggle in South Africa.

In recent years, the development of South African history has taken great strides. More and more participants in the struggle are writing and publishing their memoirs and even those who were not leaders have started to do so. Oral history has advanced considerably, and many collections of people's stories have been assembled. More critical and analytic studies have also started to emerge, moving away from the strict division between pro- and anti- liberation struggle points of view, and more objective viewpoints are now often found in recent histories. However there is still ample room for new interpretations and investigations in the exploration of the history of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. It is an opportune time to rewrite the history of the liberation movements and to take advantage of the vast range of sources now available, explore new aspects that were not addressed in the past, and look at these issues from a greater distance.

A Brief History of Umkhonto we Sizwe

The African National Congress was founded in 1912 under the name of the South African Native National Congress. Originally it was a rather elitist organisation, focusing on the rights of the small professional black middle class. In 1944 this emphasis changed dramatically with the formation of the ANC Youth League. The Youth League stressed the ideas of African Nationalism, and eventually

³ Leys, C., and Saul, J. (1995). *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: the Two Edged Sword*, London: James Currey Ltd., 2.

introduced the 'Programme of Action' in 1949 after the election of the National Party (NP) the preceding year. This 'Programme of Action' proposed mass action in non-violent resistance against the rapid entrenchment of racist laws as opposed to the earlier methods of petitioning the government conducted by only a few elites. This programme was implemented in the Defiance Campaign of the early fifties, which saw boycotts, stay-aways, civil disobedience, and other forms of non-violent resistance gain much support. In 1955, the ANC, together with other like-minded organisations, convened the Congress of the People and adopted the Freedom Charter, which provided general guidelines for a South Africa under democratic rule. With the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960, however, it became clear that the government was more than willing to meet passive resistance with deadly force, and a new strategy had to be developed. The ANC was banned (along with other organisations) and many of its members fled into exile, or situated themselves underground in order to keep the organisation together.

Umkhonto we Sizwe, or the 'Spear of the Nation', was launched on 16 December 1961 in all of the main urban centres of South Africa. Originally conceived as an independent organisation, largely in order to distance it from the traditionally non-violent ANC, its members came from the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP), and other organisations in the Congress Alliance. Its manifesto claimed that MK was to be seen not as an alternative to traditional and more peaceful methods of struggle, but as a complement to these. The first few years of MK's existence saw its units execute many successful sabotage attacks, but the membership remained limited and carefully selected, with small cells of members moving underground within the country, organising and executing attacks on strategic places important to the government or the economy. Units were non-racial, and

techniques were quite amateur, with many homemade devices being used to blow up railway lines, power stations, police stations, pass offices, and the like. This first phase of MK's operations came to a dramatic halt with the arrest, trial, and sentencing to Robben Island of the leaders caught in Rivonia in 1963. The rest of the 1960s and the beginning of the 70s saw little MK activity within South Africa, aside from a few pamphlet bombs, as the ANC tried to rebuild the organisation in exile. The only visible attempt on their part to infiltrate South Africa during this period occurred in 1968, when they sent a group of soldiers to accompany the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) into Zimbabwe, in hopes of opening a trail into South Africa. The soldiers, split into different groups, clashed with the Rhodesian forces, and all of the soldiers were captured or killed. Some escaped as far as Botswana before being imprisoned.

The early 1970s saw the re-emergence of black opposition to the government inside the country, particularly linked with the Black Consciousness movement and the formation of trade unions, with an increase in strikes, school boycotts, and other unrest. However, the ANC played little part in this new wave of protest. The march and resultant massacre that sparked the Soweto uprisings in 1976 in South Africa caught the ANC off guard, and their recently rebuilt underground struggled to capitalise on the unrest inside the country. The uprising and the resultant government repression, however, led to a large number of South Africans fleeing into exile and joining MK there to get training for operations inside the country and for guerrilla warfare. The following years saw a dramatic increase in attacks within South Africa.

While operations did increase and recruits did become well-trained soldiers, whether trained in Angola or in sympathetic, usually Eastern Bloc countries, reliable methods to get these soldiers back into South Africa remained limited. Many of the

students who had left anticipating a six-month training programme and immediate return to South Africa as a liberation army found themselves stuck in exile, most often at the camps in Angola. Some did see action in Angola in assistance of the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), fighting against the South African sponsored União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA). Morale eroded, complaints multiplied, and in January of 1984 outright mutiny erupted in the Angolan camps. Dealt with harshly by the ANC leadership, the mutinies in January and May of that year highlighted the disgruntlement and disillusionment of the MK troops, and efforts were made by the leadership to address the problems.

Activities inside the country by MK units continued to focus on sabotage attacks and an avoidance of "soft targets," attempting to avoid any loss of life. A special operations unit undertook some high profile attacks, including the bombing of the Sasolburg refinery in 1980, an attack on the Voortrekkerhoogte Air Force Base by rocket launcher in 1981, and the bombing of the Koeburg nuclear research station in 1982. Another upsurge of MK activity occurred in 1985, following a push to get all of the soldiers based in Mozambique into South Africa in the wake of the Nkomati Accord of 1984, which would make infiltration from Mozambique prohibitively difficult. In the mid 1980s, another round of uprisings backed by a broader based group of organisations came to the fore inside the country. Concerns about soft targets relaxed, and security personnel, informers and collaborators became legitimate targets, though civilian casualties were still discouraged. With the support of the ANC aligned United Democratic Front (UDF), an umbrella body consisting of many smaller community based organisations, the profile of the ANC strengthened, and MK attacks were met with a good reception from the oppressed masses of South Africa. Attacks were more often co-ordinated to support actions by the UDF and served to

complement the activities and campaigns of the mass movement. During this period, increasing numbers of recruits were trained to be MK soldiers inside the country, rather than having to go into exile to receive training, thus facilitating a faster reinforcement of the fighting power inside the country.

By 2 February 1990, when South African president F.W. De Klerk announced the unbanning of the ANC, PAC, and other organisations and the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners, MK was well established as an armed wing, and well known to the general population of South Africa. After entering into “talks about talks” with the national party government, the ANC officially suspended the armed struggle in August 1990, and depended on non-violent mass action to strengthen their position in the negotiations. However, given the huge upsurge of violence in the early 1990s between the ANC and other black organisations, particularly the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), some former MK soldiers organised themselves into Self Defence Units (SDUs) and continued their work in defence of ANC supporters. After the elections in 1994, which brought the ANC to power, some MK soldiers joined the integrated South African National Defence Force (SANDF), some took up positions in the new ANC led government, and many others simply tried to readapt to life in South Africa and struggled to find their place in the new South Africa. Many still struggle with this today.

A Brief History of the Azanian People’s Liberation Army

The Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) was established in 1959, as a faction that split from the ANC. They particularly took offence with the Freedom Charter’s claim that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.” With a manifesto proclaiming “Africa for the Africans”, a pan-Africanist focus, a non-racial stance

including anyone who owed their primary allegiance to Africa and accepted the idea of majority rule as Africans and a strong emphasis on reclaiming land from the oppressors, they quickly found many supporters. Their early days were also beset with challenges. When a country wide anti-pass protest on 21 March 1960 led to the Sharpeville massacre, resultant protests and a notable march of about 100,000 PAC supporters in Cape Town, the government responded quickly by banning both the ANC and PAC. The fledgling organisation faced a huge challenge with this banning and when combined with a policy of their leaders actively participating in any actions, they also found most of their leaders arrested during their participation in the anti-pass protests in 1960. The decision to turn to violence lacked clear articulation by the PAC, and the Poqo (isiXhosa for alone or pure) movement that arose in the early 1960s had a much larger, more grassroots based participation than MK. Poqo formed its strongest branches in areas with a well-established PAC following, particularly in the Western Cape and the Transvaal. Their operations focused on personnel of the South African police, informers, traditional leaders working with the apartheid government, and white civilians. A number of attacks were carried out, particularly in the Western Cape in the early 1960s.

The PAC set up its headquarters in exile in Lesotho, led by Potlako Kitchener Leballo. Leballo announced in 1962 that South Africa would be liberated by 1963. He went on to call on all of the PAC and Poqo branches immediately to focus on recruiting, with a target of 1000 members per branch to be reached. Then a general insurrection planned for 8 April 1963 would involve attacks on police stations and economic targets, then the assassination of white people at random. Shortly before the proposed insurrection, the Lesotho police captured a list of the PAC membership, and a wave of arrests crippled the organisation inside South Africa. Following the

round up of members, the PAC, like the ANC, found itself struggling to establish its organisation in exile, to gain support and financial backing internationally, and to build up their strength outside of the country.

Based in Zambia, then in Tanzania, and particularly plagued by leadership struggles, the governments of their host countries had to step in to help settle feuds on a number of occasions, and eventually the PAC found themselves faced with an ultimatum from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), that they must work on infiltrating soldiers back into South Africa before any more recruits could be accommodated or funding given them. Under threat of being de-recognised a plan was formed by the leadership which involved co-operation with the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in Zimbabwe and Comité Revolucionário de Moçambique (COREMO) in Mozambique. In 1968, twelve APLA soldiers were sent into Zimbabwe and on to Mozambique, and hoped to eventually reach South Africa in what became known as the Villa Peri operation, and while they did engage with and kill some Portuguese soldiers, all of the APLA men were either killed or captured.

Problems within the PAC in exile continued, and leadership feuds led to the expulsion of many members and much unrest. When the Soweto uprisings occurred in 1976, the PAC found itself too weak and strife filled to take full advantage of the situation. While the Africanist ideology of the PAC seemed much more compatible with the black consciousness oriented youth than the ANC's multiracial and communist associated organisation, the internal problems crippled the organisation and left them too involved in the leadership battle to properly recruit, train and focus the youth towards the fight in South Africa. The Soweto generation that found its way into exile to join the PAC were often thrust into the leadership battle and many found themselves on the side of P. K. Leballo, swelling his ranks of supporters.

Problems of indiscipline, infighting, and occasionally outright violence characterised the APLA cadres based in Tanzania. P. K. Leballo finally stepped down in May 1979 to be replaced by a three man executive committee led by David Sibeko, Vusi Make, and Elias Ntloedibe. The assassination of David Sibeko in June 1979 by APLA members in Tanzania illustrated the depths of the divisions and indiscipline, and marked a low point in the history of the PAC and APLA. When John Pokela, recently released from Robben Island and escaped to exile, stepped into the leadership position in 1981, efforts began to re-educate, organise, and focus the APLA troops back to the South African scene began in earnest. Training for the APLA recruits took place at bases in Tanzania, in other sympathetic African countries, and in Middle Eastern and Asian countries, particularly China. With Pokela's death in 1985, Johnson Mlambo took over the mantle of the leader of the PAC, and the recent restructuring and reorganisation of the armed wing began to pay off.

After more than 20 years of inactivity, APLA attacks inside South Africa resumed in the mid-1980s. APLA strategies focused attacks on the South African police and army, white farmers, black informers and collaborators, and white civilians. APLA soldiers were often encouraged to find and appropriate money and weapons from the enemy to support their operations, as reliable methods of funding and supply from outside the country were difficult to maintain. The highly publicised Scorpion gang who operated in Alexandra from December 1986, marked the first publicised attacks by APLA on South African soldiers in over two decades. APLA's commanders started a policy of grenade warfare in 1987, which proved successful in raising awareness of APLA and the PAC in the minds of the South African population and more than doubled operations claimed by APLA.

With the 1990 announcement that saw the beginning of the end of MK's armed struggle, APLA stepped onto the scene as the only liberation army still operating. The PAC asserted its opposition to the negotiations between the ANC and the National party, claiming that important issues, especially that of reclaiming the land for the African people, were being set aside for expediency. APLA attacks continued through the early 1990s, and captured the attention of the population, particularly with attacks on white civilians at the King Williams Town Golf Club in 1992, and the Heidelberg tavern and St. James church in Cape Town in 1993. Armed robberies also received a lot of attention, asserted by APLA to be part and parcel of reclamation of the wealth stolen from them by white people and necessary for the supply of the units, but condemned by many as outright criminality. The PAC leadership lacked strict control over APLA, and often appeared at odds with their armed wing. When they announced a suspension of armed struggle early in 1994, some attacks still continued, but by the first democratic elections on 27 April 1994, APLA no longer operated. During this period, APLA caught the attention of many South Africans, and highlighted many doubts people were having about the negotiations and the compromises being made. This was believed by many political commentators to be a good opportunity for the PAC to capitalise on the support and turn it into votes, but in the end, they failed to do so. Some APLA soldiers ended up absorbed into the new SANDF, but many others have faced the same problems as the MK soldiers in the adaptation to the new South Africa. Further, while much has been written about MK, APLA's history has largely been marginalized in the new ANC led South Africa.

Literature Review

A number of books and articles have been written about Umkhonto we Sizwe. Autobiographical accounts written about and by the original leaders and members of MK cover the decision to turn to violence and the original sabotage campaigns, as well as a few that touch on the later development and operations of MK. Most of these either strictly toe the ANC party line, or strongly oppose it. Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*⁴, which covers his whole life, from birth, through his activities in the ANC and MK, to his incarceration on Robben Island and his release, and Ntoko Mafema's *Memoirs of a Saboteur*⁵, which talks of his activities as a saboteur in both South Africa and India, are among the autobiographies which focus in part on the early sabotage campaigns of MK and the authors' parts in them, often stressing the ANC party line about the role and ideology of MK. Ronnie Kasrils' autobiography, *Armed and Dangerous*⁶ also deals with the early sabotage campaigns, then moves on to the nature of his work in exile in MK, his return to South Africa in 1990, and the process of transition, but also toes the ANC party line. He discusses his life and his motivations and includes several detailed descriptions of his activities. Fish Moseki's autobiography, *Comrade Fish: Memories of a Motswana in the ANC Underground*, documents his life as an ANC operative.⁷ Bruno Mtshali⁸ and Mwezi

⁴ Mandela, Nelson. (1994). *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, London: Little, Brown and Company.

⁵ Babenia Ntoko, as told to Edwards, Iain (1995) *Memoirs of a Saboteur*, Bellville: Mayibuye Books.

⁶ Kasrils, Ronnie. (2004). *Armed and Dangerous: My Undercover Struggle Against Apartheid*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.

⁷ Moseki, Fish. (1999). *Comrade Fish: Memories of a Motswana in the ANC Underground*, Gaborone: Pula Press.

⁸ Mtshali, Bruno. (1966). *Umkhonto we Sizwe: the Road to the Left*, Durban: Drakensberg Press. (Mtshali was an apartheid spy who acted as a state witness in trials.)

Twala's⁹ autobiographies provide the counter-view to these, taking a particularly anti-ANC point of view, dealing with the early sabotage campaign and the mid-70s to 1990s, respectively. Recently, more participants, who were not at the leadership level, have begun publishing their memoirs of their time and experiences in the armed struggle. Three notable examples of these are Jama Matakata's *Hills of Hope*¹⁰, which covers an MK operative's life story and time in MK and on Robben Island, Conny Braam's *Operation Vula*,¹¹ which deals with a Dutch woman's participation in Operation Vula, an operation established to improve communications between the exile leaders and the leaders inside South Africa, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and Thula Bopela and Dluxolo Luthuli's *Umkhonto we Sizwe: Fighting for a divided people*,¹² in which two former MK soldiers tell their personal stories. 'Official' ANC historians notably including Francis Meli,¹³ John Pampallis,¹⁴ and Govan Mbeki¹⁵ also deal with the formation, strategies, heroes, and ideology of MK within a broader history of the ANC and its struggle against apartheid. These are all restricted by their loyalties, and tend to deal primarily with the leadership, diplomacy, strategy, and ideology of ANC. They are largely similar, dealing with the same

⁹ Twala, Mwezi, and Bernard, Ed. (1994). *Mbokodo Inside MK: Mwezi Twala- A Soldier's Story*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.

¹⁰ Matakata, Jama. (2004). *Hills of Hope*, Pietermaritzburg: Nutrend Productions.

¹¹ Braam, Conny. (2004). *Operation Vula*, Bellevue: Jacana.

¹² Bopela, Thula and Daluxlo Luthuli. (2005). *Umkhonto we Siswe: Fighting for a divided people*, Alberton: Galago Publishing.

¹³ Meli, Francis. (1988). *A History of the ANC: South Africa Belongs to Us*, Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.

¹⁴ Pampallis, John. (1991) *Foundations of the New South Africa*, Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.

¹⁵ Mbeki, Govan. (1992). *The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa: A short history*, Cape Town: David Phillip; and (1996). *Sunset at Midday: Latshon 'ilang' emini!*, Gauteng: Nolwazi Educational Publishers.

leaders, events, and speeches, and covering the struggle from the ANC side. *Comrade Jack*, published in 2001, provides a rare look inside MK training and conditions in Angola, and includes political lectures and diary excerpts from Jack Simons, who taught soldiers at the MK camps in Angola¹⁶. There are a few collections of oral testimonies by South Africans who went into exile¹⁷, and these include a few accounts by MK soldiers. However, in their relatively unstructured format, which tends simply to print the testimonies of the interviewees, often abridging them and focusing on different aspects from each interview, it is very difficult to find continuity and similarities amongst people's testimonies.

Many academic works exist which focus on the nature of the ANC in exile, including the command structure and operations of MK, as well as speculations about the degree of influence of the Communist Party, and issues of international alliances, among others. Tom Lodge's many articles and chapters of books on MK¹⁸ as well as Howard Barrell's work¹⁹ are very helpful but also focus mostly on the above issues. Lodge's several articles focus largely on the state of the ANC and MK in exile in particular periods, outlining the past, present, and possibilities for the future, looking

¹⁶ Sparg, Marion, Schreiner, Jenny, and Ansell, Gwen. (Eds). (2001). *Comrade Jack: The political lectures and diary of Jack Simons, Novo Catengue*, Johannesburg: STE Publishers.

¹⁷ See for example; Bernstein, Hilda. (1994). *The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans*, London: Jonathan Cape; and Majodina, Zonke. (1995). *Exiles and Homecomings: the Untold Stories*, Johannesburg: Heinemann Publishers (Pty) Ltd.

¹⁸ See for e.g.; Lodge, Tom. (1991). Guerrilla Warfare and Exile Diplomacy: The African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress. In Lodge, T. and Nasson, B. *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*, USA: Ford Foundation; (1989). *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press; (1989) People's war or Negotiation? African National Congress Strategies in the 1980s. In *South African Review*, vol. 5, Johannesburg: Ravan Press; (1988) State of Exile: The African National Congress of South Africa, 1976-86. In Frankel, Philip, Pines, Noam, and Willing Mark. (Eds). *State Resistance and Change in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers; (1986). 'Mayihlome!- Let Us Go To War!': From Nkomati to Kabwe, The African National Congress, January 1984-June 1985. In *South African Review*, Vol. 3, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 226-247; (1992). The African National Congress in the 1990s. In *South African Review*, vol. 6, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 44-78.

¹⁹ Barrell. *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*.

primarily at the diplomatic and political sides of things. He does discuss training in his chapter of *State, Resistance, and Change*²⁰, but draws this information only from a small number of ex-MK soldiers, and generally those who were police informers or who were captured and tried by the South African government. This gives a limited view of MK and its soldiers. Barrell's short book benefits from his personal participation in the struggle and provides a good basic history of MK, but again focuses largely on the leaders, strategies, and well-known events. Several articles deal with mainly ideological and strategic issues,²¹ analysing the party line or discussing the conditions necessary for the ANC to be successful in its endeavours, but these mostly rely on extensive theory and guesswork and tend to avoid empirical evidence. Ellis and Sechaba²² provide us with an in-depth look at the relationship between the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) in exile, dealing in large part with Umkhonto we Sizwe, but focus extensively on the issues of leadership and strategy of MK, leaning toward the theory that the SACP had a large degree of control over MK. Vladimir Shubin often contradicted their claims in his history of the ANC and MK, and his position as a Soviet Central Committee member and a representative of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee provided a unique perspective²³. Stephen Davis' *Apartheid's Rebels* also provides an in depth view on

²⁰ Lodge, *State of Exile*, 234-6.

²¹ See for example; Johns, Sheridan. (1973). *Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare- A South African Case Study.* In *Journal for African Studies*, vol.11, no.2; Marcum, John. (1972). *The Exile Condition and Revolutionary Effectiveness: Southern African Liberation Movements.* In Potholm, C.P. and Dale, R., (eds). *South African in Perspective: Essays in Regional Politics*, New York: The Free Press; and Faton, Robert. (1984). *The African National Congress of South Africa: The limitations of a Revolutionary Strategy.* In *The Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. 18.

²² Ellis, Stephen and Sechaba, Tsepo. (1992). *Comrades Against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile*, London: James Currey.

²³ Shubin, Vladimir. (1999). *ANC: A View from Moscow*. Bellville: Mayibuye Books.

and history of the ANC and MK.²⁴ Only a few books try to provide general histories of MK itself, and even these focus mainly on leaders, campaigns, and diplomacy.²⁵ Howard Barrell also wrote an impressive PhD thesis about the contradiction between MK's obvious failure as a military force and its apparent success politically.²⁶ A mini-thesis written by Nicole "Nicky" Martina Van Driel provided an indepth look at the Luthuli Detachment and the Wankie Campaign of 1967.²⁷ An articles by Raymond Suttner addressed the different and enduring cultures encompassed in the ANC, including the MK and exile experiences and the early years of MK.²⁸ More recently, the South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET)'s first two volumes of *The Road to Democracy in South Africa* examine many aspects of ANC and MK histories, and make use of their rich base of oral interviews.²⁹ All of these add to the history of MK, but most do not look closely at the lives of the rank and file soldiers, and this focus is still largely missing from the available literature. While books about the ANC abound, the armed wing is not as well covered.

²⁴ Davis, Stephen M. (1987). *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South Africa's Hidden War*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

²⁵ See for example; Karis, T. and Gerhart, G. (1997). *From Protest to Challenge: A documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990. vol. 5: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979* Pretoria, Unisa Press; and Barrell. *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*.

²⁶ Barrell, Howard. (1993). *Conscripts to Their Age: ANC Operational Strategy 1976-1986*, Unpublished thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of a PhD in Politics, Oxford.

²⁷ Van Driel, Nicol (Nicky) Martina. (2003 June). *The ANC's First Armed Military Operation: The Luthuli Detachment and the Wankie Campaign, July-September 1967*, A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in the Department of History, University of the Western Cape.

²⁸ Suttner, Raymond. (2003). Culture(s) of the African National Congress of South Africa: Imprint of Exile Experiences. In *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 21. No. 2; Suttner, Raymond. (2003). Early History of the ANC Underground from the M-Plan to Rivonia. In *South African Historical Journal* 49, 123-146.

²⁹ South African Democracy Education Trust. (2004). *The Road to Democracy Volume 1 [1960-1970]*, Cape Town: Zebra; and (2006). *The Road to Democracy Volume 2 [1970-1980]*, Pretoria: Unisa. Six chapters in the first volume focus on the ANC and MK in the 1960s, and five in the second look at the ANC and MK in the 1970s.

The Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and its armed wing, The Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) have had far less written about them. Early books were usually biographies of leaders, particularly Robert Sobukwe and Patrick Duncan³⁰. Articles and studies of the PAC are few and far between, and mostly written by Tom Lodge.³¹ Bernard Leeman's works provide much detail on the relationship between Lesotho and the PAC, and of the history of the PAC, but come from a very biased viewpoint.³² More recently, chapters in the South African Democracy Education Trust's (SADET) *Road to Democracy* series have focused on the PAC in and Poqo in the 1960s, and on the PAC and APLA both in exile and inside South Africa in the 1970s.³³ Academic studies focusing on aspects of the history of the PAC are also becoming more common, including an excellent study by Kwandime Kondlo on the PAC in exile, one by Ali Hlongwane on Zephania Mothopeng, and another by Daddy Alfred Budi Mahlangu, also on the PAC in

³⁰ See for example: Pogrand, Benjamin. (1997). *How Can Man Die Better?: the Life of Robert Sobukwe*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball; Driver, C.J. (2000). *Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan African*, Cape Town: David Phillip; and Ntloedibe, Elias. (1995). *Here is a Tree: political biography of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe*, Ga-Rankua: Century-Turn.

³¹ Lodge, Tom. (1994). The Pan-Africanist Congress, 1959-1990. In Liebenberg et al, *The Long March: The Story of the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa*, Pretoria: HAUM; Lodge, Tom. (1991). Guerrilla Warfare and Exile Diplomacy: The African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress. In Lodge and Nasson, *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*, USA: Ford Foundation, 174-202; Lodge, Tom, (1983). *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 231-260, 295-362.

³² Leeman, Bernard. (1985). *Lesotho and the Struggle for Azania: Africanist Political Movements in Lesotho and Azania: The Origins and History of the Basotholand Congress Party and the Pan Africanist Congress*, London: University of Azania; and Leeman, Bernard. (1996). The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania. In Alexander, Peter, Hutchison, Ruth and Schreuder, Deryck. (Eds). *Africa Today: A Multi Disciplinary Snapshot of the Continent in 1995*, Canberra: The Humanities Research Centre, The Australian National University.

³³ Maaba, Brown (2004). The PAC's war against the State; and Mathabatha, Sello. (2004). The PAC and Poqo in Pretoria. In South African Democracy Education Trust. (2004). *The Road to Democracy Volume 1 [1960-1970]*, Cape Town: Zebra; Ka Plaatjie, Thami. (2006). The PAC's Internal Underground Activities, 1960-1980, and The PAC in Exile. In South African Democracy Education Trust. (2006). *The Road to Democracy Volume 2 [1970-1980]*, Pretoria: Unisa.

exile.³⁴ Two recent memoirs, Mxolisi Ace Mgxashe's *Are You With Us?* "The Story of a PAC Activist"³⁵ and Letlapa Mphahlele's *Child of the Soil: My Life as a Freedom Fighter*,³⁶ also give excellent accounts of the early days of the PAC in the former and the life and times of an APLA commander in the latter. Aside from these, very little has been published on the PAC, and even less on APLA.

Focus of the Study

The history of the armed struggle includes many aspects, most of which have been covered by other authors. A number of these are personal accounts of soldiers, mostly from leadership positions. Much has been published on the strategies and tactics of the armed wings, and a lot has also covered the leaders, their speeches, and official documents released to the press and used as propaganda. Some articles provide status reports on the ANC and PAC in exile, written at different points in their history, which usually include many allusions to the past, details about recent developments, and predictions about what the future will bring. The struggle is also often approached looking at the response of the apartheid state to black resistance, documenting torture and repression inside South Africa, white politics, and military incursions into neighbouring countries by the South African government, which

³⁴ Kondlo, Kwandime Merriman. (2003). *In the twilight of the Azanian Revolution: The exile history of the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania 1960-1990*, submitted in fulfilment of D. Litt. Et. Phil., Rand Afrikaans University; Hlongwane, Ali. (not dated). *The Lion of Azania: The Story of Zephania Mothopeng (1913-1990)*, Masters dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand; Mahlangu, Daddy Alfred Budi. (1990). *From South Africa to Azania?: A Critical Analysis of the Pan Africanist Congress in Exile 1962-1990*, BA(Hons) thesis, University of Cape Town.

³⁵ Mgxashe, Mxolisi "Bra Ace." (2006). *Are You With Us?* "The Story of a PAC Activist", Cape Town: NB Publishers.

³⁶ Mphahlele, Letlapa. (2002). *Child of the Soil: My Life as a Freedom Fighter*, Cape Town: Kwela Books.

became common in the early to mid 1980s. There are also several “official” histories of the liberation movements, usually written by those who participated in it, as well as books written from the apartheid state’s point of view, which usually demonise or dismiss the resistance movements. Some current debates focus on the character of the relationship between the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) in exile, and often deal with their relationship to MK. Some study is given to leadership problems in the PAC in exile and much has been written about individual leaders, such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Robert Sobukwe, and others. Howard Barrell’s Ph.D. thesis looked at the issue of whether or not MK was successful, and why. The South African Democracy Education Trust’s *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, Volumes 1 (1960-1970) and 2 (1970-1980) provide many chapters on the ANC, MK, the PAC, and APLA, and add new material to their history and draw largely on oral interviews carried out by the organisation.³⁷ All of these issues and focuses are vital and add something to the history of the armed struggle. However, this study is not intended to be an extension of these, but rather a complement to them. For this reason, many of the commonly approached aspects of the history of the armed struggle will not be broached in this thesis. Some of them will come into play in different topics of the study, but the purpose here is not to continue these debates, but rather to offer a new dimension to this history.

While South Africa never experienced a guerrilla war on the scale of the Zimbabwean, Angolan, Namibian, or Mozambiquean liberation struggles, the armed wings of the ANC and the PAC did play a significant role in the conflict between anti-apartheid forces and the National Party government. That the extent of this role is

³⁷ South African Democracy Education Trust. (2004). *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960-1970*, Cape Town: Zebra Press; and (2006). *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980*, Pretoria: Unisa Press.

hotly debated is irrelevant to this study, as MK and APLA clearly deserve a place in the history of South Africa's struggle. The Rankean tradition of great leaders and villains and great battles and events must not eclipse the history of the lesser-known people and the everyday aspects of life in an exiled and underground army. The "ordinary" soldiers of MK and APLA deserve their place in history as well.

It is in this proposed context that this study will look at the lives of the rank-and-file soldiers of MK and APLA. In exploring the backgrounds of the soldiers, the ways in which they became acquainted with and joined the armed wings, their experiences in the training camps, holding camps, and forward areas of the struggle, and their current place in South African society, a better understanding emerges of their contribution to and place in the "new South Africa". Hopefully, this will move away from an "official mythology" and towards an understanding of the "personal sacrifices" and experiences that Barnes sees lacking in current accounts of liberation struggles.³⁸

As the study will focus on the "ordinary soldier" and hopes to add to current material on MK and APLA, it will look primarily at the "Soweto generation" of recruits and their successors. Estimates indicate that only between 300-800 recruits had crossed over the borders to join MK by 1965,³⁹ as compared to around 3000 in the two years immediately following the Soweto uprising alone⁴⁰. With an estimate of over 11,000 recruits in the time between the Soweto uprisings and un-banning of the

³⁸ See opening quote by Barnes.

³⁹ The figure of 300 comes from Lodge, Tom, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, 237, where he estimates the total from the years 1961-1964, and 800 comes from Barrell, Howard, *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*, 19, covering the same period.

⁴⁰ Barrell, *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*, 33.

ANC in 1990⁴¹, the scope of the operation clearly expanded in the mid-1970s, and MK moved from its traditionally small group of elite saboteurs towards a larger army being trained for guerrilla warfare in South Africa. APLA figures are much harder to come by, though a few estimates are available. In the years before the Soweto Uprisings, estimates of APLA's number are around a few hundred soldiers. They also received an upsurge of recruits in the years following the Soweto Uprisings, the Township Revolts of the 1980s, and, as opposed to MK, many recruits joined APLA in the early 1990s. Overall estimates of APLA's numbers range from 6,000-8,000⁴², and 6,000 names were submitted for enrolment when the transformation of the South African National Defence Force began in earnest⁴³. Many of the activists from the Soweto generation left South Africa long after the uprisings had quietened as well, after long terms in detention or prison or further activities in South Africa, or both. Despite this massive influx of recruits in the post-Soweto period, most writings that deal with this period of the armed struggle's history focus on the leadership and international relations involving the ANC, PAC, African countries, Communist countries, and Western countries. Although the uprisings in the mid-1980s in South Africa did not result in the same kind of exodus into exile since both MK and APLA were trying to enlarge the struggle within the country and keep the recruits inside South Africa, the soldiers who joined MK and APLA in this period also have useful contributions to make to the history of the organisation. When dealing with MK, many authors have documented the structure of the camps in Angola, and operations

⁴¹ This number is an estimate based on calculations between Howard Barrell and Ronnie Kasrils, from von den Steinen, L. Interview with Howard Barrell, 9 December 1998, Cape Town.

⁴² Mashike, Lephophotho and Mafole Mokalobe. (2003). Reintegration into Civilian Life: The case of former MK and APLA combatants, in *Track Two*, Vol. 12 Nos. 1 and 2, 10.

⁴³ Lodge, Tom. (1995). *Soldiers of the Storm: A Profile of the Azanian People's Liberation Army*. In Cilliers, Jakkie and Markus Reichardt. (Eds). *About Turn: The Transformation of the South African Military and Intelligence*, Johannesburg: IDP, 110.

inside South Africa, so much of this detail is only addressed briefly, leaving space to explore the soldiers' experiences. In the case of APLA, very little has been written on its history, and more detail is provided on these subjects.

Sources

By the very nature of an underground and exiled organisation faced with a ruthless and unscrupulous enemy, documentation of many decisions, operations, and events is not available for study. Even that which is available, now that many documents have been released for public viewing, is very limited. Much information has been lost, and much has been limited by issues of security, as well as just plain bad record keeping and misadministration. While general numbers of the soldiers involved in MK and APLA have been put forward, these only touch on raw numbers, and few statistics are available on the areas the soldiers came from, their backgrounds, gender, race, and age breakdowns, or other issues whose examination would be very useful. Having said this, however, many sources are available to develop a picture of MK and APLA conditions and experiences. Published personal accounts provide some information on life in the two armed wings, their training camps, and official policies, actions, and ideas, though many contradictory stories arise in these.⁴⁴ Also available are the ANC and PAC submissions to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) documenting the "official" histories of the movements as well as the human rights violations that its members admit to committing during the struggle. The TRC also includes many amnesty hearings and submissions in their website, which give pertinent information on the subject. For another side of the story of abuses in MK camps, one must look at books like Twala's, articles in *Searchlight*

⁴⁴ Two of these would be Kasrils' and Twala's books, which occasionally completely contradict each other.

South Africa, and Amnesty International's report which emerged when Bandile Ketelo exposed the abuses publicly in 1990⁴⁵, as well as information in Ellis and Sechaba's book about this topic. Similarly dissident accounts can be found of the situation in the PAC, including Henry Isaacs' unpublished book, *Struggles Within the Struggle: An Inside View of the PAC of South Africa*,⁴⁶ and testimonies of people who left APLA because of the problems they met there⁴⁷. Additionally, many documents from the ANC, the PAC, and the NP government are now available from the period in question, all of which provide more background for the study. Particularly helpful here are the collections of the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape and the ANC and PAC archival collections at Fort Hare University. Many oral accounts exist in the 'Wolfie Kodesh Collection (Historical Papers & Oral History of Exile Interviews)' and the 'Hilda Bernstein collection' at the Mayibuye Centre, and the PAC archives at Fort Hare notably include boxes upon boxes of questionnaires filled out by people when they were applying to join APLA, and while the questionnaires changed with time, and many portions did not get filled out, certain trends emerge showing areas with particularly large numbers joining APLA, issues that led people to the PAC, popular routes out of the country, and organisations that channelled recruits to the PAC. The ANC London and Lusaka Collections at the Mayibuye Centre were opened for researchers initially, but have since been closed on orders of the ANC to allow their historians to go through them thoroughly, which does not bode well for the freedom of information contained therein, and has taken

⁴⁵ Such as Ketelo, Bandile, et. al. (1992). A Miscarriage of Democracy: the ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in Umkhonto we Sizwe. in *Searchlight South Africa*, 5, 35-65; and Amnesty International. (1992). South Africa: Torture, Ill-Treatment and Executions in African National Congress Camps AFR 53-27-92, London.

⁴⁶ Isaacs, Henry. (not dated, but from the mid-1980s). *Struggles Within the Struggle: An Inside View of the PAC of South Africa*, unpublished manuscript.

⁴⁷ Such as a testimony from one man who joined and resigned from APLA and later MK, published in *Fighting the Crazy War*. Vol. 2, no. 5. No further publication information available.

years so far with no sign of re-opening the collections. Luckily this author was able to access these collections before they were closed. Additional information can be found in the numerous journals published during the struggle, including ANC publications *Sechaba*, *Dawn*, and *Mayibuye*, South African Communist Party publications *Umsebenzi* and *African Communist*, and PAC publications *Azanian Combat*, *Azanian News*, and *Azanian Woman*. Also available for perusal are records of some of the trials of MK and APLA soldiers, though obtaining them often proved prohibitively difficult to access. Newspaper and journal articles from the time also provide information for the study.

The largest wealth of information for this project, however, comes from oral interviews with ex-combatants. Many of these had already been done, and can be found in the oral history collection of the Mayibuye Centre.⁴⁸ Others done by SADET were also available for study. Many others have been undertaken by the author, in an attempt to find answers to specific questions, or to provide a wider pool of interviewees. Nevertheless, several concerns surround the validity of oral history. While it is very useful in gathering information about historical events, movements, and ways of life, it is also only as accurate as human memory and nature allow it to be. But this is also true of non-oral historical sources. However, with the use of many interviews, using a broad base of people and correlating the oral testimonies with written sources, they can provide a wealth of information and add profound depths to many historical subjects. Together, the oral histories and archival material support each other to provide a detailed and informative picture of the lives of MK and APLA soldiers.

⁴⁸ The Wolfie Kodesh Collection (Historical Papers and Oral History of Exile Interviews) and the Hilda Bernstein Collection. Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape.

The Nature of Oral History and Issues Arising from Interviews

Over the last few decades, oral testimony has become widely accepted as a valuable and credible source for historians. It allows people who would generally be excluded in traditional sources except as statistics to add their voices to the historical record. Oral sources can also provide information to fill gaps in official documentation and can provide in depth eyewitness accounts that remain unmatched by other sources. They also provide a human side to history, allowing for the exploration of emotions, motivations, and values that take history beyond the tradition of names, dates, and events.

Using oral testimony in history, however, is problematic. The biggest problem facing historians trying to collect and utilise oral testimonies is simply the characteristics of human nature. Memory is fallible, and what people remember may or may not be correct. Even if they remember things perfectly, that does not change the fact that many people will change details or choose to remember them differently in order to protect their image or to impress their interviewer. Slim and Thompson point out that: "The process of ordering, discarding, selecting and combining means that memory is always a combination of the objective and subjective, and of facts, interpretation and opinion."⁴⁹ Additionally, there is no way of telling if a particular testimony is really representative of the larger population group on which one is trying to gather information. It is necessary to find a way to separate these different aspects of oral testimony in order to decide what is true and what is not. In simply looking at the testimony itself, it is often impossible to do this, but when one testimony is compared with many others and is correlated with other sources, such as letters, newspaper articles, police records, and official documents, to name only a few

⁴⁹ Slim, Hugo and Thompson, Paul (1995). *Listening for Change: Oral Testimony and Community Development*, Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 140.

possibilities, it becomes much easier to gain a clear picture of what has actually happened. By matching many different sources, it is often possible to find out which statements are true and which are fallacious. One man, interviewed during a project for SADET on the 1976 Uprisings in Cape Town, claimed complete responsibility for setting off the students' protest march in Cape Town, after claiming direct influence over the students in Soweto⁵⁰. Direct questioning of people who were involved in the student protests at the time revealed that his claims were entirely fallacious.⁵¹ Occasionally, different stories may be irreconcilable, but the advantages of using the oral testimonies far outweigh this danger. One cannot simply discard such information because it is not perfect. If perfection were the standard, little evidence, oral or written, would survive scrutiny.

Another problem of collecting oral testimonies is that it necessarily involves a process between at least two people, the interviewer and the interviewee. Their relationship will often influence the resulting product. Issues of gender, age, racial, cultural and linguistic differences, as well as their feelings towards one another, can make interviews more or less successful. Jeremy Seekings, who used extensive interviews in books on youth politics and on the United Democratic Front, mentioned that he saw real differences in the results of interviews between people he got along with and respected and those he didn't. He noted that the interviews with the former ended up being much more useful and contained much more information than the

⁵⁰ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Danile Landingwe, 24 July 2001, Cape Town, SADET Oral History Project.

⁵¹ e.g. von den Steinen, L. Interview with Nothando Nolutshungu, August 2001, Mowbray, Cape Town, SADET Oral History Project. This claim was also refuted by Geoffrey Mamputa, Taruni Terrance "Tapepe" Makubalo, and Temba Nolutshungu.

latter.⁵² Unfortunately this is difficult to avoid, but it is important to be conscious of this problem so that one can strive to avert it.

Another difficulty arises with the question of hindsight. When people relate things that have happened in their past, they do so through the values and ideas they have in the present. This may distort the way things actually were, as they are seen through different eyes than they were at the time in question. For example, one UCT student wrote a thesis on the changing perceptions of the experience of being imprisoned on Robben Island. She found that during different periods, people relating their stories of this experience would focus on completely different aspects. When the apartheid government was still in power, prisoners of Robben Island described it as a horrible place to be, with terrible guards, devastatingly hard labour, and very little hope. Now that the new government has taken over and Robben Island has become a monument to the struggle against apartheid, ex-inmates focus rather on the positive aspects of their experiences there, talking of the camaraderie, educational opportunities, and the idea of Robben Island as a political university.⁵³ Seekings recommends one way to get around this. He suggests that rather than simply asking what happened and why, which allows for filtering through current views, it is better to focus on certain issues and events and ask the interviewees to relate them through the eyes of the past. For example, an interviewer who wished to find out how the soldiers in MK or APLA saw their experiences upon joining the organisation would have various ways to go about the interview. Asking simply what conditions were

⁵² von den Steinen, L. Conversation with Jeremy Seekings, 3 October 1997, University of Cape Town; the relevant books are Seekings, Jeremy (1993). *Heroes or Villains?: Youth Politics in the 1980s*, Johannesburg: Ravan; and (2000). *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991*, Cape Town: David Philip.

⁵³ Rioufol, Veronique. (1999). *The Making of a New Past for a "New" South Africa: The Commemoration of Robben Island*, Unpublished thesis, M. Soc. Sc., University of Cape Town.

like when they got to the training camp might elicit explanations tempered by current knowledge about the logistics, resources, and leaders. But a question asking what they expected the camps to be like, then what their first impressions were, and finally how they think it should have been, with the benefit of hindsight, should provide a more objective viewpoint. By separating the past values and ideas from the present in this way, it is easier to arrive at something near what they thought at the time. Another suggestion by Seekings is to create “a window” to the past. Rather than just accepting that the camp commanders were corrupt or that the leadership didn’t care, the interviewer should ask for specific examples of this, so that there are concrete stories to augment the generalisations.⁵⁴

As much as hindsight can distort an event in an interview, it can also clarify things in a way that cannot always be found in resources from the time in question. For example, witnesses in a trial might not tell things exactly the way they happened in order to protect themselves or someone else from the consequences of punishment. However, twenty years later, when the threat of punishment is no longer there, they may be much more candid than they were at the time. In this way, sometimes oral testimonies about past events can be more accurate than things like trial transcripts recorded at the time of an event. Trevor Lummis also notes that:

The retrospective element in oral history is important because it asks questions of the past which reflect present interests and seeks evidence which was not produced at the time. That evidence is collected within a changed culture and, therefore, is not vulnerable to the biases and pressures of the period which produced it however much it may be shaped by the biases of its own day.⁵⁵

This retrospect also allows interviewers and researchers to discover material that has been unavailable before. By finding gaps in existing documentation of a time or

⁵⁴ von den Steinen, L. Conversation with Jeremy Seekings, 3 October 1997, University of Cape Town.

⁵⁵ Lummis, Trevor. (1987). *Listening to History*, London: Hutchinson, 27.

event and asking about the issues not addressed in the available sources, the record of an event or time can be augmented by oral history.

In the end, the most important thing is for a person collecting oral evidence of historical events to be fully aware of the pitfalls inherent to such a project and to do his best to avoid it. Also, by gleaning as much information as possible from many different people involved in the event in question and from integrating the oral evidence with written sources and documents, it is possible to gain a more complete picture of historical events and to add to existing material available on some subjects, as well as to add a new, human perspective unattainable through traditional sources.

As to the interviews conducted by the author, many problems arose and influenced this study. The first problem was that without any sort of regional, gender, age and background breakdowns of the soldiers of MK and APLA, it was simply impossible to establish a picture of what a representative group of soldiers would look like. In the absence of this guide, the author attempted to find a variety of different people who experienced different aspects of the armed struggle, both men and women, those who joined as students and as adults, and those who emerged satisfied with their contribution and their experiences and those who did not, as well as people of diverse backgrounds. Some attempt was made as well at regional distribution among the interviewees, but as the author is based in Cape Town, proportionally more interviewees either came from the Eastern or Western Cape or now reside there. However, it was possible to interview several people in Cape Town when they were visiting from other parts of the country, and the interviewees spent their time in MK and APLA in various parts of the country, providing more diversity.

Many contacts were available, some from UCT students who returned from exile and decided to continue their studies, which were interrupted by their

participation in the struggle. Others were found through official channels and still others from acquaintances who knew ex-MK and APLA members. Even with references however, many people were reluctant to speak of their experiences. Of fourteen calls to members of Parliament, even when furnished with the names of their friends and colleagues as referrals, only two responded and agreed to be interviewed. Many other contacts were sometimes unwilling to talk about their experiences, some because they feared reprisals against them if they were frank, others because they just wanted to forget, and a few because they couldn't see the importance of sharing their memories.

Many people who were interviewed or approached for interviews were distrustful of the interviewer. This largely comes from cultural and political issues, as many were not eager to talk to a young, white, American woman whose politics were unknown to them. Some distrusted the motives of the interviewer, or worried that their words might be twisted in ways they did not intend. Although these worries were unfounded, it is understandable that they would not immediately trust someone they did not know well, and who came from a very different background. This problem was exacerbated by many people's experiences with foreign researchers. In the years immediately after the first democratic elections in 1994, many foreign researchers came to South Africa, interviewed many people, then went home, published books, and made money from their research. A number of people have expressed reluctance to contribute to other peoples' studies and then be left behind and forgotten. Many articles and books were published that address the issues from the authors' point of view rather than somewhat objectively or from the participants' point of view, which has made people even more wary of talking to just anyone. The stigma of being American also raised its head on occasion. A paranoia, largely

justified, about American government activities and interference in foreign affairs came up when one APLA operative, introduced to the author by a stalwart and trusted PAC member, refused to believe that she was anything but a CIA agent. That particular source was adamant in his belief and unapproachable for an interview. The very nature of apartheid system and the struggle to defeat it made the race of the interviewer an issue. Nevertheless, all of the people who did agree to be interviewed were very open and friendly, willing to share their experiences and able to look at themselves critically and delve into their deep emotions and experiences. To these the author is very grateful, and from them much was learned.

As for interviews conducted by others and available to the author, these provided more of a problem. With an already completed interview, one has to be satisfied with the questions asked at the time, and cannot explore issues which were not touched on or clarify ones that were not clear. Sometimes, the interviewer's methods were much different than the ones used by this author, often asking closed questions in the style of, "Wasn't it like this," or "Don't you mean to say this," which limits the responses from the interviewee, and can make a difference in the answers that are received. These interviews, however, did allow for a larger regional base and for some ideas from people who might not be available to be interviewed today, due to their current positions, or on a couple of occasions, from people who are now deceased.

Overall, the interviews that were compiled for this study are very rich and informative, and the ex-soldiers as a group are very intelligent, open, and honest about their experiences and their feelings, which brings about pictures of life in MK and APLA which are very detailed and human, and rarely documented. Perhaps in the future, more oral testimonies such as these can be captured, or even better, more ex-

soldiers themselves will write histories, autobiographies, and fictional accounts of their experiences, but for the time being, this study hopes to start down this path in the hope that others will follow.

Chapter 1 Politicisation

There was a girl

There was a girl
eight years old, they say
her hair in spiky braids
her innocent fist raised in imitation

Afterwards, there was a mass of red
some torn pieces of meat
and bright rags fluttering:
a girl in a print dress, once, they say.¹

“Vacancies. Government of Azania. Majors, Lieutenants, Captains.
Duties: To train and lead 50 million Blacks.
Apply: SASO, BPC before the reach of the 4th Century of racist oppression.”²

Introduction

Politicisation comes from many things. Life can politicise, events can influence, and people can sway others towards finding their stand in politics. There is one thing the people who joined Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Azanian People’s Liberation Army have in common: at some point in their lives they came to have certain opinions about the country they lived in, the government that ruled them, and what their role was in attempting to change things. Some learned from their families and their position in society very early on that something was wrong with the way they lived. Others found themselves gradually coming to terms with their society and the things therein with which they did not agree. Many were recruited into politics by

¹ Brutus, Dennis. (1980). *There was a Girl*. In Feinberg, Barry. (ed). *Poets to the People: South African Freedom Poems*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 10.

² Slogan at Turfloop University, mid-1970s, cited in Hirson, Baruch. (1979). *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?*, London: Zed Press, 284.

friends, neighbours, relatives, peers, or elders. Some simply found themselves caught up in the events of the times in which they lived. A few can point to a particular point in their lives when their views changed irrevocably. Many were discouraged by others as they pursued what they thought was right. But whatever the cause, their opinions and views about the society they lived in and their own roles in it guided them towards joining MK and APLA.

Background

The 1950s were years of open and robust protest for many people. The early fifties saw the Defiance Campaign against unjust laws, in which people from all walks of life offered themselves for arrest for contravening many of the apartheid laws, particularly the pass laws and the Separate Amenities Act. The theory behind this campaign was that by filling the jails, the government would see that the laws were unjust, unenforceable and unfair, and change accordingly. The Congress of the People in 1955 resulted in the Freedom Charter, a crucial document of the liberation struggle still celebrated today. Various campaigns followed this, notably the anti-pass crusade of 1960, which resulted in fierce government repression and the Sharpeville massacre. A year later both the ANC and the PAC despaired of achieving change through peaceful means and formed and launched armed wings, Umkhonto we Sizwe and Poqo respectively. By 1963, with the arrest of many key leaders of MK and Poqo, the government largely crushed resistance. The 1960s saw a resultant wave of repression and new laws from the government and was a time of defeat, fear, and lack of opposition to the apartheid regime. While some did work to rebuild the underground, and MK managed to set off a few pamphlet bombs, this period remained mostly quiet. This lasted until the early 1970s, which saw a wave of strikes

and student protests, usually at a tertiary level, and the rise of Black Consciousness and its allied organisations. The youth of the early to mid-1970s, who were to become the fighting force in the revival of resistance to apartheid, were largely born around the time of the previous wave of resistance and grew up in a period when harsh repression forced acquiescence on the part of most of the black population of South Africa. Brooks and Brickhill characterised this generation as: “a generation reared in a period of defeat but which has never known defeat itself.”³ The Soweto uprisings, details of which can readily be found elsewhere, began in mid-1976.⁴ The uprising lasted until 1978, when the apartheid government finally crushed it. In 1983, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was launched, and the next year saw the beginning of township revolts which lasted until 1987. These periods of unrest, particularly the first one, were largely dominated by the youth and characterised by unprecedented levels of violent resistance to the apartheid government. Most of the people who joined Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Azanian People’s Liberation Army came from these two periods.

Politicised by Life

The discovery of politics for these youths happened in many ways. For some, simple existence sufficed to awaken their interest in politics. By the 1970s, most forced removals had already been undertaken, some bantustans were approaching independence, and citizenship in South Africa and the right to live in the cities

³ Brooks and Brickhill. (1980). *Whirlwind before the Storm*, London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 67.

⁴ See particularly Hirson, Brooks and Brickhill, Kane-Berman, John. (1978). *Soweto: Black Revolt White Reaction*, Johannesburg: Ravan; Mashabela, Harry. (2006). *A People on the Boil: Reflections on June 16 1976 and Beyond*, Johannesburg: Jacana; Hopkins, Pat and Grange, Helen. (2001). *The Rocky Rioter Teargas Show: The Inside Story of the 1976 Uprising*, Cape Town: Zebra; and Ndlovu, Sifiso Mxolisi. (1998). *The Soweto Uprisings: Counter-memories of June 1976*, Randburg: Ravan.

became more and more problematic for the majority of Africans. Contrasts between their township living arrangements and those of the whites in neighbouring suburbs were hard to miss. Many had witnessed police brutality at first hand and its effects on their families and themselves. In circumstances like this, there was often little need for subsequent events or outside organisations to bring the realisation of unfairness and despair at the lot of the Africans to the youth.

The harassment of a child's parents left an effect on many of the young people who would later enlist to fight against apartheid. No matter how old, these children were aware of their parents' fear, and often made the connection between the fear of their parents and the white run police force that induced it. Reverend Barney Ngakane, a prominent Soweto leader explained:

Every black home is a political school. The husband comes home every day and tells his wife how he has been kicked around and arrested for things like pass offences. The children are listening and they take all this in. This is why African school children have become politically aware so easily.⁵

This is also acknowledged by the youth themselves. One man who became active in the Soweto uprisings traced his political awareness to his childhood:

One of our duties that one can recall there was brewing home brew . . . that was made in the back yard at that time. And it was [an] illegal affair . . . Now as infants we would be in some way told to go and play at the top of the sand dunes there so that when we see [the police] we would then indicate . . . then I mean conceal everything so that when the boer boys come there's nothing, only the smell would be remaining. Its [sic] one thing that is still very, very clear to my mind. This was going on- this was my first contact with a white man. I then from that stage, that age, had seen them as people- when they come here they never come peacefully. When you see a white coming to your area, we'd know it means trouble⁶

⁵ Rev. Barney Ngakane, quoted in Kane-Berman, 25.

⁶ Interview with Mxolisi Petane. Interviewer Unknown, not dated.

Another young girl recalled the forced removal of her family, who resisted the move. She was about 5 years old, and remembered that police and their dogs used to come every day around two in the morning to harass her family to move. Her parents feared the police, and this was not lost on her.⁷ Run-ins with the police when the youths were at very impressionable ages taught them at an early age what sort of society they were living in and what their family's position was within it.

Often apartheid dictated the family situation itself, with the men being forced to go to the cities for work, and families having to stay in the reserves. Sometimes even the women remaining at home had to leave to get work, and the children were left with their extended families. One man remembers;

I've never seen my father. When my mother was staying far away from me and I grew up with . . . my aunt you see, who took me as [her] son. So all those things I could question, why should our people- I mean why should this thing happen you see. And I could see . . . [if] people [weren't] forced to work far away and so on and so on, I would be having a father and mother . . . So it- I could see some sort of immorality of the regime you see. Being I mean what I am- I think that I am partly the victim. Because they- it was not their choice. Even if my mother neglected me at an early stage . . . it was not [her] choice to do that.⁸

The basic premises of apartheid often resulted in children having broken homes, and this influenced them greatly.

Children also noticed differences in the living conditions of blacks and whites. Many had parents who were domestic workers and were able to see the insides of the white houses, which were nothing like their own. One woman remembered:

My mum used to take us to her work, place of employment and, you know, there was that element whereby you find that the employers were having two fridges full of food, you know . . . and by that time, we didn't have any fridge at home and we didn't have any electricity . . . they had kids not far from where they were staying, they had a

⁷ Kodesh, W. Interview with Veronica (Mpho) Msimanga, 17 August 1993.

⁸ Interview with Nkosinathi Robert Mjoli (Joseph Setshesh). Interviewer unknown, no date.

playing ground and at one time I said to my mum, 'momma may I please go and play with those kids?' She said no, you can't go there because you will be arrested, its not permissible,' and I said, 'why?' She said, 'no, its only white kids who are supposed to play there'. And at my age, at eleven, I wished I was white because all those kids have these opportunities.⁹

Another noted that:

My mother was a domestic servant at Rondebosch [in Cape Town] . . . and life was totally [the] opposite of the life that you are used to . . . big houses; there's no house that is that same [as] another one. Unlike where we're staying and the carriages, every house is the same. There's electricity when we entered their kitchens. There's fridges, whatever, the life of the white man which was a contrast to what we are used to.¹⁰

Some did not even need to go into the homes of white people with their mothers to realise the situation. One man explained: "When we went into town and saw the relative luxury in which white people lived, this made an indelible impression on our young minds."¹¹ Another young man asserted:

The economic and social conditions of the blacks in this country are such that no normal person or right thinking person could tolerate them. In Soweto where I lived, I have seen children die because of malnutrition. I have seen my people slaughter one another so as to get bread in order to survive. In my own family I have seen my brothers and uncles going endlessly to town in a fruitless search for work. I have seen my own father struggle to bring us up. In as far as housing is concerned, one need only look at Alexandra Township, crime-ridden, foul-smelling with the long-forgotten walks being used for sanitary purposes. It hardly compares with the posh white suburb, Kew, just 300 metres away. These things have not passed unabsorbed in my mind.¹²

The huge differences in the quality of living conditions between the black and white communities made a big impression on many black children, and often gave them

⁹ Bernstein, H. Interview with Caesarine Gwanamakuru. No date.

¹⁰ Interview with Petane.

¹¹ Excerpt from Mosima Gabriel Sexwale's statement to the court in the "Pretoria 12" trial, from Benson, Mary. (ed). (1981). *The Sun Will Rise: Statements from the Dock by Southern African Political Prisoners*, London: International Aid and Defence Fund, 66.

¹² Excerpt from Naledi Tsiki's statement to the court in the "Pretoria 12" trial, from Benson, 70.

their first glance at how unfair life was in South Africa. These experiences sometimes had a very negative effect on the self-esteem of the youngsters. One woman remembered: "When I was still a baby, my mother used to ask me, 'what do you want to be?' I said, 'I want to be a white man.' Because I saw a white man as *the* person."¹³

Another major politicising factor for this generation was the issue of forced removals. The government compelled many families to leave their homes and move to new and usually worse living conditions in the 1960s. This memory had profound effects on these children. One man recalled the forced removal of the community where he grew up with his grandmother. A teacher in his school talked to the class intimately about the removals, and told them never to forget it. She asserted: "Anywhere black people have good places, good land, they are chased away just as you do with a dog. If a dog is sitting in a nice spot in the shade, one will kick him away to sit in the spot."¹⁴ Another girl recalled being moved with her family from a nice place attached to a 'coloured' family's house to Naledi township in Johannesburg. She remembered arriving at the new place and finding the family living in a small four roomed house with another family, eight people in all, and an outside toilet. They also had to cook outside, by digging a hole, making a fire, and using it as a stove. This change in her environment played a large part in her political development.¹⁵ One woman had a very personal response to the issue of forced removals. She remembered that after her family was removed from Cape Town, she moved to the Eastern Cape, where she contracted tapeworms, and had to have two

¹³ Bernstein, H. Interview with Joyce Stofile, no date.

¹⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Thabang Makwetla, 23 September and 12 October 1998, Cape Town.

¹⁵ Kodesh, Interview with Msimanga.

operations. She said: "In fact at that time I was interpreting it according to my age. It was like if I was not sent to the Eastern Cape, I could have not got these [tape]worms from the Eastern Cape. So that was basically my involvement and that was my anger."¹⁶ Another man remembered:

We were staying at Addersvlei. It was a mixed area, we were staying . . . Chinese, you know people of the other races. When we were removed to Guguletu it was only us. As a young chap that didn't matter. But as you were growing up you then began to realise that it's only people of your skin that you see around. There's no longer other race . . . There were so many meetings around whether the families would be going or not . . . you'd see parents gathering at certain houses and notice that the debates were very, very tense. Because the mood from them was not as jolly as we were used to.¹⁷

Some didn't even have to be moved themselves to have this effect them. One woman remembered the removal of Crossroads and the KTC squatter camp in Cape Town:

People were transported in big trucks being taken all the way from Cape Town and being dumped somewhere there near the Transkei and then people had to find [their] way back. It had a serious impact on me. And the KTC squatter camps, I remember one night when we were with some friends, white friends, I mean they were shocked when they saw the situation there. The situation was terrible, it was raining and people were sitting outside without blankets.¹⁸

The moving of people from comfortable communities to new and unknown places which usually had worse conditions than their previous homes was a sure way to foment dissatisfaction in the children of these families.

Sometimes less consequential issues led youths towards politics. One in particular remembered the influence of rugby and the sports boycott of the early 1970s that got him involved in politics. With activities such as sports playing such a significant role in the lives of the youth, it is not surprising that this issue became his

¹⁶ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Thandi Zonke. July 2001, for the SADET Oral History Project.

¹⁷ Interview with Petane.

¹⁸ Interview with Thundezwa Booi, Interviewer unknown, no date.

training ground. He recalled the issue of non-racial sport being in vogue at the time, and noted: "So that came with a lot of politics in fact, because we began now to see in a practical way, defiance of all these . . . measures and acts of the apartheid acts and all...We had a very good slogan, which was saying . . . 'No normal sport in an abnormal society.'"¹⁹ A few people credited reggae music as the key factor in their politicisation. The "Africa for the Africans" slogan of Marcus Garvey and the revolutionary messages often mentioned in reggae songs led some people directly into the PAC which advocated the same slogan.²⁰ In these ways, some basic issues surrounding the lives of the youth found expression later on a larger scale in the politics of the country itself.

Another hotbed of politicisation was the school. Many students who didn't know of politics before getting to school began to explore and learn about the situation in which they found themselves. Some who had attended more progressive schools found their circumstances different from the norm. One woman recalled that she went to a multi-racial boarding school, and then transferred to a township school.

She noted:

Well things were quite different then at that school because we were used to mixing with all the races . . . We also had quite a hard time there because of this problem of ours that we are used to mixing really with everybody and all of a sudden we find ourselves exposed to all kinds of laws and things . . . well it was not easy to adjust.²¹

This change in circumstances helped her realise that there were different ways of doing things than those that were done in the townships. Others discovered politics

¹⁹ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Lerumo Kalako, 10 June 1998, Cape Town.

²⁰ APLA questionnaires, from the PAC archives at the University of Fort Hare.

²¹ Bernstein, H. Interview with Gloria Meek, no date.

through their teachers, particularly history teachers. One man remembers two dynamic history teachers who influenced his ideas:

The man who was teaching us history then was a very articulate and a dramatic person. He would start a battle to your mind and dramatise the whole scene . . . At the end of the day the British, because our fighting...was not with the Boer boy it was the British themselves that we were fighting. Superior . . . arms, military formations, military science, they were quite superior but we were putting our resistance there, fighting very fierce and hard. And after each battle, they would gain ground, they would capture certain lands. You know we fight back, we try to recapture those, they would again defeat us in battle, gain some more. So one's knowledge then was a little bit advanced by knowing that well, we are living the way we are living because we had been defeated in this battles. . . . I was [a] history student at high school taught by . . . another dramatic teacher. When we were learning about the French Revolution, it had then you know came with many answers and to that information that we were having that it is possible for people [to] mobilise, organise and rise against whatever system that they are sick and tired of . . . As small groups we were beginning to study these things very, very serious. Try and see whether there couldn't be any solutions to our problems as the French had done.²²

Others also remembered their history teachers. One girl recalled that they learned history from a good teacher, who would explain things to them in details. Then in and out of this history class, they would read banned books and pass them around, and this inspired them.²³ Some had more negative experiences with their teachers, but found politics through the experiences nonetheless. One woman remembered:

When I went to high school, I went to Vlakfontein Technical High where two-thirds of the teaching staff was white and most of them were Afrikaner, only a few were English-speaking, so they were from the SADF, they had this mentality in them that they will deal with us and all that. And looking at the South African situation, for a white person, an Afrikaner for that matter, a real Afrikaner, to come and teach at the black school, it shows that they are the rejects because if they were good, they wouldn't have come to our school . . . You are in this situation where apartheid is seriously practised right inside the school yard. For instance they had a white staff room, catered for by the school and there was an old black man cleaning it, it was very

²² Interview with Petane.

²³ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Tsidi Mhlambo, 12 February 1999, Yeoville, Johannesburg.

clean and there was a black staff room which looked like a toilet, you know. And that thing affected us.²⁴

Other young students found themselves frustrated by their future opportunities. One man related:

As a young man, I would have liked to advance myself so that I could secure myself a desirable future. But the question I had to ask myself was what were the prospects? This is the question that brings about frustration bordering on desperation to a great majority of young blacks. I knew that I could not be what I really wanted to be if in the opinion of the powers that be, such an occupation was unfit for blacks. That is to say if I wanted to be a pilot, having the necessary intelligence and ability, I still needed a further feature before I could qualify. That is, in order to be a pilot I would have to be a white man.²⁵

Government restrictions on young black people usually won the government more frustrated adversaries than complacent citizens.

Some of the youth from this generation also found politics through their family connections. Many had parents, grandparents, or extended family members who had been involved in resistance in earlier years. One boy who grew up in Athlone, Cape Town, had a family in the Unity Movement. Occasionally his home served as a safe house for family members hiding from the police. As a young child, he knew not to say a word regarding the fugitives living with them. He would listen to the news and notice that the way life was did not conform to the morals of his family. By the time he was 11, he wrote a letter to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) asking them to: "take me out of this place to somewhere without the racist terror of South Africa."²⁶ Others had family members who had spent time in prison for their activities in the early 1960s. One

²⁴ Bernstein, Interview with Gwanamakuru.

²⁵ Excerpt from Naledi Tsiki's statement to the court, from Benson, 70.

²⁶ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Chalmers Nyombolo, 30 July 1998, Woodstock, Cape Town.

recalled: "My father was politically involved. He belongs to that detachment of the 50s and he was arrested during the 1960, early 1960s and he spent some time on Robben Island, about 3 years and he came out round about 1968 . . . I was six years old then. So throughout my upbringing he used to not hide his political beliefs and the way he . . . his world outlook."²⁷ A woman who later joined the armed struggle had a similar background: "I grew up there, you know like politics it was something that was in the family, because my grandfather was a politician, both sides, my mother and my father, my [grandfather] was in Robben Island. So, in fact I was involved from the school level in politics."²⁸ Another related: "I lived with my grandparents and my grandfather had a big influence on my political development. During his time he was the president of the ANC in the Western Cape as well as a member of the SACP and SACTU [the South African Council of Trade Unions]."²⁹ Another man cannot remember when he first became involved in politics: "There's no particular period where I can say I began to get particularly active. I come from an ANC family, both my mother and my father."³⁰ Bandile "Blacks" Joyi explained:

I was born in Cape Town, my father was involved in the PAC, in its formation. I think I got the influence from him. And in general I got the influence from the family, because our family as Joyis, we are from the Madiba clan, which is very political historically of course. Firstly I experienced the apartheid system through some other things that they have done to my family. My father was never allowed to own a home, a house, because of his political involvement. He was working somewhere, at K Gate wire and fence, where he was constantly under surveillance by the security branch. That affected me as the first born. And as a result I became politically clear at an early age of about fifteen. I knew what was happening.³¹

²⁷ Interview with Zola Tyikwe (Vincent Madlala). Interviewer unknown, no date.

²⁸ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Chief P.O. Pumla Mapipa, 19 August 2004, Simonstown Naval Base.

²⁹ Interview with Thamsanqa (Thami) Ngwevela. Interviewer unknown, no date.

³⁰ Bernstein, H. Interview with Mongezi Stofile, no date.

³¹ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Bandile "Blacks" Joyi, 21 November 2002, Cape Town

Other parents did not have direct political affiliations, but their attitudes still influenced their children. One man eloquently recalled:

[My father], who I suspect of having bequeathed me a lion's share of his genes, was a very rebellious character: Almost something unheard of in the Ermelo vicinity before, he regularly boxed the ears of the white farmers who kept on reminding him of his "inferior" skin colour when his intellect, and what an intellect was that- surpassed theirs. A shrewd and successful timber contractor, he spent lots of his earning[s] on several court cases against the whites who he felt "had to be taught a lesson against their vulture-like descending behind the generalized ruination of Africans."³²

In these ways, family influence often played a critical role in the politicisation of these young people.

The early 1970s

For those who did not discover politics at an early age, as well as for those who did, the early 1970s were a period of great change and burgeoning resistance to the apartheid government. The first half of this decade led many less aware young people to become newly politicised and saw those who already had political leanings develop their ideas further. A wave of strikes across the country, the rise of Black Consciousness and its related organisations, and student protests at many universities brought the realities of the situation in South Africa and the possibilities of challenging it to the forefront of many young minds. The independence of Angola and Mozambique in 1975 further brought the possibility of winning the liberation struggle to the attention of the youth. Long before the Soweto uprisings, many young South Africans began to become politically involved in earnest.

³² Autobiography of Goodman Phiri, 3 April 1989, on his application to join the PAC.

The workers' strikes in the early 1970s were not mentioned by many ex-MK and APLA soldiers as a direct influence on their political awareness, but they definitely provided an important component of the re-emergence of resistance to the government. With strikes hitting every big city in South Africa, most saw their results in the adults staying at home, and noticed that this was a new element in the recent political trends in the country. Baruch Hirson notes in his book, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, that the long period of industrial peace in the 1960s gave way to large scale strikes in many industries, starting in Durban in 1969 and continuing until the outbreak of the Soweto uprising in June of 1976. Many of the strikes gained concessions from both their employers and the government, but as the wave gained momentum, they were more often met with fierce repression on the part of the police and the government. Some of the student organisations were involved in the strikes, providing support for the workers, and the Black Consciousness Movement won some workers into its folds.³³ If nothing else came to the youth from the strikes, they would have seen that it was possible to win on some issues, but for those that didn't have clear memories of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, it also brought home the point that the police were ready and willing to suppress resistance with brute force.

The Black Consciousness Movement became a powerful ideological force during this period, particularly among students. The ideas embraced by the movement found their way into the consciousness of the majority of the youth who came of age in this period. Largely supported by university and school students, the movement and its principles did not find much support from other parts of the community, except from those who were touched by its outreach programs, although it did attract some of the more intellectually inclined black professionals. John Kane-

³³ Hirson, chapters 7 and 8.

Berman identified three main thrusts of the Black Consciousness philosophy, namely 'psychological liberation', 'the weaning of blacks away from dependence on whites', and the unity of 'all black people in South Africa, including Indians and Coloured people.'³⁴ The first principle was a reaction to the fact that through long-term oppression of the black population, they began to see themselves as inferior to the whites. As mentioned above, some black children would wish to be white, as the white people were the ones they admired for their status in society. The same woman who once told her mother she wanted to be a white man when she grew up was just entering her teen years at this time and she remembered: "Everyone was becoming aware, Black Consciousness was spreading. I like it because it made you to be proud of your colour." She also noted that it made people react against things like skin lightening cream and made them come to believe that "black is beautiful."³⁵ The second principle of moving away from dependence on whites was largely focused on providing black leadership rather than white, as is best illustrated in the creation of a new black student organisation in July of 1969. Rather than the black students remaining a part of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), a largely white-led organisation, The South African Students' Organisation (SASO) emerged as the forefront of black student politics. One student active in this period noted:

You know during that period black consciousness was popular in the township and of course it was sort of to try and conscientise especially students to try and understand what role they're going to play in society. We shall not be submissive especially to whites as it is known as blacks we've been oppressed and segregated by the apartheid regime . . . It was during that period especially during the 70s when most of us started to realise what is important is to try and help in black organisations like for instance trying to form civic associations where we can try to conscientise our people about their plight.³⁶

³⁴ Kane-Berman, 103-4.

³⁵ Kodesh, Interview with Msimanga.

³⁶ Interview with Naphtal Manana, Interviewer unknown, no date.

Some students got involved with Black Consciousness oriented community outreach programs, which often focused on cultural activities and sports, while others worked to bring services to the communities themselves, such as health clinics and legal advice. One young medical student remembered being involved in clinics in the townships during this period.³⁷ The final objective of uniting people under a common label of 'black' didn't really see results until the uprisings themselves, particularly in Cape Town, but laid the basis for co-operation between the African, Coloured, and Indian communities that would become more noticeable particularly during the township revolts of the mid-1980s.

Many black student organisations came into being during this period. One of the most popular was the South African Students' Organisation, which was created in 1969 as something of 'an amalgam of already existing elements'.³⁸ This organisation was one of the main initiators of the community outreach programmes mentioned above. The South African Students' Movement (SASM), originally based in the Transvaal but eventually gaining support in other parts of the country, became a widespread and well-supported organisation in this period. SASM particularly focused on providing discussion forums for the youth. Many ex-MK and APLA soldiers went through discussion groups connected to SASM which led to their further exploration and understanding of political issues. Others created their own study groups, as one man remembers: "The Union of Self Study (USS) was founded ostensibly to help students with their studies, but secretly we sought to participate in a

³⁷ Kodesh, W. Interview with Ayanda Ntsaluba, 20 April 1993

³⁸ Brooks and Brickhill, p. 73.

world that was changing at an incredible speed around us.³⁹ Many people who spent these years in universities and schools mentioned both of these organisations, and had been involved in them and politicised by them. Other student organisations were also present, such as the National Youth Organisation (NAYO) and its regional branches, which was also remembered by some of the youths from this period.

Two particular SASO campaigns had a large effect on some of the students at this time. The first is referred to as the “May Revolt,” which took place at the Turfloop University in 1972. Confrontations between students and authorities had occurred at the beginning of the year, and sparks flew in April when Onkgopotse Tamothibi (Abraham) Tiro gave a graduation speech there. He openly criticised the black education system and the government and challenged the graduates actively to work against the system rather than working within it. One youth from this period recalled attending the graduation as his sister was one of the graduates, and points to this speech as one of the first moments he became aware of politics. He recalled that all the way home for three hours, the adults discussed the speech, thought it would put everybody in trouble, and anticipated an outburst of unrest. He had trouble understanding why they were all so negative about the speech when it had been hugely popular and got more applause than any other.⁴⁰ The adults were right about one thing: it did lead to unrest. Tiro was expelled, and a group of 1,146 students who protested his expulsion was also expelled. This led to a boycott of lectures at several other schools in the country. Hirson explained the ramifications of the boycotts: “As a result of the wave of boycotts, students were suspended, staff members resigned,

³⁹ Mphahlele, Letlapa. (2002). *Child of this Soil: My Life as a Freedom Fighter*, Cape Town: Kwela, 46.

⁴⁰ von den Steinen, Interview with Makwetla.

bursaries were suspended, and hundreds of students just left the universities.”⁴¹ Many of the students who belonged to SASO or the Student Representative Committees were told not to come back to the universities.

The other key campaign involving SASO showed the great influence of international events on the students inside South Africa. In 1974, the organisation called for rallies to celebrate the coup in Portugal which led to the independence of Mozambique and Angola in 1975. This coup was largely attributed to the huge expenses, both monetary and human, that the Portuguese government accrued due to the guerrilla warfare waged by the liberation movements in the two countries as well as the bleak outlook for swift victory. SASO called for “Viva FRELIMO” rallies to celebrate the imminent independence of Mozambique, and the success of the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO), the main Mozambiquean liberation movement. This was an exciting moment, as this was the first country that shared a border with South Africa to achieve independence through a liberation struggle and guerrilla war. Meetings for this organisation were banned for the crucial week, but at Turfloop University the students gathered under the auspices of the Student Representative Council (SRC) and held their rally. Hirson explained:

Twelve hundred students gathered for the meeting, but were ordered to disperse by a force of 82 policemen, equipped with guns, gas pistols and police dogs. Assaults by the police and stone throwing by students, attacks on two white members of staff and two white technicians, and the arrest of two students ended the day . . . The action lasted for over a week, but was ended just before the college authorities could issue an ultimatum. Students returned to preparations for the examinations which they were not prepared to forego, and their arrested comrades remained in police custody.⁴²

⁴¹ Hirson, 87.

⁴² Hirson, 90.

⁴³ Kane-Berman, 106.

Large scale arrests and detentions of SASO and Black Consciousness leaders at this time led to a weakening of the movements which never regained their strength, but their influence continued to be felt and those touched by their ideas did not turn back from the political road they had undertaken. John Kane-Berman noted:

The liberation of Mozambique and Angola and the guerrilla wars being waged in Namibia and Rhodesia are likely to have had an impact on a fairly wide cross-section of blacks, firing them with the expectations of major change . . . Moreover, to the extent that black South Africans saw the withdrawal of South African military forces from Angola as a sign that white power was not invincible, this too would have had an important psychological impact.⁴³

The state of regional political affairs made this generation ripe for action and, in some ways, positive that their efforts could make a difference, while still having little doubt of the might of the South African regime and the repression with which their efforts would be met.

The Soweto Uprisings

The 16th of June 1976 saw the beginning of a two-year long uprising that would become a turning point in South African history. On this day, unarmed African students marched through Soweto to protest the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction for some subjects in their schools and encountered police, who proceeded to cut them down with bullets. This was followed by a long drawn out spate of fights, protests, boycotts, stay-aways, and general unrest throughout South Africa. The government's response to the resistance was not a total surprise, as they were known to put down protest with great force and little mercy, but the nature of the event became more shocking by the fact that the people being shot this time were only

school children, many of them still wearing their uniforms. The youths' response to the repression was unprecedented, violent, and often fearless.

The uprising grew out of the many influences in the years before. In 1976, a series of school boycotts and student meetings protested this same issue. The government had decreed that all African students at a certain level in their schooling would have to learn mathematics, social studies, geography and history in Afrikaans. Many students didn't speak the language, and many teachers had the same problem. One woman who was active in school politics at the time explained: "Just imagine trying to learn maths or history in Afrikaans, it was just like learning it in Greek or something."⁴⁴ Furthermore, the students saw Afrikaans as the language of oppression, being imposed on them by the oppressors themselves. The same woman noted:

They wanted us to learn history in Afrikaans, can you imagine trying to say a year in Afrikaans? Trying to say 1966 in Afrikaans? And the history they taught us was distorted. They would teach you about Shaka, they made me hate him. They make you hate your own history and heroes and not to like yourself or the next person who's black.⁴⁵

Whatever the reasoning, this issue made the school children come out in force to reject this government imposition of the language on their studies. They finally decided to organise a huge march to protest, and met their fate at the hands of the police.

When the police opened fire on the students, they were not met by the terrified fleeing of the past generations. The students grabbed anything at hand and hurled it at the police. They then went on a rampage against anything in the township that belonged to the government. Schools were torched, beerhalls burnt down, administration buildings destroyed, vehicles and shops attacked, and police stoned.

Kane-Berman reported that in the first month or so of the uprising:

⁴⁴ Kodesh, Interview with Msimanga.

⁴⁵ Kodesh, Interview with Msimanga.

Country-wide it was reported that more than 100 buildings belonging to the Boards were damaged or destroyed, along with 250 bottle stores and beerhalls, 170 shops, 25 clinics, eight banks, about a dozen libraries, and a score of post-offices, as well as smaller numbers of hotels, cinemas, clinics, churches, community halls, magistrates' courts, and petrol filling stations. The number of police and other vehicles burnt ran to several hundred, which the Public Utility Transport Corporation (Putco) which operates township bus services, also suffered heavy losses. One-third of its Reef fleet of 926 vehicles was attacked . . . Commercial vehicles belonging to white businesses were another target of attack . . . Numbers of black-owned shops in the township were also attacked although the proportion was small . . . Schools were one of the main targets of attack.⁴⁶

One girl who was involved in the uprisings explained when they attacked non-government establishments, such as people's shops and homes, they only targeted people who were unsympathetic to the students.⁴⁷ The school boycott continued off and on until 1978, and many students never returned to school at all. As news of the police action in Soweto reached other parts of the country, the uprisings spread. Throughout the next two years, unrest continued intermittently in most of the major cities of the country. Some of the rural areas and smaller towns also joined in the uprisings.

The uprisings demonstrated many new elements when compared to past periods of unrest. The first and foremost was the age of the participants. In the past, protest and resistance rested largely in the hands of adults, but this period belonged to the youth. Determining the exact ages of participants is very difficult, but John Kane-Berman suggested:

As far as the ages of participants in demonstrations are concerned, it is possible to get only a rough picture, based on press reports giving age breakdowns of people killed, admitted to hospital, or brought before the courts. Of 1200 people in both urban and rural areas whose ages were obtained in this way in 1976, it emerges that 44 percent were 13-16 years old, 49 per cent were 17-23 years old, and seven per cent

⁴⁶ Kane-Berman, 19-21.

⁴⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Mhlambo.

older than 24. . . In the Cape Peninsula, half of the 97 people killed (92 of them by the police) were aged between 11 and 20. . . Many very young children took part in demonstrations, and several were shot dead. The [South African] Institute [of Race Relations] identified twelve children below the age of eleven who died.⁴⁸

The ferocity and violence of the uprising were also unseen before this time. The might of the police force did not cow the youth as it had their predecessors. An article in the *Financial Mail* from the time wrote: "A new generation has now grown up. Unlike many of their parents, who have developed an attitude of fatalistic resignation to second-class citizenship, these younger men and women are impatient, radical, militant, brave and proud."⁴⁹ As time went on, they adapted to the conditions by bringing water and wet rags to the demonstrations to fight the tear gas of the police, and using dustbin lids as shields from the police bullets. They innovated weapons from everyday materials, using petrol bombs, stones, and some brand new inventions like tennis ball bombs: "produced by injecting petrol under pressure into a tennis ball using a syringe, then dipping the tennis ball into petrol and balancing it on a ledge or on the floor of the building to be burnt and lighting it. The pressure inside the ball as it burnt sent their bomb rocketing around bouncing off the walls, and despite the small size often produced better results, according to one of our informants, than the usual bottle-encased petrol bomb."⁵⁰ Tires were also filled with petrol, set alight, and rolled downhill towards the police.⁵¹ Many student groups developed very clear and effective operating techniques. One man who helped the students organise in Cape Town explained their strategy:

⁴⁸ Kane-Berman, 7.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Kane-Berman, 106.

⁵⁰ Brooks and Brickhill, 153.

⁵¹ Brooks and Brickhill, 153.

We always said that any attack had to have a brief duration, 10 minutes, 15 minutes, nothing more than that. So one of the places that we targeted was this Jabulani sorghum beer facility, and so we just came in there, smashed furniture, equipment, and everything around, right? And in ten minutes, there had been so much damage done, and the place was set on fire, and we disappeared. And nobody knew who had been at the place, who had wrecked so much havoc and damage on the premises and so on. And so, we'd move from that to the next place, it would be for example, the admin offices in Langa, just in and out, five minutes, and by the time the security forces arrived, we'll be resting somewhere. And what we did is, we had many places, where the Langa Stadium is, behind it, where we had organized the Molotov cocktails, we had put in petrol, and put in all this stuff, and we had dug holes and put the stuff in, because we did not want to look around, where do you find petrol now, where do you find the bottles, where do you find this, that, and the other. So everything was ready there. And when the time came for the mission, we'd just rush in and grab the stuff, and that would always be replenished from time to time. So, that's how organized we were in general. And so this group specialized in these ambush tactics and so on.⁵²

However one looked at it, the uprisings marked a dramatic change in the political situation in South Africa.

The fearlessness and militancy of the youth in the face of such brutal repression had many reasons. It could be put down to the excitement of youth or the horrible conditions of the townships among other things. However, one of the main reasons was the fact that so many of these young people had grown up in a time of defeat. Their parents and leaders had been jailed or terrorised into acquiescence, and in their memories, their elders seemed to have given up, sold out, and fallen into acceptance of their lot as black people in South Africa. Many of them looked on their elders scornfully, and had sworn that they would not give up as easily as their parents had. A newspaper article from the day before the shooting related: "Many children have lost respect for their elders. They see us as people whose dignity and pride has

⁵² von den Steinen, L. Interview with Temba Nolutshungu, 1 August 2001, Cape Town, for the SADET Oral History Project.

been hurt and who have seemingly lost the will to resist injustice.”⁵³ This observation was an astute one. One girl later explained:

Our parents are prepared to suffer under the white man’s rule. They have been living for years under these laws and they have become immune to them. They agree to them whether they are right or wrong. They refuse to co-operate with the new generation when they plead with them for co-operation. . . . Our parents lack unity and believe in the ethnic group laws that the white man is imposing on us. They despise each other and call one another names that are degrading. The future generation has no more confidence in them any more because they have not objected to the unfavourable laws, thus the yoke automatically falls on the future generation.⁵⁴

Some young people saw this apathy and capitulation to the system and decided the mantle of fighting apartheid lay on their shoulders. Bricks and Brookhill defended the parents’ attitude:

The imposition of Bantu Education was bitterly resisted. But this resistance was largely unknown to the school children of 1976, many of whom believed that their parents had quietly capitulated to the government’s will. Yet the parents would not have responded so readily and positively as, in the main, they did to the school students’ struggles in 1976 if they had not lived through similar battles in their own day.⁵⁵

In their own way, many of the youth recognised that the elders were not all against them. The same authors noted:

The rejection by black youth of the moral authority of the older generations. . . does not extend to a political repudiation of previous generations. On the contrary, with the exception of a few pretentious remarks, the spokesmen of the school student movement have by and large referred to the imprisoned leaders on Robben Island and others in exile with respect, and have indicated that they felt they owed much to their predecessors in the struggle.⁵⁶

⁵³ *The World*, 15 June 1976, “Need for cool heads over language row,” from Ndlovu, 33.

⁵⁴ Kane-Berman, 125-6.

⁵⁵ Brooks and Brickhill, p. 34.

⁵⁶ Brooks and Brickhill, p. 104.

Whatever their opinions on the subject, the generation gap was real, and caused tensions between the adults and students in the townships.

Some were discouraged by their elders from participating in politics. This was not just their parents' own fear, but their fear for their young children and knowledge that with their children's participation they could find themselves childless. One man remembers his family's attitude towards politics. His father had been arrested and sent to Robben Island, and they used to tell him: "You see, you'll end up in prison. You'll follow your father, that's what you're going to do."⁵⁷ Another recalls his mother getting upset if he sang 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' (the African national anthem, often used as a protest song), as his mother said it would get him in trouble.⁵⁸ But for all the discouragement offered to them, the students refused to be swayed. One girl remembered that her father died on June 16, and she was expected to stay at home for the funeral and for mourning. She however, was caught up in the events and refused to do so. She remembers arriving home around 12:30 at night, and being confronted by her mother:

I was so dirty, I was filthy, my white shirt was black. And my mom asked, called me in the bedroom, and she says to me, 'my child, can you stop what you're doing for a minute? Especially for now until we bury your father? From there you can continue.' And I said, 'Okay mom, I do understand what you're saying, but can't you allow me to continue now? Because I think my dad knows exactly, he died knowing what was happening already, that children cannot stand it. If you parents could not take it up any longer, or you couldn't finish your business, we are going to finish this business for you.' And my mom started looking at me, and says to me, "But you'll die.' And I say, "Okay if I die, the military will have died already. Can you see how do I look? Then the military will have died. They won't be the only one and I won't be the only one who's died, so many, and they're still going to kill us.' And my mom was looking at me, she never cried, she never said anything.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Bernstein, Interview with Mongezi Stofile.

⁵⁸ Kodesh, W. Interview with Siphso Binda (Mandla Jwara), 24 March 1993.

⁵⁹ Kodesh, Interview with Msimanga.

As the uprisings continued, and as the students began to organise larger scale protests, stay-aways, and boycotts, it became common for the children to instruct their parents. One man who was active in Cape Town during the uprisings remembers: "We tried to politicise people, our parents, to accept the struggle. It was really bad for them, because of the disruption, the transport disruption. They had to work and they had to also understand our struggle."⁶⁰ Kane-Berman wrote: "One story had it that during one of the stay-aways a child had said to her father: 'Daddy, we are going to burn the beerhalls because we want you to stay quietly at home today. You mustn't go and get drunk.'"⁶¹ Throughout this period, the traditional roles of parents and children were often reversed, as the youth took the initiative to further the struggle and the parents often found themselves lagging behind. The generation that emerged from these events were more assertive, independent, and self-motivated than any that had come before. They would provide a rich recruiting pool for MK and APLA to draw from.

Being a part of all of this caused many people to find politics. One man, who was 14 at the time of the uprisings recalled:

Like any 14-year old, we were naïve but the situation forced us to mature much faster than we would have, facing bullets everyday of your life, teargas about all the time. I remember we use[d] to joke that if we have not smelled or seen teargas for a week, something was wrong- breathing clean air for two days. Things like that made one mature very quickly. We started reading books, we got politicised almost overnight and I think because of that, students played an invaluable role.⁶²

Police actions against the students also played a significant role in politicising the youth. Hirson relates one instance in which: "Pupils of a school that had been

⁶⁰ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Lt. Moses Mrubata, 18 November 1998, Cape Town.

⁶¹ Kane-Berman, 19.

⁶² Verbatim Statement of Njabulo Nkonyane- December 1995, in Ndlovu, 44.

undecided joined the demonstrators after they witnessed the police in action.”⁶³ One man remembered his initial reluctance to get involved,

I was part of a group of about 10 who refused to take part in the protests. We felt that our education was important and we really had quite a rough deal . . . And we were sitting in our classroom, minding our own business, doing our work, while all the kids were outside protesting . . . And at some point the door of our classroom was kicked open and there was a big policeman standing there. And he just came into our classroom and he just beat all of us. And from that moment I mean we decided if you can't beat them, you'd better join them. And so we went and we joined the protest. So in some ways I have to thank that policeman for beating us up, because he really, he opened my eyes and I think it's because of him that I then developed an interest in struggle and so on.⁶⁴

Many of the young people who would go on to join MK and APLA pointed to the uprisings as the point at which they became involved in politics.

It wasn't only school children who were affected by the situation. Some others found politics from the uprisings as well. One young woman, who was a university student at the University of Fort Hare at the time, returned home for the June holidays and became emotionally involved in the events. She found that people she knew had been shot, and some of them had died. Though she hadn't been involved in politics before then, it was enough to involve her deeply.⁶⁵ Another man who was working at the time recalled seeing the cowardice of the police attacking the students, and seeing a student he knew shot in the back by the police. He notes that this is what got him involved in politics.⁶⁶ A third man, in his statement to the court when being tried for terrorism explained how he had taken no interest in politics until the uprisings:

⁶³ Hirson, 228.

⁶⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Ryland Fisher, 17 July 2001, Cape Town, for the SADET Oral History Project.

⁶⁵ Kodesh, W. Interview with Jumaimah Modiakgotla, 8 April 1993.

⁶⁶ Kodesh, W. Interview with Mziwonke Qhabumfana, 3 November 1992.

As I saw the situation with my own eyes, the police attacked, shot, killed, wounded and seriously injured many scores of young black people, mainly school children who were involved in nothing more than peaceful protests . . . After the children were dealt with by the police in this brutal fashion, there was a wave of bitterness and hatred which spread through Soweto like wildfire . . . I became more and more depressed and I decided that the best way out was to ask for a transfer to a place outside Johannesburg . . . I tried to take the easy way out, that was to get a transfer but it did not work. . . In Soweto it was like living in a prison which was a battleground. It was relief to get away from it during the day, to go to work, and it was hell to go back there at night. The last straw happened on 24 October 1976. I attended a mass funeral for a young black man who had died whilst in detention by the security police. His name was Jacob Mashobane. Hundreds had gathered around the graveside where his coffin had been laid and even as the soil was filling it up, amidst the singing of a hymn, several cars drove up, the vigilantes of 'law and order' again, I have no doubt acting under instructions from their 'bosses', alighted from these cars and triggers were pulled. People scattered, running for dear life whilst others were brought down lifeless, some dead, some wounded. Those who managed to scale the cemetery fence were gunned down by a contingent that had stationed itself outside the cemetery. When the crowd had scattered, myself and a few remaining ones were forced at gunpoint to carry the dead and injured into carts and vans nearby . . . After this funeral I went to work on the Monday. I left work that morning and never returned. I decided to commit myself fully to the cause of the black people.⁶⁷

However they came across it, whether they were a part of the original demonstration in Soweto, joined in later in another place, or simply witnessed the events, the uprisings led many people into the political arena, and many later found themselves joining MK or APLA to continue the struggle that escalated from that day in June 1976.

The Generation of the 1980s

The people who joined MK and APLA in the 1980s were largely influenced by the same things as the Soweto generation. Their lives often led them to similar conclusions as their predecessors. Many of those who left in the 80s were of the same

⁶⁷ Issac Dontry Seko, from Benson, 75-6.

generation and had been jailed for their activities, then upon their releases, simply picked up where they had left off, jumping back into the liberation struggle. However, there were a few differences in those who were coming of age in the 1980s, and their political development also differed. The early 1980s saw a great proliferation of community organisations, and the rise of the United Democratic Front (UDF), which pulled these together to unite them in the fight against the system. Many of the members of the UDF and its aligned organisations later joined MK particularly. Other Pan-Africanist and Black Consciousness oriented organisations provided a ripe pool of recruits for APLA. In 1984 another spate of unrest encompassed the whole country and brought new elements into the fight. While the Soweto uprisings were comprised mostly of students and young radicals, the township revolts of the 1980s encompassed an extensive cross section of society. The locally based concerns such as rent increases and corrupt local officials brought in people of all ages and both genders to the struggle. While in the past the state could blame violence and resistance on a small group of radicals, agitators, and activists, it became clear this time that the majority of the population was participating in the struggle. The local issues that brought such diverse people to the struggle soon gave way to more political demands, as people came to believe that there would never be solutions to the local problems without a change in government to majority rule and universal suffrage. Youth and student organisations were joined in the fight by women's groups, sports clubs, community and civic groups, labour unions, and church associations.

Additionally, the creation of the UDF, which united organisations from all over the country, served as a co-ordinator and information service to unite local groups into a larger force. Originally created to fight against the introduction of a

Tricameral Parliament, the UDF successfully campaigned to get people to boycott the elections, which had a minimal voter turnout, indicating very little support for the parliament that was elected. The UDF was unique in that it united anti-apartheid groups from all regions, backgrounds, and ideologies to work towards a common goal, blurring differences to create a "United Front" against Apartheid. As it was constructed of many different organisations, it was by nature difficult for the government effectively to ban the UDF as a whole. Even when the renewed state of emergency led to the banning and detention of most of the UDF leadership, it had by that time organised the townships down to street committees, which allowed them to operate with a minimum of formal leadership and supplied many lesser known leaders to work in their places. While the degree of organisation varied amongst different areas, there were some, such as the Karoo, which were organised to such a degree that the Cradock Residents' Association (CRADORA) could claim: "If they decided at four in the afternoon to call a meeting for six that evening, by five everyone had heard about it through street committees, and by six the entire population of the township was assembled."⁶⁸ This impressive degree of organisation distinguished these revolts from struggles following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 and the Soweto massacre of 1976. At the launch of the UDF, the Reverend Allan Boesak talked of the idea of all, here, and now: "three little words, words that express so eloquently our seriousness in this struggle . . . We want all our rights, we want them here, and we want them now."⁶⁹ With the unification of so many diverse groups in the fight against Apartheid, it became possible to co-ordinate efforts in a manner that could make a massive impact on the state. With the co-operation of trade unions, women's

⁶⁸ Lodge, Tom & Nasson, Bill, (1991). *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*, South Africa: Ford Foundation, 74.

⁶⁹ Lodge and Nasson, 51.

organisations, student groups, and churches, potentially isolated incidents grew into huge events. Paulus Zulu explains in *Resistance in the Townships*: "What starts as localised responses such as a protest against an increase in transport fares may develop into a labour strike, and, finally, incorporate a school or consumer boycott."⁷⁰ By bringing together people across race, class, age and gender lines, a mass movement was created unlike any ever seen in South Africa.

The Pan-Africanist and Black Consciousness oriented organisations also drew large numbers to them in the 1980s, many of whom went on to join APLA. The black consciousness oriented Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) was launched in 1978, followed soon after by Azanian Youth Unity (AZANYU) in 1981, and Azanian Student Movement (AZASM) in 1983. The connection between the PAC and these organisations can be seen in the many times articles on AZANYU, AZAPO, and black consciousness were found in PAC publications.⁷¹ The Pan Africanist Students Organisation (PASO) was only formed in 1989, and many APLA members came from their membership. They had a much more direct link to the PAC, who often gave financial assistance to PASO.⁷² In looking at the questionnaires filled out by APLA recruits, AZANYU and PASO are by far the most common organisations that people had come through, with AZAPO and AZASM also quite high in numbers.⁷³

Many of the people who joined MK and APLA in this period came from these diverse organisations. One woman remembered: "I [was] most inspired by [the] women's movement. Like that time it was Women's Front and the UWO. They had

⁷⁰ Meer, Fatima (Ed). (1989) *Resistance in the Townships*, Durban: Madiba Publications, 13.

⁷¹ See for example: Mthimunye, Dan. (1993). Azanian National Youth Unity (AZANYU). In *Azania News*, Vol 19, No. 7.

⁷² PAC financial reports, 1991.

⁷³ From a sample group of 400 applications, these organisations were the most commonly cited.

a serious impact on me because I used to admire the women and see that they're doing a good job . . . They're the ones who made me politically aware more than my family's problems."⁷⁴ Another man noted: "I was still at High School, Fezeka High School. I was involved with COSAS [Congress of South African Students]. And it was immediately after the formation of the Cape Youth Congress, CAYCO."⁷⁵ And a third woman was involved in several organisations at the time:

And after I've been active around '83, when we started to form the youth, Mamelodi organisation, I was in the ad-hoc committee of Mamelodi Youth and I was in the executive when it was launched . . . But I felt that there's something lacking. Youth can't go alone . . . We discussed upon the forming of a women's organisation and I met with other leaders . . . And they said its necessary and then we formed [a] women's group in my area and I was very active.⁷⁶

Many others were involved in discussion groups that found popularity in this period, providing banned materials and exchanging ideas about them. These organisations brought the problems of the country down to the size of local and immediate problems, which attracted many members. They then focused their local resistance on a more national level. Many came to understand more about the state of the country, and were politicised in this way. This generation also came to politics in the post-Soweto uprisings period, and the shadow of that time followed them in whatever they did. Though some had not lived through this period, they still found strength and inspiration from those who had, and by learning of it, learned of the struggle to change the country.

⁷⁴ Interview with Booi.

⁷⁵ Interview with Andeci Nguneni, Interviewer unknown, no date.

⁷⁶ Bernstein, Interview with Gwanamakuru.

The Role of the Liberation Movements

Throughout this period from the Soweto uprisings to the township revolts of the mid-1980s to the eventual unbanning of the liberation movements and move towards negotiations in 1990, the ANC and PAC were present inside the country to different degrees. At some points they were able to guide resistance inside the country, while at others they were left mainly to release pamphlets and statements supporting those working inside. Their role inside the country during this period is difficult to characterise accurately. At some points they were little known and had little effect, while at others, flags, t-shirts, and posters supporting the ANC and PAC could be found in many areas. Liberation movement members often worked through other organisations as well, making it very difficult to quantify their efforts within South Africa. Operations in the country by MK and APLA units will be dealt with in a later chapter, but this section explores the degree to which the youth who would go on to join the armed wings had prior contact or knowledge of the liberation movements, and how some of them were influenced by the ANC and PAC and their members.

One very contentious issue is the degree to which the liberation organisations were involved in the 1976 uprisings. While it seems clear that they were taken by surprise by the events that sparked the uprisings, throughout the years many have claimed otherwise. Hopkins and Grange noted this trend: "The most controversial claimant is the ANC, which recently revealed that the exiled leadership had actively participated in the planning and execution of the event. All evidence suggests the opposite."⁷⁷ While they do allow that some members of the ANC underground did have a measure of influence over the students, particularly Winnie Mandela, they

⁷⁷ Hopkins and Grange, 84.

purport that this overall claim is wholly unbelievable.⁷⁸ One author who was involved in the uprisings finds the claims come up often at commemorative events: "These movements tell us endless stories about their underground preparations and how they laid the ground for the students through their internal and external cells, preparing them for that fateful day, 16 June 1976. The main protagonists in this regard were the then unbanned Black Consciousness Movement, AZAPO, the banned PAC and the ANC."⁷⁹ Despite claims of responsibility, the outbreak of rebellion was unforeseen. One author noted that the ANC doubted the usefulness of the student protests: "Congress tacticians were particularly critical of the student focus on black school curricula instead of grievances that would attract a broader constituency for revolt."⁸⁰ The claims of the liberation movements of their orchestration of the uprisings still chafe the students that were active in the rebellion. At a commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the 1976 uprisings in Gugulethu, Cape Town, a misprint on one of the displays turned a small section on the ANC's participation in the events into a huge title for that panel. Two people who had been active in the uprisings came close to walking out, and one withdrew from speaking at the event, as they thought that the exhibit was meant to claim the event for the ANC and exaggerate their participation and influence.⁸¹ The students who participated in the uprisings are almost all of the opinion that they acted without any influence. One remarked: "I do not remember any liberation movement . . . contributing to our daily meetings and discussions. In

⁷⁸ Hopkins and Grange, 84.

⁷⁹ Ndlovu, 50-51.

⁸⁰ Davis, Stephen M. (1987). *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South Africa's Hidden War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 31.

⁸¹ The author was one of the organisers of the event, and had to convince the attendees that it was simply a mistake in order for them to agree to stay.

short, as students we faced our destiny and problems.”⁸² One man who participated in the uprisings put it quite well: “We knew some ANC and PAC people, but we didn’t get the impression that they were as militant as we were.”⁸³ In 2006, however, with the 30th anniversary of the Soweto Uprisings, several documentaries aired that focused on the story of then Soweto SSRC president at the time, Tsietsi Mashinini, and on the independence of the students in the uprisings, signifying a change in the history of that period.

With the devastating setback to both the ANC’s and the PAC’s underground organisation with South Africa in the early 1960s, and the brutal repression that followed, by the 1970s both organisations were largely unseen within the country. The early 1970s saw some resurrection of the liberation movement inside South Africa, and some people joined and participated in their activities, largely in the field of propaganda and recruitment. But by and large, the youth involved in the uprisings had far more knowledge of the Black Consciousness organisations than of the national liberation movements, and some had no knowledge of any organisations at all. Many had no contact with or knowledge of the ANC or PAC, or simply knew that they existed while not knowing what they stood for or their history. One man who left the country in 1975 knew of the ANC, but didn’t know where to find them: “Because I had seen in Drum [magazine] of that year, Oliver Tambo together with Samora Machel and then I concluded that the ANC should be in Mozambique.” He asked the Swazi authorities to put him in touch with FRELIMO, who then passed him on to the

⁸² Ndlovu, 7.

⁸³ von den Steinen, Interview with T. Nolutshungu.

ANC authorities in Swaziland.⁸⁴ Another youth who was 17 at the time of the uprisings explained:

We did not know then what the liberation movements were standing for. We only knew that there was an organisation called the PAC, and there was also an organisation called the ANC. The president's house in Orlando West was just near to our school; we knew that the house belonged to Mr. Mandela. We had not seen him in the newspapers or anywhere, we only knew that he was arrested and tried for treason and stuff like that. We did not exactly know the history of the ANC or the PAC, we just knew that these organisations were somewhere in Zambia and we did not know what they were doing there.⁸⁵

Another man remembered that his idea of the liberation movements at this time was very faint. He would sometimes listen to 'Radio Freedom', the ANC's radio station, but since the authorities often interfered with the signals, he only caught bits and pieces of the broadcasts. He knew that there was a call to arms, but that's all.⁸⁶ Because of this lack of knowledge, many of the students who would go on to leave the country only learned about and got in contact with the liberation movements when they found themselves in exile.

Others already had ANC and PAC contacts inside the country. Some of the activists who had been arrested in the early 1960s were released in the early and mid-1970s, and though they usually found themselves banned, they often passed on their political ideas to the new generation. One young man remembered that during his holidays at home in Cala in the Eastern Cape, a leader in the ANC, a man named Ezra, got him involved in the organisation.⁸⁷ Another traced his politicisation to:

My contact, accidentally of course, with a old, one old man who was an ANC member, he, he had already served his 12 years in Robben

⁸⁴ Bernstein, H. Interview with William Mbalosi, no date.

⁸⁵ Verbatim statement of Paul Ndaba- December 1995, in Ndlovu, 19.

⁸⁶ von den Steinen, Interview with Makwetla.

⁸⁷ Kodesh, Interview with Ntsaluba.

Island in the sixties and also he, his banning order and house arrest. But he was selling veg and fruits, you know, fruit and vegetables so I happened to meet him at his stand when I go to school, to talk to him, talk to me, he, he will read the paper, the English paper to me, about Zimbabwe, what was happening all those time. So those were my formative years of, you know, political consciousness in a really. . . direct. . . way.⁸⁸

Another recalls living next door to a family with two brothers in exile:

One was with the PAC. I think he died somewhere in exile some time ago. The other one was in the ANC . . . This was then obviously a political family . . . I became very close to the children by the way. And through their father's connections and their uncle's connections one then had an opportunity of getting a chance of reading banned literature. We would sometimes get [an] elementary kind of political education from the uncle himself.⁸⁹

In these ways, the older generation guided many young people in their discovery of politics.

Some of the youth from this period also found themselves recruited into the ANC and PAC underground. One was approached by a stranger with whom he organised a meeting:

He said to me, 'look, I've, look I've just a few instructions for you, I've been sent to you, your name' . . . told me my name, where do I live, what I'm doing, you know, that I'm in the SRC, I tried to ask him, 'how did you know?' He said, 'Look man, I have to tell you so that you'll believe me, well . . . There are students who left earlier who are in, they were at university, these ones in Swaziland, joined the ANC, done their trainings, were sent back, so it's them who recommended me and then who gave them all the details. Well he said, 'no, what you'll have to do, you'll have to open up a cell of the ANC, and in that cell there's going to be also a, an MK cell that will be only solely dealing with military matters. Your duty and your task will be to recruit, especially focusing on youth and students, eh, people for military training.' So one agreed, one was excited, meeting the ANC, all those things.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ von den Steinen, Interview with Kalako.

⁸⁹ Interview with Lizo Ngqungwana. Interviewer unknown, no date.

⁹⁰ von den Steinen, Interview with Kalako.

Another recalled his recruitment, by an older man in the ANC, and he was told to form a core of ANC people within his medical school. They would deal with propaganda, distributing pamphlets and such, and also provided some back up for MK units inside the country.⁹¹ One man who started out non-aligned to any organisation became a part of the PAC during the uprisings:

So I think from the students side, from my side, it was finished now, I was working for the party now, for the PAC. I was going to be a target now, I had to work underground because my mission now I was working to recruit guys from Cape Town to Johannesburg. From Jo'burg some other guys would take them to leave the country. It was not easy from Cape Town to just go straight. In Cape Town I must have to recruit some few guys. Then I must have to contact with the guy on the other side. That there's another group coming to cross.⁹²

Sometimes it started much earlier and in more subtle ways. One man recalled:

Then you grow up and see the old guys then they send you somewhere you see because we were young and the police were, they didn't search us or they just leave us to pass through them but we are carrying some dangerous things, you see? But the older guys were in danger, that's why they had to send us to deliver the stuff, you see, like doing petrol bombs, making scorpions, the guns that we make ourselves, scorpions and all the stuff you see? Then as I grew up through my mind now was in war already.⁹³

Through these methods, many were recruited for and working with the ANC and PAC long before they went into exile or joined the armed wings inside the country.

In the 1980s, the mood changed. As the UDF became more prominent, the message and political views of the ANC spread. Although it's difficult to estimate the interaction between the two, it is clear that many of the main principles were the same. Funerals, rallies, and other events saw ANC flags flying high and people were

⁹¹ Kodesh, Interview with Ntsaluba.

⁹² von den Steinen, L. Interview with Nicholas Msizi, 2 August 2001, Langa, Cape Town, for SADET Oral History Project.

⁹³ von den Steinen, L. Interview with P.O. Nyameko Moshani, 19 August 2004, Simonstown Naval Base.

generally more aware of the organisation and what it stood for. Many more of those who left in the 1980s had been involved in the underground before leaving the country than their Soweto generation counterparts. Some had been involved in the 1970s, served prison terms, and upon their release, continued their activities. Many were involved in study groups reading banned literature or listening to the Radio Freedom broadcasts. One recalled: "What I can say is that my early consciousness started in 1983- in 83 I mean . . . high school. I was doing Standard 8 at the time is when I was first exposed to some books, I mean history, I was doing history. So for the first time I came across the word ANC and I used to hear about the ANC on the radio and in the news see such things."⁹⁴ Another explained:

[It was early 1981] that I developed more interest in the ANC politics. When I got the banned literature like *Sechaba* and the *African Communist*. So I started to read widely about the ANC politics, its policies and its strategies and what the Freedom Charter and we used to get- I remember receiving a cassette from my friends- the January 8th statement of President Oliver Tambo which inspired me a lot. I should think that is basically some of those things that gave me an insight into what the politics of the ANC were all about.⁹⁵

The PAC enjoyed a rise in publicity as well, particularly through the black consciousness and pan-africanist student organisations. Their journals, *Azania Combat*, and *Azania News*, which had in recent years ceased production, started to be published again in 1986 and were widely distributed, and high profile attacks by APLA received large amounts of publicity. Also at the time of the township revolts in the mid-1980s, both MK and APLA attacks multiplied greatly. MK jumped from a high of 56 a year before 1985 up to 136 in 1985 and rose as high as 281 in 1989⁹⁶;

⁹⁴ Interview with Mjoli.

⁹⁵ Interview with Tyikwe.

⁹⁶ Lodge, Tom. *Guerrilla Warfare and Exile Diplomacy: The African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress*. in Lodge and Nasson, 178.

while APLA attacks occurred for the first time in decades in 1986, and doubled practically overnight in 1987, when they launched a new practice of “grenade warfare.”⁹⁷ These attacks also inspired the youth and led them towards the ANC and PAC. In the early 1990s, the PAC and APLA attracted large numbers of people due to their stance against negotiations, and their status of being the only organisation still pursuing an armed struggle. In whatever way they found politics, eventually many of the youth from these periods found themselves motivated to join the armed struggle.

⁹⁷ Dimpho, Muriel. (1989). APLA’s grenade warfare baffles Pretoria as 74 attacks are acknowledged. In *Azania Combat*, Issue No. 9.

Chapter 2 Leaving South Africa

Please put a gun
In this itching hand
For I almost tasted victory
When the enemy dazed...
But wordspears and stones
Cannot pierce
The heart of our pain

Somebody please place weapons
In these palms that just toyed with rattles
While lullabies were hummed
For I too have heard songs
Rise from Angolan wars won
But their refrain
Will not drown
Some echoes from the homefront battle-field

With gun in hand
I could feel the fire of joy
For I would be one with many
Whose tears I must drain
Those tearing screams
From disenbowed bodies
Must be hushed forever

Please let me bear its weight
On my growing shoulders
For although I'm only a cub
I have worn the armour of man
Knowing the deeds of years
That were planted
Have fertilized our land

With new dawn's energy
I must strengthen my sinews
For I have seen creatures stampede
And build icebergs on Liberty's path
But volcanic tides will charge
Making love to our own ploughs
Which must furrow for life¹

¹ Mabuza, Lindiwe. Soweto Wishes. In Molefe, Sono. (ed). (no date). *Malibongwe- ANC Women: Poetry is also their weapon*, ANC, 42.

Introduction

The decision to leave South Africa and go into exile was difficult for those who made it. Choosing to leave behind everything and everyone they knew and go into unfamiliar places, uncertain circumstances, and be surrounded by unknown people was by no means easy. They left behind fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents, even spouses and children, as well as friends. Some left school before finishing, and others left behind jobs that they and their families needed for survival. Many had never left their places of birth and would find themselves travelling all over the world. Their destinations were unknown. Their expectations rested on rumours or guesswork. And above all, they didn't know when or if they would ever return. Despite all of this, many chose to leave, and carried out their decisions with excitement, anticipation, and courage. A few would regret the decision they had made, while most would not change their path if they had it to do all over again.

Reasons for Leaving

Every person's situation differed from every other's. However, many had similar experiences simply from living in the same places and going through the same set of events. The choice to leave the country always involved a myriad of factors, but most of those who left could point to one or two issues that pushed them towards the decision that they made.

One of the most common reasons for going into exile involved problems with the police within South Africa. During the Soweto uprisings, police would often round up the leaders of key student organisations, or even just those who were members of the organisations. Anyone in a demonstration could be taken to

detention, and it was common for innocent bystanders to find themselves pulled into the police stations as well. Once the police had people in custody, their main goal was to find out who else was involved, often through both psychological and physical torture. Many of the young people who were involved in the uprisings and eventually left the country spent some period of time in police cells under arrest or detention.

One woman recalled this happening even before the uprisings began:

We were continuously harassed, myself and my brother by the police, picked up, detained time and again, released, picked up, detained without being charged and then I only managed to go up to my second year at school because its supposed to be for three years, but I only managed to do my second year when I was detained again for my students activities and I was detained for six months in solitary confinement, that was in 1975.²

During this period she suffered a miscarriage and has health problems to this day due to the treatment she received at the hands of the security police.³ Once the uprisings took off, this tendency of the police simply became more common. Another woman recalled the situation at the time: “We were being shot at, students were dying, others in prison unnecessarily.”⁴ One man recalled:

Having really you know made a decision that it is far better to join the liberation struggle, rather than be the victim because at that stage you can imagine from June 16th until that time there were a lot of arrests, a lot of people were killed, there was no certainty, there was no education, then you know one at that stage also had a very simple view of the struggle. That if we joined the liberation struggle in big numbers, surely the state which then was exclusively a white state, then that numbers could prevail over a limited force. So this is how I joined.⁵

² Bernstein, H. Interview with Gloria Meek, no date.

³ Bernstein, Interview with Meek.

⁴ Bernstein, H. Interview with Caesarine Gwanamakuru, no date.

⁵ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Brigadier General Barney Hlatswayo, 16 August 2005, Pretoria.

For those who had been through periods of detention or prison, no illusions remained about what their fate would be if they were caught again, and many were more inclined to leave South Africa than to remain and find themselves back in police custody.

Those who did not suffer detention nevertheless suffered the constant threat of being caught. Many could not even sleep at home, and whenever the police picked up their friends, they held their breath, waiting for their names to come up under the harsh interrogations. One woman explained:

Already before I left I had spent five months, just sleeping anywhere, including in cars in the street. Never going home. And the police were . . . maybe its OK to say they were very efficient because they were raiding not only my home, but my other relatives. . . . And my mother was taken in for about 12 hours and I thought of all the horrible things that have been happening in prison, so when she was released I decided no, I should go.⁶

Another added: "Those who have been arrested, they were used to show the police houses, where we live and so on and it is out of that that a month later, after spending some days not sleeping at home, sleeping with relatives or there and there that way, we finally decided that we should go out."⁷ Many other people coming from this time period have similar memories of police harassment of themselves and their families and they often faced the choice of leaving or ending up in detention or prison. One explained: "I didn't want to become a [system] vegetable, what we used to call some of these people who are detained and tortured all the time, up to a point when you are totally useless."⁸ Often people left because they wanted to save their families from harassment due to their activities. One man explained: "I had to secure myself and

⁶ Bernstein, H. Interview with Ribbon Mosholi, no date.

⁷ Bernstein, H. Interview with Michael Meli, no date.

⁸ Bernstein, Interview with Meek.

the rest of my family, cause at one stage they had to assault my father, for the sake of me, so that's what I didn't like. So for me to secure my family I had to leave the country."⁹ While many people's families continued to be harassed after they left the country, the idea of trying to protect them spurred many into exile.

Above and beyond those who feared getting pulled in for activities they may or may not have been involved in was the situation of those who had been arrested and actually charged for their alleged activities. Some had been arrested for activities during the uprisings, and others had already been involved with the underground organisations inside and were caught for more serious offences. One man named Ayanda Ntsaluba worked for the underground at the time, and some of the people he worked with began to be pulled in by the police. He remembered that they brought one old man who had been working with him to identify him. He was very old, a peasant, and had never been to school. It was obvious that he had been beaten severely. The police took the old man to identify Ntsaluba, and the old man looked at him for about five minutes. The police thought they had him. Then the old man said: "No, even in my wildest dream I've never seen this man." Ntsaluba knew that the old man would be really punished when he got back to the police station, and knew that if he were to break, he would betray the old man's bravery, so he had to get out and continue this struggle. He ended up leaving, and told the people who were remaining behind to give him enough time to get away, and then blame everything on him. As a result, many of the people who were being held by the security police were released.¹⁰ Many people left the country while on bail, as they knew the consequences of staying would involve long sentences in prison, or a 'forced vacation' on Robben Island. One

⁹ von den Steinen, L. Interview with ex-MK soldier who wishes to remain anonymous, 19 August 2004, Simonstown Naval Base.

¹⁰ Kodesh, W. Interview with Ayanda Ntsaluba, 20 April 1993.

noted: "It was only when they arrested me [for student activities] that they became aware that I'm working for the underground structure . . . And then we got a R1500 bail with all the restrictions of reporting daily to the police stations and all those sorts of things. But fortunately when we were out of prison we arranged to leave the country."¹¹ Others who were working in the underground saw their comrades get arrested, and managed to escape the net. In the eighties, things became even more dangerous for those involved. With occasional "disappearances" of activists, often due to kidnappings or assassinations, some faced the choice of leaving or being killed. One woman remembers, "I was told by some reliable sources that there's a plot to hijack me or to kidnap me . . . to kidnap me and assassinate me and that one was highly possible. One, is that I was really problematic in prison, I used to give them hell, and two, I was very active in the township."¹² For people in this situation, as painful as the choice to leave could be, the choice to stay could easily see them consigned to prison indefinitely or even assassinated.

Others who were involved did not have such strong outside forces pushing them to leave the country. However, they decided to do so all the same. Many were simply fed up with the situation inside the country. One man explained that his neighbour and a man at work had been shot by the police in separate incidents, and that at a certain point in the uprisings, the police would just drive around and shoot people. Bit by bit he started to feel that the situation was a mess, that there was no hope, and he couldn't find a reason to stay in South Africa.¹³ Others had situations that pushed them over the edge. One girl's brother was shot and paralysed, which

¹¹ Bernstein, H. Interview with Zola Tyikwe, no date.

¹² Bernstein, Interview with Gwanamakuru.

¹³ Kodesh, W. Interview with Meshack Mochele, 15 December 1992.

really was the last straw for her. She explained: "This anger was building up, not because of my brother, but by going to funerals, attending all these funerals. Ja. But what really made me go out was because of my brother and that's when I started telling myself that I must go and train and come back."¹⁴ Another man recalled: "Something that makes me to go to get military training is that the[re] are many comrades who died in front of my eyes, most are my best friends . . . Because I was very angry about the situation inside the country . . . I wanted to carry a gun and fight with somebody is my enemy."¹⁵ The pain of staying at home and watching friends, neighbours, and relatives being shot and sometimes killed, or thrown into detention or prison, was often too much for some people. These things gave them the motivation to leave the country, partly to escape the situation and partly to do something to change it.

Yet others, particularly those involved in the Soweto uprisings, just wanted to leave the country to obtain military training. One man explained that it was very fashionable to leave in the immediate aftermath of the uprisings. He was very excited to think about leaving to become a terrorist. He didn't even want to become a guerrilla soldier, just a "terrorist."¹⁶ Another had a slightly more developed idea of his intentions and motivations:

The point of my departure was basically on the fact that for long years, our people were struggling through peaceful forms of struggle and this did not bring about the change which our people needed, which is freedom. And our people were daily killed, they were not defended. So I wanted to be also a member who will defend our people, arms in hand for the attainment of freedom. So I wanted to go and join the

¹⁴ Bernstein, H. Interview with Joyce Stofile, no date.

¹⁵ Autobiography of Patrick Tseko Mokoakoa, 11 February 1991, on his application to join APLA,.

¹⁶ Kodesh, W. Interview with Siphso Binda, 24 March 1993.

people's army and fight for our people's freedom. If need be I can lay my life for the freedom of our people.¹⁷

Whatever the political understanding, the desire to leave the country, learn to shoot, and come back to liberate the people was a strong one, and caused many youths to make their way to exile.

In the 1980s, the politics around leaving changed. People often found themselves discussing whether to leave the country, and whether the struggle existed outside in exile, or inside. One woman recalled:

There had been a lot of discussion about the question of leaving the country. There was a hot debate as to how was it for the comrades to leave the country. Well some comrades felt that it's not necessary to leave the country because the site of the struggle is here inside the country. If one leaves the country one is looked at as deserting or running away from the actual struggle which was inside the country.¹⁸

Another man recalled a meeting where one person was arguing strongly against leaving the country: "I think his argument then was that the cornerstone of the struggle is inside the country and [there is] no reason in fact for leaving the country. But then of course that was interpreted by some of us then as cowardice on the part of those who were saying they were not keen to leave etc., etc., and [we] went our separate ways there."¹⁹ During this period, the general guideline was that once a person got to the point where he had no room to move inside the country, usually due to police pressure, then it was okay to go outside to train, as he couldn't contribute anything by staying inside. One man recalled his reasoning:

The special branch were starting to harass me, us students, especially those of us who were in active positions were arrested, put in detention, interrogation. But during the year after the '85 the national emergency, declared by PW Botha in 1985, I was then again locked up

¹⁷ Bernstein, H. Interview with Zebulon Xulu, no date.

¹⁸ Interview with Mtombeli Tengimfene. Interviewer unknown, no date.

¹⁹ Interview with Lizo Ngqungwana. Interviewer unknown, no date.

for a long time. Thereafter I was then informed that I had to run away because I can see for myself that now the special branch is after my soul.²⁰

As MK and APLA had both developed programmes to train people inside South Africa, the need to leave solely to get training waned in the later 1980s.

Leaving the country was also seen as a way to motivate others to take up the struggle, particularly if the person leaving was a leader in the community. With the uprisings in the mid-1980s bringing so much more of the community into the struggle, rather than simply relying on the youth, older people started to change their minds about their roles in the fight. One woman explained:

You know what really inspired me in the question of MK is that women inside the country were so angry about . . . or tired . . . sick and tired of the soldiers in the township, occupying the township, that they used to say, 'Caesarine, you know some of our brothers and kids went away in 76, they are not coming back. We are expecting them to come and kill these people, just have a look they are occupying the township. Now we want to go . . . and I'm talking about grownups in [their] fifties, in [their] sixties, now want to go and join this MK. To go and fetch arms and fire these people as their mothers because it seems to me that they are not really serious, they are not prepared to come back and as their leader inside the country, you know that thing is sort, you must be exemplary, that's why I decided . . . I find that its necessary to be exemplary to people who are having confidence in you inside the country and all that, to go for MK and if its needs be, if the leadership feels that you can go back inside the country, go back and be exemplary, you know. Because mothers really are prepared to go for MK and come back and fight because they couldn't stand how kids were harassed, tortured and all that in front of them by this SADF in the townships.²¹

This kind of community leadership led to more diverse groups of people joining the armed struggle.

²⁰ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Lt. Comm. Mbulelo Mnyaka, 19 August 2004, Military Police Headquarters, Simonstown.

²¹ Bernstein, Interview with Gwanamakuru.

Taking Leave of Home

Whatever the reasons for leaving home, the act itself was difficult. Most of the people who left home didn't tell anyone they were going. This was for many reasons, one being the fact that one's family could possibly talk him out of his resolve, and the act of going through goodbyes could also have this effect. One woman explained her choice of remaining silent: "I knew that if I tell...especially my mother, her tears would make me not to proceed with my decision, you see, so I just had to make that straight, just to go without telling them"²² An even more important reason was the security risk of telling people they were leaving, which could lead to their capture and arrest by the police, as well as the harassment of those who were left behind by the security police. It was generally better for them be able to say: "I don't know anything," and mean it, than to leave them with important information about routes out of the country. Those who went through pipelines organised by the underground movements inside the country were particularly warned not to mention their flight to anyone.

Regardless of the reasoning behind the decision to leave, the majority of those who left did so without telling their families. One woman remembered the thought process she went through before deciding to leave:

Well, I'm from a big family and not only a big family but a closely knit family which had never before experienced any disappearances or any loss [of] any member . . . of the family. So I was the first to leave. So that in itself was quite a problem. And there were lots of things that one thought about: whether I would be in a position to make it on my own without the support of my family, how will my family feel, how would my mother feel, due to my absence, how much will this influence . . . any sort of disintegration of the family?²³

²² Bernstein, H. Interview with Elizabeth Matsembe, no date.

²³ Interview with Tengimfene.

Another man who left during this period eloquently described how it felt to leave. He explained that it was the most painful thing ever to have happened in his life. He had a strong emotional attachment to his family. Leaving was like going through death and being aware of it, choosing to do it. He couldn't tell them that he was leaving, but knew he might never see them again, and was not sure if he would come back alive. Even upon his return, he could never regain the attachment to his family. For instance, when someone dies, he doesn't react like he should, since he had already resigned himself to leaving them forever so many years before.²⁴ Letlapa Mphahlele movingly described his feelings on leaving home:

I took the money, went to town that day and bought a bag, a shirt, and toiletries. I returned home late at night and hid the new stuff in the toilet outside. In the morning, I asked Mother if I could see Mmatlou, my month old sister. I couldn't tell Mother that this would be my farewell peek at her. The baby was fast asleep, and I patted her soft cheeks and tried to open her eyelids. Mmatlou jerked away, and I wondered if she would ever get to know me. I said goodbye to Mother, who believed I was on my way to Dr. Machupe Mphahlele at Groothoek Hospital. "O sepele gabotse- go well," Mother said, and put her head back on the pillow. The chairs, pots, doors, windows, floor and the sleepy figures of my sisters and brothers seemed to scream at me, trying to hold me back. Outside I cast a last glance at the morula tree. It was deep in thought, meditating on the troubles that lay ahead of me. The breeze caressed its nude branches and whispered questions about my reckless decision. In the dawn Manaleng seemed united in its disapproval of my departure for foreign lands.²⁵

These emotional issues surrounding leaving home afflicted many of the people when they had made the decision to leave.

A few were actually eager to leave their families and homes behind, particularly when their family situation was not a happy one. One young woman,

²⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Thabang Makwetla, 23 September and 12 October 1998, Cape Town.

²⁵ Mphahlele, Letlapa (2002). *Child of this Soil: My Life as a Freedom Fighter*, Cape Town: Kwela Books, 47.

who had a different father than her other siblings and was treated badly as a result explained her feelings upon deciding to leave:

So for my age I just told myself, no man, if I go its fine. Because its better . . . than to be at home. Because there are many stories, I must be beaten, I've done this, I've done that, nothing that is right I'm always doing. So I told myself that nobody needs me in my family. So even if I'm gone, who cares? It was my assumption then. So I just wrote a letter to tell them that, 'well I'm leaving, here are your clothes, here is your everything. I didn't leave with anything that belongs to you. I just leave with myself, which I think that its not important to anybody, because you don't like me, I'm not part of you, so it's fine. Maybe where I'm going, people will like me. And if they don't, it's okay.'²⁶

While it was still difficult to leave home, weaker family ties took some of the pain away from the decision.

A very few were lucky enough to be able to say their goodbyes before leaving.

One of these noted:

I'm one of those few people who were fortunate that I was very close to my mother. I could confide in her a lot so I asked permission in fact first from her . . . [I asked] whether she would like to see me as a mental wreck from John Vorster Square or should I go into exile and continue where Nelson Mandela and others left off, and she said, farewell, go well my son.²⁷

Another man, when he filled out his application to join APLA, answered the question of whether he had left the country legally or illegally with: "Legally from my parents but illegally from the Bop[uthatswana] government since I saw no necessity of getting permission from them."²⁸ Many would confide in someone other than their parents, leaving word with an uncle or sibling so that once they were gone, the family could be

²⁶ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Weziwe Ncame, 9 September 1998, University of the Western Cape.

²⁷ Bernstein, H. Interview with William Mbalosi, no date.

²⁸ APLA application, 1990.

told what had happened to them. Even with permission and closure, it was still a terrible trial for most to have to leave behind everyone and everything they knew.

Taking leave of home without saying goodbye was often harder on those who were left behind than on those who left. Particularly during periods of unrest in the townships disappearances were common. When a child disappeared, there was a horrible process of going from hospital to hospital, police station to police station, looking for them and hoping to find them alive. If a child was never found, many parents believed that he had been killed in the fighting between the township people and the police. Many didn't know their children were alive until as long as fifteen years later, and some who died while their children were still in exile never knew at all. One woman said:

My mother was so worried, she had been preparing for a funeral for a cousin, and when she came home at night, she was expecting me to open the door, but instead found herself knocking and knocking because all the kids were asleep. Those days it was terrible because if you don't see your child, you suspect that he might be killed, particularly because I was involved with the uprising.²⁹

A few managed to drop a message to their families soon after they left just so they wouldn't worry them, leaving a note with a sister or brother, dropping a letter in the post the day they left, or sending a letter from exile when first arriving there. However, once a part of MK or APLA, contact with families was usually not allowed because it could cause serious security problems as well as putting the people at home at risk from the security forces. If someone died while in exile, their family inside South Africa would receive a telegram from the organisation to which they belonged. Often this would be the first and last word that they heard of their child since they had

²⁹ Kodesh, W. Interview with Thoko Thedorah Mavuso (Zukiswa Mindala), 7 April 1993.

left the country, and they rarely received details to explain the death, which left them with many unanswered questions.

Leaving

The process of leaving differed according to many circumstances. Some people left legally or semi-legally, crossing through the border posts into other countries. Others utilised the so-called “Green border”, when they climbed over border fences and swam rivers, to enter neighbouring countries illegally. Some went with the help of underground organisations or people who knew routes out, and others went on their own initiative, and found their own ways. Most went through Lesotho, Botswana, or Swaziland, though a few went through Namibia, and some travelled on airplanes to countries further abroad. When Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, another route opened, and in the mid- to late- 1980s, more and more people headed towards their borders.

Those who left through recognised border posts did so in a number of ways. Some had travel documents through their work that allowed them to go into other countries. One explained what he did: “At that time I was working for Anglo-American Corporation as a switchboard operator and I used their offices to get the travel document and also get permission now and then to go to Swaziland for a week and so I had the pass.”³⁰ Instead of returning when his week was up, he simply went into exile. Others had passports from the independent homelands, which allowed them to travel. Many of these had problems at the border, but made up stories to get them through. One woman who was jumping bail had previously been caught by police at the same border with banned materials. She explained how she got through:

³⁰ Bernstein, Interview with Mbalosi.

So when I left South Africa, at the border the guy . . . the policeman at the border, its one of the people that had arrested me, and I recognised him, he recognised me. So he took my passport, went to an office and started making phone calls and he came back and asked me, when am I coming back? It was around Easter time, so I said, well I'm just going for the Easter holidays and I'll be back. So I had . . . I only had a small, sort of an overnight bag, so that's all I could carry, not to arouse any suspicions.³¹

Another man, who was travelling on a Transkei passport straight to Lusaka, Zambia also provided a cover story,

You had to state the reason why I mean what are you going to do there you see. And I mean the situation of Lusaka, I mean everybody knew then that when you go to Lusaka, maybe you're going to the ANC. No we had to lie, to say no, I'm a member of . . . I'm going to the meeting of the International Labour Organisation. . . I had some files with me to carry I mean . . . for the security to see that no this person is going on business of some sort. And they asked me when you are going to be back and I said 3 days you see. And I took a return ticket.³²

In fact, the independence of the homelands or bantustans, which was one of the achievements of which the apartheid government was most proud, provided many black South Africans with the opportunity to get official documentation through illegal channels, giving false names, dates of birth, and the like. This was helpful for getting people out of the country as well as for bringing them back in later. Particularly in the mid- to late- eighties, people remember getting Transkei passports to leave the country, often through Lesotho, a close neighbour. One woman explained the process:

We have to organise some passports to Lesotho, and the only way that we can organise passport in Transkei is, is to try to stay there for some days and learn the language because what is happening, all of us are speaking Xhosa, but it's not the same, because you are coming from urban areas where the language is not the same. So we have to learn the language of Transkei and all that, which is not so much different, but its . . . a dialect more than a language. And also when you are going to take your passports, during the processes, there are some procedures that you must know who is your chief, where do you stay

³¹ Bernstein, H. Interview with Katleho Maloi, no date.

³² Interview with Nkosinathi Robert Mjoli, Interviewer unknown, no date.

and all those things, so we have to learn those things. And the only thing that we find, it was, those people were corrupt. And since we're female, so it was easy to get those passports, if we can just try and manoeuvre our way out. We've done that and then we got the passports after a month, staying there.³³

Leaving through legitimate means made the journey safer, and those who were able to take advantage of their passports escaped some of the perils of fleeing the country. However, even with the legitimate documents and a cover story, leaving the country could be stressful and scary for many of those who crossed. One man took a train to Botswana, and had a run in with security police while on the train. He remembered his own response to the border check:

With valid documents in my pocket, I feared no one. When the train stopped at the Ramatlabama border post in the afternoon, I was relaxed. We alighted and took our passports to the immigration office. After a while, an immigration officer asked us to keep quiet as he called out our names and handed back the passports. A Kilimanjaro of passports was reduced to an anthill. Then they were reduced to about ten . . . five . . . still my name wasn't called. About ten of us were straining our ears for our names as if it were the Day of Judgement. The image of the two bad-tempered men in the train flashed through my mind. The twin devils must have alerted the immigration authorities that I was coming. When the passports on the table came down to two my anxiety turned into fear and panic. Finally my name was called. I took the passport and got back into the train.³⁴

The security police were always on the look out for people leaving the country, trying to weed out the ones who might be leaving to join the liberation movements, and even with legal documents, people face detention or arrest.

Many others crossed into neighbouring countries illegally, generally finding their way to within a short distance of the border and then climbing the fences or crossing a river a couple of kilometres away from the border post, a method referred to as crossing the 'Green Border,' through the bush. Many people worked for the

³³ von den Steinen, Interview with Ncame.

³⁴ Mphahlele, 50-51.

movements underground, and developed well established routes out of the country, taking regular trips to help people cross the borders. One man involved in the ANC underground recruiting people to leave South Africa for military training and organising their passage out from the Eastern Cape in 1976 and 1977 explained the process:

We had our sister cell then in Jo'burg. So what we were doing, we'd recruit people, prepare them, take them from here through train to Jo'burg, eh, because we used mostly trains, not cars, at that time . . . avoiding roadblocks. So when they arrived at Park Station in Jo'burg, the courier that side would be waiting for them, we'll just give them the Eastern Province Herald, and they will meet there on the other side, somebody will be standing, we won't describe what he's wearing . . . just whether one has a cap, this colour . . . you'll see him . . . with a Star newspaper . . . and the person will see them when they got out, they will go out and for instance and gather in a certain platform number, platform number so and so, with their newspapers and then he will come, he will see them, because eh, also he will be briefed that side, and pick them up. Then from Jo'burg to Swaziland."³⁵

He estimated, "We used to send more than three or four trips a week; trips of ten, fifteen, five, three, to Johannesburg."³⁶ When asked about recruiting, he explained: "It was easy, you know, at that time because there were all these, the youth was very militant and students and most of the students and youth were running away from police, police harassing them. So people, everybody was looking for that, where do you join the ANC and what."³⁷ One man who was trying to find passage out at that time remembered: "Now I left PE [Port Elizabeth] at a time when an underground structure of the ANC was basically taking people out of the country . . . and there was a long queue in fact because there was quite an effective underground."³⁸ Many

³⁵ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Lerumo Kalako, 10 June 1998, Cape Town.

³⁶ Interview with Lerumo Kalako, Interviewer unknown, no date.

³⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Kalako.

³⁸ Interview with Lizo Ngqungwana.

people travelled through this underground, the cell in Johannesburg, or other organised methods. Party loyalties were often set aside when leaving the countries. ANC people with PAC contacts could utilise that organisation's mechanism for getting people across the borders, and vice versa. One man explained:

When we got our final briefing, that I mean this is a PAC journey, by then, I said no, I'm pulling out. I wasn't aware that this was a PAC journey. Maybe there were better minds in fact that had convinced me that look, we are going with this trip, but when we reached Swaziland because this was the place that we had aimed for, when we reach Swaziland we then look for the ANC there.³⁹

Another man, with ties to the ANC, who was running a route out of the country recalled his own approach:

Some I knew, some I didn't. They were sending guys to me . . . All sorts of people. I did not discriminate. I had made my mind up after Robben Island I had seen what was happening and I said "To hell, this backstabbing among political parties, it's delaying our struggle." And I made my own resolution that I'm going to serve anybody who wants to advance the struggle. Later on you can grab your niceties and brag you belong to this group. And I knew that when they left the country they are either going to get into the hands of the ANC, PAC or [BCM]. It's their choice and has nothing to do with me, but I had to help them.⁴⁰

This allowed many people to leave the country even if they didn't know the right people in their own party structures inside South Africa.

On these trips, generally transport would be arranged from whichever city they were in to the border of a neighbouring country. Then upon arrival within a short distance of the border, they would get out, go through the bush, jump the fence between the borders a good distance away from the border post, and arrive in the neighbouring country. Often the person who had taken them to the border would drive through the border post on their own with legitimate documents, and then pick the group up on the other side and take them to the place they were to stay. These

³⁹ Interview with Mxolisi Petane, Interviewer Unknown, no date.

⁴⁰ Mason, Andrew. Interview with Joe Seremane, 2004, Johannesburg Airport. For the SADET Oral History Project

trips were largely undertaken at night, leaving late at night and arriving in the next country very early in the morning. One girl who went out with the underground recalled some of the details:

We left from Fort Beaufort to Queenstown. We left with a man that we don't know, I don't know even today, I'm still asking myself I wonder where is he and who was he. Because we didn't talk with him, the only thing that they said, they said we must take a bus from Fort Beaufort to Queenstown, and then when we arrive in Queenstown we're going to meet a man near, near the buses to Transkei, so we must not talk with this man, the only thing we can ask, 'How much is a bus to Transkei?' Then we just get in the bus, and then, when the, the bus driver will ask us about the, the fees for the bus, we tell him that we are waiting for somebody. And then he will know that its us because he was just moving up and down the bus to check for us and then that's the only thing that he'll know and then he's going to pay for us . . . When we arrived in Transkei, I think we arrived late round about one o'clock. And then he just took us in another house, talked with the people of the house and then he left. So we didn't even see him and we don't know who is he.⁴¹

They then obtained Transkei passports and were driven straight to Lesotho. Another woman remembered her trip into exile:

The arrangement was that the combi will come at 11, 12 at night when people were sleeping. We weren't to tell anyone, bring very little, maybe a change of clothes, but no suitcases. Some didn't even get to bring that. I prepared the whole day, hid my things outside all day, so when the time comes, I can sneak out, take what I hid and go to the combi. They came at twelve midnight . . . I got in the combi, and knew some of the people there from the youth club. They drove us next to the Swazi border, and then we skipped, crossed the fence illegally. The driver had a passport, he was going to pass legally. He dropped us in the woods. We walked about 20 kilometres. And then we crossed, and were supposed to meet him on the other side. We delayed because of police patrols, and they must have seen us because they shot a warning, but we were determined to go forward, not backwards. Then the second shot was not a warning, so we crawled towards the border, determined not to go back. There were fourteen of us, two girls and the rest were boys. We managed but it took us long.⁴²

⁴¹ von den Steinen, Interview with Ncame.

⁴² Kodesh, W. Interview with Mpho Msimanga, 17 August 1993..

Swaziland and Botswana were the most common destinations for most of the people from the Johannesburg and Transvaal areas, with Lesotho being more popular with those from the Cape and Natal, but many crossed according to the plans they could make, rather than by which was the closest border.

Those who went through Swaziland had a double crossing to make due to agreements between the government of Mozambique and Swaziland, which forced the recruits to cross illegally into Swaziland, travel to the Mozambiquean border, and then cross illegally there again. The same woman who told of her crossing above continued her story,

After a month, we moved from Swaziland to Maputo. It was the same procedure of crossing illegally. Duma took us across, he was so strict . . . I was so scared of walking in the dark at night, and I fell over, the fear of walking at night, and there were small rocks, you know, when you don't know the route, and you're just going behind, you know, and I fell over, and when I fell over I started laughing. He came back, shouting at me. 'Do you know that you're not supposed to laugh? Ntombi [isiZulu for girl]? Hmmm?' He had a very deep Zulu accent, 'Hmm? You're not supposed to laugh. You know? You know that if you laugh, you're going to expose ourselves. Hmm? You must keep quiet. Quiet, quiet, keep quiet, do you understand?' I said yes. And it's dark, and we're walking, walking, and the way we're walking, it's like we're tiptoeing. And it's struggling, you know, it's a long journey, and we're tiptoeing.⁴³

The trips between the cities and the borders were often a very dangerous part of the journeys, particularly when police roadblocks were up on the main roads. Transporting groups of people from their homes to the border could easily attract attention. People would invent cover stories, passing themselves off as church groups, football teams, bands, and the like. One man recalled: "We were 12 in our group, with one lady. Through Johannesburg, Soweto, where we changed the combi we were travelling under cover of a jazz group called Skief, Cape Town jazz group

⁴³ Kodesh, Interview with Msimanga.

called Skief.”⁴⁴ One girl who left with a group of other girls recalled that they dressed up in head-scarves and jackets, so that if they were stopped, they would all look like old ladies and say they were going to a funeral.⁴⁵ Another group of girls dressed up as Zionist church women to avoid the police.⁴⁶ A group of boys who crossed into Botswana left their ‘fancy township clothes’ behind and dressed in old clothing in order to escape people’s attention.⁴⁷ There were as many methods of crossing as there were groups that went across.

Many people did not have the assistance of the underground movements to help them plan their journeys and get across the border. They often left with very little information and following very general tips. One woman went with a few friends to jump the fence into Botswana at night:

Of course it was frightening because there were some searchlights and the cars which were moving. But we managed to do it . . . [after we crossed], it was a long way. We were given the direction that if we go straight, we will come across Gaborone, but that was . . . it was not as they said. So we walked a long way until we came across the farm houses, you know the houses near the border. And then we got there and we talked to the people, we told them that we are South Africans. Then we lied, we told them that we came to Botswana to attend school there . . . Then we had to report to the local chief. After that we proceeded to the police station until they made contact for us with the ANC people.⁴⁸

Another woman went all by herself,

A friend of mine drove me to Mafikeng and I spent the night in Mafikeng and [at] four o’clock in the morning I crossed through Pietsane. You know the border is very wide and that time, they didn’t have the manpower to man every inch of the way and where I crossed, the border is very liberal because you find the Botswana people were

⁴⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Bandile “Blacks” Joyi, 21 November 2002, Cape Town.

⁴⁵ Kodesh, W. Interview with Jumaimah Modiakgotla, 8 April 1993.

⁴⁶ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Tsidi Mhlabo, 12 February 1999, Yeoville, Johannesburg.

⁴⁷ Bernstein, H. Interview with Michael Meli, no date.

⁴⁸ Bernstein, H. Interview with Elizabeth Matsembe, no date.

crossing, you know people were crossing back and forth, they did their shopping on our side and went back. So that's where I crossed. The river was not very deep, although it had rained the night before and the current was a bit strong. I was very scared. I was by myself . . . I didn't know where I was going. I was very frightened. And when I got to the other side, I wasn't even sure that I was already on the other side. But then after walking for something like five hours, I saw a building with the Botswana flag and that was a relief.⁴⁹

Whether on their own, with the help of the liberation movements, or through the assistance of the people of the neighbouring countries, the young recruits managed to get out of South Africa and found themselves in exile.

Arrival in exile

Arriving in exile was an exciting time for all who had left. Many experienced a wave of relief just finally to be outside of South Africa, where they had endured so much for so long. Indres Naidoo recalls arriving in Mozambique early one morning: "It was like for the first time in my life I was breathing. I'm free, I'm free, I'm free."⁵⁰ One woman found herself staying in an ANC safe house, and said: "Well, it was a sense of relief that now for the first time we could talk openly about the ANC we worshipped so much."⁵¹ One man recalled that his impression of freedom came through libraries. Once he got to Botswana, he had the first chance in his life to study the documents of the liberation organisations, and through his readings of Sobukwe's speeches, he came to find the PAC as his natural home.⁵² Another man had a bit more reserved reaction at his reception by the Basotho people: "It was very difficult. I felt both happy and helpless in the sense of being in hands of people I've never known,

⁴⁹ Bernstein, H. Interview with Ribbon Mosholi, no date.

⁵⁰ Bernstein, H. Interview with Indres Naidoo, no date.

⁵¹ Interview with Tengimfene.

⁵² Mphahlele, 59.

and my life depends on them, but also hopeful in the sense that there is support for what you are doing, they are not even South African, but are helping the struggle anyway.”⁵³ Overall, the recruits who found themselves in ANC and PAC hands upon arrival in exile found the atmosphere welcoming. One noted: “The manner in which we were received made one to feel good, it was a warm reception in a comradely manner. The older generation receiving us were excited about the young generation coming to help in the struggle.”⁵⁴ A PAC man remembered his reception in Swaziland, “The reception was good in the sense that again, being received by what one can call experienced members or stalwarts of the organisation where one was now really pumped to appreciate and understand that this was the correct decision.” A good reception in exile made them feel comfortable with their decision to leave and eager to continue on their journey.

Not everyone was so happy to be outside though. One woman recalled: “I’m now in exile, the guys are telling us, now you’re in exile, you can’t go back because you know what will happen. I was beginning to regret leaving my mother.”⁵⁵ Another recruit remembers that it was a very traumatic period of his life, he was wanted by the police, his friends had been arrested, he left South Africa, he was very emotional, but managed to keep the emotions in check. Only at night would he toss and turn with nightmares and wake up often.⁵⁶ One young girl of 16 was happy to be out, but desperately missed home. This was the same woman who was so happy to get out of a bad family situation explained above. She related:

⁵³ Kodesh, Interview with Binda.

⁵⁴ Kodesh, W. Interview with Solly Zacharia Shoke, 7 April 1993.

⁵⁵ Kodesh, Interview with Modiakgotla.

⁵⁶ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Lt. Moses Mrubata, 18 November 1998, Cape Town.

When I was in Lesotho I used to phone home and the only thing that I will say is 'hello'. And that is all. And I would just enjoy listening, different voices of people who are asking, 'Who is this person who is always phoning here and not . . . she's done it again, just put that phone . . .' And everybody is, you know, mumbling and talking and then I'll put it down and then the following day I'll do, I think I've done, I stayed in Lesotho for three months and that I've done that for three months. And they couldn't discover, sometimes I couldn't even say hello, just wait for another person to say, 'hello' then I just keep quiet and hold the phone, 'HELLO, who are you? Why are you doing this?' and then the other one they'd ask from the kitchen, 'Who is that one?' Then they'll say, 'No, we don't know,' I used to enjoy that. Because I would just think, if I could tell them, maybe they can come and fetch me and I don't want that, because I've taken my own decision, I don't want to go home.⁵⁷

Another man recalled his doubts upon his arrival in Botswana:

It was cold as my mind rewound the cassette of my life. Where did Mother think I was? She was expecting me back home that same day. How would she cope with my absence? I had told the immigration officer that I would be in Botswana for seven days. This was only my first. So I still had a chance to go back home to Mother. No, never. I had cut my moorings. I slept fitfully that night.⁵⁸

Everyone had different reactions upon arriving in exile, but excitement of what would come next predominated.

The Process

Upon arrival in a neighbouring country, there was a defined process for the newly exiled to go through. Some went completely through the underground and skipped this process, but this was the exception rather than the rule. Upon reaching the neighbouring country, whether Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique or Botswana, one generally would go to the police station, or a government department, and tell them who he was, where he had come from, and that he wanted political asylum. Many who were wanted at home gave false names due to the high level of co-

⁵⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Ncame.

⁵⁸ Mphahlele, 52.

operation between some police forces and the security police in South Africa, particularly with the Swazi police. One woman recalled:

One of the things that they told us that firstly we have to change our names . . . I mean having so many years with your only name, it wouldn't have been a very easy decision to just after change your name . . . but it was the necessity for our survival because there was the fear the Lesotho Police or security branch were having some dealings with the South African security. So when we were going to the police station to go and declare as refugees, we were having now this problem of getting ourselves new names.⁵⁹

Others would apply straight to the United Nations for refugee status. Once one had applied to get asylum as a refugee, he was asked if he wanted to be put in contact with the ANC or the PAC, and occasionally other organisations. He would choose which one, and then be put into their hands and would leave to go to Zambia or Tanzania, or occasionally straight to Angola. People who had already been involved in one organisation or the other would choose according to their membership. But many did not have an affiliation to or knowledge of any organisations, and had to learn about them and select one. One recruit recalled the routine she went through in Botswana: "I went [to the] police station and I went through the process. You know, you have to fill in forms, then declare yourself a refugee and they were very nice. Then they showed me where to get the bus to go to Lobatse. And in Lobatse I got a bus to Gaborone, and Gaborone, well, there were many South Africans there and some of my friends too were there."⁶⁰ Others had to spend time in the police stations. Another recruit who went through Botswana recalled that he was taken to the police station with his group and locked up. The floors were shining, very smooth and clean. It was very boring, and the food was bad. They didn't treat them like criminals, though, they let them go to the shop and get what they needed, but they slept in the

⁵⁹ Interview with Tengimfene.

⁶⁰ Bernstein, Interview with Mosholi.

prison, and there was no point in running away. Some PAC and AZAPO people came around, but since they knew they wanted to join the ANC, they just stayed until the ANC representative came and organised for them to leave to Zambia.⁶¹ Once through the process of choosing an organisation and registering as a refugee, many of the people who went through Botswana were housed at a refugee camp in Dukwe, in sections dedicated to their particular organisation. Another man remembered going through Swaziland:

I stayed almost ten months in Swaziland, But first we contacted the police . . . So we stayed in a police station, they went through our stories, our personal stories, background and what we wanted in Swaziland. Well, they even told us there are two political movements, which one are you to join? Well, me and my friends . . . well we cannot just come and say we want the ANC or PAC, we don't know about these things. But first what we want, we want refugee status then later we want to pursue our studies . . . In the end I went to a camp, a refugee camp . . . we met all sorts of South Africans . . . There were those who were for the PAC, those who were for ANC, so in the process we sat and listened and started finding out what is going on outside. Well ultimately I came to be more attracted to the ANC.⁶²

The situation in Swaziland at the police stations was similar to that in Botswana. One man recalled:

We were accommodated in the cells, at that stage we were about 15 to 20 people per room, but we were not literally locked up, but there was some semblance of control because at a particular time of the day you needed to be back and at night they'd lock. But during the day you could travel, go to the capital city or any of the small towns. And then you were required also that if you were not going to come back, you should then inform the committee that was running that centre that you're not going to come back and where, if they wanted to meet you, you will be.⁶³

Another man who was a member of the PAC recalled: "They asked what organisation do you belong to, and we said PAC. So they said, no phone the PAC official now,

⁶¹ Kodesh, W. Interview with Meshack Mochele, 15 December 1992.

⁶² Bernstein, Interview with Meli.

⁶³ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

they phone this guy, this guy came. Then he welcome us, welcome gentlemen, shake our hands, who are you, then he took us to Gaborone.”⁶⁴ If someone didn’t know what organisation he wanted to join, sometimes the choice was purely based on luck. If he was received by someone who was partial to one organisation, he would be influenced to join that organisation. One man related the pressure from a policeman in Botswana:

“Which one would you like to join?” “I don’t know them. You can help me by calling their representatives to come and explain their organisations’ policies to me.” “That’s impossible,” he said with an air of finality. “I can call the ANC people because I know where they stay. They are here in Gaborone. But it’d take us three days to reach PAC people. I would need a special car because they are in the Kalahari Desert. It would take us another three days to come back. And then there’s a student organisation, but they are not serious people.”⁶⁵

That man held out to learn the different organisations, and later heard a rumour that this particular policeman received payment to channel recruits to the ANC. Another man who went through Swaziland remembered a policeman who was sympathetic towards the PAC encouraged him to join that organisation.⁶⁶ Influences from other people who had loyalties to the ANC or PAC could lead someone to a particular organisation. The presence of a representative of one organisation when another was absent could also swing the decision. The fact that people often could not leave the jail until they picked an organisation also led people to choose quickly and without all the information they needed to make an informed choice.

The process in Lesotho resembled that in Swaziland and Botswana. One woman and her friend went to the police station and declared themselves as refugees under false names. They noticed: “The first thing that struck us, the police, the

⁶⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Lt. Mmfanelo “Zola” Bongco, 19 August 2004, Simonstown Naval Base.

⁶⁵ Mphahlele, 55.

⁶⁶ T. Labakeng, quoted in Ka Plaatjie, Thami. Poqo and the Azanian People’s Liberation Army, draft chapter for *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980* by the South African Democracy Education Trust. (Draft chapter given to the author by Ka Plaatjie, and this section did not appear in the final articles published.)

manner of the police there was not so different from the police that we were used to here in South Africa. The way they were harassing us, pushing us around, asking a lot of funny and stupid questions . . . That was a great disappointment to us because we thought that in Lesotho, having been free for such a long time [they were] sure to be observing some standards that we were not used to here in South Africa.”⁶⁷ The authorities later took them to a refugee camp outside of Maseru. Eventually the majority of the newly exiled South Africans would find themselves in the hands of the ANC or the PAC.

Once with the organisations, there was also a procedure. With the ANC, this consisted of writing an autobiography and choosing whether one wanted to go to school or join MK. The ANC described the process to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,

On arrival, the recruits were welcomed by the official in charge and advised of the rules that would govern their stay in the reception area or centre by the person in charge . . . Recruits had to supply detailed information on their family and educational history, their reasons for wanting to join the Movement, and details on the political activities in which s/he had been involved. Biographies also served as skills audits, and as a means of gathering valuable information of various kinds.⁶⁸

These biographies were used to get an idea of each new recruit, as well as to weed out security agents sent by the South Africa Police to infiltrate the ANC. They also served as a method of obtaining information about the situation inside South Africa and about people there who were suspected to be informers. One recruit recalls that he had to go through these basic interviews, to give them his life story, and to tell

⁶⁷ Interview with Tengimfene.

⁶⁸ ANC. *Further Submissions and Responses by the African National Congress to Questions Raised by the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation*, 12 May 1997, 111.

them who he thought were informers at home.⁶⁹ A comrade who was working for the security department in Mozambique explained,

It was my basic task to interview people who were coming from home and . . . to interview them, to go through their biographies, to assist them in first and foremost in writing out their biographies and secondly to determine as their credibility . . . working very hard too to try and sift from that group . . . the people whose stories were not credible with a lot of loopholes and stories that were clear that they were actually made false stories so that we can be infiltrated by the enemy.⁷⁰

Most recruits passed through this with no problems.

The other main question they were asked was whether they wanted to go to school or join the armed struggle. Many did choose the school option and were sent to study all over the world. Others had their hearts set on the military. Sometimes the people asking the questions would try to influence the recruits in their decisions. When they saw people who were very young, or well educated, or often if they were young girls, they would encourage them to go to school. One recruit remembered: "After three weeks under the ANC wing we were given a choice of education or military training. In spite of many attempts to dissuade me from taking the [latter] option, I went to the camps because I had a lot of anger in me and I wanted to do military training."⁷¹ Another recruit recalled her interview in Mozambique, where she received the school or MK question: "We said we wanted to go to MK. He said you are too young to go fight and we became very hysterical because that's what we came for. If we wanted to study we could do that in South Africa. We discussed, and the

⁶⁹ von den Steinen, Interview with Mrubata.

⁷⁰ Bernstein, H. Interview with Peter Motaung, no date.

⁷¹ Interview with Thamsanqa (Thami) Ngwevela, Interviewer unknown, no date.

next day they asked us again and we said no we want to go to MK.”⁷² Indres Naidoo indicated why they sometimes discouraged people from joining MK with a story,

I’ll give you the case of point of three young ‘so-called coloured’ boys that came from the Cape. They were very, very young. And in fact it was heart breaking to see them going into military when they should really be in school. And I spoke to them. And I said to them, ‘Listen chaps, you chaps should rather go to school than going into the military.’ And they said, ‘No, we have come here to get necessary training and to go back into the country.’...And of course all three went into training and the three returned into the country and two [were] killed and...one was captured.⁷³

All were not so keen to go straight to the military. One woman remembered the peer pressure that put her in that position: “We were asked whether we still intend to go for military training or to go to school. I was almost the last one they interviewed and the group said we’re still going for military training, and I felt that if I said I wanted to go to school then, it would be a betrayal.”⁷⁴ Not all were encouraged to go to school, either. One recruit remembered that he wanted to go to school, but due to the fact that he had done some work in the early 1960s for the ANC, working with sabotage, they thought he should really use his experience to join the military. Eventually he relented, convincing himself that it was better to do that and pay his own way, then to go to school and feel indebted to the movement forever.⁷⁵ Finally, the recruits were given ‘pseudo-names’, or ‘bush-names’, for security purposes, so they wouldn’t be recognised.

The PAC process was largely similar. Recruits filled out a form detailing their personal family and health details, then their education, work, and political

⁷² Interview with Mavuso.

⁷³ Kodesh, Interview with Naidoo.

⁷⁴ Kodesh, Interview with Modikgotla.

⁷⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Nyombolo.

background. They wrote or dictated their autobiographies, for the same purposes as in MK. However, the choice of school or the military was not as often given in the PAC. They took the stance that the organisation must decide where to place its people. The PAC often favoured channelling people into APLA and only a few people got scholarships to study. When first joining the PAC in Botswana, one man explained what he was told when he asked to apply to APLA: “Comrade, you can apply in writing for membership of the PAC but not for membership of APLA. Once you’re in the PAC, the organisation will decide where to deploy you, taking your gifts and talents into account.”⁷⁶ Another man who later left the PAC to join the ANC claimed that he wanted to study, but was forced to go for military training by the leadership. One could still state a preference however, and on the forms for registering with the PAC one section was titled: “Special areas of interest for deployment (What kind of work military/academic)”⁷⁷

The competition between the ANC and PAC for recruits was heated. Often people who didn’t have a good knowledge of the policies and ideologies of the different organisations were told negative things about the rival organisations to get them to join the other one. Most often though, people were given information on the different organisations and allowed to make up their own minds. The PAC archives at the University of Fort Hare contain a huge number of applications for membership that show what attracted people to that organisation. In the applications, the large majority of people who joined the PAC were attracted by the organisation’s stance on the land issue, which asserted that the land of South Africa had been stolen by the white people, and must be reclaimed by the Africans. One man articulated his reasons

⁷⁶ Mphahlele, 63.

⁷⁷ PAC applications.

for joining the PAC: "I have joined PAC and APLA because as far as I am concerned this is the only organisation that secures African's interest particularly on the land issue and rebuilding of dignity of the Africans."⁷⁸ Other recruits saw the PAC as more militant than the ANC, and that attracted them to the organisation. One man noted: "APLA soldiers do not aim to destroy buildings of which after liberation we would have to re-build, instead their task is to kill Security Police and installations and South African Defence Force the army that kills unarmed innocent masses."⁷⁹ And while the PAC officially had a non-racial focus, it was often seen as a purely black organisation, as opposed to the ANC who had many prominent white members. One man stated on his application: "The ANC was not an answer because of the whites within it."⁸⁰ Often the same things that attracted some people to the PAC made others commit to the ANC. One woman who joined MK explained: "I don't know what made me not to be in favour of the PAC. Mostly it was because of maybe the way they were too militant and the slogans which they were passing around and so forth. I mean this thing that South Africa belongs only to Africans, etc."⁸¹ For whatever reasons, when people arrived in exile, they went through the process and joined the ANC or PAC. Then they looked forward expectantly to what would come next.

⁷⁸ PAC applications.

⁷⁹ APLA application.

⁸⁰ PAC application.

⁸¹ Bernstein, Interview with Michael Meli.

The Conditions Outside

Most of the recruits who left South Africa had never been outside the country before. They went through several countries, and experienced many different places and situations. Some spent considerable time in certain places and came out with insightful impressions of the places they had been.

Many of the recruits had never been on an airplane before, which was often a daunting experience. One comrade recalled: "On the plane from Botswana, we starved ourselves until we got to Lusaka . . . we thought we had to pay for the aeroplane food and drink."⁸² Another was terrified to be flying: "It was my first time in a plane, I couldn't eat, I was horrified."⁸³ And a third was not so sure of the quality of the aeroplane: "It was my first plane, and it was a very shaky old plane. It was a very scary experience."⁸⁴ The first experience with black African pilots thrilled many. One man recalled:

We boarded a ten-seater flight to Zambia. It was our very first experience of flying and we were amazed to see a black pilot. There were none in South Africa. In fact we had never even seen a photo of one in a magazine or book before. At that point it hit me- we were no longer in South Africa. This was my first real taste of freedom.⁸⁵

Many recruits went through Lesotho and had a chance to see a bit of the capital city area. One recalled,

Well first and foremost . . . I had a problem, language problem in Lesotho. But I managed to get myself to the capital, Maseru [from the place she was staying] . . . I had no problems with the government, in fact, many Lesotho locals were very, very sympathetic to our cause and very helpful because I had some Lesotho friends. They regarded me as a sister. And the people were very sympathetic because it was

⁸² Kodesh, Interview with Binda.

⁸³ Kodesh, Interview with Mavuso.

⁸⁴ Kodesh, Interview with Mochele.

⁸⁵ Matakata, Jama. (2004). *Hills of Hope: the Autobiography of Jama Matakata*, Pietermaritzburg: Nutrend Productions, 30.

immediately after the Maseru massacre . . . So the Lesotho locals were very bitter about the South African government so that's why they were so warm towards us.⁸⁶

Another didn't feel so far from home in Lesotho: "Lesotho is like South Africa, so we didn't even feel that you are in exile, because the weather was the same, and it was during December, you know, singers like Hugh Masekela and all, there were many shows and everything, so you didn't feel like you were really in exile."⁸⁷ One woman spent a long time in a refugee camp there, waiting for enough people to gather for them to go on to Tanzania. She said that they stayed there in two big dormitories, one occupied by the younger boys, and the other filled with more matured comrades. Life there was monotonous and boring. They had enough food, though it wasn't always nice, and without anything to do, they would just wander about town endlessly. Eventually they managed to work out a programme for the camp, with language lessons to learn Sesotho, some political lessons led by some of the mature comrades, and some sports as well.⁸⁸

Botswana also inspired some new ideas. One man who spent time there found things very different from home, with very different cultural norms. He was surprised to see women, mothers, riding a bike, which he had never seen at home in Cape Town. He found that in Botswana, mothers were often the heads of households. He also found himself sitting next to white people in bars, and it was a very strange situation for him. The living conditions at his ANC residence also surprised him. There were women there, but everyone was expected to cook. They would help him out, give him directions and such, but when his cooking day arrived, he was the one

⁸⁶ Interview with Thundezwa Booi, Interviewer unknown, no date.

⁸⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Ncame.

⁸⁸ Interview with Tengimfene.

who had to do it all. This was a big change for a man who had only fried an egg ever before. He also had to keep himself and his clothes looking spotless and well pressed, when before he had always just let his sisters do that sort of thing for him. His time in Botswana taught him many new skills and changed many of his ideas.⁸⁹

Another woman remembered her time spent in Zambia. Unlike the neighbouring countries, Zambia really felt like somewhere far from home to her. She said: “What struck me most was the . . . soldiers guarding the airport there. They were too dark, too dark, I mean one could see that these are not South Africans.” She went to a residence there, and they established a daily routine. They would do some gardening in the mornings, before it got too hot, then work at indoor chores like washing clothes. They would tell stories and play games, and spent a lot of time in the library there reading books they could not get access to in South Africa. They played sports like softball, soccer, volleyball, and table tennis. Then after supper they would have news and political discussions, followed by a period called ‘jazz hour’, which was filled with singing and listening to the radio. Though it was fun at first, it quickly became boring. They were not allowed to leave the residence, and they longed to mingle with the locals. Eventually they found themselves lying around, sleeping a lot, pretending to be sick just to get to go to the clinic and meet some local people. They even tried to brew some home-made beer. Finally, they were able to leave to go for military training after two months at the residence there.⁹⁰

Tanzania was one of the hubs of transit for the recruits on their way to training. There they found a completely different place from what they knew and from what they had imagined. Every recruit who went through Tanzania commented

⁸⁹ Interview with Petane.

⁹⁰ Interview with Tengimfene.

first on the heat. One expressed: "We arrived in Tanzania, and it was hot. We were surprised, we thought maybe it was the heat of the engines, but we got to the airport and it was still just as hot . . . It was so hot we couldn't do anything, walked around half naked, sweating all the time . . . moving out at night, to get out and take a walk or something."⁹¹ Many who were used to Johannesburg were shocked at the differences between there and Dar es Salaam. One woman remembered:

When we first landed in Tanzania, we were very excited because we hear the radio talking about Dar es Salaam, we thought it was like New York City. So when we arrived, it was in the evening and we saw just a humid place, very dull. Some medical officers fetched us at the airport. We asked them, 'Are we there or are we still proceeding to Tanzania?' They said, 'Welcome to Tanzania,' and we were astonished because the way it looked was not what we thought. We expected like Jo'burg or America, but the place was so tiny, people wearing dark things covering their faces...⁹²

Another recalled her reaction upon arriving in Tanzania:

Now immediately we arrived in Tanzania, oh, things have changed, really. We see the place, the town, oh my, the place is dirty, you know the buildings, there, there's no paint, there's nothing. You can see that, no, there's poverty here. And then we, we stayed for three to six months and then there was a problem of morale, we were attacked by malaria. It, it was another misery.⁹³

One recruit recalled his arrival at the Dar es Salaam airport:

A rat ran across the floor, we said, 'Hey, this is really Africa now.' We went out of the airport, it was still very hot, there were cockroaches on the road, big ones we weren't used to. We were driven with cars into a flat there in Dar with a few guys, maybe 10 or so. We stayed there, eating meat, food, there were no shortages.⁹⁴

As they got to know the place, some began to like it better. One recruit said, "We managed to get around Dar es Salaam, went to the market, met local people, had the

⁹¹ Kodesh, Interview with Mochele.

⁹² Kodesh, Interview with Mavuso.

⁹³ von den Steinen, Interview with Ncame.

⁹⁴ Kodesh, Interview with Mochele.

local women plait us. Tanzania was nice, people were very friendly. It was my first experience to hear the Muslims praying.”⁹⁵ Another recalled: “There was no difficulty with the language especially us who were staying in town. A number of people were in a position to speak English even if not fluent English but once you speak English they are in a position to follow, what exactly it is that you want to say . . . One also picked up some Swahili words.”⁹⁶ He also compared South Africa and Tanzania and decided:

There was a vast difference between the two . . . We were from a highly developed country when it comes to economy and the infrastructure. Then we had to adjust to a country that is a little bit less developed . . . But what was also noticeable was the political development. They were more politically developed . . . So that you couldn’t realise any tension amongst the people of different colours . . . With us it still had those . . . whereby you tend to be surprised sometimes in a place you see just whites mixing easily with blacks. And theoretically this is what we hoped for. But at times when you see it happening practically it is not so easy to accept it.⁹⁷

Some of the recruits stayed in camps outside of Dar es Salaam. There they had a routine of classes, cleaning, taking care of the camp, cooking, and the like, and some physical training and political education to begin to get them in shape for the real training camps. Others were put up in town at hotels or party residences. Eventually, from wherever they were staying, they advanced to take up the task for which they had left South Africa: military training.

⁹⁵ Kodesh, Interview with Msimanga.

⁹⁶ Kodesh, W. Interview with Abraham Lentsoane (Titi Motsenang), 5 April 1993.

⁹⁷ Kodesh, Interview with Lentsoane.



CHAPTER 3 MK IN EXILE

Come friends to the forest of feast
feast of knowledge of bow and arrow
feast of whispers of spear on flight
the bush beckons all to the bush school¹

Introduction

The late 1960s and early 1970s were difficult times for the liberation movements in exile. Plagued with leadership problems, stagnancy, competition for resources and support, and an absence of influence inside South Africa, the ANC and PAC were poorly situated to launch a revolution. When the Soweto uprisings erupted inside South Africa in 1976 the organisations faced both a huge opportunity and a great challenge. Thousands of young, militant South Africans fled into exile, seeking military training and expecting to return home quickly to fight against the apartheid regime.

The African National Congress held a consultative conference in Morogoro, Tanzania in 1969. Among other issues discussed, they agreed to open membership to all races during the conference. They debated this decision at length, and a group of prominent members who opposed the decision divided the party. The ANC expelled this “gang of eight”, as they were known, in October of 1975, and the issue appeared closed. The gang of eight launched a rival organisation, which drew little support and soon faded into obscurity.

The 1974 Portuguese coup that led to the independence of Mozambique and Angola in 1975 provided the ANC with an excellent opportunity. Their close relationship with the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola

¹ From Matlou, Rebecca. (1980). *A Soldier at War (To the Year of the Spear)*. In Feinberg, Barry. (Ed). *Poets to the People: South African Freedom Poems*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 127.

(MPLA), Angola's new ruling party, allowed them to establish training and transit camps for their recruits in Angola, and gave them the ability to absorb the thousands of young South Africans who began to join them from the following year. One source noted a large wave of people leaving the country in the wake of the Soweto uprisings, trailing off to approximately 250 people per month by 1978, and an overall boost of ANC numbers from 1 000 to 9 000. The ANC won the lion's share of the new blood, with about two thirds of the recruits going into their organisation.² In the immediate aftermath of the uprisings, the average age of MK operatives tried by the state dropped from 35 to 28.³ While unprepared for the influx of new recruits, the settlement of their leadership disputes and the establishment of camps in Angola put them in an excellent position when the Soweto generation started to flee into exile to join the armed struggle.

From the Soweto uprisings until the regional peace measures which led to the closure of ANC camps in Angola in 1989, the vast majority of South Africans who went into exile to join Umkhonto we Sizwe did at least their initial training at one of the many MK camps in Angola. While a few trained elsewhere, and many went on to further training all over the world, this basic training in Angola was something of a universal experience for the MK soldiers from the Soweto generation and later groups. The training was strenuous, and the conditions often difficult. Whatever period they were in Angola, and however long their stay, their time in the training camps remains vivid in their memories.

² Davis, Stephen M. (1987). *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South Africa's Hidden War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 57.

³ Davis, 28.

June 16 Detachments & Post-Soweto Recruits

The students and their sympathisers who left South Africa to join MK in the immediate aftermath of the Soweto uprisings found their way to exile in many different ways. Eventually most ended up in Angola at a transit camp just outside Luanda called Engineering Camp. From June until December, these soldiers-to-be collected in this camp until they were finally sent on to their basic training.

Nobody who comes into a brand new situation is really prepared for it, but it is hard not to imagine what awaits and what conditions will be like. This was true for the South Africans who went into exile to join MK. The first group to leave the country after the uprisings and go to the training camps in Angola entered a situation for which they could not possibly prepare. They were the pioneers and the first to be trained in the camps there, so even the soldiers who had already trained in other places could not prepare them for what lay ahead.

One of the first things many of the ex-MK soldiers recalled about Angola and Engineering Camp would become one of the main concerns of their time there. Angola is in a malaria zone, and many soldiers fell prey to this disease during their training. One method of combating this was the use of mosquito nets, and to those who had no experience with these, it was very strange to arrive in Angola and inspect their sleeping arrangements. One man who came to Angola at this time remembered his first impressions:

Somebody said you'll find a bed, an empty bed there. So I'm going up there. On the floor, I saw a string of beds, with some nets and so on. I said, 'What's this thing?' I look around, I've never seen such a bed with a net. People are inside as if they are dead, or critically ill. Then I said- well there's an empty one. I look at this, there's sticks, four sticks two in front, two in back. I said, 'Oh gosh, I've had it' I just took them, pushed them aside . . . got into the bed . . . I thought I was going to sleep and I sleep. Something came . . . zzzzzzing! . . . Ddddddding! . . . Wwwwwwong! All these things. I said, 'What's this now?' Well I'd been to Tanzania, there's mosquitoes you know,

there's net, but we never take them seriously . . . I never slept man, it was war, man it was war . . . I went down, stayed in the veranda until the morning- I couldn't sleep because of the mosquitoes and there were guys next to me, just snoring. And then I mentioned it to some comrades and they laughed and said: 'We did the same thing too'.⁴

Many other soldiers remembered having the same reaction. One noted: "You remember soldiers sleep at halls. You'd find people, about 80 people that are sleeping here, there is 40 beds this side and that side. And every bed has a mosquito net. When you enter there, take your mind to the hospital."⁵ This is just one of the many strange circumstances these new soldiers had to get used to in a hurry.

Once they got over their initial reactions, life in Engineering Camp became largely a game of waiting to go for training. For students who had left the country intending to spend a few weeks or months learning how to shoot, then heading straight back to South Africa with a gun to liberate their country, this often came as an unpleasant experience. Mxolisi Petane remembered the camp as: "A place where soldiers were beginning to be . . . I don't want to say disillusioned or frustrated. They wanted to go to train."⁶ In the meantime however many activities occupied their time. In addition to their comrades from home, they met Angolans from Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola (FAPLA), Zimbabweans from the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU), Namibians from the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO), and even Cubans who were assisting the Angolans, and would soon become instructors for MK as well. Many thrilled to see trained soldiers belonging to black armies that were also involved in liberating their own countries. While exciting to interact with the different groups, it was also difficult at times due

⁴ Kodesh, W. Interview with Sipho Binda (Mandla Jwara), 24 March 1993.

⁵ Interview with Mxolisi Petane, Interviewer unknown, no date.

⁶ Interview with Petane, Interviewer unknown, no date.

to the cultural and linguistic mix. In countries near to South Africa which were the first stops in exile, one might find Sesotho, Setwana, Siswati, or English being spoken, which didn't seem so different from South Africa. Once they had reached Angola, they found that the Angolans spoke Portuguese and the Cuban soldiers spoke Spanish. But as one MK soldier noted: "[We had] difficulty with language, but it is typical of South Africans I think we catch on fast. Already some comrades speaking Espanola, Portuguese, teach us few words, how to greet, water, money, I love you, so on."⁷

Relations sometimes deteriorated, however. FAPLA also shared the camp, and the war against União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) had exhausted many of their supplies, especially food. Many of the FAPLA soldiers often found themselves lacking, and noticed that the South Africans at the other end of the camp had ample supplies. One soldier related: "One Angolan guy burst into our room, holding a grenade, without a pin, which we didn't know, and another guy pushing him, pulling him. We found out later this guy wanted to bomb us since they didn't have food and so on and we were almost like civilians, had what we needed."⁸ Other soldiers had similar memories of conflicts with FAPLA soldiers over food.

Activities varied, and no full training programme operated there, though they did not remain idle. One soldier recalled that they would while away the time playing soccer, doing obstacle courses, and doing light training.⁹ Another remembered that they also would go to the cinema some evenings in town, and to the beach on

⁷ Kodesh, Interview with Sipho Binda.

⁸ Kodesh, W. Interview with Meshack Mochele, 15 December 1992.

⁹ Kodesh, W. Interview with Solly Zachariah Shoke (Jabu), 7 April 1993.

Saturday or Sunday.¹⁰ A female soldier fondly described the trips to the beach and a different side to the cultural exchanges. The women waiting to begin training lived in a house in town with the leaders, but would join the men from the camp in their excursions. She remembered that she and her female comrades met some of the Cuban forces at the beach, and noted that: "They liked women, they would sing, play the guitar, try to teach us to swim . . ." and they eventually got into trouble once a couple of the Cuban guys tracked one of the girls back to their residence.¹¹ Despite some good times, however, the overwhelming urge was to go and train so they could return to fight.

Their chance finally came near the end of 1976. The recruits piled into buses holding about 100 people each and with Cuban escorts in case of UNITA ambushes. They spent almost a whole day driving to the camp, which lay far to the south of the capital city, Luanda. When driving south, it really became apparent to some that they were travelling through a war torn country. One man remembered seeing what he called, 'road scars,' like signs with gunshot holes and overturned trucks.¹² Another woman recalled Angola as terrible because of the war, and remembered going over a bridge made out of planks, and that now when she looks back, she finds the experience scary, though at the time she was too excited about getting training to worry too much.¹³ One soldier found the drive exciting, and recalled a stop near a pineapple farm for a rest and some fruit, and then another stop at a restaurant to eat some more along the way.¹⁴ Finally the excited recruits arrived at the camp they

¹⁰ Kodesh, W. Interview with Abraham Lentsoane (Titi Motsenang), 5 April 1993.

¹¹ von den Steinen, Interview with Tsidi Mhlambo, 12 February 1999, Yeoville, Johannesburg.

¹² Kodesh, Interview with Mochele.

¹³ Kodesh, W. Interview with Thoko Thedorah Mavuso (Zukiswa Mindala), 7 April 1993.

¹⁴ Kodesh, Interview with Mochele

would be training at, just outside of Benguela. They were very surprised to find a large empty, dirty space. A female soldier remembered arriving there to find no water, no houses, just a wide open space that was very dry like a desert. She had expected the camp to be like a school or something, with dormitories and all, and found only one house, where the Cubans guarding the place lived. She said that her dreams were just shattered. After 15-17 hours of driving, she hoped that perhaps they were still in transit, until one of the leaders came and said: "Welcome to our new camp."¹⁵ The women were given one room in the house that was there, for all of them.¹⁶ A female soldier noted that the room was small, and they slept like sardines, so that when one turned over, all of them had to do the same.¹⁷ Eventually they got the camp organised for the next group of trainees, and managed at the same time to do their six months training. Many moved on to Nova Catengue, not far from the Benguela camp, to help set that up as well, and it became the main training camp until its destruction in 1979 at the hands of the South African forces. The recruits of the next several years benefited from their efforts.

Post- Soweto generation recruits

Later recruits had better access to information about the camps. Some who were active in underground structures before they left the country, or who spent time in prison, were able to get information from trained MK soldiers who were working inside South Africa, or who had been caught and now shared a prison cell with them.

¹⁵ Kodesh, Interview with Mavuso.

¹⁶ 10 by one count, 11 by another.

¹⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Mhlambo.

Others would meet up with people they knew in exile, and exchange news of home for details of the camps, as one woman related:

Well the comrade I had left the country with had left me in Lusaka so I found him there so as he was the only person I could rely on, I took him aside, asked how life was there and such things. So he gave me a lot of information as to how should I behave . . . And in the process I also met comrades whom I'd been with in some schools here in South Africa who were already trained. So they also received me with a lot of enthusiasm. First question they asked was how was the situation back home, where who, where was who, what was who, so and so doing and all such things. And in return I also asked them about how military training is. So general[ly] there were lot of stories that we were being told. Well basically depending on who you- one met. Some of the stories were frightening, some were encouraging. But at the end we ended up being confused and just decided we're going forward. We'll just see what was in store for us.¹⁸

Some still arrived with no idea of where they were heading, and their reactions to the situations they found themselves in depended on their own perceptions of how things would be. One was surprised at how bad things were, having expected better:

As we used to see armies here inside the country living in barracks with conditions relatively looking good. When we arrived in the camps first it was a bit of a surprise for most of us. That those were real bushes and that people were living in dwellings built underground. But with all that what also surprised us was the amount of work that has been done by the comrades that were there before us who were able to build those areas and make them homes. For example, one was not aware that those dwellings are cemented. That in those dwellings there are beds for all of us. Well dressed beds with blankets, clean.¹⁹

Another expected far worse than what she found:

For me, I didn't find [the conditions] very hard, but for any person they were hard. Because I was imagining something that was worse than that. For instance, I was imagining that we are going to sleep in the hammock . . . and then we're going to eat the roots of the plants . . . So when I found tents and . . . I was sure of the three meals . . . I was satisfied because I was imagining something worse than that.²⁰

¹⁸ Interview with Mtombeli Tengimfene. Interviewer unknown, no date.

¹⁹ Interview with Zola Tyikwe, Interviewer unknown, no date.

²⁰ Interview with Tengimfene.

Some were just amazed to find themselves in these situations and couldn't have imagined what awaited them. One recruit remembered going to train in Quibaxe, east of Luanda, driving through the jungle on a tar road that eventually disappeared into rough dirt roads. It was a very eerie atmosphere, and the journey was broken by a cry of "Inyoka!" He looked up only to find a real live snake hanging from the tree on the side of the road.²¹ Whatever the circumstances, arriving at the camps was quite an experience for all, and most would remember this too for the rest of their lives.

Training in the Angolan Camps

Throughout the period covered in this study, the training programme largely stayed the same in all of the big training camps. Some differences developed as time went on, but the basic daily routine and the courses provided remained similar. Upon arrival at the training camps, the training staff divided the trainees into sections of about 10 people, then three sections combined to create a platoon, then three platoons made up a company, which would have around 100 people in it. The main training camps for the basic training had about 500 trainees doing the course at a time, and the course lasted about six months. Each section, platoon, company, and camp had a commander and a commissar. The commander was the person in charge, and the commissar was there as a person to guide people politically, and to sort out the problems that people encountered. The camp commanders and commissars were trained soldiers, while often the section, platoon, and company commanders and commissars were promising recruits singled out early on. Soldiers often referred to the commander and commissar as their "father and mother," respectively. One soldier

²¹ von den Steinen, Interview with Chalmers Nyombolo, 30 July 1998, Woodstock, Cape Town.

who remembered his introduction to this system remarked that the commander was younger than he was, and slight, and wondered how he could be a commander when he imagined they should be big and tough. Then they told him about the commissar. He wanted to know, "what's that?" They replied, "Well, he teaches politics." He said, "Politics? We don't need that, we just need orders." They explained, "But you can go to the commissar if you have problems with the commander or the other soldiers, he's like your mother, you can go to him with your problems."²² Companies often trained together, and the different companies would rotate among the classes. In addition to about 500 trainees at a time, the camps also housed the staff needed to run the camp. Howard Barrell, who has written much about MK, estimates that in the main camps: "There would be about 25 instructors covering the various subjects in the training programme; the camp administration would comprise the commander and about 10 others charged with portfolios like the political commissariat, ordinance, logistics, communications, personnel and instruction."²³

The trainees woke up between 4:30 and 5:30 in the morning, depending on the camp where they were training. The first half hour to hour of the day would be spent doing morning exercise, which usually consisted of taking a long run, sometimes up to 6 or 7 kilometres. After the morning exercise the trainees had a short time to wash, then they went to breakfast, for which they often had very little time to eat. One soldier remembers getting 3 minutes for breakfast, others about ten.

Then the trainees assembled, listened to announcements, and heard the news. There were particular soldiers selected to listen to the news every night on the radio, and also receive news from the Department of Information and Propaganda, which

²² Kodesh, Interview with Binda.

²³ Barrell, Howard. (1990). *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*, London: Penguin, 43.

they compiled and shared with the camp. This was the main way for the people living in the camps to stay in touch with the situation in the world and in South Africa. After this, it was usually around 6 or 7am, and they went to classes until about 12 or 1pm. They broke for lunch, and after lunch, there would be more classes, work to do around the camp, marches to go on, or extra studies or practices for cultural groups. They had dinner at night, and some time to relax, take extra classes, or hold practices for cultural groups. Classes consisted of firearms, engineering (sabotage, bombs, and the like), Military and Combat Work (MCW; the art of underground and guerrilla warfare, based on a system developed by the Soviets), politics, topography, first aid, physical training, tactics, and artillery. Then lights out came around 10pm. This routine went on from Monday through Friday, but Saturday and Sunday were less structured days, with sports, cultural events, extra classes, and a bit of time for relaxation.²⁴

Later groups of recruits found the routine changed, particularly during periods of heavy UNITA activity in the areas of their camps and South African bombing raids across the Namibian border. In these cases, the trainees spent most of their time outside of the camps in the bush, sleeping, training, and holding classes there, and only returned to the camps for a bit of sleep, food, and assemblies. In addition to this routine were special alarm drills, as Jack Simons described in his diary: “A mini alarm last night and a bigger more protracted one this morning starting at 4 a.m. Operation entailed evacuation of camp and taking cover some 100s of metres away.” And the next day: “Another “alert”- breakfast at 5:30, long trek along river bed, scrambling up ravine to reach culvert from the back. Return at 10 a.m. Rest of

²⁴ This section is compiled from various interviews.

morning recuperation!”²⁵ The camps during this period of the late seventies and early eighties often had extensive systems of trenches and dugouts for defence against air attacks, as well as underground bunker systems to keep the camp invisible from the air.

The politics classes constituted one of the main focuses of the training programme, with several class periods each day set aside for this. Political education focused on several different aspects, some covering the history of South Africa, the ANC, the SACP, and MK. Others would study revolutions around the world, such as those in Vietnam, Russia, and Cuba. Also covered in detail were the theories surrounding Marxism and Leninism, as well as political economy and scientific socialism.²⁶ MK focused largely on providing its soldiers with a clear political understanding of the history of their own struggle as well as other peoples' struggles, and taught them the circumstances surrounding their own conditions in the present.

Since policy usually precluded the quick few months of training and immediate return to South Africa with an AK-47, as so many of the youth fleeing the country expected, it was imperative to get them to look at the bigger picture. They studied issues like friendly and hostile countries surrounding their borders, international and regional influences, and the military might of South Africa. To keep their morale high when it felt like they would never return to South Africa to fight, they were reminded that many people had already been in exile for 15 years or so before they arrived there, and that the liberation of South Africa would not happen overnight. One soldier explained his ideas at the beginning of his training and the positive effects the political classes at Engineering camp gave him. He said that it

²⁵ Sparg, Marion, Jenny Schreiner and Gwen Ansell, (Eds). *Comrade Jack: The Political Lectures and Diary of Jack Simons, Novo Catengue*, Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 109-110.

²⁶ See Sparg, Schreiner and Ansell, (Eds). for some of the political lectures that were given at the camp.

was painful to unlearn all the wrong impressions about being a soldier, about the ANC, about the revolution. The instructors impressed upon the recruits the necessity of training and politicisation, but in the beginning he thought it a waste of time. He would rather just be given a weapon and then go stand at Johannesburg's Park Station and start shooting. In time he began to understand the point of politics and its use in rallying the people inside South Africa to their cause. He learned about the situations in neighbouring countries and the problems with infiltrating soldiers across their borders. Eventually his revolutionary zeal gave way to a more informed patience and the training at the transit camp helped him accept the situation.²⁷ This political training helped keep the soldiers' morale up even in the most discouraging times, and helped them develop the patience to wait for the time to go home. One soldier remarked:

There were some times when we used . . . not to get the normal food which we were supposed to get but in any case, we used to get three meals a day and we understood that we are people who are dependent upon the solidarity and also the commissars at the camp, they stressed the need for understanding a situation, because in exile and mostly in the camps, one lives under an abnormal life, but since one knows what one had brought him or her to Angola, then one accepts everything which will bring our people's freedom nearer.²⁸

This political education was of uppermost importance, as the ANC believed it vital to know your enemy and his capabilities, and to be well enough instructed in these things to be able to educate those inside the country, were one deployed there.

Physical activities were quite strenuous, consisting of long runs, practice marches, obstacle courses, and basic exercises to keep people fit. Often these exercises would come just after lunch, when the trainees had just eaten, and might also be tired from the morning classes and from guard duty during the night. This

²⁷ Kodesh, Interview with Binda.

²⁸ Interview with Zebulon Xulu, Interviewer unknown, no date.

course was sometimes known as “physico.” One man described what they did in his camp for this period:

Aish, you’ll be grilled, you’ll be, when you arrive in the field, you’ll see a number of instructors. Oh, you start running around, when you are running, you are ducking. Or sometimes they used to say you must talk, talking, chatting to each other. We at first didn’t know why they are doing this. And then when you, as you run more rounds and more rounds, talking dies down, you’re no longer talking. And then even ducking. So, there will be station, one for, you know, push-ups, one for stomach exercise, one for this exercise . . . You run, you start from that, do ten push-ups, move, you run to the other one, you don’t just go there walking. Do stretches, you run, do stomachs . . . you sweat, you sweat, you sweat, by the time you finish, you are dead.²⁹

Sometimes the “physico” would require the trainees to drag themselves across the hard ground on their elbows, getting back to camp with scratches and cuts if the weather were dry, or covered in mud if it happened to be raining. Some camps had a special long march, staying overnight in the bush, at the end of the basic training course. One female comrade recalled this march and noted that the day before the march a doctor would check everyone out to make sure they were fit and many people would suddenly feign sickness to escape it. Only she and one other female soldier participated with their male comrades. The trainees were told that the rivers were poisoned for the march, so they could only drink from their canteens, and there was a mock attack on the trainees at night from the instructors. On the way back, they ran out of water, and those who couldn’t make it had to be carried back. She wanted to give up on the way back, but determined to finish, and having recently fallen in love with her future husband, who was in her platoon, she used that feeling as a way to make it through³⁰. By the time the trainees finished their course, they had acquired excellent physical shape.

²⁹ von den Steinen, Interview with Lerumo Kalako, 10 June 1998, Cape Town.

³⁰ von den Steinen, Interview with Mhlambo.

One of the most exciting parts of the training for most recruits was the firearms training. Most of the youths who left South Africa during this period really ached to get their hands on a gun and learn how to shoot it, and their first chance to do this came as a great thrill. Their first sightings of trained and armed comrades were always memorable, and they could not wait to follow in the footsteps of those who had come before them. Upon arriving in Mozambique on the way to exile, many recruits were excited and amazed to see an army made up of black men and even women, looking sharp in their uniforms and carrying guns. Another had the same response upon arriving at Engineering Camp outside Luanda: "Our main interest was to see the weapons, to learn how does it work? Our eyes were always on the soldiers, looking at the weapons, thinking, 'we're going to use that thing, to learn to use that thing' . . . These young chaps, some very young, even 12, 14, Angolans, with weapons hanging there, we would always try to call them to talk to them."³¹

Eventually they got their chance. Sometimes they would start out dry firing the guns or using rubber bullets for practice, and their first attempts with live bullets were thrilling and occasionally humorous. One woman remembered: "When you shoot an AK, the cartridges come out the back of the gun, over your shoulder. There was one guy training with us who started shooting, felt the cartridges hitting him in the back, and got scared because he thought he was shooting himself by some mistake."³² Another remembers the start of firearm training:

The first time I used a weapon in Benguela, I was very excited. We were taught how to assemble and disassemble, learning to do it in minutes, calculating the time. It was very exciting. Then we learned how to shoot a target, doing something practical, and they taught us how to use a grenade. I was a little nervous the first time, but as time went on, I felt confident. We were told how to detonate explosives. It

³¹ Kodesh, Interview with Mochele.

³² von den Steinen, Interview with Mhlambo.

was very exciting to see myself carrying a gun, aiming, shooting, doing the practical things.³³

Learning to shoot really brought home to the trainees exactly why they were there and what they were accomplishing.

Life in the Camps

Some got their shooting lessons early and quickly, as the presence of UNITA in the area of many training camps made guarding the camps a necessity. In the first groups of trainees the trained instructors from the earlier generations would do the guard duties, but as security became more important or in the smaller camps, the trainees would be given the rudiments of shooting and a rifle and a couple would be sent straight to guard duty upon arrival. Guard duty was done in shifts of two hours, often during the middle of the night while everyone else was sleeping. One recruit explained what this was like:

It was difficult to get in the routine, especially the question of to guard during the night. It was very frustrating, you know, to stay two hours alone, you know, so you just find yourself thinking, you know, homesick and thinking about home and thinking about other things, because you just tell yourself that you can't sleep because there are hyenas around, so there was . . . this thing that, I don't know whether it was true, that when we sleep, the hyena maybe will come and you know, attack you, because the hyenas see you, I don't know where because it's dark, he knows that there's somebody there and when you are sleeping he can hear that you are sleeping and the hyena can come immediately. So there was those fears so you are afraid to sleep and all that, and you just feel that, you know, when you are guarding you are having a responsibility of the camp, if the enemy can come and attack, they are going to kill you too, or you are going to account during the process.³⁴

³³ Kodesh, Interview with Mavuso.

³⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Weziwe Ncame, 9 September 1998, University of the Western Cape.

The already exhausting training programme, when combined with the need to wake up for two hours on guard duty, made many trainees fall asleep the moment their heads hit their pillows, if not during classes. One instructor who organised literacy classes, since some of the soldiers were illiterate or having problems with English, found herself teaching outside of normal class hours, and having exhausted pupils, as well as being tired herself. She related:

Another problem was that, I mean once one is a trainee there's a lot of physical activity going on . . . A comrade is always tired . . . I mean I remember some of the days whereby after a night's duty I will teach and teach and then find that half of the class is asleep. I just ask the comrades, comrades, okay, I can see that everybody is tired so let's sleep. Then the whole class including the tutor will sleep. Well we used to post a sentry now who will watch for us when one of the seniors come. So when the seniors come I will wake up again and start teaching.³⁵

Another recruit who went to a smaller training camp recalled the same problem: "We had makeshift classes, bench formations on high benches, and if you fall asleep, you fall off. It was hard to stay awake in class, particularly if you had late guard duties."³⁶

Women made up only about 2% of the trainees in the early intakes of the Soweto generation, but by the 1980s their presence rose to 20%. They undertook the same training programme as the men, and their leaders expected them to perform equally. One woman recalled,

Men think that women cannot do what are called difficult tasks. For instance, when the time came for us [to] go to the shooting range for the first time, you know they would be very protective. 'Oh, this gun is too heavy, you can't use that,' and so on. And when you beat them at the shooting range, you know its like, 'What is happening, can you give us . . . how do you do it?' Because they think in order to shoot straight, you must be very strong, because the gun is heavy and the recoil is very hard, it can break your shoulder if you are not very careful and especially when it comes to pistol training. Because the rifle is much easier than the pistol. The pistol is very heavy and you

³⁵ Interview with Tengimfene. Interviewer unknown, no date.

³⁶ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Shirley Gunn, 27 October 1998, Observatory, Cape Town.

have to hold it on one hand very steady and I learnt that the trick is not to aim too long. Because when you aim too long, then the hand starts quivering and by the time you pull the trigger, you are off the target completely. So the best thing is to aim very briefly and pull and that does it. Now people tend to want to make sure that the target is within the sights and it doesn't take long to know that the sights are correct. And other than that, I didn't find so much discrimination.³⁷

Many of the men took the successes of the women as blows to their own manhood, and reacted by making fun of the women. One woman related: "Some of the men will tease us you know, especially when we're doing tactics, running, and especially if, let say if you, if I run faster than one of them, the males, they'll start passing funny remarks, 'no no no no, you can't beat me you're a woman' . . . They used to say such things, and it just would discourage you . . . I was voted best combatant two or three times in my detachment."³⁸ Sometimes the women surpassed the men at the training, which many of the male comrades did not appreciate. The small number of women in the camps sometimes created problems, and relationships between cadres or between trainees and instructors were common. The women were in great demand as partners, and with so few, the majority of men were going to have to do without. Affairs often occurred, and brought with them a wide variety of problems. The young girls training in the camp largely found themselves conducting relationships with the leaders and instructors. This caused a lot of friction between them and their fellow trainees. One MK member remembered:

They were women of substance who expected no pity and took part in exactly the same activities as male soldiers. I applaud them for their amazing courage and determination. Inevitably, women soldiers were subjected to amorous proposals from time to time but generally behaved themselves in a manner befitting the army. Rejected suitors occasionally spread malicious rumours about females who refused their advances but the women were undeterred by the gossip . . . Demand exceeded supply, there were far fewer female than male

³⁷ Bernstein, H. Interview with Ribbon Mosholi, no date.

³⁸ Kodesh, W. Interview with Mpho Msimanga, 17 August 1993.

soldiers so they were regarded as valuable assets. Those who did have love affairs conducted them discreetly, respecting the feelings of those outside a relationship.³⁹

Some MK women reported or experienced harassment and even rape at the hands of their comrades, but most completed training without mishap and became fully-fledged members of MK.

Late night guard duty constituted only one of the hardships the trainees encountered at their camps in Angola. The most universal complaint, mentioned by almost all of the ex-soldiers interviewed, was about the food. The comrades rarely complained about the amount of food they received, which was adequate for their survival. One recruit, in fact, was amazed at how often he was fed:

You come to a place that is better than your own home . . . when I'm saying this, better in the sense that look we are not used to three meals . . . if you have eaten in the morning you'd see when you come back. But you come to a place that insist that there's three meals a day. Full meals.⁴⁰

However sometimes the camps in Angola experienced severe shortages. Usually this did not involve people foregoing meals, though occasionally this was the case. More often they would simply find themselves facing a monotonous menu while they waited for supplies to arrive. Sometimes this would be pap, or rice and beans, or tea and bread for three meals a day for a week or so. Otherwise, depending on donations and supplies from foreign countries, they often found themselves with large stocks of something they despised, such as powdered eggs, which all who mentioned them hated. Nor did they appreciate the yellow mealie meal that prevailed in Angola. They would occasionally find worm-filled beans for their nourishment, which had simply to be choked down, as weeding all the worms out left hardly anything, and

³⁹ Matakata, Jama. (2004). *Hills of Hope*, Pietermaritzburg: Nutrend Productions, 36.

⁴⁰ Interview with Petane.

consumed too much time. Otherwise, meals usually consisted of rice, pap, or bread, with tinned meats and tea or cocoa. Occasionally fresh meat would be obtained through hunting expeditions, though this wasn't usually the case, since fairness required enough meat to share with all 500 trainees and the staff members. Fruit was sometimes plentiful in the camps that were situated on old plantations, with lots of bananas, mangoes, and pineapples to enjoy. But the day to day food supplies tended to be monotonous, especially in times of shortage, and this is what the soldiers remembered even after all these years.

Sickness also debilitated the camps. Some camps did have their own doctor, or 'medico,' in residence, but often only a regional doctor would do rounds of the different camps for check-ups and complaints. Emergency cases had to be driven to the nearest town with a hospital, or even all the way to Luanda. Occasionally, people died from their illnesses without ever returning to South Africa. The morale of the remaining soldiers suffered as a result of these deaths. Malaria brought the biggest problem to the camps, and the mosquito nets mentioned above were definitely necessary, as well as the anti-malarial pills offered in some of the camps. Jack Simons, in his diary kept while in the camps in Angola as a political instructor in 1979, wrote: "Feb. 8, Thursday . . . Am told that +/- 120 cases of malaria- nearly half our population." and then later, on Feb. 14: "I think malaria has shaken me badly- morale, drive, interest in work, the lot. Certainly took the glamour (such as there was) out of Novo [Catengue] . . . I dislike crawling under mosquito net, and dislike even more being bitten!"⁴¹ A large proportion of the trainees caught malaria at least once, and many went through it several times. One such person was an instructor at

⁴¹ Sparg, Schreiner and Ansell, (Eds). 103, 105.

Benguela who caught it many times and eventually shot himself, citing his constant attacks of malaria as one of the reasons for his suicide.⁴²

Suicides also occurred for other reasons, and this was not the only case of a soldier who decided to end his life. Anything from boredom with years in the camps without sight of returning home, failed love affairs, and fear of getting punished for indiscipline, to basic homesickness could trigger this dire reaction in both untrained and trained MK soldiers. One soldier remembers three suicides during her years in the camps, one due to a failed love affair, in which the man shot both his lover and himself, and then two others at nearly the same time that another soldier died of typhoid fever.⁴³ These sorts of events were tragic in themselves, and even more so under the circumstances in which they occurred. The soldiers who left everything behind often found themselves wondering about the purpose of it all, and if their fellow soldiers had died in vain, as so many of them spent many years in the camps in Angola, doing further or specialised training, or working on training the new recruits, when the struggle in South Africa didn't seem to be advancing noticeably. The morale of the camps dipped lowest during periods such as these.

One issue of supply for the camps that became incredibly contentious was something that seems like a natural ingredient for any group of soldiers: cigarettes. Towards the mid-1980s, reports started to emerge and gain credence worldwide about the dangers of cigarette smoking. However, as anyone addicted to nicotine is sure to note, all the lectures in the world can't keep people from wanting another cigarette, especially when it is one of the rare pleasures of a difficult existence. The rations for the MK soldiers were set at 2 packs a week per comrade, which were easy enough to

⁴² von den Steinen, Interview with Mhlambo.

⁴³ von den Steinen, Interview with Ncame.

obtain until these newly accepted reports created problems. Many of the countries sending supplies to the ANC, largely European and particularly Scandinavian countries, always had a policy of sending only supplies that were necessary for the survival of ANC members in exile, of which a large number were MK soldiers. They always refused to help with any sorts of weapons of war, which generally came from the Eastern Bloc countries. With the advent of the anti-smoking movements around the world, many of these same countries also began to have problems of conscience with supplying something potentially lethal to the soldiers. One memo from this period explained the side of the anti-smokers and the lack of supplies, saying: "Our own Comrades in the medical field in Europe, some of them professors, have told me personally that smoking is even worse than publicly alleged . . . Therefore forcing our donors to supply cigarettes, is like asking them for food, clothing, transport, medicines—' & a little bit of poison as well please.'"⁴⁴ Another memo which accepted these problems but dealt with the reality of addiction asserted, "Cigarettes burning issue: We ask for these but no response. In all countries campaigning agst. smoking, gives all sorts of diseases. So they do not want to give cigarettes. But not fair to withhold cigarettes. We will give some cigarettes but commissars must educate agst. smoking."⁴⁵ This problem caused major concerns for logistics officers and diplomats, as well as the smokers themselves.

Life in the camps was not all so terrible, however, and weekends were often the best time of all, a time of rest and relaxation, fun and games. Soccer teams were often organised, giving themselves names like 'Mandela Eleven' and 'Sisulu United', or the 'Bolsheviks' and the 'Spears' and games usually occurred on Saturdays.

⁴⁴ Memo, date and author unknown, from ANC Lusaka collection.

⁴⁵ Memo, date and author unknown (but mentions mutiny in 1984, so must be around mid-1980s), ANC Lusaka collection.

Volleyball games and swimming where possible were also popular. Requisition orders from the camps and requests sent to countries sending supplies to the ANC often asked for sporting equipment, one requesting jerseys, shorts, socks and boots for four rugby teams and 12 soccer teams, 20 rugby balls, equipment for softball, baseball, cricket, hockey, table tennis, and volleyball, track suits, canvas shoes, dumbbells, skipping ropes, weights for weight lifting, books on sport, and karate and judo suits.⁴⁶ Indoor board games also became popular for leisure time, and again the requisition orders reveal the games played. One listed: "10 sets Scrabble, 10 sets Monopoly, 10 sets Chess, 10 sets Draughts, 10 sets Chinese Checkers, 10 sets Playing cards, 10 sets Playing cards (2), 10 boxes Table Tennis balls, 6 Table bats."⁴⁷ Despite the irony of socialist-oriented soldiers playing Monopoly, the games proved popular among the cadres. Weekends also brought enjoyment of cultural activities as well as films and radio. One MK veteran remembered:

There's many cultural groups on camps. There were the Zulu dance group, the Xhosa dance group, there was the Sotho dance and many other traditional dance- South African dances. There was also the . . . choir. There was the small quartets, there was drama, many other- so we'll be divided amongst- so I decided to join the Zulu dance . . . because I didn't want to do something that I knew like singing. I wanted to learn something new. So I joined the Zulu dance. So on certain days we'd go on certain evenings to recreational hall, call it the stage whereby each of those groups now will perform. Used to be wonderful night. Sometimes we'll go and watch films. Most of the films we watched were Soviet films.⁴⁸

Also popular was listening to music and singing. One woman recalled: "Saturday nights, we would gather around the fire and start singing, before the curfew

⁴⁶ Requisition list, date and origin unknown, from the ANC Lusaka collection in the Mayibuye Centre archives.

⁴⁷ Requisition list, date and origin unknown, from the ANC Lusaka collection in the Mayibuye Centre archives.

⁴⁸ Interview with Tengimfene.

comes, we would sing after listening to the news, or if we were not singing, we just sit and tune VOA [Voice of America], a jazz station and just talk about home and everything.”⁴⁹ Music also emerged as a popular activity. Jazz and traditional African music particularly dominated as the favourite types. Musical instruments frequently appeared in the requisition orders, and the ANC created the Amandla Cultural Ensemble, which included several MK soldiers, and travelled the world performing and spreading awareness of the ANC and its struggle.

Holidays also brought a time for suspension of the training schedule and the opportunity for a good time, with dancing, music, dramatic performances, and often feasts with food not usually available to the soldiers and occasionally with beer for each person. Jack Simons wrote in his diary:

Feb. 24, Saturday: Yesterday’s commemoration of Red Army Day went off well, with a display of relevant Soviet literature, introduced effectively by members of ex-Moscow “special” platoon- a baseball match . . . and a football match between the “champion” Dynamos and a “picked team.” At night a culture evening- speeches by Cuban Commissar and Camp Commander (very good), followed by concert (highlight a drama, centred as usual around a shebeen, the most vividly remembered social aspect of Soweto life- coupled with crime. B/stan removals and resistance the political element a relatively new note in “Shebeen” acts).⁵⁰

The weekends also brought great homesickness for many of the soldiers. During the week, the training programme took up so much time that they were often too exhausted to think of home, but on the weekends, with more leisure time and activities like sports, singing, cultural dancing, and music that they had enjoyed in South Africa, thoughts often turned towards home. Memories of Friday night ‘jols’ in Soweto, Saturday afternoon soccer games in Cape Town, or Sundays spent with

⁴⁹ Bernstein, Interview with Mosholi.

⁵⁰ Sparg, Schreiner and Ansell. (Eds). 108.

friends and family would often turn the soldiers introspective and they would long for home.

One of the overwhelming responses from ex-soldiers who have been interviewed by many different interviewers about life in the camps is the spirit of camaraderie that existed there. The soldiers who joined MK came from all over South Africa, from Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth, smaller cities and towns around the country, and even from the rural areas. They came from different class backgrounds and family experiences, and they were black, coloured, Indian, and white. They left a country where the greatest problems included race and class, and arrived in exile to find a situation filled with people from the same place but without these problems. This is not to say it was utopian: reports still described some favouritism according to ethnicity or nepotism, though this was largely attributed to the leadership. But overall, many of the soldiers had fond memories of the interaction between themselves and others. One man asserted that: "The camp made us feel like South Africans and not white or black or even Capetonians."⁵¹ Another ex-MK soldier added: "Here we were from quite different schools . . . from different parts of society, and we just communicated . . . there was no question, you are from a higher class, you are from where, you are from the rural area."⁵² And a white comrade who did basic training in the camps eloquently expressed: "I've discovered my South Africanist, if I can call it that, outside. Of course, I missed . . . family, friends that I had there and the place itself. But . . . I didn't feel home as a

⁵¹ Interview with Thamsanqa Ngwevela, Interviewer unknown, no date.

⁵² Bernstein, H. Interview with Mongezi Stofile, no date.

white South African in a country whose politics I hated. And its only coming out that I was able to . . . find a South Africa that I do really love.”⁵³

This camaraderie and spirit of togetherness, especially when combined with the political training, made it much easier to overcome the problems encountered in the camps. One soldier asserted: “Well, life in the camps, one cannot say it’s not difficult. It is difficult. But there is that spirit which makes you to carry on.”⁵⁴ And a female comrade noted that: “It wasn’t hard because at that time we were willing to do it. Its only now that we realise that what we were doing there was hard.”⁵⁵ This sense of purpose, as well as the spirit that existed among the comrades, made life in the camps bearable even during tough times.

The leadership was also instrumental in morale, visiting the camps on occasion, particularly for holidays and graduations of basic training groups, giving speeches and visiting with the trainees. But their biggest impact, if people’s memories can measure this, was the way they interacted with the soldiers, by putting their policies and rhetoric into action. One ex-soldier remembered a visit by Oliver Tambo to the camp: “The president comes. He’s around here. We queue in the same queue we are going to get our food. This impresses us.”⁵⁶ Another remembers a day at Engineering Camp soon after he arrived in Angola and they were queuing for food:

There was a white guy in our queue, you know? Uh, he was standing there, then some, I think those who knew him said- ‘do you know who this person is?’ They said, ‘that’s Joe Slovo’. ‘Joe Slovo? No man, not this one, man’ . . . we expected Joe Slovo to look like a cowboy, you know? <laughs> ‘And how can he be so modest in the queue? With us you know? He must go in front, man, he’s the leader’ and so

⁵³ Bernstein, H. Interview with Barry Guilder, no date.

⁵⁴ Bernstein, H. Interview with Michael Meli, no date.

⁵⁵ Bernstein, H. Interview with Joyce Stofile, no date.

⁵⁶ Interview with Petane.

on. No, he was queuing there. 'Why does he look so clean, you know? He's a terrorist?'⁵⁷

Having the top leaders in the queue waiting their turn for food like regular trainees gave much more than lip service to the ANC's ideas of equality.

Conditions in the Angolan Camps in the Early 1980s

The soldiers who had left South Africa in the wake of the Soweto uprisings found the camps in Angola exciting during their first few years there. Their instructors, largely Cubans and Soviets with high levels of training themselves, provided interesting and well thought out training programmes. The camps had some problems with supplies, but the overwhelming urge to train and return to South Africa and the zeal and enthusiasm with which the recruits approached their training often reduced these problems to mere inconveniences in their minds. The new and very exciting training encouraged them to dream of their imminent return to South Africa.

As these young soldiers completed their initial training, many attended advanced training programmes, both in Angola and abroad, often in Soviet bloc countries, Cuba, or in various independent African countries. A few returned to South Africa as trained MK soldiers, but only a small minority. Upon completing their further training, many returned to Angola, and spent their time there doing more training, working in support capacities for the organisation there, or instructing the new recruits who continued to trickle into the camps in Angola. As more and more time passed, the enthusiasm and sense of immediate return to South Africa turned into a more jaded attitude in many of MK's now trained soldiers. By the early 1980s, some of the people living in the camps in Angola had already spent more than five years outside of South Africa, and didn't see much action of any worth going on

⁵⁷ Kodesh, Interview with Binda.

inside the country. Demoralisation and depression set in for many of them, as well as boredom and stagnation. Problems which seemed small and inconsequential when they first arrived now grew to be significant and inescapable. This change of attitude in many of the soldiers living in Angola became a serious obstacle for the organisation.

The conditions in the Angolan camps in the early 1980s were not ideal in the best of times. The conditions combined with the general feeling of demoralisation on the parts of the troops could only make things worse. Lines of supply, for example, became a common problem during this period. Food, clothing and medicine, though sometimes found in great quantities in storage facilities in Luanda, didn't reach the camps, particularly the furthest outlying ones. Food was a very hot issue, and many registered complaints about it. While food had always been a problem in the camps in the earlier days, comrades readily accepted the conditions, as they still had the revolutionary zeal that let them justify the problems and accept them as their lot. As time went on, however, complaints became more frequent and the issue commonly arose in the camps.

Fresh meat and vegetables became very scarce in the early 1980s. When Wolfie Kodesh visited the "Moscow" camp in Angola in 1984, he learned that they had had fresh meat only once in the last month, eggs once in 2 or 3 weeks, and no fresh vegetables at all. They further told him: "[the] office stopped us getting fresh meat because they said there was no money. This was stopped for two years."⁵⁸ Often the supplies never reached the camps from Luanda or were even unavailable in Luanda. A solution existed, however: many of the local towns or villages in the vicinities of the camps had fresh meat and vegetables, and some people in the camps

⁵⁸ Kodesh, Wolfie, Moscow 6/12/84, from notebook on projects in Angola.

bartered with the villagers with surplus clothing or foodstuffs in order to get preferred food. Unfortunately, the leadership discouraged this practice, and people who bartered for goods with these surplus products could be harshly disciplined for their actions. In his notebook on projects in Angola from 1984, Kodesh suggests that bartering be allowed, supplied, and controlled, and seen as a viable alternative for getting fresh food to the camps.⁵⁹ But his report came too late to stop the issue from exploding.

Medicine and medical treatment also emerged as serious problems. In many camps, rampant malaria received but minimal treatment. The leadership had to find a way to deal with the problem, and one report submitted for the National Consultative Conference in 1985 pointed out:

- 1- In our camps there is little transport or at times no transport at all for the Medical department.
- 2- Trainees are normally going to camps for training without Medical check-up at all.
- 3- Malaria cases are kept in our Medical points for a long time even though the medical officer sees that the patient gets worse without being taken to the hospital in Luanda
- 4- No proper food or diet for our Malaria cases in the West.⁶⁰

The lack of proper medical care escalated into more than just an inconvenience. Many people in the camps came down with malaria, and some had to watch their fellow comrades suffer through the illness, or even to die from it for lack of proper medical care. At times like these feelings of futility would set in among the cadres, who would wonder why this comrade of theirs could just die in exile, never having the chance to set foot in South Africa again. Some thought that deaths like this were senseless and should have been prevented with a more aggressive policy about deploying people back into South Africa.

⁵⁹ Kodesh, Wolfie, Moscow 6/12/84, from notebook on projects in Angola.

⁶⁰ National Consultative Conference 1985: MHQ unit Lusaka, regional preparation document.

Transport also developed into a substantial problem in the early 1980s, and often exacerbated other problems. Without proper transport, it became even more difficult to get food, medicine, and medical officers to and from the camps. Kodesh's notebook pointed out that adequate transport would consist of one truck and one Landrover for each camp: a modest goal. However, he found that one camp had one Landrover and no truck, and yet another had no working transport, and had to borrow a truck from another camp, which could not easily spare it.⁶¹ More transport would also have allowed periodic trips to Luanda to break the boredom of the routines in the camps.

Pure boredom and stagnation mushroomed into one of the biggest problems of the camps. One soldier noted: "on a typical day in the camps, a cadre would be awaken[ed] at 5 am. He would drag himself from his sleeping bag to face another day of boring routine, in the company of the same faces, thousands of miles from home."⁶² Another soldier explained that some of the least disciplined people in the camp, who were always complaining and hating life there, performed admirably once they were sent back to South Africa, but just couldn't tolerate the waiting and the boredom of the camps.⁶³ Often the training material in the classes did not change, even if they had been in the camps for years and had gone through several courses. One man related his response to the repetitive material:

If you are going to teach me that the ANC was formed in 1912 for 6 years, that thing is not going to change. You taught me that when I came here, I've done my training, you taught me that, the ANC was formed in Bloemfontein in 1912. Even 1980 I must still study that,

⁶¹ Kodesh, Wolfie, notebook on projects in Angola.

⁶² Twala, Mwezi, and Bernard, Ed. (1994). *Mbokodo Inside MK: Mwezi Twala- A Soldier's Story*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.44.

⁶³ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Garth Strachan, 29 October 1998 and 9 November 1998, Cape Town.

come on . . . Let him come to us and ask us what we are interested to know. We can study the history of Vietnam, Cuba, a number of countries. See we ever advocated for academic classes. But this up and down that we are doing it's bringing no development. Rather than studying the history of the ANC every day for 3 years.⁶⁴

Even beyond simple repetition, other problems plagued the training programme. In the first few years of the camps in Angola, highly trained instructors, Cubans, Russians, and South Africans who had been in exile for many years would lead the classes. Later, as more and more trainees finished their initial training and went on to advanced training, they began to return to the camps as instructors. But many of them simply regurgitated the information that had been taught to them. One woman remembered:

The instructors were comrades who had been trained in Europe, especially in the Soviet Union, and the tendency was just to regurgitate information they had learned earlier. And it created a lot of problems because when comrades start asking questions, especially sensitive things like explosives, you know, 'why do you mix this proportion of this acid? Why not the other acid?' and so on, and comrades used to get stuck.⁶⁵

When this repetition and lack of dynamic teaching style was combined with the long length of time many soldiers found themselves spending in Angola, the effect became devastating.

Beyond the basic boredom, the supplies of recreational materials broke down during this period. Libraries lacked books, games and sports equipment were insufficient, and film and video equipment was often inoperable. They were not even allowed a day or so to take a trip to Luanda for the cinema or the beach. One soldier remembered them complaining about this:

There were times we say, 'hey comrades, we are tired now, we are too much in this bush . . . Take us for a trip to Luanda, we must go and see

⁶⁴ Kodesh, Interview with Lentsoane.

⁶⁵ Bernstein, Interview with Mosholi.

the beach, go to the cinema and come back.' [The] answer that was given was, 'comrades this is a revolution and that is not possible.' And . . . a person who's telling you that 'this is the revolution', he goes to Luanda . . . and once he reaches Luanda, he goes to the beach, he goes to the cinema. He comes and join in the camp . . . Now you're asking for that chance, they say its a revolution, its not possible.⁶⁶

This boredom and despair of ever seeing home again took a devastating toll on the soldiers living in Angola. When bad lines of supply and inadequate food and medical care exacerbated these feelings, the likelihood of rebellion increased steadily. These conditions, when combined with other problems, led directly to a mutiny in the Angolan camps in 1983, which is discussed in Chapter Five.

In the end, all the training and hardships led to one goal: return to South Africa to attack the apartheid regime. Some people never had that opportunity. They remained in exile as instructors, students, or party functionaries. Some despaired of ever getting home again or of winning the struggle, and created new lives outside South Africa. And some got the chance to operate in the front line states and even inside South Africa, finally putting their training to use.

⁶⁶ Kodesh, Interview with Lentsoane.

Chapter 4: The Azanian People's Liberation Army in Exile

New Way

New way of life without fear of death
Is the only way to freedom
Others must die for others to live
You must go with me comrade, for the road is long...
Thorny... and tortuous.
My dear brother and comrade, I need your help in this long way
Fear not the enemy... for the people are with you
Comrade, take my hand... for us the road is long
Comrade, take your gun.
I know we have neither place to sleep, nor food to eat
We have no coats and no blankets to cover our now
Shivering bodies; the enemy has them galore!
Let us go comrade; they belong to us!
Victory is tomorrow!¹

Introduction

The Pan Africanist Congress also faced leadership problems, stagnancy, competition for resources and support, and an absence of influence inside South Africa in the years before the Soweto Uprisings. However, unlike the ANC, the PAC's leadership problems had not been resolved when the rush of recruits headed their way. The ongoing crisis spilled over into the next generation and crippled the organisation for years. It is discussed in detail in chapter five. While the PAC did not have the opportunity to establish training camps in one region, or to create a common programme for all of its recruits, it did have the support of many sympathetic nations that offered training for its wave of recruits. One source estimated that the PAC actively recruited about 130 people between September 1975 and January 1977, though many others found their way to the organisation without the assistance of PAC members.² The one-third of the Soweto generation that fled South Africa and did not

¹ Johnson, Raymond. (1977). *New Way*. In *Azania News*, January-June, PAC of Azania, 38.

² Davis, Stephen M. (1987). *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South Africa's Hidden War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 32.

join the ANC mostly ended up with the PAC or just took their chances as unaligned.³

This crop of new members spread to the far corners of the world and returned to Tanzania with varied skills and experiences. All hoped that they would be quickly trained, then infiltrated back into South Africa to take on the apartheid system, but few got the opportunity.

Foreign Training

For the Pan Africanist Congress, when the wave of recruits came out of South Africa from 1976, no central camps for training APLA cadres yet existed. Recruits to APLA would stay for a time in Dar es Salaam, then be chosen to do training in one of a number of sympathetic countries. For this reason, the APLA soldiers' training experiences are far more varied and divergent than those who joined MK. The PAC concentrated efforts on developing relationships with like-minded countries and obtaining training for their soldiers. Several African countries supported the PAC and provided training for the APLA recruits, including Libya, Ghana, Guinea, Uganda, Nigeria, Egypt and Sudan. Further abroad, trainees took courses in Lebanon, Syria, Yugoslavia, China, and Kampuchea, present day Cambodia. A man who had been in exile since the early 1960s recalled the process of sending the new recruits to training:

Sometimes you would send a group of cadres, a group of trainees . . . a group of two hundred, hundred and fifty to a country like Egypt, or a country like Ghana, or Guinea, these groups, but those were not cadres, they were just there for training, from there they would come back to Tanzania.⁴

One writer explained the sequence of events:

³ Davis, 57.

⁴ Interview with Mfanasekhaya Gqobose, Interviewer unknown, 18 August 2001, New Brighton. From SADET's Oral History Project.

[One group] joined the PAC in December 1976, and was part of the first group of 25 PAC members sent to China for military training. The second group was sent to China in June in 1977, while others left for Cambodia, Uganda and Libya. The groups sent to China were given training in intelligence, counter-intelligence and infantry. The reason for this kind of training was to prepare the first fifty cadres for their return to South Africa to create what was called military pockets in preparation of the eventual arrival of other units that specialized in conventional and guerrilla combat.⁵

He went on to relate the story of a man who left South Africa just before the Soweto Uprisings, and who detailed the different groups that went for training during that period:

Moerane recalls that four distinct groups of new recruits into APLA were sent to different countries for military training. Firstly, when his group arrived in Uganda it joined with cadres of the Basotholand Congress People's Party (BCPP) and were sent for training in Libya. This group of cadres was soon joined in Libya by another group of APLA recruits. Their training included infantry, espionage and weapons handling and this group left Libya after nine months. Another group of 9 cadres was sent from Libya to Syria to undergo commando training. The third group arrived in Tanzania late in early 1977 and was sent for military training to China. The fourth group that had most of the products of the 1976 Student Uprising were sent to Kampuchea for military training and that is where they got lost for some time.⁶

Some few soldiers in the Soweto Generation were trained in Tanzania, particularly at the Itumbi camp in the Mbeya district, though training in the PAC camps in Tanzania became more established and common in the 1980s and 1990s.

Examination of the questionnaires filled in by many APLA soldiers reveals some training specialties in different countries. Libya often appeared as a place for basic training in infantry, particularly during the mid to late 1970s. Guinea provided basic infantry training, and also specialisations in anti-aircraft measures and counter

⁵ Ka Plaatjie, Thami. Poqo and the Azanian People's Liberation Army, draft chapter for *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980* by the South African Democracy Education Trust. (Draft chapter given to the author by Ka Plaatjie, and this section did not appear in the final articles published.)

⁶ Ka Plaatjie, Thami. Draft chapter.

intelligence. Uganda provided a commander's course to some APLA trainees, as well as basic infantry and mines training.⁷ Nigeria maintained a special relationship with the PAC, offering both an Officer's course and Air Force training. A group of 22 APLA trainees went there in 1977 for the vitally important air force training. Given the strong enemy air force the training offered an excellent opportunity, as it would not only give them the knowledge needed to fly aircraft, but would also allow for strategic sabotage of South Africa's Air Force equipment and perhaps even capture of enemy planes.⁸ Other countries provided courses in infantry, guerrilla warfare, commando training, intelligence and security, and other specialties.

When APLA recruits first arrived in Tanzania, they lived in and around Dar es Salaam because the Tanzanian government had a policy that untrained cadres were not allowed to stay in the PAC's military camps.⁹ Their time in Dar often involved learning about politics and the history of the PAC. One man recalled:

In Tanzania, at that time our main duty was to attend political classes. That was the main thing. It was what we discovered was that the PAC emphasised the need that all members must be politically matured. And the PAC has as a principle that before they give you a gun, you should have been politically educated. Then they feel they can then entrust the weapon to such a person. Because they fear that if you are not politically matured, or developed, you could easily miss the objective, either to use the weapon in places or against specific targets that would end up embarrassing the organisation, or against other members.¹⁰

Another man remembered his time in Tanzania, waiting to go for training: "In Tanzania, that's where we met other comrades . . . who were very instrumental in our growing as future commanders of APLA. They taught us politics, deep politics.

⁷ APLA questionnaires.

⁸ von den Steinen, L. Interviews with Vusi Make, 15 August 2005, Centurion, and Brig. Gen. Barney Hlatswayo, 16 August 2005, Pretoria.

⁹ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

¹⁰ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

African Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, Marxism, Leninism, that's how we got it.¹¹ Often the waiting was difficult. People were selected to go for specific training programmes, and there was no telling when one would be called. Some went for training quickly, while others stayed in Dar es Salaam for long periods. Excitement about going to receive training often mixed with frustration at not getting there fast enough. One APLA soldier explained, "At first, I must be honest with you, I was not really happy, you know, if some of your close friends are departing and you are remaining behind, it was not a nice feeling. But one had the hope that surely my turn will come. And if that turn comes, then one must appreciate and grip the opportunity as it comes."¹² Eventually the recruits got their orders, and went to the far corners of the world where they received their initial training.

Each place had very different circumstances, living conditions, language and cultural issues, and training programmes. People's specific stories about their own experiences in various countries add to the history of APLA and provide a glimpse of the training the soldiers received. Barney Hlatswayo, who became the Chief of Staff of APLA in later years, remembered his original three month training in China in 1978. Their training started with a political and cultural component:

When we went to China the first three weeks to a month was used as part of the political training, because we were visiting all the historical sites, where we were given lectures on the Chinese revolution and the work of the communist party, which was part of the curriculum. Where you'd practically visit the site, understand and see for yourself the site, and be addressed by people who took part in the struggle. Then the whole tour ended up in Southern China in the province of Guangzhou, where the military training then started.¹³

¹¹ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Blacks Joyi, 21 November 2002, Cape Town.

¹² von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

¹³ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

After initial introduction to China and lessons about Chinese history, they went to a training camp and began the practical training:

The training programme mainly it involved tactics, it involved the methods of how to organise politically and methods of how to establish a guerrilla army. Light weapons manufactured in the East, and light to medium weapons manufactured in the West because of the concept that the bulk of your weapons surely will not come from outside, per their own experience. Yes, whatever you organise from outside should assist you to capture more from your enemy. And then we did a phase on what they called home-made explosives, how to utilise normal chemicals that you can purchase over the counter to manufacture explosives. Then plus the whole regimental discipline, the drill, I think then that really was more or less the training.¹⁴

His political training during his time in Dar es Salaam while waiting to go abroad for training served him well during the training programme in China, and he emerged from the course confident in his abilities:

One really appreciated and maybe due to the political education that one had in Dar es Salaam before the training, one had a better perspective of the essentials of their revolution and when the programme was presented again we had the opportunity to request an addition of that or exclusion of that. And that was approved. But all in all I think one felt that he was better equipped after the training than before . . . It was, one realised that in South Africa there was no chance that one could obtain that kind of training, in South Africa the military training was exclusively reserved for whites, and I speak under correction, but I know even blacks who were part of the system, they were not allowed to carry a weapon. So one had that sense of appreciation that now I am better equipped, more knowledgeable than the rest of our countrymen.¹⁵

Another man explained the training programme in China:

When PAC sent cadres to China to training, they were going to train, they were going to train not only in handling arms . . . we had to learn all sorts of things, we had to learn of course even the nature of the Chinese revolution, learn about the Chinese revolution, its nature and everything, we had learn how to exist . . . you had to plant your own crops here, your means of sustenance you see, that was also the aspect

¹⁴ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

¹⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

of self-reliance, you had to subsist on your own as long as you get the ground and tools to do that, and eh . . . in other words you can't get supplies to . . . struggle, things like food and things like that . . . the armies would do, but you do it yourself, on your own, you plough and get food by your own means.¹⁶

The Chinese programme thus focused not only on the history and lessons from the Chinese revolution, but also on self-reliance as a crucial aspect of guerrilla warfare.

The training in Guinea provided a good base for the APLA fighters who went through that programme. They faced more difficult living conditions than in many other places. Letlapa Mphahlele gave a detailed description of the conditions in Guinea. Upon arrival, the poverty of the country struck him:

Conakry looked antiquated, with dilapidated buildings and potholes and battered cars in the streets. Poverty hung like a pall over a country that had obtained its independence from France in 1958. When the French left, they uprooted telephone poles, emptied offices of furniture and important project files and stationery, removed windowpanes from buildings, took all the money they could lay their hands on, and shipped the stuff off to Europe. In their wake they left a poor but proud nation. Poverty did not deter Guinea from helping the oppressed on the continent and beyond.¹⁷

Training took place at the Centre National Kwame Nkrumah, just north of Conakry.

Mphahlele remembered the conditions in the camp:

The instructors gave each one of us a mosquito net and a pair of new yellow sheets . . . We were warned never to experiment with using paper in their toilets because the sewerage pipes were very narrow and designed to carry waterborne waste and nothing more. In place of toilet paper, we had to use water. In the early days we spent hours washing our hands with soap and sand and rubbing them against the concrete slabs to erase the stubborn smell. We laughed hilariously and consoled ourselves that what we were going through was part of the training . . . We slept on bunk beds. After a short stay in a small dormitory, we were moved to a large one called Robert Sobukwe. It was one of about ten of its size and was named after the PAC's

¹⁶ Interview with Gqobose, from SADET.

¹⁷ Mphahlele, Letlapa. (2002). *Child of this Soil: My Life as a Freedom Fighter*, Cape Town: Kwela Books, 83.

founding president. Every dormitory or facility in the centre was named after a revolutionary of one shade or another . . . Every dormitory had its own set of toilets, showers, taps and concrete washing.¹⁸

Another man who trained in Guinea said that life in the training camp was: “Very interesting, if you like hard life. I’m one person who is like that. I like suffering. Sort of a hobby sometimes, I don’t know. But sometimes you don’t realise that you’re suffering because you sometimes get used to it.”¹⁹ Mphahlele explained life in the camp:

The typical day was characterised by waking up early in the morning, and washing. Basically showering because the climate there is hot throughout and we enjoyed a cold shower. Then preparing for breakfast, that was breakfast in name because we used to prepare tea with the leaves from wild trees. I mean wild tree leaves and of course we used to drink tea with a small piece of French loaf. And from there we would wait for instructors, military instructors, depending on who was going to be in charge on that particular day, it could be physical trainer or military instructor on shooting, etc. But overall the whole training was characterised by disorganisation, we were there only nine months, but the course, we ended taking a year, because there was a lot of absenteeism on the instructors’ part. And sometimes instructors would be there, but interpreters wouldn’t be there. Because they were speaking French and the European language that was close to us was English so it was difficult when there was no interpreter for any instruction to take place.²⁰

A command report from Malusi Koli, the APLA commander in Guinea in 1987, provided a list of instruction the trainees had received in March of that year:

1. Compass
2. Combatant as an observer
3. Different actions of a soldier in defensive
4. Diffe[re]nt actions of a soldier in offensive
5. F.N. R.P.D. Machine gun (Soviet made)
6. Nuclear weapon
7. Chemical weapon

¹⁸ Mphahlele, 83-85.

¹⁹ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

²⁰ von den Steinen, Interview with Letlapa Mphahlele, 17 December 2002, Cape Town.

8. General rules of subordination
9. Transmission for military use (communication)
10. Combatant as a messenger or as an agent of transmission
11. Special care for wounded people or soldiers in the battlefield
12. Day time infantry group in defensive position
13. Self defence or close combat
14. Different actions as chief of groups
15. Transportation of wounded soldiers
16. Independent exploratory patrol group
17. Independent security group
18. Infantry group at the offensive
19. Rocket launcher R.P.G.²¹

The report also explained that the trainees had been issued rifles and given blank bullets to shoot. The commander asserted: "In all these activities the group showed more interest, and level of participation is greatly encouraging. Carrying rifles at their backs seems to have boosted the morale of us all."²² Long marches characterized training in Guinea. Mphahlele remembered one coming at the end of their programme:

Mont Kakoulima. When the instructors mentioned these two words, I was gripped by fear- as they intended. The mountain maintained its ancient and majestic posture. It appeared to be looking forward to our long-awaited arrival and its revenge for the humiliation we had inflicted on it, spraying it with anti-aircraft artillery fire. We were going into guerrilla manoeuvres in the terrain around the mountain; the climax would be the toughest of all exercises, a march to the summit. Everyone who has been on Mont Kakoulima tells you that you need strong bones to carry you to the top. We strengthened our knees with tough exercises and were ready when the day dawned. We packed our rations of rice and large quantities of dried fish- its stench wriggled our noses. During the exercise we slept in our hammocks with wet and muddy boots on, ready for any call to action. We constantly moved camp, sometimes just when sleep was starting to massage our tired bodies. The weakness in this exercise was that we were barred from using blank ammunition, which would have made it almost real. The ban was in place because of another one of Guinea's endless coup alerts [in early 1982].²³

²¹ Command Report, written by M. Koli, Commander, marked as received by headquarters in Tanzania on 16 May 1987.

²² Command Report, written by M. Koli, Commander, marked as received by headquarters in Tanzania on 16 May 1987.

²³ Mphahlele, 88.

The commander's report also described a long march as part of the training:

They introduced a long march on the first week of this month. The distance was about 35 kilometres. This march involved going up a mountain, through dense bushes, doing manoeuvres, mock attacks and jumping obstacles. We were carrying military bags with a capacity of 25 kg, an hammock and C.K.C. assault rifles. This march takes place every Saturday.²⁴

Another man who trained in Guinea remembered longer training exercises outside of the camp, "you go and stay about two weeks in the bush with nothing to eat but what you find around, in your surroundings."²⁵ Mphahlele remembered the highlight of the graduation of his group of trainees, when the president of Guinea came to congratulate them, and gave them each a high quality watch with his picture on the face.²⁶ Though a difficult life with tough living conditions, the training in Guinea was usually of a high quality and the soldiers who emerged gained not only training for their struggle, but also self-sufficiency, stamina, and the ability to survive in hostile environments.

Another man who, after a time as a camp commander in Tanzania, led a group to train in the Sudan remembered their serious language problems in training:

I left Tanzania and went to Sudan leading a group of about 30 to go and do training in Sudan. We were in Sudan for about six months, and there again it was a mixture in the sense that you had people who were previously trained and others who were not trained completely. The aim there was for those who have trained to assist those who were not trained because of the language problem. Because we were told we could experience some language difficulties, and it is true. The instructor who trained us had basic to almost nothing knowledge in English, but we had to find a common way how to communicate. But

²⁴ Command Report, written by M. Koli, Commander, marked as received by headquarters in Tanzania on 16 May 1987.

²⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Blacks Joyi.

²⁶ Mphahlele, 91.

still, because of the presence of those that were trained, one could say that the training of the whole group was successful.²⁷

He also found the conditions in Sudan a bit disappointing. He expected to find independent African countries well developed and superior to South Africa. As he had previously trained in China he expected a similar welcome, and was disappointed when they were just met by an open truck and transported to the camp, about 50-70 kilometres north of the capital, Khartoum. The camp comprised several sections, the main training centres where recruits are trained and then the adjacent area, where they had the special forces or commando camp, then an air wing and the militia camps around the area. The programme involved basic training, mainly involving tactics, platoon level organisation, the set up of companies, and the like. They also studied various types of weapons from pistols to light machine guns, heavy machine guns, and mortars. After that finished they had a stint with the special forces, the commandos, where they faced endurance training. They first heard they would move to the commando camp, then en route to that section on a flat bed truck made for transporting tanks, they were told they would remain at their normal camp and commute for training and turned back. He recalled being relieved at that decision, as the commando trainees had to wake up at one in the morning to start their day, while his group only had to awake at three a.m. They would quick march to the commando area, which was about 7-10 kilometres away, then train all day until 9 p.m. They would then walk back to their camp and immediately fall asleep. The training programme focused on individual skills, hand-to-hand combat, and strength building. They even learned specific techniques such as how to jump out of a moving car in

²⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

case of ambush. While the already trained cadres found the basic training repetitive, the commando training provided an exciting new element.²⁸

The group of Soweto generation recruits that trained in Kampuchea had an exciting tale to tell when they returned to Tanzania. While their training started out normally enough, Vietnam invaded the country during their stay and turned their training programme into a practical exercise in escaping an invading force. One recruit told of his training in Kampuchea:

I started in China . . . in August 1977. We were a group of 23 . . . and spent six weeks in China on orientation on what to expect from Kampuchea because the country had just received independence in 1975 . . . [In Kampuchea] we started with the military training about how to make bamboo shoots, not the modern AK stuff. How to make the modern traps and how effective were they. They showed as to we should not depend too much on the AK and the other modern equivalent. We should always rely on our selves. I should not get hungry, I should not think that I am not armed and if I have something to sharpen with, cut a branch of the tree and make a trap and by the time when we started it was after two months that we started with the military training.²⁹

When Vietnam invaded Kampuchea in 1978 the group of APLA trainees suddenly had to put their training to use:

When we were about to start with the heavy machine like the tanks, airplanes and helicopters then the Vietnamese invaded Kampuchea and we had to move from the city to the countryside. That was a very good experience because all that we were being taught we had to [put] into practice, how to evacuate people . . . We marched for eight months from Kampuchea going down to Thailand. Whiles going there we were intercepted and had to take another direction.³⁰

This group definitely got more than they bargained for in their training programme.

²⁸ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Brigadier General Barney Hlatswayo, 11 January 2007, telephone interview supplementary to earlier interview.

²⁹ Ka Plaatjie, Thami. Draft chapter.

³⁰ Ka Plaatjie, Thami. Draft chapter.

All of this movement of cadres and trainees around the world brought with it problems of passports, visas, flights, and clearance into and out of various countries. Most of the people who left South Africa and went into exile did not have official papers. A few had left legally, but most crossed the “green border” jumping fences and fording rivers. Others left on Transkei passports, which were not recognised in the rest of the world. The United Nations provided many travel documents, and agreements with many of the nations who supported the PAC’s struggle also helped. Guinea was particularly helpful in providing passports for the cadres. One letter documenting an offer of passports from Guinea commented: “The Guinea National Passport[s] have been of great assistance in this regard.”³¹ Sierra Leone also furnished the cadres with passports, requesting only their place of birth, date of birth, residence, height, and colour of eyes and hair, and would renew the documents furnished with the same information.³² The PAC Archives contain offers of and requests for flights, spending money, transport, accommodation and many other provisions. Offers for training programmes also abound. One letter showed the long standing relationship between Guinea and the PAC, with a request for military training and round trip flights from Tanzania for 100 cadres.³³ Offers of training also abounded, from large groups to small specific courses. One letter accepted an Ethiopian offer to train and equip 100 freedom fighters from South Africa and

³¹ Letter from Joe Mkwanzai, PAC Administrative Secretary to H. E. Foreign Minister Guinea, dated 3 January 1987.

³² Letter from Joe Mkwanzai, PAC Administrative Secretary to H. E. Foreign Minister Sierra Leone, dated 3 January 1987.

³³ Letter from Johnson Mlambo to Minister of Defence and National Security for Guinea, dated 21 February 1992.

Namibia as an initial group, to be followed by more trainees.³⁴ Another letter from Egypt offered training for three cadres in the security of vital installations at the Egyptian Police Academy in Cairo.³⁵ The logistical problems of moving so many people around the world for training at times became overwhelming, but generous and dedicated help from their allies eased the burden.

Many documents in the PAC archives at the University of Fort Hare provide informative reading on different courses of training for APLA cadres. Though many lack dates and locations, they offer insight into some of the special topics studied by the trainees. One lesson plan from the Libyan Arab Armed Forces gave great detail on the development of a mortar platoon, focusing on the 81 mm mortar. Including the principles of using the mortar and its uses, advance set up, attack, position, different defensive uses, withdrawal, and change of positions, this lesson provided the guerrilla armies with a more powerful supporting weapon in case of engagement with enemy forces.³⁶ One trainee's notes on the operation of weapons included details of blowback, recoil, and gas operation of rifles, including advantages and disadvantages of each, and diagrams illustrating the working of a rifle.³⁷ Another trainee's notes gave detailed explanations of various types of homemade explosives, including materials, preparation, and ignition information on many types of explosives, including:

1. Improvised incendiary time mine in a plastic glass

³⁴ Letter from Johnson Mlambo to H. E. Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, Chairman of Workers Party of Ethiopia, Prov. Military Administrative Council of Socialist Ethiopia, Commander in Chief of Revolutionary Armed Forces, dated 20 July 1987.

³⁵ Letter from El Sayed El Khouly, Ambassador- Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Tanzania to the PAC, dated 7 January 1992.

³⁶ "81 MM Mortar", by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces, 12 October 1978.

³⁷ "Weapons Operations" notes by unnamed trainee, 6 August 1991.

2. The fire cake
3. The incendiary bottle
4. Jellified petrol based on soap
5. Incendiary mixture of sawdust and paraffin
6. Improvised slow burning cord made out of a piece of rope (five different types)
7. Improvised Thermite for making holes
8. Improvised napalm made of suet (tallow)
9. Improvised Napalm based on Polystyrene
10. General security measure and technical protection when working with inflammable materials³⁸

Training in the creation of improvised explosive weapons based on easily accessible ingredients was vital in the training of guerrilla forces for the South African struggle, who often needed to improvise weapons when supplies were low. Another set of notes detailed issues of intelligence, security, and counter intelligence, including different types of agents, principles of recruiting, vetting, and approaching possible agents, and tasks, risks, and principles of both intelligence and counter intelligence.³⁹ Intelligence and counter intelligence were vital matters for the APLA forces, and clear training in these matters became a critical part of instruction for the cadres, some of who received specialised training in these topics. One training manual from a Junior Command and Staff Course on Military Intelligence and Security from a British military academy showed not only the high level of training material available for the trainees, but also the quality of the intelligence cadres, as the document is marked as highly restricted.⁴⁰ Even a training paper on martial arts principles appears in the archives.⁴¹ Multiple articles and lesson plans on the theory and practice of guerrilla warfare, particularly those focusing on the Chinese methods, were common in their

³⁸ Notes from unknown trainee, undated.

³⁹ Notes from unknown trainee, undated.

⁴⁰ "Junior Command and Staff Course, Phase 3, Junior Division the Staff College: Military Intelligence and Security," dated 1991.

⁴¹ "Martial Arts" from Combat Division- training school, June 1988.

training. Details of South Africa's defense capabilities were also crucial to the training, and various training manuals relating to this also appear. One details major arms suppliers related to South African defense, major weapons of South Africa's Land Force, Air Force Weapons and South Africa's Force Structure.⁴² Documents about the structure and capabilities of the Zimbabwean Army included education plans and lectures and offered insight into a newly formed army in a newly liberated African country.⁴³ Whatever and wherever their original and supplemental training courses, most APLA cadres returned to various camps in Tanzania after their training.

Life in the Tanzanian Camps

The coming together of different training groups once they had completed their courses allowed for a great exchange of ideas in the camps in Tanzania. Unlike in MK, where all received similar basic training, and only advanced training courses brought variety, in APLA the programmes differed. Upon their return to Tanzania, cadres would share their training experiences and living conditions in the various places, and teach skills specific to their programmes to the people who had not learned them. One man who returned from Guinea to do a nine month junior commanders' course at one of the PAC camps in Tanzania, remembered:

After that we went to Itumbi Mbeya in Tanzania . . . That's where we met our senior comrades who trained us further. Now, in the PAC, or in APLA, if someone has attended a military course for training somewhere, say China or so, they will come back and meet other groups, who are from other countries also. And then those studies will be put together and one thing will come out of that in terms of military knowledge, military science, and political science and all other relevant fields of study. So that's what we used to do.⁴⁴

⁴² "South Africa's Military Capability: Myth or Reality." Undated.

⁴³ "The Outline and Organisation of the Army," confidential document for the Zimbabwean army, undated but post-1980.

⁴⁴ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

Another man remembered arriving at the Bagamoyo camp in Tanzania in 1981, where a large influx of recruits had just arrived from Lesotho, and a number of groups had returned from training. Two other groups had recently returned to the PAC after being expelled during the leadership struggles of the 1970s. The new recruits were excited to hear stories from all the men who had gone for training in various places. He explained:

The group from Nigeria included people . . . who had studied civil aviation. The Guinea group told us about the poverty and hunger ravaging the West African country. The group from Sudan was noisy. They would imitate their Sudanese instructors, who were crazy about physical fitness and endurance. The group from Lebanon talked only about war. We envied their experience of the war in West Asia . . . They told us of the incessant barking of gunfire as the Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians, and a wide variety of militia on one side, and the Zionist Israelis on the other, were locked in the war for land. Theirs had been a tough mixture of theory and practice. The group from Mbeya was supposed to be the core of the Azanian People's Liberation Army. They were a difficult and rebellious crowd, and refused to participate in some of the camp programmes like physical training . . . The group from Cambodia [Kampuchea], which had had military training earlier than the others, had a long story to tell . . . The PAC group had to learn the Cambodian language before they commenced their training. They joined the Cambodian peasants in the fields, and tended pigs, goats, and rabbits . . . The training was interrupted after a year when Vietnam invaded Cambodia . . . The PAC cadres joined hundreds of thousands of Cambodians fleeing to Thailand in the north-west. Vietnamese planes rained bombs on the columns of marchers . . . The early days of the march were bearable since there was food. As soon as the food supplies ran out, death and disease reigned. They refugees turned to a diet of black spiders, frogs and bamboo shoots as they marched through the dense forests and monsoon rains . . . Relief came only when they crossed the border into Thailand. The PAC men remained in the refugee camp for a month before they flew back to Tanzania via Pakistan. Most of the members of this group had not recovered fully from their Cambodian experience.⁴⁵

The first PAC camp had been established in Tanzania in 1964, in the bush in Chunya. While the leadership stayed in Dar es Salaam, and often lived in luxurious

⁴⁵ Mphahlele, 76-78.

My job as the representative I was the main person to liaise with all government structures, plus the Tanzanian People's Defence Force, to liaise with hospitals in case we had some people who need to be admitted, to give support to those that are in hospitals as well as to organise emergency or other essential supports that is needed for the camp. But my office had a budget of about 100,000 shillings, which was a lot then, but in today's standards, it means it is about roughly 100 US dollars. But in 1979 that was quite a sum.⁴⁹

Mphahlele remembered his arrival at Itumbi:

We finally reached our new home, the APLA camp in the district of Mbeya in southern Tanzania. It was variously called the College, Itumbi, Mbeya or the Camp. It was called the College because people who were illiterate when they arrived at the place could read and write when they left it. Those who were literate when they arrived became crude intellectuals, and those who were already intellectuals generally kept away from Mbeya. Humans survived in Mbeya but the story was different for some animals. No matter how healthy dogs and domestic pigs were when they arrived, they would get sick and die within weeks . . . An imposing double-story, red-brick structure we called the Carlton Centre was the hive of camp activity. Its ground floor housed the camp press, the dispensary and the storeroom. The first floor rooms accommodated cadres, and a few tents were pitched near the Carlton to alleviate the overcrowding. The parade ground unfurled in front of the Carlton. This was also used for volleyball games and soccer, even though there was a soccer field just outside the camp. The leaders' quarters, on the edge of the forest about 200 metres from the Carlton, were called Shanghai. This was where members of the central committee stayed when they visited the camp. The camp commander and his immediate juniors also lived there . . . A few steps from the fowl run stood an old tree we called the Historic Tree (I still don't know why); under it we held meetings and listened to lessons in many disciplines. The benches and tables under the tree were made of logs split lengthways . . . Work was allocated according to the individual's physique. The strong ones fetched wood from the bush and called themselves the commandos; the weaker ones like me repaired the road into the camp; and the old and the sickly worked in the maize and groundnut fields. . . . We drew water from the nearby pool only when the water-pumping machine had no diesel or its propelling belt was worn out. We were not the only users of the pool—we shared it with an elephant that obviously abused it. He came at night, ate and destroyed banana trees, splashed in the pool and left it muddy. Early risers often saw him lumbering away.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

⁵⁰ Mphahlele, 91-93.

He later moved to Mgagao, and related his first impressions:

We had arrived at our new camp early in 1983, and it was exceedingly cold . . . We were not warmly dressed but relished the cold because it relieved us from mosquito bites and from the dreaded malaria. However we had to face the new terror of the jigger flea. When it bit it deposited a worm under the victim's skin. Compared to Itumbi, Mgagao was a city. There were six spacious dormitories, a large administration complex, a large storeroom, a large kitchen, a shelter for firewood, flush toilets and showers. Most of the toilets and showers were out of order. Here firewood was a problem because the sprawling villages had denuded the area of every dry branch.⁵¹

The first phase of building the new Ruvu camp in 1978 involved the construction of five houses, and three other buildings. The long term plan aimed to accommodate 1000 people, and to build 67 houses, a dining hall, kitchen, common room, two classrooms, a store-room, a library and a clinic.⁵² Though started as a transit camp for the military recruits, Ruvu eventually developed into a more encompassing settlement. One man who went into exile in the 1990s remembered his trip to the camp, arrival, and the process he experienced:

Then there was a guy there . . . he told us, no, I am the camp commander of that camp you are going to. And he welcomed us, 'you are welcome, you will go tomorrow morning, and it's 400 k's from Dar es Salaam to get to that place'. So we'll go tomorrow morning with a truck, because it's very hot during the day, and we are target, if maybe an agent's were operating at that time, so it's better to go at night or early hours of the morning. So I said OK. So round about two, the truck was there, we jump in the truck, it went to the bush. And there was no road there, but the driver knew where to turn, which way to go, for about 400 kms! We were just turning, turning, and there's nothing, no road, nothing.⁵³

After a seemingly interminable trip, they made it to the camp:

⁵¹ Mphahlele, 100.

⁵² Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania, "P.A.C. Transit Centre Tanzania."

⁵³ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Lt. Mfanelo "Zola" Bongco, 19 August 2004, Simonstown Naval Base.

So we arrived there, they welcomed us . . . and the programme was starting, different groups of people doing different things. It was interesting, because it goes with the stages. Normally all of you go for haircut first. Then from there go to stores, get your uniform, take all your clothes. And then you do the paperwork, where you're coming from, why you join the army, the PAC, all of that. That's registration, maybe half of the day you're doing that. Then that was just the day that you learn, what you must do, what you must not do, don't ask anything you will be told what to do. Then we started training at this base. Ok, it's an ongoing thing, you do it, I think it's nine months. But if you are not up to standard, they can say, okay, another three months until they are satisfied. Then you are soldiers, then you just carry on with the normal programme. And then you specialised in something. But we were concentrating more on education and politics, not militarism, that side.⁵⁴

Most APLA cadres spent some time in the Tanzanian camps during their stay in exile. Each camp had its own programme, but the activities were similar. A report on the camp in Ruvu explained a typical day for the residents:

- a) 7.00 am.- 8.00 am. BREAKFAST. Usually they have porridge, bread if it is there, tea or coffee.
- b) 8.00 am.- 9.00 am. IDEOLOGICAL STUDIES.
- c) 9.00 am. - 12.30 pm. VARIOUS CHORES. Some do gardening and some fishing.
- d) 12.30 pm. – 1.30 pm. LUNCH. Rice/Pap Vegetables and Meat if available.
- e) 1.30 pm. – 4.00 pm. REST/RECREATION
- f) 4.00 pm. – 5.00 pm. READING OF CURRENT EVENTS. By someone who is responsible for the radio that day, and then follows the discussion of current events.
- g) 6.30 pm. – 7.30 pm. SUPPER. Usually the same as lunch.
- h) 7.30 pm. – 8.30 pm. CULTURAL HOUR. When they sing and practise new songs.⁵⁵

As Ruvu began as a transit camp for cadres waiting to go abroad for training or return to South Africa and fight, their schedule was lighter than other camps. Another man explained the programme at Itumbi camp. From Monday through Friday people woke

⁵⁴ von den Steinen, Interview with Bongco.

⁵⁵ Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania, "P.A.C. Transit Centre Tanzania."

up around 5 a.m. to a programme for physical training. This often involved a run of 15 kilometres or so to the nearest village, then the same distance back. Other times they ran another route where they collected firewood, or out to a distant hill and back. Upon their return, the cadres would have tea, then assemble for the first parade at 8 a.m. At the parade they would find out who was ill and needed to be excused from work, and who had specific jobs to do around the camp. Some would work in administration, others in the sick bay, and still others tended the poultry or vegetable garden. At 9 a.m. they would again assemble, and assignments were given out. Certain platoons or companies would be sent to work on the road, fetch firewood, or work in the kitchen. The collection of firewood was a crucial part of winter work in the camp. In the dry season, they would stock up for the rainy season. In the rainy season one group stayed on standby in case a truck went out of the camp and got stuck. If another vehicle were available, they would get a ride to the mired truck, but often they had to walk to the stalled vehicle and dig it out of the mud. Comings and goings were common: people would leave the camp to go to school, cadres would return from training, and new recruits arrived from South Africa. And of course, some people would leave to go back to South Africa and fight.⁵⁶ When people trained in the camps, chores, rest and relaxation would fall away and be replaced by training programmes. Whether training or waiting however, instruction in politics remained a vital component of camp life.

As with MK's camps in Angola, the APLA cadres in Tanzanian camps had problems with food. While some camps became relatively self-sufficient, others relied solely on donations from allied organisations and countries. Shortages and cut backs always effected the soldiers staying in the camps. One report showed the

⁵⁶ von den Steinen, Telephone interview with Hlatswayo,

problems that arose from depending on support from sympathetic countries and organisations. Supply problems led to the following changes in food for the camps:

- Potatoes have been cut off from the ration
- That cabbage will be replaced by Mchicha . . .
- Maita has agreed to give the camp two bags of beans in a place of meat.
- Told the meeting that Ruvu will in the near future face some food problem since there is a movement of cadres to Ruvu from Bagamoyo
- He also indicated that fruits and vegetables have been reduced.⁵⁷

The camps had varied capabilities when it came to supplying their own food.

Mphahlele described the food situations in both Itumbi and Mgagao. In Itumbi he remembered:

I shared meals with Babes. Food was served to individuals, but people grouped to combine and share their meals. A group eating from one dish was called a chama, a Swahili name for party. Babes was a valuable partner. On meat days, he was not ashamed to queue half an hour before the cooks rang the bell for mealtime. The cooks dished out the rice, the staple food. We helped ourselves to the meat, with each person entitled to one piece. Babes, always the first in the queue would fork the two biggest chunks, usually ox knees. Babes had the appetite of a bird, especially on Mondays when he nursed a hangover from the weekend's booze binge. This suited my giant appetite well.⁵⁸

Particularly despised were the beans they often ate at that camp:

Beans-what the Tanzanians call maharage in Swahili- were part of the diet we had to stomach. On lean days we ate beans without oil or fat, and when there was a salt crisis in Tanzania, we ate them without salt. Those were the tough days of magendo, the black market, when sellers hoarded retail goods and sold them exorbitantly on the black market. The beans were dark brown and big and tasted as if they had been cooked in hellfire by Lucifer. They took at least five hours on the fire to cook and gave us heartburn. The beans also caused stirrings and rumblings and roarings in our stomachs. Frequently when we were

⁵⁷ Planning Committee Meeting , Dar Es Salaam 4 December 1993.

⁵⁸ Mphahlele, 92.

jogging, a runner would break off from the formation and unleash a salvo of mighty farts amid cries of “Ngubo!”- blanket! I never got a satisfactory explanation of the meaning of the cry. Did it mean, “Get a blanket to smother the noises and the smell”? Whoever started it did us a service, because the cry of “Ngubo” removed the opprobrium from farting, and we felt free to rid our bowels of dangerous gasses.⁵⁹

He recalled much better food supplies in Mgagao :

The garden thrived. We had abnormally large cabbages, beetroots, onions and carrots. The vast shamba, the ploughing field, was green with maize. We ploughed with a tractor, so our toughest manual work was weeding the fields. We called the maize field nguvu kazi- Swahili for ‘hard work’. We reared a flock of pigs and slaughtered them for meat. Yugoslavia also sent us a large quantity of tinned food that drastically changed our diet. We shipped bags full of cabbage to Iringa town to sell. We were already anticipating a time not far off when we would be liberated from handouts from the OAU’s Liberation Committee.⁶⁰

Johnson Mlambo also explained the progress towards self-sufficiency in the Ruvu camp:

We had for instance gardening where we cultivated some vegetables and the like, we had fruit, we had rice, maize, and even corn being grown. We had also livestock, from poultry to goats, to cattle and pigs. It was developing very well where we could see that some of our people who have been trained in agriculture went to some of the schools in Tanzania, getting the knowledge to run that place effectively.⁶¹

Whether in times of plenty or of scarcity, food remained in the forefronts of the minds of the cadres in the camps.

⁵⁹ Mphahlele, 93.

⁶⁰ Mphahlele, 101.

⁶¹ Interview with Johnson Mlambo, Interviewer unknown, no date, from the SADET oral history project.

Culture, sports and recreation were also a part of camp life. A group of cadres who were at Ruvu camp in its early days detailed their needs and wants in regard to music, poetry, and literature to the Department of Publicity and Information:

- 1) A list of books they require had been submitted to the department, but so far they had not managed to get the required books.
- 2) They wanted to know whether they would be allowed to submit articles/poems to the department, as contributions to the News Magazines
- 3) An invitation was extended to the staff of the department, of Publicity and Information to visit the centre to record some of their songs for the radio broadcasts.⁶²

The Ruvu camp also requested sporting goods and recreational materials. They asked specifically for:

- 1) Table Tennis Sets (Including Nets, balls, rackets)- 4
- 2) Soccer Balls- 12
- 3) Boxing Gloves- 12 pairs All Sizes
- 4) Dart Boards and Darts- 6
- 5) Chess Sets- 12 sets
- 6) Checkers- 12 sets
- 7) Playing Cards- 40 packs
- 8) Skipping Ropes- 50⁶³

Mphahlele fondly related his time working on the newspaper in Mgagao camp. They would compile information from the radio, and report on current events and sports. They also organised a number of campaigns, against ignorance, smoking, and malingering. He explained their methods and results:

In the fight against ignorance, we randomly interviewed members, from the commander on down, on current events. We published the answers verbatim. If they were incorrect, we provided the right answers alongside and the person interviewed would be the butt of jokes in the camp. I found people in the Publicity Department just as ignorant. They complained and asked to be exempted but I refused, arguing that no one had the right to be ignorant. Sam was by far the

⁶² Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania, "P.A.C. Transit Centre Tanzania."

⁶³ Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania, "P.A.C. Transit Centre Tanzania."

keenest follower of current affairs and always scored a hundred percent. On parade he encouraged the cadres to read the papers. People actually started reading to avoid embarrassment. The Publicity Department provided a translator for those who couldn't read English. The fight against smoking was not very successful among the smokers, but we grabbed and popularised Sam's slogan, "If you don't smoke, don't start." Only one cadre successfully kicked the habit as a result of our campaign, and we paraded him as a campaign victory. The third campaign, against malingering, didn't last long. With the help of the medical staff, we singled out the malingerers and they were soon on the straight and narrow.⁶⁴

Another man explained the importance of culture in a revolutionary army:

They know their cultural history, knowing who they are. Because you must have identity. With culture, you know, we used to come with plays, dramas, all those cultural things. Some traditions, why there are traditions from our forefathers. So that we are fighting against a cultural aggression, you know, which was forced on us. Or imposed on us by the Boers.⁶⁵

He happily recalled the cultural events that took place:

Singing and dancing, and all that. Every Friday we used to do that. And coincidentally, I used to lead many songs, I would sing by myself. And I used to dance also, gumboot dance and traditional dance. And I used to do poetry also . . . we used to sing traditional songs, which would have a message, political message, a heavy one. And we used to make sure that the morale of the soldiers is high. We were in charge of that.⁶⁶

As in the MK camps in Angola, sports were always popular activities in the APLA camps as well, particularly soccer. The cultural and recreational activities allowed the cadres some semblance of life removed from the military and kept them entertained, allowing them to take a break from the monotony in the camps once in a while.

Transport problems crossed political lines and affected the PAC as well. Many vehicles lacked parts and maintenance. This scarcity often left camps with no

⁶⁴ Mphahlele, p. 104.

⁶⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

⁶⁶ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

vehicles, and roads were often badly maintained and washed away in the rain. One report touched on this problem:

Mahindra which was to assist in Ruvu has broken down, spare parts do not fit well from one car (MADHINDRA) to another. LAND CRUISER TZB 7112 has developed mechanical defects. There is only one tractor that is operating. This means that there is no practical transport in this centre.⁶⁷

Johnson Mlambo described the problem of building a road to the Ruvu settlement:

Basic infrastructure was there and the area had earlier been abandoned by the sugar farmer because it is a bit of a mushy area and after the sugar farmer the prisons department tried to take it over, but because of the floods that occasionally impede normal passage of people, you find that when it's the rainy seasons, for two months or more people cannot . . . no vehicle can actually reach the camp, so people stop at Kitonga village and they have to carry things on their heads, cross over . . . You build a road, discover that the Norwegians were assisting us in this because many governments and countries would not give assistance of a capital nature you know, to build infrastructure of that time, building a road, they would rather want to help you build houses . . . even that we had to because we needed that transit, 14 kilometres, from the main road, from Dar es Salaam to . . . Morogoro, Iringa, that's going down south you know. And there were learnings, aspects of road construction ourselves in the process you know. Some of the people engaging in development, they cheat you first and they . . . the money has gone and they give you a good road, seemingly which is good, but when the rains come, they wash it away, then you learn more and more, this is the way it should be done, and this way and that way. We were making a lot of progress and access during the rainy season was a particular problem that we battled with but we had already defeated it by the time we left.⁶⁸

A United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid delegation experienced these problems when they tried to carry out a mission to inspect the camp at Ruvu in 1985, and had to turn back long before they reached the camp. Their report read:

⁶⁷ PAC Planning Committee Meeting, Dar es Salaam, 4 December 1993.

⁶⁸ Interview with Johnson Mlambo, SADET.

At 3.30 p.m. we left the main road to drive the remaining 15 km on an untarred road for Kitanga. Very soon our Landrover started to “swim” on the road, turned 90° to the left and only stopped just on the edge of the road. I saw it already capsized. We nevertheless continued on our way half walking, half driving, the car every now and then being swept from one side of the street to the other. Our two Tanzanian accompanying officials, one from UNDP and the second one from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, recommended to us that we should go back and leave this road because it would continue like that. Although the road had recently been redone for 300 000 US Dollars by the Norwegian government it was difficult to pass it during the rainy season. Since heavy rainfalls had started some days ago the road had become a sole heap of mud. Underneath the layer of sand on the surface there was moisty clay. The tyres of our landrover could not cope with these conditions⁶⁹

The party continued on their way trying to reach the camp:

After we crossed another car on the road the two Tanzanians again made reservations against our continuing our way, since they had spoken to the driver of the other car and learnt about the worsening situation of the road to come. They repeated that it was hardly worth while to make all these efforts for such a camp. We only stopped our march when we came to an unsurmountable lake of water. By then we had perhaps made half of our way. A villager passing by was asked to pass on the message to the PAC camp that the UN delegation could not come due to the bad road. We then drove back in our “swimming” [Landrover] and reached Dar at about 6.30 p.m. . . . Our proposals to make another attempt to get to Kitonga were not taken up by our Tanzanian friends. No other car would be able to pass, and it would also be impossible to arrange for a helicopter. We were also told that there was no telephone communication.⁷⁰

At times the camps were left with no transport, making it difficult to provide necessary services, like transporting cadres and supplies.

Well trained and politically armed, the APLA soldiers returned to Tanzania with one thought in their minds: to return to South Africa and put their training to use against the apartheid government. Leadership problems plagued the PAC, and most

⁶⁹ UN Special Committee against Apartheid Mission to Angola, Zambia and Tanzania April 3rd-17th 1985. Topic “Women and Children under Apartheid”.

⁷⁰ UN Special Committee against Apartheid Mission to Angola, Zambia and Tanzania April 3rd-17th 1985. Topic “Women and Children under Apartheid”.

cadres waited a long time to be given the opportunity. Some never saw deployment in the front line states or the homefront. Others found work in administrative capacities, solidarity and diplomatic circles, or went for educational courses and learned trades and skills. Some remained in the Tanzanian camps until the political settlement allowed for the first democratically elected government of South Africa. Some lost hope in the struggle and established lives in foreign countries. But the lucky few eventually received their orders and returned to South Africa to advance the struggle.

Chapter 5: Crises of APLA and MK in Exile

Long is the road to freedom
Your impatience
Will not make it shorter comrade
I know heart
Is bursting with anger
Your brain burning
With the heat of vengeance

Waiting tortures
Waiting waiting waiting
Here there nowhere and everywhere
Longing
Lingering questions
Suspicion
Who is who isn't
I know your pain
Many have felt it from time began

Unpraised burial without lamentations
Many have trod on this road
Before you
Often bloody footprints
Landmarks
For you and me
To follow
The long uneasy road to freedom¹

Introduction

Life in exile involved difficulties on many levels. Despair of ever returning home and gaining liberation threatened the minds of many members of the liberation organisations. Both the ANC and PAC faced difficult times and distractions from their goals. Each organisation faced crises while in exile, and the consequences lasted far beyond the immediate circumstances. The PAC experienced a leadership crisis that saw them expelled from Zambia, brought divisions within the organisation, affected the Soweto generation of recruits, and effectively shut down their efforts at waging a revolution for years. The ANC faced mutinies in the Angolan camps that

¹ Reddy, Freddy. (1985). The Road to Freedom. In *Sechaba*, April issue, 32.

destabilised their organisation and led to the execution, imprisonment, and ostracisation of some of their cadres.

The APLA leadership crisis

The Pan Africanist Congress faced a deep crisis in leadership in the years before the Soweto uprisings. However, they could not settle things before the rush of recruits headed in their direction. A feud between T.M. Ntantala, the Commander of APLA, and P. K. Leballo, Chairman of the Central Committee of the PAC, led to repeated conflicts and even outright violence. A basic ideological difference, with Ntantala advancing a Chinese oriented strategy regarding guerrilla warfare and Leballo taking a stance as a strong Africanist opposed to foreign influence purportedly caused the feud. Beyond this basic ideological split, accusations flew about tribalism, misappropriation of funds, autocratic behaviour on the part of the chairman, and other issues. The leadership squabbles led to the PAC's expulsion from Zambia in 1968, which forced the PAC to move its headquarters to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The recruits who came to the PAC in the wake of the Soweto uprisings found themselves in the middle of this feud.

Some APLA recruits managed to stay out of the thick of the problems, while others could not. Some received their political training in Dar es Salaam, went off for military training, and returned to Tanzania with no apparent ill effects. However others were caught up in the chaos. As an 'either with us or against us' tendency characterised the South African liberation movements, most testimonies from the time about the crisis are written by disillusioned members who were expelled or resigned from the PAC. Particularly common are testimonies from cadres who left the PAC and applied either for membership in the ANC or for refugee status with the United

Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). These people carried a large amount of disillusionment and frustration with the PAC and APLA, so their stories come with a bias, but they are useful indicators of some of the elements that drove recruits away from the PAC's crisis in leadership. One of these men, who left the PAC to join the ANC, related his experiences:

We left for Tanzania in May 1977. We travelled by Mozambican airline. We were a group of more than seventy. While we were waiting for military training the chairman of the Central Committee of the PAC, Potlako Leballo, visited us time and time again. We had meetings on Sundays. I realised that things went wrong- we received only promises of military training. Eventually a few went for training, but this represented only a fraction of the 200 waiting to be trained. I also started to see differences between the leaders of the PAC. The commander of the army, Ndandala [sic] and the PAC chairman, Leballo, were the only persons talking to us. No one was interested to fight at all. The situation became critical when a group of 30 trained cadres came back from China and were joined by a group trained in Libya. They heard they were not going back to fight. Both groups were dissatisfied and wanted to see the leadership. They went to Dar es Salaam and met Leballo who convinced them he was the only person qualified to lead the liberation struggle. But the group under Ndandala [sic] was the only group progressing. Themba Maphalala at that stage was talking against Leballo and was the only person to do this. Subsequently there was a shift against Leballo on the question why so little people were military trained. We demanded that Leballo must come and explain, but there was no progress.²

Eventually this man got fed up with the problems in the PAC and left to join the ANC in 1979. Another man experienced problems in Tanzania in the 1970s and defected to the ANC, then tried to return to the PAC in 1988 in the wake of the MK mutinies in Angola. His tale of his stay in Tanzania illustrated the disorganisation and lack of resources for the recruits:

In September, 1977 we flew out of Swaziland . . . We slept in Maputo for the night and the next morning we flew to Dar. In Dar es Salaam we staying in Kibo II or New York City as it was known to most of us. We stayed there till mid 1978 and some of us then left to stay in Manzere which was occupied mostly by comrades who were from the

² Author unidentified, from *Fighting the Crazy War: Volume 2 no 5, The third special edition in a series of six.*

Cape and who were dubbed by Leballo as "reactionaries". We stayed there for some time then the whole group moved to Mwenge. Staying Mwenge proved to be tough and really the going was too tough. We never used to get rations regularly from the Party. Then by November or December, sixteen of us mostly from Soweto decided to leave the Party to go and join the A.N.C.³

In this case, the delay in going for training, contact with disillusioned members, lack of resources, and stagnancy caused an entire group of recruits to defect to the ANC.

A report of a meeting in 1979 highlighted this exodus, noting: "Also entered was a report from cadres from the Camp who wished to take up scholarships due to adverse conditions at the camp. All these activities have created the impression of lack of discipline and authority. Cadres have gone to government offices to tender resignations."⁴ While many cadres persevered and remained loyal members of the PAC and APLA, others chose to leave the organisation and either join the rival ANC or fend for themselves with help from the UNHCR, robbing the PAC of many eager and able recruits from the Soweto generation.

Instances of indiscipline among the APLA soldiers, usually attributed to the leadership struggle and Leballo's influence on the recruits, can be found in many discussions of the problems of the time. Many sources claim that Leballo worked to recruit the newcomers to his side, creating a division between the older soldiers of APLA and the new, more militant youth. The large number of these reports came from people opposed to Leballo, and again must be approached with caution. In one case, one man who was later expelled from the organization purported that in November of 1977, PAC members training the new recruits in politics upset Leballo by not extolling his virtues to the new cadres. Unable to reassign them, Leballo had the young recruits forcibly removed from the residences, and one man was stabbed

³ PAC application biography, 22 March 1998.

⁴ Minutes from "Meeting of the Administrative Committee of the Central Committee of the PAC Meeting on April 30, 1979 At External Headquarters, Dar Es Salaam."

during the ensuing struggle. The same report claims that new recruits who were unhappy with the situation called a meeting with the Central Committee to air their grievances and hear what they had to say, but when the recruits arrived, they: “laid siege to” the Party Offices, and again violently attacked the offices the same day. Later, a gang of recruits reportedly attacked the residence of the central committee members (excluding Leballo), threatened them with violence, and took sensitive documents and keys to the offices with them. Later the same day, they took a party functionary and others hostage but the intervention of the OAU African Liberation Committee rescued them.⁵

The PAC finally held a conference in 1978 to address the crisis. Ka Plaatjie noted: “It was used by Leballo, however, to legitimise his control over the army and to bring to a logical conclusion his differences with Ntantala.”⁶ In the end, the PAC expelled Ntantala and about 60 of his supporters. They later went on to establish their own group, the Azanian People’s Revolutionary Party.⁷ One cadre, when he returned from a traumatic period of training and escape from an invading army in Kampuchea to Tanzania in the wake of the conference, found the circumstances demoralising. He returned to an organisation in crisis and found this large contingent of the people expelled. He lamented:

[After the training] our morale was very high and when we heard the news it was then that one of our comrades Sadlasafta Zakalala got disturbed . . . He started to lose his mind a bit talking funny things asking this and that and when we arrived in Dar es Salaam after that report that was given by Edmin Makoti . . . We agreed, that we did not

⁵ Ntantala, T. M. (1978). *The Crisis in the PAC*, 4 April.

⁶ Ka Plaatjie, Thami. (2006). The PAC in Exile. In SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 2 [1970-1980]*, Pretoria: UNISA, 744.

⁷ Ka Plaatjie, Thami. (1999). *Factionalism, Misrepresentation and Power Struggle in the PAC 1966-1978: A Working Paper*, Presented at the South African Historical Association Conference, University of Western Cape 11-14 July.

have to cry over this there were 67 members of the army in the camp. Sixty seven.⁸

In the aftermath of the conference, incidents of indiscipline among the new APLA cadres supporting Leballo increased. Vusi Make, in a presentation to the OAU Liberation Committee in 1979, outlined some of the incidents:

At that time 40 cadres of the PAC had left the camp to come to Dar es Salaam, to terrorize members of the organisation and had held others hostage . . . Some members of the High Command have since degenerated into a gang of thugs who perpetuate terrorism within the ranks of APLA, for example, despite their agreement to abide the directives of the Presidential Council and the Central Committee, these members of the High Command remain in Dar es Salaam, where they have forcefully taken over party houses and brought scores of cadres from the camp to back up their threats, and physically attacks on party officials and cadres at headquarters . . . At the camps those members of the High Command have set up a terror squad by appointing with Leballo's collusion and without the Central Committee knowledge or approval, their own camp administration composed of elements from the High Command also from the 41 undisciplined cadres, who have been declared prohibited immigrants by the Tanzanian government. Under this mal-administration, beatings and assaults have become the order of the day in the camp against those cadres who reject the High Command's indiscipline and are determined to serve the Azanian People's cause under the discipline of the Central Committee of the PAC.⁹

While indiscipline and violence on this level sounds quite like a mutiny, the cadres involved acted on Leballo's orders or in solidarity with his cause, and as the chairman of the PAC, he held the authority to command. In the end, the rest of the leadership removed Leballo as chairman in 1979, and replaced him with a three person committee consisting of David Sibeko, Vusi Make, and Elias Ntloedibe. APLA cadres assassinated Sibeko in June 1979, gravely illustrating the persisting

⁸ Sgubu Dube, quoted in Ka Plaatjie, Thami. Poqo and the Azanian People's Liberation Army, draft chapter for *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980* by the South African Democracy Education Trust. (Draft chapter given to the author by Ka Plaatjie, and this section did not appear in the final articles published.)

⁹ Statement by the Leader of the PAC Delegation, Mr. Vus-Make to the 33rd Ordinary Session of the OAU Liberation Committee 25th-28th June, 1979.

struggle within the organisation. Vusi Make narrowly escaped the attack, and security tightened around the leaders. He remembered that the Tanzanian neighbours were unimpressed by this, as guards could stop and search anyone passing the leaders' residences.¹⁰ Make then took over as the chairman for a short period until John Nyati Pokela left South Africa and took over as chairman in 1981.

On occasion, the circumstances became so extreme that the Tanzanian authorities had to intervene. After the attack by the 40 cadres who Tanzania asked to have expelled from the country, the host country became very concerned about the leadership squabbles, and the lack of progress in the revolution, as one report explained: "The Tanzanian Government has since decided to freeze our activities by prohibiting entry into Tanzania of any PAC cadre (trained or untrained) until all cadres presently in this country have been infiltrated into Azania."¹¹ The Tanzanian army also stepped in to settle the problems of the Itumbi camp: "The remaining PAC leadership lost total control of the forces at Itumbi camp. Eventually the Tanzanian Defence Force intervened in 1981, and in the operation to wrest control of the camp, four APLA cadres were killed by the Tanzanian Defence Force."¹² One man remembered the event:

At that stage then there was a crisis within the PAC, which followed the assassination of our director of foreign affairs, the late David Maphgumzana Sibeko, who was also our representative at the UN and that then threw the whole party and the movement into a crisis. And then there was instability because the camp, Chunya, was opposed to the leadership, and then the Tanzanians wanted to enforce some control. So everybody had to be back into the camp and when we were in the camp, then the most unfortunate chapter of our struggle took

¹⁰ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Vusi Make, 15 August 2005, Centurion.

¹¹ Administrative Report Presented to the Administrative Committee of the Central Committee on April 30, 1979. By Henry Isaacs, Acting Administrative Secretary.

¹² TRC, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Armed Forces Hearing: PAC/APLA*, 7 October 1997, Cape Town.

place. That was on the 11th of May where the Tanzanian authorities when they wanted to enforce their will some of our senior members in the camp undermined the call and they were warned that the Tanzanian law and the wish would prevail. And those leaders still didn't take note or heed or appreciate and then Tanzania had to enforce their will. And in that process I think four people were lost, and then eleven were injured. And it was immediately after that shooting incident that I was then on the squad appointed by the Tanzanians to take charge of the camp.¹³

While most, though not all of the Soweto generation recruits to APLA encountered the leadership problems, those based in Tanzania commonly encountered them. One man of the Soweto generation explained his views of the crisis. He said that initially his generation of APLA recruits were quite involved in the feud, were very loyal to Leballo and believed in him. It was only later that their views began to change. Particularly instrumental in the change were groups of trainees who returned to Tanzania from Nigeria, Lebanon, and Guinea. They began to question Leballo's role, and the tendency to brand anyone who disagreed with the chairman as a counter-revolutionary. They began to talk about the effects of the crisis, and that the PAC must not allow itself to be drawn into ill repute in the eyes of the world. Their influence helped lead to the stepping down of Leballo.¹⁴ The indiscipline and poor training of the Tanzania based soldiers had to be addressed in later years, when first John Nyati Pokela, then Johnson Mlambo, took over leadership of the PAC, and worked to reorient and retrain the soldiers.

Occasional flareups continued even in the 1980s. After being welcomed back into the fold by Pokela, the PAC members expelled by Leballo in 1978 still found

¹³ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Barney Hlatswayo, 16 August 2005, Pretoria.

¹⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Brigadier General Barney Hlatswayo, 11 January 2007, telephone interview supplementary to earlier interview.

themselves labelled as dissidents. In his letter of resignation from the party in June of 1983, one of these members related his experiences in this regard:

On the morning of 23 March 1983 I was subjected to a gangster-like forced raid by a group of party members . . . at my house in Temeke . . . The next couple of weeks were to see running battles of hide and seek in the streets of Dar Es Salaam and the uncalled for and subsequently established highly irregular involvement of the Tanzanian police who had been invited by the party. Throughout this period I have personally not had any official explanation for this kind of action taken against me by the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania. This deep silence and mystery, so uncharacteristic of this organisation as I have know[n] it since 1963 up to 1977, when Lebal[1]o unleashed upon some of us cadres whom he had incited [who] deal[t] with us accordingly, was an ominous indication to me that once again I had become a target to be dealt with accordingly.¹⁵

Occasional relapses into the problems of the 1970s continued on throughout the 1980s, though eventually the new leaders returned discipline to the ranks. Despite this crisis, the ensuing indiscipline and violence, and the ongoing problems, most of the recruits managed to get their military training in various parts of the world, and came back ready to pursue the armed struggle.

In the wake of the infighting, the leadership worked to instill discipline in the camps and get the cadres back on track politically. Letters from the Tanzanian government pointed out a common problem of trained cadres who were not deployed, and not in the camps but rather living in Dar es Salaam with no duties and causing problems.¹⁶ A report from 1979 highlighted and addressed this problem and set out new rules, including:

1. All trained, students and other cadres presently residing in Dar es Salaam without any particular duty to perform must with immediate effect be taken to their respective camps.

¹⁵ Letter from Bunga Glen Mpukane to Joe Mkwanazi, 20 June 1983.

¹⁶ Letter from W. Mwaipyana of the office of the Prime Minister of Tanzania to the Chief Representative of the PAC, and from W. N. Kaihula of the same office to the Chief Rep, 1979 and 1980.

2. All trained, students and other cadres coming to Tanzania from abroad must be taken to the relevant camps upon their arrival. They must not be allowed to stay in Dar es Salaam.¹⁷

At one meeting the leadership debated the best ways forward in rehabilitating the cadres:

The main issue tackled was the militarization of the leadership of Bagamoyo. This move was necessitated by the need to instill discipline at that centre. However, there were views that this problem of discipline is a political problem which needs a political solution, some members stated. Another view also prevalent was that we should realise that we have to use force to enforce discipline after all methods of persuasion have failed.¹⁸

The PAC also instituted well defined and spelt out codes of conduct. These included several documents: a Military Leadership Code of Conduct, one spelling out APLA Service Offences, one entitled "The Discipline of the Battlefield", which required a signature from the cadre, Camp Rules and Regulations, and a document spelling out a clear code for corporal punishment, when needed.¹⁹ One PAC scholar explained:

These changes emanated from open engagements between the PAC leadership under Vusumzi Make and the general cadreship in 1980. The hostilities to the new leadership had subsided and the daunting task of rebuilding the PAC was beginning to unite cadres in the camps. Their spirits were uplifted when the news of Pokela's arrival as disclosed. He became the new chairman of the PAC and Commander-in-Chief of APLA from January 1981. He recruited fresh blood into the Task Force of APLA.²⁰

¹⁷ PAC Inter-departmental memorandum from the Chief Representative to Directors and Head of Departments, Dated 23 February 1983, citing letter of of 28 August 1979.

¹⁸ Minutes of Central Committee Meeting, August 22, 1982.

¹⁹ Azanian Peoples Liberation Army Service Offences; Azanian People's Liberation Army Military Leadership Code of Conduct; Corporal Punishment (C.P.) In the PAC, as a Disciplinary Measure; Mgagao Camp Rules and Regulations; Discipline of the Battlefield.

²⁰ Kondlo, Kwandime Merriman. (2003). *In the Twilight of the Azanian Revolution: The Exile History of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa): (1960-1990)*, thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree D. Litt et Phil in Historical Studies, Rand Afrikaans University, October, 306.

When John Nyathi Pokela was released from prison in 1980, the PAC leadership called him into exile to take over as the chairman of the organisation in January of 1981. With a policy of addressing the problems that caused so much trouble for the PAC, he worked to restore unity, develop the homegoing programme, and intensify the largely non-existent armed struggle. His efforts bore fruit in later years, but his stint as leader of the movement ended prematurely with his death in June of 1985. Johnson Mlambo, who left South Africa to join the organisation in exile upon his own release from Robben Island in 1983, succeeded Pokela. Mlambo built on the foundation started by Pokela, and the succeeding years showed a huge upsurge of APLA activity inside South Africa for the first time in decades. Mlambo remained chairman when Zephania Mothopeng became president of the PAC, and both continued in those positions until Clarence Makwetu took over the presidency in 1990. The legacy of leadership struggles, which characterised the PAC throughout its existence, limited its effectiveness and negatively influenced its supporters. One man explained the problems experienced by APLA in the wake of these problems:

So that was the problem through and through, that's why unlike the MK and the ANC, with the ANC there was that kind of continuity, which is very vital to the effective execution of the armed struggle. The high command of Joe Modise, Chris Hani, etc. that left the country in the early sixties, was the same high command that came back and reported to their leaders, their political leaders, Sisulu, Mandela, etc. But now with the PAC, the high command that left in 1960, was toppled in 1975, the one of 1975 was toppled in 1976, the one of 1976 was toppled in the eighties, so like people like me they only know the PAC in the '80s, because there was that, I don't know if it is proper to call it a vacuum of military leadership. . . . So that I think undermined the effectiveness of APLA on the ground. Because we lacked continuity and we never blended the youth militancy with the age experience, the thing that the ANC did to its advantage.²¹

²¹ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Letlapa Mphahlele, 17 December 2002, Cape Town.

Background to the MK Mutinies

In the mid-1980s, many of the soldiers in Angola participated to varying degrees in mutinies against the leadership, which marked a low point in the ANC's struggle. Aside from the dire conditions in the Angola camps discussed in chapter three, many other issues contributed to the eventual blow up. Spending years in the camps with no reprieve and very little change in the routine sufficed to cause a state of extreme boredom. One report to the National Consultative Conference asserted:

This department [Personnel and Training] should up-date its training programme and should sen[d] comrades to military academy and even academic schools. It can only be absurd to keep comrades for 8 yrs in the camps without any improvement or advance in both military or academic schools.²²

One MK soldier explained to his interviewer that not going back was incredibly difficult, and at times he would despair of ever returning to South Africa to fight. He would often have just to walk away alone for a bit and come to terms with that.²³ One man explained to the Stuart Commission, a commission created to investigate the causes of the first mutiny: "Our lengthy stay and conditions in exile (i.e. camps) has made some of us to lose all sense of human feeling, lose complete touch with humanity, we do not have the same resistance." The report went on to say: "The commission believes that the conditions in the camps, the total isolation from the outside world, the desperation and frustration of not being deployed make it practically impossible for cadres to survive (politically, morally and psychologically)

²² National Consultative Conference 1985: MHQ unit Lusaka, regional preparation document.

²³ Pilcher, Rosie. (1998). *Occupational Hazards: Observations of Conditions in Umkhonto we Sizwe's Angolan Camps*, unpublished thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of an honours degree in history at the University of Cape Town.

in the camps for several years.”²⁴ The long years in the camps caused increasing stress in the lives of the rank and file soldiers.

To make matters worse, the rank and file soldiers often resented the leadership. The rank and file believed that the leaders lived the easy life, not suffering deprivations, while they themselves suffered in the camps. Many documents written in the aftermath of the mutinies pointed to the inequality in circumstances between the average soldiers and those in positions of power. Much of this hostility focused on the ANC Chief Representative in Angola’s office. Comments from the rank and file when interviewed in the aftermath of the mutinies included: “No money for camps but new cars bought constantly for Chief Rep’s office,”²⁵ “Instead of the Northern Camps and other outlying sectors being given top priority, it became blatantly clear that Luanda itself and particularly the Chief Rep’s residence was the top priority”²⁶ and “House of Chief Rep. should not be a place where everything is eaten and not elsewhere.”²⁷ These inequalities extended beyond the leadership in Luanda, however. Another document noted: “Commanders and other members of the administration should cease to eat fresh food which other comrades can not obtain because this will have wrong interpretation and raise misunderstanding among comrades.”²⁸ The leaders and commanders often failed to deal with these complaints diplomatically either. One document reports: “Irrelevant

²⁴ Stuart Commission Report 1984. (1996). In *Appendices to the African National Congress Policy Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, August 1996*, 10. While the Stuart Commission’s report was finished in March of 1984, before the second mutiny in May, the exploration of the causes of the first mutiny applies to the circumstances of the second as well.

²⁵ Programme of TG [Treasurer General] in Angola- December 1984.

²⁶ Main Observations about situation in Angola- 27/12/84.

²⁷ Kodesh, Wolfie. Meeting with office and Regional Command: 23/12/84, from notebook on projects in Angola.

²⁸ ANC summary report, Logistics Department (Luanda).

demoralising and sarcastic answers were advance[d] in reply to questions posed by the rank and file to those in authority.”²⁹ Another report remarked on the changes in relations between the camp leaders and the rank and file: “The normal standard was that everybody does his own washing and cleaning their rooms, members of the administration included, but today with the youth in the administration they [want] to have soldiers working as domestic servants for them.”³⁰ This blatant disregard for the ANC policy of equality in the movement incensed the rank and file, and added more fuel to the fire that led to mutinies. These issues alone caused serious demoralisation and dissatisfaction among the comrades stationed in Angola’s camps, but even more problems arose during this period to add to the already difficult situation.

The ongoing involvement of MK soldiers in the war between the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) and União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) further exacerbated the situation. The Angolan government’s decision to let the ANC establish training camps within its borders rested on more than Pan-African solidarity. The complicated regional situation in Southern Africa drew many countries into intricate relationships. South Africa illegally controlled Namibia, as well as continuing policies of repression in South Africa. This gave them two main enemies in the vicinity of Angola: SWAPO in Namibia, and the ANC in South Africa. The defense of Namibia was critical to the apartheid government’s plan to keep countries bordering South Africa hostile to guerrilla infiltration routes. The MPLA, the main Angolan liberation movement during their own struggle for liberation, governed Angola, which had recently gained its independence from Portugal in 1975. Independence brought them more conflict,

²⁹ Document submitted for National Consultative Conference of 1985, from unit C-13.

³⁰ Document submitted for National Consultative Conference of 1985, from unit C-13.

however, and a constant state of civil war between the government and UNITA, a rival movement, plagued the country. South Africa, who wanted to keep the Namibian/Angolan border from falling into the MPLA's hands, which would allow SWAPO access to the country, supported UNITA with arms, money, and sometimes military force in order to keep Angola destabilised and to cause problems for both the MK and SWAPO forces based there.

The Angolan government placed the MK camps strategically, situating them as buffers around the capital city Luanda. While MK did not actively fight against UNITA during their first few years in Angola, they could not remain neutral. At first, MK took purely a defensive stance, fighting UNITA only when it directly threatened MK camps. However, as time passed, they eventually found themselves committing to assist the Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola (FAPLA), the MPLA's army, in the fight against their rival movement. South Africa's support of UNITA made their involvement even more justifiable, as they were able to fight their enemy directly, though still far from the battleground of South Africa.

The MK soldiers originally responded to this call for help from FAPLA enthusiastically. The Stuart Commission report of 1984 remarked:

At this early stage there were apparently no signs of unhappiness or unwillingness on the part of comrades. The early enthusiasm was due to a number of factors:

- a) The need to defend MK base camps developed into a general political understanding of the need to participate practically in the struggle against imperialism, against a bandit force- UNITA- which was used as an extension of the South African defence forces;
- b) The need to get out of the camps, away from the boredom of camp life because some comrades had been staying in the camps since 1977;
- c) The need to gain combat experience.³¹

³¹ Stuart Commission Report 1984. (1996). In *Appendices to the African National Congress Policy Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, August 1996*, 17.

The first operations against UNITA went very smoothly, and the soldiers felt a sense of victory and accomplishment in these early days. Later, however, this was not the case. FAPLA forces lacked organization so many operations went badly. Supply lines were unreliable, reconnaissance was sporadic, and the troops often had little or no backup and support. One report for the National Consultative Conference asserted:

In August 1983 when demoralisation had reached its climax almost the whole army was mobilised for the Eastern Front in Angola, even the comrades who were preparing to get home were diverted to this front instead of reinforcing the home front . . . Some of our experiences in that front are alarming. There was no proper troop control, no reliable communication system, missions were not properly planned some times not planned altogether. Logistical distribution was not satisfactory. Our forces were reinforced by militia which was not properly trained and poorly equipped and relations were at the lowest critical level.³²

These conditions led to many MK casualties.

The soldiers began to question why they were involved in this fight at all, and their original enthusiasm evaporated to be replaced with dissent and hostility about the situation. A recent book on Cuban involvement in Angola noted: "The Cubans, SWAPO and MK guerrillas would fight tenaciously (and often to the death) while Angolan units crumbled around them. Gradually resentment grew among the FAPLA's allies at the way they were being used to fight a proxy war."³³ The Stuart Commission report noted one particular battle on 26th December 1983, in which the MK forces fell into an ambush. The FAPLA forces supporting them ran away from the ambush, and 5 MK soldiers died. The commission reported: "Some time later, a decision was taken that the dead bodies of our fallen comrades should be retrieved,

³² Document submitted for National Consultative Conference of 1985, from unit C-13.

³³ George, Edward. (2005). *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965-1991*, From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale, London: Frank Cass, 155.

and for the first time, our comrades saw death- with the dead bodies mutilated and some in an advanced stage of decomposition.”³⁴ The MK soldiers did not take these casualties well.

Many of the soldiers who had been in the camps during this campaign remember their reactions vividly. One man explained that when the Eastern Front campaigns started, they found it very exciting. They saw it as a chance to gain experience and break the monotony of staying in the camp and waiting to return to South Africa. But as time went on, they experienced difficulties and started to think about where they stood, where they came from, and why there were there. They saw some comrades die in ambushes and raids, some maimed in attacks, and some getting completely frustrated.³⁵ Another man recalled: “after some few ambushes . . . most of our people were injured. They start to say they can’t fight in a foreign country . . . Why should we fight Rhodesia, why should we fight here in Angola while we should go home and fight at home.”³⁶ The disillusionment and frustration of fighting against UNITA became a substantial complaint in the mutinies that soon followed.

The actions of the Department of Intelligence and Security (NAT)³⁷ emerged as the foremost cause of dissatisfaction and anger. The ANC described NAT’s origins and duties in its submission to the TRC :

The roots of NAT [Department of National Security and Intelligence] can be traced to the establishment of a military intelligence unit in the 1960s, tasked with undertaking reconnaissance missions to find routes for the infiltration of trained MK cadres; the establishment of reception

³⁴ Stuart Commission Report 1984. (1996). In *Appendices to the African National Congress Policy Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, August 1996*, 18-19.

³⁵ Kodesh, W. Interview with Siphon Binda, 24 March 1993.

³⁶ Kodesh, W. Interview with Graham Morodi, 23 March 1993.

³⁷ Even in the ANC’s own documents, NAT is referred to in many different ways, such as the Department of Intelligence and Security, the Department of National Security and Intelligence, etc. In this study, it will be referred to as the security department in most cases to save confusion.

areas inside the country for these cadres; and the selection of inanimate targets for armed propaganda attacks. At this time the Department had no counter-intelligence capacity: there was no structure specifically tasked with the screening of recruits and exposure of agents in our midst. In the 1960's, cadres were carefully recruited or selected by ANC branches inside the country before being sent abroad for military training. This screening and selection process inside the country resulted in a degree of complacency in the ANC's mission in exile.³⁸

The sudden influx of students and sympathisers in the wake of the Soweto uprisings made their job much more difficult. Rather than carefully selected and vetted recruits, a flood of unknown volunteers wanted to join, and among them there were occasional spies from the apartheid government:

The new phase after the upheavels [sic] of 1976 saw the mass exodus of youth, seeking contact with the ANC driven by the desire to acquire the skills necessary to respond to the brutality of the regime with military force. It was critical for the ANC to set up the necessary structures to process all these new recruits: for ensuring proper deployment of cadres; for utilising information they passed on to the ANC, which could be used to build the underground; and to ensure that agents of the regime were weeded out.³⁹

The purpose and duties of the security department were straight forward enough, but in practice, the lines blurred. With thousands of people arriving from South Africa and actively seeking out the ANC and MK in the wake of the Soweto uprisings, the security department faced a task larger than it could have anticipated.

The recruits leaving South Africa would be asked to write an autobiography, including details on themselves and their political activities within the country, as well as details on people who they suspected of being involved with the enemy. In this way they would weed out some of the blatant enemy agents who came without

³⁸ ANC. (1997). *Further Submissions and Responses by the African National Congress to Questions Raised by the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation*, 106.

³⁹ ANC. (1996). *Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 68.

proper cover stories, and managed to catch many spies in this way. Others came much more prepared however. The TRC submission explained:

Some agents were exposed because they were known within the country. Others were naïve and inconsistencies in their biographies which all recruits had to write were easily spotted. However, some were well-trained in the fields of political, military, and intelligence work. This included briefings on how to aim at being deployed in certain positions of strategic importance, how to rise within the ranks of the ANC, how to identify key moments at which agitation against the leadership could serve to undermine the ANC, how to gather information for necessary assassinations and other attacks, or to carry out such deeds themselves.⁴⁰

Many of these agents managed to escape the security nets and infiltrated the organisation undetected. Some caused great damage to the organisation before being caught.

The first serious attack on MK's structures in Angola by South African agents occurred in September of 1977, at Novo Catengue camp in the south of the country. One spy managed to poison the food of almost the entire population at this camp. One man who was there at the time related:

So this chap came then with his poison, put poison in the food. You know we are poisoning 500 people that, that's how serious the enemy agents were. That was September of 1977 . . . Fortunately because our kitchens were separated, Cubans were eating in their own kitchen. They were preparing their food on their own. We were preparing our food. So they were not affected. I mean they were there, fresh, helped us, came with their doctors- 30 Cuban plus 30 Cuban doctors coming to the camp. If you have an idea where the camp is. Camp is not a place that is easily accessible. But they came there. We were injected and whatever and whatever. That saved of us from dying. Not a single person died from that thing. Was it not [for] their quick response . . . It was a slow poison that would have taken us.⁴¹

Another woman remembered the poisoning, explaining that her group was going for night shooting practice, when people started complaining about feeling bad after

⁴⁰ ANC. (1996). *Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 68.

⁴¹ Interview with Mxolisi Petane, Interviewer unknown, no date.

eating the fish that night. Some thought it was a lack of good cleaning of the fish, and the Cubans thought that they just didn't want to go for lessons, but then everyone got sick. They had to call the Cubans from town by helicopter, and they nursed them back to health, but they were sick for most of that week.⁴² Another woman recalled the poisoning. She had not been so hungry that evening, and wasn't fond of the fish they had, so she didn't eat much. Then when everyone got sick, she was afraid that they would think she had done it, since she wasn't sick, so she pretended to be sick and have the same symptoms as everyone else.⁴³ The poisoning struck a huge blow to the morale of the trainees, and people remained suspicious for a long time about who had done it. The Security Department only caught the actual culprit in 1981.

The second major strike occurred when enemy forces bombed Nova Catengue in March of 1979. One woman recalled:

They raided the camp, ja, and they dropped more than five hundred bombs of different types there and then two comrades, in fact there were three, two of our South African comrades and one Cuban was killed in that raid and just about everything was destroyed within seconds. The operation lasted for three minutes . . . It was all over, there was nothing left of the camp at all. A camp which we had built up, you know, with our own hands, for over a year we had worked on that camp, within three minutes, it was all gone, razed to the ground, there was nothing, absolutely nothing. Even the chickens that were there burnt to death . . . And the comrades were really brutally killed because I think they spotted them, when they tried to run to the defence post outside, there where we were hiding, they thought that the planes were leaving and they came out of the dugouts and then only to come and find that the planes were returning for a second round, to come back for a second time, and then they were spotted and they were gunned down by machine gun. One comrade's head was totally gone and you couldn't even pick up their bodies, because you would try and pick them up, the leg would come off, so they had to be picked up with spades . . . So we just had to make graves and bury them there in the camp. And it was for the first time that it really dawned on me that now we are involved in war . . . it was . . . at that time that I really realised how vicious the Boers are, that, you know, if we were in the

⁴² Kodesh, W. Interview with Thoko Mavuso, 7 April 1993.

⁴³ Kodesh, W. Interview with Veronica Msimanga, 17 August 1993.

camp at that time, there wouldn't be a single one of us that would have survived.⁴⁴

The South African forces that attacked had clear intelligence about the routine of the camp, only available from someone on the inside. The camp had to be abandoned after the attack, as it was razed to the ground, and as a demoralising act, it was immensely successful, even though the raid occurred when the soldiers were elsewhere. If the soldiers had been in the camp it would have been completely devastating, taking out 500 of the trainees as well as their instructors two full countries away from home.

NAT immediately consolidated the department and began to train and deploy new recruits, as well as to establish a detention centre, Camp 32, in Angola. One of the first tasks it set itself was the recruitment of more personnel to the department. Often the department would recruit youths coming out of the country, send them on a course in East Germany, and then deploy them to duties in security and intelligence. This became one of its biggest mistakes. Camp 32, also known as Quatro after the notorious 'number four' prison in Johannesburg, became the most notorious arm of the security department.

The poisoning and bombing at Novo Catengue caused the department to worry about enemy spies but, two years later, another incident heightened this panic. In March of 1981, the ANC accidentally uncovered a spy ring that involved some people in very high positions in the organisation. The apprehension of one spy, known as 'Piper', led the security department to many others. The men identified as spies included the commander of Quibaxe camp in Angola, the head of MK Security in Angola, and another man deployed in security. These men, some of the best and

⁴⁴ Bernstein, H. Interview with Gloria Meek, no date.

brightest of their group of recruits, had been above suspicion until a lucky break enabled the department to expose the ring. This 'Spy Scare' of 1981 led to serious tightening of security and eventually to such extreme measures on the part of the security people that the rank and file in Angola generally despised the security department and lived in a state of fear. The mutineers' statements' foremost complaints targeted the security department and appeared in almost every unit's report to the National Consultative Conference the next year.

In the camps in Angola, this spy scare manifested itself as the idea that anyone who criticised the movement or committed breaches of discipline was an enemy agent who was trying to demoralise the cadres and move them to rebel against the movement. This was plausible, as sometimes the actual spies would purposely undermine conditions in the camps in order to cause dissatisfaction among the cadres. One man who was a company commissar in Mazimbu in the early 1980s recalled the problems he had with the commander of the camp. He often argued with the commander, who would issue unreasonable orders and refused to negotiate. The commander, his camp, and his company appeared to be dissenters. They found out later that the commander was a spy, and then understood why he had acted in this way. The cadres felt real frustration over these issues, which caused them much dismay.⁴⁵ Other spies encouraged their comrades to smoke dagga or drink illicit alcohol, among other breaches of discipline. With the unsettled conditions in the camps at the time, some of the comrades easily followed in this direction. However many people got in trouble when indiscipline arose from other causes. It reached a point where anyone caught smoking a joint, drinking alcohol, or just asking to be sent home to fight, would be branded an enemy agent by the security department. Many

⁴⁵ Kodesh, W. Interview with Lentsoane, 5 April 1993.

people found themselves so depressed about the long waiting period in the camps and the conditions they found themselves in, that they turned to dagga or alcohol to escape their problems. Earlier, the commanders and the security department tolerated dagga smoking and drinking. This idea that anyone breaching discipline must be an enemy spy changed this situation.

If unlucky enough to be caught, a soldier faced severe punishment. One man remembered his own experiences when he was living in the camp at Malange. He hadn't smoked dagga in three years, though he had enjoyed the occasional joint earlier in his life. At one point he decided to have a puff from someone else's joint, which happened just when the security department started rounding up the smokers and punishing them. He and his fellow smokers were rounded up and beaten until they confessed their crime. They were also forced to tell the security men who else they knew who smoked dope. He was tied to a post and beaten, then left overnight in the cold. He was with a group of 40 men who were punished for this indiscipline, and he recalled hearing his commissar, Oupa Maloi, being beaten to death nearby for a similar crime. He served three months of hard labour, and then returned to the ranks. He went then to another camp, Caculama, with Zimbabwean officers, and recalled that there they were able to smoke dagga freely. These contradictions from camp to camp made it very difficult to figure out what actions would be punished at any particular time, and left many soldiers fearful and uncertain.⁴⁶ Nor was this an isolated incident. Many reports point to severe torture of cadres who committed indiscipline. One report submitted for the National Consultative Conference pointed out problems with the security department abusing the cadres: "1- Cadres disappeared without trace at the hands of the security, 2-Individuals would kill without any

⁴⁶ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Chalmers Nyombolo, 30 July 1998, Woodstock, Cape Town.

accountability, 3-Beatings to death became rife, 4-Members of the security assumed enormous power . . . Persecution became the order of the day.”⁴⁷ The people in the camps reached a stage where they constantly feared what might befall them if they stepped out of line. Many felt this treatment was very unfair. As soldiers at Malange camp asserted to Wolfie Kodesh in 1984: “Not all mistakes are made on purpose.”⁴⁸ The idea that any step out of line meant a purposeful attempt to damage the organisation caused countless difficulties for many of the MK cadres.

Another issue that eventually led to the mutinies had similar roots. The Security Department interpreted any indiscipline or dissent as sabotage of the organisation. They viewed many other activities similarly: criticism of the conditions in the camps, complaints about the length of time spent in the camps or any other legitimate concerns. When the Treasurer General, Thomas Nkobi, visited camps in Angola, he heard: “Frank and open talk [is] not tolerated at some camps and there is a fear of victimisation if you talk up.”⁴⁹ This closure of official routes for legitimate complaints left the soldiers with no way to channel their frustrations and grievances, which led to further frustration and dissatisfaction in the rank and file, and contributed to the mutinies that were to come.

Once branded an enemy agent for whatever reason, the stigma could rarely be escaped. And often security department personnel spread false rumours or distributed reports branding people as agents. They rarely corrected this false and unsupported information . One report pointed out:

Dissemination of wrong information: This department [security] is the chief culprit, a number of comrades have been victims to this

⁴⁷ National Consultative Conference 1985: MHQ unit Lusaka, regional preparation document.

⁴⁸ Kodesh, Wolfie, notebook on projects in Angola.

⁴⁹ Programme of the Treasurer General in Angola- December 1984.

shortcoming. The members introduce unfounded allegations about this or that comrade being an agent or having deserted the organisation, this is spread in the rank and file officially and unofficially only to learn later when the man shows up that he/she was being deliberately destroyed. In some instances an official report is given only to learn the contrary is true. Facts enumerated here under bears testimony in that regard . . .⁵⁰

The document cited several specific examples of people the department reported to be spies, who were later cleared. It went on to say:

Furthermore a number of comrades have been labelled only to discover later that they are instructing or doing some important duties somewhere. This information is leaked by the security deliberately or due to its inefficiency . . . It has been our bitter experience that some of our cadres have remained suspects for too long. Further no checking and counter checking has been done. Unfortunately information has been forced out of them resulting in confession under duress or torture.⁵¹

Many people found themselves branded as traitors and condemned to spend years and years in the camps, as, without security clearance, they could not deploy to the front. This led to even more demoralisation, particularly for those who had simply made a mistake but remained loyal to MK and the ANC. Some have found that the stigma of being an enemy agent has followed them back to South Africa even today, where they still face suspicion and disgust.

Many people had far worse problems with the security department. Abuse and torture of suspects became common. Some suspects found themselves sent to Quatro, the infamous prison camp in the north of Angola. The history of the abuse and torture of suspects at Quatro, or Camp 32, can be found in many documents released in the early 1990s which first broke the story of abuse in the ANC camps. The ANC admitted the systematic torture in their submissions to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Skweyiya Commission investigated the origins of the mutinies and

⁵⁰ National Consultative Conference 1985: MHQ unit Lusaka, regional preparation document.

⁵¹ National Consultative Conference 1985: MHQ unit Lusaka, regional preparation document.

documented the conditions in Quatro. It cited overcrowded cells, inadequate health care, even worse food supplies than the other camps, harsh labour, and serious psychological and physical torture. Often the guards forced inmates to do hard labour until they collapsed, after which the guards severely beat them.⁵² Systematic torture became endemic, and various torture practices became synonymous with Quatro camp. The Motsuenyane Commission, which also investigated the mutinies' origins, documented many common abuses:

- lengthy isolation in solitary confinement;
- regular beatings under the feet or elsewhere with guava tree sticks or with coffee tree sticks;
- napalm- being rubbed with (or rolling naked on) hairy beans or leaves of a plant which caused itching;
- pompa- blowing ones cheeks or pumping them up so that a guard would slap the cheeks causing excruciating pain to the ears;
- pawpaw- being covered on the face with the skin of a scooped out pawpaw fruit and beaten;
- Beirut- flogging while naked and lying in a face-down position;
- helicopter- being tied hand and foot and suspended on a pole or log like a pig on a spit;
- being tied to a tree and remaining there in public view for a long time;
- red ants introduced into clothes one was wearing and being bitten by these ants;
- Slaughter- digging a hole shoulder deep and being beaten on the head and hands as you obey the instruction to come out of the hole;
- Starvation- being denied food as a form of punishment;
- chopping wood for hours on end;
- 1000 litre tank- drawing water and pulling a 1000 litre tank uphill with others and being beaten in the process;
- Third degree interrogation- non-stop interrogation for two days or more.⁵³

These are only a few examples of the daily torture in the camp. Beyond these, suspects were often beaten and tortured until they signed false confessions, which

⁵² ANC. (1996). Skweyiya Commission Report 1992. In *Appendices to the African National Congress Policy Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, August 1996*.

⁵³ ANC. (1996). Motsuenyane Commission Report, 20 August 1993. In *Appendices to the African National Congress Policy Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, August 1996*, 44-45.

were difficult to refute once signed. Some people remained in Quatro for many years under these circumstances, and many neither had charges brought against them, nor had a chance to have their day in court to refute the allegations. Some who were kept in these conditions remain loyal to the ANC today, despite the treatment meted out to them. Others found that their experiences at the hands of the security department disillusioned them with the movement and never supported it again.

The security department's notorious behaviour emerged as the primary grievance of the mutineers, and one of the major issues which the MK soldiers raised in preparation for the National Consultative Conference that followed it. The serious problems between the security department and the rank and file soldiers caused a lot of hatred, animosity, fear, and unhappiness. Many used the Conference as their first opportunity to strike back at the department, and attacked them in the harshest possible words. One unit asserted:

The backbone of all armies is the Security department . . . It is through practical experience that the security department more often than not and whether consciously or not is the source of a very serious source of catastrophe rather than security and firmness to the organisation . . . Following the sequence of events therefore it is clear to all genuine and freedom loving patriots in the organisation as a whole that the security department is rotten it is the source of ALL EVILS AND HENCE THE NERVE CENTRE OF REACTION instead of progress [emphasis theirs]⁵⁴

The cadres particularly complained about the choice of personnel for the Security Department. Those cadres chosen for training and deployment as security officers were often very young and, after being sent on a course in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), they deployed with full powers over the rank and file soldiers. Many complaints came from the various camps about this. One suggested: "Age limit in the Security Department: Some operatives are too young and socially

⁵⁴ Report submitted in preparation for the National Consultative Conference of 1995, from "Unit U."

inexperienced to handle this task. Comrades suggest inclusion of older comrades to guide and assist them.”⁵⁵ Another remarked: “Political consciousness and maturity should be the prime qualification of appointment to the responsibility of recording officer [a security dept. position].”⁵⁶ The attitudes of the security men and women also created problems. One report noted:

In the security all the ‘yes men’ type of cadres are serving, they first get the basic training sent to GDR, then work in this important department. Hence the chaotic nature of their working, beatings instead of persuasion because of ignorance and political immaturity . . . [The] majority of their cadres ended being renegades and nothing has been done since 1977.⁵⁷

The youth and political immaturity of the security cadres appeared in many submissions to the National Consultative Conference and emerged as a large part of the problem.

MK soldiers also described the omnipotence of the department as a weakness. One report noted: “The security department works independently as a supreme body, is very negligent and also relaxed. It also has too much power.”⁵⁸ This power, unanswerable to any oversight or monitoring, became the security department’s ‘blank cheque’ to do what they liked. Often they failed to root out actual enemy spies, but rather abused their power and even hurt innocent bystanders. Another report purported: “Most are apolitical, inexperienced and even non-security officers or functionaries in their daily work. The best they do is to look for drunk comrades, come into love affairs of other cadres, and . . . use force at slightest provocation.

⁵⁵ Report submitted in preparation for the National Consultative Conference of 1995, from the Luanda District.

⁵⁶ Report submitted in preparation for the National Consultative Conference of 1995, from Viana Camp.

⁵⁷ National Consultative Conference 1985: MHQ unit Lusaka, regional preparation document

⁵⁸ Report submitted in preparation for the National Consultative Conference of 1995, from the Luanda District.

Force is the primary in their activities. Their criterion is faulty to say the least.”⁵⁹ Overall, the hatred and fear of the security department affected all of the soldiers in Angola and became a primary cause of the mutinies that were to follow.

The MK Mutinies

The mutinies began in January of 1984. Dissatisfaction with the problems seen above finally crystallised into action on the part of some soldiers. Following a particularly difficult battle with UNITA, many soldiers in camps in the Malange district began to shoot their weapons into the air, protesting their situation and demanding attention from the leadership. They demanded that Oliver Tambo, the ANC’s president; Joe Slovo, MK’s commander; and Chris Hani, MK’s commissar, address their grievances.

Though Hani met with the mutineers, the other leaders refused. The mutineers then decided to go to Luanda to confront their leaders. By February, the action spread to Viana transit camp just outside the city. Soldiers from all corners of Angola streamed into the camp to find out what was going on and decide whether they supported the mutiny. Some sources claim that the soldiers planned to storm the headquarters in Luanda, but diverted to Viana, while others say that the mutineers moved to Viana, and then others came of their own accord, sometimes commandeering vehicles to get there. The shooting in the air continued, and the soldiers refused to be disarmed, citing fear of the security department reprisals if they surrendered their weapons. Chris Hani met with the mutineers at one point, asking all those who supported the ANC to make themselves known. One man who was there recalled:

⁵⁹ National Consultative Conference 1985: MHQ unit Lusaka, regional preparation document

Thereafter came the leadership, came Chris Hani, called a meeting in Viana and first of all the things, he asked that all the people who were there, comrades were there, he asked the people, look here, I want to know who are the people who are no longer interested to be within the ANC, they must step out so as they can go to the UN. None of the comrades left or went out, none.⁶⁰

The mutineers did not care to abandon the struggle, but merely to change the circumstances in which they languished. They elected a committee of ten to present their grievances to the leadership. Among other things, the mutineers demanded a national consultative conference, a change in the attitude towards deploying people to the front, an intensification of the struggle inside South Africa, and disbandment and investigation of the security department. On February 16, FAPLA sent forces to take over the camp and disarm the mutineers, and a few casualties occurred on both sides. The Security Department sent many of the mutineers to Quatro, and some to other camps under a cloud of suspicion.

At Pango camp in May of 1984, yet another revolt erupted. The mutineers in this second mutiny largely consisted of cadres transferred there from the mutiny in Viana. Again, the Security Department quelled the mutiny, but casualties occurred on both sides, and the fighting was more serious and had more severe consequences. The Security Department executed seven of the Pango mutineers, and another group sentenced to execution only received a reprieve at the last minute. More people went to Quatro and others faced discipline for their actions. This marked the end of the mutinies.

The MK leadership responded to the mutinies inconsistently. Some leaders acknowledged that the mutineers had legitimate grievances, while others maintained that enemy agitators who preyed on soldiers delinquent in their political development had caused the whole thing. While the mutineers did have many legitimate

⁶⁰ Bernstein, H. Interview with Jeff Mtembu, no date.

complaints, they lacked the outlet to vent them in a constructive way. But regardless of whether the circumstances justified the mutinies, the leadership united in its response to the mutinies: they represented a serious breach of military code, and had to be put down severely in order to prevent it from happening again. The Stuart Commission shared this view, and noted:

However, the Commission, while accepting that the cadres had many genuine grievances, strongly criticise the tactics adopted to solve these. Under no circumstances can we condone:

- the indiscriminate shooting and terrorising of the Angolan people;
- the total rejection and contempt of authority;
- the breakdown of military discipline;
- the orgy of drinking and dagga smoking.[during the course of the mutiny, many soldiers took advantage of the lack of authority to engage in drinking and smoking sessions].⁶¹

Most of the mutinies' leaders were imprisoned at Cuatro, except for the seven who were executed. The effects continued to emerge over the next few years. However, things could not go on as before, and efforts had to be made to change the situation even if the form through which the protest came was illegitimate. The mutinies revealed the intolerable circumstances for the majority of soldiers in Angola. The grievances that led to the mutinies showed that many areas of the organisation needed reform and change. In the immediate aftermath of the mutinies, many investigations revealed what should be done to change things. The MK leadership implemented some of the recommendations, while they ignored others.

In the months following the first mutiny, members of the Treasurer General's department, including Wolfie Kodesh, went to Angola to talk to the soldiers in the camps and investigate some of the problems. A report from the Treasurer General's office and Wolfie Kodesh's notebook on projects in Angola from the same visit refer

⁶¹ ANC. (1996). Stuart Commission Report 1984. In *Appendices to the African National Congress Policy Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, August 1996*, 25.

to many problems and offer many solutions. The reports developed systems for keeping track of supplies and getting them to the camps where they were needed. They added suggestions for supplementing the logistics department's efforts with a system of bartering between the camps and the locals. They advised some personnel changes, such as replacing the illiterate man in charge of logistics in Luanda with someone more qualified to keep records and deal with requisitions. Problems of deployment, leadership, the security department, and relations between the rank and file and the leaders were also addressed and suggestions made to improve these.⁶² However, assessment of the degree to which any of these recommendations were implemented is elusive. The leadership never followed up some reports, but did put some suggested changes into effect.

Following the first mutiny, the Stuart Commission investigated the causes and events of the rebellion. Their report is a detailed and well-researched look at the problems that led to the mutiny as well as the mutiny itself. Though it came before the subsequent action in Pango camp, the commissions' finding regarding the reasons for the mutiny and demands of the mutineers remained the same. However, once submitted to the leadership, it disappeared for many years. The leadership also made concerted efforts to conceal the mutinies and their origins, and no public knowledge of the revolt came to light until the early 1990s, when a few people returned to South Africa and began to bring issues of abuse to light. This was largely done as a way to discredit the ANC, but contained substantial truth in the accusations. Some rumours and leaks had surfaced before this, but the story of the mutinies remained largely suppressed until these people brought it to publication. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided a place for the ANC to answer its accusers, and the

⁶² *Programme of TG [Treasurer General] in Angola- December 1984*; and Kodesh, Wolfie. *Notebook on projects in Angola*.

organisation submitted details about the abuses as well as the Stuart Commission report and other subsequent reports detailing abuses of ANC people by their own organisation.

The most significant event following the mutinies was the calling of the National Consultative Conference of 1985. The rhetoric surrounding the conference denied that its calling had anything to do with the mutinies. But one of the mutineers' demands had been the calling of just such a conference. And even if the conference's origins had nothing to do with the mutinies, which is unlikely in the extreme, the reports coming in from all corners of the organisation exposed the same problems that led to the mutinies and the mutinies itself almost universally. Further, many changes came in the course of the conference that directly addressed the mutineers' complaints and problems. Andrew Masondo, the National Commissar, one of the men who the mutineers wished to see removed from their lives in Angola, was redeployed to another position. Mzwai Piliso, the head of the security department and also a target of the mutineers' discontent, was redeployed the year after the Kabwe Conference. However, Joe Modise, the Commander of MK, who was also one of the mutineers' most hated characters, retained his position. The Conference drafted and adopted a Code of Conduct which put into writing the policies of the ANC to prevent abuses such as the ones that had taken place in Angola. And a Department of Justice, put into place as a way to monitor the security department and develop a system of checks and balances, would limit the powers of the security department to misbehave.

No clear account, however, assesses the extent to which these changes had any real effect on the circumstances of the movement. The calling of the conference had a positive effect on many of the soldiers. A report from 1985 noted:

As conference preparations started the morale of the comrades started to ascend [sic]. This is so particularly after the visit of a delegation

from the National Preparatory Committee of the National Consultative Conference and the visit of the Army Commissar and other leaders to the centres.⁶³

Despite their initial support, the effectiveness of the process was limited. The Officer of Justice lacked co-operation from the security department, which largely neutralised his office. And abuses continued, though heightened awareness abated. Many of the soldiers did not welcome the process of contributing to the conference itself. One report from Angola expressed: "complete mistrust of the Regional Conference." This mistrust had a sound basis, as the regional report for the National Conference severely minimized the problems that occurred at the various Angolan camps. Some of the camp reports attacked the conditions in the camps, the war with UNITA, and the security department in no uncertain terms, but the official report from the regional office neglected to deal with these issues seriously and omitted some altogether. While the conference did address some problems, in many cases the problems remained unresolved, and many practices that had caused problems for the soldiers continued.

Some changes occurred in the aftermath of the mutinies and the conference. The post-1984 trainees mentioned a policy of 'criticism and self-criticism,' which in principle provided a forum allowing the cadres to air their grievances as well as to examine their own performances and to seek ways to improve them. However, one soldier remembers that while this practice occurred on a regular basis, the cadres still felt that they could not be open and honest in their criticism. More often they would just say that things were fine, or bring up petty gripes about other people in the

⁶³ Report on ANC in Angola for the Year Beginning January 1984 to 8 January 1985.

camp.⁶⁴ A report from early 1985 reported improvements in medical support, food supplies, and transport. It explained:

There is a regular supply of eggs, meat and fresh fish in the Luanda District . . . The regular presence of qualified doctors in the region has also helped to alleviate the health situation. Added to this is the supply of mosquito nets coils and sprays which for a time being helped to fight effects of malaria. . . . Worth mentioning here is the alleviation of the transport shortages, especially, for the Luanda district by the arrival of donation of cars-scooters from Yugoslavia . . . We have been selling to Angolans in Provinces extra clothing we get from Donors in exchange for local currency, meat, or things we require.⁶⁵

The report also asserted: "Today we can say that relations are normalizing."⁶⁶

As for the mutineers, their lives would never be the same again. Of the ones who were taken to Quatro, some stayed there for years. Some not only didn't get out until the camps in Angola were vacated in 1989, but were then taken to Tanzania and remained under suspicion. Some remained in other camps, and never saw deployment. Some were seen as dissidents for the rest of their time in Angola. Others were 'rehabilitated' and found their way back into acceptance in MK. One soldier recalled dealing with the mutineers in his camp. They were difficult at first, would argue a lot, and resisted authority. But they would fight out the issues in discussion forums and try their best to go on with the programme of the camp. He recalled that eventually the camp was transformed, and things went back to normal. One of the mutineers went on to work as a political education officer, and some others eventually became instructors.⁶⁷ Others never escaped the wrath of the security department. Some of the mutineers who had been imprisoned in Tanzania, in the

⁶⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Weziwe Ncame, 9 September 1998, University of the Western Cape.

⁶⁵ Report on ANC in Angola for the Year Beginning January 1984 to 8 January 1985

⁶⁶ Report on ANC in Angola for the Year Beginning January 1984 to 8 January 1985

⁶⁷ Kodesh, W. Interview with Meshack Mochele, 15 December 1992.

Dakawa camp, only emerged in 1988. A woman who was working in the communication department there remembered having the mutineers in the camp. The security men would warn them that these people were dissidents, that they shouldn't listen to them, and that they were enemy agents. But during interaction with these men, they seemed just like normal guys, so the other cadres didn't know where to put their sympathies. Many cadres ostracised the mutineers, and the people who encountered them didn't know whether to believe the stories the security department told them or to believe their own instincts that the mutineers were decent and loyal comrades.⁶⁸ The mutinies marked the lowest point of the ANC and its struggle, and continued to effect many people long after it ended.

Conclusion

Existence in exile was difficult in the best of times for the ANC and the PAC. In harder times, the heightened circumstances of exile and struggle made feuds become crises and complaints become mutinies. In the process, some dedicated and committed cadres lost their way and became disillusioned. Some gave up on the struggle entirely. Others became casualties of the crises and at best found themselves tarred as enemies or expelled from their organisations. In the worst case, many lost their lives along the way without ever getting the opportunity to fulfil the destiny they had planned for their lives. The PAC's leadership crisis and the resultant problems lasted more than a decade and crippled the organisation's ability to pursue a revolution inside South Africa. The ANC's mutinies led to executions, human rights abuses, and the marginalisation of many loyal cadres. But the resolution of the crises

⁶⁸ von den Steinen, Interview with Ncame.

saw both organisations and their armies ready to pursue the struggle in earnest by the mid- 1980s, just in time for an upsurge of resistance within South Africa. And despite the problems outside the country, MK and APLA emerged dedicated and ready to fight, and the struggle continued.



Chapter 6

MK in the Front Line States and South Africa

The MK Oath

I shall go:
Where all men are deaf
Whether dead or alive
Where all sounds are all one
An echo upon an echo
Where bones brittle
In a kiss with copper
Where blood like crude
Oozes from sabotaged lines
Because I have taken oath
In the People's Court
To march forward into the Battle Storm

I must go:
As big guns roar
And tanks rumble
Whilst bombs thunder
Like vicious volcanoes
And pistols spit
Like poisonous snakes
And ricochets screams
Like wicked witches
Where rifles hiss
Like cornered cobras
And grunts and groans are common cries
The signals of the silent world
For I have taken oath
In the People's Court
To march forward into the Battle Storm

I'll be gone
To where sappers sing
In solemn solos:
"A mine a man"
That's their sweetest song
The only chorus with a safe note.
Since I have taken oath
In the People's Court
To march forward into the Battle Storm.¹

¹ Sejake, Wellington. (1979). The MK Oath. In *Dawn, monthly journal of Umkhonto we Sizwe*, Vol.3, No.11, 41.

Introduction

When the Soweto generation of recruits and those who followed them chose to join Umkhonto we Sizwe, one goal was foremost in their minds: to go back to South Africa and fight the apartheid government. Many never saw this opportunity. They found themselves in countries all over the world, training or studying. They became instructors in the camps, or worked in administrative capacities. They found places in the diplomatic activities of the organisation. Some even abandoned the struggle and settled elsewhere, making new lives for themselves. However, some did find themselves deployed in the front line states, Botswana, Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe, and others got the orders they had longed for: go home and fight. Some who operated inside had never been in exile, while others had served their time in the camps and waited, sometimes for years, to receive their marching orders.

Receiving the orders

The arrival of the truck that took soldiers back to Luanda for the first step of the return to South Africa always excited the soldiers stationed in the camps in Angola. When the truck pulled in to the camp, an immediate sense of anticipation permeated the soldiers, and a desperate hope that they would be called to go back.

One man remembered:

It started with the distant rumble of trucks. We always loved that distant rumble of trucks . . . usually mChina was there hidden among the leaders and commanders and their aides and security comrades, clutching his little folder stuffed with pieces of paper all of us would give up a packet of cigarettes to see. mChina, who came to the camp far too seldom and far too secretly, to select comrades for the front, for the battlefields of Sasolburg and Koeberg and Silverton and Booyens. Whenever the rumbling trucks came, each of us would spend breathless days until the trucks rumbled off again, waiting for a

comrade from camp HQ to come and call us out of a topography class, or political discussion, or drag us away from our lunch.²

Another remembered the origin of the name and his own calling:

The following weekend Madoda 'Isaac' Mnyamana told me that *Um-china* had arrived and my name was on the list! Back in South Africa- particularly in the Durban area- people played an illegal game similar to lotto. The 'china man' was the person responsible for paying out the winnings. In this particular instance it meant that I was one of the lucky people chosen to leave for South Africa.³

If they were chosen they received little or no notice and were ordered not to tell anyone, so any friends in the camp had to be left in the dark. But usually the impending departure overwhelmed all of the other feelings and they looked forward expectantly to their pending return to South Africa to fight.

Others left South Africa at the request of the organisation in order to undergo a faster and more specialised training program in order to expedite their return home. They were often sent to Quibaxe, Funda, or Caxito camps in Angola, which had fewer trainees, a faster program, and more stringent security and adherence to pseudonyms. They left for a short period of time, got trained, and returned to South Africa immediately. Some never even went that far for their training. Some took crash courses in the front line states or even inside South Africa itself. However one trained, the order to go inside or to the front as an operational soldier was exciting and often scary.

The return

For those who went outside to the camps in Angola or other training facilities before deployment inside the country, the return to South Africa closely resembled

² Wilson, Jimmy. (1991). Of Presidents and Pigs. In *Umkhonto we Sizwe 30th Anniversary Souvenir Magazine*, 16.

³ Matakata, Jama. (2004). *Hills of Hope*, Pietermaritzburg: Nutrend Productions, 46.

the passage out. They followed the same routes, and many of the same people worked to help them along the way. Many front line countries had safe houses in which to put them up on their way through to South Africa. One woman, who worked for MK in Lesotho and Swaziland, remembered that her family was involved with the ANC, and long before she became involved herself, she recalled men constantly coming in and out of their home in Swaziland. Often she found herself sharing her room with many MK soldiers or recruits who were on their way into or out of the country.⁴ One man remembered his mixed feelings upon crossing back into South Africa:

Emotions vacillated between bravery and panic. I imagined myself liberating my people and saw their jubilation as they hailed all the freedom fighters as heroes. On the other hand, casualties around infiltration sites were high and I was afraid of being captured or killed. Here we were, given no choice as to our point of entry. Thoughts of friends and family went round and round in my head but I managed to compose myself. I was a soldier of the people's army- prepared to die for a noble cause.⁵

The returnees, unless they had left the country with a good cover story, or been given false identification documents, would find themselves climbing the fences to get back into the country, entering illegally, just as they left.

The Front Line States

MK's struggle faced greater obstacles than other countries' liberation armies in that South Africa's neighbouring states sometimes provided obstacles for their struggle. Until 1975, Portugal still ruled Mozambique; Zimbabwe achieved independence from the white government only in 1980; and Namibia remained under South African occupation until 1990. Botswana and Swaziland were reluctant to antagonise South

⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Nosizwe Khumalo, 16 June 1999, Cape Town.

⁵ Matakata, 51.

Africa, as so much of their economies depended on South Africa's goodwill. Lesotho (called Basotholand until independence in 1966) often aided the ANC, but as a landlocked state, completely surrounded by South Africa and dependant for economic reasons, the access was difficult for MK's soldiers. The ruling party often influenced the level of support, with the Basotho National Party (BNP) allied with the ANC and the Basotho Congress Party (BCP) on the side of the PAC. The co-operation of the neighbouring states varied and changed over time.

Until the independence of Zimbabwe, the guerrilla war raging inside its borders largely precluded MK access through that country. Once Zimbabwe won its independence, the ANC found things no easier, as the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) had won the elections and the ANC had backed the losing party, the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU), so the new government had little interest in helping them. After a few years, the ZANU government's negative sentiments softened, and they permitted the ANC to have a presence in the country, though MK's soldiers and commanders still had to operate underground there. If caught, they did not face serious punishment, but the agreement with the government meant that they had to keep a low profile. One woman who worked in Zimbabwe transporting weapons, money, and supplies into South Africa through Botswana and Swaziland recalled that she had to act as if she were an ordinary expatriate, and with her background as a student leader, many people criticized her, thinking that she no longer worked for the ANC. Meanwhile, she performed all sorts of work for MK and their special operations unit underground. She found that she had to cut herself off from South Africans who were in Zimbabwe, which made her feel rather isolated, as that was the community in which she would have felt most at home.⁶ Another man

⁶ Kodesh, W. Interview with Angela Brown, 19 March 2003.

recalled his time in Zimbabwe, where he was supposed to hold media workshops for church groups. He would have to work his full day from 8-5 doing the workshops, then spend the nights going to secret meetings.⁷

Beyond this basic use of Zimbabwe as a crossing point into South Africa for arms, supplies, and personnel, at one point MK tried to open a guerrilla front on the Zimbabwean border. One of the commanders in that region recalled the process during 1985 and 1986. Many people infiltrated through Kruger Park, sometimes up to eight or ten people at a time, but the capabilities of the security forces dealt them a serious blow throughout the operation. He recalled:

The process [has] largely failed. It's failed significantly. Not a single group of personnel to my knowledge have been located into the country, because of the enemy's capacities . . . So, very little progress has been made by mid-1986 and you have moved towards a situation where the idea of establishing a guerrilla zone is almost subconsciously moving away, and you've moved into mine warfare and hit-and-run tactics- at best the movement of sections of MK cadres to ambush and carry out attacks on farms . . . By late 1986, 1987, there is very near to a 100 percent casualty rate.⁸

He recalled how horrible the situation was, for him to have to order people to go into the country in this process, knowing that their chances of surviving were nil.⁹ As time went on, operating out of Zimbabwe became easier and easier, but with all of the concentration of South Africa's forces on that border, often it could only serve as a base from which to launch missions through other front line states.

Botswana, Lesotho, and Mozambique were originally very lenient about letting MK operate out of their countries. Swaziland was a vitally positioned country,

⁷ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Chris Vick, 10 February 1999, Melville, Johannesburg.

⁸ Barrell, H. Interview with Garth Strachan, 5-7 August 1989, Harare.

⁹ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Garth Strachan, 29 October 1998 and 9 November 1998, Cape Town.

particularly given its shared borders with Mozambique, a staunch ANC ally, and South Africa. However, the environment was often difficult to work in, particularly after the death of King Sobhuza, an ally of the ANC and a father-in-law to one of Nelson Mandela's daughters, in August of 1982. Botswana did not officially allow the ANC and MK to operate in their country or use it as a base, and if an MK cadre were caught there with weapons, he might face a prison sentence. When it came to people working underground in the early 1980s, they did not face much trouble from the authorities who lacked the capacity to adequately police their activities, though they did have to keep their work secret. Mozambique accommodated the ANC more in the 1970s and early 1980s. They allowed ANC and MK cadres to operate openly as long as they did not infiltrate South Africa directly across the Mozambiquean borders, but rather crossed through Swaziland first. Lesotho was generally helpful in allowing MK and the ANC to operate in their country, though their isolated location limited the usefulness of their more open policy, and the ruling party determined the level of support. When the Basotholand National Party (BNP) was in power, the ANC had an ally to count on, but the Basotholand Congress Party (BCP) had a long standing alliance with the PAC, and during their reign, the Pan-Africanists received preferential treatment. After the coup of 1986, however, the new government gave in to South African pressure and demands and expelled ANC cadres from the country.¹⁰ Swaziland, after the death of King Sobhuza, was never very accepting of the ANC, and refused to let MK operate in their country. Despite the general difficulties with the Swazi government, however, normal Swazi citizens often aided the ANC and MK in their struggle. The levels of government co-operation with the ANC on the part of the front line states varied considerably, but all housed a number of MK and ANC

¹⁰ Edgar, Robert. (1987). The Lesotho Coup of 1986. In Moss, Glenn and Obery, Ingrid. (Eds). *South African Review 4*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 380-381.

personnel, with or without their knowledge or permission, and all served as passages in and out of South Africa for personnel, supplies, money, communications, and weapons. And in all of the front line states, no matter what their official policies towards the liberation movements, ordinary citizens were the lifeblood of support for the MK soldiers.

Whatever open operation or co-operation the ANC and MK enjoyed in the different front line states, their support waned in the early- to mid-1980s. When the South African security forces started to attack the neighbouring countries in attempts to hit ANC and MK personnel, as well as to intimidate and destabilise the front line states, some of the countries yielded to the pressure to stop helping the ANC. South African forces attacked Mozambique in 1981, in the Matola raid, which killed several people. One man who was there at the time recalled:

It was quite obvious it was the work of agents who had crossed over, one kilometre from South Africa . . . and this was the beginning of the terror campaign that was launched. We lived like rats. We had to run for our lives, we had to sleep [out of] the house often, we would get word from Frelimo that so many Boers were seen crossing over, don't sleep in your house . . . It was a massacre, they attacked three of our houses . . . They killed 12 of our comrades in three houses. The thirteenth one died subsequently in hospital and they kidnapped two.¹¹

Later, the South Africans attacked a jam factory with their planes, killing three Mozambicans, and then attacked a Mozambican house, killing a number of Mozambicans and only one ANC member.¹² Many car bombs, assassinations, and raids followed.

In December of 1982, South African commandos killed 28 South Africans and 12 Basotho in an attack on Maseru, Lesotho's capital. One man who escaped death that night recalled seeing the house across the street attacked and fleeing:

¹¹ Bernstein, H. Interview with Indres Naidoo, no date.

¹² Bernstein, Interview with Naidoo.

Around 1 a.m. there was a loud bang which seemed like a bomb. The vibration shook our little house. The second blast happened immediately after the first. I didn't know what was happening but I was dead sure that whatever it was, it was in my neighbourhood. I peeped through the window only to find the house opposite us, owned by Chris Hani, in flames . . . We went for the door and started to count one, two . . . my comrade was just about to dash out when the firing started. We quickly crawled back inside leaving the door open as it was. This time the firing was heavier . . . Again, the firing stopped. We repeated counting, one, two, three . . . my comrade dashed off. Immediately after, I followed him. We ran as fast as our legs could carry us. Behind us, the firing started. We wondered whether they saw us or whether they were continuing to destroy Hani's house. We didn't stop to look but ran in the direction of town. We arrived at the house of a comrade, who was terrified to open the door. Well, eventually he did and we told him what had happened. After some 15-20 minutes, there was a knock at the door. We all froze, saying 'Well, they followed us and finally caught up with us' We asked who it was and, to our relief, it was some of our comrades. They told us that a house where some of our comrades were staying in Thamae, Maseru, had been attacked too. We were frightened, wondering how many had been killed but hoping that it should be either one or none . . . Morning came and around 5 a.m. we walked back . . . We soon discovered that more than two places had been attacked. The death toll was rising. There was sadness and bitterness in all our faces. We vowed to avenge their death.¹³

Gaborone in Botswana did not escape the raids. In 1983 South African commandos attacked that city, to the great surprise of those residing there. As one man remembered:

The house across the road from me was attacked and I thought they were coming for me . . . I was woken up at about half-one in the morning by the sounds of shots. I immediately got up, looked out the window and saw SADF attacking the house across the road. I immediately knew what was going on but didn't know . . . I knew there were comrades staying across the road . . . I thought that I was also a target, and my response . . . I had no means of defence, I was alone in the house and no way of escape because both exits from the house opened right into the view of the SADF soldiers who were just about ten/twenty metres from my front and back door. So I just sat it out. The next morning, of course, when we took stock, 12 people had been killed, quite a few of them locals, or non-ANC people . . . about six ANC people had been killed. What is interesting about the raid is that this thing had been happening in Mozambique and Lesotho and the

¹³ International Defence and Aid Fund. (1985). *Fact Paper on Southern Africa No. 12: Massacre at Maseru, South African Aggression Against Lesotho*, London: IDAF, 19-20.

problems in Swaziland had been starting and I think we had told ourselves that Botswana was somehow immune.¹⁴

Swaziland also experienced ongoing problems. The Swazi government and police often co-operated with the South African government, allowing kidnappings and arrests of ANC personnel in Swaziland. One woman who operated in Swaziland and Lesotho recalled her boyfriend, who was an MK soldier, being kidnapped, taken back to South Africa, arrested and eventually tortured to death by the South Africans, though he was operating inside Swaziland. She was arrested with him, and taken to the border, and would have also been kidnapped if not for the timely intervention of her uncle at the border. She recalled that every time she returned to Swaziland from Lesotho, she would get scared wondering what was awaiting her there, and what would happen to her.¹⁵ Unlike earlier South African attacks on MK camps in Angola these unprecedented attacks on neighbouring countries shocked both the MK operatives and the front line states and their citizens. The countries' reactions to these raids varied. Mozambique faced a double pronged attack both through South African commando raids and through South African support for the rival army that fought the government forces in the south of the country. Eventually they succumbed to the pressure and signed the Nkomati accord in 1984, which ejected ANC and MK personnel from the country and refused to let them operate in Mozambique. However, Mozambique allowed a small contingent of six 'non-military- personnel' to remain and continued to support activities in this country. Rather than move the personnel to another front-line state or back to Zambia, MK took advantage of the situation as an opportunity to infiltrate as many soldiers as possible directly into South Africa, and a resulting jump in operations ensued.

¹⁴ Bernstein, H. Interview with Barry Guilder, no date.

¹⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Khumalo.

In Botswana, things got more difficult after the raid. One man related:

It got to a situation where we would frequently get arrested by the local police, jailed, held for two weeks, maybe more, deported to Lusaka. Lusaka's position was that it couldn't afford to send new comrades back and we got sent back illegally and this carried on indefinitely. It was a sort of, in fact you could use the term, I know its sexist-gentleman's agreement- we would get arrested, deported, they'd know we would come back and it would be a cat-and-mouse game, until we got arrested again . . . But the effect of that was that the more often you got arrested and deported the better known you became to the local police and the more difficult it was to even go down to the shops for a packet of cigarettes.¹⁶

In Lesotho, the raids and South African economic pressure played a part in the coup that ousted Leabua Jonathan as the leader of the country. In the wake of the coup, the new government expelled ANC members from the country. While the dangers of life in South Africa far exceeded those in the front line states for MK operatives, raids, bombings, assassinations, and the like often occurred in the front line states as well, making the people operating there constantly fearful for their lives. Despite the difficult circumstances at the time, however, infiltration into South Africa continued apace. One source estimated that 40-50 MK cadres entered South Africa per month in 1986,¹⁷ strengthening MK's presence inside South Africa and bolstering their operative capacity.

Operating inside South Africa

Operations inside South Africa took a number of forms. In the early years following the Soweto uprisings, missions were often hit-and run operations, with units entering the country, hitting a target, and then escaping back into the front line states. Later, some units became established inside the country and carried out operations for

¹⁶ Bernstein, Interview with Guilder.

¹⁷ Davis, Stephen M. (1987). *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South Africa's Hidden War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 124.

long periods of time, until capture, death, or until their covers were blown and they escaped back into the neighbouring countries.

Originally, MK largely focused on sabotage of government installations. Railway lines, police stations, and government offices formed the majority of targets, though they also attacked some security police. After the ANC conference in Kabwe in 1985, the focus changed, and MK deemed more targets as legitimate. MK also designated SADF and SAP personnel and installations and those working with the government as legitimate targets.¹⁸ ANC policy stressed the avoidance of civilian casualties, and most of the interviewed MK personnel who participated in operations mentioned this policy. Occasionally civilian personnel, or “soft targets,” died at the hands of MK units, but more often they practised restraint and the units made major efforts to avoid these types of casualties.

The hit-and-run operations largely involved orchestration and logistical support from outside of the country. The units established inside South Africa at the time often lacked external support. One man who operated inside in the immediate aftermath of the Soweto uprisings recalled that he had no contact with any other ANC cell or structure inside the country, and that he basically generated his own ideas based on his experience.¹⁹ Another operating at the same time recalled: “We were entirely self-reliant . . . They picked us up at the border and dropped us at Komatipoort, that was all.” His group came in for reconnaissance, left, came back in for the operations, and then left again.²⁰ This procedure worked well, but neglected to build up a serious presence inside the country, or to establish relationships with the

¹⁸ ANC. (1996). *Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 49-51.

¹⁹ Barrell, H. Interview with Jeremy Cronin, no date.

²⁰ Barrell, H. Interview with Naledi Tsiki, 26 November 1990, Johannesburg.

populace inside South Africa. Even later, in the early- to mid- 1980s, a special operations unit organised and carried out hit-and-run operations of a spectacular nature, including attacks on the Sasol plants, a rocket attack on Voortrekkerhoogte Air Force Base, and other major MK successes. In his statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, one member of this unit explained their process for carrying out an operation:

Initially we would have perhaps documentary information which we would pick up on- do some studies around it. For instance if one took the whole question of the power grid etc., a lot of the initial information was gained from documentation, the entire pylon grid was gleaned from documentation [outside of the country]. On the basis of that we would then send initial reconnaissance to determine whether the information that we had gleaned from documents was accurate, reasonably accurate and on the basis of that we would get those reports, we would then draw up initial plans, we would then send units to say: "We are thinking of tackling the following targets, go inside and carry detailed reconnaissance on these. The units would then go to the actual targets, determine what they were able to do and at the same time they would find areas where they could base in, they would begin to look at drawing up a plan of action as to what they were going to do at every point. And each time the cadres then came back to headquarters and reported on what was happening and what they were able to do, we then talked to them about what happens in this case or another case, you know:" Will you be in a position to survive should you face various contingencies"? Of course we couldn't plan for all the contingencies but we tried to look at an all round plan. We would then go into a situation or drawing up a proper plan, we would then infiltrate material that we thought appropriate for that operation, get it into the country . . . then people would be sent into the country with the resources that they required, money, the weapons . . . they would then get to their operational areas. Prior to the time they would then check out the area that they were going to operate in, get to the base areas, establish that, if they needed any additional support they would establish that themselves. They would then go and draw the material from the caches, check the equipment, clean it if it required that and prepare themselves for the operation. They would then carry out final, a final reconnaissance prior to the operation and finally carry out the operation. They would then also withdraw and also trying to ensure that here was an alternative that existed at most times.²¹

²¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearings, Aboobaker Ismail, 06 May 1998, Johannesburg.

Later, the unit received free reign to choose their own targets. Another member of the same unit explained the process they went through in a real attack:

I chose the Ciskei Consulate as it represented the discredited . . . system. The ANC led campaign to discredit the homelands governments was under way at the time. There also existed intense repression at the time which continued until 1994. This was deemed a legitimate target. Reconnaissance of the target revealed that all offices on the floors, on the particular floor, were vacated at the latest by 5.30 pm. The cleaning staff only became active on the floor in the later hours around 8 pm. Mohammed Ismail and I reconnoitred the target the day before the operation was carried out. The following day, I on my own placed the charge at 5.30 pm. The explosion took place around 7.30 pm. According to reports one person was injured.²²

Many units used similar procedures and techniques to reconnoitre a target. If a police station were the target, an operative could go to report a fictitious crime and spend enough time in the station to get a clear idea of the layout, staffing, and hours. For an industrial target, a soldier could go in under the pretext of applying for a job and find out not only the lay-out but also information about the staff, working hours, and the like. Casual conversations in these cases with police or workers could also reveal crucial information. The units established the targets as legitimate, carried out reconnaissance to determine the routine of the place and the people who would be there at any given time so as to avoid unnecessary casualties, and then finally carried out the operation.

Other units had to enter the country, establish bases or safe houses, and undertake a number of tasks. These units were to stay active as long as possible. One source notes that in the mid-1980s: "The average MK cadre's period of survival in a unit which remained active was short- about six months, according to one MK

²² Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, Mr. Shaik, Mohamed A. Ismail, Johannes Mnisi, 7 May 1998, Day 4.

officer's estimate."²³ Survival referred to the unit remaining in action and undetected. A comrade's survival could end due to arrest, blowing of their cover, escaping to a neighbouring country, or of course death.

The units served a number of functions beyond operations and attacks. Political education also played a part of their roles inside the country, as well as reconnaissance and intelligence. MK soldiers also recruited and trained new people as a crucial part of their underground work. Recruitment always involved risks and difficulties. Cadres had to develop clear instincts about people and recruiting them always carried the risk of a security breach. If a soldier approached someone and they were not interested, his cover had been blown. While some people would not go to the police, others might. One man explained the process of recruiting:

First of all, what you need to do is to acquaint yourself to a person. Go with him to a soccer game if you can, buy a beer or two, engage in a discussion, to have a feel of a person, as to . . . what is his thinking and then you throw some ideas as well, not indicating where you stand. And then later on you can ask him. But if people come and say, 'No, you should join the ANC', what will you do? Then you get an indication . . . there was no textbook that you'll use to recruit a person. It's a manner in which you judge a person and feel a person. Some people, okay, that we happened to know, that is just easier . . . We could just be bold enough and say 'Chief, this is the situation. I would like you to be part and parcel of my outfit.' And then once he disappoints you it becomes a sad feeling because then it makes you feel insecure, because you have exposed yourself and the person didn't take what you were proposing to him. And you know, sometimes you would even think of killing that individual.²⁴

Once a person had been approached and accepted the proposition, a number of different paths lay ahead. They could be sent straight out of the country to train, often a crash course, or receive training inside the country. Crash courses worked very

²³ Barrell, H. (1990). *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*, London: Penguin, 60.

²⁴ TRC Amnesty Committee, Amnesty Hearings for Application AM6211/97, General Siphwe Nyanda, General Solly Shoke and Johannes Rasegatla, testimony of General Shoke, quoted in SADET. (2006). *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2*, Pretoria: UNISA Press, 484-5.

well for people who had a legitimate reason to disappear for a few weeks or months and could then return legitimately to South Africa after the training. This allowed them to remain in South Africa legally and work underground while staying under the radar of the security police and maintaining their normal lives. One man remembered his crash course in Angola:

I went with other guys to Angola, but even there I stated my case, I'm not there to have a full training, but just the stuff to open my eyes, how to use, how to protect myself in case I should engage, you know fire and shootings and stuff. It was a crash course, so they call them, in guerrilla warfare. After that only three months that crash and then I said thank you guys I am alright now, I can now go back, because the war was inside not outside. That was one of my beliefs. So back there, home in the Cape where I was born, and even then now at that time the youth was already now also in the pipeline of the struggle, everybody involved, I also get involved now when I'm arriving back.²⁵

In Mozambique in the aftermath of the Soweto uprisings, they would single out people under the radar of the police in South Africa, and who were not yet missed. These people received two weeks training, covering firearms and guerrilla tactics, strategy and underground work, and explosives, then returned straight back into South Africa. In later years they might even receive a more rudimentary training covering security, weapons, communications, and dead-letter boxes.²⁶

Inside South Africa, particularly during the 1980s, MK units trained recruits closer to home. The places for the training would vary depending on what they were learning at any given time. One woman who received this training in the Transkei remembered:

It depends now where was the weapons you had to train. Maybe you had to go to someone's house as a place for a meeting to learn some few things for that particular time, but you can't use someone's house for a long period of time, you know? So for certain things we have to

²⁵ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Lt. Comm. Mbulelo Mnyaka, 19 August 2004, Military Police Headquarters, Simonstown.

²⁶ SADET. (2006). *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2*, Pretoria: UNISA Press, 474.

go for a meeting for a few minutes there, but then as you know for training you need open space, a place where it's out of the city and because we use firearms and things like that so you really need something like a bush to do those things. Like the SAP or Defence Force, they don't like to use a small place for training. The part of the training that we had to do for a few months, you don't even know where you are going, you don't tell them so you go away, where, you don't even know sometimes you don't have to know the place. Because you leave at night and you go to this certain area where you don't see people and come back at night and you don't see the place so you can go and say that was a place if you get locked up or something like that, you know? So some things have to be secret you know, but we know you've been in a place like this even if he doesn't know which side of the country he was.²⁷

The training inside the country covered most of the same topics as the more extensive and formal training in Angola. The same woman explained her training programme:

It's just like normal things like physical training, so you have to be fit, teaching you weapons, how to use weapons, things like that, the most important thing to get involved in political education because if you don't know what you're doing is all about, then you end up doing the wrong thing. But if you know what is the motive of what you are doing, then you know what to do. So it was very important things to know: what you're fighting for, why you're getting involved in this thing, you know, what is this you're getting involved, you know? To know the theory before you jump to practical, because you can't like just take a gun and go and shoot people without knowing what for and what is the reason and who the people you're shooting are, so political education was very important.²⁸

Others received only the basics of military training. One man recalled training people in his community:

Part of the things that I was doing now, when I was back from my class training in Angola, I was also training them how to protect themselves, how to use the weapon. Assemble, disassemble, all the information that I was having I shared with them. The people was protecting themselves in the whole situation.²⁹

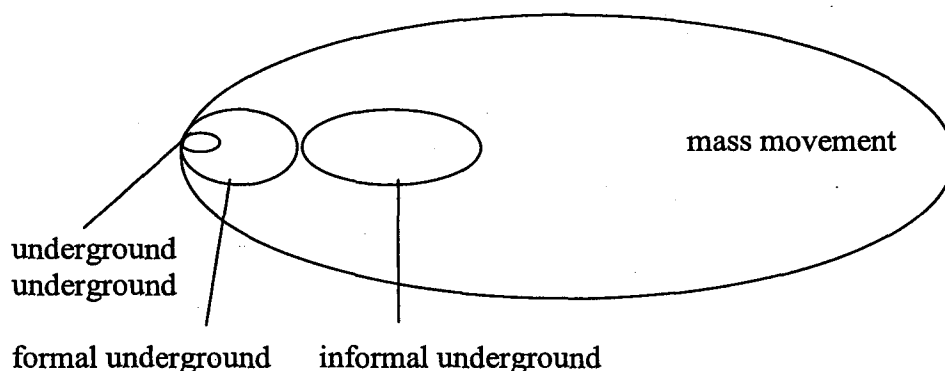
²⁷ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Chief P.O. Pumla Mapipa, 19 August 2004, Simonstown Naval Base.

²⁸ von den Steinen, Interview with Mapipa.

²⁹ von den Steinen, Interview with Mnyaka.

The recruitment and training of new recruits was crucial to advancing the struggle in South Africa. The use of internal training and crash courses made it easier to bring these new recruits directly into an operational capacity.

The set up inside South Africa was a complicated one. A diagram suggested by Howard Barrell, a former ANC operative and author of several works on MK, gives an idea of how things worked.³⁰



The 'underground underground' refers to those who were in the country illegally and operated completely as underground operatives. The 'formal underground' refers to those who were in the country with legitimate cover stories, perhaps with legitimate or forged ID documents, and who worked underground on the side. The 'informal underground' refers to those who saw themselves as working for the ANC and furthering its goals, though they worked without any guidance or contact with the organisation. Then the 'mass movement' refers to the general movement working against apartheid.

Those who were working in the 'underground underground' had to work under stringent security and secrecy. They did not have cover stories and were in the country illegally, which placed them in far greater danger of being picked up by the

³⁰ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Howard Barrell, 9 December 1998, Cape Town.

police. They would stay in 'safe houses' or at bases they established themselves. One unit actually created a sort of urban dugout system, using tactics learned from the North Vietnamese. One of the members explained the structure, situated in an abandoned mine. They dug a space for 5-6 people and their equipment, shored the walls up with roofing beams, and added a ventilation pipe and entrance/exit. Camouflage became vitally important to their survival. They preserved the topsoil when digging, and religiously re-camouflaged the entrance whenever leaving or entering. He remembered how well they succeeded: "We did it in such a manner that some people at some point in time came and . . . braaied meat on top of us while we were sitting underneath, without even noticing that there's anything unbecoming here."³¹ This was an extreme case, however. Most units working this far underground had to operate from safe houses. One woman who was part of a mixed race unit working in Cape Town explained that they usually rented a house in one area or another, and then made efforts to blend into the community. If they stayed in a Coloured area, she stayed in the house and out of sight, as she was white. If they stayed in a white area, the coloured and black members of the group remained out of sight. In this way, they avoided attracting undue attention.³²

Those working in the 'formal underground' usually had cover stories to explain their presence in the country and their lifestyles. They would either hold normal jobs or appear to hold normal jobs, and would be integrated into their communities as normal members of the area. One man explained that his contact found him a place to stay and he had to come up with a story of who he was and what

³¹ Johannes Malekole Rasegatla, quoted in Magubane, Bernard and Houston, Gregory. (2006). *The ANC's Armed Struggle in the 1970s*. In SADET, *The Road to Democracy Volume 2 [1970-1980]*, Pretoria: Unisa, 485.

³² von den Steinen, L. Interview with Shirley Gunn, 27 October 1998, Observatory, Cape Town.

he was doing. He said he was James, from the Free State, and had happened to get a job in Johannesburg, so he would stay with these people until he managed to organise other arrangements. Every day he would have to wake up as though he was going to work and then come back in the evening as though he had just finished. Really he didn't have a job, and was doing underground work during the days, but in this way, he stayed in this home and looked like a normal member of the community.³³ The people in the 'informal underground' were very useful to the people working inside the country as contacts, couriers, and support personnel. While not necessarily directly involved in the organisation, they shared a common purpose, and as normal citizens, had more freedom of movement and connections with the communities in which the units were operating. They could also be given political education which would bring them closer to the folds of the ANC, and they provided a good pool of recruits for membership in and training for the ANC and MK.

Supply routes and communication proved tricky aspects of working inside the country. There were practically as many different ways to communicate as there were operatives. Communication had to be possible between the units and their regional command and the leadership outside of the country. While many units operated largely autonomously, able to go for long periods without communicating with their leaders and authorised to designate their own targets, carry out operations, and do their other duties without checking in constantly with their higher ups, at times communication was necessary. Supplies needed to be brought into the country so operations could be carried out. Changes in policy or specific orders needed to be able to reach the units. Communication, though vital to operations inside the country,

³³ Kodesh, W. Interview with Solly Shoke, 7 April 1993.

often became very difficult due to the long and insecure lines among the different levels of personnel.

Supplies entered the country in various ways. Often one person or unit took responsibility for bringing arms, money, or messages into the country and locating them somewhere. They would then report back to someone in touch with the unit inside, who would receive information on the location of the supplies. This method maintained security, as the operational units didn't know the people who delivered the supplies, or even how to find them, and vice versa. Often the organization purchased vehicles and then fitted them with hidden compartments where the material to be brought in could be stored. The vehicles were then driven across the border without the material being found, and the supplies were hidden somewhere where the units could locate them. One woman involved in bringing supplies in from Zimbabwe explained:

I used to travel maybe every 6 weeks, two months I'd go the whole Botswana route . . . we were doing our own arms carrying. And I- that's where I will drive the weapons down and hand them over . . . they were all custom sort of- custom built DLBs [Dead Letter Boxes] as well- hidden caches in . . . I would generally buy vehicles, generally in Botswana because it's cheaper and get back. We would deal with them, we had some very good people who are excellent . . . at hiding these things. And then we had a very effective way of wrapping, it would all be sort of foil and then . . . gloves and seal everything . . . I mean our packing was just like a jigsaw puzzle. And it was that- some aspect of it was very professional . . . Well I had to make contact with people and transfer or- in some occasions because things weren't set up we actually had to dig holes, bury these and generally . . . so that [another] person's responsibility then to make sure that the person coming in from South Africa would then know exactly where it was.³⁴

Another woman who worked underground in Botswana in ordinance recalled the process:

³⁴ Kodesh, Interview with Brown.

It came in a vehicle, and the vehicle we would park behind the back of the house and offload the vehicle. And then we would store it in the DLB in the house. And then when I was going to actually go on trips inside, there would be like an evening or two evenings where either myself or, ja, eventually I was loading DLBs on my own, into the car DLBs. But most of the time, Kate would come or Alex would come and we'd make a whole evening of it and we'd eat and we'd wrap . . . I mean a lot of time, in the early days the stuff would come unwrapped so we had to wrap it, and Oh God, and you had to wrap it so tightly because you wanted to get the most that you could get into these DLBs and they were small compartments, but the amount of stuff we managed to fit in, like 12 Aks, you know, 10 limpit mines, 20, 30 grenades, 10 pistols, you know things like that. You would never think that you could get these things in. So, the stuff would be brought out, you'd lay it all out, you'd count it, then we'd start this process of packaging tape and what else did we use, we used like, uh, it wasn't foil wrap, it was saran wrap, that plastic wrap, and then, I mean that used to take hours and hours and hours and I'll always remember the [makes sound like tearing plastic wrap], and I had this house that had almost no furniture in it and it would just echo and echo and we'd have to play music loud and it was just, but I mean those were some of the most fun times that we had because, ja, we would sit around and it would be freezing cold in the middle of winter in Botswana, fuck it's cold at night, and there's no heat in these houses and you know how it is, and you're sitting on this bare tile floor and it's fucking cold and you're wrapping this material. And then the material goes into the DLB and packing the DLB in itself is a bit of an art, and sometimes it would take hours to do . . . So ja, DLB construction was quite sophisticated, and it was never done, it was done by people who had that skill. And it was, in the early days the cars would come to me with DLBs constructed to fit . . . And the ones that were constructed in the houses also, quite sophisticated. And they would try their damndest to teach me how to build one of these things, and I mean I always built completely pathetic DLBs, completely. Ja, I think it's something, either you have the skill or you don't, you know? And it's like a carpentry thing, you've got to be able to figure out how to do things in very small spaces.³⁵

She also explained the process of locating the DLBS and what she had to do so that they would be found by the operatives:

I had to write, I had to create maps, but I had to do it in code, and we had a book code. And don't ask me how it worked, because I don't remember but it was like certain, you'd take certain lines from a page of a book and you'd count the number of letters, I can't even remember how I did it, but anyway, I was taught that it was a standard book code. And then you would sort of draw a rough sketch and then you would

³⁵ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Andrea Meeson, 18 May 2002, Johannesburg.

code all the coordinates, and it wasn't really serious geographical coordinates, you would say, okay, you drive exactly 2.5 kms from this spot and on your left is X. And you'd have to find all these identifying marks in the middle of the bush. So that was another thing you had to consider when you were reconnoitring spaces, is how easy it is to explain to somebody how the fuck you find this place. It's a rock under a tree in the middle of Natal. How many rocks and trees are there? Well . . . Ja. So everything was incredibly precise in that way. How many paces? And then you'd have to pace things out, and how long is your pace compared to somebody else's pace, so all that had to be sorted out beforehand. So you take 12 paces and then you stop and you turn directly right. And so you had to sort of map it out like that as you were doing it. And then digging the DLB, I mean there was a standard way they wanted you to dig them, like down and across, and I gave up on that very early on, thank you very much. I never told anybody I did, but you know frankly if I have to go down to my knees, dig to where I can stand to my knees and then dig across, fuck! This girl's got other things she can do. Ja, I wasn't slack, but I didn't dig custom DLBs I really didn't. And there were certain times when I was dropping a significant amount of material and I mean, as long as it's not noticeable and it's deep enough that people aren't going to fall into it, that's it. And also working on your own, I mean I worked on my own for, aside from I think there was about five months out of all the time that I worked which was about six, seven years, that I worked with other people. I did about four drops all together with other people and you know it makes a difference but it's also quite hectic because you're responsible for the other person and if things fuck out or they get noticed or, I had some hectic, I had some unnerving experiences, to the point where I didn't want to work, I felt much better working on my own.³⁶

Another example from Zimbabwe became famous when discovered. The ANC set up a backpackers touring company that operated out of Europe, doing 'Cape to Cairo' holidays in a bus. People on their holidays travelled on the bus, and when they stopped in Zambia or Zimbabwe to go sightseeing, the operatives loaded weapons into concealed compartments within the touring bus. The tourists then rode on top of these weapons into South Africa, where someone else unloaded them.³⁷ Another man recalled his experiences in bringing supplies in to the country. He went to Lesotho with another operative, and the ANC personnel hid pamphlets and

³⁶ von den Steinen, Interview with Meeson.

³⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Strachan.

literature in their vehicle. They weren't told where it was hidden or how it was done, and found themselves terribly nervous as they crossed the border, but they were never caught.³⁸ Many vehicles were adapted in these ways to bring in supplies for those who operated inside.

The methods of communication also varied incredibly from sophisticated to very simple. Often communication went through couriers. One man who was supposed to be a student at the University of Cape Town had a room in a residence, and people dropped off a parcel or a newspaper with some message wrapped inside of it, and he picked them up at his residence. In this way many messages got through without compromising the couriers or the people sending and receiving the messages, as they never actually saw one another. Another very useful and successful method was the use of DLBs on a smaller scale than the ones that held weapons. With only two letters and a number, someone trained in this method could find a DLB anywhere in South Africa. One might receive a letter regarding a theatre production a friend had seen, or something else seemingly innocuous, with pinpricks under the key letters and number, or an ad in the newspaper that held the important information while posing as an innocent personal advertisement. With the two letters and a number, one could find the correct area, find a mark on a stone or wall or something, and find the hiding spot with the supplies, whether money, messages, or even weapons.³⁹ This also enhanced security as the people planting things in the DLBs and the people receiving the supplies never met and couldn't compromise each other were they caught.

³⁸ Kodesh, W. Interview with Ayanda Ntsaluba, 20 April 1993.

³⁹ von den Steinen, Interview with Barrell.

Another common method was that of a 'book code'. One person on each end of the communication had to have a copy of the same book to crack the code. Without knowing the book being used, the code could not be deciphered. One man who worked for the political underground and often did reconnaissance for MK's operations explained the process. He had been using a copy of *The Omen: Final Conflict*, and in order to write the letter he would have to find the word he wanted in the book, write the page number, line number, and word number for each word in the letter. This was particularly difficult in cases which involved place names or people's names, as he had to write the code out for each letter of the name in question. Once he completed the coded letter, he would photograph the paper with the coded report, process the pictures, and cut the negative into the smallest possible piece. He would then take a postcard, slice it open, slip in the negative, glue it shut, address it, and go to a post box away from his home to post it. The process of translating a report into code could take as long as three or four hours, and the whole process became terribly time consuming, but once done, the code could rarely be broken.⁴⁰ Newspaper advertisements also became popular for arranging meetings. A simple classified ad in the *Mail and Guardian* that read: "Dear Ruby, dinner last Friday night was divine, let's do it again next week." would translate into a particular place and time for meeting, if one knew the right way to analyse it.⁴¹ These are but a few ways of communicating that allowed important information to be sent and received by the units operating inside the country without overly attracting suspicion or interception by the security police.

⁴⁰ von den Steinen, Interview with Vick.

⁴¹ von den Steinen, Interview with Vick.

Combating any surveillance that the police might have on a soldier, particularly one who worked in the 'formal underground,' with a cover story and possibly a documented background in activism, also became important. Using public telephones or borrowing an acquaintance's phone could get around any phone taps that might occur. Phone taps could also be useful in spreading disinformation. If one suspected that his phone were tapped, but pretended to have no idea, it was possible to elaborate a cover story or send incorrect information to the authorities. Talking outside the home also avoided surveillance. One man who worked with his wife in the political underground recalls that whenever they wanted to discuss anything that would compromise them, they would go for a walk.⁴² Others suggested that sometimes being blatant could confuse the security police. By having a high profile as a political journalist, the same man could say to the security police: "I would have to be really stupid to be drawing attention to myself by writing about the ANC if I was also working for them."⁴³ While this approach was dangerous, it did manage to get him out of trouble on occasion. The security police detained another woman and forced her to write a statement before being released. She had been trained to stick as much as possible to the truth, for example, not denying knowing someone if she could have been seen with them, but simply denying knowledge of their activities. Once she was released, she returned home and immediately reproduced her statement so as to remember exactly what she had told them. This came in handy when the police called her back each Monday to rewrite the statement. She reviewed the statement she had reproduced and then stuck to the same story.⁴⁴ By switching around meeting

⁴² von den Steinen, Interview with Barrell.

⁴³ von den Steinen, Interview with Barrell.

⁴⁴ von den Steinen, Interview with Khumalo.

places, calling on different phones, and otherwise changing one's modus operandi, it was possible to escape surveillance in many instances.

Another common method of communications and support for the unit was through couriers and contacts who were part of the 'informal underground' or who had been recruited for the purpose of communications. One woman who operated in Lesotho enrolled at Roma University and actively sought out South African students to recruit in this way. She would befriend them, then give them political education to bring them to the side of the ANC. Once this had happened, with a little training as well, she was able to give their names and details to incoming MK soldiers as contacts, or to send them to South Africa with messages for the units inside. As legitimate South African students, they were able to get in and out of the country easily and without suspicion, and they knew the communities inside well.⁴⁵ Many people came in to the folds of the ANC and MK this way, starting out as friends or often, in the case of women, lovers of MK soldiers who would mould them into ANC supporters and then employ them as couriers or contacts. This same woman often got into long debates and arguments with some male comrades, arguing that when one recruited men, they merely talked to them, but when recruiting women, the men often entered into relationships with them and then gradually brought them into the folds of the ANC in this manner. She herself had become involved this way, and didn't think it was necessary to have these double standards.⁴⁶ Foreigners also provided a good source of operatives, and the ANC often recruited people abroad to work in the support structures inside South Africa. Conny Braam explained her role in the book *Operation Vula*. She had been recruited in the Netherlands to help devise disguises

⁴⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Khumalo.

⁴⁶ von den Steinen, Interview with Khumalo.

for the MK soldiers who would be going underground, but also recruited people who could go work in South Africa, establish a life there, and provide a safe house and support for the operatives. Usually white and foreign, with no obvious connections to the anti-apartheid movement, these agents often eluded the South African security forces.⁴⁷ Another girl who went on to work in ordinance in Botswana and then inside South Africa, was a Canadian student who had been recruited at her university in Toronto. She remembered:

By the middle of the first year, we invited the ANC rep in Toronto to come and give a speech for something . . . and he came to speak and then afterwards he took us for drinks in the Grad pub. And I think I stayed afterwards and we just chat chat chatted. And then, you know, he was good at chatting up women. Our Yusuf. Anyway, so then he contacted, I mean that, he said, you know, I'd like to speak to you about something, can I call you and we'll have a meeting, blah blah blah. I said ja, okay sure. And I kind of forgot about it after that. Then three weeks later I get this phone call. And he says, no, let's have a meeting so I go and have supper with him and I remember it very clearly, I think it was a Greek restaurant we had supper in and he was, he said to me, asked me whether I would be willing to come to South Africa for three weeks to distribute political material. So, well, I thought what the hell, why not, you know. So I said yes, and then as the conversation progressed, the time that I would spend here increased more and more and more, then he said would I be willing to come for three months or so and do the same thing. And so I think, I mean I can't remember my response, but obviously in the end I agreed to consider it. And it meant of course that I would have to not go back to university. And in the end, by the end of the supper, he was talking about me coming for sort of very long term. And how this was going to work, I'd have to get a job, I'd have to, you know, set up a life here, I mean, he didn't say actually where but. So I was left to consider all this and then another, I think it was another two weeks later we had another meeting where he said if I decided to go ahead with it then a lot of things in my life in terms of who I associated with, how many political meetings I went to, blah blah blah blah blah, you know he wanted to know my affiliations with different political groups on campus, you know, the person that I was involved with was a member of the communist party, so there were all kinds of those considerations. And so I, you know, slowly but surely, this was in probably January, February of 1986 I think. And by October 1986, I was in Botswana.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Braam, Conny. (2004). *Operation Vula*, Bellevue: Jacana.

⁴⁸ von den Steinen, Interview with Meeson.

Through couriers and contacts who were recruited to help in this way, whether South African or foreign, messages and support became available to the units working in the country.

Despite all of these different methods of communication and supplies, units sometimes lost their connections to the outside when the police captured someone in a crucial position in the lines of communication. In some cases the units had to come up with money, contacts, and even material for weapons on their own. Some used contacts with people they knew in the area, while others called on the informal underground to find support. One man who operated a unit in Cape Town for two years, which was an unusually long time, found his unit cut off for a period. He explained: "After some time, communication between us and headquarters was cut off, we had to fend for ourselves, to go look for money, contacts, support, and all. We succeeded. We relinked with headquarters again later, and supplies came in, especially arms and explosives, and our operations grew in scope and quality."⁴⁹ In this way some units lengthened their survival by remaining in action even without support from the outside.

The Effects of Working Underground

Working inside the country involved terrible danger. Some lucky few MK soldiers managed to escape back out of the country if their covers were blown or the police caught on to their activities. Shoot-outs with police happened on occasion, and many soldiers died in such confrontations. Even if a soldier were caught without violence, he often faced torture at the hands of police. 'Accidents' in police custody

⁴⁸ Kodesh, W. Interview with Tony Yengeni, 13 January 1993.

⁴⁹ Kodesh, W. Interview with Tony Yengeni, 13 January 1993.

were common, and many activists died at the hands of the police or in their custody, due to excessive torture, neglect, sickness, or even purposeful murders. Even if an operative survived police custody, a trial could see him imprisoned for lengthy periods of time or even executed if the crime was deemed serious enough. A few MK soldiers lost their lives through judicial decisions during this period. Working inside the country even as a political operative was terribly dangerous, and working as a soldier, actively attacking the apartheid government and structures led to the deaths of many MK cadres. Conditions like this made life underground exceedingly stressful and taxing. Many people who operated inside the country have severe emotional and psychological scars that remain unhealed to this day.

The first few months or even years of operation could often be as exciting as they were stressful. Finally getting the opportunity to put training to use and make an active contribution to the struggle was enormously exciting, and often very fulfilling. Many ex-soldiers cite an intense rush of adrenalin and a major high that came with carrying out an operation. The stress, danger, and excitement that came with executing an attack often left one seriously excited for a period after completion of the attack. If an operative worked in the 'formal underground,' and lived as a normal member of the community, this could be a dangerous condition, as it was hard to explain this post-operation rush if people met this person and wondered why he was acting so strangely.

Eventually, however, the elation and excitement gradually wore off, and stress and fear took the upper hand. One woman recalls that the first year she worked underground the excitement was foremost but then the stress became too much for her. She saw her comrades dying and being captured, and a feeling of serious

depression and fear engulfed her.⁵⁰ Another man who worked in the political underground remarked that living under constant stress and paranoia was very draining. It made him very tired, terribly worn down and lonely.⁵¹ Immense stress often eroded an operative's emotional strength, and some of those who worked inside the country and in the front lines eventually found themselves burning out on the work, and many had to move on to other postings far away from it all to recover.

Those who worked in South Africa and in the front lines always had to maintain vigilance about security. Secrets became a huge part of their lives, and lies became second nature. If an operative had a rough experience, he simply could not share it with someone else due to security considerations, and often people ended up feeling horribly isolated and alone. The need to keep people from knowing too much also fed this isolation. A cadre sometimes only had contact with one or two other people, and sometimes had rare and sparse communication with superiors, though most people worked in units of three or so, had their comrades to support them. People in the front lines often had contact with the leaders and visits from them, which could keep up their morale, but the people working inside the country necessarily lacked this support.

While remembering that hundreds of other people existed in the same situation and thousands outside supported his work could be easy enough for a soldier underground, it was much harder to believe that and feel the support when isolated from the rest of his comrades. One man who worked in the political underground, carrying out reconnaissance for MK's operational units as well as doing political work, noted that due to the very nature of his work he never really received feedback

⁵⁰ von den Steinen, Interview with Khumalo.

⁵¹ von den Steinen, Interview with Barrell.

and it was often very discouraging and disheartening not to have any affirmation of his work. While he knew the value of what he was doing, he had no idea of how much his work really helped, or whether it effected anything at all.⁵² This lack of support led to a deep feeling of isolation and depression in some individuals. By the very nature of the work most of the underground soldiers undertook, the feeling of having a huge organisation and thousands of people behind one just wasn't there most of the time, and many soldiers became very discouraged.

Some also had problems due to their personalities. One woman who worked with a unit in Cape Town explained that she was a very talkative and outgoing person, and life underground was really terrible for her because she had to suppress that side of her. Another man in her unit was more introverted and solitary, and didn't have so much difficulty with the situation, but for her it was really horrible.⁵³ The emotional drain that life underground had on the soldiers often devastated them, and many found themselves burnt out after even a short period in operations.

Many people who were involved in the underground have underlying problems which stem from their time underground and still affect them today. For those who worked inside the country under a cover story, adaptation after demobilization often became very difficult. By the very nature of working clandestinely while maintaining an above-board identity, they had to lie all the time. Each operative working in this way had to build up a legend around himself, and constantly support it and embroider it. Some people who went through this found their lives profoundly affected. One man who worked in the political underground noted that he would have a partner, and couldn't tell her the truth or unburden himself

⁵² von den Steinen, Interview with Vick.

⁵³ von den Steinen, Interview with Gunn.

to her, and had to lie constantly. Even today, he finds it hard to deal with relationships. With all of the lies, legends, secrets, and deceptions he used while underground, it all became a way of life. Now he finds it hard to have a close and trusting relationship, and even to this day, he finds it hard to tell the truth when lying comes so naturally to him.⁵⁴ Another woman who worked in the front lines finds that since she made friendships as a way of recruiting people, and picked people to be with who would be useful to the struggle, she ended up without many legitimately close relationships. Even today she finds it hard to get close to people, and rarely allows herself to get involved in serious friendships.⁵⁵

Some others feel that they missed out on life by being involved in the struggle. One woman mentioned that while she was involved with MK, she would sometimes wonder whether it was all worthwhile. She knew that other people she had grown up with had made something of their lives as she herself wanted in earlier years: received an education, found a good job, made money, or settled down to marriage and children. She doesn't regret what she did, but often found herself plagued by self-doubt during her time in the struggle.⁵⁶ Another woman realised that she never really had a normal youth. She spent all of her time involved in politics. Instead of thinking about boys or a spotty face in her teenage years, she went to rallies and only knew people involved with the struggle. She feels like she wants to do things now that she was not able to do when she was younger.⁵⁷ Many people who worked underground and spent their whole lives doing this sort of work find themselves

⁵⁴ von den Steinen, Interview with Vick.

⁵⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Khumalo.

⁵⁶ von den Steinen, Interview with Khumalo.

⁵⁷ von den Steinen, Conversation with Rassool.

working through severe emotional problems today as a result. But few would change the routes their lives took if they had the chance.

The constant fear and stress also took a toll on many people. Fear of arrest, fear of failure, and uncertainty about the future hung over the heads of these soldiers constantly, and drained them emotionally. One woman who worked in the front lines around the time of the raids into neighbouring countries recalled that every time she returned to Swaziland she found herself wondering what awaited her. She went to sleep not knowing if someone would attack and kill her during the night. Every time she went to the border, the Swazi officials there harassed her, and the whole situation became very depressing and trying. Eventually she simply had to get out, and left to go overseas for many years.⁵⁸

Conclusion

For the MK soldiers working inside South Africa and in the front line states, life involved danger, fear, and excitement. Some found themselves eventually arrested and put in prison. Others had to flee the country. Some had breakdowns from the stress of the circumstances they found themselves in. Many remain affected by their experiences today. But they were lucky in that they had the chance to do what they had intended all along, and are secure in the fact that they accomplished something important and notable. Many lost comrades and friends to death at the hands of the security forces. Many others simply did not survive to tell their stories.

⁵⁸ von den Steinen, Interview with Khumalo.

Chapter 7

APLA in the front line states and South Africa

Lets Liberate the South

Lets liberate the south
Lets march forward resolutely!!!
Lets wipe out the racist Boers
And their clique of traitors

Oh!! They have broken our bones
Shed our blood- for our Azania
Our hatred for them rises to the sky
For many years- our country has been divided

Sharpeville- Soweto- Langa- Nyanga
Urge us to go and annihilate the enemy.
Shoulder to shoulder- lets march.

Rise up- heroic people of the south!!!
Rise up- face storms and tempests!!!
Lets swear to save the motherland!!!
Lets swear to sacrifice all!!!

Swords and guns in hand- lets march forward
The hour of glory has come for our country
Lets build a lasting-
Bright future for our motherland.¹

Introduction

While the Azanian People's Liberation Army had many well trained and disciplined fighters waiting to deploy inside South Africa, they were unable to establish a presence inside the country until the mid-1980s. The leadership crisis crippled the organisation for many years, but by the early 1980s efforts to reorganise the army and push the home going programme were well underway. Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 provided the PAC and APLA with a staunch ally in a country bordering South Africa. Inside South Africa, PAC members worked for years to build up the underground presence of people loyal to the organisation and ready to assist

¹ Major, Mbuso. Lets Liberate the South. Poem found in handwritten notebook, dated 2 October 1979.

incoming insurgents. By 1986, almost a decade after the Soweto generation joined the fight and more than two since Poqo attacked its foes, APLA finally began to operate against its enemy inside South Africa.

In the front line states, Botswana and Zimbabwe emerged as the jumping off points for many APLA cadres infiltrating the country and the best places to smuggle arms and materials across the South African border. Botswana did not allow freedom fighters to operate openly, but its long border with South Africa made it a strategic rear base for many APLA cadres and the Botswana authorities lacked the capacity to police much of the activity. Vusi Make, the chairman of the PAC from 1979-1980, remembered that they would occasionally receive intelligence from the Botswana government, and that APLA cadres deployed there were instructed to avoid confrontations with the Botswana authorities, and if cornered, to surrender peacefully.² The PAC's close relationship with the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), which ruled independent Zimbabwe from 1980, allowed for open operation, support, and infiltration routes. Lesotho remained a convenient base from which to operate, though its isolated nature limited its usefulness. The Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO)'s strong alliance with the ANC precluded APLA operation through that country, and the route through Swaziland so often used by MK cadres did not become a major route for their APLA counterparts.

Inside South Africa, APLA cadres carried out a number of tasks. Their units had a responsibility to recruit and train new members, capture arms, ammunition and funds for the continuation of the struggle, and carry out operations. APLA's policies on what constituted a legitimate target varied notably from those of MK. Policemen, soldiers, farmers, and even white civilians faced attack from the APLA soldiers.

² von den Steinen, L. Interview with Vusi Make, 15 August 2005, Centurion.

While the media and the more moderate South Africans vilified their policies, the attacks often sparked enthusiasm and support from the more militant masses. In the early 1990s, APLA came into its own. With MK's armed struggle suspended, APLA remained the only armed wing still operating. With many high profile attacks that received copious media coverage, their star rose in the minds of many people. Their popular slogan: "one settler, one bullet" entered into the national lexicon and drew large support from more militant South Africans opposed to the compromises promised in negotiations with the apartheid government. However, the PAC failed to turn this support into votes when the first democratic elections occurred in April of 1994, and the ANC emerged as the most popular organisation and the new government of South Africa.

The Front Line States

The nature of the armed struggle in South Africa was such that people and material needed transportation across bordering countries in order to reach South Africa. Zimbabwe was a useful ally for the PAC given its proximity to South Africa. As early as 1979, a summary of an APLA meeting in Itumbi in Tanzania reported cooperation with ZANU in obtaining and caching weapons. The report noted:

With regard to arms and equipment, any such supplied to the P.A.C. are to be delivered to the Eastern Front through ZANU (starting with those held by the Tanzanian Government) and the P.A.C. will strive to assist ZANU in obtaining supplies of heavy weapons.³

Once Zimbabwe gained independence it served APLA well as a rear base and a transport hub. One man recalled that the illegal movement of troops from Tanzania through Zambia led to an advantageous situation in the 1980s:

³ Summary of APLA meeting 10 May 1979 Itumbi.

But then because of the thousand three hundred that we took out of Tanzania illegally, the good thing that came from that is that the African Liberation Committee, the structure of the Organisation of African Unity [OAU], they made a decision that we are no longer allowed to travel by road. If we need to take people back into South Africa, they are ready to buy us air tickets. I think it became also a luxury because then everybody who wanted to infiltrate into the country they would be flown from Tanzania to Zimbabwe, then Zimbabwe, that is why again the core of our leadership, the military leadership, moved away from Tanzania to be in Zimbabwe where it was coordinating and running the whole business.⁴

The move of the high command to Zimbabwe allowed better communication and shorter routes for infiltration. Letlapa Mphahlele recalled moving back and forth between Botswana and Zimbabwe to communicate with the high command, and transporting weapons and supplies from Zimbabwe to Botswana for infiltration.⁵

The close relationship between the PAC and the Basotholand Congress Party (BCP) also provided a reliable base. While changes in government influenced the degree of helpfulness on the part of the Lesotho government, with the Basotholand National Party (BNP) an ally of the ANC, and the expulsion of many PAC operatives after the coup of 1986,⁶ the PAC received much support from that country throughout their struggle. Once the OAU established the rule that the PAC must infiltrate via flights rather than roads, Lesotho also became useful as a transit hub. One man explained:

We could also recruit other people from South Africa into Transkei and from Transkei we would take them through Lesotho, from Lesotho then they would fly to anywhere in the world to train and then a similar system was in operation. They would finish their training, back into Lesotho as refugees there, then infiltrated back into Transkei and into South Africa.⁷

⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Brigadier General Barney Hlatswayo, 16 August 2005, Pretoria.

⁵ Mphahlele, Letlapa. (2002). *Child of this Soil: My Life as a Freedom Fighter*, Cape Town: Kwela Books, chapter 15.

⁶ Edgar, Robert. (1989). In Moss, Glenn and Obery, Ingrid. (Eds). *South African Review 5*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 243.

⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

With the proximity to the Transkei, one of APLA's strongest areas, Lesotho was also useful for meetings between commanders inside South Africa and the members of the high command who remained in exile. Lesotho passports were also convenient for operatives as they could distance themselves from the struggle in South Africa by claiming to be foreigners and thus avoiding police attention.⁸

Botswana was one of the most vital front line areas of operation for APLA. A well-structured system of support for the cadres developed, allowing them to cross the borders home and supplying them with arms and funds to begin their operations. Letlapa Mphahlele recalled the situation when he worked in Botswana in 1985: "We had arms and personnel but we didn't have the right network to infiltrate them into Azania. We had a network of professional people who were not familiar with guerrilla methods and ended up in the hands of the Boers."⁹ He and his compatriots set out to remedy the situation and facilitate the movement of soldiers by sending a scout to reconnoitre the border:

In the village of Pitsane Molopo, John drove to an old friend of his, who was extremely happy to see him . . . He left me in the village and, using his Botswana passport, went to chat up the police and the immigration officials on both sides of the border. He crossed to Makgobistad, the village in the erstwhile Bophuthatswana on the other side of the border. He came back and told me what he had found out—the lie of the village, the bus services, the places for crossing without having to go through the border post, and the village code of hanging white washing on the line when there was no police patrol and coloured washing to warn of one.¹⁰

He reported this development to his superiors, and received orders to help two men infiltrate across the border. He remembered: "I left for Botswana with the two but

⁸ Mphahlele, chapter 19.

⁹ Mphahlele, 114.

¹⁰ Mphahlele, 116.

Mchana wasn't there. He surfaced after weeks, beaming with smile. 'Mchana, the mission was successful,' he said, puffing at a cigarette. 'The route is clear and people are ready to receive the cadres.'"¹¹ They then commenced the crossing:

As we stood by the border fence shortly after nightfall, I gave the final instructions. "Comrades," I said. "This moment has eluded many cadres. You have to regard yourselves as lucky because you're now about to cross. In that village across the border, you'll find a car with its park lights on. You'll travel to your destination by car. Any questions?" . . . I watched the two scale the fences and disappear into the dark, into history.¹²

Sometimes there would be problems on the other side, and those soldiers responsible for the routes would blame themselves. While there were strict rules to follow, in the midst of actually working underground, cadres would disregard the rules. Mphahlele remembered one instance when things went wrong. He received word that cadres he previously helped across the border were ready to receive more, but did not know that they had been captured and turned by the South African police. When the night came:

There was no sign of the car that was to meet the cadres. We decided they should take the smaller guns, the Scorpions, and walk to a bus stop on the other side of the border. They left me with the rifles. Just before dawn, as I was walking back to Lindela in the car, I heard rifle fire from Mokgobistad across the border, rattling with demonic ferocity . . . I cursed myself for not having called off the mission. It had been drummed into me and I in turn had taught others that if a courier failed to turn up, the entire mission had to be aborted.¹³

In time, they were able to establish a reliable route and successfully infiltrate cadres and arms across the border. One soldier remembered his crossing:

We went in through the fence of course, illegally, then a bakkie which was driven by one Ndebele old man, I've forgotten his name. He went into the borders legally then met us somewhere. And we saw the boers

¹¹ Mphahlele, 116.

¹² Mphahlele, 116

¹³ Mphahlele, 119.

crossing. After some time then we jumped into this bakkie and we were safe.¹⁴

Unlike the MK soldiers, who generally crossed the border without weapons, and received them on the other side, APLA soldiers generally carried their weapons and some funds with them when they crossed, and kept them at the ready. One man recalled his crossing, and they brought: “two scorpions, machine pistols, two Chinese grenades, stick grenades, and two grenades, ordinary grenades. We had some cash with us, maybe about R2000 or so.”¹⁵ Mphahlele remembered another crossing:

Zonyane and Themba each stuffed a bag with two Scorpion machine pistols, six fully loaded magazines, two stick grenades, TNT slaps and extra ammunition. I wanted all the arms concealed, but Mchana said each fighter had to have a gun ready for action if the need arose.¹⁶

As time went on, the crossings became more efficient and faster. When Mphahlele crossed himself years later, he noted:

As we neared the border, I told him I admired his efficiency and that of our other operatives based in Botswana, and the way they worked with contacts in Azania. In the past it took one month to get a person from home to come and fetch literature or weapons. This time it took Modiegi less than a week to alert his internal contact to fetch me from the border.¹⁷

Once safely across the border, armed and with some funds, the APLA soldiers were ready to begin their operations and got the chance to do what they had set out to do so long ago.

While the PAC suffered fewer attacks than the ANC in neighbouring countries, the threat of attack stayed in the forefront of operatives' minds. Mphahlele remembered the raid on ANC houses, and recalled an alarm that came afterwards. He

¹⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Blacks Joyi, 21 November 2002, Cape Town.

¹⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

¹⁶ Mphahlele, 116.

¹⁷ Mphahlele, 138.

had been watching a boxing match with a number of other people, when they received a warning:

Just as we were fuming and insulting the referee for denying us victory, we heard an agitated knock on the door. Odirile Moalafi had run to tell us that he had heard that the Boers were going to raid Botswana that night. Within seconds we evacuated the flat. The unwritten rule prohibited anyone from asking another where he or she was going to hide.¹⁸

Constant vigilance was necessary not only to protect against South African cross border raids, but also to maintain the operational security and avoid being jailed by the Tswana police. The successful machinery in Botswana facilitated the infiltration of many soldiers and their arms to South Africa and provided support to the soldiers inside the country.

Operating Inside South Africa

Once a soldier received the order to deploy inside South Africa, his dream of fighting the apartheid government began. Soldiers usually crossed illegally along the same routes that most had taken out of the country. Support personnel assisted them in crossing the border, and picked them up once they arrived in South Africa. The moment of return excited and moved the soldiers. One man recalled his feelings upon crossing the border to return home after an absence of a decade: "Mixed feelings. And you'll be surprised that one found himself sort of excited that you get home. But with a different reason. To fight, not to meet people and hug, no no. To fight the enemy. So this time had ultimately come after 10 years."¹⁹ Another man recalled his nervousness and false confidence:

"This is the last fence," Thabo said, and leapt over. I handed him my bag and followed. Joy, fear and hope electrified my whole being. I

¹⁸ Mphahlele, 110.

¹⁹ von den Steinen, Interview with Blacks Joyi.

unzipped the bag and took out the Scorpion machine pistol. "You look nervous," Thabo said. "Is this your first time in the country since you left?" "No, this is not my first time," I lied to cover my nervousness. He didn't pursue this further. "Okay, you remain here. I'll be back with the transport." He disappeared into the dark night.²⁰

Once inside the country and established, the cadres went to work.

While APLA soldiers infiltrated in small numbers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, attacks were nonexistent. Only when the police captured APLA cadres did the media mention them. One newspaper report from 1979 announced the arrest of several PAC members trained in Libya and China. It reported their mission in the Transkei as:

- Study the local situation and familiarise themselves with the people.
- Assist the locals in order to gain their confidence.
- Establish pockets so that mobilisation could be effected when the time became ripe for the onslaught against South Africa, Transkei and BophuthaTswana . . .
- Prepare recruits for guerrilla warfare against South Africa- and after the defeat of South Africa, they foresaw no problems in defeating Transkei and BophuthaTswana.
- Establish contacts and safe places for militarily trained members of PAC.
- Establish arms caches.
- Report regularly to the "high command" on progress made in the campaign.²¹

While that particular group failed in their tasks, many others paved the way for the APLA units that began attacking in earnest in 1986. The efforts of Pokela, and then Mlambo as chairman finally began to pay off. Mlambo recalled:

My main thrust was then to say we have to consolidate the good work that [Pokela] has been doing, particularly strengthening the links between the organisation outside and the [home] front . . . So I would say then that to me, I was particularly pleased to see that the home going programme definitely came much more to the forefront during my chairmanship. I was not inventing anything new, I was merely carrying out the programme which was well led out by the central

²⁰ Mphahlele, 138-9.

²¹ (1979 March 23). PAC Cells Cracked in Kei. In *The Post*.

committee already piloted by [Pokela]. So APLA's activities and presence and profile became more and more during my time when [sic] which went even beyond that. We also helped the internal PAC to form structures which could mobilise the masses inside the country, not just to mobilise and work with a few for APLA but politically to be able to say something under those difficult conditions.²²

The changes in leadership and the emphasis on rebuilding the army in the early 1980s finally led to a force able to take the struggle back to South Africa.

When APLA first arrived back on the scene in South Africa, a few operations and units gained media coverage and stuck in the minds of the masses. A number of attacks in Alexandra, a Johannesburg township, carried the trademark of Scorpion machine pistols, which became synonymous with APLA as the years went on. Referred to in the press as "The Scorpion Gang," this unit attacked policemen and soldiers in the township in late 1986. Mphahlele remembered helping two of those cadres cross into South Africa, and their influence:

I watched the two scale the fences and disappear into the dark, into history. With Themba Phikwane in command, within a week the Yugoslav-made Scorpion machine pistols set Alexandra Township ablaze. On December 16, 1986, the Scorpion fatally stung soldiers deployed in the township to enforce the state of emergency.²³

One PAC publication claimed up to 15 security force members as casualties of this unit,²⁴ and its operations brought the PAC and APLA back into the public eye as combatants for the first time in two decades.

In 1987, APLA began a programme of "grenade warfare," in which swift attacks with hand grenades became common. A particularly notable attack was carried out on 21 April 1987, when APLA soldiers lobbed a grenade over a security

²² Interview with Johnson Mlambo, Interviewer unknown, no date, from the SADET oral history project.

²³ Mphahlele, 118.

²⁴ APLA's grenade warfare baffles Pretoria as 74 attacks are acknowledged. (1989). *Azania Combat*, Issue 9, 3.

fence from a moving vehicle and struck recruits at the Tladi police training camp in Soweto, killing one and injuring 64. In a single attack, they quadrupled casualties at the hands of APLA in the first few months of 1987.²⁵ An APLA publication claimed 34 raids involving the use of assault rifles in 1988, compared with 74 grenade attacks, showing the popularity of this new strategy. Quick attacks characterized APLA units, as explained by an APLA publication that explained the basic elements of this kind of attack:

- Typical guerrilla attacks;
- Only hand-grenades were used;
- The targets were security forces;
- The attacks were well-conceived, well-planned and well-executed;
- The guerrillas involved were mainly those trained and armed inside the country;
- Their attacks were not followed by arrest and invited no reprisals against innocent people in the immediate vicinity;
- And there was no claim of responsibility.²⁶

In the wake of this new approach, the popular APLA slogan “one settler, one bullet,” was amended in some circles to, “one hand grenade, ten settlers.”

APLA attacks in the mid to late 1980s focused on policemen and soldiers, often finding them outside of work and attacking them unexpectedly. One report notes an attack on four policemen drinking in a shebeen in Atteridgeville outside of Pretoria. Attacks of this sort were usually of short duration and allowed for the escape of the APLA unit. *Azania Combat* explained: “The attack was carried out with speed, precision and meticulousness that have become the operational trademark of the boys . . . It is now becoming an APLA operational pattern to carry out attacks that

²⁵ Mazambane, Willie. (1987). APLA operations increase as record 65 cops are hit in single PAC guerrilla attack. In *Azania Combat*, Issue 4, 3.

²⁶ (1989). 42 SA cops are hit as APLA brings in a new-type warfare. In *Azania Combat*, Issue 8, 3.

roadblock in Lichtenburg in 1988 received much press coverage. While accounts differ as to the number of casualties, hand grenades and gunfire from the APLA side met with gunfire from the police. One soldier recalled the policy of 'no surrender':

People [are] not allowed to surrender . . . If I am fighting I only have one bullet, I can shoot myself, because I destroy the information that police want from me. APLA members . . . must know that you like or not, if you have only one bullet inside your pocket, then if that round is finished, then take that round and shoot yourself. The information is dead.³⁰

While it was much easier to operate inside the black areas of South Africa, occasionally the fight came to the white areas. In the mid to late 1980s, APLA's attacks on police and security forces generally led to black casualties, but they aimed to take the battle to the white areas and attack white police and security forces. In August of 1987, a battle occurred between security forces and APLA cadres in the white Johannesburg suburb of Bramley. Azania Combat hoped this would become common:

We have to ensure that if there is no peace in the townships, there can't be peace in the white suburbs . . . The war theatre is steadily but surely expanding to cover even areas which have hitherto been quiet. This is how it should be because before the war moves to such areas, the white community will not understand what is happening in the African townships.³¹

Mlambo explained the policy, "Hardly a week passes without a funeral in the black townships . . . Let us make whites bury their own dead."³² By the early 1990s, attacks in white areas on white civilians became more prevalent and a main component of APLA's strategy.

³⁰ Luvuyo Kulman, quoted in Foster, Haupt, and de Beer. (2005). *The Theatre of Violence: Narratives of Protagonists in the South African Conflict*, Cape Town: Institute of Justice and Reconciliation, 247.

³¹ (1987). APLA operations shift to white SA. In *Azania Combat*, Issue 5, 6.

³² (1986). PAC guerrillas are in the country- regime now admits. In *Azania Combat*, Issue 1, 4.

APLA also worked on politicising and recruiting people in the rural areas, and saw them as a vital place for operations. One claim from the PAC secretary for defence in 1987 said: "APLA combatants have, in the period under review, been able to mount guerrilla operations and carry out extensive mass political work in the rural areas."³³ He also noted: "In South Africa, the rural areas are just that weakest point because the enemy's communication network and operational mobility are very limited there."³⁴ Recruitment and politicisation in those areas gave APLA a strong base of supporters and became a common characteristic of their operations. One APLA cadre remembered his own training and the emphasis on politicising the rural areas came into use when he deployed inside South Africa. After a time in the Free State he and his unit moved towards the rural areas of the Eastern Cape:

It's because we were destined for the rural areas, because we believed in our military line as APLA, that we want to be based on the military, on the rural areas. Fight from rural, but have some urban guerrillas, few urban guerrillas, who are training people, workers and semi-workers and students and other people around the urban areas. And then we from the rural areas, some commanders would come from there, will train people from there, and send them in undercover. So if you look at it, our main aim was to encircle the cities, because the enemy is powerful in the urban areas. He's got powerful communication lines and he's less powerful in the countryside, because of these reasons. So that was our strategy. Encircling the cities. Tactically we had small units that were hitting the enemy in vital points. That's the strategy that was used by Mao Tse Tung in China. And we were taught that strategy.³⁵

By the early 1990s, in the Eastern Cape and Transkei particularly, APLA had a strong presence outside of the main urban areas. This also assisted training, as lessons in

³³ Mazambane, Willie and Daniels, Romero. (1987). APLA's guerrilla activity goes to rural South Africa. In *Azania Combat*, Issue 5, 4.

³⁴ Mazambane, Willie and Daniels, Romero. (1987). APLA's guerrilla activity goes to rural South Africa. In *Azania Combat*, Issue 5, 4.

³⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

firearms were less likely to face discovery by security forces when they took place far from populated areas.

This upsurge in APLA guerrilla activity in the 1980s received recognition in the notoriously censored South African press. While usually vilified, the increasing reporting of their actions showed the effect they were having. In 1988, the *Financial Mail* recognised the upsurge: "In 1987, say the police, 85 PAC terrorists were captured; in previous years there was scarcely any sign of them. They have accounted for at most 1% - 2% of terror attacks in SA in the Eighties. This seems to be changing."³⁶ While the police originally dismissed them, the attacks grew so common that statements about APLA began to emerge and its name featured in more and more news reports.

APLA did not distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' targets, as MK did, and often claimed superiority to MK in their choice of targets, as they were actually striking the personnel of the apartheid system rather than just blowing up symbols. Though MK did extend "hard targets" to include police and security forces, the PAC often brought up its legacy of sabotage without casualty. In the 1980's APLA largely targeted policemen and South African Defence Force soldiers. Farmers also came into the firing line, and white civilians were considered fair game, and both became common targets in the early 1990s. Often PAC literature would stress their superiority over MK in striking at useful targets, and taunt the ANC for blowing up buildings and railway lines. A quote in *Azanian Combat* in 1988 asserted: "We (in the PAC) have never suffered from a psychosis of what constitutes soft or hard targets."³⁷ While targeting the policemen and security forces directly attacked apartheid government personnel, the PAC and APLA often faced condemnation for

³⁶ (1988 July 29). Pan-Africanist Congress: Getting Active Again. In *Financial Mail*, 48.

³⁷ Ebrahim, Cde. Gora, PAC Secretary for Foreign Affairs. (1988). In *Azanian Combat*, Issue 7, 26.

attacks on farmers and civilians. One APLA delegate at the TRC explained their strategy as one of proportionality: "To put as my grandmother would have put it, you do not attack an elephant with a needle nor do you attack an ant with a hammer."³⁸

Once established within the country, more and more APLA units undertook operations. Strikes at the police and army formed only a part of the responsibilities of the units though. A crucial part of the operational work was recruitment and politicisation. With the emphasis on Chinese style guerrilla warfare prevalent in APLA, it was vital to the struggle to convert people to the PAC and recruit them both as soldiers and for support structures. Mlambo explained the importance of politicisation:

And so the home going programme, although it was a military programme principally, but within APLA we understood one thing that it is politics that are in command of the gun, politics are in command of the gun and war is necessary because conflicts that are there could not be resolved by other means and the only ultimate resort is war you see. So that now mobilisation of the people in various fronts, to be aware and to be active and to participate in their own struggle, that became a critical element, teaching our people of course that they must be able to fight ultimately and the youth were particularly keen on that.³⁹

APLA cadres often involved themselves in areas of society that could reap large numbers of recruits. Mlambo explained the importance of reaching as many parts of society as possible:

Therefore this political battle, the political war in which we were involved was to be fought on various fronts. We had to work amongst the working class people in the urban areas, the students on both urban and rural areas, even amongst religious people, you have to interact with them and work with them and show them that at least if we are all made in the image of the one God, to accept to be treated otherwise by other creatures who are also made in the same image of the same God is really out of the question, it's unacceptable. And we had therefore

³⁸ TRC, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Armed Forces Hearing: PAC/APLA*, 7 October 1997, Cape Town.

³⁹ Interview with Johnson Mlambo.

to try and go to all segments of the population and influence them in that fashion but of course we know that the youth were a bit much more impatient and felt that they must hit at the enemy at the nearest opportunity, at the first opportunity.⁴⁰

One man maintained a presence in student circles while operating underground and explained this part of his duties: "But it was not about attacking only, you must open cells for political classes, maybe every week, but if possible every day you meet at night and discuss party politics, the aims, objectives, and goals, then they must go to school during normal hours and try to recruit other students."⁴¹ Another man who worked in a mine in the Free State explained: "We joined the miners there, so our cover was to join the miners and be part of them, politicise them, which we did."⁴² Another man remembered his own recruitment. He was involved in gangsterism and crime, but met an APLA member who politicised and recruited him:

I stayed with Moss and he let me into the secrets of the PAC and also made me politically aware and conscious of the political climate that existed at that time. He told me that the enemies were police, soldiers, as well as all the other people who were working for the previous regime. He explained to me that he wanted myself, Lulamile as well as Doctor to be members of the PAC who were going to fight for the black nation against the oppressive Government rather than being criminals.⁴³

Often the recruitment process occurred slowly and gradually. One man remembered his own recruitment in the mid-1980s. While battles raged in the townships, some older guys convinced students to come with them on small missions aimed at making the areas ungovernable. After a while, they built up trust and offered them guerrilla warfare training. Once trained, the new cadres would replicate the process. He

⁴⁰ Interview with Johnson Mlambo.

⁴¹ von den Steinen, Interview with Bongco.

⁴² von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

⁴³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, 17 September 1998, Nkosinathi Mpumelelo Mvijane, Johannesburg Day 4.

eventually developed a keen instinct for whether someone was trustworthy and might make a good soldier, or if they were not right for the job and might be a security risk.⁴⁴

Once recruited to APLA, the new members received training from the stalwarts. If a unit trained abroad, then infiltrated, they could then recruit and train people inside South Africa or in the Transkei and then have the newly trained soldiers form their own units, who would recruit more, increasing their forces exponentially.

One man explained the process:

Okay, what they usually do, the APLA operatives, at that time, those were from exile, the idea was to identify people that they can trust, and train them. Because they were small units, maybe they come as a unit of six, if I may say, then they operate as that unit. After some time, they dissolve, each one open his own unit, recruit people, then they become six. Then after that six operate for one, maybe six months, when you gain confidence, then you open your own, you know spreading like that, that was the structure that was used at that time.⁴⁵

Training often took place in the Eastern Cape or Transkei, two traditionally strong areas for the PAC. The independent status of the Transkei allowed them more freedom of movement, and the government there sometimes supported their efforts. Though traditionally seen as a supporter of the ANC, the APLA Chief of Staff remembered Bantu Holomisa, who led the Transkei from 1987, as helpful to their efforts as well. He recalled: "Really I think another good development was when Bantu Holomisa was the leader of Transkei. [He] openly aligned or declared his support to the liberation struggle. Then we made good contacts with them."⁴⁶ One author explained the relationship: "In the Eastern Cape, APLA units were based in the Transkei, where the Holomisa administration tolerated their presence in return for the

⁴⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with P.O. Zwelakhe Christopher Ndlovu, 19 August 2004, Simonstown Naval Base.

⁴⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Bongco.

⁴⁶ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

use of APLA training facilities in East Africa by members of the Transkeian Defence Force.”⁴⁷

The trained members took the recruits to various places for political lessons, weapons training, and basic training in operating underground. One man delineated the procedure in an amnesty application to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

So these Africans were trained because every member of the crash course who would be recruited will be asked questions and we would want to see whether this African does he have understanding of the country's political situation. If we are satisfied that they do have the understanding, great understanding of politics within the country it is only then that we can treat them as fit and proper people to take participation in the task force and undergo a crash course. It has two parts, ideological and political, then follows the military part of it, weapon handling, battle formations and such other things. Due to the limited time and place where at that time we were not able to render, especially at the locations, proper training to these members because the enemy was all over looking for us. They were given important facts, those that were necessary to take the struggle forward.⁴⁸

Another man remembered his training near Butterworth in the Transkei. He received political lectures and military training: “The way I was trained to fight in the forests, to protect myself when being attacked, methods to attack, to ambush and raids, such things.”⁴⁹ The training programme became well structured by the early 1990s. One recalled his training which took place at a camp outside of Sterkspruit in the Transkei, where they stayed in tents for the six months of training before being deployed as a unit. He remembered that the tents were quite full and many people trained there at

⁴⁷ Lodge, Tom. (1995). *Soldiers of the Storm: A Profile of the Azanian People's Liberation Army*. In Cilliers, Jakkie and Reichardt, Markus. (Eds). *About Turn: The Transformation of the South African Military and Intelligence*, Johannesburg: IDP, 113.

⁴⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearings, 25 March 1997, Oupa Khotle, Bloemfontein day 2.

⁴⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, 1 April 1998, Dumisani Ncamazana, Day 3.

the same time.⁵⁰ In the urban areas, training had to be more adaptable. One man who received training in Soweto recalled: "The training was done all over the place. It's just that the places were supposed to be secret so that nobody knows what's happening there. We would be taught guerrilla warfare, taught intelligence, how to spy and get some info and that."⁵¹

Once trained, the new APLA members began to participate in operations until they were ready to operate on their own and recruit new members. One man explained this probation period:

At some stage when you gain confidence and you've committed some ops, like a gangster you must commit a crime of some sort, after that they can be sure that no, they can operate on their own. Then they leave you and just give you guidelines, do A, B, and C, and hit police stations. Then maybe you go and observe sometimes, just depending on his trust, then when you gain that confidence that you can operate on your own, then you operate on your own. Maybe for a couple of months, maybe four, five months, then they divide you, okay go and recruit your own people and open your own unit. Then operate on your own and become a commander of that new unit. And then this thing goes on and on and on.⁵²

With this method, APLA managed to increase its fighting force inside South Africa without having to send recruits abroad for training. Once mentored by experienced soldiers, the new cadres expanded the army and recruited their own members.

The support of the Transkeian people went beyond provisions for training recruits. In some cases, APLA units undertook attacks armed with weapons from the Transkei. Mphahlele related:

Transkeian soldiers and police were the main source of weapons for Apla. Polite Xuma and Sandile Njikelane brought us a lot of arms and ammunition from members of the Transkei Defence Force based in

⁵⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, 13 October 1998, Phakamele Cishe, Port Elizabeth, Day 2.

⁵¹ von den Steinen, Interview with Ndlovu.

⁵² von den Steinen, Interview with Bongco.

Umtata. Misile Stemela and Sichumiso Nonxuba regularly fetched grenades and ammunition from members of TDF Special Forces stationed in Port St Johns. I was once approached by the Transkeian police in Sterkspruit, offering to lend Apla their service arms. They said we could use the weapons for a mission and return them after the operation. They were disappointed when I told them the arrangement would compromise them- anything could happen to those arms, and if they landed in the hands of the Boers they would be traced back to their origin. However, Apla operatives in Sterkspruit enjoyed the support of the Transkei police and army.⁵³

Beyond armaments, APLA cadres also held a degree of freedom when in the Transkei. The apartheid government had given the area independence, and so sometimes support for APLA included protection from the South African police and a safe place from which to launch attacks into South Africa. Occasionally an APLA cadre might even get Transkei police protection when moving through parts of South Africa. Mphahlele remembered his experiences with the Transkeian police:

Earlier, when I was arrested at a police roadblock in Thabalesoba in Herschel with rifles, grenades and ammunition, I was taken to Sterkspruit police station. On learning that I was an Apla cadre, the station commander, Phenduka, invited me to join him and other senior police officers for a barbeque . . . After the feast of meat, the commander of the local riot squad, Captain Skwatsha, took me to his home, where I spent three days. He then drove me to Umtata through hostile South African territory. He assured me that no South African Boer would dare arrest me, because I was under Transkeian protection. To quell my fears, he gave me a fully loaded gun with spare magazines, and said in the event of South African Boers attempting to arrest me, we would both fight them. We arrived in Umtata safely and government officials returned the weapons to Apla. When Thapelo Maseko and I were arrested with a large quantity of weapons at a roadblock in Umtata, we identified ourselves as Apla and were immediately released. The weapons were returned to Apla the following day.⁵⁴

With the support of some members of the Transkeian army and police, APLA had a valuable ally to assist them in their struggle. Homemade weapons also augmented their capacity to carry out operations. Mphahlele noted:

⁵³ Mphahlele, 163-4.

⁵⁴ Mphahlele, 164.

The fighters struggled to get arms, but that didn't dampen their spirits. Instead they made petrol bombs, and spiked PVC pipes with nails- to throw across roads when retreating after an attack. At the time the armed struggle was abandoned, Apla cadres were developing a petrol bomb launcher. We realised late in the day that in guerrilla warfare, every fighter had to be a weapon manufacturer.⁵⁵

With the constant recruitment and training of new members inside the country came the need for more weapons and funds for the APLA cadres to conduct operations. One crucial task for the soldiers was that of "repossession." APLA cadres often lacked the reliable supply lines that benefited their MK counterparts. Though the leadership recognised the necessity of funding and supplies for the operatives, they were often unable to follow through. One report on a meeting of the PAC central committee in 1982 noted:

The defence department needed funds to lay the infrastructure in Azania. This has not materialised because of lack of funds . . . The grand total of defence budget is \$8.8 million [this is the amount needed, not the amount available]. This was itemized under transport, reconnaissance, infiltration etc. Money was to be sent to the front posts at the three operational areas: Botswana, Lesotho and Zimbabwe. Each bank account was to have deposits of \$100,000 for a start. At the rear base readily available liquid cash was needed so as to be infiltrated over a certain period. Money for transport, couriers, self-help projects was needed . . . These needs are only for the start. When the flow starts we will probably need more.⁵⁶

Despite the early recognition of the funds needed to carry out the armed struggle, the organisation remained unable to raise them. Even the assistance from the Transkei could only support certain units, predominantly operating in the Eastern Cape. APLA training emphasised the Chinese style of guerrilla warfare, focusing specifically on self-reliance. When originally infiltrated into South Africa, the soldiers usually brought some weapons and money, but once inside they normally had to fend for

⁵⁵ Mphahlele, 163.

⁵⁶ Minutes of the Plenary Session of the Central Committee Meeting at External Headquarters, Dar es Salaam, December 1-7, 1982.

themselves. With the exponential increase of their ranks through the recruitment and training system inside South Africa, the need for weapons and funds to equip new units became vital. With the Pan-Africanist Congress' stance that Africa had been robbed of land, resources, and wealth, repossession meant the reclaiming of what was rightfully theirs. In this way, APLA units often repossessed arms and money from the "settlers" or white people, as well as their agents, in order to carry out their struggle.

Policemen and farmers came at the top of the list of enemies targeted by the APLA units, and since both groups carried or owned weapons, the natural progression of these attacks allowed for both a legitimate target and a source of arms and funds.

One man related an operation to the TRC:

We were at the Katlehong Police Station. I had conducted reconnaissance from Monday to Thursday. What happened was that we had not targeted Mr Mashamahite specifically. We had targeted any policeman who would come out of the police station whether alone or in groups. Therefore on the 21st of January, the Thursday, we were standing nearby there and he came out at about four and he proceeded towards the direction of the swimming pool. We immediately followed him and there were three of us. And as he approached the swimming pool I decided to rush so that when he actually emerges out of that place I will be in front of him and Gift and the other person will be following him from behind. I rushed and as he came I drew my gun and I pointed my firearm at him. And the only thing he attempted to do, he tried to grab me so I shot him and as he fell Eugene and Gift advanced. One of them removed his gun and at that time I was on the lookout for anybody who might approach. We removed that gun and retreated.⁵⁷

In an operation of this nature, units were able to target an enemy policeman and provide weapons for their newly formed unit:

After killing Mr Mashamahite, I reported the incident to my highest commanders. I told them that I had killed a policeman and the gun that

⁵⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, Shakespeare Buthelezi, 14 September 1998, Johannesburg Day 1.

we removed from him, we had just opened a unit in Katlehong, therefore we needed weapons and the way to obtain such weapons would be to kill and disarm policemen, and I would inform the chief director of national operations of how my unit was operating, and they will decide how they handle the matter.⁵⁸

Another man recalled his transition from trainee to soldier and the need to capture weapons from the enemy:

Well in the night they used to, okay they used to train us in small weapons . . . these small sub machine guns and AKs. They train and train and train and train and train. Then after sometime, after two months or four months, they gain confidence in you, we used to raid the police stations in our townships, and take arms there, we'd disarm them and take arms. Because they told us they train, they have their own arms so we must get our own and the way we get our own, is to take them from the police so we used to raid police stations most of the time . . . so we used to raid these police stations and disarm, ja, arm the people, liberate our area, disarm the enemy and arm the people. So we used to disarm the police, when we see them patrolling, then we'd disarm them.⁵⁹

Attacks on farmers yielded similar results. While often vilified for attacking white civilians in the form of farmers, APLA saw this group as legitimate targets. The Chief of Staff for APLA in the 1990s, Barney Hlatswayo, explained the targeting of farmers:

And then the next target then, although officially not sanctioned at the highest level was to target the farmers. Again this stems from the belief and the theories to the philosophy of land as being the most important thing and that the war was basically the war over the land rights . . . but remember also in our own understanding, the white community was not purely or cleanly a civilian, because they were forced by the law that they should have either been conscripts, served for a certain period in the military, and then they were necessarily the reserve of the defence force. So they were part of the military structure so in that light then really one had no problem in targeting them because surely if you take the commando system, it's more of local people in their area guarding their own property and so on. But they

⁵⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, Shakespeare Buthelezi, 14 September 1998, Johannesburg Day 1.

⁵⁹ von den Steinen, Interview with Bongco.

were issued weapons by the defence force and directly or indirectly they were still a commando.⁶⁰

As the farmers often received weapons from the South African army and formed commando units, APLA considered them targets and seized their weapons to advance their own operations. One man recalled such an operation:

So I was caught in that kind of a situation and at the same time we were harassing farmers. Making the situation unbearable for them . . . You know sometimes, you'd burn a farm, burn the crop and attack and confiscate his weapons and money of course, because according to our programme that was repossession.⁶¹

Another man explained an operation to the TRC. They attacked a farm, captured the farmer and his wife, and demanded weapons and money. They received two firearms and a trunk full of money, which were then used to support future operations.⁶²

APLA units also stole cars to use in the execution of attacks. In that way, operations and repossession tasks combined both to attack the enemy and provide resources for the units.

While this was the general policy for all APLA units, the commanders singled one unit out particularly as a repossession unit. This unit focused on seizing weapons and funds from the enemy on a larger scale. Many attacks on armoured cars came under their operations, or they would attack white shops or white people and take the money to fund operations. One man explained:

The unit that was termed the repossession unit was the special unit which was formulated by the PAC as well as the high commander of APLA and our main job functions were to repossess, especially money, cars, jewellery, every article or item that was valuable in order to

⁶⁰ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

⁶¹ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

⁶² Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, 20 January 1999, Xabiso Aaron Dingane, Kirkwood and Greytown, Day 3.

generate income for APLA and to be able to buy arms and ammunition in order to further our struggle.⁶³

When his unit successfully gained money or other items, he would take them to Botswana and hand them over to commanders there. If the money was not enough to cover a trip that far, then it would be used to fund further operations of his unit.⁶⁴ The general rule in APLA was that money seized in an attack went to the unit commander, and then if large amounts are involved, the money went to a higher commander for distribution to more units. The armed robberies carried out by some APLA units became a point of contention. The media and other organisations branded the APLA cadres as criminals, and many struggled to get amnesty for their operations from the TRC in later years. Hlatswayo explained the policy of armed robberies:

Yes, the other aspect we also mentioned in the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, was also the question of the armed robberies. And for sure, being a poor organisation we never saw that as a crime. For us to be able to expand, to support, the growing numbers, we had to look at other alternative sources.⁶⁵

These alternative sources often supported the units, but many APLA cadres still find a stigma attached to them for their repossession activities. This lack of weapons and funds, and the policy of repossession sometimes backfired. Without adequate support from their parent organisation, many APLA cadres found themselves destitute, and a few even abandoned the struggle and turned to crime. Mphahlele recalled visits to various units:

⁶³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, 23 November 1998, Tapelo Patrick Maseko, Johannesburg, Day 1.

⁶⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, 23 November 1998, Tapelo Patrick Maseko, Johannesburg, Day 1.

⁶⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

Cadres were literally starving. They complained that most PAC members were not taking care of them- a fact I was later to establish myself. Members urged the cadres to commit robberies to survive. When they refused to do that, they were called cowards who were beaten by mere criminals who had not been given military training abroad. It's a sad record that during the nineties Apla suffered more casualties on 'repossession missions' than on combat with the enemy.⁶⁶

While many repossession operations were legitimate, some APLA cadres did descend into criminality as a result of their lack of support.

Evasion of the police always worried the minds of the APLA cadres. Sometimes blatant admittance to other crimes was enough to keep people from reporting a cadre to the police as a terrorist. One man remembered using this strategy:

We were using taxis . . . which was a risk, but we managed because we used to suffer on the way. Sometimes the driver would say, "I suspect you guys, you look like terrorists." And then I would say, no, we are smugglers. And fortunately for us we had about four, two whatyoucallit, something like diamonds, I've forgotten their names, two red stones and blue stones, two blue ones, two red ones. So we'd tell the guy no, look, we are selling these. So he said, it's fine. Because at that time if you had a guerrilla in your [taxi] or a terrorist, is what we used to be called by the system, you'll get a high sentence.⁶⁷

Hiding in plain sight was a risky strategy, but often a successful one. The same man remembered living on a farm when farmers were at the alert: "Then Fort Beaufort, that's where we were operating from. We were living in a farm. And the owner of the farm, it was a boer."⁶⁸ Another man recalled living in the backyard of a house where a policeman lived. A fellow APLA cadre stayed with him and their rent was paid by a sympathetic group:

They even paid the rent for the backroom he shared with me, from which I'd peep out and see a police uniform flapping on the washing

⁶⁶ Mphahlele, 144.

⁶⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

⁶⁸ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

line. Under our bed there would be AK47 rifles and plenty of ammunition. Nothing could have been better than that- being housed by a member of the police force, who didn't know what we were doing.⁶⁹

Mlambo recalled a particularly successful cover story:

I remember a story of one comrade . . . he spent time in the underground, several years, it could be four years or so, and he had even taken up some job just to give himself cover . . . and when he was ultimately arrested, the boer for which he was working for was saying "no you are making a terrible mistake, this man is not a terrorist, etc. etc." So the question of camouflage and working quietly amongst the people.⁷⁰

In most cases, however, cadres had to choose their lodging carefully and attempt to stay under the radar of security forces and informers. Dividing up a unit was one way to do this. One operative recalled:

For instance, if it happened that they arrested one of our soldiers, we do not accommodate ourselves in only one house. We separate our units. We were six, divided in twos. Two guys will be in their own house which is known only by the commander . . . We only meet when we supposed to conduct an operation.⁷¹

This strategy limited the effectiveness of police action and allowed for the continuation of a unit's operations even if some cadres were caught. The same soldier remembered the policy of preparing for attacks:

The only person who liaise with us is the commander. The soldiers do not know exactly what their mission will be, nor when the mission will be executed. They only wait for the commander to tell them, 'Prepare yourself, we are now going' . . . In fact, the reasons for the commander not to disclose or not to tell the soldiers is for . . . security . . . I might discuss with my soldiers that on a particular date we will be going to operate on the area so and so and so. Maybe it happened that the

⁶⁹ Mphahlele, 142.

⁷⁰ Interview with Johnson Mlambo.

⁷¹ Luvuyo Kulman, quoted in Foster, Haupt, and de Beer, 246.

person might be arrested and then he will disclose all that information and then the mission will fail.⁷²

Security was always a vital consideration for the units.

Communications were also a crucial aspect of APLA operations. From the newest recruit starting with a unit for the first time up through the echelons to the high command of APLA, communication was vital to coordinate attacks, identify targets, report on operations, and organise supplies, funds, and support. However, often units had to fend for themselves and lines of communication were difficult to maintain. The structure of APLA aimed for every unit to have a commander, commissar, and logistics person, but in the 1990s, when recruitment and training inside South Africa grew by leaps and bounds, this was often not possible. Each unit would have a commander, and then local and regional commanders above them, then a Director of Operations in charge of all activities inside the country, then the high command situated in exile. While most APLA soldiers recalled reporting to their immediate or regional commanders, and occasionally to the Director of Operations, communication with the high command was much more difficult. Cadres usually reported on their operations to their immediate commander in person, though occasionally via phone or written report. One man recalled:

The question of the written report would take a lot of time. It will require maybe three days to reach their place. Sometimes I have to go there and report in myself, in my person in front of them. Sometimes I have to use the phone as there, as it is a fast way of communication. So, in this incident, I used the phone.⁷³

⁷² Luvuyo Kulman, quoted in Foster, Haupt, and de Beer, 246.

⁷³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearings, 20 April 1998, Phila Martin Dolo, Aliwal North, Day 1.

On the ground, APLA recruits received the basics of the political stance and APLA policy, then carried out operations on their own. APLA's Chief of Staff, Barney Hlatswayo, explained that the upper levels of leadership had communication, largely through student couriers, and met four times a year with the high command. The exile-based commanders would also visit South Africa to communicate with the internal commanders. Telephones also featured as methods of communication, but not for sensitive issues.⁷⁴ But at the lower level of the units operating on the ground, communication was largely non-existent. APLA's hearing with the TRC noted:

And we have indicated here, that from that level downwards, communication was very, very difficult. Not only communication but the level of skills seemed to deteriorate- rather as it went down towards the what's-you-call-it, the ground operative.⁷⁵

Given the lack of communication, APLA operatives often found themselves without support from their parent organisation, and sometimes their attacks even faced condemnation from the PAC leadership. Mphahlele, the Director of Operations at the time, explained his feelings about the communication problems and lack of support:

I have mixed feelings, if you are a child you enjoy if you are not having responsible parents, because they don't check if you are doing your homework, if you are doing this, you feel freer you know, if your parents are not responsible. So in the PAC we had that joy you know, that we derived from that lawlessness, you know and lack of discipline from the leaders, because they would give you money without asking what you have done with the money, so that is the things that, you feel that they have given you more room to manoeuvre. But on a serious note, when you see that we are going nowhere, then it was very difficult. Difficult in the sense that, when the ANC was deploying its cadres in the country, it would budget for them, and they would get periodic supplies, and their reports and everything would be monitored. But with us they just said, go inside the country, see how

⁷⁴ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo, 11 January 2007, telephone interview supplementary to earlier interview.

⁷⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Armed Forces Hearing PAC/APLA, 7 October 1997, Cape Town Day 1.

you survive, and as a result we had many cadres involved in armed robberies, in criminal activities, and at some stage you know we lost more APLA cadres during robberies than during combat.⁷⁶

He also remembered the problems that came with distrust between the leadership and the cadres on the ground in the aftermath of the leadership crisis:

We had this problem, we had a big gulf between the cadres and the leadership. In the majority of cases the cadres would pretend to be loyal to the leaders, so long as they were in Tanzania, or in the camps, but as soon as they were unleashed, or thrown into South Africa, they would immediately not communicate because they did not trust their leaders, and unfortunately for a long time PAC never had a serious leadership. We had people who were just exhibitionists, ultimate clowns, people that one would feel you are risking your life if you are reporting your operations inside the country to them. But all you can do is, you know, falsify you know, that in case he's working for the enemy, he should give the enemy that piece of false information. So that was the problem through and through.⁷⁷

This lack of trust often saw justification in the eyes of the cadres when the leadership withheld their complete support:

So conveniently for them they said cadres on the ground can choose targets for themselves. And maybe people on the ground, we chose targets for ourselves, and controversial targets for that matter, in the eyes of the world, and the leadership condemned you know, those operations. But when we confront them, why did you condemn it, they say for diplomatic reasons, for these reasons, etc. So that again was something that we had anticipated all along, that a war is just a continuation of politics by other means, and if you were politically indecisive, you cannot wage a decisive war.⁷⁸

This became particularly problematic in the early 1990s, when APLA units carried out attacks on white civilians that led to large amounts of news coverage and debate.

One internal report from the time explained the problem:

We agreed that the King Williams Town [discussed below] and other incidents were badly handled and that, among other things, lack of

⁷⁶ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Letlapa Mphahlele, 17 December 2002, Cape Town.

⁷⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Mphahlele.

⁷⁸ von den Steinen, Interview with Mphahlele.

consultation on a matter or action that constituted a departure from PAC's tradition, policy and norms of behaviour contributed to the confusion that became endemic with all sorts of statements.⁷⁹

Though these attacks often faced condemnation even from the PAC leadership, they inspired many of the more militant South Africans and raised support for APLA among the masses.

The varied tasks of an APLA unit led them to carry out a number of operations of different types and use their own discretion to establish targets. Many applicants for amnesty to the PAC noted a 15-point code that dictated their behaviour, particularly towards the masses among whom they operated. The code read:

1. Do not surrender to the enemy or hand over arms or information;
2. Do not make a [false] statement or accusation in all your reports;
3. Obey orders in all your actions;
4. Do not forcibl[y] take or demand anything from the masses of the people;
5. Report and surrender to your officers everything that is either captured from the enemy or collected from the people;
6. Speak politely to all persons;
7. Pay fairly for all you buy;
8. Return in good condition anything you borrow;
9. Pay for or relace anything you damage;
10. Do not hit or insult people;
11. Do not misuse or damage people's private or public property;
12. Do not take unfair advantage over anyone;
13. Men should not take liberties with women, and women should not use femin[in]e beauty or charm to lure men into compromising situation;
14. Do not ill-treat captives or anyone in your charge, and
15. Do not malinge[r] or l[o]iter around.⁸⁰

One man explained his operations when deployed in 1992:

In August we attacked off duty soldiers in Ga-Mothapo killing one and injuring the other . . . In October myself and three recruits of which

⁷⁹ Proposed solution to the problems of relationship between political and military streams. Report written by Sipho Shabalala, 31 January 1993.

⁸⁰ Confidential M.C. Directive to APLA, undated.

one was later sent to Transkei went on a fundraising mission and killed a farmer and his wife in a poultry farm near Bendron in the Bochum area . . . In December I together with Sporo and two SDU's went to Zonke squatter Camp where Inkatha people were killing PAC members and attacked an Inkatha base killing three IFP members All the other operations that followed were targeted to the Internal Stability Unit of the SAP that was killing the people of Thokoza and were not specific APLA operations.⁸¹

During this period the man was also recruiting new members, training them, and sending them to various places to operate.⁸² Another man recalled that his unit mainly focused on farmers but also sabotaged government buildings, attacked police stations, and seized arms from the police.⁸³ Each operation also required careful reconnaissance. One man's unit focused on getting information on strategic enemy installations so that they could attack: "We used to do political campaigns, and just sabotage. Stealing weapons from police stations, getting a connection somewhere where there's military hardware, like police stations, and getting some information from places like Koeberg, this place here, or other relevant places of importance."⁸⁴ Cadres also used insiders as a source of information for attacks. If the target were a farm, a soldier would befriend one of the farm workers. If a country club, they talked to the staff. If a unit planned to hit a police station, one operative would report a false crime in order to see the layout of the station and the number and distribution of the officers. One man explained his process:

In fact, to be an APLA soldier you had to be so flexible. It was so difficult for the police to identify us, because we wore clothes that are similar to those weared by the civilians . . . We are so young as you have noticed . . . So it is difficult to identify exactly that person is a

⁸¹ Report of an operative dated 20 July 1994, name of the operative and the commander are simply the initials M. and R. respectively.

⁸² Report of an operative dated 20 July 1994, name of the operative and the commander are simply the initials M. and R. respectively.

⁸³ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

⁸⁴ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

soldier. The same applies when we conduct our reconnaissance. You will think that I am just having some looks or I am just looking for a job, so sometimes the police had difficulties in identifying our units.⁸⁵

The APLA cadres had diversified skills and the leeway needed to decide on targets and plan operations. A unit had to be able to vary its approach, and attack police, soldiers, and farmers, recruit and train new members, defend against the violence going on in the townships, and adapt to any conditions they came upon. Some units even had their own traditions. One man remembered his unit's preparations for attacks:

In fact, it is an old, old thing that were used even by Shaka and those heroes, the late heroes. They used to sing a song before attacking that particular place. So we also do the same thing. Before we go to our target, we boost our morale by singing songs and make sure that everyone is comfortable. Even when we share our firearms, we spread our firearms; if we are spreading them [on] the table, we spread them here, you will take a firearm which you will feel is comfortable for you. Then as a commander you will ask your forces . . . 'Everybody is he comfortable? Everybody is he ready?' Then you will command a unit, a happy unit. No one had a fear in that unit. They all accept what might happen during the course of the operation.⁸⁶

While the PAC's policies were non-racial and allowed membership for all Africans, defining anyone who owed their primary allegiance to Africa and accepted the idea of majority rule as Africans, in practice the membership was predominantly black and African. Though the PAC had a white member representing them in Algeria⁸⁷ four years before the ANC allowed whites to become members, in practice few white people joined the PAC. Mphahlele remembered the issue of white membership arising while he was in prison in Botswana:

⁸⁵ Luvuyo Kulman, quoted in Foster, Haupt, and de Beer, 246.

⁸⁶ Luvuyo Kulman, quoted in Foster, Haupt, and de Beer, 247.

⁸⁷ Patrick Duncan, a former Liberal Party member. For more information on Duncan, see Driver, C.J. (2000). *Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan African*, Cape Town: David Phillip.

We established that ANC cadres warned the whites who entered the prison against PAC racism . . . Truth is that white people are allowed into the PAC. In recent years Dr Costa Gazi, for example, left the ANC to join the PAC. Even after Pedro, a White man and an Apla operative visited us in prison before we were convicted, the ANC cadres continued to spread the lie that we excluded whites from our ranks . . . However, the PAC hasn't done enough to recruit white members.⁸⁸

APLA Chief of Staff Barney Hlatswayo remembered three white APLA cadres, but all worked for the external mission in exile, and he does not remember any white cadres who worked inside South Africa.⁸⁹ More APLA cadres came from the so-called "coloured" population, particularly in the Western Cape. Qibla, a militant Muslim organisation, for example, had a long-standing relationship with and cooperated with the PAC and APLA, and even received training through their efforts. Many other "coloured" people also joined APLA as individuals. Women were welcome in APLA, but few joined. One source suggested that APLA had 200 female members in total.⁹⁰ Hlatswayo estimated that as much as 25% of APLA cadres trained externally were women, but the majority saw deployment in administration structures or went to study abroad. During his stay in Tanzania from 1979-1980, he recalls only ten or fewer women in a camp in the Mbeya region. He remembered that a few APLA women insisted on deployment inside South Africa, stood their ground, and received it, and paid them tribute for their strong convictions.⁹¹ While women trained just as men did, some concessions were made. A document laying out the procedure for corporal punishment of indisciplined APLA cadres noted that while

⁸⁸ Mphahlele, 130-131.

⁸⁹ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Brigadier General Barney Hlatswayo, 5 February 2007, telephone interview supplementary to earlier interviews.

⁹⁰ Mashike, Lephophotho and Mafole Mokalobe. (2003). Reintegration into Civilian Life: The case of former MK and APLA combatants. In *Track Two*, Vol. 12, Nos. 1 and 2, 14. This estimate was provided by a senior APLA Veterans Association Official.

⁹¹ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo, 5 February 2007.

physical discipline was warranted in some cases: “No female member of the PAC shall under any circumstances undergo corporal punishment of any kind.”⁹² When it came to deployment however, women rarely got the opportunity to operate inside South Africa. One prominent PAC member explained that women most often worked as couriers, in communications, or in security.⁹³ APLA publications note one prominent woman who participated in Poqo in the 1960s⁹⁴ and two who died in battle in the 1980s. In 1986, Lesotho troops attacked a unit of six APLA cadres in Qacha’s Nek near the South African border, including a woman named Boniswa Ncukana,⁹⁵ and early reports from the Lichtenburg battle between APLA cadres and the South African police claimed one of the APLA soldiers killed in the fight was female.⁹⁶ Despite an open policy, PAC official statements and documents often take a very patriarchal attitude towards women. In the special hearing on APLA for the TRC, one PAC participant explained:

Apla has a record of treating the women well and equally. I know there are some instances where it is reported that women were abused in the liberation movements camps. In the Apla camps there is no record of that happening. Instead our young men married those girls that they loved and some of them sitting behind me have the wives who are comrades in arms. We have this on record and I think we are proud of that record that we kept our ladies as ladies and when we loved them and they loved us we married them.⁹⁷

⁹² Corporal Punishment (C.P.) in the PAC, as a Disciplinary Measure, February 1986.

⁹³ Conversation with Mxolisi “Ace” Mxgashe, 5 July 2006.

⁹⁴ Mazambane, Willie. (no date). And it’s Aluta Continua for PAC’s Nomvo Booi, a former POQO fighter. In *Azania Woman*, Special Issue, 6-7.

⁹⁵ Toboti, Waters (1986). PAC woman leaves indelible imprint on Azania battlefield. In *Azania Combat*, Issue 1, 16.

⁹⁶ (no date). A woman among PAC fighters, in *Azania Woman*, Special Issue, 3 and 5.

⁹⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Armed Forces Hearing, PAC/APLA, 7 October 1997, Cape Town Day 1.

While women did train and occasionally operate as APLA cadres, their deployment was limited and many did not get the chance to participate as fully as their male comrades.

APLA in the 1990s

When F.W. De Klerk announced the unbanning of the ANC and PAC and the release of Nelson Mandela and other imprisoned leaders on 2 February 1990, the beginning of the end of the apartheid government commenced. However, many people distrusted the government's motives for the negotiations that started soon afterwards. The early 1990s saw unprecedented violence inside South Africa, which took the form of rival black political organisations attacking each other's members. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) members clashed with members of the ANC and their staunch ally the United Democratic Front (UDF) in many areas and, to a lesser degree, members of the PAC. Later years confirmed the apartheid government's involvement in arming, training, and supporting IFP forces. ANC and PAC members also clashed in some townships. Suspicion of the motives of the apartheid government predominated, and their position of military strength upon their entry to the negotiations was worrisome. The PAC saw an opportunity to win support in the early 1990s. Bilateral negotiations between the ANC and the South African government left them out of the "talks about talks" and they decided to make their own way in the new political environment. While the ANC suspended the armed struggle in 1990, APLA continued to operate until 1994. APLA attacks increased, and Azania Combat claimed the deaths of 7-10 policemen a month at the hands of

APLA in 1990,⁹⁸ and a 34% jump in police deaths in APLA attacks in 1991.⁹⁹ One author asserted:

Certainly, before 1990, the PAC's military made only a minor contribution to a guerrilla insurgency, the historical importance of which was to be chiefly symbolic. In the years which followed, though, their scale of operations and the political impact of these began to rival Umkhonto's earlier deployment.¹⁰⁰

The PAC stood against the type of negotiations commencing, as they explained in an article in 1993:

- The present negotiations will not automatically lead to the transfer of power from the minority to the majority. The talks, it says, are intended to entrench white minority
- Precisely because of this, the PAC believes armed struggle should continue until a "mutual cessation of hostilities" is declared with the government
- Until this happens, the PAC intends to stay in negotiations with one main purpose: To point out the dangers to the other participants.¹⁰¹

The PAC also called for a closely monitored process to keep control of the process out of the hands of the apartheid government:

The PAC has also demanded a transitional authority in the run-up to constituent assembly elections. It sees this authority as being made up of representatives from the liberation movements and the existing government, with some international participation. The body will take over control of the budget, electoral processes, state media and security forces during the transitional period.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ (1990). 'APLA is killing ten SA cops a month' says report. In *Azania Combat*, Issue No. 11, 6.

⁹⁹ (1992). 150 policemen are killed as PAC guerillas intensify the war. In *Azania Commando*, supplement to *Azania Combat*, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Lodge, *Soldiers of the Storm*, 115.

¹⁰¹ Mantzaris, Evangelos. (1993 September). Trying to keep out of being too far in. In *Work in Progress*, 16.

¹⁰² Mantzaris, Evangelos. (1993 September). Trying to keep out of being too far in. In *Work in Progress*, 16.

The emphasis on land that had served them well over the years and had drawn many adherents also came up in their rhetoric, and they insisted that redistribution of land needed addressing in any legitimate negotiations:

High on the agenda of the Constituent Assembly must be the land question, which is the core of our struggle. We note that the present "ownership" of that land by the settlers is provided for in the present South African Constitution. The Constituent Assembly, as adopted and formally endorsed by the PAC, will leave the settlers with no basis upon which to cling to that land and, therefore, to power.¹⁰³

With the strength of the ANC at the time, and their burgeoning negotiations with the government, the PAC had to find a way to capture the masses' attention and gain strength for the organisation. One way to do this was to continue the armed struggle after the ANC abandoned it.

The justification for continuing the armed struggle featured in many PAC statements at the time. They asserted:

We cannot just be told by F.W.de Klerk and his regime that we must stop fighting. Who are they to give us orders? We believe that there should be a negotiated mutual cessation of hostilities, and we have defined such cessation as "the stopping of war and achievement of peace." The process of the mutual cessation of hostilities must include joint monitoring of all armed formations during the transitional period, under a neutral authority. This should also involve international scrutiny and through investigation of the location and size of the weapons now in the hands of the South African Defence Force (SADF), the police and other security forces.¹⁰⁴

More succinctly, the PAC and APLA often pronounced: "We cannot abandon the bullet until the ballot is secured."¹⁰⁵ In a time of increased violence in the townships, continued police and SADF actions, distrust of the apartheid government, and uncertainty about the future, this stance resonated with many South Africans. In an

¹⁰³ (1991). APLA backs Constituent Assembly. In *Azania Combat*, Issue 13, 2.

¹⁰⁴ (1993). The war goes on. In *Azania Combat*, Issue 16, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Army Leadership Discussion Paper on Current Party- Programme, dated 1992. This slogan can also be found in many other documents and journals of the PAC.

additional move, APLA created a Task Force dedicated to the safety of PAC members in the time of turmoil. Occasionally, units acted directly to address the problems of violence, though the APLA policy was to avoid internecine violence when possible.

Another popular move on the part of APLA was the continued targeting of white people, including many civilians. While condemned soundly by most media, the South African government, and many moderate organisations and citizens, this aspect of the campaign met with approval from some more militant elements of society. The PAC and APLA often expressed their reasoning behind the attacks. In one article, the author asserted: "The racist media have made great play that APLA was attacking so-called "soft" targets, including children, although there is no evidence of this. But as Cde Phama points out black people killed by the regime are never considered "soft" targets."¹⁰⁶ After an attack on a golf club in King William's Town, an article in the *Sowetan* agreed:

But the media, shapers of opinion and society ran "outrage" stories . . . for four white deaths when at least 20 other black people died on the same weekend. Sure, the white people were dining (harmlessly) in the golf club . . . What on earth were the five black people doing in stokvels in the Vaal on Sunday night? Plotting the overthrow of white domination? No. They were harmlessly enjoying themselves. One cannot but conclude from the response of the Government, the police and the media (*Sowetan* included) that indigenous Africans have metamorphosed from being inanimate dispensable objects to innocuous dispensable people.¹⁰⁷

Three operations in particular received attention: the attack on the King William's Town Golf Club on 27 November 1992, the attack on the St. James Church in Cape Town on 25 July 1993, and the attack on the Heidelberg Tavern in Cape Town on 30 December 1993. Mphahlele recalled the emphasis of the media on these particular incidents:

¹⁰⁶ (1993 July). APLA goes on the offensive. *Azania Today*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Legardien, Ismail. (1992 December 2). White life is still more precious... In *The Sowetan*.

On the night of the attack on the tavern, an army base and a police station were also attacked by Apla, but the media, and later the TRC, chose to focus on the tavern attack. This was part of the attempt to paint Apla as a bunch of cowards who were good only at attacking innocent revellers.¹⁰⁸

That attack marked a retaliation for an attack on schoolchildren in the Eastern Cape:

At the time the Heidelberg Tavern was attacked I had issued an order suspending attacks on civilian targets. However, I had waived this order after the murder of five schoolchildren by the SADF in Umtata. Even then I said the security forces had to be our primary targets.¹⁰⁹

Though loudly condemned from many sides, these attacks on white civilians proved popular with the more militant Africans who took offence at the continuing violence in the townships and the slow progress of negotiations. Mphahlele recalled:

The Apla attacks on the St James Church and the Heidelberg Tavern in 1993 had been condemned locally and internationally. The PAC was among the first to condemn the attack in the church, and some members of the Apla High Command distanced the guerrilla army from the attack. On the other hand, prominent businessmen in Umtata gave their nod to the attacks when they delivered large supplies of groceries to the Apla cadres in the town. They always did this after any spectacular Apla operation.¹¹⁰

Another writer noted African support for the operations: "The PAC observation- that it took white deaths to make the government take political violence seriously- struck a chord with township dwellers which spread far wider than the traditional support base of the PAC."¹¹¹ In the special hearing on APLA for the TRC, one delegate related:

Within the oppressed African communities, it was something that was seen to be very, very, very right because it was at the time when there was a lot of violence committed against ordinary people, innocent people, because these people had never undergone any training. They were never a threat to anyone, but they were just being massacred, senselessly.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Mphahlele, 202.

¹⁰⁹ Mphahlele, 202.

¹¹⁰ Mphahlele, 202.

¹¹¹ John Battersby, (1993 September). Running with the PAC. In Work in Progress.

The attack on the St James Church, in which 12 people were killed and 148 wounded,¹¹³ particularly met heated arguments and condemnation. The idea of a religious service as a target offended many. But as APLA representatives explained to the TRC: "The psyche actually which was informed by the operations of the brutal apartheid system, where our people, innocent as they were, were actually attacked in churches, attacked in schools, attacks on the roads, attacks in- attacked in buses and churches."¹¹⁴ While contentious and debated, these attacks brought about much discussion and brought sympathy and support to the PAC and APLA. One author noted: "Opinion polling later suggested that a substantial minority of young people living in cities strongly approved of APLA's activities."¹¹⁵ Even today, these attacks remain in the minds of people, and still define the public's views of APLA, both positively and negatively.

APLA units undertook many other operations during this period. One writer noted:

In 1992 APLA insurgency more than quadrupled. Newspaper reports suggest that its members participated in 45 attacks on, or exchanges of fire with, police . . . In his new year's address, Sabelo Phama promised that 1993 would be 'The Year of the Great Storm'. Police statements confirm a significant stepping-up of the scale of operations with reports of 142 attacks, the great majority of them, 128, directed at farms . . . Twenty eight of these farm attacks were in the Eastern Transvaal, a region hitherto unaffected by APLA operations.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Truth and Reconciliation Commission Armed Forces Hearing PAC/APLA, 7 October 1997, Cape Town Day 1.

¹¹³ Lodge, *Soldiers of the Storm*, 112.

¹¹⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Armed Forces Hearing PAC/APLA, 7 October 1997, Cape Town Day 1.

¹¹⁵ Lodge, *Soldiers of the Storm*, 114-5.

¹¹⁶ Lodge, *Soldiers of the Storm*, 112.

Public support for their actions continued to rise, even earning Joas Magolego of the Sundowns football team the nickname of “APLA.”¹¹⁷ In the midst of this surge of operations and spread of support for APLA, the PAC decided to suspend the armed struggle in January 1994. This announcement came as quite a surprise to many APLA cadres. Rather than receiving the information directly from their leaders, most members heard the announcement through the press. Mphahlele remembered the moment he heard the announcement:

‘Shh, it’s time for the one o’clock news,’ I said, increasing the volume on the radio. The voice of a newsreader droned: “The PAC has suspended its armed struggle, the organisation’s leader, Mr Clarence Makwetu, told a press conference in Johannesburg today.” . . . “Since when does the PAC use the media to communicate with its fighters?” I said . . . I didn’t believe the radio report, and reminded myself that the media have always been mischievous, stuffing words into the mouths of our leaders to sow confusion and distrust among us. But the evening TV news bulletin vindicated the radio reporter. There were Makwetu and his lieutenants, dressed in suits and ties, posing in front of cameras and a host of journalists and calling off the armed struggle.¹¹⁸

Some APLA attacks continued to occur after the suspension of the struggle. The PAC maintained this was a problem of communication because some APLA soldiers had not yet heard of the suspension. However, Mphahlele remembered a more considered continuation of attacks:

Everyone agreed to defy the PAC leadership. It was a short meeting, and we agreed to formally inform the cadres throughout Azania to ignore the order and continue with their operations. On their side, the leadership of the PAC didn’t condemn the attacks that occurred after they suspended the armed struggle . . . The PAC merely attributed these to Apla cadres who had not yet heard of the suspension because they were operating in remote areas. I believed we should not suspend the armed struggle until we had wrung out some concessions from the other side, like amnesty for all Apla cadres and the release of all those who were in prison.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Mphahlele.

¹¹⁸ Mphahlele, 170.

¹¹⁹ Mphahlele, 171.

Hlatswayo, the Chief of Staff based in Zimbabwe, recalled the problem:

And then the political leadership . . . made a decision to suspend the armed struggle. But then we had people who did not want to comply. Again it was our duty as commanders to ensure that they complied. And again the need was there, and again I think my . . . visit was again to try and prevail over them and tell them you are only correct if you have political cover. If you don't have political cover, then you are criminals. And then other members they started appreciating that, and the issue of the suspension then became a reality. Only one or two incidences after that happened. But on the whole one had to accept that even when you say cease fire it does not happen overnight. The message must filter through.¹²⁰

In the end, all APLA operations stopped by the time of the first democratic elections in South Africa in April 1994. The soldiers then had to find their way in the new South Africa.

Rivals or compatriots?

Though they fought a common enemy in the apartheid government, the ANC and the PAC were rival organisations. They had to compete for international support, funding, recruits, and support from the masses. In exile, the two organisations often vilified each other in an attempt to secure more support. People who left one organisation to join another often faced suspicion and might be branded as spies. In the 1990s inside South Africa, in some townships the ANC and PAC supporters fought bloody battles with each other. But when it came to the trained MK and APLA soldiers on the ground, respect for one another was more common. On occasion they even assisted each other or undertook joint operations.

¹²⁰ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

When in prison, ANC and PAC members often put aside their rivalry and became friends. Letlapa Mphahlele remembered the camaraderie in Gaborone Central Prison in Botswana.

News of daring action by both Apla and MK combatants reached us. Our spirits soared when we heard of clashes between Azanian guerrillas and the South African forces. One afternoon Radio Botswana boomed from the giant prison speakers that MK cadres had fought fiercely with the South African forces at a roadblock in Lichtenburg in the Western Transvaal. We shook the hands of ANC comrades and congratulated them. The whole prison buzzed with the news of MK heroism . . . The next day we were itching to read the details of the battle of Lichtenburg in the newspapers from South Africa. We usually borrowed newspapers from ANC comrades. Bongo lent me his newspaper after reading it. He smiled, patted me on the shoulder and said, "It was Apla that fought the Boers in Lichtenburg. Well done comrade." The other ANC comrades also congratulated us.¹²¹

Mphahlele also noted the generosity of his ANC compatriots:

We PAC members rarely got visits and supplies from outside. We sponged off ANC cadres, who shared everything with us, including their s'mokolo- foodstuffs, especially meat, smuggled from the kitchen for the prison currency of cigarettes. I hated it that we had become parasites, but I rationalised it by telling myself that everything the ANC possessed was raised on behalf of the victims of apartheid, including us.¹²²

While heated debates often ensued on policy issues and ideology, when they found themselves locked up together, MK and APLA soldiers focused on their commonalities, rather than their differences.

On the operational side, some APLA and MK cadres planned and/or carried out joint operations. When the ANC suspended the armed struggle, some MK members supplied weapons to APLA cadres who were still fighting the apartheid government. One man remembered planning an operation with an MK counterpart:

¹²¹ Mphahlele, 123.

¹²² Mphahlele, 124.

This comrade . . . was an MK soldier, he said to me, can we please make a joint operation. I said yes. That was, to me, very important, it was a significant gesture, you know. Of unifying people in Azania. But then it never happened because I was arrested before they were arrested . . . So that APLA and MK used to be one in some operations.¹²³

Mphahlele remembered assistance which APLA cadres received from MK soldiers in the early 1990s:

Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) gave us limpet mines, a bazooka and an assortment of arms and ammunition. Apla regional commander Polite Xuma was the link between Apla and MK and he received the consignment. He also arranged for MK comrades to train Apla cadres in the handling, transportation and setting of limpet mines. One of the people that were trained was Hasp's brother Vuyani Namba. he successfully used a limpet mine in Queenstown, but was killed by one in Durban. The bazooka was used by a unit of five Apla cadres against a petrol depot in East London.¹²⁴

Mphahlele elaborated in an interview:

It was highly commendable. Actually it was done at a time when the two political parties were at each other's throats. On the ground they were killing one another but thanks to [sic] maturity prevailed. They felt that they should help us in the operations but that would be disobedience to their political leaders who had suspended the armed struggle. But they gave us the weapons that they had. They not only gave us to hit, but we did not have training of Russian limpet mines, so they would train our cadres for that. So there was that close cooperation.¹²⁵

The APLA Chief of Staff, Barney Hlatswayo, also confirmed the cooperation. He received several reports about cooperation, particularly the arming of APLA units by MK soldiers in the early 1990s.¹²⁶ Despite the ongoing enmity between the two organisations, the soldiers of MK and APLA showed respect and support for each other, recognising their common cause and enemy.

¹²³ von den Steinen, Interview with Joyi.

¹²⁴ Mphahlele, 163.

¹²⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Mphahlele.

¹²⁶ von den Steinen, Telephone interview with Hlatswayo.

Conclusion

Though its operational presence inside South Africa became effective only in the mid-1980s, APLA left a clear mark on the history of the struggle in South Africa. Their more militant attacks on security personnel, farmers, and white civilians led both to support from many parts of the black population, and condemnation from more moderate and white parts of society. Many strikes remain controversial, and their memories intrinsically link with the APLA name. Despite less support from exile, unreliable supply lines, and often lack of communication, the APLA cadres soldiered on in the face of difficulty, and continued to attack the apartheid government. Their star rose in the early 1990s, as the only organisation still actively fighting, and their actions drew many sympathisers and supporters. The political arm of the PAC remained ineffectual, and any sympathy and support people felt for APLA's operations did not translate into votes. It would have taken a miracle to challenge the juggernaut of the ANC and Nelson Mandela's bid for the presidency. In the end, the ANC emerged triumphant as the first democratically elected government of South Africa, and the PAC languished in the elections, winning less than two percent of the votes. The APLA soldiers then had to find their way in the uneasy peace and uncharted waters of the new South Africa.



Chapter 8 The Aftermath

Now that the dust has settled on the grubby roads of the townships, the battle is over. The distinctive “mellow yellow” police Casspirs have long since withdrawn and activists no longer fear the dreaded 4am Security Branch knock on the front door. Yet the war is not yet won. There are combatants who survived the armed struggle who have been unable to find a place in South Africa’s new army and are still battling for some form of recognition; others are already on the slippery slope downhill. Still others have long since crumbled under the strain of unemployment.¹

Introduction

On February 2, 1990, F. W. De Klerk delivered a speech that shocked the world. He announced the imminent release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners, and the unbanning of the ANC, PAC, and the Communist Party. Though secret negotiations had been going on for several years between the ANC and the apartheid government, this was the first most people heard of a possible negotiated solution to the struggle between liberation movements and the apartheid government. As recently as 1985, one document submitted to the leadership in Lusaka noted that people working against the liberation movement were spreading false rumours about possible negotiations and that this idea was abhorrent and would never come to pass.² In exile, the speech was largely unexpected, particularly for the rank and file of the liberation movements. In a matter of months, circumstances changed dramatically. The ANC leadership returned to South Africa, and the suspension of the armed struggle in 1990 led to many ANC and MK members beginning to go back from 1991. The PAC’s circumstances differed: while some of its political leaders returned to South Africa soon after the speech, most of APLA’s leadership and cadres

¹ Fakier, Yazeed. (1998). Jobless MK fight poverty. In *Grappling with change*, Cape Town: Idasa, Cape Times, Western Cape Education Department, 94.

² Paper submitted in preparation for the National Consultative Conference of 1985, origin unknown.

remained in exile or operated underground inside South Africa until 1994, as their armed struggle continued.

This was a period of great upheaval and change, and proved a difficult transition for many people. As time went on and people returned to South Africa or normalised their situations inside the country, many more problems emerged, and the transition to a democratically elected government did not bring the results the soldiers expected. The integration of liberation forces, homeland armies, and the South African Defense Force (SADF) proved problematic for many. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process was often flawed and contentious. After many years of dependence on their organizations, many soldiers struggled to adapt to the need to provide for themselves. As the years have gone on, problems remain unresolved. Support from the government and development programmes are limited, though some ex-soldiers have created non-governmental organizations to address their problems. Even today, many former MK and APLA soldiers live in a state of abject poverty and lack employment and opportunities for further education or for the psychological and physical care some greatly need. For these people who were willing to give their lives, and who did give years of their lives for the hope of a better situation in South Africa, the “new” South Africa is fraught with problems.³

The situation in MK

F W De Klerk’s speech surprised most ANC and MK cadres. Many were flat out shocked when the announcement came. Some were in the middle of training

³ While many studies have been done on the situation of ex- MK and APLA soldiers, and several are quoted in this chapter, one in particular made an effort to use the ex-soldiers’ own words to tell their stories. For this reason, Sasha Gear’s (2002). *Wishing Us Away: Challenges facing ex-combatants in the ‘new’ South Africa*, Violence and Transition Series, Vol. 8, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, is cited extensively in this chapter. All of the studies cited reached similar conclusions, however, and the issues discussed below appear in all of them.

programmes when they heard, and were in countries so far away that the news received minimal coverage. One woman remembers being in Russia when the news arrived and how little they focused on this announcement:

I was not aware. Because what I, what was happening in Russia, it was during that time of the, the war between Iran and Iraq, so you know the whole world was interested in the Middle East, what was happening in the Middle East. So the only news we heard about South Africa was the question of negotiations, Mandela is out, it ends there. So I was not interested about that because that will make me homesick, the only thing we were interested was the question of the Middle East, you know, we used to, to know what was happening there. Russians were not familiar with the, the South African history and the South African news. And most of them, they went to Middle East and came back so they used to brief us what was happening over there, so we used to take sides, you know, against America and all that. So that was the feeling in Russia.⁴

Others recall a great feeling of elation. One man who was in Zimbabwe when the announcement came remembered: "In February 1990 when we heard the news, none of us could believe it. We had a huge party that night."⁵ Some members felt let down when they heard about the peaceful negotiations. After so much training and planning for taking the country by force, the announcement of negotiations was an anti-climax. One man expressed his expectation, which was very common: "I imagined riding into Pretoria on Russian tanks."⁶ Reactions to the announcement varied from great optimism to distrust and fear.

Shortly after the announcement and Mandela's release, much of the leadership returned to South Africa and set up headquarters in Johannesburg for the first time in just under thirty years. Most of the rank and file soldiers remained in exile, however,

⁴ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Weziwe Ncame, 9 September 1998, University of the Western Cape.

⁵ Majodina, Zonke. (1995). Interview with Johannes Van Vuuren. In *Exiles and Homecomings: The untold stories*, Johannesburg: Heinemann Publishers, 48.

⁶ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Chris Vick, 10 February 1999, Melville, Johannesburg.

where a state of confusion dominated. The woman who had recently returned from training in Russia and found herself in Lusaka at this time related the problems she encountered once the leadership had moved back into South Africa:

What frustrated me, when I came back [to Lusaka], things have changed also, you find that the headquarters are in Johannesburg, and you are lost. There is nobody to report to, in fact there's nobody who is interested to know, you know? So you are having those things in mind that when you come back you must write a report to say I've done this and this how am I going to use it, I mean, there was absolutely nobody. The commanders were in Pretoria, so I stayed there in Lusaka not knowing what to do, because everybody's busy. Then I decided to, to go to school, I wanted to do, er, radio communication in aviation, the only things that they wanted was a letter from the ANC to say I've done blah blah blah, for them to give, for the ANC to give the Zambians certificates and all that. But there was nobody to do that, so I was frustrated and couldn't get the course.⁷

Many people found this lack of leadership and state of uncertainty disturbing. Still in exile, they were unable to pursue the things they wanted to do, and yet they were unable to return to South Africa. Many found themselves at the end of their training programmes or assignments with nobody left in the exile leadership to tell them where to go next.

Inside the country, the situation also remained uncertain. Many of the units inside did not know what was actually going on, and whether they should continue their missions or wait to see what happened. With the focus on 'talks about talks' and the way forward unclear, many of the units found themselves without guidance, supplies, or instructions, and yet not demobilised and still in the country illegally and underground. This period was very difficult for these units. One man remembered returning from exile for a consultative conference, and deciding simply to stay in the

⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Ncame.

country instead of leaving as he intended to. As a former leader of the underground in the Western Cape, people there looked to him for answers. He recalled:

When I was in Cape Town [in 1991], I connected with our under [ground], because at that time we still had MK units underground. When they heard that I'm around they just made a communication, I had to go and see them. Complaining, all of them, because things at that time were, were not proper, because these talks, the preparation for coming in, leadership being in, involved in all these preparations. There was some confusion, units inside the country didn't know what's actually happened, there was a question of, which was a very you know hot issue, the question of the suspension of the armed struggle, because we didn't know it outside, the units inside the country didn't know it, and we heard it in Zambia on the BBC, when it was announced and papers, all of us, ay, it was a really tense and tough situation . . . So when I came in, they contacted, I had to go to them, to the underground units and brief them what's happening. What's happening, the confusion is what's happening inside, what are the resolutions of the conference, whilst I had to organise, well they didn't have money, I had to organise money for them through people I know.⁸

All of the MK soldiers, both inside the country and in exile, found this period of confusion and disorganization extremely difficult. The question of a possible suspension of the armed struggle and the lack of leadership and support, whether simply for new assignments, or more importantly, material and monetary support for the units inside made life during this period of limbo a great hardship for some. Eventually, however, when the armed struggle was officially suspended in 1990, conditions became clearer, and many cadres began to make their ways home. Upon their return, they often found their homes plagued by violence. In the early 1990s, more violence erupted in South Africa than ever before. Fights between the ANC and the IFP were common in many areas, and some communities developed Self Defense Units (SDUs) to protect themselves. While these units were not a formal part of MK, many soldiers participated and even armed and trained the people. Others gave support to the APLA cadres still fighting. Returned MK soldiers also faced

⁸ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Lerumo Kalako, 10 June 1998, Cape Town.

harassment and arrest by the security police, despite the clearance and indemnity given them by the government. By the elections in 1994, however, most of the upheaval had settled down.

During 1991 and 1992, many MK cadres returned to South Africa for the first time in years. Those who had left in the immediate aftermath of the Soweto uprisings had left the country as young, idealistic school children and returned as adults. Some of them had lived in exile nearly as long as they had lived inside South Africa. But almost all were excited at the prospect of going home.

One of the worst trials of this time was waiting for the clearance to be able to return to the country. Those in exile needed clearance from the South African government to be able to return, and amnesty for many of their 'crimes' such as leaving the country illegally, joining the banned liberation movement, and some for more serious crimes of treason and sabotage. Without the clearance, their return would lead to their arrest. One woman recalled waiting in Lusaka to get her clearance. She remembered that the faxes came in all the time, and every time one arrived, they would search for their names, anxious to hear that they could go home. Every time their names did not show up, they were greatly disappointed.⁹ Once their names finally arrived, and they received their clearance, people faced the process of returning to the country.

Returning to South Africa was a daunting enterprise. Getting on a plane in Lusaka, or Europe, or any number of other places, and knowing that one would arrive in a country that held so many memories and dreams for them brought incredible excitement. However, the realisation that a year previously, had they taken the same plane, they would likely have faced arrest, torture, trial and even death, added tension

⁹ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Tsidi Mhlambo, 12 February 1999, Yeoville, Johannesburg.

and fear to the flight. Many people had trouble believing that the apartheid government would allow them back. The government had not proved trustworthy in the past, and some doubted that the clearance was legitimate. Some found their fears substantiated when they encountered difficulties entering the country. One woman recalled that upon her arrival in Johannesburg, the special branch of the police harassed her for seven hours. They told her that her clearance was not there, though it actually was. They questioned her about where she had been, what she had done, where she had come from, and whom she had seen. The person who was supposed to meet her there did not arrive, which made matters worse. Eventually, a senior person in the special branch arrived, and arranged for her to get through, but it was a difficult and frightening experience.¹⁰ Others recall their arrival in Johannesburg as a surprisingly pleasant experience. Another woman remembered being apprehensive of the police and informers who might be at the airport to meet her. However, upon her arrival, the white women working at the airport were very polite and even called her "Ma'am," which she could never have imagined.¹¹ This arrival home was very trying and scary for many of the comrades who returned during this period, but for most it was thrilling to be back.

MK was officially disbanded at a ceremony in Soweto on 16 December 1993, thirty three years to the day since its inception. One man remembered his feelings at the event:

I was overwhelmed with excitement and nostalgia when we finally disbanded uMkhonto weSizwe at Orlando Stadium on 16 December 1993. I shall never forget this event and was so proud of wearing my MK combat uniform freely in my own country. I met up with a number of soldiers, some of whom I last saw in Angola. All of us fought to free our people from oppression. The military commands

¹⁰ Kodesh, W. Interview with Mpho (Veronica) Msimanga, 17 August 1993.

¹¹ von den Steinen, Interview with Mhlambo.

and drills brought back great memories. We may not have been paid for our services in money- but we were certainly rich in our souls. Ex-soldiers mingled together and shared great moments. It was indeed a fitting ending- the final page in our book.¹²

After the celebrations, however, the ex-MK soldiers faced a hard road ahead.

The Situation in APLA

For the APLA cadres both in exile and inside South Africa, the situation was much less certain. Surprise at De Klerk's speech ruled, but reactions varied. Letlapa Mphahlele recalled the debate:

It was 1990 and exciting things were happening on the home front. De Klerk had lifted the ban on the PAC and other liberation movements. He was talking about negotiations with the ANC and the PAC. Tata spoke excitedly about changes in South Africa, and was looking forward to returning home after thirty years in exile. His friend Twenty Million didn't share the excitement . . . "What do you think you'll benefit out of going home to the same oppressive system?" Twenty asked Tata with a frown.¹³

Although the PAC had been unbanned, the organisation refused to enter into talks until the apartheid government met certain conditions. The bilateral 'talks about talks' between the ANC and the government excluded the PAC and other organisations. While some of the political leadership returned to South Africa, and many of the political structures inside the country resumed above ground activities, the APLA soldiers had no intention of stepping down, much less orders to do so. The PAC's stance against negotiations and continuation of the armed struggle lasted practically until the 1994 elections and meant that those in exile had either to remain there or infiltrate back into South Africa illegally. Those inside the country remained underground and not only continued but escalated their activities. The recruitment of

¹² Matakata, Jama. (2004). *Hills of Hope*, Pietermaritzburg: Nutrend Productions, 109.

¹³ Mphahlele, Letlapa. (2002). *Child of this Soil: My Life as a Freedom Fighter*, Cape Town: Kwela Books, 136.

new soldiers continued, and while some trained inside South Africa, others left for Tanzania to undergo training, mirroring the return of the MK soldiers. Supplies and funds became even scarcer as the world questioned their refusal to suspend the armed struggle when the ANC had done so. Mphahlele recalled the response when he asked for more supplies to support their ever expanding operations:

I briefed Barney about the political and military situation in Azania. I also asked him to send more cadres and weapons into Azania as quickly as possible. He told me lack of funds had halted the movement of cadres from the rear to the front. He also said that most African states, including our main backers, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, were irritated by PAC's continuation of the armed struggle. They had reduced their support. At the time the Apla camps were overflowing with militant youth, and this had resulted in starvation and disease. Barney said several cadres had recently died of malaria and that HIV-Aids had begun to take its toll in the camps. "So, comrade, do your best in Azania and don't expect much from outside," he said bleakly.¹⁴

Though he received some money, the message struck home, and he realised that they could not rely on the organisation for support. When he went to visit the cadres on the ground, he found disturbing trends:

Only a few of the cadres were well-off -those who had been embraced by generous members of the PAC who were outside Apla. Some of these dressed well and called their suits 'city camouflage'. Starvation drove numerous cadres to their old family homes, where they were warmly welcomed and well looked after. Some of these continued to operate from their homes, while others simply disengaged and applied for indemnity. I guess it was a combination of homesickness, poverty and the lack of direction in the PAC that drove them home. This led to tension and suspicion in the units. I was warned by some cadres to avoid others. As a result, I sometimes met only two members of a unit of seven and avoided those who were not trusted.¹⁵

In the midst of their most successful years operationally, APLA cadres faced huge problems and uncertainty, and some abandoned the struggle in the face of this adversity.

¹⁴ Mphahlele, 152.

¹⁵ Mphahlele, 147.

In the end, APLA operations ceased by the first democratic elections in April 1994, and the soldiers faced a long process of normalising their lives in South Africa and trying to integrate into a society from which they now felt distanced. The APLA soldiers also tread a thin line when it came to legitimacy. While most MK members received clearance and indemnity from the police before they returned to South Africa, the APLA members had continued their armed struggle and many faced arrest due to their activities even after the new government took power.

The consequences

Getting back to South Africa after so many years in exile was an incredible experience for most of the soldiers who returned. Setting foot on the soil of their motherland, seeing their families again, and looking forward to a new future, the returned soldiers were largely happy to be back. One man remarked, “Well, it was good to be back and be sitting in South Africa again. Well, when one was in prison, we didn’t think really it will be so soon.”¹⁶ Another remembered the relief and sense of freedom that came with his return from a camp in Tanzania:

That life that I was living there and compared to the life with all those restrictions, you don’t have to go there, just lie in a confined space for all those years and you’re not even allowed to go to town, it was just like freedom on its own. One of the happiest moments of my life: 26 of June 94 when I came back to South Africa.¹⁷

¹⁶ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Lerumo Kalako, 10 June 1998, Cape Town.

¹⁷ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Lt. Mfanelo “Zola” Bongco, 19 August 2004, Simonstown Naval Base.

One man remembered a great feeling of relief: “It was a great feeling, realising that no, everything comes to an end at some stage.”¹⁸ For most returnees, their repatriation brought hope for the future and a wish for some peace in their lives.

One of the greatest moments many people experienced after their return to South Africa or their emergence from underground was the reunion with their families. Many family reunions were happy ones. Some parents, loved ones, and friends had long since thought the soldiers dead. Those in exile were often forbidden to contact their families, and those who worked underground avoided their families to prevent both their own arrest and their families’ harassment. Having their loved ones return to them alive and well answered their prayers. Many soldiers received a warm welcome from their families. One man recalled:

Father opened the gate amid shouts of “Hallelujah” and “Amen” from Mother. We hugged and kissed and neighbours woke up to join in the jubilation. Aunt Ramasela pinched herself to see if she was not dreaming. Each person woke his or her neighbour up and Manaleng became lively in the middle of the night. Women, some with children strapped on their backs, sang and danced and ululated. Malose went to Maralaleng and other villages to tell other relatives that I had returned home . . . The congregation dispersed after four and I struggled to sleep. Barely two hours later, a new wave of visitors rolled in.¹⁹

Another man recalled the good reception upon his return. His family met him at the airport and took him to his uncle’s home for a traditional gathering. Many members of his family wanted him to stay with them, but he was busy working for the organisation, and stayed in a hotel. He visited everyone though, for two days here, a day there, a weekend there, and eventually reconnected with his extended family.²⁰

Yet not everyone was welcomed like a prodigal son, one man remembered: “My

¹⁸ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Brigadier General Barney Hlatswayo, 11 January 2007, telephone interview supplementary to earlier interview.

¹⁹ Mphahlele, 194-5.

²⁰ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Brigadier General Barney Hlatswayo, 16 August 2005, Pretoria.

mother acted as if I just went behind the house and came back.”²¹ For many, their homecoming and reunion with their families marked a high point in their lives.

However, some homecomings brought disappointment. Many came home to their families only to find that though they had made it through their trials, their loved ones had died. One woman recalled the heartbreak of coming home to find her mother dead:

My twin brother came to fetch me from the Spar Hotel. It was very exciting to think I would see my mother and siblings again. On the way home, I stopped at the O K Bazaars to buy my mother’s favourite sweets. When we got home, I went straight to my mother’s bedroom. I looked around for a long time and I knew that she had died a long time before. I was numb. All the excitement just left me. My brother said, ‘Sit down, let’s tell you what happened.’ I was very angry and said, ‘Why did you lead me on all this time?’ I blame my family for not letting me know the truth. They were writing all the time saying my mother was waiting for me. Had I known, I would never have bothered to come back.²²

Another man recalled:

Then of course I had my own disasters you know, my family had been [decimated], my mother had gone and so on, so I had no stable home because now I could only go to my auntie’s house, imagine other people who came back and found no home, after all these years, you ought to be hunting for relatives and the relatives would like you at a distance, when you are here now you are a problem.²³

Deep and horrible pain faced those who returned home only to find their loved ones absent. Even those whose families remained intact often found the return home a painful one, with their families in dire straits and their own contributions

²¹ Mashike, Lephophotho and Mokalobe, Mafole. (2003). Reintegration into Civilian Life: The case of former MK and APLA combatants. In *Track Two*, Vol. 12, Nos. 1 and 2, 26.

²² Majodina, Zonke. (1995). Interview with Johanna Matlala, In Majodina, *Exiles and Homecoming: The Untold Stories*, Johannesburg: Heinemann.

²³ Maaba, Brown. Interview with Peter Molotsi, 7 January 2001 in Kroonstad, as part of the SADET Oral History Project.

and they returned long after the MK soldiers who had received support. In the townships in the early 1990s, a new slang term emerged that referred to people who spent carelessly or excessively: 'exiles.'

Even those who remained in South Africa during the armed struggle lacked the skills and knowledge to support themselves. The MK soldiers operating inside the country also received support from the ANC. The APLA soldiers practiced self-sufficiency during their operations and found themselves better suited to getting by, but what used to be called repossession soon became crime and was not an option for most cadres.

The lack of money and employment created considerable tension between ex-soldiers and their families. While most of the soldiers did not expect simply to receive work and money on a platter, many of their family members expected them to get compensation for their work in the liberation struggle with prestigious government jobs and money. Many told tales of family conflict that ensued from this problem. One man noted: "Everyone in my family expects me to buy them a leather jacket."²⁹

A female soldier remembered:

You see I came from a family of seven, all of them useless and leading unproductive lives. What's happening now is that we are all fighting over this little four-roomed structure we call home. It was all right when I still had money and was buying groceries. When my money ran out, things turned sour. When my sister bought soap and I was having a bath, she would ask, 'How many times do you bath a day? We only bath once a day to save soap.' On top of that, my children did not get food. They would come back from school to nothing.³⁰

Politics, University of Cape Town Department of Political Studies, 98. NB: Mokalobe's interviewees remain anonymous in his article.

²⁹ Cock, 5.

³⁰ Majodina, Interview with Matlala.

She eventually left her family home and struck out on her own: "It was not easy to get started. I had no money to buy a stand, to get material and to build the shack I'm living in now. I had to live like a slave with another woman while we tried to put the shack together. My children had to live with friends as I had nowhere to send them . . . Luckily we now live on the food parcels we get from the Red Cross."³¹ Another ex-soldier remarked: "My sister-in-law makes it clear that I am a burden on them."³²

Another man said:

I live on begging. I drink and smoke. People are tired of buying me these things. They used to do it freely when I arrived back . . . Now they run away every time they see me. They know that I am going to ask for a smoke or a drink. I have overheard some complaining that they did not send me into exile, so I should not become their burden. Only my sisters care. How long will they care for an old man [38 years] like me? I do not know; I am scared.³³

Another ex-soldier remarked: "For six months I didn't hear one good story. Most of my friends had been thrown out by their families once their repatriation money had run out."³⁴ Life for the returned soldiers was difficult enough without adding this huge stress on their family relations. Many split from their families entirely, and others live in a constant state of conflict with them.

The SANDF and integration

Some ex-combatants found an opportunity for employment in the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) which aimed to integrate members of the SADF, soldiers from the homeland armies, and MK and APLA members. But the

³¹ Majodina, Interview with Matlala.

³² Cock, 5.

³³ Cock, 4.

³⁴ Majodina, Interview with Van Vuuren.

integration process did not run smoothly. Negotiations for integration of the armed forces initially involved ANC and MK leaders on one side, and SADF leaders on the other. APLA came into the process very late and had little say in the way integration occurred. One man who was involved in the negotiations for APLA recalled that on the arrival of the APLA negotiators they got a raw deal, and were forced to accept all that had been decided. They received a heap of papers over a metre high, divided them among themselves according to infantry, air force, logistics, etc., and tried to find any contentious issues.³⁵

Ex-combatants presented themselves at various assembly points and many found this experience daunting. Philip Frankel's book, *Soldiers in a Storm: The Armed Forces in South Africa's Democratic Transition*³⁶, documents the entire process from negotiation to fruition. He noted the fears of some soldiers:

It is a measure of the level of mutual suspicion that some MK leaders believed that the Wallmansthal [Assembly Area] was a concentration camp where they were to be cordoned prior to an SADF military onslaught. Either way, confusion was rife and living conditions were, at least at the outset, sufficiently poor to justify some of the worst MK suspicions. Adequate tents, bedding, and clothing were in short supply for much of 1994, and each delay tended to confirm [MK] suspicions. Food was initially poor and unvaried, except for that provided to SADF personnel. This fueled conflict until the NDF eventually provided a common catering system contracted out to a civilian company. Ablution facilities were initially poor, overcrowded, and a danger to public health.³⁷

He goes on to note that the APLA assembly area at De Brug had better conditions, but the unease of many soldiers remained. Notably, despite APLA's leadership problems and the large number of people who received training on the ground in South Africa,

³⁵ von den Steinen, Telephone interview with Hlatswayo.

³⁶ Frankel, Philip. (2000). *Soldiers in a Storm: The Armed Forces in South Africa's Democratic Transition*, Oxford: Westview Press.

³⁷ Frankel, 75-76.

British observers at the assembly points noted that a group of APLA leaders were: “smarter, better disciplined and more political-oriented”. Frankel further noted: “Very few of its members were rejected by the NDF and then largely on medical grounds.”³⁸ Some soldiers did not pass the bar for integration due to levels of training, age, physical abilities and the like. Demobilisation gratuities were available for ex-combatants who did not choose to join the defence force, but they were one off payments and many failed to receive them. One study showed that over a third of their respondents received no gratuity, due to: “not having been part of the official integration and demobilization process; having joined the SANDF and then resigning, or having been dismissed, administrative problems, or having been informed that they did not qualify for the demobilization package.”³⁹ Many ex-combatants continued with the process of integration despite the difficulties.

The assignment of ranks proved a contentious point for many ex-MK and APLA soldiers. MK never instituted a ranking system for its soldiers, and anyone below the high command held the same position. APLA recognised the importance of ranks and created the Siyaya commission in the mid-1980s to explore the imposition of ranks on a liberation army. The Chief of Staff recalled the process:

I think their job, their work lasted for over six months, but finally when they presented all their work was recommended and adopted. We then started with the rank structure. I think that also gave us a better edge and a better understanding of how to carry on with warfare . . . I think at first there was confusion and uncertainty, but with time I think the more, also the regimental discipline, the way we had organised it in our camps, people began to appreciate and comply with the requirements. And I think to a greater degree that also assisted us in maintaining absolute discipline within our ranks. Then this, maybe later on as I will comment, there was a plus for us when the negotiations for integration took place, because we were more than experienced, more than prepared to handle that, the problem of how do we rank or what

³⁸ Frankel, 76.

³⁹ Mashike and Mokalobe, 17.

are the ranks that are applicable of APLA members who were to integrate.⁴⁰

Despite the existence of ranks in APLA, both MK and APLA members received ranks they considered beneath them. A number of people appealed the decisions and fought, in some cases for years, for the rank they felt they deserved. Members of the SANDF have many stories of this fight. One man who joined the navy recalled the problem:

I must say integration went very well but from the start it wasn't a success because there was a lot of things needs to be redone like most of the guys were not given their ranks properly, so we actually started as a group from seamen, all of us. Instead of giving a higher ranking officer which were working under us and their ranks but that has been reviewed and everything has be sorted out up to so far.⁴¹

Soldiers also had to go for bridging training to augment their training in guerrilla warfare with training for a formal military structure. Those who received specialised training in exile faced a much smoother integration process. The Chief of Staff of APLA recalled a bridging course undertaken by several MK and APLA soldiers in Zimbabwe in the lead up to the 1994 election, but this signified the exception rather than the rule.⁴²

Once integration began in earnest, many more problems developed. One of the most critical of these emerged in the attitudes of many white commanders.

Racism flourished in the early years of the integrated force. One man explained:

What I would like to emphasise is that in the defence force, the boers were harassing us a lot . . . If we had problems, they told us that MK no longer exists [and that] this army belongs to SADF. So we were not able to work together with them because they were harassing us; doing all sorts of things to us . . . We were even training in Afrikaans. So these are some of the problems we were getting in the camps.

⁴⁰ von den Steinen, Interview with Hlatswayo.

⁴¹ von den Steinen, L. Interview with MK veteran who wished to remain anonymous, 19 August 2004, Simonstown Naval Base.

⁴² von den Steinen, Telephone interview with Hlatswayo.

Sometimes the comrades were even beaten during training in the camps. It was those problems and many others I cannot explain. They are quite a lot, you see . . . I can talk about them maybe till sunset brother, they are quite a lot.⁴³

Incidents occurred as a result, including one in 1999, when a black soldier shot and killed six white soldiers and a white civilian at Tempe Military Base in the Free State. Other shooting incidents took place in Phalaborwa and Simon's Town.⁴⁴ While these incidents were rare, some ex- MK and APLA soldiers were disillusioned with the army and opted to leave their best employment opportunity behind. One man expressed his difficulties: "Things were getting worse day by day. I could not stand what the SADF members were doing to us. I decided to leave. Many did leave too. Few were fortunate to get employment but many of us are still unemployed."⁴⁵

Another explained:

We were discriminated by the entire integration process under the hands of former SADF members. Remember these are our former enemies. How can any one trust them? What they wanted was to make the process so difficult that some of us should leave. Even if we complained about their behaviour to our senior comrades, nothing was done. There was just no hope in that system.⁴⁶

One man decided to embrace the opportunities available to him in the SANDF and went for counselling. However his experiences there only exacerbated his problems:

I requested counselling in the SANDF. Because of racism I encountered, I left. It was not worth it. In the consultation room there

⁴³ MK veteran quoted in Gear, Sasha, (2002). *Wishing Us Away: Challenges facing ex-combatants in the 'new' South Africa*, Violence and Transition Series, Vol. 8, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, chapter 3, 8. NB: Gear's interviewees remain anonymous in her article.

⁴⁴ Mashike and Mokalobe, 13.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Mokalobe, 77.

⁴⁶ APLA veteran quoted in Mokalobe, 77.

was a filing cabinet with files written blacks, whites, coloureds and Indians. How could you expect such a racist person to counsel you?⁴⁷

Even today, difficulties persist in the SANDF. One man recalled problems with his rank, and had a civil case still pending against the army in 2002:

Nineteen Ninety-Five I joined the SANDF as a Colonel. And that was refused to be that rank and settled for a Lieutenant Colonel, but I then appealed and won my appeal as a full Colonel. I was at 44 Parachute Brigade . . . till the time when I had a case, a civil case which is still on right now, that is why I'm here. Ja, so maybe I'll be back, I'll go back to the army, or maybe I'll look for another private company post.⁴⁸

Another man lamented the ongoing problems in the navy:

No it's okay. I'm happy, but not that happy. The navy's got its own problems. And I don't think we're going to sort them out now, it's going to take a while. Sometimes you ask yourself why am I wasting my time here, because this is not what I was fighting for. It happens. Sometimes I ask myself why because everyday you must come here and fight, you must come here and argue, because people they just put obstacles in your way deliberately I don't know for what. There are government policies but they just disregard them. I don't know what reason, they don't know who they are working for. So there's a problem but we are facing it now. It's not like the olden days where you know who is your enemy. Now you don't know who's with you and who is your enemy. You're in the dark.⁴⁹

Others found the armed forces better, and are satisfied in their positions. One woman explained:

So even South Africa we have things that is going to take a long time to come right, but I'm glad that like here in the navy, they're giving us opportunity, like female, it's not like before there were females, we don't have to do this training, we can't go on this course, you know? It's just equality to everything, and we're looking forward to the challenges, you know, like if a man can do that, then why can't she, all of us can do, you know? Even in a promotion wise, it's really going fine because now they're trying to make up to the standard of male and female in the same equality, like the way they were talking about the

⁴⁷ MK veteran quoted in Lamb, Guy and Mokalobe, Mafole. (no date.) *'Soldiers of Misfortune': The Forgotten Warriors of South Africa's Liberation Struggle*, Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Cape Town, Paper to be presented at the conference on "Re-Conceptualising Democracy and Liberation in Southern Africa," 10.

⁴⁸ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Bandile "Blacks" Joyi, 21 November 2002, Cape Town.

⁴⁹ von den Steinen, Interview with Bongco.

other day in the parliament, the one of 50% of women, 50% of men. So I'm just hoping that one day in this defence force it's going to be like that. But it's still male dominated you know environment, Ja. It still is, but we're getting there. We're getting there.⁵⁰

For some ex- MK and APLA soldiers, the armed forces have become a career, and though their attitudes vary, they rest assured of a stable job. However many others did not integrate, or did not remain in the armed forces.

No Economic Miracle

Unemployment in South Africa was and is a nationwide problem. No guarantee of jobs awaited the ex-combatants, and many still struggle to survive. The Soweto generation and their successors are particularly at a disadvantage in the job market. So many people joined as school children, before even matriculating. Most abandoned their education, only trained in military and guerrilla warfare, and lack skills and job experience. In a country in which many college graduates cannot find jobs, finding employment is extremely difficult for the uneducated and unskilled. Some found careers in the new South African National Defense Force, others gained positions in government as ministers or as support staff, and some found work with their organisations. A few received money from their organisations to study, though most did not. One man explained his difficulties: "I completed my matric two years ago and it has always been my desire to go to university to study law. I have been trying without any success to get funding from the government even though promises were made that we will be financially assisted."⁵¹ Another lamented: "When I was in exile, I trained as an electrician and when I came into the country I wanted to further

⁵⁰ von den Steinen, Interview with Chief P.O. Pumla Mapipa, 19 August 2004, Simonstown Naval Base.

⁵¹ MK veteran quoted in Mokalobe, 101.

my studies in electrical engineering through a technikon. Unfortunately, funding has been hard to come by. I finally gave up. Now I am unemployed.”⁵² For the majority of the MK and APLA soldiers, once the initial financial help some received ran out, they had to fend for themselves. One survey of ex-MK and APLA soldiers found: “Only 16% indicated that they were involved in income generating projects, such as waged/salaried employment or as entrepreneurs.”⁵³ One report quoted a man who expressed his meager wishes: “I would like any job as long as it will help me to survive and contribute at home.”⁵⁴ Unemployment and its consequences remain the biggest problem facing most of the ex- MK and APLA soldiers in South Africa.

Some people were able to make their own luck, and dedicated themselves to finishing their education and obtaining skills with which to find a job. This was not always easy. One woman described her experiences in going back to school:

So they were afraid of me, they didn't want to take me to school, because they said I'm going to corrupt their children, there was that feeling within the community. That their children can't stay with that terrorist. So it was interesting really. So I just told them no, there's nowhere that I'm going, I am going to study, your children are going to study, their own books, and things like that. Because they called a meeting, I was called, that I'm going to frustrate and corrupt their children. So I said, no you must relax, I'm just here for my, you know I'm having my own agendas, they must just forget about me. Because they knew me in 1982, '83, I was in Port Alfred, you know, I used to come from Fort Beaufort, to organise meeting, maybe to say that nobody's going to school and all that, so they know, you know, so I just told them no, I, I'm the other person now, having another agenda. People relax, I'm not going to do anything.⁵⁵

Those who attained some schooling and skills training in exile could sometimes use that training to find jobs or to create their own businesses. One woman returned to

⁵² APLA veteran quoted in Mokalobe, 101.

⁵³ Mashike and Mokalobe, 13.

⁵⁴ Cock, 3.

⁵⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Ncame.

South Africa with her family, and though well trained, the sorts of jobs offered did not satisfy her. She joined forces with another woman who worked for the ANC underground, and joined her business.⁵⁶ Others had skills, but faced discrimination in the job market due to their membership of MK or APLA. One man explained his approach to this problem: "I just say I am from the SANDF not MK. Whites still hate us."⁵⁷ Another admitted: "I never tell. Guys who do that have never been employed. I know Boers hates APLA members. They say we kill farmers. How can such people employ you?"⁵⁸ One study noted the prevalence of this problem:

To avoid possible discrimination from potential employers, many former combatants said that when applying for employment they do not mention their military background. Some said they keep two sets of curriculum vitae, one with a military background and another without.⁵⁹

But for most, the future was bleak, and unemployment and poverty became a way of life.

This lack of opportunities and options led some ex-MK and APLA soldiers to turn to crime. Many others considered it as an option. As Jacklyn Cock pointed out: "Discontented demobilized soldiers represent a considerable security threat as evidenced by the experience of Uganda, Burundi, Nigeria and the current situation in Mozambique."⁶⁰ One man explained the problem:

It was APLA and MK people [that] were demobilised. That is what shows that . . . they want to drive us into crime, because if we just sit doing nothing with just a gun as a skill, we will suffer. If we do not join the police or security companies, it is then we form gangsters or such groups.⁶¹

⁵⁶ von den Steinen, Interview with Mhlambo.

⁵⁷ MK veteran quoted in Lamb and Mokalobe, 5.

⁵⁸ APLA veteran quoted in Lamb and Mokalobe, 5.

⁵⁹ Mashike and Mokalobe, 17.

⁶⁰ Cock, 1-2.

Another former cadre shared his personal experiences:

I have personal knowledge of people in crime who haven't been caught. You know, we were trained for such things as guerrilla warfare and [now,] being left there at the ledge - you are a time bomb really, you are just ticking away because all the skills and all the suffering that you had to go through and how you [were] made to develop yourself under those conditions, you utilise that tool to [the] maximum. It's unlike people who have been trained . . . You were trained to be devious, [to] do things and not get caught . . . You know, some even go to court and get acquitted because [of] how they do this: they think, they plan.⁶²

Beyond the desperation that leads some ex-combatants to consider turning to crime, some criminals realised the advantages of having a trained guerrilla soldier on their side, and tried to recruit ex-MK and APLA cadres to join their efforts. One man related:

[The area where I grew up] has lots of *tsotsis* and they know me. A lot of them have approached me to help them out and I tell them that I wasn't born a thug. They want me to help them with car hijacking and bank robberies. I tell them that the only thing I know is politics.⁶³

Not all are able to stand on principle however. One man told an interviewer: "Some guys approached me and told me that I should help them . . . because I don't have money and I'm suffering. I said, 'Yes, we can go'. I'm ready anytime because I can't sit around when I don't have money."⁶⁴ Another showed his good training while still considering the lure of crime: "I [was] approached last week but I don't trust some of the guys [so] I won't go with them. If they were people I trusted, I would go."⁶⁵ One man recognised both the dangers of neglect and the possibility of an alternative:

⁶¹ MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 5, 50.

⁶² MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 5, 56.

⁶³ MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 5, 51.

⁶⁴ MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 5, 53.

⁶⁵ MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 5, 53.

Young cadres are now unemployed. There are many of them who are consuming drugs because of frustration. They should be educated. They have skills and can combat crime in our country. If they are not assisted, they will be involved in crime as others are still doing. Others have guns and they know the areas where arms were hidden during the liberation struggle.⁶⁶

For some, the lack of opportunities, support, and education leaves them little choice but to use their training to find their own illegal sources of money.

The Psychological Legacy

Psychological problems are also endemic to many of the returned MK and APLA soldiers. For some these are small and manageable. Many ex-combatants find their lives influenced by their time in MK and APLA. While it might only manifest itself in small ways, like one's approach to relationships, the effects still endure. One female cadre explained:

But ja, you know psychologically I think that's the thing that interests me because I think that's the thing that's least explored. I mean you don't allow yourself to absorb how that's effected your life, how it's effected your ability to have relationships, how it's effected the choices that you made, I mean the choices that I made about having children, I mean fundamental things that I've done in my life have been impacted very very clearly from that experience. And I think that the other thing is that you realise in retrospect, there's fuckall romantic about armed struggle. There's really nothing romantic about being in that kind of situation. I mean I think for us to be recruited and to be asked to serve in that kind of way, ja, I mean we were, it was something that was really significant. And it felt good to be acknowledged that way as somebody who could do something purposeful, on that level. But in another way, you just went into it with like, with these doe eyes almost. And you had to be hardcore, you had to, I mean I was pretty hardcore before I went there, but I wasn't hardcore in the sense that I really believed.⁶⁷

Another man explained a general change in his personality:

⁶⁶ MK veteran quoted in Lamb and Mokalobe, 8.

⁶⁷ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Andrea Meeson, 18 May 2002, Johannesburg.

I believe that even with those ex-combatants who are above water [employed] there's a commonality. Before the violence I used to be somebody who cheered up somebody else. But I'm no longer that person . . . I realise I prefer to be very much on my own. I sit in the car and watch them partying . . . I don't feel like laughing . . . [We need] something to make those who are still alive to be like relaxed and happy and be able to integrate with the community nicely.⁶⁸

Others developed substance abuse problems to attempt to escape their problems. One woman escaped her habits: "I used to say it was better to stay drunk and now I realise how bad this thing is. Most of [my APLA colleagues] have passed away. Before I was in the Service Corps, I was frustrated and took a lot of alcohol. I just wanted to drink, to find solace in drinking."⁶⁹ Another man remarked: "Other guys get involved in smoking dagga, others in drinking [because] when they look, their families are poor. A person thinks about such things, such as, 'Maybe if I did not go to exile I would have finished my education and be able to help my family'."⁷⁰ Some feel the pressure of family expectations, and turn to substance abuse to escape. One man explained: "Society sees us as heroes and expects too much from us. When they see some of our comrades driving in beautiful cars, they expect the same from us. This is a real frustration to me. To escape this pressure of heroism I spend most of my time drinking."⁷¹

Still others have much deeper problems. Many have resorted to suicide. One man related:

I have . . . about ten [friends] - oh, when I count correctly there's another one . . . There was our fellow comrade who drank poison. He killed himself . . . I have a cousin-brother who I was with in Transkei,

⁶⁸ MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 6, 10.

⁶⁹ APLA veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 6, 12.

⁷⁰ MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 6, 5.

⁷¹ Quoted in Mokalobe, 100.

who was a PAC. He also killed himself by drinking poison. Many others have shot themselves because of the situation that we are in.⁷²

Another man explained: "It's like this Saturday we buried a friend of ours who shot himself last Monday. His problem was that the government was using us as their tools and at the end of the day they dismiss us and don't care about us anymore."⁷³ Others direct their problem at others. One man noticed that his temper is much closer to the surface: "I'll react more impatiently to any situation ... I wouldn't hurt anybody but my emotions will boil very quickly."⁷⁴ Another recognised the violence that resided within him and acted to save those he cared about: "I felt that I was going to kill my girlfriend, that's why I decided to go far away, so that I can think clearly."⁷⁵ Others did not manage to rein in their tempers and hurt people around them. One man related:

Ja, this thing happens . . . Maybe we would sit at a shebeen and drink, and we would drink and drink. When we are drunk maybe you talk to me badly. It means what would solve [it would be] if we talk about it verbally, but now eish! I would grab him. It just happens. I would take a bottle and hit him with it, things like that.⁷⁶

Others remain ticking time bombs, and their family members live in fear. One man recalled:

Sometimes you feel like you want to cry. The other day I had a sister of one of the comrades I was arrested with. She was hysterical, telling me that she is finding it difficult to live with him because, what happens is, the poor fellow is so demoralised that he is no longer thinking straight and all he wants to do is to party. He's becoming a party animal. He doesn't care anymore because he believes that no one

⁷² MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 6, 13-14.

⁷³ MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 6, 13.

⁷⁴ MK/SDU veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 5, 70.

⁷⁵ MK/SDU veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 5, 72.

⁷⁶ MK/SDU veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 5, 71.

cares for him so why the hell should he care? He is trying to find some kind of consolation and he is doing a lot of wrong things. He becomes so aggressive that they have to leave the house.⁷⁷

As for any military veterans, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is also a worry. One study noted many problems soldiers experienced that fit this diagnosis. They cite nightmares, substance abuse, flashbacks, strong reactions to loud noises, insomnia and detachment as common symptoms.⁷⁸ However, ex-combatants rarely recognize or know about PTSD, though many suffer its effects.

The ANC, PAC, and the current government do not provide psychological help for these soldiers. A few managed to find ways to get counseling, such as one man who was attending a university that provided free psychological help to its students, but most had no way to get help. One study noted: "None of the respondents experiencing psychological problems indicated that they have received treatment and/or counselling."⁷⁹ An ex-soldier explained the problem: "A person is traumatised but the issue is that there are no places where one can go and seek help. This thing ends up affecting you." Money problems exacerbate this lack of services, as well as a feeling of pride, and a desire to conquer their problems alone.

For many cadres who have avoided the pitfalls, the most disheartening situation is to see their comrades living on the streets and losing themselves to substance abuse and psychological problems. One journalist remarked on the plight of many ex-soldiers: "You've probably already met some of them under irritating circumstances in town- guiding your car into a parking space for a few cents. Or

⁷⁷ MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 5, 82.

⁷⁸ Mashike and Mokalobe, 18-19.

⁷⁹ Mashike and Mokalobe, 20.

lying sprawled across your path on the pavement.”⁸⁰ One ex-soldier started tracking down the people from his neighbourhood who had been members of MK. He commented:

By then, many of them had become *bergies* and hoboes. It was sad for me as their commander to see what was happening to the people who fought with me in the struggle. These were trained MK soldiers who had gone down the drain. They had ended up in the gutter. Some of them became addicted to drugs because there was no help after 1992 when things quietened down. They are now drug addicts, alcoholics, gangsters- in and out of jail. After the elections, people were power crazy and crazy for positions. There was totally no help from anybody . . . I always say the cops couldn't break me, either in interrogation or harassing my family or whatever they did, they couldn't break me. But to see guys I recruited living in the streets, being parking attendants, and at the other end seeing people integrated into the army with jobs and positions . . . who never lifted a finger for this new democracy- that's what breaks me personally.⁸¹

Another woman noted that occasionally she runs into an ex-comrade on the streets of Cape Town, begging for money or parking cars for money, destitute, demoralised and broken, and how difficult it is for her to see these people who have fallen into this state.⁸² Many of the soldiers who have managed to make a life for themselves find themselves horribly depressed and demoralised upon seeing their fellow comrades in such dire conditions.

Some ex- MK and APLA soldiers have not had the chance to readapt to society. Many remain in jail for operations they carried out under the auspices of their organisations. While both the ANC and the PAC insisted on the unconditional release of all freedom fighters before negotiations with the government commenced, this demand fell by the wayside.

⁸⁰ Fakier, 94.

⁸¹ Faried Ferhelst, quoted in Fakier, 95.

⁸² von den Steinen, Interview with Nosizwe Khumalo, 16 June 1999, Cape Town.

Neither Truth nor Reconciliation

Some secured their release through applying for amnesty to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but not all of these received amnesty. The PAC particularly took exception to many of the conditions of the amnesty process. One of their main complaints concerned the equal treatment of freedom fighters and those who supported apartheid under the TRC. As apartheid was condemned as a 'crime against humanity' by the United Nations, they did not believe that the forces fighting against it should be equated with those who had supported the regime. Police raided the PAC Umtata office in May 1993, and they never returned the documents seized. This complicated the PAC's participation in the TRC as many crucial documents necessary to support their members' claims could not be obtained.⁸³ The APLA Director of Operations, Letlapa Mphahlele, refused to apply for amnesty and has faced threats of prosecution off and on for years. He explained his stance:

Morally and politically, I felt that I was not going to go to the TRC, if they say I should go there to confess my crime, my commission and omission. I said no ways. That I'm doing symbolically. At least there must be someone who is challenging it. And every time there were charges against me, murder, attempted murder, terrorism, possession of arms, explosives, ammunition. But I said, I'd better take this route than go before the TRC and say I'm sorry. So then this is the stance that I have taken.⁸⁴

On a realistic level, however, he encouraged all the APLA cadres in prison to apply for amnesty and supported their applications, as he recognised this was the best chance to gain release from jail. He also rejected the idea of legislated reconciliation, but independently sought reconciliation with some victims of APLA attacks quite

⁸³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Armed Forces Hearing PAC/APLA, 7 October 1997, Cape Town Day 1.

⁸⁴ von den Steinen, Interview with Mphahlele.

successfully.⁸⁵ Even the idea of truth became contentious as well. A few ex-combatants have indicated to this author that they only admitted to the actions they knew could be proven or had been witnessed, but kept many other actions to themselves. Others also admitted to crimes they served sentences for, but had not committed, simply to facilitate their release.⁸⁶ Many did not apply for amnesty unless they had to. One man asserted:

I will not go and open a case that I have killed a person before they write me a letter [calling me] . . . Why must I get myself arrested? I will never get myself arrested [by saying] that I killed a person on a certain day. What if that case is taken and turned into a criminal case, and not a political case? So we must be intelligent when we talk about things such as these.⁸⁷

Some ex-soldiers still sit in jail after their amnesty applications failed. One man lamented:

Since my comrades have been released, I have felt bad. In fact, I feel down, because there is no one in my organisation who has yet come to console me and my comrades have not come since they have been released just to console me, but I hope they will come to boost my morale.⁸⁸

Even those who received amnesty still feel enmity towards the process. One such man remarked:

I'm an ex-political prisoner who has been released by the TRC . . . I tried by all means to apply to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996 [but it] took so long to respond. I [was] released only in November 1998 . . . Some people are released, some are not . . . Most of our people are lying in jails all over South Africa . . . They are angry and they ridicule the TRC.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ von den Steinen, Interview with Mphahlele.

⁸⁶ Interviewees in this case will remain anonymous.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Gear, Sasha, *Wishing us Away*, Chapter 7, 17.

⁸⁸ Luvuyo Kulman, quoted in Foster, Haupt, and de Beer, (2005). *The Theatre of Violence: Narratives of Protagonists in the South African Conflict*, Cape Town: Institute of Justice and Reconciliation, 250.

⁸⁹ MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 7, 16.

The treatment the former apartheid personnel also weighs heavily on the minds of many ex-combatants. One man expressed:

Justice was not done at the TRC hearings. Some of those murderers are living in luxury and occupy high positions in the present government. Nothing was done to those Generals in the SADF who committed acts of terror. While these Generals were let free despite the atrocities they committed, many of our comrades who liberated this country are still in jails.⁹⁰

On the other side of the TRC fence, many ex-combatants made submissions as victims of crimes against humanity committed by the apartheid forces. They, as well as many other victims, expected promised reparations for their suffering, but this never occurred. One man lamented: "Reparations have not been forthcoming. The government is silent about the issue. This is an indication that the efforts of many people who suffered under apartheid are not valued in a democracy."⁹¹ Many ex-combatants still bear ill will towards the process.

A Bitter Legacy

All of these conditions combined have led to bitterness, disillusionment, and a sense of betrayal on the part of many ex-MK and APLA soldiers. They feel that the organisations to which they committed their lives have let them down. While most did not expect a free ride once liberation came, many assumed they would get the opportunities to become active and contributing members of society. One man explained his expectations and dreams:

One of our expectations as soldiers during the time of the struggle was that the government would be overthrown through the use of weapons. We believed that, immediately after this was achieved, we would seize property and land and given them to our own people. We would choose the houses we wanted to occupy. Others expected to own

⁹⁰ APLA veteran quoted in Mokalobe, 159.

⁹¹ APLA veteran quoted in Mokalobe, 160.

farms, believing that the new government would distribute the country's resources. We were so sure that they would take care of the soldiers who fought for liberation as well. We would empower our people . . . We expected a hero's welcome for returning soldiers and imagined all the smiling and excited faces, families reuniting and old friendships re-activated. Sharing information and talking about our experiences, we intended to defend the gains of our revolution and were eager to sacrifice and die in the same manner as we did during exile. All this was nothing more than soldier-talk . . . They still expect past values and principles to be upheld yet that appear to be something only a handful of men adhere to today. It has been a tough journey.⁹²

One study explained:

The majority of respondents indicated that they had expected to achieve sustainable financial security so that they could enjoy a relatively good standard of living following the end of apartheid. They had envisaged achieving this through a combination of mechanisms, such as skills training, access to education, secure employment, resources to establish businesses, pensions, government subsidized housing and access to land.⁹³

For many, their sense of betrayal runs deep. One man expressed his bitterness:

You'll notice that today our cadres are lying in the streets, loitering in the streets, no jobs, no nothing . . . They find themselves being regarded as rotten rubbish which may be thrown into the dirty bin. We were surviving under a terrible situation during the apartheid regime, but now this is a new regime [and] our people are regarded as useless . . . I can say: big fishes, they entertain themselves, small fishes are going to be food for big fishes.⁹⁴

Another man expressed his view: "This thing that [the] ANC has done to us has destroyed us. For such a long time [we were] working for the ANC [but] the ANC has thrown [us] outside like morning mucus."⁹⁵ Another noted:

Some of our comrades are getting richer and richer. They are less concerned about the ordinary people. They only care about themselves and their lavish lifestyles, and forget it is through our blood and sweat that they are where they are today because of us. Some of those who

⁹² Matakata, 130-131.

⁹³ Mashike and Mokalobe, 20.

⁹⁴ MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 2, 11.

⁹⁵ MK veteran quoted in Gear, *Wishing us Away*, chapter 2, 11.

benefit today were never part of the struggle. When we were fighting they were doing nothing and enjoying themselves. Now they earn large salaries and the poor keep on getting poorer.⁹⁶

The leadership's motives are often called into question. Mphahlele expressed it well:

And one other thing, I don't think our leaders, whereas, I'm not supposed to talk about ANC, but generally speaking, PAC, ANC leadership, I don't think they had faith in the revolution we were involved in. Because if you take their personal lives, behaviours and inclinations, whereas they were commanders in chief, but they would always make it a point that their children go to the best universities in the world, most preferably in Europe and America, and children of peasants and workers like me would be stampeded to the military training, and these who are being prepared to run the country, and we are being prepared to be run, even after the country has been liberated. So we had such type of a leadership, people who would be in Dar es Salaam, but have his family based somewhere in Europe or in America. And come and visit the camps, dressed in military fatigue, you know, tell us how much he loves the country, how we should be prepared to lay down our lives, but that same person would not let their son or daughter be part of that. So we could read that our leaders did not have faith in the cause that they were encouraging people to pursue.⁹⁷

This particular complaint is a common one. Even during the struggle many soldiers resented the lives of luxury they felt many leaders led in exile. In the aftermath, the continuation of this problem exacerbated the divide between the leadership and the cadres. Many former soldiers feel deeply the sense of betrayal and disregard by their organizations for their contributions.

In the immediate years after the unbanning of the ANC and PAC and after the first democratic elections in South Africa, many studies and recommendations recognised the necessity of providing services for demobilised soldiers of MK and APLA. At their 48th National Conference in 1991, the ANC resolved:

That the NEC take full responsibility for the transferring of funds to regions for the maintenance development and general welfare of all

⁹⁶ MK veteran quoted in Mokalobe, 151.

⁹⁷ von den Steinen, Interview with Mphahlele.

MK cadres, both inside and outside the country and that proper and appropriate binding mechanisms be established to ensure this.⁹⁸

In 1993, Nelson Mandela elaborated at an MK conference:

The issue of welfare is not one that can be reduced to the handing out of money for services rendered. The welfare of our combatants and that of our returned exiles in general is directly linked to a commitment on the part of the ANC to recognise the incredible sacrifices and commitment to liberation by generations of our people who found their way into the ranks of the ANC and MK. Those of our people who have been denied the opportunity to lead normal lives by virtue of the commitment to the liberation of our people must be given access to pensions, health care, housing, education, skills training and employment. It is imperative that we are committed to redressing the historical injustice of apartheid and racism . . . I want to state unequivocally that the ANC is committed to ensuring that any future democratic government will be committed to providing the necessary means to address this issue.⁹⁹

The constitution of the Veteran's Association of South Africa, which focuses on ex-combatants, returned exiles, and ex-political prisoners, but leaves the option open to include other veterans, recognized the need for medical care, pension/compensation, rehabilitation and education, commemoration, repatriation of mortal remains, housing support, improvement of the public image of veterans, job provision, and insurance.¹⁰⁰ Many studies in the early years, including several already cited in this chapter, focused on the plight of veterans and the services they required. However as time went on, most of these resolutions, recommendations, and pledges fell by the wayside.

Other African countries managed to institute successful reintegration programmes for demobilized soldiers. One example is Uganda, which introduced such a plan from 1992-1995, in the same years South Africa faced a similar problem.

One study explained their efforts:

⁹⁸ ANC 48th National Conference, Durban July 1992, Adopted Resolution on Umkhonto we Sizwe.

⁹⁹ Keynote address of the President of the African National Congress- Cde. Nelson Mandela: Eastern Transvaal 3rd and 4th September 1993.

¹⁰⁰ Constitution of the Veterans Association of South Africa, no date.

The programme had two elements. Firstly, a 'settling-in-kit' was designed to cover the first six months after discharge. The package consisted of the provision of shelter, food, clothing, transport, medical care and education for veterans' children. The second element, the 'long-term package' included reintegration measures such as vocational training and credit facilities. . . . Soldiers and their dependents went through pre-discharge orientation briefings, intended to provide them with information on how to open a bank account, how to start income generating activities, environmental and legal issues, basic health and child immunisation, civic duties, legal rights of women in civil society, along with family planning and AIDS prevention. A 'transitory safety net package', in cash and/or kind, was provided to assist former soldiers in the initial stages of resettlement. These packages included food, civilian clothing, household utensils, building materials, seeds and agricultural implements. The package also included funds for the payment of school fees for children for a period of 12 months.¹⁰¹

Another study showed the positive effects of this programme for former child abductees who served as soldiers:

One of the boys who had never been through a centre felt that it was easier for former abductees to readjust if they had been to a centre. He indicated that they had been cared for, given things such as resettlement kits and received education. For youth who had been through the centres, the one thing they most appreciated was education and skills training, since this facilitated their transition into the labour market.¹⁰²

South African efforts, however, fell far short of this example.

In 1996, the South African government passed the Special Pensions Act, which provided pensions for people who participated in the struggle against apartheid. The act meant to include not only the armed wings of the ANC and the PAC, but anyone who worked full time for an organization that worked against the system, anyone jailed or banned as a result of their activities, anyone disabled due to their

¹⁰¹ Shelton, Garth, Monyue, David, Pullinger, Ann, Simmonds, Matthew, and Williams Rocky. (2001 August). *Demobilisation and its Aftermath I: A profile of South Africa's Demobilised Military Personnel*, Institute for Security Studies, ISS Monograph Series, No 59, 30.

¹⁰² Veale, Angela and Stavrou, Aki. (2003 November). *Violence, Reconciliation and Identity: The Reintegration of Lord's Resistance Army Child Abductees in Northern Uganda*, Institute for Security Studies, ISS Monograph Series, No. 92, 40.

participation in the struggle, and the dependents of deceased activists. However several complications arose during the implementation of this act and many who should qualify for special pensions under the spirit of the law have been denied, while some who do not qualify are receiving benefits. An official at the Special Pensions office in Cape Town explained the emotional highs and lows of his position:

You know when somebody is turned down, not approved, you know, you feel bad about it. Sometimes, it's a person who, it's a guy who could qualify but it's a guy who can't articulate some of the things, or is scared of putting some of the things down. But once a person is approved, you say, "shoo, it's been approved," it really makes me very happy. Especially for the elderly people, you know? Some of them are dying, many of them are dying now, and when you get people before they die, especially it makes you feel very very good. Because some of them can't walk, some of them are at home, some you have to go and see, you must fill in the bank form and so on, but once they get paid, approved and paid, ja, that's very good. But you feel down when somebody is turned down, eh, but you can't do anything about it, maybe because of his age he doesn't qualify, but sometimes you do, you could have qualified, but some minor thing, maybe some of them they are not able to get information to prove what they claim. Then you encounter a problem. Some of them, their political parties will not verify them, that they were full time active members. And sometimes there's a record, he was a member, but not qualified as full time active, he was working, he was, you know, teaching or whatever, also what happens is by full time, if for example you were working for the government at that time, and you were in the struggle, fighting, for example, then you don't get paid because they said you can't be full time in the struggle and full time at work.¹⁰³

A study by the Human Rights Media Centre identified several problems. The act excludes anyone under the age of 35 as of 1 December 1996, which leaves out many ex- MK and APLA soldiers, particularly the large number of young people who joined APLA in the early 1990s. The Special Pensions officer described this problem as one of the worst:

And I think that the most problematic and difficult one is the one of the age thing, under 35. Now many people feel this is completely unfair. For people not to qualify simply because they were young. And they

¹⁰³ von den Steinen, L. Interview with Zolile "Ghost" Ndindwa, 19 November 2002, Cape Town.

argue that basically now, in fact, the people that were at the forefront of the struggle are the youth. They were there carrying the bombs and the guns, they were doing the actual work in the country. They would train in most cases with the older guys, they would come into the country using the same guns, the same grenades, the same tactics and so on, and now when it comes to pay time they are not eligible. That's a very sensitive one. And initially these guys, even now guys are very angry with that. Very very angry.¹⁰⁴

A process is currently ongoing to find a way to address this problem, but it lies outside of the Special Pensions Act. A research group established to seek out ex-activists and arm them with information about the act failed miserably, though they were well paid. The language of the act is vague and various offices and members of the board interpreted it differently, excluding some people who should have qualified. The application process was difficult as well, and many offices made their own decision to discourage some people from applying, which was not their mandate. Even some of those who received the Special Pensions faced difficulties when they originally received overpayments, then had to pay back the monies given them, which caused further hardships. Financial transparency and audits have been limited, and mismanagement may have occurred.

In some offices, ex-combatants volunteered to work for no pay in order to assist their comrades in the application process. For ex-MK and APLA members who joined the SANDF, the matter becomes even more clouded, as any who spent time in the armed forces has a choice of a military pension or a special pension, and need considered advice as to which will benefit them more. The ongoing process of amending, clarifying, and applying the Special Pensions Act continues, and applications have closed and then re-opened on several occasions. However for many ex-MK and APLA soldiers, the bureaucratic process, unhelpful officials, and long wait has caused them grief. Some have given up on the process, while others missed

¹⁰⁴ von den Steinen, Interview with Ndindwa.

years of payments due to their problems with the application process.¹⁰⁵ Hopefully this process will eventually become accessible and more people can benefit. As for the younger cadres, they must simply wait and hope that a way to address their needs comes to fruition.

Other official attempts to address the plight of former soldiers have been limited at best. The South African Defense Force's Service Corps aimed to help demobilized soldiers, and far undershot their goals. One study explained: "The skills training offered by the Service Corps was often abundantly offered in civil society, for example, motor mechanics and bricklaying, and finding a job was therefore nearly impossible."¹⁰⁶ Another ex-combatant explained: "Most of our members who received their training in the SC are unemployed. This tells you much about the kind of training and the manner in which it is conducted."¹⁰⁷ Despite their best intentions, veterans' associations are chronically under-funded, and are not able to address the problems of their constituents.¹⁰⁸ One man noted:

We were initially provided with R500 a month for 3 months, but we were later told that funds have dried up. As far as I know, MKMVA [MK Veteran's Association] has not provided any training to anybody. To some of us, it is only a place where you meet your comrades and share your memories.¹⁰⁹

With the lack of government sponsored programmes, some former soldiers have started their own Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to help their comrades.

¹⁰⁵ Information in this section is based on research done by this author for the Human Rights Media Centre, and a draft pamphlet on Special Pensions written in the process.

¹⁰⁶ Liebenberg, Ian and Roefs, Marlene. (2001 August). *Demobilisation and its Aftermath II: Economic Reinsertion of South Africa's Demobilised Military Personnel*, Institute for Security Studies, ISS Monograph Series, No. 61, 55.

¹⁰⁷ APLA veteran quoted in Mokalobe, 99.

¹⁰⁸ Mashike and Mokalobe, 23-24.

¹⁰⁹ MK veteran quoted in Mokalobe, 99.

One organization provides training in skills needed to run a small business, and sets up former soldiers to do so, often matching MK and APLA soldiers as partners in a business, usually run from a container in the townships.¹¹⁰ Another has a Combatants Support Initiative as one of its programmes, focusing on the psychological and social problems of ex-combatants and providing life and vocational skills training.¹¹¹ Other organizations or even small informal groups of ex-combatants make attempts to address the problems as well. But much more needs to be done to support former MK and APLA soldiers, as well as other activists from the struggle against apartheid.

Conclusion

When De Klerk delivered his speech in February of 1990, apartheid's end was imminent. Hope and victory stood side by side with uncertainty and fear in the minds of both MK and APLA combatants. Many MK soldiers soon returned from exile or emerged from underground, reunited with their families, and tried to start the business of adapting to the 'new South Africa'. APLA cadres mainly remained underground or in exile until 1994, and then faced the same tasks. Problems stemming from their time in the armed wings of the ANC and PAC often persist today. Some integrated into the new South African National Defense Force, a process that was rife with difficulties. Many had to apply to the TRC for amnesty or possibly face prosecution for their actions during the struggle, or were already jailed for their actions and applications for amnesty were their only way to get out of prison. However, the TRC process was fraught with difficulties for many of them. Poverty, unemployment, psychological and physical problems, and a sense of betrayal still hold tight on the lives of many ex-combatants. As things stand at the moment, too many of these

¹¹⁰ von den Steinen, L. Conversation with the founder, Meshack Mochele.

¹¹¹ Direct Action Centre for Peace and Memory website: <http://www.dacpm.org.za/combat.html>.

people who dedicated themselves to transformation in South Africa and have much to contribute to the country are sleeping in the streets, are addicted to alcohol and drugs, are struggling with their psychological problems, and are oppressed by dire poverty and unemployment. The applications filled out when people joined APLA provide a haunting picture of what could have been. One question asks about the recruits' future ambitions, and the answers show the dreams so many liberation struggle soldiers once held for their futures. To mention just a few, answers to that question included doctor, engineer, professor of architecture, lawyer, historian, builder and draughtsman, musician, farmer, carpenter, economist, photographer, archeologist, electrician, teacher, accountant, public relations officer, theologian, motor mechanic, and war-correspondent.¹¹² For many veterans of the armed struggle, these echoes of their youthful ambitions are now just dreams deferred, perhaps forever. While it is true that these people could be a great asset to the country, they could also become a dire threat. With thousands of disillusioned, demoralised, desperate and destitute men and women, who are highly trained in military and guerrilla warfare tactics, this population has the potential to hurt the country as well. Many of the people who chose to give up everything to fight for liberation are now feeling betrayed by the government and their organisations as they are being discarded by the wayside. Substantial damage is already done, and it is likely that some of the ex-soldiers have slipped beyond the reach of programmes to help them. But it is not yet too late. Policies such as the one professed by Nelson Mandela can and must still be instituted, or a great injustice will have been perpetuated on those who gave their lives to fight another one.

¹¹² APLA Questionnaires.

Conclusion

The men and women who joined Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Azanian People's Liberation Army came from all corners of South African society. What they all held in common was a commitment to defeat a brutal and unjust regime and a dream of a brighter future and unlimited opportunity for themselves and their children. When negotiations led to the first democratic elections and new government ruled by the majority in 1994, many believed their dreams would finally be realised. But that freedom has been an uneasy one. While South Africa has emerged as a leader on the continent, the economy continues to grow, and many have attained success, the large majority of South Africans have yet to see improvement in their lives.

While South Africa never experienced a war of liberation on the scale of other African countries, the armed wings of the ANC and PAC vitally contributed to the liberation of the country. The South Africans who joined the struggle in droves in the aftermath of the Soweto uprisings of 1976 and those who followed them in the 1980s and 1990s swelled the ranks of the liberation movements and contributed a revitalising lifeblood of militant and dedicated freedom fighters. Their actions increased the support from the masses, inspired others to take up the mantle of struggle, and laid siege to the apartheid government's economic and psychological strength. Though MK and APLA cadres failed to ride into Pretoria on tanks and wrest power from the hands of their oppressors, their contributions forced the apartheid government to recognise its ensuing demise and take a seat at the negotiating table.

In the aftermath of apartheid and the dawn of the "new" South Africa, however, their leaders have neglected, abandoned and forgotten them. While a few have gained success under the new dispensation, and others have managed to carve

out humble but comfortable lives, the huge majority remain in dire straights. Having abandoned everything to join the struggle, they now find themselves without education, skills, job experience, homes or support. The added burdens of psychological and sometimes physical scars from their experiences make them even more vulnerable and crippled. Despite lip service paid to their heroism and contributions in the form of speeches and monuments, the tangible support they so desperately need and so plainly deserve is not forthcoming. The sense of betrayal at the hands of the leaders grows continuously in the light of this neglect.

Since the current government of South Africa started as an organisation fighting for not only a change in government but also for the opportunities and improved living conditions their people lacked, the dangers of marginalizing and neglecting people should be clear to them. As the last country in Africa to throw off the yoke of white rule, they have abundant examples of the consequences of neglecting their veterans. One report pointed out protests and riots by disgruntled ex-combatants in Namibia in the mid-1990s in the aftermath of independence, and Zimbabwe in 1997, a full 17 years after theirs.¹ Further away, lessons can even be learned from Sudan, for example, where one book noted:

Many of these ex-military men, whose livelihoods had been ruined by the economic crisis or the drought became very frustrated and turned to violence. Known locally as *gata el turuk* or bandits, they attacked passengers in western Sudan, stealing their properties. A second, equally violent and more politically destabilising coping strategy, was for ex-Ansar to mobilise themselves as part of the Arab tribal militias who were fighting their Dinka neighbours over pasture and water resources.²

¹ Dzinesa, Gwinyayi Albert. (2006 January). *Swords into Ploughshares: Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa*, Institute for Security Studies, ISS Paper 120.

² Gakmar, Chol Gidion. (2002). Disarmament and Demobilisation. In Ajawin, Yoanes and de Waal, Alex (Eds). *When Peace Comes: Civil Society and Development in Sudan*, Eritrea: Red Sea Press, 101.

The neglect of former soldiers there and the ongoing wars have led to more deeply seated problems there:

The culture of violence and use of force alone to resolve problems has become embedded in Sudanese society. Throughout large swathes of Sudan, traders must carry guns to defend themselves from armed bandits. Kalash bijiib kash ('AK47 brings cash') is a motto heard in western Sudan. Inter-tribal disputes that would earlier have been resolved peacefully, or would at worst have deteriorated into fights with local weapons, are now likely to involve militiamen armed with modern weapons.³

While South Africa has not experienced wars on the level of Sudan's, the neglect of its former soldiers, their guerrilla training, knowledge of arms caches still unearthed, and ever present sense of betrayal could well lead to crises in the future. Many have refused to yield to the temptations of crime. But the more time that passes without sufficient programmes to aid, assist, retrain, and employ this group, criminal options on the part of ex-soldiers become increasingly tempting. If the current government ever reaches the point where the majority perceives it as unjust, oppressive, or even just neglectful of its constituents, this pool will be a natural base from which to work against the government. As Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel espoused in 1830: "What experience and history teach us is this- that nations and governments have never learned anything from history or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it."⁴ And as Karl Marx, once taught to all MK soldiers in their Angolan camps and a smaller component of APLA's political education later elaborated: "Hegel says somewhere that all great events and personalities in world history reappear in one fashion or another. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy,

³ Gakmar, 106.

⁴ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. (1872). *Lectures on the philosophy of history*, London: Bell and Deldy. (First edition published in 1830).

the second as farce.”⁵ One can only hope that the government of the “new” South Africa takes its lessons from history, and reaches out to their abandoned soldiers. Perhaps the organisation once led by Nelson Mandela, who became an icon for justice all over the world, will heed his own words: “True reconciliation does not consist in merely forgetting the past.”⁶

The full history of MK and APLA’s soldiers has yet to be written. Many interviews conducted by the author and other researchers provide a rich base of stories that illuminate the human dimension of the history of the struggle against apartheid. However, thousands of people have yet to tell their stories. Researchers must continue and intensify the collection of oral history. With more time, contacts, and funding, oral history projects and individual researchers can persist in revealing new aspects of South Africa’s turbulent history. An emphasis on training in oral history collection for speakers of all South African languages would deepen the pool of material collected. Dissemination of this information is also a crucial task. Access to oral interviews, writing of books and articles, and opportunities for the ex-combatants to talk to the public about their experiences are all essential areas that cry out for development.

This study has provided vital insight into the rich experiences of South Africa’s freedom fighters. The political awakening of those who went on to join MK and APLA came from diverse influences. Life under apartheid, experiences in the system of Bantu education, and family influences, whether through apathy or activism, politicised many young South Africans and instilled them with a driving need to commit themselves to the fight against apartheid. While many of the South

⁵ Marx, Karl. (1926). *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, London: Allen and Unwin.

⁶ Statement of National Executive Committee of the ANC on the occasion of the 84th anniversary of the African National Congress, presented by President Nelson Mandela, January 8, 1996.

Africans of the Soweto Generation were too young to remember previous campaigns against apartheid, the early 1970s saw a resurgence of resistance that caught the minds of the youth and intensified their political awareness. Waves of strikes and the resultant police oppression of workers, the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement and its ideology of psychological liberation, unity of the oppressed masses, and community involvement and activism, and the Portuguese coup in 1974 which led to the independence of Angola and Mozambique the following year all served to galvanise a generation into action.

The Soweto uprisings brought a youthful militancy to South African resistance, and a visibly brutal response from the apartheid authorities. A rush of people fled into exile to join the liberation organisations and gain the skills needed to combat the apartheid government with force of their own. While the ANC and PAC had little influence on or control over these students and their activities, they found a militant, dedicated, and impatient pool of potential activists ready to reinvigorate their stagnant struggle, though their weakened states precluded a rapid and strong military response to support the uprisings. This Soweto generation of MK and APLA soldiers marked a decided break from their predecessors in their intense militancy and determination and their huge numbers revitalised resistance to apartheid, swelled the ranks of both liberation armies, and marked the beginning of an unprecedented level of armed operations aimed at defeating the apartheid state.

In the mid-1980s, the townships exploded again, and a wider subsection of South African society dedicated itself to the struggle and joined MK and APLA both in exile and inside the country. Community organisations of students, workers, and women became involved and even sports and religious organisations joined the fight against apartheid. Strengthened by the Soweto generation of recruits, the ANC and

PAC faced a unique opportunity to augment and support the community struggle with armed action. MK units often attacked targets chosen to complement community actions, and APLA units operated for the first time in two decades, striking directly at the personnel who enforced apartheid. Both organisations drew recruits to their armed wings, and the resultant operations applied greater pressure than ever before.⁷

Their politicisation and the periods of unrest inside South Africa caused thousands to flock into exile to join the ANC and PAC. Once politicized leaving home faced the prospective cadres with difficult decisions. Some had strong impetus to leave South Africa while others simply became fed up with the situation inside South Africa and actively sought military training from the ANC and PAC outside the country. The road they faced was long and difficult and the loved ones they left behind were forever changed by their absence. Once they arrived in the neighbouring countries, they found a process in place to facilitate their arrival, and most went on to join MK and APLA to obtain military training. They encountered new ideas and felt the intoxicating freedom of independent black ruled countries. And they looked forward impatiently to the chance to train in guerrilla warfare and return home to fight the apartheid government.⁸

The recruits to MK obtained training in the Angolan camps in politics, history, and guerrilla warfare. The APLA recruits often spread to diverse and far-flung countries, and received training in politics, the Chinese Communist model of guerrilla warfare, and self-sufficiency. Their varied training allowed the opportunity for a rich exchange of ideas in the Tanzanian camps. Life in the ANC and PAC camps was often difficult but a sense of purpose, camaraderie and patience made it tolerable. Life in exile was challenging, however, and crises facing both the ANC and PAC in

⁷ See Chapter One.

⁸ See Chapter Two.

exile threatened the continuation and intensification of the struggle against apartheid. A leadership crisis in the PAC in the 1970s, and an MK mutiny in Angola in the early 1980s marked low points in the history of the organisations. Some unlucky souls never returned home, and died in exile due to disease, accident, South African attacks or UNITA activity, or even execution by their own organisations.⁹

The animosity felt by many cadres towards the leaders and their lifestyles during this period remains relevant today, and a sense of betrayal still haunts many ex-combatants. While an existence in exile was necessary for the ANC and PAC to wage the struggle, the very circumstances of exile led to enduring problems and sometimes diverted the emphasis from the war they were fighting and focused scarce resources and support away from their purpose in order to address and resolve their circumstances.

Some soldiers received the opportunity to deploy in the front line states and inside South Africa, actively combating the apartheid regime. MK operations were characterised by sabotage of government facilities and, after 1985, direct attacks on apartheid personnel. Their policies stressed the avoidance of civilian casualties at all costs. They had effective communication with their leaders, and reliable lines of supplies and funds to support their operations. APLA operations targeted police, soldiers, farmers and white civilians. Their training in self-sufficiency proved vital, as lines of communication and supplies from the organisation were unreliable. Operations focused on not only attacks, but also the “repossession” of arms and funds from the enemy to support future operations. Clashes with the police, operation in the

⁹ See Chapters Three, Four, and Five.

rural areas, and attempts to take the battle to the white areas also characterised the APLA strategy.¹⁰

F.W. De Klerk's speech in February 1990 announcing the unbanning of the ANC, PAC, SACP, and other organisations, and the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners stunned most MK and APLA cadres. Suspicion of the negotiating process and of the apartheid government's degree of sincerity mixed with excitement and joy at the idea of ending the struggle, attaining their goals, and returning home.

For months, life in exile for MK soldiers became chaotic, as the leadership relocated to Johannesburg and abandoned the rank-and-file outside of the country. Chaos also ruled inside, as units operating underground did not know whether to continue or to suspend the armed struggle. While the leadership's seizure of the opportunity for a peaceful settlement is understandable, their precipitate return to South Africa abandoned their cadres in the early days. By 1991, many MK soldiers began to return home after the suspension of the armed struggle in 1990.

In the early 1990s, APLA therefore became highly visible on the South African scene after MK suspended its armed struggle. The PAC opposed the format of the negotiations and insisted on minimum requirements and concessions from the apartheid government with international monitoring. While they continued with their normal operations, several high profile attacks on white civilians gained notoriety in the media but were welcomed by more militant circles of black South African society. The PAC suspended APLA's operations only in early 1994, but most units heard the development through the media rather than from their own leaders. The Director of Operations and several of the internal commanders decided to continue armed actions,

¹⁰ See Chapters Six and Seven.

believing that the PAC leadership had betrayed the struggle. But APLA activities finally ceased and by the elections in April of 1994, their armed struggle ended. When the APLA soldiers suspended their activities, they were too late to take advantage of indemnities from the apartheid government, and some still faced arrest and imprisonment for their activities even under the new government. The disconnect between the PAC leaders and the APLA members manifested itself in an enduring mistrust of leadership and a deep seated feeling of betrayal for many former APLA members, which only intensified in the “new” South Africa.

When they returned from exile or emerged from underground, most MK and APLA soldiers thrilled at the reunion with their families. Some families hailed their returning heroes, while others rejected them. Initial payments of some money from their organisations or from the National Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees ran out quickly, and the pleasure of reunion often descended into resentment and rejection. These ex-soldiers faced problems adapting to life back in South Africa as ordinary citizens. Many of the veterans lacked education, skills, and job experience and struggled to find employment. Nor did the option of integration into the new South African National Defence Force offer a panacea for many. Ex-MK and APLA soldiers often received ranks they felt beneath them and struggled for years to correct the problem. Others rebelled against the racism still deeply embedded in the SADF in the early days of integration. Some did remain and pursue careers with the Defence Force, but many found that option unacceptable.

For those who failed to find employment, crime was tempting. Some succumbed and used their skills in guerrilla warfare to find illicit sources of money. Some criminals recognised their skills and attempted to recruit ex-soldiers. Psychological problems still plague many ex-combatants and assistance is rare and

difficult to obtain. Many ex-combatants express despair and bitterness at seeing their fellow comrades reduced to desperate circumstances.

Those who remained imprisoned after the change in government had to turn to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the hope of gaining release. Problems with the TRC were common and many people still resent their treatment. The PAC publicly opposed the parameters of the TRC, but many of their soldiers applied for amnesty for lack of other options. Those who received it could resume their lives, but many of those denied remain in prison today. Feelings of betrayal run deep in many ex-combatants who, while they did not expect a free ride after democracy arrived, did expect assistance with education, skills training, housing, and job placement.

While many studies took place in the early years of negotiations and freedom, and all relevant organisations professed their intentions to provide services for ex-combatants, very little has been implemented. The Special Pensions Act provided for pension payments to former activists, but problems have plagued the process and many who should qualify do not receive pensions. Some ex-combatants took it upon themselves to help their comrades, and started Non-Governmental Organisations to assist and provide services for ex-combatants and other activists. But far too little has been done to help MK and APLA veterans, and many continue to exist on the fringes of society, destitute and bitter. While it is true that these people could be a great asset to the country, they could also become a dire threat. With thousands of disillusioned, demoralised, desperate and destitute men and women, who are highly trained in military and guerrilla warfare tactics, this population has the potential to devastate the country as well.¹¹

¹¹ See Chapter Eight.

The veterans of MK and APLA, for the most part, are dedicated people who committed themselves to work for the overthrow of an unjust system. Many have wide-ranging experience with foreign countries and people and the discipline that comes from military life. The benefits they could bring to a democratic and changing South Africa are immeasurable. While the country has passed out of the reign of apartheid, and now subscribes to the one man, one vote ideal, many challenges persist. Poverty, lack of services, racism, crime, HIV/AIDS, and many other problems still permeate the society. Yet these dedicated people are not utilised to fight these problems. While some activists transferred their fervour to other arenas, many more are available to contribute to transformation.

Delivery is a vital component of the government's mandate, but occurs too slowly in the eyes of the people. The government could recruit ex-combatants and other activists to assist in the provision of housing and essential services, providing them with skills training while working towards one of the goals of the revolution. Additional funding from foreign donors and big business would allow for sustainable employment for the soldiers and development for the communities. The devastating effects of HIV/AIDS in South Africa might be curtailed by enlisting veterans in the fight and providing training in HIV/AIDS education and care for the afflicted. Crime in South Africa continues to increase, and dominates the headlines. Militarily trained and committed soldiers wasting away in unemployment are a natural pool of recruits to combat this trend. In the mid-1980s many organisations had street committees to combat crime and policed the townships effectively. This background is a natural complement to police efforts in the battle against crime. The possibilities are endless, and the benefits to both the ex-soldiers and the country could be immense. The MK

and APLA soldiers have proven their dedication and discipline in fighting injustice, and deserve the opportunity to continue working for change in South Africa.

Museums and schools could also provide opportunities for employment of ex-combatants. At Robben Island Museum, ex-political prisoners serve as teachers and tour guides who add their own experiences to the history of the island. The Apartheid Museum, Freedom Park, and other public venues for the history of the struggle could provide employment for ex-MK and APLA soldiers, whose stories would enrich the programmes. Outreach programmes could also bring personal testimonies to schools, allowing the students to learn about the struggle from participants. As time passes, more children will grow up outside of the shadow of apartheid. As one character in a book explained to his grandson when asked why he fought in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle: "We fought because life wasn't worth living as it was. We fought so we could look each other in the eyes, heads high. We fought so that you would never, never, understand why we fought."¹² One day, the children of South Africa will have trouble understanding what their grandparents went through, but they must learn about the country's past and the qualities of dedication, sacrifice, and commitment that led many to fight apartheid. Personal accounts add a vital human side to history that is unavailable simply with books and official views of history. South African society can only benefit by learning from the experiences of the people who sacrificed all they had in order to fight a system they knew to be wrong.

Job training and placement are also crucial to the former MK and APLA cadres. Businesses could introduce mentoring programmes allowing the ex-soldiers to receive on-the-job training at businesses so that they can gain the skills and experience necessary to find employment. Publicly funded psychological counselling

¹² Moore-King, Bruce. (1988). *White Man, Black War*. Harare: Baobab Books, 85-86.

and medical care for those who need it would not be prohibitively expensive, and would reap huge benefits for society. There are many options available in reintegrating these soldiers into society and, as seen in the previous chapter, they are desperately needed in order to keep this group from fading from view, or falling into substance abuse, crime, and poverty.

The MK and APLA leadership knew how important it was to be able to study the experiences of other armies all over the world. Trainees learned about the Russian Revolution, Vietnamese soldiers in the Vietnam War, Cuba and China's revolutions, and the liberation struggles of many African countries. The history of the MK and APLA soldiers who fought against apartheid offers no less vital knowledge for future study.

The history of the liberation struggle has focused on the leaders, politics, strategies and tactics, and details of the struggle. It is also both necessary and desirable to approach the history from more revealing angles. Social history and oral history have entered the mainstream of historical inquiry, and have proven very valuable methods to study the past. With the use of oral history, a much deeper understanding of the people involved in South Africa's struggle is possible.

Oral interviews with MK and APLA soldiers and other members of the liberation struggle do exist in South Africa. However, much more extensive work needs to be done in this area. Many interviews took place even before De Klerk's speech in 1990 or in the years immediately following it. Though memory can fade over time, hindsight also allows people to reflect on their experiences and provide deeper analysis of their experiences. Interviews conducted today could provide much more information than those that came before. Furthermore, now that negotiations have ended and a new government holds power, worries about exposure,

incrimination, and security have diminished. Researchers can now discover much more information, particularly about the operational side of the veterans' experiences. The South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) has already undertaken many interviews with activists to add to the history of the struggle. Their initial two volumes add new perspectives to the public consciousness.¹³ But the approach of specific academic articles written by knowledgeable experts neglects some of their research and omits valuable information they have collected. For example, they failed to use the interviews conducted by the author and co-workers about the 1976 uprisings in Cape Town for their volume on the 1970s, and access to the interviews in their collection remains restricted to many researchers.

Also crucial is the issue of language. Most interviews done with ex-soldiers and liberation struggle activists have been conducted in English, but if people with skills in vernacular languages were to receive training in oral history methods and interview the soldiers, the interviewees would be able to express themselves in whatever language they are most comfortable speaking, thus allowing much greater clarity and detail. The use of all South African languages in the collection of oral history would also expand the possibilities of dissemination and reach a wider audience.

Collections of oral history have become common all over the world to preserve people's stories long past their lifetimes. Steven Spielberg, together with the Simon Wiesenthal Center, has undertaken the recording of as many interviews as possible with survivors of the Holocaust.¹⁴ This project is almost too late, as the remaining survivors are few and very old. However in South Africa, there is still

¹³ South African Democracy Education Trust. (2004). *The Road to Democracy Volume 1 [1960-1970]*, Cape Town: Zebra; and (2006). *The Road to Democracy Volume 2 [1970-1980]*, Pretoria: Unisa.

¹⁴ Information learned from a visit by the author to the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, 2000.

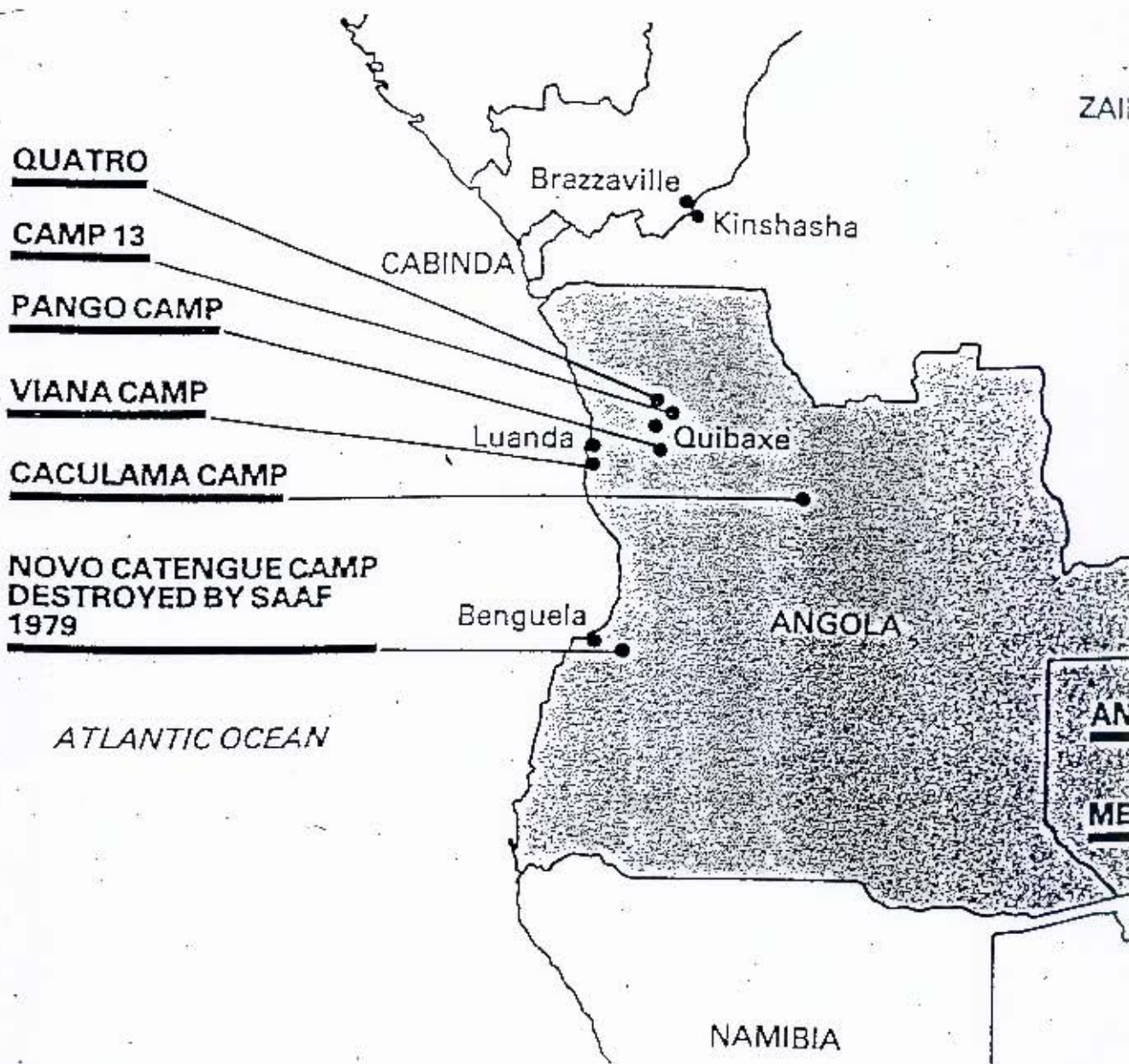
ample time to record people's experiences while the memories are fresh in their minds and most are still alive to tell their stories. A project like this would allow the recording of memories for use in the future. South Africa has the unique experience of being able to re-write its history. The official history during the period of apartheid rule focused largely in the Afrikaner Nationalist tradition, neglecting and demonising the experiences of other people. Official ANC and PAC histories necessarily supported the organisations and glossed over their problems while emphasising their good points. In the wake of ANC victory, historians have largely neglected and marginalised the PAC and APLA's stories. Oral history provides a unique and irreplaceable point of access to the experiences of those South Africans who devoted their lives to bringing about the downfall of apartheid. Today, the opportunity exists to change the face of South African history, and the seizure of this opportunity will prove crucial to its future.

There is still time to address the problems presented above. Programmes to develop and support ex-combatants remain vital to the future of the country. The re-integration of ex-combatants and the opportunity for them to participate fully as citizens of the "new" South Africa remain critical to the future development and security of the country. They provide a rich source of talent, skills, and commitment that must be harnessed to combat the persistent problems plaguing the country today.

The post-liberation experiences of other African countries provide a diverse selection of examples and solutions, some to avoid and some to attempt. The collection and dissemination of the stories of apartheid era activists and soldiers must be augmented and prioritised to add a crucial element to the history of the South African struggle. Development of researchers in all South African languages is also necessary to this process. The money, power, and infrastructure already exist in

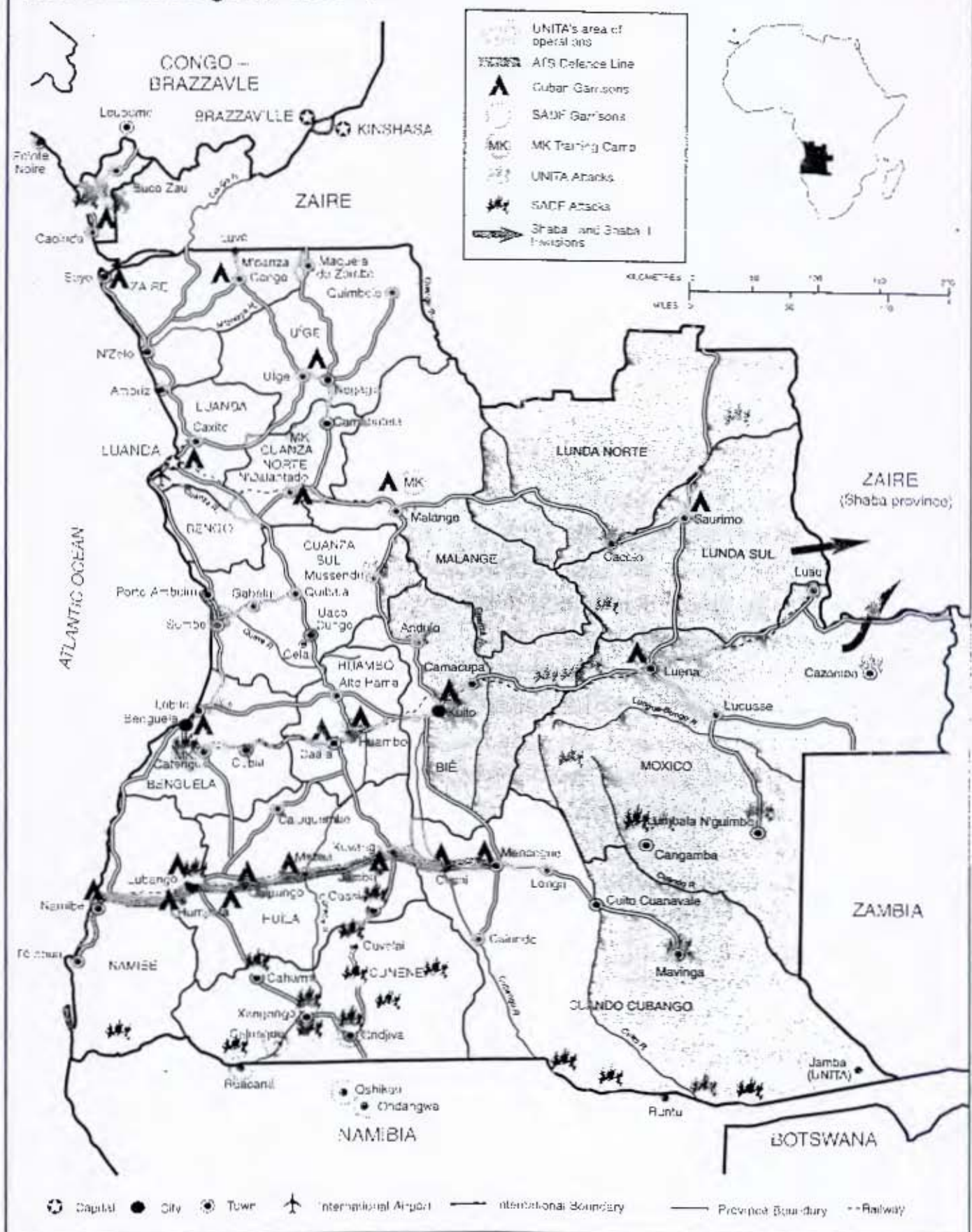
South Africa both to provide vital support to ex-combatants and to promote the collection and dissemination of the oral history of the struggle participants. All that remains to be realised is the determination and will to do so. This study provides a beginning to this process, and hopes to inspire continued efforts.

Some Umkhonto we Sizwe Camps In Angola



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