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**THE ROLE OF UMKHONTO WE SIZWE (MK) IN THE NATIONAL
LIBERATION STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA WITH REFERENCE
TO THE RURAL FAR NORTHERN TRANSVAAL, 1976 – 1990**

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**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Cape Town,
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

Doctor of Philosophy

**Cape Town
August 2007**

DIGITISED

20 MAY 2013

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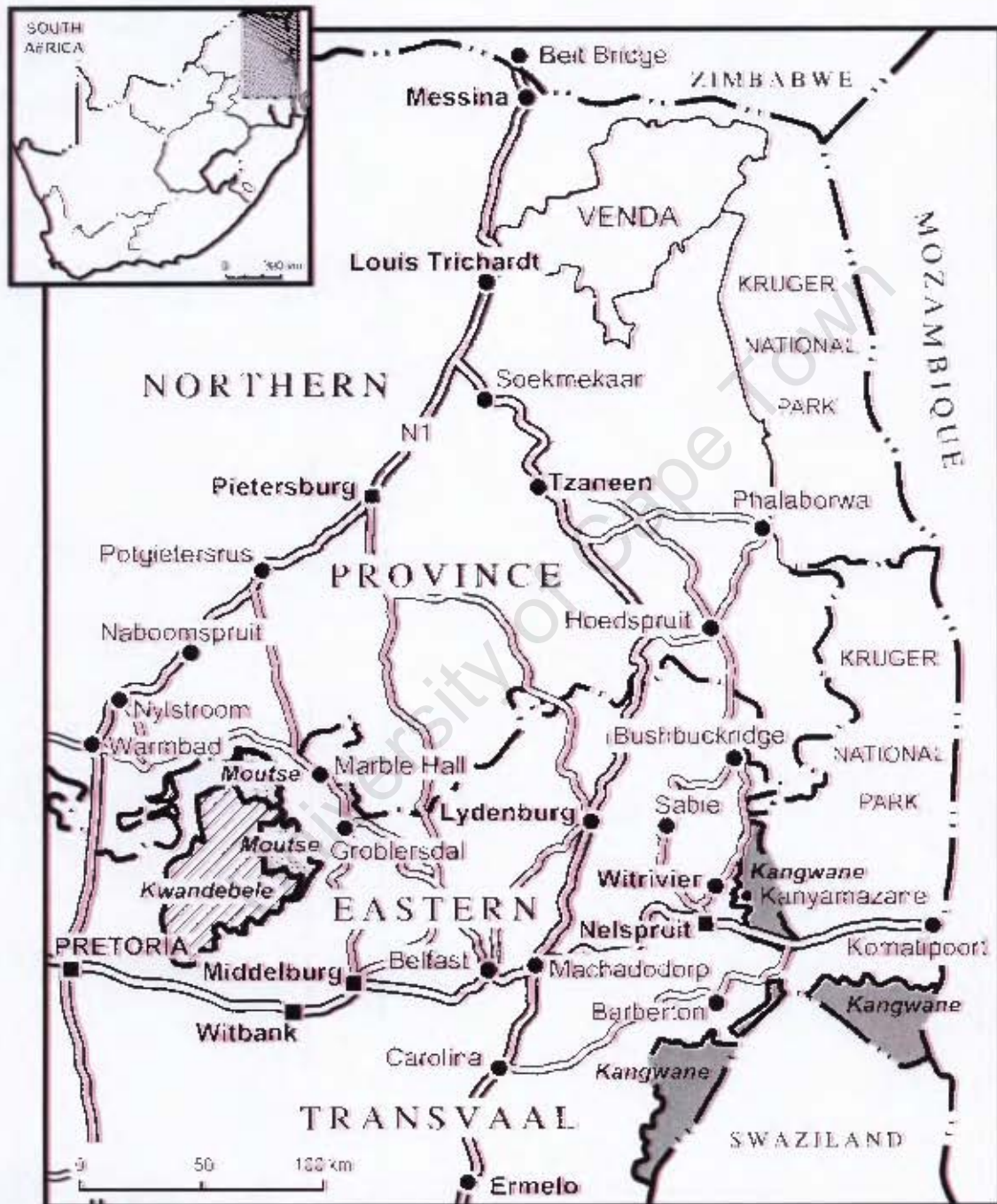
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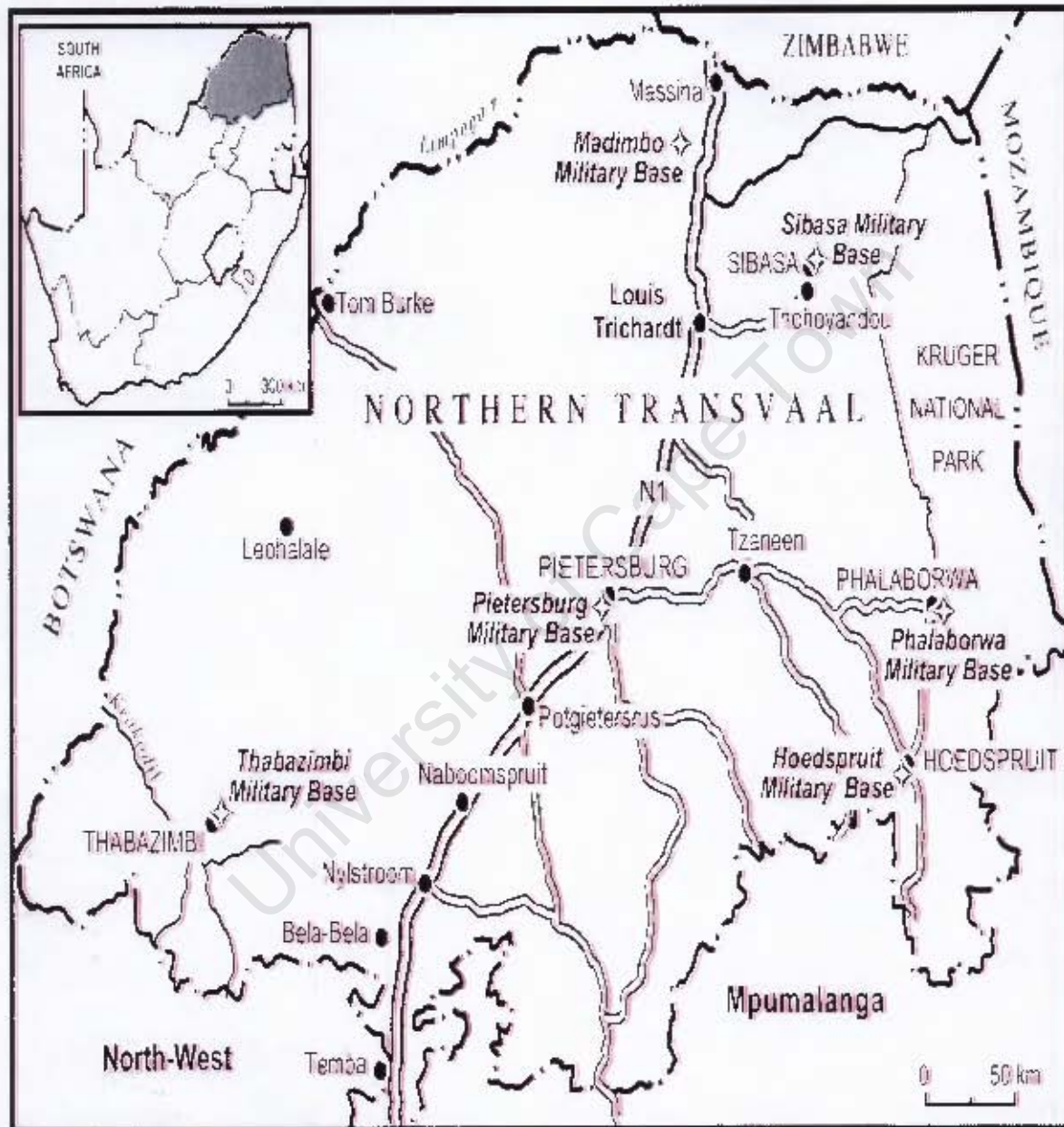
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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the role of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and, by extension, that of the African National Congress (ANC) in the period from 1976 to 1990, in the far northern Transvaal. This era witnessed unprecedented political upheavals in the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa. It is generally acknowledged that the period commencing in 1976 marked the beginning of a sustained onslaught on the South African government by the opponents of racial discrimination. Some of the themes of this study are: the 1976 student uprisings and their snowballing effects on students' political consciousness throughout the country; the revitalisation of the ANC in exile, particularly after the 1979 Vietnam visit, and the organisation's ability to link up with internally based political formations such as students and community-based organisations, and political activists; and the emergence of the independent labour movement inside the country in the 1980s. The integrative nature of the student, parent and community interactions and their ability to connect with the ANC/MK and take up the cudgels at the behest of these communities are hallmarks of the situation during this period.

Sporadic and symbolic demonstrations of military prowess remained the thrust of MK operations throughout the years covered by this thesis. The thought cherished by the majority of the Black population in the years of the liberation struggle, that somewhere out there in exile existed an immensely powerful liberation force, sustained not only the ANC but most of the freedom fighters that were internally-based. It was this belief, the study posits, that was necessary to rekindle the spirit of liberation at home and in

exile, and the hope that liberation was within reach. Some of the adherents of this ideal such as Tlokwe Maserumule, Stanley Mathabatha, Ephraim Mogale, Amos Lubisi and countless others cherished the hope that MK would liberate them from the pangs of oppression. To this end, the study has been able to foreground the fact that this strong feeling that the ANC was alive and active transcended all the odds against the forces of liberation. Thanks to well-calculated symbolic military incursions, the ANC/MK did not fade into political oblivion, but sustained hope.

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DECLARATION

I solemnly declare that the conceptualisation and execution of the thesis is the product of my own research. I have not submitted any part of the thesis anywhere either as an article or towards the fulfilment of a requirement for a degree with any university.

Marepo Lesetja

Date

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University of Cape Town

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the foot-soldiers of Umkhonto we Sizwe of South Africa.

University of Cape Town

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Professor Chris Saunders for his invaluable guidance and the patience that he exercised during the preparation and writing of the following thesis. I am also indebted to the interviewees who gave up their valuable time to share their experiences with me. The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) served as the foundation of the study and I am appreciative.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Advisory Council
ANC	African National Congress
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
AZASCO	Azanian Student Congress
BAAB	Bantu Affairs Administration Boards
BASA	Black Academic Staff Association
BAC	Black Advisory Council
BC	Black Consciousness
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BDF	Botswana Defence Force
BPC	Black People's Convention
BOSS	Bureau of State Security
CA	Congress Alliance
CC	Community Councils
CD	Congress of Democrats
CCB	Civil Cooperation Bureau
CCS	Central Committee Secretariat
CI	Christian Institute
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
CIS	Crime Intelligence Service
CPRC	Coloured Persons' Representative Council
CRC	Coloured Representative Council
CRIC	Community Resource and Information Centre
CONTRALESA	Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPC	Coloured Persons Council
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CUSA	Council of Unions of South Africa
DIRD	Department of Internal Reconstruction and Development
DLB	Dead Letter Box
FBI	Federal Bureau of Intelligence
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
FRELIMO	Front for the Liberation of Mozambique
GDR	German Democratic Republic
ILO	International Labour Organisation

JCC	Johannesburg City Council
JC	Junior Certificate
IPRC	Internal Political and Reconstruction Committee
MAWU	Metal and Allied Workers Union
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MCW	Military Combat Work
MI5	British Security Service
MI6	British Intelligence Service
MK	Umkhonto weSizwe
MOSSAD	Israeli Secret Service
MNR	National Resistance Movement
NCC	National Continuation Committee
NEC	National Executive Committee
NIC	National Indian Council
NSMS	National Security Management System
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OPCO	Operations Committee
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance Movement
RC	Revolutionary Council
RIPRC	Regional Internal Political Reconstruction Committee
SAAF	South African Air Force
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADCC	Southern African Development Coordination Conference
SASO	South African Student Organisation
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SADET	South African Democracy Education Trust
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SAIC	South African Indian Council
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SAPS	South African Police Services
SASOL	Suid Afrikaanse Steenkolen en Olie
SAYCO	South African Youth Congress
SB	Special Branch
SCM	Student Christian Movement
SRC	Students' Representative Council

SSRC	Soweto Students' Representative Council
SOYCO	Soweto Youth Congress
SOU	Special Operations Unit
STEYCO	Steelpoort Youth Congress
SU	Service Unit
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
UCM	University Christian Movement
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UDF	United Democratic Front
UMC	University Management Council
UBC	Urban Bantu Councils
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army

Introduction and Research Overview

The rural Northern Transvaal¹ encompassed a vast region in the northern part of the old South Africa. It was strategically located; particularly the area bordering Zimbabwe (Venda) and Swaziland (KaNgwane), yet the underground liberation struggles that took place in the region remain mostly unreported. The overriding aims that underpinned the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns of 1967/8 were informed by the strategic significance of this area, which was accentuated by the liberation of the southern African countries such as Angola (1974), Mozambique (1975) and Zimbabwe (1980). The fact that these countries – together with Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland – harboured ANC members made them important role players in the crusade for freedom in South Africa. This study does not consider the activities of ANC members in Angola, Botswana and Lesotho because (with the exception of Botswana) these countries share no borders with the rural Northern Transvaal.

Because only a minimal written literature exists on the significance of this region with regard to the role that was played by the African National Congress (ANC)'s liberation army, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the current study is multidimensional in character and constitutes an attempt to fill the lacuna in the historiography of this region, created by the scarcity of written historical materials. The study argues against the idea inherent in a number of writings that the liberation struggle in South Africa was urban-based. Such writings include the works of Tom Lodge ('The African National Congress in South Africa, 1976 – 1983: Guerrilla

¹ See maps 1 and 2 as well as an adaptation of the maps of the region from Reader's Digest Association South Africa, *Reader's Digest atlas of Southern Africa* [cartographic material], (Cape Town: Reader's Digest Association South Africa, c1984) in the appendices. The Northern Transvaal in the study includes the Eastern Transvaal.

War and Armed Propaganda', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 3 (1 & 2), October 1983; 'The State of Exile: The African National Congress of South Africa, 1976 – 1986', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 1987, amongst others), Howard Barrell ('Conscripts of their Age: African National Congress Operational Strategy, 1976 – 1989', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1993, and *MK-The ANC's Armed Struggle*, London, Penguin, 1990) as well as Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882 – 1990, Vol. 5, Nadir and Resurgence 1964 – 1979*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). Other studies do acknowledge that rural settings were suitable areas for the launch of the armed liberation war. Peter Delius (*A Lion Amongst the Cattle, Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1996), Joe Slovo (*An Unfinished Autobiography*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1995) and Heidi Holland (*The Struggle: A History of the African National Congress*, London, Grafton Books, 1989) argue that the national liberation struggle in South Africa had a rural orientation. They concede that the objective factors tilted the liberation struggle in favour of the urban settings.

The study aims at giving an account of the neglected rural struggles waged by MK in tandem with the rural communities of the Northern Transvaal. The tracing of this history should provide a degree of insight into a wide range of intricate and vibrant traditions of struggle, resistance and compliance. At issue throughout the research is the question of how MK recruited members carried out operations and kept the South African security forces paranoid and vigilant. MK managed to recruit, militarily and politically train and revolutionise cadres and communities that had been acquiescent and apolitical. It also managed, contrary to the popular

belief that soldiers are trained for frontal military confrontation, to help defeat the South African government politically by mobilising the oppressed African majority against it.

Literature Review

Research on the subject of the liberation struggle in South Africa abounds. This proliferation notwithstanding, there has been little incisive study of, and intensive historical research into, the role of MK in South Africa, especially its role in the rural Northern Transvaal during the years of its clandestine status. While a number of historians and political scientists have carried out research on MK on a national scale, Peter Delius is one of the few to have focused on the rural Northern Transvaal. Among his conclusions are the following:

The ANC was no stranger to Sekhukhuneland. It had a rich history of connection with the area, which stretched back to the first decade of the century and which cannot be done justice in context. In the 1940s attempts were made to revive the organisation in the area and there were a number of sympathetic chiefs and clusters of local supporters of the movement. Nonetheless, the ANC's relationship with the area remained primarily refracted through chiefs and the educated, Christian elite and it had limited grass roots support. As John Nkadimeng points out: There were ordinary people who were members but on a very small scale. The problem is that when the organisers went to organise they were inclined to speak to the chiefs.²

Delius provides a wealth of information on the resurgence of MK in the region after years of a military and political lull, and attempts to make available the 'missing link' that existed in the historiography of MK in

² Peter Delius, 'Sebatakgomo: Migrant Organisation, the ANC and the Sekhukhune Revolt', *Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, October 1989, p. 598. See also Peter Delius's article, 'Migrants, Comrades and the Rural Revolt: Sekhukhuneland 1950 – 1987', *Transformation* 13 (1990) and *A Lion amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1996), pp.76 – 107.

the region by offering an account of how MK was introduced in the Northern Transvaal on the release of the first batch of MK leaders from Robben Island such as Nelson Diale, Peter Nchabeleng, Joel Ntsoane and others.³ By contrast, the present study shows how the seed of revolution germinated and eventually engulfed the entire region, particularly after the formation of the UDF in 1983. Delius's research does not draw on the first-hand input of MK cadres themselves, and his and other previous research tends to address the connections that were established between the exiled cadres of the ANC and MK and the communities in the Northern Transvaal superficially. Here I explore the connections and intricacies of the relationships that existed between the political activists who were domiciled in the urban areas and those who were rurally-based. Critical factors such as migration, the transport system and schooling and their interplay are some of the aspects that have not been scrutinised and analysed to expose how they impacted on the national liberation struggle in general.⁴ This led to a situation where many people began to believe that the liberation struggle was urban-based.⁵ This view is simplistic and does not take into cognizance the dynamics of the South African geographic landscape and social configurations.

As has already been mentioned, little has been written on the liberation history of the Northern Transvaal. The chapter entitled "The Turn to armed struggle" in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa* Volume 1

³ Peter Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 173-174.

⁴ Peter Delius's 'Sebatakomo: Migrant Organisation, the ANC and the Sekhukhuleni Revolt', *Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1989, provides an interesting read but he fails to make a connection between those migrants who were not necessarily interested in tribal local politics and the bigger picture of the national liberation struggle seen in such cadres as Martin Mafefo Ramokgadi and John Kgoana Nkadimeng.

⁵ Sello Mathabatha's 'Missionary Schools, Student uprisings in Lebowa and the Sekhukhuleni Students' Revolts, 1983-1986' in *African Studies*, 64, 2, December 2005 seems to argue that the urban areas influenced the rural revolts, whereas the present study argues that it was the meeting of the minds of similarly-inclined people that carried out the liberation struggle.

(1960-1970) traces the historical episodes that informed the decisions that were taken to resist government laws (Bantu Authority, in the case of Sekhukhuneland) by armed resistance in the 1960s.⁶ The chapter contends that the ANC started discussing possibilities of the armed struggle after numerous requests for arms were made by rural people of Mphondoland and Sekhukhuneland. It avers, “Rural networks and revolts contributed both to the decision to pursue armed struggle and to the supply of recruits for MK once it was launched.”⁷ In the second volume of the *Road to Democracy* series, on the 1970s, there is no mention of what happened to the overtures of armed resistance in the two prominent regions (Mphondoland and Sekhukhuneland) that spawned the idea of armed resistance in the 1960s. Prominent people who had secretly goaded and recruited people in the rural areas of Sekhukhuneland to resist the encroachment of the Bantu Authority in the region were arrested and some left the country. There is a pressing need to explore and chronicle what happened to the freedom fighters who either went underground and resurfaced later or were imprisoned and later released from jail. It is common knowledge that Elias Motsoaledi and John Kgoana Nkadimeng went to life imprisonment on Robben Island and into exile respectively. What became of Flag Boshielo is still shrouded in mystery despite the fact that Oliver Tambo told a gathering at the University of Lagos in 1971 that Boshielo “had been wounded and captured.”⁸ These three men with rural roots in the Sekhukhuneland in the far Northern Transvaal were prominent figures in the resistance politics since the 1950s. The current study maintains that an armed struggle was pursued in the region from the

⁶ Benard Magubane, Phillip Borner, Jabulani Sithole, Peter Delius, Janet Cherry, Pat Gibbs and Thozamile April, *The Turn to Armed Struggle, in The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 1* (1960-1970), (Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2004), pp. 53-145.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 61.

⁸ Gregory Houston and Benard Magubane, The ANC’s Armed Struggle in the 1970s, in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 2* (1970-1980), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 453-530.

days of these three prominent political figures. The study aims to give a regional focus to MK cadres' contribution to the liberation struggle. While the region is mentioned in the second volume of the *Road to Democracy* book briefly (pp. 467-468), this study argues that reliance on individuals who were catapulted onto the national stage is not the sufficient way of writing a regional historiography. The present work includes case studies of MK cadres who operated underground without detection.

The authors of the chapter on Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns⁹ in the *Road to Democracy* book argue that these campaigns were reactions to, "...the mounting pressure from MK cadres in military camps in Tanzania on the ANC leadership to send guerrillas back to South Africa to fight the apartheid regime, and secondly, the barriers to successful infiltration by guerrillas."¹⁰ The chapter acknowledges the importance of the present day Limpopo (previously far Northern Transvaal) as a strategic point of entry for infiltrated MK cadres into the northern part of the country. The authors maintain that "Venda, a South African language spoken mainly in the far northern province of Limpopo, is similar to Shona and made communication between Shona-speaking ZAPU cadres and their MK colleagues easier."¹¹ In contrast, the current study traces the routes that were used by military and politically trained MK cadres who were convinced that they carried the hopes of the majority of the people of the region. These cadres did not "mount any pressure" on the leadership to be deployed into the country. They knew that they had an obligation to set the oppressed population free from the yoke of oppression. The far

⁹ South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 1* (1960-1970), *Op. Cit.*, pp: 479-540.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 481.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 489.

Northern Transvaal was a suitable strategic entry point. The issue of language was secondary; the deployment of cadres into the country was not based on linguistic proficiency only.

The political turmoil that engulfed most of the rural Northern Transvaal has not been put into its proper political context. It has hitherto been researched and analysed as a separate phenomenon by researchers such as Ineke van Kessel (*“Beyond Our Wildest Dreams”: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa*, 2000) and Jeremy Seekings (*The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991*, 2000). Seekings argues that the June 1985 Kabwe Consultative Conference of the ANC in Zambia concluded on the high note of the promotion of the “people’s war” and as a result there was an increase in MK attacks after mid-1985.¹² Seekings and van Kessel’s perception of MK in the military rather than the political sense lacks a proper awareness of the historical context in which MK objectives were crafted. Van Kessel confidently states, “In reality, MK never posed a substantial military threat to its formidable opponent.”¹³ But Colonel Jack Buchner of the South African police conceded that the ANC’s attacks were unstoppable. His words were, “When a flea starts biting you, it can bite you whenever and wherever it wants.”¹⁴

Unlike other studies on the subject, my argument is that the increase in military attacks had nothing to do with a “renewed confidence and sense of direction” after the Kabwe Consultative Conference but much to do

¹² Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000), p. 162.

¹³ Ineke van Kessel, *“Beyond Our Wildest Dreams”: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2000), p. 38.

¹⁴ Steve Mufson, *Fighting Years: Black Resistance and the Struggle for a New South Africa*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), p. 194.

with high levels of political mass mobilisation and involvement by dint of active agitation, leadership, guidance and advising people in issues that troubled them. This study suggests that the ANC knew that its aims and objectives could provide solutions to the people's troubles. There was also a strong possibility of reciprocity if the organisation could champion the people's rights and solve their problems.

Siphamandla Zondi's Chapter 3 in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 1: 1960 – 1970* (2004) offers a historical explanation of rural struggles in the Northern Transvaal since 1919. The chapter, which relies heavily on personal interviews deals with resistance in the two villages of GaMatlala and Zeerust in the Northern Transvaal and neglects to supply the threads that held resistance together when the chips were really down. The chapter concludes:

The ruthless determination of both Malan and Verwoerd to impose apartheid laws on rural Africans succeeded in pushing rural activists to fatigue. However, it would be a mistake to dismiss the peasant struggle as a failure, given the impetus they provided for grassroots mobilisation and the pivotal role played by rural communities and networks during the underground and armed phases of the struggle for liberation.¹⁵

The chapter does not capture political developments that took place later after the suppression of the first political agitations of Zeerust, for example. In this study the point is made that Zeerust became an important place for recruitment not only because of its proximity to Botswana but also because many generations were schooled in the politics of resistance over the years.

¹⁵ South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol. 1 1960-1970*, Op. Cit, p. 175.

Following on the path adopted by Zondi are two theses, 'Succession Disputes, MaCongress and Rural Resistance at GaMatlala, 1919-1980', by D. M. C. Sepuru and M. P. Kgobe's 'Resistance to Betterment in the Pietersburg Area: A Case of GaMatlala, 1940-1980'.¹⁶ These studies provide a rich historical background to the emergence of resistance in a rural area as a result of the government's intrusion into traditional rural communities. However, the fact that these theses, which are historically important, concentrate on a single village means that they contribute only a little to the regional historiography intended by this study.

Howard Barrell carried out significant research on the role of MK in the national liberation struggle in South Africa from 1976 to 1986.¹⁷ His thesis has some interesting observations but while this study concentrates on ordinary MK cadres, Barrell's mostly deals with the exiled national leadership of the organisation. The current study questions some of the conclusions Barrell reached. Barrell contends:

At the most critical moment in its history, in the midst of the most serious uprisings in South Africa in which its name was being widely proclaimed a leader of a revolution; the ANC had held a conference and concluded it with no generally agreed formulation of strategy.¹⁸

Such a conclusion elicits a lot of questions. For instance: what made the ANC's name to be "widely proclaimed a leader of the revolution" in the first place if it could not formulate its own strategies and tactics? Is

¹⁶ Sepuru, D. M. C., 'Succession Disputes, MaCongress and Rural Resistance at GaMatlala, 1919-1980', BA Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1992 and Kgobe, M. P., 'Resistance to Betterment in the Pietersburg Area: A Case of gaMatlala, 1940-1980', BA Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1992.

¹⁷ Howard Barrell, 'Conscripts to the age: African National Congress Operational Strategy', 1976-1986', PhD. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1993.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 326-30.

Barrell aware of the ANC's conference modalities where various commissions report back on their deliberations or he is suggesting that the commission on *Strategy and Tactics* at Kabwe Consultative Conference failed to agree on their deliberations? Why the conference was declared a Council of War? Does it suggest that notwithstanding the declaration there were no ways and means of waging that war? Such questions point to the need for further research.

Barrell also published on MK,¹⁹ His research was carried out under suppressive conditions where no free flow of information existed, particularly with regard to the internal underground operations of the ANC/MK. His analysis of events in the country was based on the (mis) information which he was given, as regards some of the underground activities of MK. Lack of access to relevant information led him to the conclusion that MK had no reception committees inside the country, that it possessed no direct and sustainable link with the exiled ANC/MK leadership and that it carried out its erratic sabotage attacks on a "hit and run" basis. Barrell attributes the alleged failure of MK operations to confusion "over the absence of underground structures able to integrate and deploy those infiltrated; over what political role those infiltrated could play; over the poor quality of the political briefings they received before infiltration; and over whether there they were merely 'cannon fodder.'²⁰

Contrary to Barrell's assertions, area military committees existed where MK operations were launched. In the mid-1980s in Moutse, for example,

¹⁹ Howard Barrell, 'ANC Conference: "All For The Front!"' *Work In Progress*, No. 38, August 1985, p. 9-13, 'Bash Your Neighbours Strategy', *New African*, July 1986, p. 11 – 12 and *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*, (London: Penguin, 1960).

²⁰ Howard Barrell, *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*, (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 389. Barrell attributes that assertion to Mac Maharaj after an interview he held with the latter.

an area military committee (AMC) accountable to the military and political wings in exile was formed to coordinate the struggles against the incorporation of Moutse into the Bantustan of KwaNdebele, in tandem with mass-based community organisations. Chris Hani deployed Jerome Joseph Maake to Moutse from exile after thorough consultations and preparation.²¹ It is incorrect to blame MK for “hit and run” operations because that is the nature of guerrilla tactics. Mahwidi Lawrence Phokanoka, a veteran of the combined forces of MK and ZANU in the 1967/68 Sipolilo and Wankie Campaigns and a Russian-trained MK cadre in the early 1960s, argues that:

We should not even fight in guerrilla warfare. We need not fight the enemy. You run away from them. Your main task in guerrilla warfare is to train the civilian people, to recruit and when you fight...it would be ...it could only be two minutes. It means you had information. It means you are well organised to get information about it. You cannot ambush someone who you don't know where he is going to pass, which roads he is...so; you need a lot of organisation. It is quite a lot. So, you had to do that. You are not fighting. You are defensive and you are running away most of the time when you see the enemies coming or hear the enemy coming.²²

The current study provides examples, based on the accounts of people in the underground who were assigned particular roles, of how MK combatants carried out their missions with relative ease. Barrell is not alone in criticising MK for failure to lay down the groundwork for operational purposes. Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart (*From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990, Volume 5, Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979*, 1997) similarly blamed MK for its lack of underground structures to receive and

²¹ Interview with Jerome Joseph Maake, by the author, Polokwane. Limpopo Province, 4 November 2003.

²² Interview with Phokanoka Mahwidi Lawrence, by the author, GaNchabeleng, Limpopo Province, 5 July 2003.

support guerrillas when they arrived inside the country on various missions. This loophole, in their view, stemmed from the fact that no clear-cut policies had been laid down regarding strategies and tactics and the ultimate objectives thereof. Karis and Gerhart enquire:

Was military action required to generate popular support or was popular support a precondition for effective military action? Strategists envisioned a “people’s war” that would be “protracted,” and with the masses “armed,” but the vision of ultimate victory was clouded. Would the eventual “seizure of power” be primarily military with popular support or political (perhaps the long-dreamed-of-general strike) with military support?²³

The present study shows that there were links, reception committees and sustainable contact and communication with those concerned, both inside and outside the country. It also argues that Karis and Gerhart’s supposed operational policy conflicts were in fact normal debates that were honed and perfected in the course of prosecuting the liberation struggle, whether military or propaganda-based. Popular support for the ANC/MK was not only predicated on military actions by MK but on a number of other factors that the thesis addresses.

Compiling a literature review on a topic that has been accorded neither proper research nor thorough analytical commentary is not an easy task. Major political events from 1976 to 1990 have not been thoroughly examined by historians on a regional basis. Researchers have concentrated on national history and in the process the study of regional events has suffered. The paucity of literature in this case can be attributed to a number of reasons, as outlined. This study, unlike those of other researchers, will be devoted to the life histories of cadres who were

²³ Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990, Volume 5, Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 301.

infiltrated back into the country, who carried out missions clandestinely and who survived, or were eventually arrested and sentenced to imprisonment, or were killed by apartheid forces in battle. A reassessment of the literature on the role of MK in the rural Northern Transvaal must conclude that while there is a broad body of literature relevant to the study (on a national scale), scholarship directly concentrating on the topic suffers from various limitations, and that there is a glaring need for specific research on the topic in the rural far Northern Transvaal.

Sources

The elucidations and opinions presented in the study emerge from a variety of sources. The major limitation of this research consists in the absence of a collection of trial records, as is the case with Michael Lobban's work.²⁴ His study deals with specific cases of "guerrillas who survived inside the country..." (and) "often remained dependent upon external command, ordinance and intelligence."²⁵ I was not able to access the court records of the majority of my informants at the South African Court Records Centre in Pretoria. I solicited the services of the True Recall tracing agency in Polokwane to locate the court records that I needed, but to no avail. There is no access to court records, I was told. My overriding aim was to verify the nature of the activities that were committed by my informants in pursuance of the liberation struggle and not to rely on their word of mouth, given the notoriety of the courts in

²⁴ See Michael Lobban, *White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

²⁵ Howard Barrell, *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 459.

extracting information under duress.

The study has immensely benefited from cadres of MK in the Northern Transvaal who have been readily available to provide information on how people were politically conscientised, recruited, spirited out of the country, vetted in exile, introduced to ANC politics, militarily or politically trained and deployed back into the country for various missions prescribed by the MK leadership. I believe that the strength of this thesis lies in its access to these cadres' first-hand experience of how they were arrested, to what extent their missions were carried out before they were intercepted by police and how they managed to cross borders that were teeming with security police and informers, who in most cases masqueraded as drunkards in the small shops that are usually found in farmlands around the borders. The cadres that were interviewed provided the vital link needed to carry out the underground guerrilla struggle in South Africa. It is their story on which the present research is solely dependent. It will also draw upon the limited literature on the subject.

Grele argues that oral history as part of social history provides an “opportunity to understand consciousness, to radically alter historical practice by bringing ordinary people into the study of history, to reshape the discipline, to create a public that is conscious of its own history.”²⁶ The interviews that I have conducted with a number of interviewees have taught me that it is important to familiarise myself with “...the dynamics of oral transmissions, the function and immediate context of performance, the conventions of the genre, the structural and stylistic laws of poetic

²⁶ Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*, quoted by Ronald Grele in *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, (Chicago: Precedent Publishers, 1985), p. 129.

form, the prevalent cultural imagery even the indigenous “world view.”²⁷ I was fortunate in a number of ways with regard to my interviewees; suffice it to mention that I have a comprehensive knowledge of their “world view”; I have travelled the route that some of them travelled in the quest for freedom in South Africa. It is said that “History cannot be written unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he is writing”.²⁸

The limitations of oral methodology are well-known and not worth repeating in great detail here, except to sum up by means of Ivan Berend’s quotation of Aristotle’s *Poetics* in the article ‘History as a Scholarly Discipline and *Magistra Vitae*’. Aristotle distinguishes between history and poetry, arguing that, “Poetry is something more scientific and serious than history because poetry tends to give general truth while history gives particular facts.”²⁹ I conducted more than seventy interviews and throughout all these sessions there were special concerns facing the interviewer. The interviews revealed the extent to which informants can go in distorting and embellishing their life stories. In an interview with Lengoati (Ngoma) Dannyboy in Middleburg, Mpumalanga Province, I sensed a tinge of self-consciousness in his narration of his political involvement, and in the process he embellished his story.³⁰ Other interviewees, like Ben Mokoena, were able to debunk some of the inflated stories that were narrated by Lengoati. In subsequent interviews, Lengoati confirmed that he had lied even to the ANC in Nigeria about his

²⁷ Karim Barber, *Discourse and its Disguises: The Interpretation of African Oral Texts*, (Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, 1989), p. 14.

²⁸ Carr, E. H., *What is History?*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 18-19.

²⁹ Quoted in C. Brady, *Ideology and the Historians*, (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1991), p. 187.

³⁰ Interview with Lengoati (Ngoma) Dannyboy, by the author, Kilimanjaro Guest House, Middleburg, Mpumalanga Province, 8 July 2002.

academic qualifications before he left the country.³¹ Other interviewees exuded gallantry and inspiration and seemed credible and chronologically accurate. The personal account of Patrick Thibedi (*nom de guerre*, Mabuza Chamusso Julius)³² gained recognition from Joe Slovo who had personally sent Thibedi on a mission to the SASOL oil refinery in Secunda in the early 1980s.³³ Alessandro Portelli argues that it is impractical to exhaust the complete reminiscences of an informer and that the information usually obtained is the product of mutual rapport.³⁴

Passerini's observation that "people's memories of their own past lives, what they can remember and what they forget, are shaped by their own expectation for the future and whether they have children or young people for whom they care and who may outlive them" is relevant to the two interviewees mentioned above.³⁵ I tried to distance myself from direct involvement where I know the interviewees on a personal level. The idea was to afford interviewees an opportunity to air their own views without interference and interrogation. I managed to pretend that I knew nothing about some incidents that were narrated to me, with the intention of according ordinary people the opportunity of making history by retracing the steps that they took in their lifetimes.

We have learnt much, over a long a period, about the roles of those in power, be they in the liberation movements or in government. As Mayer

³¹ Interview with Ben Mokoena, by the author, Kilimanjaro Guest House, Middleburg, Mpumalanga Province, 8 July 2002.

³² Interview with Patrick Thibedi, by the author, ANC Provincial Office, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 29 August 2002.

³³ Joe Slovo recommended that Thibedi's mission be recorded in a film and his daughters are currently busy with this project.

³⁴ A. Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different?' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 71.

³⁵ L. Passerini, 'Memory and Totalitarianism' in *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories 1*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 212.

puts it in another context but similar circumstances, "...relatively little attention has been paid to the ideas of the ordinary Black villages in South Africa in the context of their material conditions and subjective experience at different periods. Data about the ideas of the powerful, and the motives behind these, are generally more accessible than the comparable data of the powerless, and this is so especially in South Africa."³⁶

Chapter Outline

Chapter One concentrates on outlining the background against which the first tentative steps towards armed propaganda warfare unfolded. It describes the conditions that prevailed at the time, such as the atmosphere of optimism as a result of the emancipation of the people of Angola and Mozambique. The chapter encompasses political developments that took place at the University of the North in the 1970s and the recruitment of potential MK cadres from this university. It examines the dangers inherent in the process of recruitment for an underground liberation movement. The chapter explores and juxtaposes these internal developments, such as the emergence of the legal trade unions and student formations, with the steps fostering revival that the ANC took in exile, in order to bring MK in tune with the mood that prevailed inside the country in the late 1970s.

Chapter Two focuses on the collapse of the nascent political activities of agitation that were beginning to emerge in the late 1970s after the clampdown on what the government perceived as ANC-inspired

³⁶ Mayer, P, *Townsmen or Tribesmen: Conservatism and the Process of Urbanisation in a South African City*, (Cape Town, O.U.P., 1961,) p. 4.

structures. The chapter exposes the heavy-handedness of the South African government in dealing with Black political aspirations. The route that aspirant freedom fighters took into exile as a result of the unbearable pressure that was brought to bear by the security police forms part of this chapter. The chapter argues that the arrests of the cream of the leadership of student organisations and trade unions, the reservoir of MK recruitment, created a government-triggered implosion of organised opposition to the regime's policies.

Chapter Three deals with the knotty question of rural versus urban debates alluded to in the Introduction. The locality of the liberation struggle constitutes a huge debate in South Africa's political history, in the sense that there are perceptions that the urban areas resisted the system of apartheid much more fully than rural inhabitants of South Africa. A similar debate is taking place today regarding the former exiled members of the ANC, those who were on Robben Island and those who stayed behind and waged the struggle for liberation inside the country. The chapter briefly covers the politics of exile as they impacted on the internal politics. The porous nature of the Zimbabwean border also comes under the spotlight in this chapter.

Chapter Four deals with the interplay between MK and the internally based organisations aligned with the ANC. This includes the United Democratic Front (UDF) which masqueraded as a front for all organisations that were ANC-orientated. The chapter considers the movements, and various missions of deployed MK cadres, inside the country. In addition it describes the dangers that cadres faced once inside the country. The chapter does not purport to supply a blow-by-blow account of what happened in various MK missions but gives an account

of how some of those missions were carried out. In the light of impending threats of prosecution for crimes committed during the struggle for liberation in South Africa, various informants withheld information that dealt directly with what they had done. They preferred to reveal how they had carried out their actions rather than “spill the beans” on what they did.

Chapter Five explores the drastic measures taken by the South African government in an effort to cling to power. The legislative steps to contain the spirit of freedom and the responses of those who were on the receiving end of the government’s legislative authoritarianism constitute the main features of this chapter. The declaration of a state of emergency and the contrasting responses that this unleashed from the oppressed communities represent some of the salient points of the chapter.

Chapter Six seeks to recapitulate some of the hypotheses that are proposed throughout the study: that the banning and banishment of MK cadres such as Peter Nchabeleng and Nelson Diale to the rural areas of the Northern Transvaal assisted in forcing MK underground in the region; the rural versus urban debate; and the relative significance of exile and internal struggle. The aim is ultimately to justify the contention that ordinary people in the ranks of MK carried on the crusade of liberation and that they should be recognised as having done so.

Chapter One

Introduction

The Morogoro Consultative Conference – The Turning-Point?

South African historical writing is awash with generalities concerning broad theoretical issues pertaining to the political situation of the 1970s. This research in contrast focuses specifically on the particularity of actual issues in the rural Northern Transvaal during the period 1976 to 1990. It does so from interpretation and interrogation of primary sources, mostly personal interviews and, by implication, the first-hand experiences of those interviewed. Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger state:

Wars are often summed up as the decisions of leaders and the movements of armies. It is often forgotten that all these depend on ordinary soldiers, who personally sacrifice to achieve advances and victories, and physically suffer the consequences of retreats and victories. 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.¹

This chapter seeks to put in context the political climate of the late 1970s in South Africa with regard to the conditions under which the ANC and MK operated in the rural Northern Transvaal and in the country as a whole.

After the disastrous years of the late 1960s in which the ANC had experimented with the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns², the 1970s were

¹ Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger, (eds.) *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, (Harare: University of Zimbabwe), p. 6.

² See Rendani Moses Ralinala, Jabulani Sithole, Gregory Houston and Benard Magubane's Chapter in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 1 (1960-1970)*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 479-540.

years of transition and regrouping.³ The watershed Morogoro Consultative Conference of 25 April – 1 May 1969 and the decisions that were taken⁴, such as the establishment of the Revolutionary Council (RC), remain some of the highlights.⁵ The RC was mandated to carry out a sustainable strategy for the liberation of the entire South African people and the “overall planning, preparation and conduct of operations.”⁶ This marked the beginning of years of self-reflection amongst the ANC; it also marked the commencement of the reconstruction of the dormant underground structures that were cowed into submission by the brutality of apartheid in the 1960s. Policies and strategies were reappraised and synchronised with the ANC and MK vision. One of these policies concerned the relationship between the military and the political leadership. The intention was to strengthen the relationship between MK and the political leadership under the ANC. Needing reappraisal were counsels attributable to Chairman Mao Tse-tung’s creed that, “Our principle is that the party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the party.”⁷ The ANC wished to address the question of accountability in its prosecution of renewed efforts with regard to the armed struggle. Acts of armed struggle refers to those acts that were carried out to create positive attitudes in population toward the armed forces.⁸ This also included the establishment of good relations and

³ The first five years after the Morogoro Consultative Conference have been classified as the period of “Recovery and Regrouping.” See Ian Phillips, ‘No Peace under Apartheid’, Paper presented to the 1987 Biannual Conference of the Political Science Association of South Africa, Stellenbosch, 1-3 October, p. 21.

⁴ See Nhlanhla Ndebele and Noor Nieftagodien’s Chapter in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 1 (1960-1970)*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 573-599.

⁵ For an elaborate structure of the RC and the powers it wielded see a paper titled ‘The Proposed ANC Structure for the Effective Execution of the Armed Struggle in South Africa.’ Umkhonto we Sizwe Papers, Jack Simons Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town.

⁶ Tsepe Motumi, ‘Umkhonto we Sizwe – Structure, Training and Force Levels (1984 to 1994)’, at <http://www.iss.co.za/Pubs/ASR/ADR18/Motumi.html>.

⁷ Abigail Urey Ngara, ‘Mao’s Legacy and Africa,’ *Africa*, No.62, October 1976, p. 37.

⁸ Houston, G, *The National Liberation Struggle in South Africa: A Case Study of the United Democratic Front, 1983-1987*, {Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999}, p. 25-6.

mutual understanding between the masses and the armed forces. The leadership of MK grappled with the lessons learnt by responding to the protests of MK cadres in the camps in the late 1960s, particularly those in Tanzania who wanted to come home and prosecute the struggle on their home turf.⁹ As the ANC argued in 1979:

Our struggle shall be prosecuted as planned, and we shall not be forced into adventuristic confrontations with the enemy in order to satisfy our critics or to [be] use[d] as propaganda stunts. We accept the basic and well-proven tenet of guerrilla warfare: the guerrillas shall choose the time and the battlefield to seek out and destroy the enemy.¹⁰

In the aftermath of the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns, the ANC/MK leadership reflected on what had happened. Chris Hani severely criticised the leadership for lack of adequate preparation and disregard for captured MK cadres, particularly those that were languishing in Southern Rhodesian jails.¹¹ Hani was angry after he was arrested with 33 other MK cadres who took part in the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns and served a two-year jail sentence in a Botswana prison.¹² The leadership's inability to analyse their preparations in the hope of being able to assess them and derive lessons that would make it possible for them to devise correct strategies and tactics in relation to the enemy was described by Hani as devastating.¹³ Hani also went hammer and tongs at the leadership regarding its concentration on exile politics at the expense of the underground activities in South Africa.¹⁴ His severe criticism epitomised

⁹ For a comprehensive study on the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns read Ralinala R. M., *et al.*, 'The Wankie and Sipolilo Campaigns', South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, (1960 – 1970), Op. Cit.*, pp. 479 – 540.

¹⁰ Southern Africa: Realities and Illusions, *Sechaba*, March 1979, p.6.

¹¹ Ralinala R. M., *et al.*, 'The Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns', in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, (1960 – 1970), Op. Cit.*, p. 536.

¹² Fish Keitseng, *Comrade Fish: Memories of a Motswana in the ANC Underground*, (Gaborone, Pula Press, 1999), p. 51.

¹³ Vladimir Shubin, *ANC, A View from Moscow*, (Bellville, Mayibuye Books, 1999), p. 86.

¹⁴ South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960 – 1970, Op. Cit.*, p. 536 – 537.

the feelings of MK cadres in camps outside South Africa. Phokanoka, who was captured after he lost contact with the main group and was betrayed by members of the local community in Southern Rhodesia to whom he had gone to receive directions and food, is critical of the leadership for being awash with the theory of guerrilla warfare and for not relying on local knowledge.¹⁵ His lament is that the leadership continued to:

...use this knowledge of the theory of guerrilla warfare, which [it] never discussed with us. So, we [were] having one thing in mind and they [were] having ...we don't know what else in mind and that is why we think that there were [very] serious clashes in waiting that did not put some of us in their good books.¹⁶

Hani and Phokanoka's criticisms of the ANC/MK leadership's guerrilla warfare strategies and of how captured guerrillas in Botswana and Southern Rhodesia were ignored revolved on the interpretation and understanding of what is entailed by guerrilla warfare. The ANC/MK conception and definition of guerrilla warfare seemed to dovetail with what Hani and Phokanoka were lamenting; the only divergence being the difference in the implementation of guerrilla warfare theories in a practical war situation. The ANC/MK axis defines guerrilla warfare as:

... a long drawn out war ... [which] strikes when the enemy is unprepared, and where the enemy is weak. These will not be the battles of armies face to face, but hundreds of surprise attacks by freedom fighters who will hit where the enemy is weak, retreat when he fights back, take cover to re-organise, and prepare to launch the next surprise attack. Guerrilla fighters are not armies in uniform, but fighters of the people, who melt into the people or the countryside when the enemy searches for them, and are hidden by the people, because they fight for the cause of the freedom of the people.¹⁷

¹⁵ Interview with Lawrence Phokanoka, by the author, GaNchabeleng, Limpopo Province, 5 July 2003.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ 'The Morogoro Conference', *Sechaba*, Vol. 4, No. 1, January 1970, p. 6.

It was mainly in view of Hani's biting criticism that the leadership of the ANC/MK decided to hold its Morogoro Consultative Conference (25 April – 1 May 1969) in Tanzania, where two major decisions were taken: the drawing-up of the *Strategy and Tactics Document of the African National Congress* and the formation of the RC to prosecute the liberation struggle with renewed vigour.¹⁸ The Morogoro Conference sanctioned the policy of guerrilla warfare but emphasised that such a war could not occur in a political void.¹⁹ A political struggle was crucial in pursuance of the armed struggle, the consultative conference recommended.

The Sipolilo and Wankie campaigns, although militarily disastrous, signaled to the South African government that the ANC/MK had not been completely obliterated from the scene. It was clear to the government that the northern part of the country was likely to be used by MK in its assaults. Military personnel were then concentrated along the northern borders of the country.²⁰ It was now clear to the South African government that it had to establish anti-guerrilla units if ANC/MK was going to be kept at bay. This issue forms part of the following discussion, which shows that the northern part of South Africa was monitored by well-trained soldiers ready to act at the slightest provocation.

In the aftermath of the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns, in 1969 five “anti-terrorist” camps were established specialising in counter-insurgency

¹⁸ For details on Strategy and Tactics of the ANC document visit <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/stratact.html>.

¹⁹ Hein Marais, *South Africa Limits to Change: The Political Economy of Transition*, (London, Zed Books, c1998), p. 28.

²⁰ The government military air bases can be seen on map no. 2.

and counter-guerrilla warfare.²¹ In Sibasa (Venda) and Thabazimbi (in the present Limpopo Province) anti-guerrilla plans were devised involving about 5,000 and 2,000 men respectively, primed to defend the country from the infiltration of guerrillas advancing from the independent African countries north of South Africa.²² These military exercises by a security-conscious South Africa were informed by the apprehensions and misconceptions that effective anti-guerrilla operations needed to be implemented by units of Africans, who were then considered for roles in counter-insurgency warfare despite the fact that the Minister of Defence had stated in 1970 that black Africans would be employed by the department only as common labourers.²³ Forty-eight Africans were trained at Baviaanspoort in 1975,²⁴ and at Lenz Military Base in Johannesburg and at about this time some of the Bantustan soldiers were also trained by the South African government in facilities like Lenz Military Base, Potchefstroom Cavalry School and Eerste Rivier near Cape Town. That Bantustan soldiers were trained by white South African military officers on secondment to the Bantustans, such as Brigadier Phil Pretorius (who was seconded from the SADF to the Transkei in 1974), ensured that SADF military doctrines were embraced by the Bantustan troops.²⁵ The Black South African soldiers who joined the SADF were not spared being indoctrinated that the country was under siege. Nor were they spared the misconception that the ANC was a “terrorist” organisation under the thralldom of the Soviet Union. These Black soldiers were fed the racist diet that any organised grouping inside the

²¹ Francis Meli, ‘Military Doctrine of the Apartheid Regime’, *The African Communist*, No. 69, Second Quarter 1977, p. 49.

²² *Ibid*, p. 49.

²³ Kenneth W. Grundy, ‘The Rise of the South African Security Establishment. An Essay on the Changing Locus of the State Power’, *The South African Institute of International Affairs*, August 1983, p. 6.

²⁴ *Rand Daily Mail*, December 6, 1976.

²⁵ Francis Meli, ‘Military Doctrine of the Apartheid Regime’, *The African Communist*, No. 69, Second Quarter, 1977, p. 51.

country opposed to government policies was “communist-inspired” and that it had to be extirpated from the face of the earth. The legacy and the deliberate distortion of the genuine demands of the people led to profoundly detrimental conclusions in the minds of some Black soldiers: that the “communists” were arriving to persecute them for their support of the South African government. It became normal, over time, when the government became obsessed with its own security, to establish specialised security forces that wreaked havoc not only against the ANC and MK but also against the neighbouring countries which hosted them.

The Reconnaissance Regiment based on the Bluff in Durban provided training and personnel for cross-border operations into the Frontline States, particularly in the 1980s, as in Gaborone (June 14, 1985), Maseru (December 9, 1982) Maputo (January 30, 1981) and the triple raids of May 19, 1986 into Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe.²⁶ In 1986 Trewits, a counter-revolutionary intelligence target centre, was established with regional committees in the Northern Transvaal, Eastern Transvaal, Far Northern Transvaal, Western Transvaal and the Northern Cape.²⁷ Brigadier Jack Cronje, Vlakplaas commander of the counter-insurgency unit between 1983 and 1985, told the amnesty hearings that these areas had been chosen because they were the nearest to foreign countries and could be used to carry out Trewits’s primary purpose - to identify targets outside South Africa. Generals Jac Buchner, Bob Beukes and Johan Victor headed Trewits. Their actions were not limited to the mentioned areas only, since they moved out of those regions when necessary.

²⁶ The responsibilities of the Reconnaissance Regiment (also to become known as the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB or ‘The Organisation’)) are summed up in Rocky William’s ‘Back to the Barracks: Changing Civil-Military Relations Under Botha and De Klerk’, Paper Presented at the 22nd ASSA Conference, University of Cape Town, 30 June – 3 July 1991, pp. 25-26.

²⁷ For details on Trewits visit http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/meja.1996/9610_s961030f.htm.

The obsession with “guerrillas from the North” helps accounts for the reorganisation of the Bureau of State Security (BSS) (dubbed BOSS by the media) and its being given “super-powers of investigation, arrest and detention.”²⁸ The Public Safety Amendment Act of 1969 played midwife to BOSS as a “national, secret intelligence-gathering organisation.”²⁹ The scene was now set for protracted confrontations in South Africa, with the South African government fully prepared to defend apartheid and all its ramifications. The ANC, on the other hand, was prepared to engage the South African government and give it sleepless nights.³⁰

The significance of the northern part of the country as an infiltration entry point is dealt with in subsequent chapters, in which the turbulent years of the 1980s are discussed. It will be shown how MK managed to outclass and outmanoeuvre numerous roadblocks and high concentrations of the SADF and commandos that were armed to the teeth, waiting for an ANC/MK invasion inside the country. The aim of providing a short historical background on the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns and the subsequent Morogoro Consultative Conference is to contextualise the events that unfolded after the reassessment of the ANC’s operational policies. After the conference, the focus was to fall on cultivating home-grown political activities that included the masses on the ground. The RC’s mandate encompassed liaisons with the newly-released cadres of MK, particularly those incarcerated on Robben Island in the 1960s. The establishment of the MK underground presence in South Africa by means of propaganda and the infiltration of existing organisations became one of

²⁸ William J. Pomeroy, *Apartheid Axis: The United States and South Africa*, (New York, International Publishers, [1971]), p. 27.

²⁹ Hilton Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, (Cape Town, Struik, 2001), p. 4.

³⁰ See the entire paper by Pauline Baker, ‘South Africa and Its Neighbours’, Unpublished Paper Presented at the South African Institute of International Affairs World Peace Foundation Conference, Hilton, Natal, 1984.

the obligations of the RC. The stage was now set for a protracted war between MK and the defenders of apartheid.

The Revolutionary Council (RC)

One of the most important decisions taken at the 1969 Conference was the establishment of the RC, which was essentially mandated to carry out three main tasks: a) the development and revival of internal structures that had been ‘cowed into submission’ by the security police operating internally in South Africa or that had been struck by despondency and lethargy as a result of the lack of visible political activities; b) to operate a publicity campaign for the ANC and c) to wage the armed struggle with added determination.³¹ These objectives needed the support of the oppressed and struggling masses of black people in South Africa who were supposed “to study and master the methods of guerrilla warfare which enable[d] oppressed people to fight and defeat huge imperialist armies.”³² Of the above objectives, only a) and c) are relevant to this study. The RC fulfilled the mandate of overseeing military and political developments until it was replaced in the early 1980s by two separate military and political structures. These will be referred to fleetingly throughout the study.

As an earnest of their intentions before the dawn of the new decade of the 1970s the ANC formed the RC to rebuild the mass armed underground and revive the political struggle. The composition of the RC (1969 –

³¹ These RC objectives are summarised in ‘Umkhonto we Sizwe: Building People’s Forces for Combat War and Insurrection, Part 2’, *Sechaba*, January 1987, p. 21. See also Ronnie Kasrils’ paper ‘Politics and the Armed Struggle: The Revolutionary Army,’ Lusaka, Zambia, 14 February 1988, Umkhonto we Sizwe Papers, Jack Simons Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town.

³² ‘The Morogoro Conference’, *Sechaba*, Vol. 4, No. 1, January 1970, p. 5.

1976) was also reflective of the enlightened intentions of the ANC/MK after the lesson of the 1967/8 Wankie and Sipolilo military adventures. It was also reflective of the combined military and political determination of the exiled leadership of the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Oliver Tambo (ANC) was elected its chairman; his deputy was Yusuf Dadoo of the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). The secretary of the RC was Joe Matthews until 1970, and thereafter replaced by Moses Mabhida. Siphon 'Simon' Makana was elected an assistant secretary. Joe Modise bore responsibility for military operations inside the country. Additional members comprised John Gaetsewe, Jacob Masedo, John Motshabi, Mziwandile Piliso, Joe Slovo, JB Marks, Robert Resha, Tennyson Makiwane, Moses Kotane, Duma Nokwe, Reg September, Andrew Masedo, Ruth Mompati, Gertrude Shope, Jackie Sedibe and Thabo Mbeki.³³

The RC's resolve to resuscitate dormant or cowed internal MK structures was accorded a new lease on life when the earlier members of MK were released from Robben Island in the early 1970s. Their release coincided with the RC's creation of a special Sub-Committee on recruitment and training, which was required "to co-ordinate its work closely with the Operations Committee" (OPCO).³⁴ The RC further committed itself to establish contacts, collaborate with the newly released "comrades" and investigate their support and welfare.³⁵ The roles of both the special Sub-

³³ Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane, *The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s, The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 2 (1970-1980)*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 407

³⁴ Vladimir Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow*, *Op Cit.*, p. 159.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.159.

Committee and the Operations Committee will be dealt with later, in other chapters.

In the context of this study these newly released “comrades” in the rural Northern Transvaal included Nelson Diale, Peter (Petrus) Nchabeleng, Joel Ntsoane, Morris Matsimela and others.³⁶ Most of them had been sentenced to Robben Island in the mid-1960s for MK-related activities and when released in the early 1970s were banished to the rural areas of the Northern Transvaal.³⁷ Diale, Nchabeleng and Ntsoane, for example, were arrested in Pretoria in the 1960s for sabotage and MK-related activities and sentenced to Robben Island for eight years. They were released in 1972 and banished to their hometowns of Sekhukhune (Diale and Nchabeleng) and Mphahlele (Ntsoane). The RC was aware of these releases. The sending of MK cadres into the country to reconnect with these activists was complemented by instructions given to the newly released comrades by the MK leadership incarcerated on Robben Island to recruit more members once they were out of prison.³⁸ On the other hand during the early 1970s the ANC had begun to despatch MK cadres inside the country on some military, but mostly political missions. The internal scene inside the country was also showing considerable agitation. Somewhere in the country attempts at resuscitating the networks of underground activities of the 1960s by Winnie Mandela, Samson Ndou and others and their subsequent arrests gave hope to the oppressed that there were still people who were prepared to sacrifice their lives for

³⁶ Diale Nelson, Joel Ntsoane and Nchabeleng Peter 369/18/9/64 (case numbers) were charged for sabotage in Pretoria in 1964, University of the Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library Historical Papers section.

³⁷ Interview with Diale Nelson, by the author, Diphagane, Sekhukhune, Limpopo Province, 28 May 2002.

³⁸ Interview with Jacob Zuma, by the Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape, 2002.

freedom.³⁹ The arrests of trained MK cadres inside the country after years of a 'political lull', such as Cholo Theophilus Ranka⁴⁰ and Alex Moumbaris,⁴¹ also assisted in reviving sagging morale amongst aspirant political activists. Cholo and Moumbaris were arrested while on a mission to enter the country with the intention of establishing the underground networks of the ANC/MK.⁴²

A number of factors caused the ANC/MK leadership to reflect on its role in the liberation struggle: the deployment of cadres such as Thabo Mbeki to Swaziland in 1973 and Chris Hani to Lesotho in 1974 after a four months' stay in South Africa;⁴³ and the events taking place inside South Africa such as the 1973 Durban strikes;⁴⁴ the threatening student-orchestrated political climate at the University of the North that eventually culminated in the expulsion of Onkgopotse Tiro in 1972⁴⁵; and the impact of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) on the political landscape. The arrest of James April in particular and the documents found on his person alerted the South African government to the fact that the ANC and its allies were placing strong emphasis on re-establishing communications lines to South Africa. These and other events elsewhere

³⁹ Madeline Fullard, State repression in the 1960s, in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 1 (1960-1970)*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 341-348.

⁴⁰ Cholo Theophilus Ranka was arrested in 1971 by the South African police together with Justice Mpanza, Petrus Mthembu and Gardner Sijake and two 'accomplices.' Sean Hosey and Alex Moumbaris, in a daring mission to ship trained guerrillas into South Africa by using a ship called the *Adventurer*. They were arrested after one of the MK cadres who were infiltrated into the country was arrested and exposed the others.

⁴¹ Alex Moumbaris was part of the Cholo mission who traveled before them to South Africa to form part of the reception team when they eventually landed on the Transkeian coast.

⁴² Tsepe Motumi, 'Umkhonto we Sizwe – Structure, Training and Force Levels, 1984 to 1994', *African Defence Review Issue*, No. 18, 1984, p. 1.

⁴³ Howard Barrell, 'Conscripts to their Age', *Op. Cit.* p. 110.

⁴⁴ For a comprehensive study of the Durban strikes see the Institute for Industrial Education, *The Durban Strikes 1973: Human Beings with Souls*, (Institute for Industrial Education, Durban, 1974), the entire issue.

⁴⁵ Peter Delius, *Mpumalanga: History and Heritage*, (University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2007), p. 248.

were encouraging signs that matters were heading in the right direction politically.

The process and regeneration and regrouping was long and very arduous. In an attempt to move closer to the theatre of the struggle (South Africa) the ANC/MK leadership formed Regional Internal Political Reconstruction Committees (RIPRCs) in countries bordering South Africa⁴⁶ under the stewardship of the RC; they were mandated to oversee the prosecution of the struggle in South Africa from their respective neighbouring countries. The role descriptions of the RIPRCs included the establishment and sustenance of links with the underground MK units inside the country. These RIPRCs were directly responsible to the Internal Political Reconstruction Committee (IPRC) chaired by John Motshabi, with Mac Maharaj as its secretary. Other additional members of the IPRC included Ruth Mompoti, Dan Tloome, John Gaetsewe, Ray Simons and Reg September. The IPRC was in essence a working committee under the RC.

The structure of the RC was well-organised so that when MK recruits were spirited out of the country they could be linked up with a RIPRC in a particular country. The fact that the same people shouldered different responsibilities in different organs of both the ANC and MK should not lead to confusion, although it was only after 1978 that the tasks of the RIPRCs became clearer. In Botswana the RIPRC consisted of Zakes Tolo, Dan Tloome, Marius Schoon, Jenny Schoon (Jeannette Curtis), Patrick Fitzgerald, Henry Makgothi and Magirly Sexwale and someone

⁴⁶ The Regional Internal Political Reconstruction Committees (RIPRCs) and Internal Political Reconstruction Committees (IPRCs) were to a large extent, *ad hoc* committees that were formed for the sole purposes of the prosecution of the liberation struggle. They were administrative in nature and outlook.

who preferred to be known by his *nom de guerre* of Negro. The Botswana RIPC was responsible for everything that pertained to the liberation struggle not only in Botswana but also, because of their proximity to Bophuthatswana in South Africa, everything that involved the struggle in South Africa from this perspective. The organisation of RIPC in Swaziland was streamlined in the same way as in Botswana. It comprised Joseph Mdhuli, Chiliza (Nkonyane), Jacob Zuma, John Nkadimeng, David ‘Inch’ Rwaxa, Albert Dlomo, Stanley Mabizela and Albert ‘Bafana’ Duma. Their role was to provide MK cadres with logistical support and equipment whenever they were on a mission and to keep them abreast of developments both inside South Africa and without. The RIPC’s primary role was to work towards internal reconstruction of political units of the ANC instead of MK – a political task rather than a military task. (Joseph Mdhuli, Chiliza (Nkonyane), etc, were not part of the Swaziland RIPC, but of forces based inside and outside the country up to 1976 that constituted the ANC machinery (not yet RIPC) in Swaziland and political underground in Natal and the former Transvaal.) Joe Matthews, Robert ‘Bob’ Matji, Ezra Sigwela and Khalakhi Sello formed the RIPC in Lesotho, carrying the same responsibilities as those in other neighbouring countries. Zimbabwe’s RIPC was to play the same role after independence in 1980.⁴⁷

However, problems occurred in the “frontline states” where MK was trying to establish its presence. Three examples of three countries that ‘hosted’ the ANC will illustrate this point. The turn of political events in Southern Africa during the mid-1970s affected Swaziland despite her economic dependence on South Africa. King Sobhuza of Swaziland had

⁴⁷ See the role that was played by Refiloe Mudimu from Zimbabwe and his contacts inside South Africa in Chapter Three.

allowed the ANC an official presence in his country since 1975, but under restrictions in the sense that the ANC members were not allowed to carry arms, run official offices or travel freely.⁴⁸ King Sobhuza was sympathetic to the ANC, as was manifested in March 1976 when South African security agents kidnapped Joseph Mdhluli and Cloepus Dlomo in Swaziland for recruiting people in Natal.⁴⁹ As a precautionary measure and in a display of sympathy for the ANC the Swaziland government 'arrested' Albert Dlomo, Jacob Zuma and Thabo Mbeki after this event. The Swaziland government's contention was that the three men were on the verge of being kidnapped by South African security agents in Swaziland, just like their ANC colleagues.⁵⁰ The changes that happened amongst the ANC leadership and the liberation movements of South Africa and Swaziland over the years comprise the subjects of subsequent chapters.

The usurpation of power in Lesotho in 1970 by Leabua Jonathan ushered in antipathy for the ANC's objectives. The coup in Lesotho meant that its administration's relationship with the ANC was subject to review. The Secretary General of the ANC at the time (1970), Alfred Nzo, for example, condemned the usurpation of political power, the declaration of a state of emergency and the apprehension of members of the Basotholand Congress Party and its leader, Ntsu Mokhehle. When Lesotho aligned herself with the Socialist group associated with the Soviet Union she further alienated herself from South Africa. The South African homeland policy also created a source of friction between the two countries. The independence of Transkei in 1976 was a thorn in the flesh

⁴⁸ John Daniel, 'A Comparative Analysis of Lesotho and Swaziland's Relations with South Africa', *South African Review* 11, South African Research Service, p. 235.

⁴⁹ 'Swaziland Protest Note to Pretoria', *Africa*, No. 60, August 1976, p. 18.

⁵⁰ 'Swaziland: Apartheid Tentacles', *Africa*, No. 58, June 1976, p. 75.

of the Lesotho government in the sense that the Transkeian government wanted Basotho citizens who wished to travel to Umtata to apply for visas in Transkei. Matters came to a head when the Lesotho government decided in 1977 to close the Quacha's Nek border post because of the Transkei's persistence regarding the visa issue. Yet the RIPRCs were able to survive and function under relative conditions of hardship.

The attitude of the Botswana government towards the liberation struggle in South Africa became clear after the outbreak of the 16 June 1976 uprisings in Soweto. The President, Sir Seretse Khama, felt "a pan-African obligation towards the victims of minority regimes" and appointed Lebang Mpotokwane, the former High Commissioner of Botswana to the United Kingdom, to be responsible for the management and organisation of government support to expatriates.⁵¹ The Botswana government had received the highest number of refugees from South Africa. Generally in this period it is therefore clear that the RIPRCs in neighbouring countries were not operating unhindered in their host countries, which affected MK internal operations negatively. Lodge observed that, "Umkhonto operations and logistics are directed and administered through Botswana and other territories adjacent to South Africa, but the vulnerability of these countries and their government's attitude to Umkhonto rules out the development of large military bases by the ANC within its borders."⁵²

The RC's mandate to direct operations inside South Africa lasted from 1969 to 1983 when two committees, the military and the political,

⁵¹ 'Botswana and Swaziland, Refugee Problems', *Africa*, No. 63, December 1976, p. 73.

⁵² Tom Lodge, *Op. Cit.* pp. 9-10.

replaced it.⁵³ Joe Modise chaired the first while the second was chaired by John Nkadimeng, the General Secretary of SACTU. The operations of these two committees were subject to the approval of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC. The logistics of exile and other commitments inherent in the liberation struggle against the apartheid necessitated the establishment of a coordinating committee that was entrusted with the task of supervising the work of these two committees. The South African government was, conversely, aware of these developments or it anticipated them long before they could take shape. In the case of Botswana, for example:

The assumption in Pretoria seemed to be that unarmed exit to Botswana was the prelude to armed infiltration to South Africa under the sponsorship of a militant African organisation, such as Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military strike force of the outlawed African National Congress (ANC).⁵⁴

The (il-) logic of border control posts, travel permits and regulations, monitoring of South African airspace, aeroplane movements and the installation of electric fences that encircled South Africa stemmed from this fear expressed above, amongst other reasons. It is no exaggeration to conclude that MK was regarded as a threat to the South African government and Botswana's example supports that conclusion, which is based on the fact that there was no defence force in Botswana to oppose the South African government, as the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) was formed only in 1977.⁵⁵

There was clearly no RIPRC in Mozambique before the collapse of the

⁵³ Tom Lodge, 'State of Exile: the African National Congress of South Africa, 1976-86', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 1987, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Richard Dale, 'Between Pretoria and Praetorianism: Crafting a National Security Establishment and Policy For Botswana, Paper presented at the Thirty-First Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Chicago, Ill., October 28-31, 1988', (Atlanta: ASA, 1988) p. 7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 10.

Portuguese government in a *military coup d'état* on the 25 April 1974 carried out by the Portuguese Armed Forces Movement. The situation altered after the collapse of Marcello Caetano's government in Portugal. Mozambique was thereafter used throughout the years of the struggle as a base for the war of liberation in South Africa. Tom Lodge states that the exiled High Command of MK was, until the signing of the Nkomati Accord in March 1984, located in Maputo.⁵⁶ Joe Modise, who was head of MK, and his supporting staff in MK's Central Operations Headquarters were based in Lusaka and not in Mozambique during the period up to the signing of the Nkomati Accord. A major advantage of the collapse of Caetano's government was the hope that it brought to the liberation movement in South Africa, which assisted the RC in its two main objectives. Celebrations were organised in major cities throughout South Africa after the collapse of the Portuguese government, by internal political organisations, particularly those of students, whose educational training in Bantu education was no longer unchallenged. These students perceived the naked truth that "apartheid held no benefits for them and they were being 'brainwashed' into thinking that they were inferior, lesser human beings."⁵⁷

The South African Student Organisation (SASO), the Black People's Convention (BPC) and the secondary schools' South African Student Movement (SASM) took up the cudgels at the behest of their respective constituencies by celebrating during the FRELIMO rallies. On 25 September 1974 SASO-affiliated SRCs organised a prohibited rally of about 30 000 members in support of the transitional government in

⁵⁶ Tom Lodge, 'State of Exile: the African National Congress of South Africa, 1976 – 86', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 1987, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, (eds) *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, (Harlow, Longman, 2003), pp. 73 – 74.

Mozambique that took over after the collapse of the Portuguese colonial empire.⁵⁸ The majority of black communities celebrated with the Mozambicans on their first anniversary of independence in June 1975.⁵⁹ The student demonstrations on various tertiary campuses, organised by SASO, reflected the mood of those who wanted freedom for South Africans. The message was quite clear on the students' posters: they were not only celebrating but had high hopes of their own freedom in their own country of birth. Some posters read:

Frelimo fought and regained our soil, our dignity. It is a story. Change the name and the story applies to you. The dignity of Black Man has been restored in Mozambique and so shall it be here. Black must rule. We shall drive them to the sea. Long Live Azania. Revolution!! (Samora) Machel will help! Away with Voster Ban! WE are for Afro black Power!!! Viva Frelimo. Power!!! We shall overcome.⁶⁰

It is logical to argue that these community-based organisations such as SASO, SASM and BPC were not engaging in politics in a vacuum. They managed to establish contacts with outlawed organisations such as the ANC and PAC and other minority splinter organisations that were in exile. The role of the RC became vital in linking up with these organisations and with individuals who could not find a political home in South Africa and had decided to leave the country. Subsequent chapters will demonstrate that many students who were attending tertiary institutions in the early and mid-1970s eventually found their political home in the ANC and MK as well as in other organisations of lesser note. It will also be shown that their political roots and the niches that they carved later in politics stemmed from the influence that they gained when

⁵⁸ Dan O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948 – 1994*, (Randburg, Ravan, 1999), p. 179.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁶⁰ Robert M. Price, 'The Apartheid State in Crisis: Political Transformation in South Africa, 1975 – 1990' in Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, (eds.) *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 75.

the political fortunes of Southern Africa changed in their favour.⁶¹ These individuals, in line with the political philosophy of the time, Black Consciousness, became community activists at home and student activists at universities. The fact that the tertiary institutions became fulcrums of the underground struggles that were waged particularly in the northern part of the country was not actually surprising because it vindicated the fact that the ANC/MK leadership was committed to integrating political and military strategies for the struggle within South Africa as advocated by the RC.⁶² The process of the recruitment of individuals who established themselves politically either at community or tertiary level in the underground structures of MK may be traced to this period of the 1970s.⁶³

Southern Africa in the 1970s – An opportunity missed by MK?

The South African government became very jittery about its influence in Southern Africa after the collapse of the Portuguese government and its colonial empire in Africa. Portuguese-controlled countries such as Angola, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique were liberated in 1974-75. In Zimbabwe the armed struggle had intensified since the mid-1970s. The balance of power in Southern Africa now tilted in the favour of newly liberated countries and South African government became concerned about its future. The government's attitude towards its neighbours was initially characterised by the policy of détente. The spirit of celebration that engulfed black southern Africa was dealt a severe blow when the

⁶¹ Many political activists that form part of the material of this study, such as Dick Ralushai, Matthews Phosa, Ngoako Ramatlhodi and others, trace their roots to the Black Consciousness Movement. They were not necessarily members of the BCM but they shared most of the political frustrations of the time with it.

⁶² Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge, Op. Cit.*, p. 36.

⁶³ Interview with Mathabatha Stanley, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 2 August 2002

South African security forces invaded Angola in August 1975, to be stopped only by the combined forces of Angolan and Cuban troops in March 1976.⁶⁴ The withdrawal of the South African troops from the outskirts of Luanda in March 1976 was regarded by Black South Africa as a military defeat of the South African security forces. O'Meara argues that, "it certainly helped precipitate widespread black defiance which led to the historic events of 16 June 1976."⁶⁵ The outbreak of the Soweto upheavals barely four months after the humiliating defeat of the SADF in March 1976 demystified the myth perpetrated by the government, that the SADF was unconquerable. The 16 June upheaval was regarded as a glorious rebellion; those who died were seen as heroes and heroines of the struggle for liberation. More and more people began to look for greener military and political pastures outside the borders of South Africa. Under these conditions the RC together with its regional structures in the neighbouring countries became very necessary for those who were fleeing the apartheid bullets.

MK's utilisation of countries such as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland to carry out military and political missions implied that internal secret bases were needed where internal recruitment and operations could be planned and carried out. In the rural Northern Transvaal the University of the North became a nerve centre for MK recruitment activities; here, too, contacts were found for community leaders who were based in areas that were very remote from the university.⁶⁶ One should ask why the University of the North was so unique in its location and composition that

⁶⁴ Dan O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years, The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948 – 1994*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 179.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁶⁶ Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane, The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s Chapter in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 2 (1970-1980)*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 395.

it was singled out by MK recruits and the South African security forces in general. Southern Africa was in fact not lost to MK in the 1970s, particularly in the rural Northern Transvaal. The networks that had been established clandestinely since the early 1970s ballooned and engulfed the entire region in the 1980s.⁶⁷ The establishment of ANC/MK underground networks was a complicated process that left many political activists behind and it has been observed that these organisations were “too underground.” The level of distrust and secrecy permeated the underground political operations to such an extent that it was extremely difficult to be open about the underground work that was being done.

Schools and villages in the vicinity of the University of the North were influenced by the political activities taking place at the university. Frans Mohlala, who never studied at the University of the North, for example, became a leading political light in the 1980s as a trade unionist and MK underground operative, after being influenced by his father who was a gardener at the university.⁶⁸ The latter had been influenced by students at the university who would approach him for sanctuary when the security police were looking for them. His father’s sympathy towards the students inspired Mohlala (junior) to join the liberation struggle. Similar experiences will be described in detail in the next section.

The political landscape of the 1970s was ripe for infiltration and recruitment into the underground military and political work of MK. No major recruitment drives took place on a large scale, however, for many reasons. Notable was the fact that most political actions were taking place

⁶⁷ For the complicated process of underground network establishment see the document ‘The Creation of the Underground Units by MK’ provides an interesting read. For details see Jack Simons Collection, Umkhonto we Sizwe Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town.

⁶⁸ Interview with Frans Mohlala, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 22 June 2004.

at tertiary institutions whose students stemmed originally from urban areas. Student activists of the time, particularly at the University of the North, such as Cyril Ramaphosa, Mosiuoa “Terror” Lekota, Pandelani Nefolovhodwe and many others, had a degree of urban sophistication which they brought to the University of the North in the 1970s. Secondly, rural areas are, predominantly, abjectly poverty-stricken and as a result not many families could afford to send their children to tertiary institutions like the University of the North. It is necessary therefore to examine in great detail the uniqueness of the University of the North that made it a target for both the security police and MK cadres on recruitment missions.

The University of the North: A cauldron of the struggle since the early 1970s

The South African government’s determination to implement separate development was taken a step further by the passing of the University Education Act (no. 45) of 1959, which was intended to make tertiary education racially exclusive. The Minister of Bantu Education and Administration was empowered by this Act to establish university colleges for non-whites. As a result four such colleges came into being: those of the North, Zululand, Durban Westville and the Western Cape in the tradition of their predecessor, Fort Hare. The University College of the North was intended for the North-Sotho (Bapedi), South-Sotho, Tsonga, Tswana and Venda national units. In terms of Section 22 of the same Act admissions of Africans from other ethnic groups were allowed on condition that the Minister of Bantu Education and Administration

granted permission.⁶⁹ Readmission was not automatic and the council reserved the right to approve an application for readmission.⁷⁰ The 1969 Act (No. 47) of Parliament proclaimed these university colleges autonomous.

The University of the North was established in terms of Act no. 47 of 1969 as an institution in its own right, having first been established as a University College in January 1960 under the guidance of the University of South Africa. The founding of the university college (and all other university colleges for that matter) was not well received because of the interference of the South African government in their affairs. The opposition's concerns were that this interference would compromise academic freedom and autonomy. The fact that the university councils were white and government-appointed also represented a source of conflict since this composition was interpreted as paternalistic. On the basis of these sentiments the student's representative council (SRC) of the University of the North organised a boycott of the installation of the chancellor in 1970.⁷¹ The SRC's contention was that if the university college was indeed meant for black students it should be managerially black as well. The students argued, furthermore, that the content of the courses (disciplines) offered at the university college should also reflect the aspirations of black people. The SRC also preferred that members of the white community who were on the management council should rather take their positions in the advisory council and not the other way round. It was at about this time, incidentally, that students at tertiary institutions all

⁶⁹ J. G. E. Wolfson, *Turmoil at Turfloop: A Summary of the Snyman and Jackson Commissions of Enquiry into the University of the North*, (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, August 1976), p. 6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁷¹ A NUSAS National Campaign pamphlet, South African History Archives (SAHA), AL 2457, Historical Papers Library, University of the Witwatersrand.

over the country gathered together to form SASO, whose exclusive black membership somewhat confirmed the motives of separate development as regards racial exclusivity. SASO's constitutional preamble reads:

Whereas, we the Black students of South Africa, having examined and assessed the role of Black students in the struggle for the emancipation of the Black people in South Africa and the betterment of their social, political and economic lot, and having unconditionally declared our lack of faith in then genuineness and capability of multi-racial organisations and individual Whites in the country to effect rapid social changes...do commit ourselves to the realisation of the worth of the Black man, the assertion of his human dignity and to promoting conscious and self-reliance of the Black community.⁷²

SASO's stand on black membership was informed by the fact that they had broken away from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), arguing that NUSAS, which was predominantly white, was not catering for their aspirations as black students. SASO argued that in the South African political context there was no middle road: one was either part of the system of apartheid or against it. SASO's attitude was also influenced by the prevailing climate of the time. South Africa was gripped by the Black Consciousness philosophy, a result of which manifested itself at the University of the North when black and white members of the staff association who had belonged to the same association previously went their separate racial ways.⁷³

Unequal treatment based on grounds of skin pigmentation was the cause of heightened racial consciousness and the eventual breaking-up of the staff association into racial categories. In 1971 black members of the staff association formed their own association, called the Black Academic Staff Association (BASA). The recognition applied for by BASA from

⁷² 'SASO Constitutional Preamble', cited in J. G. E. Wolfson, *Turmoil at Turfloop*, *Op Cit.* p. 12.

⁷³ Interview with George Mashamba, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 22 August 2002.

the management council of the university was received in 1972. Against this background and around this time Onkgopotse Abram Tiro delivered his famous speech as the ex-president of the SRC in April 1972, during a graduation ceremony. As a starting-point Tiro referred to J.B. Vorster's assurance that "No black man has landed in trouble for fighting for what is legally his."⁷⁴ Tiro's scathing speech landed him in trouble: the university suspended him the next day for bringing it into disrepute. In solidarity with Tiro the entire student population (of about 1 146 students) went on a mass protest after they had embarked on a sit-in that was abruptly dispersed by the police using tear gas.

The university's reaction was to expel the entire student population, which infuriated not only the students at the university but those at almost all black universities. Different communities were also enraged by the university's suppression of the freedom of speech on the campus. More than two thousand people in Soweto alone took to the streets in protest against this decision.⁷⁵ The University of the North later rescinded its own decision and ordered the students to reapply for readmission on an individual basis. The motive was to refuse Tiro readmission and to suspend the SRC and all its subcommittees. When Tiro reapplied his reapplication was declined. On 2 June 1972 the students returned to the university only to find that 22 of their members, including the entire SRC, had been refused readmission despite promises of admission on reapplication.⁷⁶ This led to a second strike, upon which the university expelled all its students, who refused to leave; on June 6, 1972, the police

⁷⁴ G. M. Nkondo, *Turfloop Testimony: The Dilemma of a Black University in South Africa*, (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1976), p. 91.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Colin Legum, 'A Republic in Trouble', *Africa Contemporary Record Current Affairs Series*, Vol. 5, 1972-73, p. 41.

removed them using dogs.⁷⁷ This was to become a trend at the University of the North until the dawn of the new political dispensation in the 1990s.

Tiro's suspension and eventual expulsion followed what the university called "proper channels", in the form of a meeting by the University Management Council (UMC) on 15 May 1972 in Pretoria at which it was decided that a Commission of Inquiry be appointed from members of the Management Council. Two other members of the Advisory Council (AC) were co-opted onto this commission, whose mandate was to investigate the causes that had led to the unrest at the university and to recommend measures that needed to be taken to remedy the situation. Notwithstanding other recommendations, two important ones were made that are relevant to the present study: that SASO should not be banned from the campus but rather be assisted in sublimating its efforts to organise black students' activities. It was further recommended that BC should be encouraged because it carried with it the possibility of paving the way for the eventual implementation of the homeland system, for black people only.

Incessant student unrest followed and a new SRC with a revised constitution insisted on by the management council was installed in September 1973. It was this management-approved SRC that was eventually forced to resign when the local branch of SASO was formed on the 16 March 1974, following Pandelani Nefolovhodwe's proposal that it do so. Nefolovhodwe, who replaced Muntu Myeza as President of SASO, was also elected the president of the new SRC at the university. Muntu Myeza replaced Henry Isaacs when the latter was banned in 1973

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 41.

as SASO leader under the Suppression of Communism Act. The expelled Tiro became a permanent organiser of the SASO and the president of the Southern African Students' Movement (SASM) before unbearable conditions forced him to flee the country into exile in Botswana. The South African security police devised a parcel bomb which eventually killed him on 1 February 1974, a day before he was to meet with the ANC for possible talks concerning unity.⁷⁸ When Tiro was murdered in Botswana the students at his Alma Mater organised a memorial service for him on the 17 February 1974 that was attended by black members of the staff and the students. SASO worked in tandem with BASA, which became evident when 22 August 1974 was set aside "to mourn for our Black brothers and sisters who have been killed by direct and indirect forces of oppression."⁷⁹ The chairperson of BASA chaired the platform together with SASO's speakers during the SASO week (20 – 22 September 1974), of which the theme was "Building the Nation for the Struggle"; on this occasion preparations for the pro-FRELIMO rallies that were to be held on the 25 September were announced. The Minister of Justice decided, on 24 September 1974, to ban these rallies. On the day of these celebrations, countrywide meetings of students and community political activists went ahead despite banning orders. About 1 000 people gathered at Curries Fountain in Durban for the celebrations, the police decided to baton-charge the revellers and several people were arrested. Students and members of the BASA were also assaulted for refusing to disperse when ordered to do so by the South African security police. Countrywide arrests of suspected political activists followed.

⁷⁸ Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, Bavusile Maaba and Nkosinathi Biko, The Black Consciousness Movement, in The South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 2 (1970-1980)*, Op. Cit, pp. 152-153.

⁷⁹ J. G. E. Wolfson, *Turmoil at Turfloop*, Op Cit., p. 17.

The University of the North continued to be plagued by student uprisings in the early 1970s despite the implementations of the Commission of Inquiry in 1972 and the “doctoring” of the SRC’s constitution by the university management council to suit the latter’s stand. The South African government was aware that there was no way in which tertiary education could function smoothly when the political situation outside the university campus was literally explosive. Out of ignorance of some of the contributory factors the government appointed a one-man commission under Mr. Justice J. H. Snyman to investigate comprehensively the causes of student unrest at the University of the North and to make recommendations. The Snyman Commission was appointed after the Chairman of the University Council, Professor J. H. van der Merwe, had requested the Minister of Bantu Education and Administration to investigate the events of 25 September in particular. Events however overtook van der Merwe. During the university recess after the aborted celebrations the security police arrested Gilbert K. Sedibe, the president of the SRC and Pandelani Nefolovhodwe, the immediate past president of the SRC and the then newly elected president of SASO.⁸⁰ When the university reopened on the 16 October students held a mass meeting that was reportedly attended by about 1 400 students in which a decision to march to the nearest police station of Mankweng was taken. In the memorandum which they delivered to the police station the students demanded the release of Sedibe and Nefolovhodwe. During this melee Cyril Ramaphosa, the local SASO chairperson, was arrested, which sparked further class boycotts until the intervention of BASA culminated in the return of students to their lecture rooms.⁸¹

⁸⁰ South African Institute of Race Relations, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1974*, pp. 373-374.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

The Snyman Commission, appointed in 1974, was suspicious of the University Christian Movement (UCM), which had paved the way for the establishment of SASO. The Commission felt that “UCM’s secret objective was to train Black people of South Africa for an armed revolution against the Whites.”⁸² Spawned in 1968, a year after the formation of the UCM congress, SASO only thrived for a few years and disbanded in 1971. However, the Student Christian Movement (SCM) absorbed most of SASO’s membership. Secondly it was recommended that BC should be encouraged, as it would eventually lead to support for the homeland system that was then being forced on South Africa. Interestingly, SASO and its BC adherents denounced the homeland system and its leaders at a five-day conference held at St. Peter’s Seminary in Hammanskraal in January 1974. They criticised in a resolution any “purported representation of the Black struggle in the country by the so-called leaders of the Bantustans.”⁸³ The same criticism was repeated by SASO in July 1974 at a conference at St. Ansgars near Wilgerspruit in which SASO noted “with grave concern and disgust the growing false feeling of relevance of the homeland leaders, the Coloured Persons’ Representative Council (CPRC), and the S.A. Indian Council (SAIC) in Black politics.”⁸⁴ The Snyman Commission concurred with the students in recommending that the university should be handed over to the Blacks to control.⁸⁵ This never occurred.

The political situation at the University of the North was volatile and open to political manipulation. The scene was set for infiltration of ANC recruits into the university. As a prohibited organisation, how was MK

⁸² J. G. E. Wolfson, *Turmoil at Turfloop, Op Cit.*, p. 12.

⁸³ South African Institute of Race Relations, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1974*, p. 377.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

⁸⁵ J. G. E. Wolfson, *Turmoil at Turfloop, Op Cit.*, p. 8.

able to recruit members, particularly students, here? John D. Brewer later suggested that banned organisations which were opposed to the South African government had only two options for mobilising inside the country. “The first is to piggy-back on those organisations which survived the clampdown or whose political activity was not expressly forbidden; the second is to utilise some of the platforms and initiatives established by the state.”⁸⁶ Cadres of MK earmarked individuals at tertiary institutions for recruitment into military and political operations. The University of the North was one such institution.⁸⁷ In the 1970s the overwhelming majority of students at tertiary institutions held only vague ideas about the ANC and its underground operations. There were also concerns that the BC adherents would usurp the ‘lacuna’ in internal politics and this feeling was fanned by the BC’s attitude that “...the ANC was a conservative and apathetic organisation whose non-racial politics were inimical to the liberation of black people.”⁸⁸

The recruitment of underground MK operatives began in earnest at the University of the North in the late 1970s, not only amongst the students but also the staff, particularly members of BASA. The fact that connections existed among BASA, SASO and different SRCs also contributed to the creation of an atmosphere of political awakening and interaction. Thabo Makunyane, Collins Chabane, Louis Mnguni, Joyce Mashamba, George Mashamba, Peter Mokaba, Jerome Joseph Maake, Norman Mashabane, Ngoako Ramatlhodi, Matthews Phosa, Cyril Ramaphosa, S’bu Ndebele and Terror Lekota represent some of the staff/student leaders who established links with the underground

⁸⁶ John D. Brewer, *Critical Choices for South African Society: Black Strategies for Change in a Constrained Society*, (Cape Town, Institute for the Study of Public Policy, 1989), p. 8.

⁸⁷ See ‘The State versus S.J.T.D Ndebele and 3 Others, Case No.51/76 in the Supreme Court of South Africa, 28 June 1977’, National Archives, Pretoria.

⁸⁸ Elinor Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: in Our Lifetime*, (Claremont, David Philip, 2002), p. 325.

structures of MK in the far Northern Transvaal.⁸⁹ University lecturers and community activists in the vicinity of the university campus, such as Joyce and George Mashamba, Joyce Mabhudafasi and Ndebele, worked in tandem with students and members of the community to further the objectives of the liberation struggle. They held secret meetings at the university campus and discussed the recruitment of students, particularly those who held leadership positions in student politics, and ways of spiriting them out of the country for training in military combat work (MCW) during the university recess. The intention was that they should be able to influence others when they returned from military and political training in exile without being detected by the police, and also to carry out underground political work without attracting any attention. One method of carrying out underground political work for MK was to recruit members without adopting an overt political posture in student politics. Work underground and keep a low political profile – that was MK's motto. The individual roles of some of these people will be explained in the course of the entire study. In the final analysis, the role that the University of the North played was summed up by Colonel Willem Johannes van der Merwe of the Pietersburg security branch when he made his submission to the TRC Amnesty Committee in 1997. He explained:

In this context the University of the North was the flash-point in the sense that a large group of students were concentrated there and it housed a large number of students, more than it was destined for and there was a lot of political activity taking place there and more specifically undermining political activities, and this was aimed against the state.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ These people were not necessarily students simultaneously at the University of the North but studied there in the 1970s.

⁹⁰ Colonel Willem Johannes van der Merwe, TRC Amnesty Application WJ 4380/96 *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing*, 1997 at <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/amntrans/pburg/vdermerwe.htm>.

Student recruitment into the ranks of ANC/MK

At the University of the North, therefore, in the mid-1970s the struggle for liberation inside the country was planned and waged by the underground cadres of MK in tandem with the regional IPRCs in Botswana and Swaziland.⁹¹ This is not to imply that no struggles were waged in other parts of the country. The major question that needs to be answered is: how were the links between exiled organisations such as the ANC and MK and operatives in underground cell formations established in the first place? How were those linkages sustainable and how was it possible for members, who had recently been released from Robben Island under severe banning conditions to serve in the underground struggles as cogs in the liberation wheels?

In answering all these questions it is important to bear in mind Boris Ponomarev's advice. Ponomarev, of the Central Committee Secretariat (CCS) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), warned Moses Kotane and Yusuf Dadoo who were in Moscow to attend the 22nd CPSU Congress in 1961 that:

It is necessary not to counterpoise one form of struggle to the others but to combine skilfully all these forms. The armed struggle is a struggle of the broad people's masses. It means that in the conditions of the preparation for the armed struggle the political work to win the masses acquires decisive importance. Without consistent political and organisational work among the masses to your side and preparation for the armed struggle are two side of the same question. Both these tasks should be accomplished in close interconnection.⁹²

The active participation of students and community activists exposed them to recruitment into the ranks of MK. The profile that political

⁹¹ Interview with Matthews Phosa, by the author, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 30 January 2004.

⁹² Vladimir Shubin, *A View from Moscow, Op Cit.*, p. 42.

activists assumed in their various fields in life somehow determined their political destinies. Ngoako Ramatlhodi, for example, maintains that the change of tactics, from open political engagement to debates and protest poetry, at the University of the North where he was a student greatly assisted them in warding off the attention of the security police.⁹³ Accordingly, Clive Glaser advances the argument that, "...debating societies, Christian youth groups, SASM and a cluster of young ex-Turfloop teachers influenced by Black Consciousness ideology were all crucial ingredients in this process."⁹⁴ Ramatlhodi later left the country at the turn of the 1970s for Lesotho, where he met Tito Mboweni and Chris Hani. Ramatlhodi would travel to Botswana to meet with his MK commander, Mongane Wally Serote, for briefings and debriefings. Serote, a well known protest poet, advised Ramatlhodi to mask their political missions by poetry.

Just how were recruitments undertaken? Though the stories of recruits moving into exile and in a few cases being reinfiltated into South Africa are very intricate and differentiated, some broad patterns can be detected and depicted. The first category of recruits comprises those who underwent a process of broad political conscientisation before they made their decisions to move into exile. Phosa, Makunyane, Ramatlhodi and those recruits that enjoyed the privilege of studying at tertiary institutions fall into the first category. They were exposed to politics at these institutions and when they eventually left the country they had made contacts and knew what was in store for them on the other side of the fence. Makunyane, for example, was not able to leave the country but

⁹³ Interview with Ngoako Ramatlhodi, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 24 February 2004. See also Peter Delius, *Mpumalanga: History and Heritage*, p. 248

⁹⁴ C. L. Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics in Soweto, 1958 – 1976', PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1994, p. 285.

knew ANC members in Lesotho and Botswana.⁹⁵ When he was arrested in 1979 in Venda and sentenced to eight years on Robben Island he was distributing ANC leaflets that were denouncing the impending independence of the Venda Bantustan.⁹⁶ Phosa served as an underground commander of MK units in and around the Bushbuckridge and Nelspruit areas.⁹⁷ In some cases those MK recruits who left for exile with tertiary qualifications or experience (since some were expelled before they could finish their studies) were not dispatched back into the country because they were needed in the internal structures of both the ANC and MK in exile. Another problem was that some had well-developed careers; Phosa, for example, had enjoyed a distinguished legal career in Nelspruit before he left for exile in 1985. Owing to these considerations and others it was not always possible to send MK cadres with such profiles back into the country as they might be apprehended before they could execute a single mission.

In some instances political conscientisation took place as a result of, in most cases, a politically conscious relative, and a contact with an ANC cadre on a recruitment mission, or a generalised experience of apartheid and all its wrongs (mostly engendered by forced removals or police brutality). Staying with Makunyane for a while, he also stemmed from a politically conscious family. His mother's relative Tolamo from Sekhukhuneland was in exile with the ANC and she spoke glowingly about him.⁹⁸ Makunyane's father was a medical doctor and experienced

⁹⁵ Interview with Thabo Makunyane, by Siphamandla Zondi, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, SADET Oral History Archives, 11 May 2002.

⁹⁶ Interview with Ephraim Mogale, by the author, Bronkhorspruit, Gauteng Province 26 & 27 April 2003.

⁹⁷ Interview with Matthews Phosa, by the author, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 30 January 2004.

⁹⁸ Interview with Thabo Makunyane, by Siphamandla Zondi, Polokwane, SADET Oral History Archives, Pretoria, 11, May 2002

discrimination in his efforts to practice medicine. Secondly, other individuals at some point had been obliged to decide to move into exile. The events preceding or informing such a decision are sometimes very interesting. Some decisions were taken without any clear idea of what actually occurred in exile, and, in the broader sense, of what the ANC stood for. The defining feature of this major life decision was most often chance and inevitability, rather than extensive deliberation; the need to escape the attentions of the security police, for example, was often more pressing than an intellectual commitment to the ANC. Tlokwe Maserumule left the country under these conditions when his life was threatened by the security police from Middleburg. Unable to track Tlokwe down, the security police left a note with his mother which read, “*Jy praat te veel. Ons het jou gehoor*”.⁹⁹ A loose translation would be “You talk too much. We have heard you”. Tlokwe left for exile in 1981 without knowing what was in store for him. He was quite sure that he was escaping danger from the security police, only to be arrested in 1984 while on a recruitment mission in the rural far Northern Transvaal.¹⁰⁰ The details of this event are related in other chapters.

Thirdly, in every case, recruits were obliged to make the actual, hair-raising trip into exile. It is these narratives that are often the most gripping, being tales of secrecy, evasion and lurking danger. Fourthly, in almost every case, recruits were received in exile without any clear idea of where they were or of what organisation they were joining. As such, they all underwent a dual process of screening and political education. This became the regular procedure after the poisoning of MK cadres in training camps in Angola during the late 1970s. The twin processes were

⁹⁹ Interview with Tlokwe Maserumule, by the author, GaMatlala, Limpopo Province, 11 July 2002.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 July 2002.

calculated to ward off enemy agents and foster political reorientation after years (in some cases) of BC exposure.

There was a tendency in MK, particularly owing to the changing political fortunes in South Africa, not to overuse any category of recruitment too frequently for the purposes of reinfiltration. MK was highly unlikely before the late 1980s to reinfiltrate recruits who were known to have had a political profile inside the country before they went into exile. Operation Vula¹⁰¹, which will be discussed later, comprised an exception to the norm. This also applied to double agents who happened to leave the security police after suspecting that their cover was going to be blown. Malaza Siphithi Vincent was an underground MK operative working for the South African security police, under the guardianship of Eugene de Kock of the notorious Vlakplaas unit.¹⁰² Malaza was a regular visitor to the ANC in Swaziland, not knowing that his colleagues in the security police were watching him. In the late 1980s Malaza disappeared from the security police while on a mission in Swaziland to lure his contacts in MK to a trap set up by Eugene de Kock, amongst other top brass of the Vlakplaas security police unit. The details of his double loyalty and its repercussions will be discussed in relevant sections.

Combinations of recruitment strategies were employed at different times for different people. Individual experiences of recruitment into underground political activism consequently vary. A major discovery of underground ANC/MK operations in the rural Northern Transvaal took

¹⁰¹ For a brief discussion of Operation Vul'indlela (Operation Vula) see Barrell's "Conscript to Their Age: ANC Operational Strategy, 1976-1986", PhD Dissertation, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 445-6.

¹⁰² Interview with Siphithi Vincent Malaza, by the author, Sunnyside, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 18 January 2005.

place on the arrest of S'bu Ndebele in May 1976. Ndebele was a librarian at the University of Swaziland where he worked in the same capacity at the University of the North before he was “deployed” to the University of Swaziland to serve as a link with the Swaziland-based RIPRC and other recruits from all over the country. Ndebele had been a student activist in SASO politics at the University of Natal before he was employed by the University of the North in 1973 as a librarian. His connections with the people of the rural Northern Transvaal in the underground revolutionary struggle, such as Joyce and George Mashamba, and Patrick E. Tshabalala, had been established before his deployment in Swaziland.¹⁰³ George was a lecturer in the philosophy department while his wife (Joyce) was a student at the time. Rejoice Mabhudafasi was employed as a librarian at the University of the North and also collaborated with Ndebele in the underground cells of the ANC.¹⁰⁴ Frequent visits to Swaziland by the Mashambas for consultations with the ANC were facilitated when Ndebele relocated to the University of Swaziland. Ndebele and his contacts at the University of the North, such as the Mashambas and other members of the community, were eventually arrested for creating underground cells and recruiting people for military and political training under the banner of the outlawed ANC.¹⁰⁵ Secret meetings on the ANC and underground political work were held together with George.

The importance of the arrests of Ndebele, George Mashamba and his wife Joyce lay in the fact that they revealed that much organisational

¹⁰³ For Ndebele's role see Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane's Chapter The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s in The South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 2 (1970-1980)*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 429-430.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Rejoice Mabhudafasi, by the author, Johannesburg International Airport, Gauteng Province, 16 March 2004.

¹⁰⁵ National Archives, 'State Versus S J T Ndebele and three others, Judgment in the Supreme Court of South Africa, 28 June 1977', Case Number 51/76, National Archives, Pretoria.

underground work was taking place in the rural Northern Transvaal. It was vital for the organisation to be able to make use of Ndebele who hailed from Natal, with connections in the rural Northern Transvaal based in Swaziland. The constant trips undertaken by the Mashambas to Swaziland to liaise with the ANC culminated in the recruitment of many people who also recruited others into the internal underground structures of the ANC in the Northern Transvaal. The advantageous position of the Mashambas at the University of the North assisted them in liaising with people such as Obed Tshukudu (also known as Super), Molefe Patrick Lemmy Mogodi and others such as Louis Mnguni, who became prominent in the UDF in the 1980s.¹⁰⁶ Their arrest was a temporary setback to the underground operations in the region.

Matters were beginning to move faster outside the university as well. The arrest and subsequent trial and conviction of Tokyo Sexwale and eleven others in 1977 brought to light the existence of networks of MK cadres who were already recruiting people for military training, even in the heartland of the rural Northern Transvaal, and particularly in Sekhukhuneland.¹⁰⁷ The fact that newly released former Robben Island prisoners such as Nelson Diale and Peter (Petrus) Nchabeleng were amongst those charged in Sexwale's case as co-accused was a clear indication that an underground network existed. Naledi Tsiki was a member of that underground network who was arrested together with Tokyo Sexwale, for blowing up the Pietersburg-Pretoria railway line in

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Louis Mnguni, by the author, Arcadia, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 11 February 2003.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Lobban, *White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era*, *Op Cit.*, p. 200. See also, National Archives, 'State versus Sexwale and eleven others, the Supreme Court of South Africa Transvaal Provincial Division', Case number CC 431/77, National Archives, Pretoria.

the rural Northern Transvaal village of Dikgale on 26 October 1976: a clear sign of MK activities in the area. The success of Tsiki's mission even during the heightened security situation after 16 June 1976, offered another clear indication that meticulous assessment of the situation and planning had been carried out. The question of how the ordnance used by Tsiki in sabotaging the railway line in Pietersburg arrived in the country will be answered later when the mechanisms for storing weapons are described.

The high concentration of community leaders such as academics, ex-Robben Island political prisoners and student leaders in one area of the rural Northern Transvaal assisted in the reawakening of suppressed political sentiments. At the University of the North leaders were produced not from the hallowed lecture rooms but in the dimly lighted rooms of residential hostels and neighbouring villages. From the university student leaders were able to interact with members of the COSAS as early as 1979, after the formation of that student formation and other organisations that were ostensibly non-political.¹⁰⁸ These interactions amongst ANC-aligned organisations became the norm in the 1980s, during which new methods of replenishing arrested activists were also crafted and perfected.

In summary, the role that the University of the North played in radicalizing people in the region contributed to the success of most of the MK underground operations in the rural Northern Transvaal. As R. W. Johnson argues, "There is no recorded instance of a guerrilla war being

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Ephraim Mogale, by the author, Bronkhorspruit, Gauteng Province, 26 & 27 April 2003.

successfully waged without the benefit of a sanctuary;”¹⁰⁹ hence the University of the North could be regarded as a “sanctuary” and reservoir for MK underground cadres for the whole of this region. The fact that the majority of people who ended up in the ranks of MK were at some stage of their lives students, or members of either the administration or academic staff at the University of the North, lends credence to this assertion.¹¹⁰ The environment as regards recruitment was aided by the realization, which became predominant in the 1980s, that the primary concern amongst political activists was the defeat of apartheid rather than ideological purity. No ideological contradiction existed when a BCM adherent joined either the ANC or the PAC because:

The BCM was explicitly non-aligned politically. Apart from the fact that it was legally dangerous to do so, the BCM consciously avoided favouring either the ANC or the PAC. It saw itself as a movement to regenerate and regroup internal resistance. The secret allegiance of affiliated members were (sic) irrelevant as long as they committed themselves to forging black unity.¹¹¹

This is not to deny that ideological conflicts did culminate in clear divisions amongst the student and staff population at the University of the North. Like the rest of the country, the northern part of South Africa was populated by variant political formations opposed to the ANC.

MK recruitment methodologies

Anyone with any practical knowledge of guerrilla warfare knows that it is relatively easy for the individual to take to the jungle, immensely more difficult for him to come out again – unless it is as a defector, with the

¹⁰⁹ R. W. Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 301.

¹¹⁰ Almost all members of MK in the study interacted in some way with the University of the North at some stage of their political awakening and maturity.

¹¹¹ C. L. Glaser, *Youth Culture and Politics in Soweto, 1958 – 1976*, [S.l.: s.n.], 1994, *Op. Cit.*, p. 289.

connivance of the security forces.¹¹²

Douglas Hyde's assertion runs contrary to MK's recruitment strategies in many ways. Recruitment was not necessarily a prelude to the "jungle". It depended on the objectives. The recruits could enter and leave the "jungle" with relative ease, not relying on collusion with the security forces. People were recruited internally to distribute pamphlets, to paint slogans or write graffiti on a voluntary basis. Recruiters were not obliged to explain the liberation organisation or political message that was conveyed. The crux of the ethos is pertinently described by Raymond Suttner thus:

People worked on the principle of 'need to know', that is, one person may have interacted with X with regard to one activity, but X ought not to have known that that person also related to Y but in connection other activities.¹¹³

Capability, commitment, interest and loyalty in the execution of these tasks would normally lead to further discussions, until the recruiters were fully convinced that they could move into other stages of recruitment, such as engaging the recruits in potentially threatening conditions, by way of example, the revelation of the recruiter's political affiliation or ideological persuasion. For instance, some people were recruited into the structures of MK without being told that they were part of MK.¹¹⁴ This was not an aberration but an operational requirement that was informed by the material conditions of the time. The extent and scope of the missions assigned to potential recruits varied and in most cases depended

¹¹² Douglas Hyde, *The Roots of Guerrilla Warfare*, (Sydney, Bodley Head, 1968), p. 150.

¹¹³ Raymond Suttner, 'The Character of ANC/SACP Underground Work – Possible Imprint on the Present?' Unpublished Paper, Conference on 10th Years of Democracy, University of South Africa, Pretoria, August 2004, p. 4.

¹¹⁴ Peter Delius, *History and Heritage, Op. Cit.*, p. 268.

on the level of (assumed) commitment that recruits demonstrated in a particular situation. This explains, for instance, why Edward Feit (although he was referring to the period 1960-1964) arrived at the conclusion that no particular patterns were rigidly adhered to, although time and again the leadership would lay down some general guidelines as dictated by the local conditions.¹¹⁵ Manifestly, the recruitment process was more complex than Hyde intimates. The primary cause of this complexity was the mistrust and lurking dangers that surrounded the entire process. Those cadres who were assigned the tasks of recruitment, amongst other obligations, did not readily trust those whom they tried to recruit. Suttner again elucidates:

The process of recruitment and deployment generally did not provide or allow the opportunity for monitoring operatives on a personal level. People may have changed over time and in the response to what they experienced. They may have experienced psychological difficulties. A process of disillusionment or demoralisation may have rooted itself somewhere within some people's consciousness and those who deployed particular operatives may have been unaware of this. A problem may have been lurking or emerged unobserved, only to have decisive effect in moments of stress or danger or inactivity or after arrest.¹¹⁶

No hard and fast rules existed concerning the choice of potential MK cadres who were to be recruited. There were, however, standard requirements that recruits were expected to meet depending on the task that recruiters had in mind for them. It did not matter whether the recruits were needed for operations that were not directly planned from exile. Internal operations carried out by units of MK were in most cases carried out without the supervision of the MK leadership, for many and varied reasons. The struggle needed to be carried forward; and to expect daily

¹¹⁵ Edward Feit, *Urban Revolt in South Africa, 1960 – 1964*, (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1975), p. 217.

¹¹⁶ Raymond Suttner, 'The Character of ANC/SACP Underground Work – Possible Imprint on the Present?' Unpublished Paper, Conference on 10 Years of Democracy, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

instructions on events that were unfolding rapidly inside the country was practically counterproductive and not feasible. This does not signify that MK took no accountability for operations. Caution was always needed in such cases so that the security of missions and MK cadres was never compromised. MK had guidelines on mission inside the country but common sense was always encouraged when MK cadres were on missions.

Jean Middleton avers that inasmuch as it was difficult to recruit people into banned organisations, there were mechanisms also in those organisations where recruits were carefully observed before they would be ultimately enlisted.¹¹⁷ Middleton further reveals that the cadres who were responsible for recruitment would sometimes approach those whom they knew for this purpose.¹¹⁸ This explains why in most cases, people who knew each other swelled the ranks of the liberation movements. However, another facet of this phenomenon is evident where, in some cases, members of the same household ended up in the ranks of the liberation movement because the police force harassed them in pursuing one member of the family who may have joined the liberation movement.¹¹⁹

The internal process of recruitment of cadres for military training was mostly undertaken in secrecy because MK was an outlawed organisation. Recruitment was also fraught with serious risks that involved loss of limb or life. It is reasonable to assume that no government will ever exist that

¹¹⁷ Jean Middleton, *Convictions: A Woman Political Prisoner Remember*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1998), p. 12.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ The point was made clear by Cassius Motsoaledi whose father was on Robben Island; the security police persecuted the family and ordered Motsoaledi to report to the local police station every day during the mid-1970s.

will complacently observe people recruiting against it. Recruitment for internal operations that were propagandistic in nature did not require extensive and elaborate discussions about organisation manifestos and policies, nor lengthy debates about the mechanisms of and the dangers immanent in such secret undertakings. A high degree of moral commitment and integrity kept recruits going for they knew the dangers of lapses in security precautions and discretion, particularly those who had joined the struggle in pre-Rivonia trial times. Robben Island, death and a life of being maimed constituted the immediate possible destinies. Nevertheless, people risked their lives in the face of these life-threatening hazards. The determination of MK cadres to wage armed warfare against the South African government was summed up by its first commander, Nelson Mandela. Addressing a conference of the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa in Addis Ababa in January 1962, Mandela clarified:

It was now clear that this was a political demonstration of a formidable kind. It was still a small beginning because a government as strong as South Africa can never be induced to part with political power by bomb explosions in one night and in three cities only. But in a country where freedom fighters frequently pay with their very lives...planned acts of sabotage against government installations introduced a new phase in the political situation and are a demonstration of the peoples' unshakable determination to win freedom whatever the cost may be.¹²⁰

The sentiments expressed by Mandela reflected the balance of the forces that had locked horns in the protracted South African war: the South African security forces with their sophisticated military weaponry versus MK's unshakable political determination and minimal weaponry. On the one hand, the South African government followed internationally

¹²⁰ 'Comrades in Arms,' *Work in Progress*, Number 62 & 63 (double edition), November/December 1989, pp. 9-10.

acceptable recruitment procedures coupled with military conscription for those who refused to join the national defence force, while on the other MK clandestinely recruited those who took it upon themselves to join the crusade against the obnoxious system that was founded on racial prejudice, sustained by racial hatred and perpetuated by racial bigotry – apartheid.

Recruitment into the ranks of MK had usually differed from one unit or individual to another since its inception. The following examples will demonstrate this point. Feit states that the South African Council of Trade Unions (SACTU) became a reservoir for MK's underground activities in the early 1960s after the banning of the ANC. He maintains that, "the Management Committee of SACTU and the NCC had agreed that SACTU was to be responsible for steering the recruiting campaign through factory committees, the campaign to be a national one."¹²¹ The NCC was the National Continuation Committee formed after the banning of the ANC in 1960 to continue the work that the ANC had been doing before the banning. It comprised the Indian Congress, Congress of Democrats, Coloured People's Congress and SACTU. The fact that SACTU would organise for MK at the factory level left the entire work of organising outside the factories to the Congress Alliance (CA). It was on this basis that SACTU took a decision at its 1961 conference to make the recruitment of people into the structures of MK a priority.¹²² Also at that conference the modalities of recruitment were discussed. It was decided that every sector of the community should be approached, with the intention of recruiting people for training. The formation of local committees, area committees, regional committees and what would now

¹²¹ Edward Feit, *Workers without Weapons: The South African Congress of Trade Unions and the Organization of the African Workers*, (Connecticut, Archon Books, 1975), pp. 162 – 163.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 162 – 163.

be called provincial committees were also discussed. The power assigned to each structure was commensurate with the level that each structure occupied in the hierarchy of MK. This all-encompassing approach to recruitment became fashionable in the 1980s until the demise of apartheid.

When MK was officially launched on December 16, 1961, the National High Command, Provincial Command, Regional Command and so forth wielded power in that order. There was no way in which a local unit of MK could take a major decision with far-reaching consequences without the approval of a higher structure. However, the level of secrecy under which the struggle was waged allowed aberrations in this pecking order. Individual decisions were sometimes taken depending on the material conditions prevailing in a particular environment. The pressing issue was not how to organise MK properly but how to arrange for members to continue the sabotage campaigns and to train abroad.¹²³ This situation altered when the MK leadership operated from exile, directing missions inside the country.

The biggest issue concerned the kind of people needed for training. The National High Command of MK had declared in 1962 that only potential recruits whose ages ranged from sixteen to thirty years and who possessed the minimum qualification of a Junior Certificate (JC) were needed.¹²⁴ This educational requirement proved to be a tall order as few African men had been educated to that extent during those years. When Joe Qgabi visited Natal at the beginning of 1963 he was informed that the only difficulty in recruitment was the educational regulation; hence he

¹²³ Bruno Mtolo, *Umkhonto we Sizwe: The Road to the Left*, (Durban, Drakensberg Press, 1966), p. 34.

¹²⁴ Edward Feit, *Urban Revolt in South Africa, 1960 – 1964: A Case Study*, *Op Cit.*, p. 213.

subsequently advised the Natal Regional Command that they could overlook such a requirement.¹²⁵ The underlying motivation behind it was the fact that if the National High Command recruited everybody for training abroad the language might prove a barrier as a result of an inability to comprehend and speak in English. Only when interpreters were obtained was this requirement waived. This educational requirement could not be strictly adhered to, for obvious reasons. What does one do with a person who arrives at a camp in exile with no educational qualifications, yet having evaded the security police that were suspecting him of MK membership? Some of these recruits in fact left South Africa without any form of formal schooling but distinguished themselves in combat with enemy agents or their surrogates in neighbouring countries.¹²⁶

The security police clampdown on political activities hindered the process of recruitment as outlined above. The enactment of the “90 days law” in May 1963 assisted the South African government to arrest suspects for acts of sabotage and inadvertently heralded a new phase of MK recruitment that was relatively sophisticated.¹²⁷ Other means of recruitment were embarked on, including individual approaches. Several such anecdotes exist. Flag Boshielo recruited John Nkadimeng into the ANC and SACP and they later worked in MK.¹²⁸ Through contacts like these Nkadimeng came to play a prominent role during the late 1970s in Swaziland when he became a member of the regional IPRC there after he

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 215.

¹²⁶ Shepherd Malinga who left for exile as a young boy fits the description quite well. For details see about his military bravery see Makhanda Senzangakhona *et al*, 'Umkhonto we Sizwe: Within Living Memories (Part 3), *Umrabulo*, No. 15, July 2002, p. 60.

¹²⁷ E. S. Reddy, *The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa and the International Solidarity: a Selection of Papers Published by the United Nations against Apartheid*, (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, c1992), p. 304.

¹²⁸ Interview with John Kgaona Nkadimeng, by Sifiso Ndlovu and Siphamandla Zondi, SADET Oral History Archives, Kew, Johannesburg, Gauteng Province, 13 & 18 March 2001.

had left for exile in 1976. Nkadimeng was not new to the liberation struggle. Salient points in his political career include the following: his seminal role in the formation of the Sebatakomo Movement in Sekhukhune in 1953; his secretaryship of the *ad hoc* committee that was tasked by the ANC to coordinate all rural revolts inside the country; his attendance at a consultative meeting with the ANC in Lobatse, Botswana, in 1961 in which he met with Chris Hani and Andrew Masondo amongst others and learnt how to wage the underground struggle under conditions of illegality; and his imprisonment in 1964 at Stofberg prison in the Free State for two years.¹²⁹

The dangers of recruiting people without circumspection are patent and the High Command of MK was well aware of them. It was suicidal to disclose the intentions of the recruitment campaign to every person who was approached with recruitment in mind. For instance, Mogaramedi Godfrey Sekhukhune, an MK cadre in the rural Northern Transvaal area of Sekhukhune, recruited Christopher Tolo for military/educational training from this area in the early 1960s. Sekhukhune was working in consultation with Elias Motsoaledi who would either arrive personally to collect recruits or dispatch an emissary.¹³⁰ Tolo developed cold feet on the day of the appointed departure when MK officials came to collect him and others from Jane Furse Memorial Hospital in 1963.¹³¹ This was very disturbing. The MK officials threatened that if he told anybody what he had learnt about his recruitment they would come back for him. This admonition was not good enough. What if Tolo revealed the whole story

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Elias Motsoaledi became one of those who were eventually arrested after the apprehending of the National High Command in 1963 at Rivonia, Johannesburg. He was sentenced together with others to life imprisonment on Robben Island.

¹³¹ Interview with Shadrack Moetanalo, by the author, Madibong, Sekhukhuneland, Limpopo Province, 8 October 2002.

of who recruited him, with whom he had been recruited, where he was going and for what reason? These are some of the factors that were not taken into account when Sekhukhune recruited Tolo, Shadrack Moetanalo, Brian Kabini, Tumi Matabane, Michael Mashupye and Moses Basset. Sekhukhune was not aware that Tolo would renege on his commitment to take up the cudgels against apartheid. However, it is probable that Tolo was not told the whole truth. This assumption is borne out by his would-be colleague Moetanalo's experience. They were recruited together by Sekhukhune and it is unlikely that Tolo could have known a lot about MK more than Moetanalo because Moetanalo was a "personal assistant" of Sekhukhune.¹³² It is possible that both of them knew relatively little about MK and its operations at the time. Besides, this period was still an early phase in the life of MK.

Moetanalo left the country in 1963 in the hope that he would be back within six months after training. Unbeknown to him he would live in exile until 1990, when the ANC was unbanned by the South African government. The ANC did not prevent him from returning; in fact, he was expelled for supporting Tennyson Makiwane's "Gang of Eight."¹³³ Moetanalo did not return home after his expulsion because he suspected that the South African government would not believe his story of expulsion, and besides it was unlawful to leave the country as he had done. Basset and Mashupye died on the battlefield while Kabini and Matabane are still alive and active in ANC politics.¹³⁴ Tolo's case and the reservations of Sekhukhune in recruiting him were not unique. The

¹³² *Ibid*, 8 October 2002.

¹³³ The "Gang of Eight" was a group of senior ANC/MK officials who were expelled by the ANC for bringing the organisation into disrepute.

¹³⁴ Interview with Brian Kabini, by the author and Sello Mathabatha, Motetema, Limpopo Province, 16 March, 2002.

ANC/MK axis was beset with the same problems throughout its years of military and political engagement with the South African government. Underground political work, as Middleton observed, allowed one little opportunity to study and discuss political doctrines.¹³⁵

The 1970s brought a new approach to MK recruitment along with the release of MK cadres from Robben Island in the early 1970s such as Nelson Diale, Peter Nchabeleng, Morris Matsimela, Joel Ntsoane and the return into the country of individuals on recruitment missions. The upsurge in political awareness and police brutality in the 1970s as a result of the government's inability to contain political anxieties brought with it new patterns of recruitment of people who were bound for military training in exile. As one example, an MK recruiter called Ike approached Stanley Mathabatha and Tito Manthata at Boapara-Nkwe School for the Sons of Chiefs.¹³⁶ Ike knew Tito because his (Tito) mother stemmed from Botswana and Tito had relatives in Swaziland too. Both Ike and Tito had met in exile when Tito was visiting his mother's relatives. Tito invited Ike to visit him at Boapara-Nkwe when he was inside the country on a recruitment mission. Tito also invited his friend, Stanley, to meet his "cousin". Boapara-Nkwe was a school in the former Lebowa Bantustan that catered for male sons of chiefs only. Although Stanley is not a direct heir to the throne of the Mathabatha chiefdom in the present-day Limpopo province he qualified for the school on the basis that his ancestral roots are traceable to the Mathabatha nobility. His father's position as an educator of note in the area might also have contributed to his admission to this exclusive school. Tito was an heir apparent of the Manthata chiefdom in the rural Northern Transvaal.

¹³⁵ Jean Middleton, *Convictions: A Woman Political Prisoner Remembers*, *Op Cit.*, p. 63.

¹³⁶ Interview with Stanley Mathabatha, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 2 August 2002.

When Tito and Stanley spoke with Ike over a container of *morula* (traditional beer) in Makompong at the Tompi Seleka College of Agriculture in the early 1970s (both the School and the College were in the same vicinity) Ike delivered a political lecture to them as a way of recruiting them into the underground structures of MK. He knew that there would be no danger in doing so because Tito had met him previously. Tito and Stanley were able to travel during the school holidays, with the assistance of Ike, to eMawelawela in Swaziland for MCW.¹³⁷ Stanley learnt later that Ike had died in Swaziland, while Tito became a highly trained MK cadre who was later arrested at the beginning of 1984 after entering the country on military and political missions.¹³⁸ Tito's arrest coincided with that of Tlokwe: they were dispatched together into the country using different routes but the plan was to meet later inside South Africa and take stock of their missions. However, Stanley remained, to act as a hub for the underground operations of MK in the rural Northern Transvaal particularly in the 1980s but was eventually arrested in the late 1980s (amongst other arrests) as part of Operation Vula.¹³⁹ His underground roles included facilitating the missions of deployed MK cadres inside the country by assisting them to locate dead letter boxes (DLBs); meeting with MK stalwarts and reputable community leaders who might assist in the struggle without formally joining the ANC/MK; and recruiting new members, not necessarily for MK only, but also for the ANC-aligned political formations, particularly in the 1980s.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 2 August 2002.

¹³⁸ Interview with Tlokwe Maserumule, by the author, GaMatlala, Limpopo Province. 11 July 2002.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 11 July 2002.

MK now embarked on individual recruitment amongst people who somehow knew each other or whom the recruiters without their knowledge had earmarked. This was the case with Amos Lubisi (Charles Ngidi) of Tonga, Komatipoort who had been recruited by his nephew O'Lubisi Vladimir Kyich Ulvanov Raul as early as 1974.¹⁴⁰ As in most cases the recruitment of Lubisi by his nephew was not as cautious as it should have been. Lubisi would be relied upon when taking MK recruits out or inside the country but would not know about them or their missions. Raul, a member of the underground MK operations infiltrated into the country, wished to use his uncle's knowledge of the routes to Swaziland and back to spirit recruits out of the country and to assist those who were returning on military/political missions to carry out their tasks with relative ease.¹⁴¹ After working underground for a stint Lubisi left the country unprepared when three MK cadres (Tokyo Sexwale, Robert Manci and a third person whose identity remains shrouded in secrecy) were caught in a "Bordergate incident" in which Constable Brits and Sergeant Khoza were injured when Sexwale threw a hand grenade at them. The MK men were being transported in a police Land Rover after refusing to open their luggage under the pretext that they had no keys.¹⁴² Lubisi left the country abruptly when all three escaped into Swaziland and was given a lift by Norman Tshabalala who was driving a Combi from Alexandra; the latter was a member of a unit that was transporting recruits out of the country into Swaziland. Lubisi was to stay and work on the Mazimbu and Mbeya agricultural farms in Tanzania until 1995 when he returned to South Africa.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Amos Lubisi, by the author, eMankwene, Komatipoort, Mpumalanga Province, 4 October 2002.

¹⁴¹ Peter Delius, *History and Heritage*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 246.

¹⁴² Michael Lobban, *White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 200-201.

Thousands of people were not recruited into the ranks of ANC/MK but found themselves destined to join these forces largely because of the intolerable conditions brought about by police brutality. This tendency occurred well into the late 1980s, when the ANC/MK decided to discourage recruits from going into exile. After 1986 the focus changed from external to internal training.¹⁴³ The receiving environment was beginning to burst at the seams and as an alternative internal military/political training was encouraged. Another category of people allegedly committed crimes that had nothing to do with politics. When they were about to be charged in court as suspects it was fashionable to cross the borders into exile. For example, a pickpocket and an Ensindisweni Primary School learner from Mhluzi Township in Middleburg, Mpumalanga province, Dannyboy Rufus Lengoati (also Ngoma), left the country in 1976 for an exile completely apolitical. Dannyboy lied about his academic qualifications when he chose to continue with his education in Nigeria and eventually suffered “depressive psychosis” in exile. To this end Dannyboy reveals:

... and this uncle of mine, Ben and company, they were in SASM, the South African Student Organisation (*sic*). So, you see. I too was arrested. I came out with a bail of two hundred rand. But then my uncle told me that we should leave the country in December. We should run away. So, we left the country in 1976, you see. We (were) supposed to have gone to court on the 19th of January 1977. And on the 19th of January (1977) we were arriving in Tanzania from Mozambique, you see. There I studied in Nigeria until I completed my matric. There after I went to East Germany where I was intending to study pedagogics (pedagogy). But unfortunately I got the mental breakdown in Germany in 1981, January ...¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Maphai Vincent, *Resistance in South Africa: Azapo and the National Forum*, ([S.I.:s.n.], 1987), p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Dannyboy Lengoati, by the author and Sello Mathabatha, Kilimanjaro Guest House, Middleburg, Mpumalanga Province, 8 July 2002.

Ben Mokoena, to whom Dannyboy is referring, confirms that indeed Dannyboy was arrested not for any political reason but owing to his criminal pit-pocketing activities, for which he was to appear in court.¹⁴⁵

When the Mhluzi group (Ben Mokoena, Dannyboy Lengoati, Tsietsi Tolo, January Masilela, Vuvu Mndebele, Vusi Sindane, Solly Makwakwa and many others from Middleburg's township of Mhluzi) left for exile in two batches (1975 and 1976) difficulties were experienced that could have scuppered the entire mission of going into exile and coming back to fight the war of liberation. Solly Makwakwa was sent back home to Mhluzi, Middleburg to take into exile a youngster who had been left behind when the rest of the group departed.¹⁴⁶ It was feared that if the police apprehended him he would spill the beans about those who were still inside the country recruiting others to leave it for military training. Richard Moale failed to leave with the 1976 group of Ben Mokoena and Jabu Sindane because he did not turn up as had been agreed. It was possible that the police were aware of their impending move into exile and had pounced on him in his sleep before he could leave the next day in 1975 or 1976. Ben Mokoena and Jabu Sindane were obliged to leave "unceremoniously" to avoid what was probably happening to Richard Moale.

When the 1975 group left for Swaziland the whole of Mhluzi Township was abuzz with the news that January Masilela and company had departed; the police, knowing that they had friends in the area, started persecuting the latter. When this behaviour failed to elicit any positive

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 8 July 2002.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Vusi Sindane, by the author, Military Headquarters, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 20 February 2003.

response from the suspected recruits the security police entered Swaziland themselves and arranged with the Swazi royal police that the Mhluzi township group recruits should be brought back to South Africa so as to be united with their parents. Before the death of King Sobhuza (1983) the Swazi royal police were lenient with the South African political refugees. They would normally hand them over to the United Nations agency responsible for political refugees in Swaziland. The South African police traveled to Swaziland together with some of these recruits' parents to convince them to abandon their dreams of joining the liberation crusade.¹⁴⁷ The South African police failed, even though they had organised free transport for the recruits to come home.¹⁴⁸ None other than some members of the Swaziland royal police discouraged the recruits from returning to South Africa with the South African security policemen, fearing the worst for them.

Conclusion

The dawn of the 1970s signaled a new beginning in the fight against the system of apartheid. It was a decade of many major political events that were unfolding in Southern Africa. The attainment of freedom by Southern African countries such as Mozambique and Angola opened the floodgates of enthusiasm for joining the liberation movements in exile. It was also in the early 1970s that the South African government started releasing people who were serving on Robben Island for political

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Mdebele Vuvu, by the author, Middleburg South African National Defense Force (SANDF), Provincial Headquarters, Mpumalanga Province, 26 February 2003.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 26 February 2003.

activities that were administratively classified as criminal.¹⁴⁹ On a national scale the political trial of Winnie Mandela, Samson Ndou and 22 others at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s heralded a new beginning for South African resistance politics. The arrests of James Edward April, Alexander Moumbaris and Ranka Theophillus Chokwe also impacted on the “political lull” that had engulfed the country until then. These arrests rekindled the faltering hope that had engulfed the South African political scene after the apprehension of the first MK High Command at Rivonia in the early 1960s. Matters, however, changed for the better with the ANC’s establishment of the RC in 1969 after the Morogoro Consultative Conference. Criticisms that the exiled leadership of the ANC and MK were accustomed to the comfort of exile and were therefore neglecting the liberation struggle on the home front jolted the movement into action.¹⁵⁰ Throughout the years the regional structures of MK in neighbouring countries were able to give an account of their activities and operations.¹⁵¹ The processes of recruitment for MK underground activities were tried and tested throughout the 1960 and 1970s. The concentration of students at the University of the North and their contacts in exile assisted in the process of MK underground recruitment. The rapport that existed between the students and some university staff such as George Mashamba and Rejoice Mabhudafasi as well as their interaction with the University of Swaziland based S’bu Ndebele assisted in casting the recruitment net wide in the rural Northern Transvaal. Care was taken to regard one process as perfect for fear that the security police

¹⁴⁹ Archival records classify “political crimes” committed by members of the liberation organisations under the criminal category.

¹⁵⁰ For criticisms of the ANC and MK see Nhlanhla Ndebele and Noor Nieftagodien’s Chapter, ‘The Morogoro Conference: A Moment of Self-Reflection’ in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, (1960-1970), Op Cit.*, pp. 587-9.

¹⁵¹ For example, the ‘1987 Military Report’ and the ‘1988 Annual Military Programme’ attest to the fact that MK took stock of operations that were taking place in the Frontline State. For details see Jack Simon Collections, Umkhonto we Sizwe Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town.

were going to know about it and use it against MK potential recruits. However, recruitment trends were established in the rank of trade unions, family members and people who left for exile after fearing for their own safety in South Africa.

The outbreak of the Soweto uprising in June 16, 1976 and its subsequent spill-over effect into other areas, the increased level of political consciousness and the disruption of people's lives as a result of police brutality raised political awareness to such heights that MK recruiters experienced a field day.¹⁵² This explains why most of the people who will be discussed in the following chapters were recruited into the underground structures of MK and continued to serve the organisation until the turn of the 1970s when most of them left the country to pursue their political aspirations. These future MK cadres graduated from the University of the North's underground political cells and were able to link up with community organisations in their respective localities. A contingent of MK cadres was able to identify and recruit these student activists and teach them the strategies and techniques of operating the liberation struggle clandestinely.

¹⁵² Peter Delius, *History and Heritage*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 249.

Chapter Two

The Shattering of a Hope and the Road to Exile – the Late 1970s to 1983

The mood of optimism that had gripped South Africa after the political emancipation of Angola and Mozambique,¹⁵³ the turning point in the political fortunes of Black people as a result of the outbreak of the Soweto student uprisings on June 16 1976 and the tentative steps towards armed propaganda warfare came to an abrupt end when the government clamped down on these political aspirations. The South African government was no novice in its brutality towards her political opponents. Portents of this had been noticed by the international community before 1976. It was no surprise that the then Tanzanian President, Julius Nyerere, told a meeting at Oxford University in England in 1975 that South Africa was a tyranny. He went on to state that it was not the only tyrannical police state in the world, or even in Africa, there were too many of them. The difference was that South Africa's brutality against its political opponents was legislated and therefore carried out with impunity. Hardly a year thereafter, Oliver Tambo, the acting president of the ANC, had reflected on the situation in South Africa, particularly after the 1976 Soweto student revolts. Tambo acknowledged the difficult period ushered in after this episode. He lamented, "We are entering a very difficult period in our history. Many more of our people will be called upon to make the supreme sacrifice. The enemy himself will throw in everything he has in order to ensure our destruction.

¹⁵³ See the description of the mood of jubilation in Sampie Terreblanche's *A History of Inequality in South Africa 1652- 2002*, (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2002), p. 307.

Victory, however, is certain.”¹⁵⁴ Tambo could not have been more accurate.

Pursuant to Tambo’s premonitory statement, this study traces the steps taken by individual political activists in the late 1970s when the underground world collapsed on them. In the rural Northern Transvaal most of these political activists of the banned ANC/MK were still students at the University of the North. There were also those rurally based political activists who had links with other MK cadres operating under the same conditions elsewhere in urban areas. Regarding these, poignant questions abound. What happened to the cadres in this mêlée that was unleashed by the 16 June 1976 insurrections? How did they manage to reach their destinations in exile? How did those who chose to remain inside the country survive in their clandestine obligations to pursue the liberation struggle? Additionally, the study explores (albeit superficially) the situation in exile with regard to the operations of the RC and how it counteracted the South African government’s stratagems and tactics. Was the RC ready to carry out its tasks or was it caught napping by the events of 1976 onwards? This question constitutes the focus of this chapter.

Those ANC recruits who left the country knew that the heart of the liberation struggle was inside South Africa. They went into exile for military and political training purposes. They were informed in exile that the masses of the oppressed people inside the country represented the cogs of the liberation struggle. Trained MK cadres were merely the

¹⁵⁴ Romesh Chandra, *The Soweto Uprising - Heralding South Africa's Dawn*, World Peace Council and the African National Congress of South Africa, (Place, publisher and date unknown), p. 20.

wheels that propelled the freedom struggle towards its destination.¹⁵⁵ In this chapter the role of individuals or groups of people in the 1970s and early 1980s is outlined, with the intention of pointing out the extent to which the ANC/MK was deeply rooted in the masses. When the ANC/MK deployed its cadres inside the country to politicise the people and take up the cudgels against the South African government, there was also a move, conversely, by the RC in exile to prepare itself for any eventuality with regard to MK actions inside the country. The writer intends demonstrating how the complementary work of the RC in exile dovetailed with its professed intentions inside the country. The RC's intentions of reviving the underground structures inside the country were indeed realised, albeit on a small scale, in the 1970s. Manifestly the decade was largely one of painstaking reorganisation and mobilisation in terms of armed propaganda warfare: a slow and arduous process that needed constant and painstaking attention and refinement.

One of the exiled leaders of the Soweto student uprisings, Tsietsi Mashinini, blamed the ANC and PAC for the torture that the students had endured at the hands of the South African police as a result of allegations that these two organisations had directed the student revolts.¹⁵⁶ Both the ANC and South African government concurred that the ANC was involved in the student riots; a fortnightly journal in France, *AfriqueAsia*, published an admission by Oliver Tambo that the ANC was indeed involved in the Soweto student uprisings, and to prove to the whole world that the ANC was communist-inspired, the Minister of Police, Jimmy Kruger, gave permission for newspapers to quote and publish

¹⁵⁵ Various ANC/MK documents (some of them are included in the study) on the nature and role of the masses attest to this statement., for example see confirmation on Tebogo Kgobe, 'Is South Africa Suited for Guerrilla Warfare?' *The African Communist*, Number 117, Second Quarter, 1989, p. 28.

¹⁵⁶ Mashinini Blames ANC For Torture', *Daily Dispatch*, 9 December 1976.

Tambo's statements, hoping that, "His statements confirm the Government's view that the recent disturbances in Soweto and elsewhere were not about language alone but that the ANC was also busy with agitations,"¹⁵⁷ that were allegedly communist inspired. It was felt in government circles of the time that every political agitation had communist inspirations in it. This explains the befuddlement that afflicted the government in response to the political agitations that occurred after the 1976 student uprisings. The government saw bannings and imprisonments as the answer to "communist inspired agitations".

The ominous clouds gathering on the horizon eventually opened the sluice gates of repression in the rural Northern Transvaal. The arrest in 1976 of S'bu Ndebele and his underground ANC unit members, George Mashamba, Joyce Mashamba and Percy Tshabalala at the University of the North impacted negatively on the underground work in which they were engaged. The fact that the state's allegations against Ndebele and his co-accused mentioned widely separated localities such as Turfloop, Swaziland, Madadeni (KwaZulu), the University of Zululand, Tzaneen and other places demonstrated the scope of the underground struggle not only in the rural Northern Transvaal but throughout South Africa.¹⁵⁸ Ndebele's unit and its contacts in the region such as Obed Tshukudu, Patrick Kabelo Mthobi, Isaiah Ndambi, Maxwell James Shivundlane, Stanley Keith Makwakwa, to name a few, sent shivers down the South African government's spine and placed it under the international political spotlight. The government was aware that draconian steps in curbing countrywide unrest and intermittent MK activities were affecting her image very negatively. Equally, the ANC/MK was also aware that

¹⁵⁷ 'Tambo Failed – Kruger', *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 July 1976.

¹⁵⁸ These people were named in *The Star*, 'Graduate Tells of ANC Bid', 1 December 1976.

whoever gained the allegiance of the people was going to win the national political liberation struggle. For its part, the ANC/MK argued that, “It [was] naïve to believe that the oppressed and the beleaguered people [could] not temporarily, even in large numbers, be won over by fear, terror, lies, indoctrination and provocation to treat liberators as enemies.”¹⁵⁹ The obligations entrusted to the RC and its sub-committees were geared towards the containment of this concern.

Under these conditions of repression and confusion the cord that held the underground political struggles together was temporarily snapped or weakened; this state repression in turn partly affected the speedy deployment of trained MK cadres inside the country. The establishment of effective lines of communication with those political activists who managed to evade arrest and concealed themselves inside the country was also put in abeyance. This state of affairs was compounded by the lack of friendly borders around South Africa even though some of the host countries had been liberated. The newly independent countries of Southern Africa were still struggling to find their feet in the 1970s. The fact that some of those countries, particularly Botswana and Swaziland, were somewhat dependent on South Africa for their economic survival compromised their willingness to contribute towards the emancipation of the majority of South Africans. The outbreak of civil wars such as those in Angola and Mozambique also negatively affected the plans by the MK leadership to make use of these countries as springboards for forays into South Africa. Hence the sanctuary given to the liberation movements was limited by the stringent conditions set by these host countries.

¹⁵⁹ African National Congress, *Forward to Freedom, Strategy, Tactics and Programmes of the African National Congress of South Africa*, (Tanzania, Morogoro, 1971), p. 9.

The disarray, however, never affected the people's expectations of the ANC/MK and their ability to live up to these. Sceptics about the armed propaganda liberation struggle, such as Dale McKinley, have commented that the ANC's armed campaign and the accompanying symbolic appeal of MK heroism erected a mere façade of legends concerning the armed struggle. The expectation was prevalent that MK would be able both to protect the people as well as to act as insurance for the fundamental transformation of South Africa, Dale McKinley asserted.¹⁶⁰ In his conjectures, McKinley seems to forget that people joined the liberation struggle not because they found dialectical materialism appealing to them but because the ANC/MK was broadly perceived in South Africa to constitute the only exiled pressure group capable of waging armed propaganda war against the South African government.¹⁶¹ It was this confidence of the oppressed people of South Africa that the ANC desperately wanted to win in pursuing the liberation crusade. For its part the government wanted to pulverise that image and those expectations that served as a link between the ANC and the oppressed people.

The RC's internal role cut out?

The steps being taken by the RC in exile to revive suppressed political aspirations and to establish links with 'old comrades' who had either been released from detention or whose banning orders were about to expire were mostly complemented inside the country, albeit largely indirectly, by efforts to foster political awareness spearheaded by adherents of the BCM. The level of political maturity was very high, since no ideological

¹⁶⁰ Dale T. McKinley, *The ANC and the Liberation Struggle: A Critical Political Biography*, (London, Pluto, 1997), p. 106.

¹⁶¹ 'South Africa: ANC Vibrations', *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 22, No. 3, January 28, 1981, p. 22

confusion existed between the BCM-orientated organisations and those that subscribed to the policies of the ANC, which in turn led Karis and Gerhardt to conclude that, “Some regarded ideological fine points as a secondary consideration; others did not. Members seeking guidance on how to leave the country safely and what to do after leaving regularly approached SASO and BPC leaders.”¹⁶² It was a very complex process even to begin to unmask the truth concerning who was really a member of the BPC, SASO or the ANC. How would any SASO or BPC leader know about escape routes to exile when these organisations were not encouraging people to skip the country for the purposes of educational and military training? The fact that certain members of these organisations knew something about the ANC was indicative of the ANC’s renewed efforts at infiltration of the other political organisations that were operating, at least officially. It also indicated the extent to which the ANC took conscious decisions to recruit people for the eventual dislodging of the South African government, disregarding their ideological affiliations.

The exclusivity of the BPC and SASO was somewhat diluted by the fact that recruited ANC members in their ranks, such as Nkosasana Zuma, were instructed by the ANC to recruit people and influence debates and discussions within the Black Consciousness world.¹⁶³ Thabo Mbeki recruited Nkosazana Zuma on her visit to Swaziland in 1975. However, as mentioned earlier, these immediate spin-offs were short-lived. The BPC, which was formed at the instigation of SASO in 1972 and banned in October 1977, never developed into a mass-based community

¹⁶² T. Karis and G. Gerhardt, *From Protest to Challenge, Op. Cit.*, p. 149.

¹⁶³ Howard Barrell, *Conscripts of their Age, Op. Cit.*, p. 108.

organisation.¹⁶⁴ The art of defeating the apartheid government's techniques of bannings was, however, perfected. The banning of SASO spawned the Azanian Student Congress (AZASCO) in 1979, which was heavily influenced by the underground ANC and in 1981 adopted the Freedom Charter, later changing its name to the South African National Student Congress (SANSCO) in 1986.¹⁶⁵ The focus from then onward was to build community-based organisations by means of overtly sectarian organisations such as COSAS. The idea was to politicise all sectors of the community, even though the same people doubled in their obligations as students and community leaders thereafter.

The first inaugural conference of COSAS on 31 May 1979 at Wilgerspruit, Johannesburg, ensured that the political fortunes of the BCM began to decline. Ephraim Mogale, the first COSAS National President, managed to secure delegates from the rural Northern Transvaal as well as the Eastern Transvaal to attend. Mogale had been previously requested to make arrangements for people to attend the conference, among whom were keynote speakers Helen Khuzwayo and Nthato Motlana. Mogale had initially been attracted to the ANC's policies and principles after the Soweto uprisings. He was conscientised in an unusual way, in the sense that while he was attending the political trials of the 1976 student leaders he became politically conscious.¹⁶⁶ He first came into contact with the ANC in 1979 in Orlando East, when he attended the memorial service for the slain MK cadre, Solomon Mahlangu.¹⁶⁷ During

¹⁶⁴ Vincent Maphai, 'The Role of the Black Consciousness in the Liberation Struggle', Cited in Ian Liebenberg, *et al.*, *The Long March: The Story of the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa*, (Pretoria, HAUM, 1994) p. 126.

¹⁶⁵ *State Strategy: Divide and Rule, Repression and Reform, October Elections A Recipe for Conflict?* NUSAS, SRC University of the Witwatersrand, Central Print Unit, 1988, p 12.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Ephraim Mogale, by the author, Bronkhorspruit, Gauteng Province, 26 & 27 April 2003.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 26 & 27 April 2003.

this service Mogale consulted with Joe Qqabi and they took the decision that the need existed for a national student body which would also champion the rights of the general populace.

The formation of COSAS was not necessitated by the vacuum created by the banning and imprisonment of student leaders such as those in the Soweto Student Representative Council (SSRC); it was owing to the reason outlined above. As a matter of fact, the SSRC was supplanted by the Soweto Student League, which in turn was short-lived because of the formation of COSAS as a national student umbrella body.¹⁶⁸ In the late 1970s high-profile student leaders in SASO and of SRCs at various tertiary institutions began inviting Mogale to address their meetings. This strategy was adopted at the University of the North where students such as, *inter alia*, Thabo Makunyane and Ngoako Ramatlhodi in particular, and later, Collins Chabane, Matthews Phosa, Jerome Joseph Maake, and Joe Phaahla (who was then studying at Wentworth Medical School in Durban), would request Mogale to address mass student meetings at tertiary institutions. Chabane, Maake, and Ramatlhodi and many others in various communities in the region subsequently left the country for military and political training in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Their colleagues in the underground stayed inside the country and were able to link up with their exiled compatriots by various means. This point will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

In these student mass meetings at tertiary institutions Ephraim Mogale meticulously articulated the views of the underground ANC because those student leaders in attendance did not feel free to express their own

¹⁶⁸ 'A Weekly Digest of African Affairs', *Africa News*, Monday, February 6, 1978, Vol. X, No. 5, p. 9.

views for fear of reprisals.¹⁶⁹ Mogale was absorbed into the underground operations of the ANC in which he had a specific role to play. He, for instance, was tasked in 1979 to distribute pamphlets denouncing the independence of the homeland of Venda, as well as pamphlets supporting bus boycotts in Seshego and supporting resistance to the enforced removals of the Batlokwa community in Botlokwa. Outside the confines of tertiary institutions Mogale's efforts also produced dividends, as for example, in 1980 when about 100 University of the North students marched through Mankweng Township (Turfloop) remonstrating against the removal of Makgato (Botlokwa) tribesmen.¹⁷⁰ The Makgato community under Chief Machaka, in Botlokwa, was supposed to relocate to Kromhoek, 100km away, in 1979 but resisted the government's move.¹⁷¹

The attempts by Mogale and his unit in the rural Northern Transvaal did not go unnoticed by MK, particularly regarding the attempted forced removals of the Botlokwa community outside Polokwane. The ANC/MK thus issued a statement in which they rejected the South African government's explanation of the Batlokwa removals as offered by the deputy secretary of the Department of Plural Relations, Mr. Serfontein on 15 November 1978. The ANC/MK argued that the removal of the Batlokwa was aimed at creating a so-called "white corridor" to the north of the country, for the security forces. The MK attributed this removal to the fact that "the Northern Transvaal [had] witnessed a number of armed clashes between the white racists and units of Umkhonto we Sizwe and

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Ephraim Mogale, by the author, Bronkhorstpruit, Gauteng Province, 26 & 27 April 2003.

¹⁷⁰ A NUSAS National Campaign pamphlet, South African History Archives (SAHA), AL 2457, University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers Library.

¹⁷¹ *The Star*, February 6 1982.

the racist minority regime [was] afraid that armed struggle in the region [was] spreading like wild fire.”¹⁷² When the government openly expressed the desire to create this “white corridor”, it was very obvious to MK that other strategies in using the same route were needed to avoid frontal confrontations with the South African soldiers.¹⁷³ The strategies and tactics involved were not aberrations but standard practices in guerrilla warfare. Subsequent chapters further explore these strategies that were employed by MK yet never detected until the suspension of the armed struggle in 1990.¹⁷⁴ The reliance of the security forces on the statistics provided by farmers in the region might have contributed to the heightened state of vigilance in the region that culminated in the desire to create such a “white corridor” for the security forces. Alarmists such as Koeks Terblanche, chairperson of the Soutpansberg branch of the National Farmer’s Union of the Northern Transvaal, misguidedly attributed the fact that whites no longer lived on 58% of the farms in the region to increased guerrilla threats in the region.¹⁷⁵

In one of his escapades Ephraim Mogale traveled to Venda with Thabo Makunyane on an underground political task to distribute pamphlets in the Sibasa and Makwerela areas, protesting against the South African government’s homeland policies and the tentacles of the latter in the form of the Venda homeland. While on this mission, Makunyane was arrested by the security police after a security slip-up and betrayal in which Mogale and Nwedamutswu “Mumsy” Mamabolo Phillip, an underground

¹⁷² *Ibid.* p. 9.

¹⁷³ Interview with Refiloe Mudimu, by the author, Navy Headquarters, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 21 January 2005, puts this observation in context particularly with respect to the use of the same route in the 1980s by MK couriers from Zimbabwe.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Refiloe Mudimu, by the author, South African Navy Headquarters, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 21 January 2005.

¹⁷⁵ ‘South Africa: Nationalist Re-Alignment?’, *Africa Confidential*, December 1, 1978, p. 2.

MK contact person in Venda, escaped separately. Nwedamutswu was driving a getaway car and, in the confusion that ensued after the arrest of Makunyane, he ran away and left behind Mogale who had not yet been apprehended at the time. Mogale made an attempt to return to the University of the North, where Makunyane had been based before his arrest, to quickly retrieve incriminating evidence he feared would implicate the latter. On his way back Mogale picked up Thupana in Botlokwa. Thupana was a teacher and also a contact in the underground political struggle, based in Botlokwa, the community threatened with removals. However, the police had already raided Makunyane's room (at the University of the North) and found, amongst other items, a letter that Mogale had written to Makunyane outlining some of their underground operations. Mogale described this as "a very compromising letter."¹⁷⁶ At the same time a commemoration was being held at the University of the North to mark the second anniversary of the banning of perceived enemies of the government on 19 October 1977. Realising that Makunyane's room had been raided and documents seized, Mogale attended and addressed the audience during the commemoration service held on 19 October 1979. Mogale was arrested on 10 November 1979 in Warmbaths after his narrow escape, for alleged complicity in underground MK operations. He and Makunyane were sentenced to eight years each. Their sentence was reduced to five years on appeal when they were already serving time on Robben Island. Nwedamutswu escaped into exile, where he remained until the unbanning of the ANC in 1990.¹⁷⁷ Before this period Makunyane had made contact with Chris Hani in Lesotho and had thus been able to disseminate whatever information he

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Ephraim Mogale, by the author, Bronkhorspruit, Gauteng Province, 26 & 27 April 2003.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Nwedamutswu "Mumsy" Mamabolo Phillip, by the author, SADET Oral History Archives Head Office, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 23 March 2005.

had gained to his cells at the University of the North.¹⁷⁸ After the arrest of Mogale, the South African government made a determined attempt to smash COSAS, arresting almost all its leadership on suspicion of contacts with the banned ANC, as allegedly proven in Mogale's case. Mogale disputed this perception and argued that they had only been convicted of the possession of prohibited ANC literature.¹⁷⁹

The decline of the BCM-inclined entities conversely gave rise to the so-called Charterist-orientated organisations: those which aligned themselves with the Freedom Charter of the ANC and its fraternal structures. The Charterists' revival was largely attributable to the formation of COSAS because of its embracing of the Freedom Charter, the policy document of the ANC. The birth of COSAS helped to return the ANC to the driving seat of South African resistance politics.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, the organisations who were ideologically BCM-inclined also found a political home when the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) was formed in 1978. However, AZAPO remained on the fringes of resistance politics and is now moribund. The establishment of COSAS later spawned a number of community-based youth organisations such as the Soweto Youth Congress (SOYCO), founded in July 1983 following the COSAS annual congress that was held in Cape Town. Here a resolution had been adopted to create community-based organisations that would cater for the political aspirations of the youth who had been excluded from the membership of COSAS. The formation of COSAS and the subsequent establishment of youth congresses marked

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Ephraim Mogale, by the author, Bronkhorspruit, Gauteng Province, 26 & 27 April 2003.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 26 & 27 April 2003.

¹⁸⁰ Khehla Shubane *et al.*, 'Soweto' in T. Lodge and B. Nasson (eds.), *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*, *South Africa Update Series*, (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1991) p. 262.

the beginning of the revival of ANC-aligned organisations and the establishment of sustained contacts with the ANC in exile by those who had stayed behind in the country.¹⁸¹ Those who remained served as a link with those recruits who eventually left the country. The ANC apparently encouraged the formation of organisations inside the country, stating:

...Consequently, we welcome the formation of any organisation whose aim is to oppose oppression and racism, even if that opposition is in the first instance confined to the specific issues such as high rents, low wages, inferior education, land hunger, the pass laws, the absence of freedom of worship, and the right to conscientious objection.¹⁸²

Tambo's statement signalled a new vision in the ANC. It was important, therefore, for the MK to realise that revolutionary guerrilla warfare comprised mainly a political conflict supported by unorthodox military and political methods. As Sarkesian advises, revolutionary guerrilla warfare cannot succeed unless it is based on the social grievances of a particular society.¹⁸³ The formation of ANC-aligned organisations at the community levels was informed by this understanding that the struggle for liberation could not be predicated on policies and principles only. For it to be effective, it needed to be imbued with community-based issues. There was no emphasis on the military at the expense of the involvement and politicisation of the masses. In fact, "[when] talking about revolutionary armed struggle, the ANC is careful to point out that it is talking about political struggle which includes the use of force."¹⁸⁴ The use of force was minimal, as various historical sources will demonstrate.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Mogale Ephraim, by the author, Bronkhorspruit, Gauteng Province, 26 & 27 April 2003.

¹⁸² 'An Interview with Oliver Tambo by Africa Report Interviewer', *Africa Report*, September-October 1981, p. 21.

¹⁸³ Sam C. Sarkesian, *Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare*, (Chicago, Precedent Pub., 1975), p. 375.

¹⁸⁴ Robert M. Price and Carl G. Rosberg, 'The Apartheid Regime, Political Power and Racial Discrimination', *Institute of International Affairs Studies*, (Berkeley, University of California, 1980), p. 96.

When asked about the defensive nature of MK Ronnie Kasrils' response was:

There are revolutionary movements, which at their foundation addressed the question of seizing state power. They immediately recognised and analysed the use of state power and the need to develop a force to seize state power. With us that was not the ethos. So the blows of Umkhonto in the early period were directed at reinforcing mass struggle and securing, rather than at seizing power...¹⁸⁵

The tempo of political consciousness was kept alive under difficult conditions by the events taking place at the University of the North. Students, lecturers and members of the administrative staff all played a pivotal role after the 1970s as a rallying point for opponents of the status quo. Plagued by student uprisings from its inception in 1969, the University of the North became a conduit for the political activities that were being carried out in the rural Northern Transvaal.

The University of the North was situated in the now-defunct homeland of Lebowa. The point is made in order to demonstrate that Lebowa had no jurisdiction over the university and what was happening in it. Hence the attitude of Lebowa as a government will not be described. It is also argued that Gazankulu, Lebowa, KaNgwane and Venda homelands were sideshows and that what was occurring inside those territories was peripheral and is therefore unimportant to the study. Most important, however, are MK activities at institutions that were based in these territories, which were referred to in 1969 by the then Deputy Minister of

¹⁸⁵ Ronnie Kasrils, *The Role of Umkhonto we Sizwe, Work in Progress*, 8 August 1990, p. 8.

Bantu Affairs in the South Africa government as “superfluous appendages.”¹⁸⁶

Neighbouring boarding schools (neighbouring to the University of the North) in the region were not spared of the resurgence of underground political work. Protests by learners at boarding schools were mainly attributable to the fact that these schools were in the neighborhood of the University of the North, where students were, relatively speaking, highly involved in politics. They were boarding schools that catered for students from all over the country. It is in this context that this study may appear to focus on the University of the North at the expense of others. Other institutions of higher learning covered by this study such as the (then) Mgwenya Teachers Training College in the KaNgwane homeland (Eastern Transvaal) also experienced a number of students’ protests and property damage in excess of R50 000 at a particular point but these pale into insignificance when compared to the culture of resistance at the University of the North.¹⁸⁷

The Internal Domino Effect

The bannings on Wednesday October 19, 1977 (alias Black Wednesday), coupled with the death in detention of BCM leader Steve Biko, widespread detentions and the escape into exile of thousands of people heralded the general demise of community leadership and in particular

¹⁸⁶ International Defence and Aid Fund, *This is Apartheid: A Pictorial Introduction*, (London: IDAF, 1978), p. 18.

¹⁸⁷ Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash. The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (London, Zed Press, 1979), p. 188.

that of the BCM.¹⁸⁸ Many people who had been politically active in the rural Northern Transvaal were either in prison, on the run or in exile. Nonetheless, the smouldering ashes of liberation were not completely extinguished, as had been the intention of the government when it arrested and banned most political organisations and many individuals. The South African government failed to realise the dismal truth that it could arrest, imprison and exile its opponents but it could not put an end to the desire to be free. This unending desire led to many manifestations of resistance to the government's determination to suppress opposition to its racial policies.

BCM politics laid the foundation for the revival of other political formations. From the ashes of the BCM emerged AZAPO, as already stated. Those adherents of the BCM who were not in detention, prison or exile reconstructed AZAPO and it was launched in April 1978, effectively to replace the BPC. This new entity was soon beset with internal leadership-related problems. The national council of AZAPO expelled Curtis Nkondo from its presidency for an alleged "breach of principles", which resulted in the Azanian Students Organisation (AZASO) severing relations with AZAPO and joining forces with COSAS. Established in November 1979, the AZASO was initially ideologically inclined towards AZAPO.¹⁸⁹ The ANC-related Soweto Civic Association (SCA) was formed in September 1979 and from then onwards many townships and rural areas founded their own civic bodies, bent on tackling their own peculiar problems at the local level. The government was consequently faced with a Phoenix-like reaction to its

¹⁸⁸ Harry Mashabela, *People on the Boil, Reflections on Soweto*, (Johannesburg, Skotaville, c1987) p. 105.

¹⁸⁹ For a comprehensive study see Maphai Vincent, *Resistance in South Africa: Azapo and the National Forum, Op. Cit.*, the entire issue.

oppressive racist policies, where the banning of an individual or an organisation would result in the emergence of another, constituting a trend well into the late 1980s. A case in point is the Azanian Students Movement (AZASM), the black consciousness entity which emerged in 1983 after COSAS and AZASO had joined the ranks of the ANC-inclined organisations and there was a need for a Black Consciousness student organisation. The National Forum; also a predominantly black consciousness grouping that emerged in June 1983 was also formed to bring together Black Consciousness organisations into a front. The UDF was formed three months later, as a front to oppose the constitutional reforms that gave rise to the tricameral parliament. In pursuance of this mandate, it brought under one umbrella scores of organisations, including the trade unions. The banning of the UDF in the late 1980s led to the emergence of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM).

Clearly, the South African government was faced with the mammoth task of suppressing the political aspirations of the majority of the citizens of South Africa but was always outmanoeuvred by the very citizens in that mind game who sporadically re-emerged elsewhere as something else.¹⁹⁰ It became increasingly clear to the South African government in the 1980s that banning orders did not represent an effective mechanism for dealing with increasing political conscientisation. This explains why other methods, such as “state of emergency” regulations, were favoured in the 1980s.

The internal domino effect was felt (by the government) when imprisoned political leaders were able to be replaced. There was renewed

¹⁹⁰ See ‘Resistance Spreads to Rural Areas, *City Press*, March 23 1986.

determination on the part of the new generation of political leadership that there should not be a return of political lull accessioned by the swoop on the ANC of the 1960s. This renewed hope and vision was indirectly given a boost (as well) when Martin Mafefo Ramokgadi, a seventy-seven year old veteran, was appointed the ANC's underground chief internal organiser.¹⁹¹ Ramokgadi was able to link up with previous prison mates (from Robben Island) in the rural Northern Transvaal, such as Diale and Nchabeleng, who were relatively younger than him.¹⁹² MK veterans were able to establish links with other younger members of MK and went on to recruit new members for the organisation. A number of political prisoners who had been imprisoned on Robben Island and elsewhere were quietly released in the 1970s, which offered a renewed hope of resistance and mature political underground work in the rural Northern Transvaal, even though there was little publicity about their release, and the communities to which they were banished viewed them with trepidation and distrust. In spite of this, "legal" political formations inside the country such as student movements and BCM-related organisations were able to locate the ex-prisoners and then link them up with clandestine operations that survived the eagle eye of the government. This situation was, however, ephemeral since the fledgling political movements were dealt a severe blow when the nuclei of the underground political work were damaged in the mid 1970s. Nevertheless, the seed of rebellion had been deeply planted in the minds of the majority of the oppressed people, and the 1980s provided the opportunity for new approaches to the liberation struggle.

¹⁹¹ Stephen M. Davis, *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South Africa's Hidden War*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, c1987), p. 28.

¹⁹² Diale, Nchabeleng and Ramokgadi were part of the "Pretoria 12" arrested in a swoop that included Tokyo Sexwale. The three were acquitted in the trial.

Trade unions: conveyor belts for MK?

The formation of black trade unions is not closely related to the topic of this study; however, it is important to underscore the fact that, as it had done in the past, the ANC continued to recruit people for MK from the ranks of the labour movement. It is maintained that “no political organisation could hope to master any support without the cooperation with the (workers) unions.”¹⁹³ The ANC’s history is replete with examples. The recruitment of MK from the ranks of trade unions was not a new development since SACTU had been used in the early 1960s as a conveyor belt for MK recruits.¹⁹⁴ However, SACTU was unable to recruit people of other ethnic origins in factories owing to statutory prohibitions: the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Bill (ICB) of 1954 prohibited the formation of mixed unions. In this context, therefore, racially based unions were formed, one after the other. The TUCSA had catered for white workers’ aspirations well into the late 1960s, when the government’s taking into custody and suppression of trade unionists in factories drove trade unions underground. Their emergence in the early 1970s was highlighted by strikes in cities such as Durban; hence a short discussion of the emergence of the labour unions in the 1970s to the early 1980s is provided. Such a discussion is relevant, as it was during the 1980s in the rural Northern Transvaal that the underground structures of MK encouraged the formation of labour organisations which could wage economic struggles at the factory level. Some of those who were eventually apprehended for MK activities were discovered with bundles of fake bank notes: a clear indication that an element of economic war

¹⁹³ Maphai Vincent, *Resistance in South Africa: Azapo and the National Forum*, Op. Cit., p. 3.

¹⁹⁴ Edward Feit, *Workers Without Weapons: The South African Congress of Trade Unions and the Organization of the African Workers*, (Connecticut, Archon Books, 1975), pp. 162-163.

was present in MK's armed propaganda warfare.¹⁹⁵ In the late 1960s and 1970s SACTU faded into inactivity as a trade union organising for MK, but individual members continued with little success.

The political awakening during the early 1970s is largely attributable to trade unionism, particularly in Durban and surrounding areas.¹⁹⁶ Together with its student constituency the ANC was able to continue to recruit members for underground operations in the 1970s. The recruitment drive was accorded a new lease on life by the independence of Mozambique and Angola in the 1970s, which also "... made violent resistance seem thinkable and feasible for many who had previously endorsed non-violence."¹⁹⁷ The Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1978 was intended to bring together different small trade unions that were operating without a national body. The establishment of the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) in 1980 "symbolised the emergence of new national centres of African trade unionism, unwavering to set their own agenda and priorities for both political and economic action to advance the interests of their worker membership."¹⁹⁸ The interests of the workforce were in the main political and only secondarily economic.

The 1979 Wiehahn Commission Report under Professor Nic Wiehahn to some extent indirectly assisted the realisation of the workers' dreams in the short term. The Commission was given the mandate of examining all the laws that were being administered by Fanie Botha, Minister of Labour. It was appointed in 1977 by the South African government as a

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Tlokwe Maserumule, by the author, GaMatlala, Limpopo Province, 11 July 2002.

¹⁹⁶ See Institute for Industrial Education, *The Durban Strikes, 1973*, (Durban: I.I.E. in association with Ravan Press 1974), the entire issue.

¹⁹⁷ 'After Soweto – Part 11', *Africa News*, June 20, 1977, Vol. V111, No. 24, p. 10.

¹⁹⁸ Sheridan Johns and R. Hunt Davis Jr., *Mandela, Tambo, and the African National Congress. The Struggle Against Apartheid 1948 – 1990: A Documentary Survey*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 190.

result of, amongst other reasons, rapid economic growth that would impact negatively on the manpower situation if discrimination was still going to be pursued. Although no commissioner acted as a representative of black workers' interests, the report suggested in general that the essential workers' rights embodied in the International Labour Organisation's (ILO's) principles should be preserved in labour legislation and should be applicable to all workers without regard to race, colour or sex.¹⁹⁹ The three black members of the Commission were Chris Botes (TUCSA unionist), Ben Mokoatle (an academic in Wiehahn's Institute at the University of South Africa who later became a personnel manager) and Gopie Munsook (TUCSA unionist and member of the South African Indian Council).²⁰⁰ They did not represent any labour aspirations of the black working force. The recommendations were however diluted by the rightwing pressure in government that regarded them as major concessions to the demands of the black labour force.²⁰¹ In the eyes of the black working force the commission remained largely suspect as it was not informed about the aspirations of those whom it purported to represent. The spirit of trade unionism was coterminous with that of the liberation struggle. It was also ideologically inclined towards a particular political philosophy. This explains why some trade union members eventually left the country while others stayed on and faced the government only on the level of ideology. The 1980s vindicate this point sufficiently, as may be observed in the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) on the one hand and an amalgamation of BCM-related trade unions on the other.

¹⁹⁹ D. M. J. Ncube, *The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the Development of Black Trade Unions in South Africa*, (Johannesburg, Skottaville, c1985), p. 117.

²⁰⁰ Stephen Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today, African Workers in Trade Unions, 1970 – 1984*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), p. 170.

²⁰¹ South Africa: Afrikaner in-fighting, *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 20, No. 16, August 1, 1979.

The struggle for freedom was not the exclusive territory of students, trade unions and the university community. In various communities in the rural Northern Transvaal, political activists who could be perceived as “nonentities” in terms of the above cohort groups equally waged the armed underground propaganda liberation struggles. The political struggles that were waged in tandem with various communities were nothing new because the ANC had been engaged in such combat for many years. Individual activists who became prominent in community-related activities were recruited to join the ranks of MK. The most important factor to consider was to champion the rights of the communities and spearhead any move towards the resolution of their problems. In the final analysis, the ANC argued for the integration of its political aspirations with those of the affected communities inside South Africa because “The ANC has often stated that MK combatants trained in camps outside South Africa are only its officer corps. The main combat forces are within South Africa itself.”²⁰² Abdi Said Yusuf concurs with Tebogo Kgobe regarding the locality of the liberation struggle. He states that the ANC and the PAC were involved in a liberation struggle globally and within the country, “[but] both the ANC and the PAC believed the heart of the struggle to be in South Africa.”²⁰³ The involvement of the masses was the ultimate objective of the ANC/MK.

This aim accounts for the genesis of what came to be known as the “people’s war.”²⁰⁴ Tebogo Kgobe advances the view that the people’s war comprises armed resistance by the people themselves, organised in

²⁰² Tebogo Kgobe, ‘Is South Africa Suited for Guerrilla Warfare?’ *The African Communist*, Number 117, Second Quarter, 1989, p. 28.

²⁰³ Abdi Said Yusuf, ‘1942-, Racial Belief Systems of Nationalist Movements: A Case Study of Angola and South Africa’, University of Denver, *PhD Thesis*, 1976, p. 156.

²⁰⁴ See the entire issue of *Sechaba*, ‘African National Congress 1976 – 1986, Building People’s Power’, London: ANC, 1986?

different ways by the inhabitants of villages, apart from the guerrilla forces but complementary to their actions. The same sentiments inherent in this interpretation of the “people’s war” were recognised by leading defenders of the apartheid system such as special security police officer Gideon Nieuwoudt of CCB infamy.²⁰⁵ Testifying before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) amnesty committee he explained that the ANC’s 1980 Vietnam visit culminated in the initiation of a people’s war in which the masses were mobilised and armed.²⁰⁶ The masses of the oppressed population in factories were strongly encouraged to become involved in their own struggles.

It is essential to explain briefly how the term “struggle” was conceived in the ranks of MK. It must be detached from its militaristic subtext and be left with its political connotations, which implied two results in practical situations: a) MK recruits who were deployed inside the country were ordered to contribute towards the building of the ANC underground capacity there, and b) those that were entrusted with military-specific tasks were instructed to engage in armed propaganda warfare.²⁰⁷ These acts of propaganda were specific to a particular era – the period from the late 1979 to the end of 1982. These tasks could not be launched without the assistance of the communities. It is in this context that the concept of the involvement of the masses in the “struggle” should be analysed and understood. It was incumbent on MK cadres to infiltrate and complement community actions against the state if MK were to change its image of having been “... long rendered virtually impotent by bureaucratic

²⁰⁵ TRC Amnesty Commission, 25 September 1997, Case Number 3820/96, Port Elizabeth.

²⁰⁶ Janet Cherry, ‘No Easy Road to the Truth: The TRC in the Eastern Cape’, Paper presented at the Conference entitled The TRC: Commissioning the Past, 11 – 14 June 1993, University of the Witwatersrand, p. 7.

²⁰⁷ Rocky Williams, ‘The Other Armies: Writing the History of MK’, Cited in *The Long March: The Story of the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa* by Ian Liebenberg, *et al*, p. 28.

communist leadership...”²⁰⁸ To shed this burden of its apparent extinction MK needed to become actively involved in community issues, which would not be achieved by blazing guns on every street corner but by committed people directing and defending communities affected by problems of neglect and oppression. “The failure or success of a guerrilla movement is ultimately determined by its acceptance or rejection by the local population. It is thus essential that inhabitants of the region see fit to support the guerrilla cause”, Colonel de Vries and Lieutenant McCaig caution.²⁰⁹

Consequently, acts of armed propaganda struggle were in line with the maxim that guerrilla outfits operating underground were in danger of extinction if they did not popularise themselves. The armed propaganda struggle of MK was intended to rebuild the ANC’s political wing by doing so.²¹⁰ The bombings of police stations, railway lines and other government institutions were influenced by this aphorism. MK relied upon plenty of international experience in its armed propaganda struggle against the South African government. These valuable experiences were much appreciated in the ranks of MK, but it was constantly pointed out that “they [could] not be mechanically applied to our situations.”²¹¹ Each and every sector clandestinely organised by the ANC had its own task to perform. The working community was obliged to organise itself and thereby defend the gains achieved on the factory floors. It was expected to politicise and replenish the incarcerated MK cadres who had ended up

²⁰⁸ Correspondent (London), *Sunday Times*, ‘Eight expelled Men Plan to Put New life into ANC’, *Sunday Times*, 4 January 1976.

²⁰⁹ Col R de Vries and Lt G I McCaig, *Mobile Warfare in Southern Africa, ISSUP Strategic Review*, University of Pretoria, August 1987, p. 18.

²¹⁰ Tom Lodge, ‘The African National Congress: Kabwe and After’, *International Affairs Bulletin*, Vol. 10, No.2, 1986, p. 5.

²¹¹ Mafosi Shombela, ‘Our Armed Offensive, Military Strategy in South Africa’, *Sechaba*, March 1986, p. 13.

in the hands of the security police. It was impossible therefore for the ANC to rely on its own expertise and disregard the international experience of guerrilla warfare struggles waged elsewhere. This self-introspection led to the Vietnam visit.

The Vietnam Visit

In any liberation struggle where armed forces contest for political territory, it is necessary that the contestants return to the drawing board from time to time. The intention is to replenish worn-out ideas, hone and perfect fresh strategies and tactics that are necessary and relevant to the successful prosecution of the liberation struggle. The ANC was no exception to this need for self-introspection. Its tradition of non-violence and prohibitions on the indiscriminate injury of innocent civilians led people to various conclusions about its efficacy in sustaining military resistance in South Africa. John Brewer, for instance, concluded that the ANC's commitment to political mobilisation and non-violence had hindered it in the past from embarking on military resistance.²¹² When the ANC leadership realised the need for an alteration in strategy and tactics it dispatched a high-profile delegation to Vietnam in 1978 to study the journey that the Vietcong guerrillas had taken in their struggle against France and the United States of America (USA). This high-powered delegation was decided upon after the years of low-key political activities that had characterised the early 1970s. It was, "however, after the 1976

²¹² John D. Brewer, *Black Strategies for Change in a Constrained Society*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

youth uprising in Soweto, [that] the ANC and MK were reactivated.”²¹³
The Vietnam visit therefore took place at a crucial time.

“Why the sudden need for MK reactivation?” one may ask. The majority of the obstacles that had hindered MK all these years in waging the armed propaganda struggle against the South African government still loomed large. A case in point is to be noted in the following factors: South Africa still possessed the most highly developed network of communication systems in Africa – roads, railways and airstrips – covering almost the entire surface area of the country; the lack of vast expanses of unoccupied territories or forests where surplus equipment dumps, training camps and rest areas could be established; the existence of a highly developed industrialised economy, supported to the hilt by Western imperialism and equally highly developed and well-equipped armed forces supported by an armed and militaristic white civilian population of over three million. Consequently, the ANC leadership took conscious decisions to sustain the momentum generated by the outbreak of the 1976 student revolts and the general atmosphere of Uhuru (freedom) by launching an intensified armed propaganda warfare campaign which would influence other initiatives that were also being revived.

As stated, the motive of the Vietnam delegation was primarily to study the strategies and tactics that the Vietcong military had used in its struggle against the French and United States forces. The focus was placed on the linkages of the Vietcong with the masses, the relationship

²¹³ W. J., Breytenbach, *The ANC: Future Prognosis*, (Stellenbosch, Institute for Future Research, 1989), p. 6.

between the armed struggle and the political struggle, as well as on how the people were engaged in that struggle.²¹⁴ It was hoped that the trip to Vietnam would assist in the invigoration of the underground structures of the MK that were in existence, but not as militarily and politically effective as initially envisaged. After the 1978 Vietnam trip the emphasis had fallen on the strategy of armed propaganda and resuscitating the underground political work. All these internal manoeuvres with respect to political consciousness notwithstanding, there was a need for mass mobilisation so as to assist the MK cadres to operate effectively within the politicised communities on a sustainable basis. The successful execution of missions by the MK depended on the involvement of the masses in providing the cadres with safe houses, information on the movements of security forces, food, identification of targets and any other logistical and essential support. It is this scenario that saw the armed revolutionary propaganda strategy becoming the hub of the liberation struggle. This role was particularly heightened after 1976 when many political refugees such as students, religious people and “ordinary” members of the South African communities left the country for educational and military training. This is not to imply that political mobilisation had received less attention in the past. The new wave merely imparted additional zeal.

The Vietnam trip proved to be a catalyst for MK’s armed propaganda campaign. Oliver Tambo was at the helm of the ANC delegation, which remained in Vietnam for twenty-one days. On its return, the deputation submitted a report for discussion in a joint workshop of the National

²¹⁴ For details on the Vietcong activities see Giap, ‘To Arm the Revolutionary Masses, To Build the People’s Army’, pp 298 – 307 in Ben Turok’s *Revolutionary Thought in the 20th Century*, (London, Zed Press, July 1980).

Executive Committee (NEC) and the RC in Angola, which ran between 27 December 1978 and 1 January 1979.²¹⁵ Major resolutions were adopted, amongst which were the following: a) the ANC was to mark January 8 of every year with an official statement on the history and relevance of the organisation with regard to the South African liberation struggle, b) certain days of common historical importance in South Africa would be commemorated, c) there was to be a heightened annual focus on ANC activities, and d) attention was to be paid to every sector of South African society. In pursuance of these resolutions the ANC declared 1979 the Year of the Spear in acknowledgment of the gallant battle of the Zulu army at the Battle of Isandlwana and of the cadres of MK who were engaging the South African government in reconstructed guerrilla warfare. The process of political awakening and mobilisation inside South Africa was catered for by the January 8 Statement and the declaration of special years by the ANC.

Moses Mabhida and Joe Slovo were given the responsibility of thrashing out the lessons of the Vietnam visit. A Politico-Military Strategy Commission set up the Luanda Meeting in Angola; its members comprised OR Tambo, Thabo Mbeki, Joe Modise and Joe Gqabi. This Commission reported its deliberations on a number of issues in August 1979. Among some of the vexing questions addressed was whether the commission felt that the armed struggle would assist in engendering a nation-wide mass insurrection or whether a long-drawn-out people's war was the better option. The commission settled for the latter, but did not

²¹⁵ Document 114. Report of the Political-Military Strategy Commission (the "Green Book") to the ANC National Executive Committee, Parts One and Two with two annexures, August 1979 in Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge, Op. Cit.* p.720.

rule out the possibility of a nation-wide insurrection that would be predicated on political developments inside the country.²¹⁶

The incidental benefits of this visit, such as characterising the Vietnam struggle as rural or urban, were deliberately avoided because of the limited time that the commission had at its disposal. This study will expatiate on the rural versus urban location of the liberation struggle. The commission pledged to undertake a study tour of Vietnam which would in fact encompass the study of the Vietnam War in its totality, and that the envisaged tour would cover the issue of migrant labour and the extent to which these migrants relied on subsistence farming undertaken by their immediate families for survival.²¹⁷ It was important for the ANC/MK to study this phenomenon: the backbone of many a guerrilla movement. In South Africa, Tom Lodge observes, migrants and peasants were tightly controlled as the government depended on them for its own survival.²¹⁸ Lodge's remark notwithstanding, the South African struggle was not entirely dependent on any one individual or strategy. Both sets of participants on either side of the combat line (rural and urban, in this context) knew that it was incumbent on them to carry the struggle forward under any conditions. The peasantry was limited in power and infrastructure, while the urban cadres were slowed down by repression in the city. Consequently it was, from the onset, thought that the armed struggle should be spread between the cities and the countryside where the masses could be armed and the enemy's resources stretched. In the light of all these teething problems and lessons learnt from the Vietnam visit that plagued the liberation movement in the 1970s, Joe Slovo was

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 724 -729.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 725.

²¹⁸ Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945, Op. Cit.*, p. 296.

singled out to shoulder the responsibility for organising an effective, steady build-up of arms caches and an embryonic guerrilla network inside South Africa in the 1970s that would eventually be relied upon in the 1980s.²¹⁹

A few points need to be accentuated in relation to mass participation in the liberation struggle. The nature of the struggle for liberation and the theory of armed guerrilla warfare negated the involvement of the masses in the day-to-day execution of the struggle in the strictest sense of the word. Some far reaching decisions remained the preserve of the leadership and those that were assigned to carry them out. Mass involvement carried its own seed of self-destruction if applied strictly as implied. It is true that: “the revolution is the work of millions of people, of the popular masses who stand up to overthrow the ruling classes, the classes commanding a colossal machinery of violence together with other material and spiritual means.”²²⁰ Equally true is the fact that these “millions of people” are not always kept abreast of developments as they continually unfold in the liberation struggle, which is in line with the theory of guerrilla warfare that operates on a need-to-know basis. The question of how these “millions of people” participate in the revolution is extremely important. The extent to which they are engaged in the execution of the revolution is left to a few. This suggests therefore that even if popular revolutionary consciousness exists in a liberation struggle, military decisions and missions are not communicated to the masses. Contemporary South African history is sated with examples that substantiate this point. A few white soldiers and security personnel who

²¹⁹ South Africa: ANC Vibrations, *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 22, No.3, January 28, 1981, p. XX.

²²⁰ Le Duan, ‘The Vietnamese Revolution: Fundamental Problems, Essential Tasks’, *Marxism Today*, July 1970, p. 200.

“confessed” their roles in sustaining apartheid during the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) hearings argued that they were merely carrying out the orders of their military and political masters: they were not involved in the crafting of policy formulations and adoptions. As soldiers they were expected to carry out orders mechanically without moral scruples. The same principle can be attributed to MK cadres and other extra-parliamentary forces of the time on the other side.²²¹ Hence sensitive information on military matters, for example, was mainly imparted to a few people for fear of torture by the security forces, and organise, conscientise and politicise the leaders of the people on a small scale rather than the masses of the oppressed people. This was not supposed to represent the norm but was an act taken in terms of a practical situation. The same reasoning nullifies the arguments advanced by Howard Barrell that MK was not effective because of:

... the absence of underground structures able to integrate and deploy those infiltrated; over what political role those infiltrated could play, over the poor quality of the political briefings they received before infiltration; and over whether they were merely ‘cannon fodders.’²²²

Reception committees for deployed MK cadres, detailed plans of mission inside the country and hence assertions about “cannon fodders [sic]” are luxuries that clearly have no place in armed propaganda warfare. An infiltrated reception committee, for example, would scuttle the entire mission as those cadres that would have been received would reveal detailed information if they had been sufficiently and qualitatively briefed before they left their military or political masters in exile. Certain MK cadres were deployed inside the country specifically to service

²²¹ The distinction is that liberation movements were motivated by the desire to attain freedom for all citizens while the other side (SADF) was prepared to die for the perpetuation of the system of apartheid

²²² Howard Barrell, *Conscripts for their Age, Op. Cit*, p. 389.

various units on various missions as their core responsibility. These service units were trained in the art of secret communications, like communicating with somebody whom one does not know. Just passing a particular spot at a particular time or wearing certain clothes which would communicate a message to whomever was supposed to see them comprised one of these techniques.

Contrary to popular misconceptions MK ran various units under its umbrella that carried different responsibilities: for example, the Mass Mobilisation Unit, Propaganda Unit, Intelligence Unit, Recruiting Unit, Reception Unit, Workers Unit, and Reconnaissance Unit.²²³ The Reception Unit was responsible for the provision of accommodation for deployed MK cadres, the gathering of information in relation to their deployment and acquainting them with their surroundings as well as assisting with the “maneuverability and camouflage” of the resources at their disposal.²²⁴

Conclusion

The spirit of optimism that was generated by epochal political events such as the 1973 Durban strikes, the liberation of some Southern African countries from the yoke of colonialism, and the 16 June 1976 students uprisings in Soweto and their spill over into other areas was dealt a severe blow when the South African government used draconian measures to quell all anti state activism. Political activists’ hopes were dashed when the South African government clamped down on their

²²³ See *The Creation of the Underground Units* pamphlets, Jack Simons Collection, Umkhonto we Sizwe Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, pp. 3 – 4.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

nascent political aspirations. The banning and imprisonment of people after the Black Wednesday (19 October 1977) shattered the hopes of ever challenging the government meaningfully with bare hands and stones. Youths left the country in their droves to join liberation movements, particularly the ANC in exile for military and political training. Members of the work force also took the advantage that they were legally allowed to operate on work floor so they organised workers on behalf of the ANC. This was a culture that was adopted in the early 1960s by SACTU in which workers were recruited to swell the ranks of MK. In exile, at the same time, the ANC was also beginning to reorganise itself. Various internal structures of the organisation were reactivating themselves and their roles were being more integrated and streamlined. The role of the RC in exile, in reorganising itself to deal effectively with the influx of political refugees from South Africa, has been examined. The RC's efforts at reviving internal organisations inside the country were beginning to take shape.

The political trials underway in the 1970s, of the leadership of the BCM, BPC, SSRC and COSAS later, towards the turn of the decade, rejuvenated the resolve of those who had managed to leave the country and join the exiled political organisations. During 1977 alone, for example, ninety-five trials were held under the security laws, a manifestation both of the intensification of the struggle and of blunders made by the liberation movement. The charges concerned ranged from recruiting people for military training (as in the case of S'bu Ndebele and his University of the North connections) to the creation of cells, smuggling arms and explosives or engaging in sabotage or guerrilla

activities for the purposes of armed propaganda.²²⁵ Some of those who were jailed and those who left for exile were relatively young and “politically unconnected.” In the nature of the underground liberation struggle activities were carried out circumspectly and surreptitiously; this may have created impressions of political unconnectedness.

The discovery of S’bu Ndebele’s underground unit at the University of the North came too late to curb the supposed “damage” that underground political activism was doing to the psyche of most people who came into contact with the unit. The fact that its members refused to plead guilty to “two charges of taking part in terrorist activities” was an indication of their resolve to wage the struggle against all odds.²²⁶ Their arrest and that of many others countrywide created a political mood that was desperately needed by MK in exile. As a consequence, the activists who were not university-based were roped into the underground world of the struggle. Tactically, most of these activists left for exile to join the liberation movements.

The present chapter advanced arguments concerning the genesis of the regional struggle as evidenced by the concentration of MK recruits at the University of the North, and how the struggle ballooned into exile. Those recruited at the University of the North, mostly under the tutelage of BCM adherents, loom large in the story of the 1980s, as we shall see. MK recruits were expected to be multifaceted in terms of their resourcefulness, like Nchabeleng, who was described as having “... embodied three aspects of the struggle – the rural, national and class

²²⁵ Mary Benson, *Nelson Mandela*, (London, Panaf, 1980), p. 197.

²²⁶ ‘Teacher tells of ANC Contact’, *The Star*, 9 December 1976.

working struggles.”²²⁷ The next chapter investigates the debate regarding the locality of the struggle, whether it was mainly urban or rural in nature.

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²²⁷ *SASPU National*, April/May 1986.

Chapter Three

Urban or Rural? From the 1970s to the 1980s

One of the most interesting debates taking place in the South African historiography of the liberation struggle concerns whether the liberation struggle was mainly rural or urban. It is therefore of great importance from the onset to delve somewhat into the history of the ANC and consider how it carried out its objectives. The intention is to demonstrate the futility of the rural versus urban debate. The historic conference of the ANC in 1912 represented a wide spectrum of the South African population. This variety included the indigenous population, ranging from the kings and leading chiefs of the day, to the intellectuals, workers, peasants, women and practically everybody.²²⁸ It is logical to conclude that the inclusion of kings and paramount chiefs as well as everyone else in the 1912 ANC conference sent a clear signal that the ANC had no intention of confining the struggle to a particular setting of the Union of South Africa, whether rural or urban. One of the overriding aims of the introduction of the Bantustan system in the mid-1950s was underpinned by the misconception that (at least in theory) “one third of the entire African population lives in Bantustans.”²²⁹ However, the Bantustans eventually became dens of resentment and organisational resistance, rather than fostering the tribal affiliations for which the South African government had hoped. The Pondoland and Sekhukhuland revolts provide valuable experience in this respect.²³⁰ The Bantustans were

²²⁸ Interview with Oliver Tambo, President of the African National Congress of South Africa', *Africa Report*, September-October, 1981, p. 20.

²²⁹ International Defence and Aid Fund, *This is Apartheid: A Pictorial Introduction*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 18.

²³⁰ See Govan Mbeki's *South Africa, the Peasants' Revolt*, (London; International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1984), the entire issue and Peter Delius's 'Sebatagomo: Migrant

designed to undermine African nationalism, since nationalism contradicted apartheid. Rural terrain, the peasantry and guerrillas were therefore essential to a successful prosecution of the political struggle.²³¹

Luli Callinicos claimed that, “rural resistance to the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act ... put armed struggle on the agenda.”²³² Initially, though, the ANC showed a lack of commitment to making use of rural areas because of logistical shortcomings and the practical implications that the rural environment presented, such as those observed by Callinicos, who points out that MK’s concentration on the “peasantry in the rural terrain [meant that MK] had not only suffered heavy losses in their attempted incursions into the country via the homelands, but [was] nowhere near the townships when the countrywide urban uprisings spread”.²³³ This failure to link rural revolts with urban turmoil did not dissuade the ANC from placing rural problems onto the national agenda, and eventually collapsed the dichotomy between rural and urban struggles. An ANC representative later confirmed the geographically widespread nature of the liberation struggle when addressing the United Nations:

Our bases are amongst the people of South Africa in the urban and rural areas and throughout the length and breadth of our country, which we are determined to liberate. It was from these bases that our armed combatants struck twice at the Koeberg nuclear power station, a thousand miles from the border; it was from these bases that we hit Voortrekkerhoogte, the regime’s military headquarters on the outskirts of Pretoria; and it is from there that we are hitting hard targets all over the country such as police stations, oil-from-

Organisation, the ANC and the Sekhukhuland Revolt’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, October 1989.

²³¹ Regarding the peasant (Bantustans in the South African context) contribution to the liberation struggle it is essential to take note of the Zimbabwean experience. For a description see Kriger, J. N., *Zimbabwe’s Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press Review with Africa Information Service, 1992) and Terence Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe*, (London, James Currey, 1985).

²³² Luli Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo Beyond the Engeli Mountains*, Cape Town, David Phillip, 2004), pp. 366 – 367.

²³³ *Ibid*, p. 523.

coal plants, electric power stations, and the regime's air force headquarters in Pretoria.²³⁴

This statement discredits the myths nurtured by the security-conscious officials of the South African government's defence machinery that the borders of the country should be tightly guarded so as to ward off MK insurgents from neighbouring countries. It also confirms the fact that the liberation struggle later became widespread and all-encompassing and was not confined to the urban settings of South Africa. The attack on government installations, as the ANC statement points out, affected a number of different areas of the country. Urban targets hit by MK operatives were selected on the basis of such considerations as the accessibility to those targets, the possibility of disappearing into crowds of people after carrying out a mission, the probability of not being identified before performing the mission and other advantages that urban settings provided. After all, the principle underpinning the approach to the liberation struggle was that if the South African government security forces were concentrated they would lose the wider territory and if they were scattered they were likely to lose strength. This is a tried and tested military strategy in guerrilla warfare theory. It was necessary that the armed propaganda liberation strategy be nationwide and in the hands of many people so that the security forces would be obliged to deal with widespread resistance. The military strategies of MK were quite varied, in a constant state of adaptation and in line with the theories of guerrilla warfare that guerrillas should be able to be swallowed up and protected by the masses if need be.²³⁵ The concentration of the liberation movement

²³⁴ 'ANC Representative Addresses the United Nations', *Sechaba*, June 1984, p. 9.

²³⁵ Comparative rural studies confirm that a properly politicized peasantry can serve as both a conduit and source of personnel for any guerrilla movement. See specifically Robert Buijtenhuijs, *The Revolutionary Potential of African Peasantries: Some Tentative Remarks*, (Leiden, African Studies Centre, 1991), p. 9.

on urban areas was informed by these practical concentrations rather than by any conscious policy decision. The system of racial segregation artificially devised urban areas that were much more fully resourced than the rural ones. Hence it was in this context that the scale of the revolts was tipped in favour of the more infrastructured urban areas.

The “rural versus urban” debate has a history in that the ANC had never paid much attention to the rural struggles that were being waged long before the armed propaganda strategy could be thought of, which might have created the impression that the urban setting was preferred to the rural one. The historical background to this impression, particularly in the rural far Northern Transvaal, is to be observed in the impact of Proclamation No. 67 of 1958 which banned the ANC in Sekhukhune, Zeerust, Marico’s Reserves and Ramokgopa, hence possibly contributing to the ANC’s lack of adequate attention to rural areas. Joe Slovo made the observation that, “but, although many of the leaders of the rural upsurge sought advice and material help (including weapons) from the ANC, it would be an exaggeration to claim that the events were either led or organised by our movement.” Slovo stated further in the same publication that, “...our weakness as an organised force in the rural areas persists up to today and is even more serious in the light of the regime’s Bantustan offensive.”²³⁶ Notwithstanding Slovo’s concern, the ANC never abandoned the plan of using rural areas adjacent to the border area as entry points. This entailed securing infiltration routes by means of trusted contacts and monitoring the movements of the security forces who might waylay MK cadres into traps. The ANC stated, “The plan was to continue

²³⁶ Joe Slovo, *The Unfinished Autobiography*, (Randburg, Ravan Press, 1995), p. 106.

to infiltrate MK cadres into the most receptive rural areas adjacent to the borders of South Africa.”²³⁷

The battles between the GaMatlala communities from 1919 to the 1980s²³⁸ and the priority accorded by the ANC during the initial stages of the formation of MK to training people in rural areas to support the guerrillas, as encapsulated in Operation Mayibuye in 1961, offer examples that indicate that no preference was accorded to either the rural or the urban settings in the liberation struggle.²³⁹ The Matlala communities, for instance, engaged each other in fierce battles over local issues and allegiance to the ANC.²⁴⁰ The point is that no attempt was made by the ANC to confine the struggle to a particular locale, although the fact that most of the ANC leaders were urban-based contributed to this perception of the struggle as likewise focused on urban areas. These leaders entered these areas primarily for work-related reasons rather than political activities; when they encountered the system of apartheid, they took part in the politics of liberation in their places of abode: the urban areas. They continued to keep contact with their rural backgrounds and problems.

In the case of the rural far Northern Transvaal, before the commencement of the more sustained liberation struggles of the late 1970s, the links between the rural and urban environment were to be found in the migrant workers, who mostly stemmed from the rural areas. These workers later

²³⁷ Luli Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo, Beyond the Engeli Mountains, Op. Cit.*, p. 364.

²³⁸ See D. M. C. Sepuru, ‘Succession Disputes, MaCongress and Rural Resistance at gaMatlala, 1919 – 1980’, B.A. Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1992 and M.P. Kgobe, ‘Resistance to Betterment in the Pietersburg Area: A Case of GaMatlala, 1940 – 1980’, BA Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1992.

²³⁹ Holland Heidi, *The Struggle: The History of the African National Congress*, (London, Grafton, 1989), p. 145.

²⁴⁰ *The Star*, February 7 1980 and *The Citizen*, February 9 1980 make it quite clear that the ANC was involved in local conflict.

served as a pool of recruitment for MK activities.²⁴¹ The argument remained valid, though, that, “Even when presented with the opportunity of linking up with organic protest movements and incorporating activists thrown up by rural struggles, the urban based ANC leaders proved remarkably slow to respond.”²⁴² The reason(s) had to do with practicalities rather than the willingness to engage. In rural areas until the advent of the 1980s it was logistically highly risky to support rural struggles from without. The unreliable modes of transport, such as railway, bus and train services did not facilitate the rapid movement of MK cadres. The advent of the taxi industry and the hiring of cars expedited the interaction between rural and urban political activists.²⁴³ Many examples may be adduced of political activists who were arrested in rural areas because they could not convince the authorities of the reasons why they were present in such settings during political upheavals. They were arrested on spurious grounds such as an accent, for example, that “betrayed” them in an environment where they had not grown up.²⁴⁴ It is logical to conclude that the introduction of influx control measures was calculated to regulate the movement of people, with the expressed hope of containing the spread of political ideas.²⁴⁵ The political landscape altered throughout the years in South Africa and problems such as those mentioned above were soon overcome. The migration of students from urban schools to boarding schools, tertiary colleges and universities in rural areas affected the political status quo. There was a perception in the minds of most of the parents in the urban areas of South Africa after 1976 that their children would be better educated in the rural boarding schools. The

²⁴¹ Peter Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle, Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1996), p.133.

²⁴² Matthew Chaskalson, ‘Rural Resistance in the 1940s and 1950s’, *Transformation*, No. 3, University of Natal, Durban, 1989, p. 57.

²⁴³ In the 1980s it was easy to hire cars and carry out MK-related activities without detection.

²⁴⁴ Interview with Cassius Motsoaledi by the author, Erasmuskloof, Gauteng Province, 16 May 2005.

²⁴⁵ See Simons, H. J., ‘Passes and the Police’, *Africa South* Vol.1, October – December, 1956, p. 52.

distinction between rural and urban struggles became blurred in the process, particularly in the 1980s. In addition, MK's training methodologies took the entire range of South African topography into cognizance.

In ANC guerrilla training camps outside South Africa, specialised training in rural or urban warfare was determined by the individual's choice and the mission at hand, as determined by the military and political leadership. Tom Lodge alludes to this fact in his explanation that in those training camps different programmes were arranged for rural and urban settings.²⁴⁶ Material conditions therefore dictated the pace and texture of the struggle in a particular locale. The assumption is that no single part of the rural areas had escaped the impact of land alienation, labour migration, taxation, tampering with traditional authority structures by the government. In this context the rural far Northern Transvaal experienced political upheavals, like the rest of the country. The movement of political activists from one spot to another should not be misinterpreted as the confinement of the struggle to that particular geographic locality. Rural areas were relatively "politically stable" and therefore relatively "safe" for political activists to hide from persecution by police in urban areas. This had nothing to do with the concentration of the liberation struggle in either locality, but everything to do with survival strategies. It was simpler to hide in rural areas because of the homogenous nature of the settlements, the inaccessibility of some rural terrain and the veneer of tranquility associated with such areas. More importantly, rural communities, being united, could easily ward off any

²⁴⁶ Tom Lodge, 'The State of Exile: The African National Congress of South Africa, 1976 – 86', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.9, No.1, January 1987, p.7.

attempts by the security police to infiltrate them and ultimately arrest political activists who had been given sanctuary by them.²⁴⁷

If the ANC held the view that the national liberation struggle was countrywide and influenced by the material conditions that negatively affected the oppressed communities, why the controversy about the locality of the liberation struggle? To answer this germane question, a brief historical perspective on the rural and urban South African settings is necessary. Also essential is a summary of the problems that affected both settings and ultimately collapsed the rural and urban dichotomies. The government's preoccupation of the 1970s that the homelands should cater for the political aspirations of the Black majority led to its neglect of the Black Advisory Councils,²⁴⁸ which were statutory councils set up by the South African government in the hope of co-opting the black elite into the structures of black municipal administration. After 1971 the authority of urban Black municipalities was emasculated when their powers were transferred to the Bantu Affairs Administration Boards (BAABs), the aim of which was to apply the state guidelines regarding urban removals and urbanisation. The BAABs were later assisted in carrying out their mission as a result of the government's appointment of the Reikert Commission: the latter recommended special employment for permanent urbanised citizens, and the removal of the excess jobless blacks. The commission suggested that the government should provide for the resettlement of

²⁴⁷ Two examples of interviews with Collins Chabane by the author (Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 3 March 2003,) and Jerome Joseph Maake by the author (Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 4 November 2003) serve to justify this point in the sense that, in the case of Maake, he was able to reside at Moutse for almost two years, carrying out MK activities undetected. He even adopted the local surname of Jiyane and only a small number of his units knew the truth about him. Chabane stayed at his home village in Gazankulu, carrying out MK activities until he was arrested after a betrayal.

²⁴⁸ William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 254

those workers not needed in the cities: by implication, in the rural areas.²⁴⁹

The altering political landscape after the 1976 student revolts that started in Soweto but later engulfed most of the country forced the government to pass the Community Council Act (1977), which ensured that urban African municipalities were established under the auspices of BAABs. A new breed of elected African municipal officials took the flak on behalf of the government. It was the government's intention that the pent-up rage of urbanised Africans should be confined to the first tier of the government – the municipalities. These consequently faced the wrath of the African majority, and the government's propaganda machinery later referred to this confrontation as "black-on-black violence".²⁵⁰ It was also hoped that the existence of the Community Councils would derail the liberation struggle since residents would be occupied with questions of participation in these municipal structures and with everyday concerns such as skyrocketing electricity bills and resulting cut-offs, or an unreliable electricity and water supply, rather than with the national question of economic and political emancipation from the national yoke of oppression. Political consciousness was, however, awakened, and awakened for good.

One should note, therefore, that when political consciousness deepened the Community Councils collapsed. Their properties, such as community halls, municipal offices, schools, etc., became targets of political anger

²⁴⁹ NUSAS, *Exposing Total Strategy*, University of Cape Town, SRC Press, February, 1980, p. 8.

²⁵⁰ The term referred to black people who were fighting those who were also black and were seen to be supporting the government in its effort to retain the system of apartheid. The involvement of the so-called Third Force proved that there was no black-on-black violence but rather that a third agent was involved.

and frustration. Lack of funds also compounded the problems faced by the municipal officials in the implementation of their mandate. The violence gripping most urban areas as a result of the collapse of municipal infrastructures led to the migration of youths to the rural areas in search of a stable schooling environment.²⁵¹ These young people, in tandem with rurally-based student activists, revolutionised the rural schools that had enrolled them. Secondary schools such as Hwiti, Pax, Setotolwane, Marobathota and others in the rural far Northern Transvaal experienced unprecedented levels of enrolment, particularly in the 1980s;²⁵² and also high levels of student riots. As mentioned earlier, the high levels of political consciousness also resulted from the proximity of these schools to the University of the North. Tertiary students were able to politicise the neighbouring high schools in the area, especially those with boarding facilities. Local issues that bedevilled rural communities, such as the unsatisfactory community services delivered by chiefs and local authorities (in rural townships) were taken to new heights. This move blurred the alleged dichotomies that are often punted concerning the locality of the liberation struggle. These students later altered the political environment of the area in which the schools were based. A mistake often made, however, is to assume that these rural schools were stable and passive before the arrival of urban student activists. How does one explain the fact that the first president of COSAS, Ephraim Mogale, appointed at the Wilgespruit conference in the late 1970s, stemmed from the rural areas of the rural far Northern Transvaal?

Rural situations were not necessarily areas of political tranquillity and quiescence, although the urban areas were at the cutting edge of the

²⁵¹ See Sello Mathabatha, 'Missionary Schools, Student Uprisings in Lebowa and the Sekhukhuneland Students' Revolts 1983 -1986', *African Studies*, 64, 2, December 2005.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

liberation struggle because of the predominance of the pertinent issues upon which the struggle was based.²⁵³ Difficulties with the modes of transport, the cost, supply of electricity, skyrocketing rents, housing, the permanent presence of the security forces that had occupied most of the townships after the breaking-out of violence since September 1984 in the Vaal Triangle, and a host of other issues affecting the urban African communities caused the struggle in these areas to be much more focused and sustainable. The availability, or lack, of amenities around which people's problems were based allowed the daily struggles against the government to be much more visible. This does not mean that the inhabitants of rural areas were quiescent. The exposure of political events taking place in rural areas took time as there were no news agencies to capture them as they were unfolding. The *New Nation* newspaper was to conclude later that "...resistance in Sekhukhune and the rest of Lebowa (1986) has much in common with the style of anti apartheid organisations in the urban townships."²⁵⁴ There was nothing new in this conclusion. In the 1950s and 60s most of the areas in the rural far Northern Transvaal were in fact resisting the government's betterment schemes, its culling of their livestock, forced removals disguised as resettlement under the settlement pattern systems and rulers who had been imposed, acquiring their new status after cooperating with the advocates of the Bantu Authorities.²⁵⁵ These were issues of national importance but they affected particular groups of people living in rural settings. Urban communities were not necessarily affected by the introduction of Bantu Authorities

²⁵³ Phala Mahwidi John, for example, was arrested in 1977 for MK-related activities in Soweto. He was involved in the rural struggles since the 1950s and linked up rural activists with urban ones until his arrest and subsequent imprisonment on Robben Island, for details see *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 October 1977 and 19 October 1977.

²⁵⁴ *New Nation*, January 10 1986.

²⁵⁵ See Delius, P. *A Lion amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 51-75

although by law they were supposed to be assigned an ethnic locality in the Bantustans.

In the late 1970s and 1980s the political sands shifted and a new generation of rural political activists emerged, to wage the struggle differently. These activists could not wage the liberation struggle in the same way as their counterparts in urban areas, for a variety of reasons. In most cases, there was an interaction between the two geographical settings. Each and every political setup exhibited its own peculiarities and uniqueness. Rural political activists could not burn down schools, for example, because those schools belonged to their parents, as members of their respective communities. The homeland governments, in this case, those of Gazankulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele, Lebowa as well as the Republic of Venda, assisted rural communities in building schools on a rand-for-rand basis. In other words, if the cost of building a school was R100 000, for example, the community was supposed to raise its own half of the total amount and the government would contribute the remaining R50 000. To raze those schools that had been built by the parents' money would have alienated the older generation from the political activists who were mostly young, on the whole. This is not to deny that no schools were destroyed in these homelands but in the majority of cases the schools burned down were located in the semi-urban areas of these homelands, such as Lebowakgomo, KaNyamazane, KwaMhlanga, Giyani, Seshego and Thohoyandou. Where schools were razed in rural areas, in the majority of cases they were technical schools and colleges erected by the government to provide certain skills needed in a particular homeland.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ In 1986, for example, at Sekhukhune College of Education in the now defunct Lebowa homeland some assets such as tractors were torched by rioters.

In the urban areas the situation was very different. Schools were constructed by Community Councils at the behest of the national government and there was no sense of ownership attached to the schools amongst the majority of people whom they were supposed to serve. The concentration of the majority of people in urban areas as a result of the scarcity of employment in the rural areas and of other social amenities also contributed to the imbalance of the liberation struggle in favour of the urban setting. Rural migration to the cities was bound to shift the balance in favour of the latter. The persecution of political activists in both rural and urban environments would not be tolerated forever by MK as it became increasingly easy to locate political activists from the urban areas to rural areas where they would normally hide from police harassment. The failure of some political activists to adapt to and be absorbed by rural communities led to the exploration of other avenues of escaping police brutality. An outlet into the relative serenity of exile was the most likely option: a temporary sojourn in preparation for infiltration back into South Africa to further the campaign of freedom. On the other hand there were those political activists who did not evade the long arm of the law and landed themselves long stays on Robben Island. But this was not necessarily the case. Certain political activists, strangely enough, managed to outwit the security forces and continued to wage the liberation struggle while on the most wanted lists. The subsequent discussion deals with those political activists who were not so fortunate as to escape the long arm of the law and decided to cross the borders into exile.

State repression and MK 'slippery' routes

As state repression upset the binary of urban and rural locale of the armed struggle, it is necessary to trace the mindset behind state repression by examining the government of the day. With P.W. Botha becoming Prime Minister in September 1978, concepts referred to in passing earlier, such as the 'Total Strategy' and the 'Destabilisation Policy', were taken to new heights. The Total Strategy was:

[A] comprehensive plan to utilise all the means available to a state according to an integrated pattern in order to achieve the national aims within the framework of the specific policies. A national total strategy is, therefore, not confined to a particular sphere, but is applicable at all levels and to all functions of the state "structure".²⁵⁷

Botha inherited a state that was security-conscious. Prime Minister B. J. Vorster was so obsessed with the country's security after the collapse of the Portuguese colonial empire that he began to expand the capacity of the military.²⁵⁸

In October 1974 Vorster launched a policy of "detente" that was intended to draw the like-minded countries of southern Africa into a constellation of states united against communism. In this case the enemy was yet to be found. The South African invasion of Angola in 1975 and the brutal suppression of the Soweto uprisings in 1976 destroyed all chances of dialogue and any friendly relations between South Africa and her neighbours.²⁵⁹ The hostility that then characterised the relationship between South Africa and the nearby states conversely assisted the ANC

²⁵⁷ Glen Moss, 'Total Strategy', *Work in Progress*, No. 11, 1980. p. 1.

²⁵⁸ Robert Davis and Dan O'Meara, 'Total Strategy in Southern Africa: An Analysis of South African Regional Policy since 1978', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, April 1985, p. 118.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 188 – 189.

to establish bases in them. In turn these hostile neighbourly relations informed the 'Total Strategy' and the 'Destabilisation policy'²⁶⁰ which were not necessarily linked. The attempts by the South African government to coax her neighbours into non-aggression pacts should be analysed in this context.²⁶¹

The political emancipation of Angola and Mozambique triggered a sense of being besieged in the mind of the South African government. The fear of MK being hosted by some of these neighbouring countries underpinned all the non-aggression pacts and foreign policies that the South African government devised, but these actions were cases of closing the stable-door after the horses had bolted, in the sense that the seed of resentment against white domination had already been planted inside South Africa. In acknowledging the impact that the Southern African political changes wrought on South Africa Colin Legum states:

South Africa is clearly not an "island" lodged in the Southern African region but an integral part of a political subsystem within which changes in one area impinge directly on all its other parts. Just as white-ruled Rhodesia could not insulate itself from the changes resulting from the ending of Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique and Angola, so, too, South Africa has seen the splintering of its hopes of being able to erect a kind of Berlin Wall along the Limpopo and Cunene Rivers. It is not just that isolated groups of armed guerrillas have been able to penetrate its defense line but, much more important, that there is no impermeable barrier to the spread of ideas and influence.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ On the policy of Destabilisation see Gavin Cawthra, *Brutal Force: the Apartheid War Machine*, (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, May 1986).

²⁶¹ The motives of Vorster's policy of détente have invariably been questioned but 'The Constellation of States: Peace in Pieces?', *South African Yearbook of International Law*, Vol. 7, 1981, p. 105 – 113 expresses reservations quite glaringly. See also Brittain's *Hidden Lives, Hidden Deaths: South Africa's Crippling of a Continent*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1988).

²⁶² Colin Legum, 'Southern Africa in South Africa: the Impact of Regional Events on Domestic Politics,' cited in *South Africa in Southern Africa: The Intensifying Vortex of Violence* by Thomas M. Callaghy, (New York, Praeger, 1983), p. 153.

The South African government had hoped that its borders would not be porous and that its neighbours would not grant political asylum to South African political refugees, fearing that these countries would be used as springboards for guerrilla attacks. It had also hoped that political refugees who managed to establish contacts with exiled organisations such as the ANC would not be provided with facilities with which to train and plan acts of sabotage against it.²⁶³ This proved to be a myth. Encouraged by the examples of successful guerrilla warfare in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, the majority of the South African political activists who were either persecuted by the security police or were politicised by underground members of the ANC in their communities in the rural far Northern Transvaal decided to cross the border and join the South African liberation movements.²⁶⁴ The fear that gripped white farmers in the north of the country can be summed up by the behaviour of Willie Esterhuyse, a border farmer in the north, who led a 50-man commando. He carried a 9mm pistol at all times and taught his 8-year-old son how to use his semi-automatic weapon just in case they were attacked by MK.²⁶⁵ It is demonstrated that while the South African government armed and transformed farmers in the border areas into commandos waiting for MK cadres, MK deployed its military and political cadres into the country by unconventional means,²⁶⁶

Dispersed political activists in the far Northern Transvaal could not hold on to their rural or urban settings. State repression was very severe and

²⁶³ Deon Geldenhuys, 'Some Strategic Implications of Regional Economic Relationships for the Republic of South Africa,' *ISSUP Strategic Review*, January 1981, p. 20.

²⁶⁴ Viva FRELIMO rallies of the mid-1970s were generally signs of encouragement and support by students and members of communities that the liberation struggle in South Africa was also possible. said in text.

²⁶⁵ 'Northern Transvaal Landmines', *Sunday Star*, 22 December 1985.

²⁶⁶ This point is made clear in an interview by Dick Ralushai, who had been based in the now defunct homeland of Venda (adjacent to Zimbabwe) since the late 1970s and received so many weapons, that the DLBs were saturated towards the mid-1980s.

caused enormous harm to political activism. The subsequent discussion provides an account for that dispersion and political consciousness (and not necessarily the road to exile). Collins Chabane, Ngoako Ramatlhodi, Tlokwe Maserumule, Jerome Joseph Maake, Nwedamutswu “Mumsy” Mamabolo Phillip and others left the country either in the late 1970s or at the turn of the 1980s for exile. Thabo Makunyane, who at the time was imprisoned for distributing banned literature in Venda, had been born into an ANC family. His grandfather was a card-carrying member of the ANC. His mother’s cousin, a Tolamo, died in exile and these circumstances came to influence him at a later stage of his political development. Thabo’s maternal uncle almost died during the Sebatakomo Movement uprisings in Sekhukhune in the late 1950s.²⁶⁷ (Makunyane was born in Sekhukhuneland.) This led to the Makunyane family relocating from the Sekhukhune area and later moving to Polokwane. His mother’s constant references to and lionisation of people she knew in the ANC and who were in exile also contributed to Thabo’s political awakening.²⁶⁸ Thabo in turn influenced his own acquaintances and friends and the gospel of freedom was preached and spread in this fashion. In this context, he was later sentenced, together with Ephraim Mogale, to eight years on Robben Island in the late 1970s (later to be reduced to five). The futility of banning people and suppressing their ideas of freedom and destabilisation was patently clear because the die had already been cast. Exiled political activists were already undergoing military and political training, ready to be deployed inside the country, and they knew the routes back home. The following case vindicates this point.

²⁶⁷ See Peter Delius, ‘Sebatakomo: Migrant organisation, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt,’ *Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, October 1989.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Thabo Makunyane by Siphamandla Zondi, Polokwane, SADET Oral History Archives, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 4 June 2001.

Zimbabwe: The launching pad of the armed propaganda liberation struggle?

Since Mozambique, Angola, and Zimbabwe attained independence, the regional picture has undergone profound alteration. Countries that once had shared similar interests with South Africa are now controlled by regimes overtly hostile to Pretoria; thus the anti-apartheid fires that were already smouldering throughout the continent were fanned by the new policy-makers. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was re-energised by these events, and its Liberation Committee was newly inspired. Not only could they now devote their undivided attention to South Africa and its so-called 'colony' of Namibia, but they could utilise the neighbouring independent states as launching pads in the 'liberation' of the blacks in both territories. The exiled A.N.C. and the P.A.C. might still have to do the fighting, but they found themselves surrounded by friends who would assist them politically, diplomatically, infrastructurally, and militarily.²⁶⁹

In particular, the liberation of Zimbabwe in 1980 signalled a range of possibilities for that of South Africa. The historical relations between the ANC and the Zimbabwean liberation forces, particularly the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)'s Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) were not by any means to be terminated on the attainment of independence by Zimbabwe in 1980. The South African government was aware of these historical links and wanted to cut them before the ANC could take advantage of Zimbabwean independence from the clutches of Ian Smith's government. South Africa's economic domination of the southern African region was one way of throttling the Zimbabwean government into submission.²⁷⁰ At independence, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe discovered that the country was financially and politically indebted to South Africa as it had inherited the legacy of the Unilateral

²⁶⁹ Chris Maritz, 'Pretoria's Reaction to the Role of Moscow and Peking in Southern Africa', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, (1987), p. 326.

²⁷⁰ Leaders of the 'front line states' formed SADCC in 1980 to try to strengthen economic ties amongst themselves and lessen economic dependency on South Africa.

Declaration of Independence (UDI) (Rhodesia, 1965).²⁷¹ Owing to their cooperation with respect to trade and transport the two countries exchanged “trade consuls” and the security forces collaborated, “in theory to seek out criminals”, but in practice the cooperation amounted to South African pressure on Zimbabwe to make life difficult for members of the ANC.²⁷² An outright rejection of the debts incurred by the colonial government in Zimbabwe was not an option since it could have strained the relationship of the two countries and jeopardised the liberation of South Africa’s majority from the white minority. But in 1980 the South African government, notwithstanding its power in all spheres, seemed to be under siege as a result of these remarkable changes in the political fortunes of the Southern African region.²⁷³

President Mugabe of Zimbabwe knew that the South African government would exact a price for his support of the ANC. The formation of the Mozambique National Resistance Movement (MNR or RENAMO) at the instigation of the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) and South African collusion with Rhodesia after Mozambican independence in 1975 returned to haunt the Mugabe government later in the 1980s. On Zimbabwean independence the RENAMO directorate was flown to South Africa’s Phalaborwa military base in the far Northern Transvaal.²⁷⁴ RENAMO ensured, by sabotaging the Mozambican rail systems, that Zimbabwe was held economically hostage to South Africa. Its incessant bombing of the Beira railway, an oil pipeline to Zimbabwe in the north and the coast road from Maputo to Beira destroyed the Zimbabwean

²⁷¹ Guy Arnold, ‘Zimbabwe: Escaping South Africa’s Coils’, *New African Market*, No. 245, February 1988, p. 35.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁷³ Dennis Austin, ‘South Africa 1984’, *Chatham House Papers*, No. 26, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, p. 46.

²⁷⁴ Simon, Jenkins, ‘Destabilisation in Southern Africa’, *The Economist*, Vol. 288, 16 July 1983, p.19.

economy.²⁷⁵ Summing up Zimbabwean economic situation, Barber concludes:

As a land-locked country she (Zimbabwe) has to rely on her neighbours for access to the outside world, and South Africa's ports and transport system which have always been important became even more so in the 1970s, when, for one reason or another, the Mozambique ports were not available.²⁷⁶

The Zimbabwean government persisted despite all these man-made obstacles, being forced by moral and historic obligations to assist in the liberation struggle of South Africa, as argued below. It was under these circumstances, therefore, that Zimbabwe hosted most of the political refugees who were either released from the country's jails or came to settle and carry out the ANC's underground liberation struggles.²⁷⁷ The following historical case details some of the salient incidental benefits accruing to the ANC/MK as a result of the Zimbabwean government's political savvy and determination to see southern African free from colonial misgovernment. President Mugabe realised that inasmuch as the Mozambicans had hosted him and made major sacrifices he too was morally and politically obliged to assist the ANC in the fight against apartheid. He needed to do so in a manner that would be acceptable to critics and not bluntly demonstrate support arrogantly and openly for the ANC. Space was therefore created for MK operatives in Zimbabwe who remained there on sufferance mostly during the 1980s, carrying out MK missions into South Africa through its northern border. The intention is to bring to light the fact that it was not only the urban areas of South Africa

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁷⁶ James Barber, 'Supping with the Devil – Zimbabwe-South African Relations', *International Affairs Bulletin*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1982, pp. 4-5.

²⁷⁷ Interview with William Motau by the author, IKIM Building, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 27 August 2002. Motau was captured by the Rhodesian forces in the 1967/8 Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns.

that contributed to the liberation struggle waged by MK. The intricate nature of the liberation struggle couple with a range of sophisticated networks that straddled both the rural and urban settings, justify the inclusion of these case studies.

Harare Motorway Express Bus Company and MK

The arrival of Refiloe Mudimu in January 1977 in exile signalled an end to the relative complacency that the South African government had enjoyed in terms of the security of the rural far Northern Transvaal. Refiloe, a student leader during the Soweto 1976 student uprisings, left for exile in Mozambique and was appointed the deputy political commissar of his group on arrival there.²⁷⁸ Refiloe trained in East Germany during June 1977 and was appointed a commander under the stewardship of Duncan Nhlanhla Mahlangu on his return, after which he stayed in Quibaxe (Camp 13) in Angola. Here he was appointed one of the instructors in military combat work (MCW) as well as in military topography. He assisted in compiling the ANC military topography manuals. In 1978 he was summoned to Lusaka to take part in the ANC's envisaged movie, *The Battle for South Africa*. Duncan Nhlanhla Mahlangu was also summoned to Lusaka for the same mission because of his recent experience during his escape after the capture of Solomon Mahlangu in Johannesburg.²⁷⁹ Refiloe was asked to give an account (in the movie) of what had led to the 1976 Soweto student uprisings. Duncan Mahlangu was presumably requested to relate the George Goch incident

²⁷⁸ Interview with Refiloe Mudimu by the author, South African Navy Headquarters, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 18 January 2005.

²⁷⁹ See 'Let us Emulate Mahlangu', *Dawn: Journal of Umkhonto we Sizwe* Vol. 6, No. 4, April 1982.

in which he had escaped, while Solomon Kalushi Mahlangu was later hanged.²⁸⁰

In 1979 Joe Qqabi visited Camp 13 and he and Refiloe were able to discuss their interaction back in South Africa before both of them left the country. The current head of logistics in Angola passed away and as a replacement Joe Qqabi recommended to Mzwai Piliso (a special aide to the ANC's Acting President Oliver Tambo at the time) that Refiloe would be a suitable candidate.²⁸¹ This marked the beginning of Refiloe's steady rise in the hierarchy of the ANC and MK. He subsequently left Quibaxe camp to Luanda in August 1979 to take over the position of the deputy chief of logistics in Angola. He was also included in the treasury committee and remained in those positions until 1981. Refiloe then proceeded to Lusaka, Zambia, to be married. While he was waiting for the formalities to be concluded he was appointed MK representative in the national youth preparatory committee, which later revived the ANC youth section. In this committee Refiloe's colleagues were Eddy Funde, Max Sisulu, Joyce Dipale and others. It organised the ANC youth conference that took place in Mazimbu, Tanzania during 1982.

After this conference Welile Nhlapo was appointed the first chairperson of the ANC youth section in exile. Klaus Maphepha (Vusi Mavimbela) was a member of this section, Mongezi Stofile was in charge of publicity, while Joyce Dipale and Mpho Masetla were also included in the executive committee of the youth section of the ANC. Max Sisulu took responsibility for the internal reconstruction of the youth initiatives.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Joe Qqabi always insisted that recently recruited MK cadres should be given positions of responsibility so that they gave direction based on recently acquired information, rather than MK relying on those cadres whose knowledge of internal events was suspect because of their long stay in exile.

Refiloe worked under Stofile as the national coordinator of the youth and radio programmes of the ANC's Radio Freedom, broadcast from Lusaka. The ANC youth section presented a bulletin called *Revenge* and another youth bulletin was entitled *Forward*. Refiloe was a member of the *Forward* editorial board. Refiloe was later appointed the chairperson of the ANC youth section in Lusaka for three successive years, and in this position he was able to collaborate very closely with Thabo Mbeki and Welile Nhlapo.

In the course of his duties Refiloe eventually met Cassius Maake and Paul Dikeledi and they discussed their main concern at the time: that the need existed for MK to deploy members in the front areas (Frontline States). The same discussion was later held with Chris Hani. Hani prevailed upon Refiloe to agree that there was a pressing need for him to pack and join the ranks of MK on a fulltime basis. Hani informed him that he should choose between being permanently stationed in Botswana or in Zimbabwe. Refiloe chose the latter because he had relatives there that could assist him in the execution of his political duties. After his South African passport was forged Refiloe was infiltrated into Zimbabwe using his South African names as reflected in these identification documents. Refiloe's surname of Mudimu should be written and pronounced "Modimo" to denote its South African Northern Sotho (Sepedi) origin. The Zimbabwean version of the same surname is Mudimu and on this basis he was able to masquerade as a Zimbabwean citizen.²⁸² It was also on the basis of this surname that he was able to affiliate to the ZANU-PF and enjoy access to whatever he needed in Zimbabwe. Refiloe later proceeded from Zimbabwe to Zambia in order to report to his MK

²⁸² Mudimu is a surname that is common, mostly in the Mashonaland area in Zimbabwe.

superiors on the progress he was making in his endeavours regarding infiltration into the northern part of South Africa.

Refiloe mislaid his passport before he could return to Zimbabwe. A new passport was issued for him in Zambia, bearing a different name, but on the declaration form that was to be completed at the border post with Zimbabwe Refiloe mistakenly gave an address that eventually led to his arrest. When his period of stay in Zimbabwe lapsed the Zimbabwean Ministry of Home Affairs started looking for him. He was arrested for staying too long in the country. Initially the Zimbabwean authorities gave Refiloe the benefit of the doubt because he was claiming to be a Zimbabwean on the basis of the spelling of his surname – Mudimu. They requested him to fetch his “parents”. He obliged. Only after he had brought his “parents” to the home affairs offices were he was asked the name of his “mother” – which he could not provide. Although Refiloe’s deportation order to Zambia was then issued, Shadrack Khumalo (Africa, *nom de guerre*) was a member of the ANC security personnel in Zimbabwe who had connections with officials in the home affairs department. Khumalo and his contacts there “stole” Refiloe’s file and as a result he was able to continue to stay in Zimbabwe illegally, coordinating MK activities, ordnance in particular.

In this capacity Refiloe was responsible for the infiltration of weapons into South Africa using the rural far Northern Transvaal as an entry point. A tour bus company called Harare Motorway Express used to ferry numerous passengers into South Africa and back into Zimbabwe, mostly Zimbabweans but occasionally South Africans. Refiloe recruited some of the bus drivers and conductors of this firm into underground activities. It is possible that the owners of the bus company were not aware of the

activities of their drivers and the MK connections. The Beit Bridge border post in the Musina (Messina, in the past) area was used as an entry point. The bus travelled from here to Johannesburg and it was able to offload its “gifts” (see below) at certain bus stops where internal MK contacts were waiting. Refiloe started by managing to “befriend” Dominic Katana who was employed by this company as a regular bus conductor.²⁸³ The Zimbabweans using these buses preferred, in the early 1980s, to change rands into Zimbabwean dollars and it was during one of these encounters that Refiloe and Dominic met. After exchanging pleasantries and befriending each other Refiloe recruited Dominic for the smuggling of arms.

Dominic revealed to Refiloe the existence of secret compartments being used to smuggle liquor into Zimbabwe from South Africa, which were later used to transport arms and ammunition destined for the latter country, wrapped in such a way that they looked like real gifts from relatives or lovers. The employees of the Harare Motorway Express bus company, particularly the bus drivers, were paid for their courage in taking the risk of smuggling ordnance. The MK recruitment units were enlisted to recruit people who would receive these gifts inside the country. Once a person was recruited, using various mechanisms like identifying well-known political activists inside the country, he would then be summoned to Zimbabwe to be briefed concerning MCW. The classes in Zimbabwe included secret communications such as sign language, topography for the purposes of the location of DLBs, and a whole range of techniques that the underground world of MK’s liberation struggle encompassed.

²⁸³ Dominic Katana arrived at the ANC head office after the installation of the new government, asking to be recognised for his role in the South African liberation struggle.

In Johannesburg, Dan Montsitsi, one of the leaders of the Soweto student uprisings, usually received the “gifts” that were mostly wrapped as if they were Christmas gifts with red ribbons on top. It is essential to dwell on the “gifts” story in detail to prevent possible confusion and scepticism about the veracity of the story. These “gifts” were not addressed to any particular person and they were usually hidden from the passengers’ view in the secret compartments mentioned earlier on. The bus drivers were told of the dropping-off places and the contacts that would receive the parcels. They were not supposed to meet these “contacts” inside the country.²⁸⁴ Timing, the mode of transport and the weight of the “gifts” comprised essential factors. But in urban areas few localities were available as dropping-off points. Personal gestures and distinguishable attire that were probably described (to the bus drivers) were made use of in such cases after “formal introductions” between the recipient and the bus driver. Secret briefing meetings, for example, were held in Zimbabwe between Refiloe and whichever bus driver was assigned to South Africa to meet MK contacts for this purpose. Drivers would be informed that when they arrived in Johannesburg they would, for instance, be approached by somebody wearing a black hat the brim of which would be turned backwards, for example. These disguises were meant for identification purposes and to test the loyalty of the bus drivers rather than to cause confusion. Any interaction was fraught with the possibility of arrest and needed maximum vigilance.

In towns such as Makhado (Louis Trichardt) Dick Ralushai was the contact who received the “gifts” for the rural far Northern Transvaal

²⁸⁴ “A Contact is a single individual performing one or other function for the movement. He does it consciously and is committed debasing all consequences,” *The Creation of the Underground Units*, Umkhonto we Sizwe Papers, Jack Simons Collections, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, p. 3.

region of Venda and the surrounding villages.²⁸⁵ The ANC Intelligence Unit deployed inside the country recruited Ralushai into these activities. The work of recruiting people for the infiltration of arms was not confined to the ANC intelligence unit only. Members such as Kenny Fihla, his sister Bessie and Dan Montsitsi as well as Rapu Molekane on the Witwatersrand also recruited others who were, in their judgment at least, trusted cadres of the ANC organisation or sympathetic to its policies. Ralushai, for instance, exhibited a history of BPC and SASO involvement where he had served as a branch secretary in Sibasa (Venda) under the auspices of Simon Tshenuwani Farisani in the 1970s. Ralushai's SASO activism resulted from his days at the University of Zululand, where he had studied law until he was unable to return to the university as a result of the solidarity that students there had pledged with the University of the North students when Abram Tiro was expelled in 1972.

Ralushai was arrested on the 19 October 1977 together with the rest of the leaders of the majority of black student and political organisations and detained at Modderbee prison in Benoni for almost a year. He shared a prison cell with his boss Percy Qhoboza, in the sense that Dick also acted as the rural far Northern Transvaal correspondent of the *Weekend World*, the newspaper Qhoboza edited.²⁸⁶ Modderbee prison represented a learning curve for Ralushai in the sense that he met many prisoners who were politically mature, such as Matthews Maphumolo who had already served ten years on Robben Island before he was released in the late 1970s. Maphumolo joined the Modderbee group who had been detained there since 1977. Ralushai was released in 1978 and subsequently

²⁸⁵ Interview with Dick Ralushai, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 26 February 2005.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

converted to ANC politics because of his exposure in prison to the ANC's cadres and politics. He brought this wealth of experience to the ANC and Refiloe's underground unit.

Ralushai led a unit of about six people such as Elias Ramano, Calvin Mthiwane, Mashudu Mudau and others, which was not only responsible for the distribution of arms and ammunition and their storage in the rural far Northern Transvaal but also for a number of attacks in the Venda area during the 1980s. The headquarters of the former Venda homeland's armed forces and the fuel depot in Louis Trichardt included some of these targets.²⁸⁷ The unit also attacked the magistrate's office in Thohoyandou, the capital city of the Republic of Venda. Another attack in the Venda area was that on the police station in Sibasa during 1981. Bishop Peter Phaswane, Dean Tshenuwani Farisani, Reverend Mahampa and Ramano Shikororo were detained on allegations of complicity in these incidents.²⁸⁸ They were subsequently released in 1982 on the grounds of insufficient evidence to link them with the police station incident.

A difficulty faced by homeland activists at the time stemmed from the fact that only a few people were interested in politics because of the repression meted out to political activists by the Venda security police. These police could easily clamp down on these activists as they were few in number and were well-known to the security forces of both South Africa and Venda. The same known political activists were arrested for every action taken against the government by its political opponents. Under these repressive conditions a deluge of "gifts" from Zimbabwe

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ Interview with Dean Farisani, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 29 April 2005.

nevertheless continued to flood the rural far Northern Transvaal. In an interview with Ralushai the point was made clear:

Interviewer: Do you think that you had a lot of “hardware”?

Ralushai: Yes, you know.... there was a stage when these things were coming like we were going to have a war at one stage. You know, one would actually be going out almost every two nights, you know, or three nights... I remember particularly towards the late 80s, we were actually receiving a lot of “hardware” from outside (Zimbabwe). We were...at one stage not managing to have the proper dead letter boxes (DLBs) for those things but we had to work overnight to get the proper storage for them.²⁸⁹

Refiloe’s mission was made possible by the people selected inside the country by the ANC Intelligence unit. Ralushai used his insurance company’s car to transport the “hardware” to various storage facilities in the rural far Northern Transvaal. The map of the area where the “hardware” was to be dropped would be handed to Ralushai prior to its offloading by his contacts in exile as arranged by Refiloe and others. The time would also be communicated to him beforehand, as would the mode of transport involved. This entailed the colour of the vehicle, its number plates and the driver for that particular day. Most of these drivers were part of the mission and as a result they would know what to do. These deliveries were mostly undertaken at night and the weight of the “gift” suggested its contents. It was on the basis of his political history and his job with the insurance firm that Ralushai had been recruited. He was at the time based inside Venda in the Vivo area, which was the next port of call after Beit Bridge for the bus company and other transport truck companies.

The receipt, storage and distribution of ordnance were not as straightforward as is suggested here. The ANC Intelligence Unit, for

²⁸⁹ Interview with Dick Ralushai, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province 26 February 2005.

example, would recruit people with a pedigree of political activism and then hand them over to the RPMRC for a crash course in the reading of coded messages, weapons handling and storage, identification of dead letter boxes, sign communication techniques and a host of other related matters that needed to be circumspectly adhered to at all times. The reconnaissance unit, for example, would identify the potential targets. There were many ways of carrying out reconnaissance missions of these. One method was to organise picnics near the targets. It is common knowledge that revellers normally take photos and in the process of celebrating during a picnic photos of the target would be taken for further inspection by another unit such as the Special Operations Unit, which would carry out the mission on the said target.

The Special Operations Unit (SOU), commonly called Special Ops, was intended to be a unit empowered to select highly symbolic targets and mount “spectacular armed propaganda attacks”.²⁹⁰ Owing to such attacks MK came to be highly regarded. It was later remarked that the ANC waited for opportune moments to “fan the flames of unrest with guerrilla attacks, which increased from 40 in 1984 to 136 in 1985 and 228 in 1986.”²⁹¹ The SOU operated outside the classical behaviour of military combat. In line with the theory of guerrilla warfare it avoided direct military confrontation with the SADF and other security enforcement agencies of the various homelands where it operated. Joe Slovo was responsible for it.

The profiles of people recruited in these underground MK structures were supposed to be kept very low at all times so that police attention would

²⁹⁰ Luli Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains, Op. Cit.*, p. 530.

²⁹¹ Anthony Marx, *Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960 – 1990*, (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 157.

not be drawn to them. When Refiloe was appointed the commander of the Nchabeleng Unit²⁹² after 1986, under the auspices of the Service Unit (SU),²⁹³ Ralushai became one of the key players on such missions in the area. However, in Zimbabwe Refiloe was redeployed from the ordnance department after the death of Cassius Maake in Swaziland in 1986, paving the way for Rachid (Ishmael Abubaker),²⁹⁴ who was introduced to Dominic Katane in order to continue the work that Mudimu was doing with MK. The Harare Motorway bus company continued to be used extensively for many years, escaping police detection. Cars owned by individuals and hired vehicles were also used for the same objectives; in most cases their drivers or owners would not know about the consignments they were transporting back to South Africa. The ANC officials in Zimbabwe would normally book visitors into hotels and then take care of their cars while visitors were attending to their assignments in Zimbabwe. Secret compartments would be constructed in these cars; contacts in South Africa would be informed about the compartments and the registration numbers of cars carrying the “gifts” into the country. The same feat was repeated in other neighbouring countries by different units of MK that were infiltrated into them.²⁹⁵

Still other underground operatives of MK were assigned the tasks of ensuring that consignments of arms and ammunitions were safely stored when they had already been delivered inside the country, in places like

²⁹² Nchabeleng Unit was named after the United Democratic Front leader in the Northern Transvaal who was killed by the police in 1986. The unit operated in and around the Northern Transvaal immediately after Nchabeleng was beaten to death by the security police at Schoonoord police station. He was also a veteran of the ANC/MK who spent 8 years on Robben Island and was released in 1972.

²⁹³ MK's Service Unit was led by Linda Mti in the 1980s. It was responsible for servicing all units that were operating inside the country.

²⁹⁴ Cassius Maake (Job Tabane) was one of the leaders of MK, stationed in Swaziland at the time, before his assassination by Eugene de Kock's security police.

²⁹⁵ See Gomolemo Mokae's 'Robert McBride – A Coloured Life', PhD Thesis, Vista University, Pretoria, 14 June 2003.

KwaNdebele, Moutse and Phalaborwa. For example, Nick Matlhakoane was responsible for the receipt and distribution of arms and ammunition in and around Phalaborwa.²⁹⁶ He was also tasked with the responsibility of monitoring Glory Sedibe (September). September defected from MK after being abducted from the ANC in Swaziland in the mid-1980s with the aid of the Swazi royal police and thereafter worked for the South African security police; according to MK his actions needed constant surveillance. He was the second-in-command of the political machinery in Swaziland, responsible for rural military and political missions in the far Northern Transvaal. His defection and vast knowledge of MK operations particularly in this region was considered dangerous by the ANC. It is assumed that the security forces regarded him as a major acquisition in their conflict with MK. September was arrested by the Swazi Royal Police in the Phungalegazi area (a royal residence) and handed over to the South African police who made him an offer he could not refuse – to be an *askari*.²⁹⁷ September died of poisoning in the early 1990s under mysterious circumstances after he had tried unsuccessfully to be reconciled with his former friends in the ANC.

In Tzaneen Refiloe established contacts which ensured that the infiltrated arms and ammunition were safely transported to their destination. Most of these recruits would cross the Beit Bridge border post into Zimbabwe legally in order to hold briefings and debriefings with Refiloe's unit, returning into South Africa and continuing with their above-board duties. Cassell Mathale, the current provincial secretary of the ANC in Limpopo, was one such person. Trish Hanekom, Ryder (Paul) Moloto and Refiloe

²⁹⁶ Interview with Refiloe Mudimu, by the author, South African Navy Headquarters, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 21 January 2005.

²⁹⁷ An Askari is a former guerrilla 'turned' or recruited by the security forces, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume Seven, August 2002, p. 922.

met with Mathale from Tzaneen in the Beit Bridge area during the mid-1980s; while they were holding this meeting the news of Ephraim Mogale's car accident in Botswana was reported to Refiloe. Mogale was being infiltrated back into the country after a visit to Zimbabwe for consultations on the underground activities of MK. At the time of the accident the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) inside the country needed Mogale for their conference. Mogale was one of the veterans of MK who were tried and tested and could therefore easily move in and out of the country for briefing and debriefing purposes.²⁹⁸ In Moutse, for example, Isaac (Sam) Ditshego was the main contact, assisted by Mahlangu Bax, Ephraim Mogale and others. Sam Nkosi together with Pharephare (Richard Mothobi) travelled into exile from Bushbuckridge before they were reinfilitrated into the country through Botswana to carry out the mandate of securing a safe place for arms and ammunitions. They too met with Refiloe for these purposes.

The stockpiling of weapons admittedly had its own flaws. In theory, weapons were supposed to be stored in DLBs at all times unless they were going to be used in a mission. The dangers of DLBs are legendary, as a single example will demonstrate. The apprehending of Chief Mohlamonyane Piet Mathebe and his unit led the police to the arms cache in the Potgietersrust (PP Rust) area.²⁹⁹ Chief Mathebe and his section of the Nchabeleng unit were still discussing how to store these arms when the police burst in on them. The unit possessed a sketch and by means of it the police were able to trace other arms caches in the PP Rust area. The

²⁹⁸ Interview with Ephraim Mogale, by the author, Bronkhorspruit, Gauteng Province 26 & 27 April 2003.

²⁹⁹ Chief Mohlamonyane Piet Mathebe was recruited into the ANC/MK underground in the mid-1980s when his village of Moutse was involved in a protracted war with the KwaNdebele government that wanted to incorporate it. See Phatlane, S. N., 'The KwaNdebele Independence Issue: A Critical Appraisal of the Crises around Independence in KwaNdebele 1982 – 1989', MA Thesis, University of South Africa, November 1998.

arrest of one individual led to the taking into custody of the whole unit or units. This kind of situation also accounted for the arrests of MK cadres during Operation Vula in the late 1980s.³⁰⁰

The apprehension of Chief Mathebe's section needs further elaboration because it exposed the weaknesses of the DLBs for the purposes of storage. Holes were dug and used as storage facilities. The idea was to avoid human-to-human contact as far as possible, for fear of the consequences arising from arrests and defections to the South African security police under extreme interrogation and torture. For the next person to find the DLBs, it was not necessary to have a map of the area where the DLBs were located. Visualisation of the area and the exact place when weapons were stored should have been sufficient. The MK training in topography and map interpretation was meant to address some of these concerns. The arrest of MK cadres with maps on their persons would obviously lead the police to the DLBs, as Chief Mathebe's case had demonstrated, and the consequences were dire. As a result DLBs would be known only by a very few MK underground cadres on a need-to-know basis. It was therefore possible that an area could be saturated by DLBs. Dick considers that in his area of Venda he ran out of suitable locations, particularly towards the late 1980s, as large consignments of "gifts" had been received by his unit from Refiloe in Zimbabwe.³⁰¹ There were always dangers of DLBs being excavated, either by people who might have seen MK cadres bury weapons or by workers carrying out their daily work. In urban areas, household yards and to a limited extent open playing fields were used in most cases because there was not

³⁰⁰ Interview with Refiloe Mudimu, by the author, South African Air Force Headquarters, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 21 January 2005.

³⁰¹ Interview with Dick Ralushai, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 26 February 2005.

enough open space for DLBs.³⁰² Rather than depending on the cooperation of the owners of the yards, in most cases they were not informed about their yards acting as storage facilities because in such situations honesty was not always an option. Underground military and political matters require maximum caution.

Refiloe's key vantage point in Zimbabwe helped MK to infiltrate arms into the north of the country despite the fact that the area was teeming with security forces. The South African security police expected that they would be able to apprehend MK cadres, since the area was once described as not being far from "the fangs of the terrorists."³⁰³ Most of these "terrorists" used either the Botswana or Swaziland "pipelines"³⁰⁴ to enter the country and link up with their "gifts" from the heavily guarded Zimbabwean route. Some of these "terrorists" made use of the same route from Zimbabwe into Beit Bridge border post, unarmed since their "gifts" had preceded them.

The porous nature of the two country's routes can be captured by a narration of the role played by Sam Ditshego in the 1980s. Ditshego was recruited inside the country for MK operations. He married his wife in an area that straddles the two countries of South Africa and Botswana, called Pitsane-Molopo. Pitsane-Molopo used to be a geographic unity but the course of history disrupted that unity and created two villages that are separated by a fence between the two countries. The inhabitants of the village share everything, including social events such as burials and

³⁰² Interview with Madela George (Mdu) Mokoena, by the author, South African Police Services (SAPS) Regional Headquarters, Middleburg, Mpumalanga Province, 15 October 2002. In this interview this point emerged clearly because Mdu believes that his unit's DLB is still situated in his father's yard in Mhluzi, Middleburg Township.

³⁰³ *Lebowa*, 'Homeland Leaders Reject Independence', 13 December 1974, p. 29.

³⁰⁴ "Pipelines" were secret routes of infiltration into South Africa and exit into exile used mostly at night by MK cadres.

weddings, as well as other cultural engagements. As a son-in-law of the village Ditshego would receive invitations to attend some of these social gatherings. He and his MK contacts in Moutse would make use of such occasions to infiltrate people into the country from Botswana and spirit those who had been recruited out of the country.³⁰⁵ All that was needed for people to be able to travel to Pitsane-Molopo was an official letter from Ditshego's chieftaincy in the Moutse area near Groblersdal. The chieftainess was an MK sympathiser and a son of hers, who was heir to the throne of the Bantoane community, was a member of the underground MK unit: Chief Mohlamonyane Mathebe. The Chief later left the country for formal military and political training with ANC/MK.

The recruitment of people inside the country for MK was multi-pronged. Contrary to popular arguments such as those advanced by Howard Barrell,³⁰⁶ the role of some comrades in South Africa was to find MK sympathisers who would accommodate MK cadres on missions inside the country. But matters did not always turn out as planned and aberrations should not be understood as norms. The case of Maserumule Tlokwe will make the point clear. Tlokwe left the country for Mozambique in 1979 after constant police harassment. He handed himself over to the FRELIMO forces and was eventually united with the ANC. Years later (in about 1983-4) Sipiwe Nyanda, an MK leader responsible for the rural Northern Transvaal MK machinery, deployed him into the far rural Northern Transvaal together with Tito Manthata on a recruitment drive.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Interview with Refiloe Mudimu, by the author Navy Headquarters, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 21 January 2005.

³⁰⁶ Barrell argues, amongst other accusations, that MK ran no reception committees for deployed cadres on various missions inside the country and that this hampered their progress in the execution of those missions.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Maserumule Tlokwe, by the author, GaMatlala, Limpopo Province, 11 July 2002.

The two MK cadres were not travelling together but were intending to meet at some point inside the country to consolidate their missions.

Tlokwe entered the country through “pipelines” into the KaNgwane area (Eastern Transvaal at the time). He was instructed to stay for a week at GaMampuru in the Steelpoort area and wait for the next instruction from his superiors in MK in exile. Everything initially proceeded as arranged. His next task was to move to the Motetema Township outside Groblersdal after accomplishing his first mission and wait for the following instruction. When Tlokwe was taken to Motetema to join the Maepa family (his host while en route to the next destination) he found that the family had relocated to Dennilton. The driver who transported him to the Maepa family just dropped him at a particular spot; Tlokwe was then supposed to locate the Maepa household in Motetema. Tlokwe eventually managed to trace the Maepa family in Dennilton, some thirty kilometers away from Motetema location. Unfortunately Isaac “Ike” Maepa, the owner of the homestead, was not staying there with his family at the time. He was somewhere on the Reef carrying out ANC missions.³⁰⁸ Tlokwe spent time with the family waiting for the instruction regarding his next step. The instruction never arrived as arranged but he waited lest his superiors lose his track. Possibly, when Tlokwe was dropped at Motetema and told to wait for the “next instruction”, those who were supposed to convey these instructions lost trace of him when he could not find the Maepa family. The fact that Tlokwe did not receive the “next instruction” and was arrested could be attributed to this disruption in the line of communication.³⁰⁹ The fact that he eventually found the

³⁰⁸ Isaac Maepa was an underground MK operative with a legal travel document (a passport) which he used to travel legally between South African and Swaziland on behalf of the ANC.

³⁰⁹ The point with these “next instructions” was that neither the carrier of the “instructions” nor the recipients knew about them. Different units within MK knew and monitored relayed instructions to MK

Maepa family in the Dennilton area, did not form part of the plans of his MK handlers in exile; hence the delay and the dislocation of the entire mission.

Tlokwe was already well-armed and was mostly in hiding, only going out to meet certain people for particular missions but when his main instruction was not forthcoming he grew tired of hiding during the day and started visiting the shops nearby. On the other hand, Maepa's children and their friends were acquainted with him and noticed the large amount of money that was in his possession. Little did they know that these R50 notes were mostly fake, intended to flood the South African economy so as to facilitate its collapse. One of the friends of Maepa's children stole some of the notes. He was severely assaulted by the Maepas' children who later related the episode to Tlokwe. Tlokwe admonished the children for having assaulted the "culprit" as this act was unlawful. The children later decided to go and finish "this thief" off in the fear that he would lay a charge of assault against them. They also knew that he would mention Tlokwe as the owner of the money that he (the thief) had stolen and were concerned because they were aware that Tlokwe was a member of MK and that he was well-armed.

Tlokwe was no longer able to hide his weapons as he was supposed to have left for his next destination before people's suspicions were aroused. The problem of a lack of communication disrupted all these plans, as did the facts that the Maepas had relocated to Dennilton and that Maepa senior (Isaac Maepa) was not there.³¹⁰ The "thief" was located at the hospital from which he absconded to the nearest police station where he

cadres deployed in the fields of operations. Military and political "instructions" are normally sacrosanct: although they allow room for individual ingenuity they should not lose its gist.

³¹⁰ Interview with Ike Maepa, by the author, Groblersdal, Limpopo Province, 13 August 2003

reported the whole story. Tlokwe was arrested after contingents of backup security police were summoned to Dennilton from the Middleburg and surrounding areas.³¹¹ Tlokwe was eventually sentenced in 1984 to a lengthy prison sentence on Robben Island after legal representations by Matthews Phosa and Dikgang Moseneke. The point of this episode is that in guerrilla warfare exactitude is essential but is not always adhered to. In Tlokwe's case it was not true that:

Once the ANC has dispatched guerrillas from their home bases it is unlikely that it is so able to exercise control over its personnel that it will avoid acts of terror. Far removed from military command the isolated guerrilla is a relatively free agent, selecting his targets, and proceeding towards them. There is always the temptation to replace military targets with softer civilian targets, either because there is less chance of detection, or because they satisfy one of the above-mentioned psychological needs.³¹²

The ANC in exile was also watching political developments inside the country with interest, which was not only focused on the government's policies and how it was reacting to the ANC's attempts to unseat it; the ANC was also concerned about the behaviour of its cadres deployed inside the country. In his response to Oliver Tambo's concern about what was happening here where MK cadres were "seemingly" not adhering to military and political instructions, Chris Hani assured Tambo that was not the case. Hani alluded to the fact that the MK command structure was not always present on the ground and that it was sometimes impossible to supervise activities, given the distance from Lusaka to Johannesburg or

³¹¹ Tlokwe told the TRC Amnesty Committee about his missions inside the country when he was deployed by MK but never, like many of the MK cadres, revealed what he did exactly inside the country. At some point of his presentation he mentioned that, "I cannot be precise" when asked by the TRC commissioner. See Tlokwe Frans Maserumule, TRC Amnesty Application Submission Application Number AM 6217/97.

³¹² Andrew Prior, 'Political Culture and Violence: A Case Study of the African National Congress of South Africa', *Politikon*, Vol. 11, No. 2, December 1984, p. 18.

Durban. Lines of communication were long – it was a feat of no mean magnitude to get MK cadres to reach their destination.³¹³

The above example demonstrates that there were indeed reception committees that received MK cadres from exile, as Tlokwe's example has shown, and also indicates that problems were associated with the execution of MK missions inside the country. The sympathisers of MK were prepared to take risks that involved life and limb. It is however, important to note that most of these sympathisers were not informed of the impending missions in which they were going to assist. For instance, Dorcas Mokoena served as a link for infiltrated MK cadres in the eastern Transvaal township of KaNyamazane and also assisted in supplying those cadres that needed food and accommodation in the area, as early as the 1970s.³¹⁴ No prior arrangements were made with her. She would be informed on the spot about what to do. When Dorcas eventually visited Zambia in 1986 as part of the Inyandza National Movement of the KaNgwane administration that was visiting the ANC in Lusaka for talks, she read in one of the ANC records about people who were cooperating with the organisation and discovered that her name was also recorded. However, she had never divulged her name to any MK cadres that visited her house nor did she ask them for their names. She was never officially requested by MK to assist in any way but individual MK members who were infiltrated knew that she was ready to assist in whatever way she was asked to. In a way she formed part of the internal structures that were needed to provide assistance to infiltrated MK cadres who were in transit to other areas in the inner part of the country on various missions. Dorcas undertook several trips to Swaziland on ANC missions to meet with Chris

³¹³Luli Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains*, Op. Cit., p. 522.

³¹⁴ Interview with Nomsa Dorcas Mokoena, by the author, 6 November 2004, KaNyamazane, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 6 November 2004.

Hani, amongst other contacts in that country, but she never gained a sense of the magnitude of her own contribution to the liberation struggle that MK was waging.³¹⁵ Hani never requested her to assist deployed MK cadres in the homeland of KaNgwane where she was an educator.

Conclusion

The often-talked-about question concerning whether the real locality of the struggle was urban or rural is a non-issue, since the struggle for liberation was a national one waged by the ANC amongst other liberation organisations, which gradually permeated and eventually engulfed all parts of this country. The rural areas of the far Northern Transvaal were made use of in the same way as the urban areas in the prosecution of the liberation struggle in South Africa. The struggle, as the ANC came to realise after the 1978 Vietnam visit, was not supposed to be planned and introduced from the outside.³¹⁶ Several trials of MK cadres arrested by the security police demonstrated the intricate nature of the liberation struggle and that it is a myth that the struggle for liberation in South Africa was simply urban-based and simple. After all it was the ANC that had argued from the onset that “the plan was to continue to infiltrate MK cadres into the most receptive rural areas (Pondoland and Sekhukhune amongst those receptive areas) adjacent to the borders of South Africa.”³¹⁷ Callinicos argues that the rural resistance to the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act had placed the armed struggle on the national agenda.³¹⁸ The inclusion of rurally-based political activists from the far Northern Transvaal, such as Nelson Diale, Peter Nchabeleng and his son Elleck,

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, 6 November 2004.

³¹⁶ Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: Op. Cit*, pp. 720 – 734.

³¹⁷ Luli Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains, Op. Cit*, p. 364.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 364.

vindicated the argument that the struggle was not as urban as is mistakenly thought. The disruptions of schooling in urban areas resulted in the migration of students to rural boarding schools but when the latter experienced educational disruptions, the authorities (such as the Lebowa government) altered the admission policies and only admitted day students.³¹⁹ This did not curb political unrest.

In South Africa political activists who were engaged in underground guerrilla struggles escaped from urban settings and vice versa when the security police were looking for them. When they arrived in a particular locality they did not hide indefinitely but made contact with the local underground MK structures that were determined to destroy the apartheid system. When they could no longer function effectively in the far Northern Transvaal MK cadres such as Mathabatha, Mogale and others used to hide on the Reef where they linked up with the urban-based MK cadres.³²⁰ Mathabatha was able to carry out the instructions of MK undetected from as early as the early 1970s when he left the country during school vacations for Swaziland where he received training in underground political and military combat work (MCW).³²¹

It became essential to involve ANC cadres in community problems everywhere these existed so that the organisation could champion the rights of every sector of the South African society. A non-partisan approach was needed to draw nearer to community-related problems in both the rural and the urban settings. It was in this context, therefore, that the ANC encouraged the formation of the “broadest possible national

³¹⁹ *Financial Mail*, 21 March 1986.

³²⁰ Interview with Stanley Mathabatha, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 2 August 2002.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

front for liberation; the reinforcement of the underground by drawing in activists thrown up by the mass struggles; the proliferation of political operations; and the establishment of a central coordinating body inside the country”.³²² This “body” will be dealt with later.

The Harare Motorway Express Bus Company provided a valuable service to MK, undetected until the unbanning of the liberation organisations in 1990. The above example was used to signify the importance of the rural link, particularly the far Northern Transvaal area adjacent to the border with Zimbabwe. Had it not been the underground work and commitment of the rural based underground MK activists such as Ralushai and others in the Nchabeleng Unit, the Zimbabwean based MK operatives would not have been able to link with the colleagues in the urban areas of South Africa. The 1985 ANC Consultative Conference in Zambia later officially encouraged the transportation of “gifts” to South Africa. Howard Barrell reported that: “The ANC is a large organisation with representatives and cadres in some 40 countries. Particularly since 1976, the ANC has been redirecting more and more of its external mission’s resources back into the country”.³²³ These “resources” needed recipient inside the country who were linked with MK cadres in way or another. The overriding aim was preparation for a protracted people’s war inside the country. The favourable conditions of relative ungovernability here, particularly in the mid-1980s, played into the hands of those advocating the people’s war. The Zimbabwean route that assisted in the infiltration of arms and ammunitions into the country was one route amongst many others. It was not sanctioned at an official level by the Mugabe regime, but it would be

³²² Luli Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 526.

³²³ Howard Barrell, ANC Conference: ‘All for the Front’, *Work in Progress*, No. 38, August 1985, p.11.

inaccurate to state that the Zimbabwean government was not aware of the ANC activities.

The role of the 'frontline states' in the South African liberation struggle differed from one country to another. Swaziland's role altered somewhat after the death of King Sobhuza and the signing of the secret non-aggression pact with South Africa in 1982. The pact did not hinder the ANC from carrying out its obligations to the oppressed South African people. The 1984 Nkomati Accord between Mozambique and South Africa hampered ANC operations effectively. The Accord represented the culmination of the South African government's lifelong wish to drive the ANC bases, facilities and passage routes out of Mozambique.³²⁴ The Accord, however, permitted the ANC a diplomatic presence in Mozambique. The affirmation of support for the ANC after the Nkomati Accord was confirmed by the Front Line States' Summit Meeting held in Arusha, Tanzania on 29 April 1984 in which the developments in southern Africa were considered. The Summit's communiqué read that "Mozambique's commitment to continued moral, political, and diplomatic support for the ANC in the struggle against apartheid and the majority rule in South Africa" was appreciated.³²⁵ Some of the setbacks that were experienced in this respect are scattered throughout subsequent chapters.

³²⁴ Spicer Michael, Nkomati And Beyond, 'Peace In Our Time' – Will It Be Myth Or Reality?, *Finance Week*, Vol. 20, No. 11, March 22-28, 1984, p. 569.

³²⁵ 'Peace is Incompatible with Racism and Colonialism: Final Communiqué of the Front Line States Summit', *Sechaba*, June 1984, p. 4.

Chapter Four

MK and the Internally Based Organisations

Introduction

The countrywide tyranny against the adversaries of the apartheid system of the late 1970s resulted in a mass exodus of political activists into exile. Their persecution and banning, the incarceration of ANC advocates and the disappearance and killings of MK cadres could not be unchallenged forever. There was a need to reconsider the strategies and tactics dealing with the brutalities of the government. The lessons of the 1960s in which the ANC and MK were suppressed, resulting in the majority of people escaping into exile for years, could not be repeated. As Mzala proclaims, “students of strategy know that although no revolutionary struggle exactly repeats the experience of previous revolutions, we can nevertheless learn a lot from the experience of others”³²⁶. Similarly, the political activists of the 1980s avoided the mistakes of previous revolutionary generations.

Their overriding aim was to campaign and organise a strategy unheard of in the past, encompassing every sector of the South African community. The interactions between those activists inside the country and those who were in exile assisted in developing this approach, in particular, at the end of the 1970s. Oliver Tambo admitted in his summary of the deliberations of the 1979 Politico-Military Strategy Commission that:

³²⁶ Mzala, ‘Umkhonto we Sizwe: Building People’s Forces for Combat, War & Insurrection, Part 2’, *Sechaba*, January 1987, p. 23.

We've been forced by events into a false, bad strategic situation in which [the] armed struggle is and remains the basis of political struggle – an impossible equation. [It is] necessary to correct this distortion... [It is also] necessary to recognise that our approach is an external approach: we see the struggle as being built up from outside, introduced from outside by people who are outside... This approach wholly excludes the people, the masses, as the decisive factor not only for victory, but [also] for any progress at all in our struggle... [We] see a serious strategic problem to solve before we can make advances. Hence the view that we slow down on [military] operations and work for a change in order of priority as between political work and military operation.³²⁷

Manifestly, the Vietnam lesson inculcated in the leadership of the ANC formed the strategy that mass political support must eventually involve all sectors of the society. Furthermore, it also taught the ANC leadership that an armed propaganda liberation struggle must be guided and determined by the need to generate political mobilisation, organisation and a prolonged resistance. A strategy was required to sustain resistance while replacing political activists who were exiled, jailed or killed. Still, there was a pressing need for trained MK cadres to be redeployed into the country to fan the flames of liberation. All these noble objectives were to remain pie in the sky if the ANC did not either establish a sustainable internal existence or infiltrate existing political and trade union organisations that were holding out against the government's draconian measures, within the country.

The efforts taken by the exiled mission of the ANC and MK to achieve liberation in South Africa needed to dovetail with the actions taken by the internally-based organisations with similar aspirations. To that end, this chapter examines the efficacy of these interactions and how the level of political consciousness within the country impacted on the

³²⁷ Luli Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains, Op. Cit.*, pp. 526 – 527.

implementation of the MK operations inside the country. Additionally, the chapter traces the resurrection course of “Charterism”, the philosophy of a comprehensive patriotism and non-racialism attributable to the Freedom Charter and the ANC.³²⁸ It also examines the 1980s persecution of individuals serving in the UDF with specific reference to the UDF’s actions in the rural Northern Transvaal. The intention is to verify whether the ANC/MK managed to establish contacts with internal organisations that were either ANC proxies or worked with the ANC because they shared common political aspirations. Consequently, the role played by the trade unions in entrenching the ANC/MK as forces to be reckoned with in the South African liberation struggle is briefly examined since it has already been thoroughly dealt with. This chapter advances the hypothesis that the UDF was formed after the ANC’s call for the establishment of a central coordinating body inside South Africa.³²⁹ Hence, postulations that the UDF was a substitute for the ANC within the country may have some elements of truth, thus it is argued that the dovetailing activities of the two organisations on their home turf, confirm this assertion.

The decline of the BCM-inclined organisations that dominated the South African extra-parliamentary politics throughout the first half of the 1970s was largely attributable to their disregard for broad organisational-building and collective actions.³³⁰ The BCM orientated organisations and individuals also, were not dogmatically wedded to their ideologies. It was only a matter of time before some of them would alter their ideologies along with the changing political landscape. The 1981 congress of AZASO, for example, resolved to drop the Black Consciousness cause

³²⁸ Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF. A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983 - 1991*, (Cape Town, David Phillip, 2000), p. 29.

³²⁹ The assertion that there was a link between the ANC and the UDF was made by the South African government; see the *Beeld* newspaper, 2 August 1984.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

and to view Black students as part of an oppressed community firstly, and secondly, as students. This was an attempt by enlightened student members of the BCM to rid students of their elitist tendencies that had developed during the SASO days. In practice, this meant that students had to play a supportive role towards community struggles and political campaigns initiated at a community level. Students were recruited to: visit and assist communities facing removals, distribute leaflets about political campaigns, help organise rent boycotts and create support committees for striking workers. Matters of immediate concern to students were addressed, only if they were able to make a substantial contribution to these student organisations committed to the struggle of the people.³³¹

The tendency to increase one's commitment and contribution to the liberation struggle, a lesson from the struggle against state repression, was a relatively new phenomenon during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The exclusion of the non-student population in opposition politics led to the formation of the BPC of South Africa with the express hope of taking care of the generic Black populace's political aspirations. The decline of the BCM organisations left a legacy to organisations that took root after this nosedive.³³² The political floor-crossing that ensued was not largely ideological and it is in this context that it was relatively easy to move to the ANC-oriented formations when they came to the fore in the late 1970s. After years of lacklustre existence it remains a logical conclusion how the ANC-inclined organisations came to dominate the 1980s and

³³¹ Maticias, 'Ten Years of the Black Tertiary Student Movement', *Sechaba*, November 1989, p. 10.

³³² For a different contestation of the ascendancy or decline of the BCM organisations see Lawrence Schlemmer, 'The Stirring Giant: Observations on the Inkatha and other Black Political Movements in South Africa' in *The Apartheid Regime, Political Power and Racial Domination* by R.M. Price and Carl G. Rosberg, *Institute of International Studies*, University of California, Berkeley, 1980, pp: 94-126.

eventually the new South Africa. A synopsis will be provided: In its calculated attempts to stifle any form of unity within the ANC and to completely annihilate this enemy, the government instituted the infamous 19 October 1977 clampdown on political organisations, certain religious institutions (such as the Christian Institute) and the liberal press, all of whom opposed its racist policies. The government also expressed its frustrated ire in the banning of individuals, for example, the 23 October 1977 five year banning order served on Beyers Naude. The potency of the collective action by mass organisations signalled the need for a united front against apartheid. It was only in late 1979, with the formation of the COSAS, that the gradual gravitation towards the ANC related organisations appeared.

Other events in the far Northern Transvaal also resuscitated the ailing image of the ANC/MK. The 1979 arrest of MK members: Neimbithi Lubisi (O'Lubisi Vladimir Raul Ulvanov), Petrus Mashego, Naphtali Manana, Ikanyeng Moses Molebatsi, Hlolile Benjamin Tau, Phumlani Grant Shezi, Jeremia Radebe, Boyce Johannes Bogale and Thomas Mngadi, further contributed to the reawakening of political interest in the ANC. The crackdown of the free flow of information did not prevent the news of the arrest of these MK cadres from spreading. The charges of attempted murder against Mankutu Mashapa and Thomi Mothibi by Lubisi, Mashego and Manana when the latter attacked the Soekmekaar police station on 4 January 1980, not only indicated the emerging widespread nature of the liberation struggle, but also highlighted its changing texture.³³³ The Soekmekaar police station was attacked during the same period that the neighbouring Batlokwa community put up

³³³ South African Institute of Race Relations 'A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, African Political Affairs', 1980, p. 248.

massive resistance against forced removals.³³⁴ It can be concluded that the MK attack was calculated to inform the community of Botlokwa that it could look to MK for support against forced resettlement policies of the apartheid state.³³⁵ The Lubisi MK unit established bases in Tzaneen from which it was able to launch attacks on the Soekmekaar police station. These forced removals were motivated by the South African government's security misconceptions that there was a need for the creation of a corridor to the north of the country that should not be obstructed by a cluster of villages and thus, the white farmers in the border areas were armed to the teeth and organised into commandos.

The political events towards the end of the 1970s gave renewed hope that black resistance politics that was dominated by the BCM related organisations' rhetoric was coming to an end. The government draconian reactions to growing political disturbances inadvertently assisted in the demise of the BCM influence. The dawn of the 1980 decade signalled the new mood of optimism generated by MK related activities such as the arrests of the COSAS leadership and the new vociferous trade union movement. Similarly, a new sense on strategies and tactics gripped the ANC in exile that brought to the fore the fact that mechanisms needed to be hatched that would bring synergies between the exiled organisation's operations and the new political cadreship that was evolving inside the country. The overriding question was how to integrate political agitations unfolding inside the country with actions that were taken by the ANC to infiltrate new ideas and actions into the country. That is the preserve of the following discussion.

³³⁴ 'Guerrilla Attack', *Sechaba*, London, April 1980, p. 17.

³³⁵ Interview with Mogale Ephraim, by the author, Bronkhorstspuit, Gauteng Province, 26 & 27 April 2003.

New strategies and tactics at the crossroad.

An experienced generation of the ANC from the prisons, particularly Robben Island, together with a hardened generation of youth, who were prepared to be mowed down by apartheid bullets, required a new approach to the theory of freedom. These lessons from both the younger and older generations of different freedom fighters had some tangible and implementable outcomes at the turn of the 1970 decade. The creation of political machineries to train the political cadres who infiltrated the country and replicated themselves through political education of the people in the struggle, and elevating the combat spirit, were some of the strategies and tactics vigorously adopted in the 1980s.³³⁶ These efforts found expression in various SA community-based organisations that were later affiliated to the UDF. Whether the UDF was an envisaged “central coordinating body inside the country”³³⁷ that was to be established as part of the mandate of the terms of reference of the Politico-Military Strategy Commission is secondary to this study, but, of profound importance is that this “central coordinating body inside the country”, had individuals who would fulfil the missions of the ANC and MK. Their contributions under the banner of MK are scrutinised throughout this study.

It is against this background that the 1980s decade dawned throughout the country, in particular, in the rural far Northern Transvaal. The governments of countries of southern Africa was generally in the hands of the ANC sympathisers and therefore the “rear bases” phenomenon was tangible. The “rear” bases” phenomenon refers to the countries that shared borders with South Africa and likely to be used by MK as entry

³³⁶ Mzala, ‘Umkhonto we Sizwe: Building People’s Forces for Combat, War & Insurrection’, Part 2, *Sechaba*, January 1987, p. 24.

³³⁷ Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge, Op. Cit.*, p. 722.

points. The ANC was also relatively well-prepared to make inroads into South Africa from these frontline states where it existed in these neighbouring countries under sufferance without free reign to conduct its own affairs. From all corners of the country the borders appeared to be porous. The internal political activists were able to communicate and direct political proceeding with the exiled leadership. In March 1979 for example, the Botswana police arrested four South Africans armed with explosives, automatic weapons and a large quantity of ammunitions after raiding houses in Gaborone. Shorty Tlhamedi, James Rantau, John Maruo and Zacharia Tolo were imprisoned for the possession of weapons of war. However, "Botswana's strategic location and political obligation to the liberation cause inevitably defines that country as a country of transit. The government had consistently refused to allow guerrillas to operate from or through its territory."³³⁸ The truth is that the Botswana government turn a blind eye on ANC activities and it was only when those activities became glaring that she intervened. The ANC was waiting in the wings of these countries where there had been occasional arrests. However, the arrest of MK cadres caught with weapons of war was expected but not acceptable in the sense that there were criticisms when host countries took action against ANC members caught with weapons. Addressing a meeting in London, in March 1979, to launch a campaign against military and nuclear links with South Africa, an ANC official, Seretse Choabi accused African governments of denying ANC members access to their countries.³³⁹ Some years later, in the neighbouring countries, such as Mozambique (after the 1984 Nkomati Accord), and Swaziland (in the transition years in the wake of the death of King

³³⁸ Roger Southall, 'Botswana as a Host Country for Refugees', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 2, July 1984, p. 159.

³³⁹ South African Institute of Race Relations, 'A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1979, African Political Affairs', Johannesburg, p. 54.

Sobhuza II in 1982), the ANC found itself constantly harassed by these countries at the insistence of the South African government. In sharp contrast to this view, Matthews Phosa surmises that only a small minority in the neighbouring countries supported the South African government's pressure to extradite the ANC.³⁴⁰ The neighbouring countries found themselves in this quandary throughout the history of the struggle in South Africa, while, generally, individuals took it upon themselves to assist in the struggle championed by the ANC.

The purpose of the foregoing account is to depict, albeit perfunctorily, the atmosphere under which the ANC was operating in the Frontline States. The Southern African situation was daunting. The ANC was aware that the problems posed by these states were insurmountable. How the ANC was to link the emerging organisations in South Africa with these rear bases was of profound importance. A general realisation in the ANC existed that engaging the masses on its side and preparing for the armed warfare were two sides of the same coin.³⁴¹ Even though the reference is to an earlier date, 1961, its implication is that communication within the organisation was interlinked over a series of decades for an ongoing fossilised common liberation vision. Therefore, it should have come as no surprise that the ANC had infiltrated most of the organisations that had emerged from within the country, and then spearheaded their campaigns. This approach was not new to the world of liberation politics. As Amilcar Cabral observes, a people's struggle becomes theirs if it is based on their aspirations, dreams and desire for justice and progress and not on those of

³⁴⁰ Interview with Matthews Phosa by the author, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 30 January 2004.

³⁴¹ Vladimir Shubin, *A View From Moscow*, (Bellville, Mayibuye Books, University of the Western Cape, 1999), p. 42.

the minority or the opposition.³⁴² Armed with all these aspirations, the ANC embarked on a journey to the home front which characterised the 1980s which was an indirect response to Oliver Tambo's message of 8 January 1979, in which he called on all opponents of racial conceit, dominance and white supremacy, to let loose a resolute battering on the false political, economic and racist obstructions under the axiom, apartheid or separate advancement.³⁴³ The new strategies and tactics that were fashioned out by the ANC's years of underground operations needed to be complimented inside the country. Military and political policies, strategies and tactics couldn't be applied in a vacuum. There was a need that the MK should establish links with organisations that were operating inside the country under extreme conditions of repression. Deployed MK cadres on recruitment drives inside the country were mandated to strengthen the internally based organisations that shared political vision with the ANC. The following section expatiates on it.

The rebirth of internally based organisations and MK units: The 1980s

The major problem that frustrated the renewed determination to resuscitate dormant internal political structures of the ANC was that these structures were "weak and vulnerable".³⁴⁴ The armed propaganda warfare was one of the strategies adopted by the ANC "to stimulate the process of regeneration" of these internal structures within the country.³⁴⁵ The process of the rejuvenation by deployed political cadres of the ANC was

³⁴² Amilcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle – Speeches and Writings*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1979, p. 75.

³⁴³ OR Tambo, 'January Message', *Sechaba*, April 1979, p. 4.

³⁴⁴ Thomas Karis, 'The Resurgent African National Congress: Competing for Hearts and Minds in South Africa', cited in Thomas M. Callaghy, *South Africa in Southern Africa, The intensifying Vortex of Violence*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 191.

³⁴⁵ Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 28.

long and very arduous. This was not out-of-the-ordinary. The blasé visibility of the ANC in the 1976 student uprisings was one of the many reasons that contributed towards the rarity of effective and tangible internal structures of the ANC. This changed with time. The arrest of Lubisi's unit as well as other landmark armed propaganda attacks, such as the 1980 bombing of SASOL, popularised the ANC nationally. The military top brass of the SADF admitted, in the 1980s, that the "problem" with the ANC was that it was everywhere.³⁴⁶ How did this "problem" of the prevalence of the ANC come about? Is it true that "the insurgent campaign", as Tom Lodge declares, "re-established the ANC as the predominant force in black South African politics even [when] its support [was] still mainly in the form of ideological inclination and emotional sentiment rather than organised membership."³⁴⁷ Of course, Lodge missed the point that the ANC was organised and underground. How was it possible for the ANC to achieve its objectives of sustaining and maintaining the cooperation of the underground networks if it was not organised? What mechanism was adopted to reconnect the underground-based MK activists with the organisations that held the same view?

"Ideological passion"³⁴⁸, described by Jack Spence as a concept "that offers an explanation of the past, announces present discontents and projects a vision of the future", also assisted the ANC in its effort to win the hearts and minds of the people. The ANC's Department of Internal Reconstruction and Development (DIRD) was entrusted with the promotion of that "ideological passion" through its proxies inside the country. *The Strategy and Tactics Document of the ANC* declared the

³⁴⁶ 'Response to Comrade Mzala by Nyawusa', *Sechaba*, April 1985, p. 18.

³⁴⁷ Tom Lodge, 'State of Exile: The African National Congress of South Africa, 1976 – 1986', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 1987, p. 2.

³⁴⁸ John Edward (Jack), 'Spence, Revolutionary Warfare', *International Affairs Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1981, p. 22.

same notion as propounded by Spence, highlighting the depravity of wealth on the grounds of skin pigmentation, the suppression of skills, and increasing poverty and starvation. The ANC maintained that its policies carried the aspirations of those deprived of these essentials and wished to have an over-arching umbrella organisation that could accommodate the objectives of the local community-based organisations into a national body, an ideal organisation that the ANC's DIRD wished to have dealings with. Established in 1977, this department was aware of the complicated terrain of its field of operation in the country. The UDF became a recipient of this "ideological passion" but the confluence was afflicted with life threatening obstacles.

The DIRD's problem was also related to the fact that the Frontline States were not prepared to risk the wrath of the South African government by allowing the ANC free reign to use their territories as launching pads. These Frontline States were, however, prepared to accommodate the ANC politically, diplomatically, infrastructurally, and militarily as they surrounded South Africa.³⁴⁹ Since the success of any revolutionary armed-force hinges on the presence of a dependable rear base close to the country under attack, these states were strategically positioned for the ANC.³⁵⁰ South Africa's military and economic superiority made these Frontline States lethargic in their assistance to the ANC. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe made the point patently clear in June 1981, that under the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) they were morally obliged to assist the liberation movements in South Africa and Namibia. However, "We have said we will not create conditions in this country

³⁴⁹ Chris Maritz, 'Pretoria's Reaction to the Role of Moscow and Peking in Southern Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1982, p. 326.

³⁵⁰ Stephen Ellis and Tshepo Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile*, (London, James Currey, 1992), p. 43.

which can be used by any organisation for carrying out military attacks against our neighbours, including South Africa.”³⁵¹ Mugabe knew as much as anyone interested in the politics of the region that such statements were intended for cordial neighbourly relations with South Africa. Cross-border raids into neighbouring states, including Zimbabwe, were carried out by the South African government on supportive allegations that most of the ANC host countries ascribed to the liberation movement. After the Zimbabwean independence in 1980, for example, 13 ANC guerrillas imprisoned by the Ian Smith government were released and the ANC was later allowed to open offices in Salisbury (now Harare).³⁵² These MK veterans were permitted to stay in Zimbabwe and assist in interacting with underground MK cadres inside the country through DIRD.³⁵³

The arrival and subsequent appointment of Mac Maharaj as the DIRD’s secretary general in the late 1970s in exile assisted in fulfilling the mandate of the department. He was relatively new in exile and had inside knowledge of the underground connections within South Africa, particularly with Pravin Gordhan. Joe Nzingo Gqabi also made a major contribution through his internal connections in Botswana while in exile in June 1978 after his terrorism acquittal as part of the “Pretoria 12” earlier in the year. The notorious “Pretoria Twelve” trial at the Pretoria Old Synagogue Court included Mosima “Tokyo” Sexwale, Naledi Tsiki, Martin Ramokgadi, Seathlolo Jacob, Lele Motaung, Simon Samuel Mohlanyaneng, Elias Masinga, Michael Ngobeni and Pauline Mohale. They were arrested for alleged conspiratorial activities to topple the

³⁵¹ *The Star*, 9 June 1981.

³⁵² South African Institute of Race Relations, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1980, “African Political Affairs”*, Johannesburg, p. 62.

³⁵³ Interview with Motau William, by the author, IKIM Building, SANDF Provincial Offices, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 27 August 2002.

South African government.³⁵⁴ Their arrest demonstrated tentative steps that the exiled section of MK was trying to establish with their counterpart inside the country throughout the country. The trial exposed a network of rurally- and urban-based underground MK activists. Influential MK leaders such as Diale, Nchabeleng and Ramokgadi were eventually acquitted, which in turn assisted in the resurgence of the underground struggles that had nearly been nipped in the bud in the rural areas of the far Northern Transvaal. Diale and Nchabeleng later became active underground ANC/MK members in the Northern Transvaal. They became, particularly Nchabeleng (who became the UDF leader of the Northern Transvaal) leading faces of the UDF in the Northern Province. Back to Gqabi's arrival and updated internal knowledge in exile. Gqabi was a veteran of the MK, having joined the outfit in 1961 and subsequently gaining military training abroad. He was apprehended upon his return and sentenced to two years' imprisonment for leaving the country illegally. At the end of his two-year jail term, Gqabi was rearrested at the Fort, charged under the Sabotage Act, and sentenced to 10 years on Robben Island.³⁵⁵ His mysterious assassination in Harare, Zimbabwe, on 31 May 1981, where he was an ANC Chief Representative after independence, was a major blow to the internal/external axis of the ANC/MK.³⁵⁶ It was on the basis of these nascent political connections between the ANC, the disjointed internal organisations, and individuals inside the country that the ANC urged internally based people, in an interview with *New African*, March 1980:

³⁵⁴ Michael Lobban, *White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era*, *Op Cit.*, p. 199. For details about Sexwale's case see State versus Sexwale and eleven others, the Supreme Court of South Africa Transvaal Provincial Division, Case number CC 431/77, National Archives, Pretoria.

³⁵⁵ 'Obituary: Joe Nzingo Gqabi', *Sechaba*, September 1981, p. 30.

³⁵⁶ Muriel Horrell, 'A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1981', South African Institute of Race Relations, p. 25. for details on Gqabi's assassination see also Peter Stiff, *Cry Zimbabwe Independence – Twenty Years on*, (Cape Town, Galago, 2000), pp. 59-66.

The African National Congress is continuously encouraging our people to organise themselves into all manner of formations to continue the struggle and to raise the level of confrontation. We, therefore, welcome the emergence of all organisations that seek to unite our people in the struggle against the fascist dictatorship. Our principal objective then becomes that of ensuring that such organisations are activated into struggle.³⁵⁷

The ANC's message was later to be taken to its fruition when the political playing field reached maturity. The political playing field was ready to be "activated into struggle" in the sense that trade unions were 'allowed' to operate in factories after the recommendations of the 1979 Wiehahn Commission. The worker's right to go on strike was taken away in the sense that if there was such a need, an application had to be sent to the government's Department of Manpower and Utilisation (DMU) for approval. The migrant workers, who formed sixty percent of the South African workforce, were excluded from trade unionism³⁵⁸ because they were regarded as "migrant" workers. In keeping with the policies of separate development, they did not have the permanent rights to reside in the "white" areas of South Africa.³⁵⁹ This a blow to the migrant workers of factory floor but they were always able to articulate their political frustrations at hostels where they were residing. In the case of the far Northern Transvaal the Northern Transvaal People's Congress (NOTPECO) was later able to provide link between these migrant workers and their political aspirations that were deeply ensconced in the UDF. NOTPECO offered a vital link between the workers' organisations based in the urban areas and the Northern Transvaal Youth Congress

³⁵⁷ Sheridan Johns and R. Hunt Davis, Jr, *Mandela Tambo and the African National Congress. The Struggle against Apartheid 1948-1990, A Documentary Survey, Op. Cit.*, p. 240.

³⁵⁸ 'Pretoria's Commission of Inquiry', *Sechaba*, July 1983, p. 25.

³⁵⁹ 'South Africa: Trade Unions Tactics', *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 20, No. 24, November 28, 1979, p.1.

(NOTYCO).³⁶⁰ NOTPECO was formed in August 1986 by a combination of migrant workers and the regional organisers of the UDF in the rural far Northern Transvaal.³⁶¹ NOTPECO brought with it years of experience in the struggle for liberation in South Africa because most of its members such as Wilfred Monama and Jepson Nkadimeng were tried and tested members of trade unions and Sebatakgomo movement in the 1950-60s.³⁶² When the far Northern Transvaal was gripped with political violence members of NOTPECO were able to assist in providing a sense of direction and leadership. The usurpation of political control and power by the youths particularly in the late 1980s account for the demise of NOTPECO in the politics of the region.

The system of apartheid that the ANC was fighting against ensured that there were no legal loopholes that could be explored by the migrant workers towards their attainment of their membership of the trade unions. Some workers who fell outside the migrancy category did not find it easy though in their trade unions. The Labour Relations Amendment Act (LRAA) making it compulsory for the unions to register with the Industrial Councils (ICs) remained a problem. The LRAA replaced the Industrial Conciliation Act (ICA). It also replaced the Black Labour Relations Act (BLRA) of 1953 and the Settlement of Disputes Act (SDC). The status of the workers was not altered by the Act, as they continued to be regarded as “labour units” in that they were allowed to participate in a statutory bargaining system that did not afford them genuine trade union rights as workers.³⁶³ The situation was further

³⁶⁰ *The New Nation*, April 23 – 29, 1987.

³⁶¹ Gregory F. Houston, *The National Liberation Struggle in South Africa. A Case Study of the United Democratic Front, 1983-1987*, (Brookfield, Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), p. 230.

³⁶² Interview with Nkadimeng, Jepson, by the author, Sekhukhune, Limpopo Province, 22 September 2004.

³⁶³ Thoziso Majola, ‘Challenges Facing the Black Workers’, *Sechaba*, November 1982, p. 7.

complicated by the fact that most of the trade unions refused to register with the ICs which, in turn, refused to negotiate with trade unions that were not registered with them. Of critical importance was the fact that the unions were not permitted to participate in politics.³⁶⁴ The acceptance of the recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission by the government allowed black workers to unionise under strictly controlled conditions and thus indirectly creating another fertile ground for political mobilisation.³⁶⁵ The need for ideological flexibility became evident to the ANC in its drive to enlist the support of a broad spectrum of South African political persuasions.

In the rural areas of the far Northern Transvaal, this limited freedom of trade unionism had no immediate considerable spin-offs for the ANC because the area was largely dependent on subsistence-farming, which does not suggest that there were no trade unions operating in this region. Things changed over time. For instance, the significant role played by the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) in the mid-eighties in the Steelpoort area cannot be overlooked.³⁶⁶ This organisation not only concentrated on shop floor problems but also took the responsibility to establish community-based political organisations, such as the Steelpoort Youth Congress (Steyco), which later became an affiliate of the UDF. The fact that MAWU had an office in the village of GaMampuru, not in the town of Steelpoort or in one of the factories where its membership was based, is a clear indication of the synergy and cooperation that existed between the factory workers and community activists. Generally, trade union activism made inroads into politics, a scenario that proves

³⁶⁴ 'Solidarity with S. A. Workers', *Sechaba*, February 1981, p. 5.

³⁶⁵ Miriam Lacob, 'What Role for Black Unions?' *Africa Report*, November-December 1982, p. 40.

³⁶⁶ Peter Delius, *A Lion amongst the Cattle. Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal, Op. Cit.*, p. 180.

that the two were inextricably intertwined. Eventually, Johan Wessels of the Steelpoort Farmer's Action Committee asked their Member of Parliament who happened to be a Minister of Manpower as well, Pietie du Plessis, to erect a fence that would separate Steelpoort from its neighbouring villages of Sekhukhuneland because of the villages' politicisation.³⁶⁷ This was a clear reflection of the extent to which politics had encroached on everyday life in rural communities of the far Eastern and Northern Transvaal. The locality of the MAWU office also had to do with the fact that Chief Mampuru of GaMampuru community had political sympathies for the trade union movement. He was a member of Sebatakomo and Khuduthamaga (*sic*) in the 1950s.³⁶⁸ This migrant rural organisation was suppressed throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The example of the connection and membership of Sebatakomo movement of the 1960s by Chief Mampuru illustrates the futility of the government's attempts at suppressing political aspirations. The historical role that was played by the trade unions in the 1960s in assisting people to join MK justifies that assumption that MAWU (and by extension, Chief Mampuru) had sympathies for the ANC in the GaMampuru area of the north-eastern Transvaal. The fact that Chief Mampuru hosted Tlokwe Maserumule (an MK deployed cadre in 1984) confirms the assumption that there were sympathies.³⁶⁹ Tlokwe was deployed in the area for politicisation and recruitment purposes. The ANC had a sophisticated and thorough process of verifying credentials of hosts before the deployment of MK cadres. The host's political background, current political

³⁶⁷ 'Steelpoort Farmers set to look at the electric fence', *The Star*, 14 May 1986.

³⁶⁸ Sebatakomo was "a migrant-worker-based political organization formed within the ANC in 1954 (and) played a crucial role in the events that culminated in the Sekhukhuneland Revolt of 1958" and Makhuduthamaga were people who were opposed to the introduction of the Bantu Authority in Sekhukhuneland in the 1950s. For a comprehensive study of Makhuduthamaga and Sebatakomo see Peter Delius's Sebatakomo: 'Migrant Organization, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, October 1989.

³⁶⁹ Interview with Tlokwe Maserumule, by the author, GaMatlala, Limpopo Province, 11 July 2002.

affiliations and sympathies as well as the possibility of accomplishing a mission while hosted were some of the considerations before a host can be selected. These considerations were not communicated to MK deployees for fear of compromising the mission in case of military and political miscarriages. Miscarriages of military and political missions that ended up in political trials indirectly assisted in informing people inside the country that MK was alive and active. These political trials also exposed the connections between trade unions on the side and the political ferments which were gripping the country in the 1980s.

Early in the 1980's, political trials that involved trade unionists were already underway. In the trial of Barbara Hogan, for example, the government wanted to prove that there was a connection between the emergence of trade unionism in South Africa and the underground operations of the MK. In this trial, Hogan admitted to being an ANC member and to assisting in organising two consumer boycotts at the behest of striking unions and further helping in the formation of a union that catered for unemployed black people.³⁷⁰ Trade union movement was not confined to a particular locality and what Hogan was accused of did not exclude the unemployed people of the far Northern Transvaal. One of the famous cases of "death in detention" at the hands of the security police was that of the secretary of the Food and Canning Workers Union, Dr. Neil Aggett, in the early 1980s.³⁷¹ In the eyes of the security police, the line, if at all existent, between trade unionism and overt political actions, was blurred which was also the attitude of the ANC, as many examples confirmed. The formation of a trade union that catered for

³⁷⁰ 'South Africa', *Africa Report*, November-December 1982, p. 35.

³⁷¹ For the role of Neil Aggett in trade union movement see Nicole Ulrich, 'Labour, Race and the State: The death of Neil Aggett and the Black Trade Union Movement in South Africa, 1979-1983,' University of the Witwatersrand, Unpublished paper, Johannesburg, 1999, the entire paper.

unemployed black people spelt danger in the eyes of the government because the majority of rural people and were unemployed. The connection between the envisaged union by Hogan and her membership of the ANC was not a prospect that the government that was hell-bent on destroying the ANC would allow. Issues of immediate appeal to the unemployed were plenty. Most of the causes of friction in the rural areas of the far Northern Transvaal that brought people together centred on the shortage of land, racism masquerading as separate development, tribalism, and in some cases, successions related to chieftainships. It was these problems that the ANC encouraged organisations inside the country to grapple with "...in factories, on the farms, in the Bantustans, at universities and on the battlefield."³⁷²

Old members of the ANC in the region who were lying low such as Diale, Nchabeleng and Ntsoane became sources of information on ANC related matters. There were not novices in the ANC, MK, underground operations and trade unionism. Nchabeleng spent eight years on Robben Island and when released in 1972, was banished to his home village of Apel in Sekhukhuneland. The South African government purposely disregarded the fact that Nchabeleng had lived in Pretoria before his imprisonment on Robben Island and that he had left Apel village 25 years prior to his arrest. Nchabeleng had been quite active in the Office Workers Union, SACTU, the ANC and Sebatakomo before his arrest. Diale had the same membership of organisations as Nchabeleng and was also released at about the same time. Diale was banished to GaMasemola village and Ntsoane was sent to GaMphahlele where he stayed with his sister, an anomaly in the course of events of African family life

³⁷² Sechaba, 'Unity in Action', January 1982, p.1.

patterns.³⁷³ It becomes necessary to point out that such a disruption of life of the victims of apartheid was the least of the government's concerns. Diale later established an Advice Centre at Jane Furse in Sekhukhuneland where he 'advised' the youth on how to skip the country to go and join MK in exile.³⁷⁴ Diale and Nchabeleng continued to influence youth organisations in the area throughout the 1980s. Their efforts bore fruit in the mid-1980s, particularly in the former Lebowa Bantustan. The 1986 killing of Nchabeleng on grounds of instigating violence in the region was a clear indication of the impact of his involvement in the liberation struggle in the rural areas of the far Northern Transvaal. Some of the youth from the area joined the ranks of MK as a result of repression and these old MK cadres' influence. The majority of the youth joined youth congresses that were affiliated to the UDF which Nchabeleng led.

The political unrests that engulfed rural Northern Transvaal, such as those in 1986 at Apel in Sekhukhuneland (organised by the Sekhukhuneland Youth Congress), were widely reported.³⁷⁵ This is the area where Nchabeleng was banished to. In the mid-1980s throughout the region youth congresses would use victims of unrest's funeral to plan ahead. In Motetema Township outside Groblersdal, the Lebowa police killed seven youths in March 1986 when the youths were stopped at a police road block, designed to hinder mourners from attending a political funeral in the township.³⁷⁶ These political funerals were used as political rallies at which future action-plans were formulated. Night vigils were mostly used by leaders of the youth congresses to meet and chart the wayforward with political leaders who were regarded as having links with

³⁷³ Interview with Joel Ntsoane by the author, GaMphahlele, Limpopo Province, 10 August 2002.

³⁷⁴ Interview with Diale Nelson, by the author, Diphagane, Sekhukhuneland, Limpopo Province, 28 May 2002.

³⁷⁵ *Financial Mail*, 21 March 1986.

³⁷⁶ Interview with Stan Mathabatha by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 24 January 2004.

MK either in exile or underground. The police tried to intervene to curb the number of people that were supposed to attend these funerals but they seldom succeeded.

In the final analysis, it has been demonstrated, and it will be demonstrated again that the establishment of underground connections between the seasoned leaders of MK and trade union movement as represented by Diale and Nchabeleng and their urban based colleagues such as Ramokgadi, Nkadimeng and Gqabi (particularly after September 1976) proved to be useful. The flame of liberation engulfed most of the Northern Transvaal when more and more people were recruited into the ranks of the UDF and underground structures of the ANC and MK. Diale and Nchabeleng established clandestine contacts with other political activists who remained inside the country, maintaining a low profile in the suppressive atmosphere of the 1970s.³⁷⁷ In the confusion of the 1976 uprisings, their political profile improved somewhat as they became the source of information on how to leave the country and join the ANC and MK.³⁷⁸ Gqabi, Nkadimeng and Ramokgadi made contact with long-standing former members of Sebatakomo and the ANC in the rural far Northern Transvaal. It was easy to trace them, as both Nkadimeng and Ramokgadi were members of the Sebatakomo movement. After September 1976 Ramokgadi made several trips to Sekhukhuneland where he contacted Diale and Nchabeleng.³⁷⁹ Sexwale's unit established two more units of MK at Apel and GaMasemola under Diale and Nchabeleng. The idea was to provide internal political and military training as well as

³⁷⁷ Interview with Diale Nelson by the author, Diphagane, Sekhukhuneland, Limpopo Province, 28 May 2002.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ Peter Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle. Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 178.

sending selected individuals out of the country for intensive training.³⁸⁰ Sexwale's unit was not only assigned to Sekhukhuneland; it had similar assignments elsewhere in the country as well, including the explosion on the Pretoria-Pietersburg railway line at Dikgale on 26 October 1976.³⁸¹ The encounter and narrow escape of Sexwale and his group at the border between South Africa and Swaziland, led the security police to several clues that eventually closed down the entire far Northern Transvaal network of the MK. A total of 163 individuals including Diale, Nchabeleng, Ramokgadi, Gqabi and Nchabeleng's son, Elleck, were all arrested. Diale, Nchabeleng and Gqabi were eventually acquitted in what was known as "the Pretoria 12" trial. Diale and Nchabeleng, as subsequent discussions will show, would play leading roles in the 1980s in the underground operations of the ANC and MK and the UDF. Gqabi went into exile in 1978.

The Home front – What Next?

In her chapter aptly titled *The Search for the Road Ahead*, Luli Callinicos captures the overriding aims of the ANC's desire to come home and fight the liberation struggle. This was a search for the road, fraught with thorns, bullets and betrayals, which in itself was not important, but rather, the destination that lay beyond it. More important was that which led one into exile in the first place. Callinicos states, "Their fervent aim had been to acquire the expertise to mobilise more effectively, to continue the struggle inside the country, to rebuild the underground and set in motion

³⁸⁰ Interview with Diale Nelson, by the author, Diphagane, Sekhukhuneland, Limpopo Province, 28 May 2002.

³⁸¹ Michael Lobban, *White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 201.

guerrilla warfare against the apartheid regime.”³⁸² Not all people involved in the struggle would engage in combat warfare, but many were prepared just in case it reared its head. Mzala explicates:

...without arms in hand, ... these gallant comrades, in many unrecorded cases, planned and executed their missions and built a foundation on which our people’s army was built; they too, like the military combatants, are the heroes of our revolution, their names will last forever, and one day all our people will know of them and will need them for their courage.³⁸³

The point is that there were thousands of people who were involved in the liberation struggle without formal membership of either the ANC or MK. This had been the case all along in the ANC and the 1985 Kabwe Consultative Conference of the ANC’s decision that all members of the movement had to undergo military training, and should not be miscalculated as *casus belli* in a military sense, but should be interpreted as a tactic in anticipation of a need for battle readiness. This was not a new clarion call. Early in the 1970s, Joe Matthews made this point quite clear that an ideal MK cadre should be an all-rounder. He states:

We must arm the people not only with modern weapons but [also] with revolutionary skill and ideas. Above all South African revolutionaries must master the problems posed by the South African revolution. The tendency to draw relevantly and irrelevantly from other struggles by analogy should not be encouraged. True, we must be ready to learn the revolutionary experience all over the world. But in the end the creative thinking of our own revolutionaries is required to be applied to the South African revolution.³⁸⁴

The revolutionary international experience as advocated by Matthews influenced the ANC that it was not necessary to overcome South Africa militarily “but to create an intolerable situation for the occupying power

³⁸² Luli Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo Beyond the Engeli Mountains*, Op. Cit., p.363.

³⁸³ Mzala, ‘Umkhonto we Sizwe. Building People’s Forces for Combat’, War 7 Insurrection, *Sechaba*, Part 2, January 1987, p. 24.

³⁸⁴ Joe Matthews, ‘Forward to a People’s Democratic Republic of South Africa’, *Sechaba*, September 1967, p. 11.

or its puppet regime.”³⁸⁵ Although Seegers was referring to the revolutionary tactics adopted by FRELIMO in its fight with the Portuguese colonial government in Mozambique, similarly, the ANC learnt that the lessons of guerrilla warfare that sustained an ungovernable political situation and not the “political threat per se”, would lead to governmental capitulation. But who were these South African revolutionaries that Matthews was referring to? How were they supposed to carry out their mandate while trying to avoid the mistakes that led to the arrests of others before them?

MK cadres who were sent home on various missions were exposed to many challenges, opportunities and obstacles. There was a need to strike a balance in pursuance of the liberation. A new and committed MK cadre deployed inside the country was needed. The atmosphere of near ungovernability prevailing inside the country as of the early 1980s dictated that there should be a rethink on deployed cadres of the movement. Tambo decided that there should never be any mission inside the country that would be based on maps nor an “on-the-spot” study of areas.³⁸⁶ He did not imply that MK cadres were no longer going to be sent into unknown territories nor that people were no longer going to be arrested with incriminating evidence on their persons. Tambo meant that reconnaissance missions, the identification of local comrades and the familiarity with the topography were going to be emphasised before the commencement of any expedition. These would involve intensive research about local politics, operational area, language and the political history or sympathies of the contact persons. Tambo learnt a valuable

³⁸⁵ A. Seegers, ‘Strategy in National Revolutions: Some Aspects of FRELIMO’s Revolutionary Strategy’, *Politikon*, Vol. 4, No. 1, June 1977, p. 66.

³⁸⁶ Luli Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo Beyond the Engeli Mountains*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 368.

lesson from the MK's daring Operation J.³⁸⁷ His prudence limited frontal confrontation between MK cadres and the South African security forces within the country. Three salient feat of military and political gallantry echoed Tambo's injunction.

One such interesting incident (the incident that fits perfectly into Tambo's vision of an MK cadre) comes from an MK cadre, Patrick Thibedi, who was at Secunda when the SASOL oil plant refinery was bombed in June 1980. Thibedi was a driver in a construction company that had been contracted to deliver the sand used in the completion of the SASOL II and III factories. The night SASOL was attacked by MK cadres, Thibedi decided to work overtime, making several deliveries of sand to the factory. The police investigations led them to suspect that Thibedi's overtime work must have been a ploy to assist those cadres who eventually shelled the factory. He was hunted down and arrested by the police and shot at, sustaining a broken leg, after attempting to escape from a moving police van near Evander. He was eventually absolved of any complicity in the attack. Heartbroken and angry while in detention, Thibedi had discussions with an arrested MK cadre, Moss Molefe, at Randfontein police station on how to join MK. After his acquittal towards the end of 1980, Thibedi consulted with foreign mine workers from both Swaziland and Mozambique on how to enter their countries. He immediately left the country through Komatipoort to join the ANC and attended a one-month crash course at Funda Camp in Angola where he learned military engineering specialising in explosives and target shooting. He returned to attack the SASOL oil plant refinery on 21 October 1981 after being personally briefed by the head of the Special

³⁸⁷ Operation J was a codename for an MK operation that was envisaged to be carried out by highly trained cadres (about 25 MK cadres) on the east coast of South Africa using an old cargo ship, the Aventura.

Operations Unit, Joe Slovo.³⁸⁸ Thibedi insisted that his was supposed to be a one man mission and Slovo granted him his wish. Thibedi, having accomplished his mission, decided to use the remaining arsenals of weapons in Witbank before he headed back to report in exile. Unbeknown to Thibedi, the South African security forces were out in full force looking for him when he decided to visit his children and mother-in-law at Marapong in the Dennilton area of, today, Mpumalanga province. A massive roadblock by all shades of security forces in the country, set up at Verena near Witbank, prevented Thibedi from realising his dream of paying his children a fleeting visit en route to exile. Realising that he risked long-term imprisonment he decided to turn back from that roadblock but the security forces fired at his car. He survived, and disappeared until he was arrested near the Swaziland border on 27 October 1981. Thibedi was later sentenced to 24 years imprisonment on Robben Island.

The point about Thibedi's experience is that it fits perfectly into Tambo's vision of an ideal MK cadre who was supposed to be infiltrated into the country, and the information and knowledge that he was supposed to possess. Thibedi knew the target (SASOL oil plant refinery) quite well, the area (just in case there was a need for an immediate escape) and the language in case he needed to get information in line with his mission. Thibedi refused to be accompanied by other MK cadres because of his suspicions of possible betrayal and mistrust amongst members of the same unit and also because of his confidence that his mission needed him and him alone – this was an act of bravery. It is true that Slovo warned him against visiting his wife or children in Dennilton yet, in spite of this,

³⁸⁸ Interview with Patrick Thibedi, by the author, ANC Provincial Head Office, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 29 August 2002.

the mission was accomplished.³⁸⁹ A lesson was learned by Thibedi in MK cadre's previous missions into the country that resulted in massive arrests of the entire underground network of operatives. The Sexwale-Tsiki units and their internally based contacts, discussed earlier, provide a relevant example. These units allegedly "travelled persistently – conducting a blizzard of meetings" and, eventually being nailed down by the security police on December 30 1976, brought about the destruction of the entire machinery. It is documented that Ramokgadi and Gqabi wrote about the experiences recommending that, "without a well-developed underground and organised domestic political base, armed activity should not be commenced."³⁹⁰ Slovo concurred with this view cautioning that, "creating a core of trained professional armed cadres, putting them into the field with adequate logistical support and with adequate contact to carry them through the initial period, requires long-term planning."³⁹¹ It was against this background, among other factors, that Thibedi insisted on a one-man mission, and the ANC obliged.

The general directive given to MK cadres brought into the country from exile was to establish an MK presence inside the country by politically educating and recruiting people into the underground structures once they were formed.³⁹² This was one way in which MK thought it could "[sink] its roots deep amongst the masses of our people whose combat formations it is leading to confront the military machine of the apartheid regime."³⁹³ It was impossible to recruit people who had no known sympathy to the liberation cause. This explains why community leaders,

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ Howard Barrell, *Conscripts to their Age, Op. Cit.*, pp. 151.

³⁹¹ Joe Slovo, 'South Africa - No Middle Road', in B. Davidson, J. Slovo and A. Wilkinson, *Southern Africa: The New Politics of Revolution*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1976), p. 94.

³⁹² Interview with Maake Jerome Joseph, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 4 November 2003.

³⁹³ Alfred Nzo, '65 Years of the South African Communist Party', *Sechaba*, September 1986, p. 20.

student and trade union activists were mostly targeted and eventually recruited into the underground structures of the movement. Cadres of MK such as Cassius Motsoaledi, Casper Musekwa and Robert Mokoena were dispatched to the Bushbuckridge area of the now-defunct Bantustan of Lebowa (from exile) for reconnaissance and recruitment purposes in the early 1980s. Motsoaledi and Mokoena were from prominent political families in Soweto and Musekwa knew the area of Venda quite well even though his parents had gone into exile in Swaziland some years prior to the independence of the Bantustan. Motsoaledi's father, Elias, was languishing in jail on Robben Island as part of the first MK command imprisoned after the Rivonia treason trial. Mokoena was related to Paul Dikeledi (Peter Sello Motau) who was later to be shot dead on July 9 1987 by the occupants of a BMW sedan bearing South African number plates when the taxi in which he was travelling was stopped in Swaziland.³⁹⁴ Dikeledi was killed together with a member of the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) Cassius Maake (Job Shimankane Tabane) while Augusta Tsinini of Mozambique escaped in that butchery.³⁹⁵ They, amongst other MK cadres deployed in the region, were all part of the Northern Transvaal rural machinery of MK responsible for the recruitment and reconnaissance of potential targets in the rural far Northern Transvaal in the 1980s. Mokoena knew the area of Bushbuckridge as he had relatives there who were eventually roped into the underground operations of MK. These relatives and political friends served as hosts (reception committees) and facilitated some of the missions assigned by the MK leadership to those that were deployed in the country, such as Mokoena, Motsoaledi and Musekwa.

³⁹⁴ 'Obituary: Cassius Make and Paul Dikeledi', *Sechaba*, September 1987, p. 29.

³⁹⁵ Moss Glenn, 'MK and the Armed Struggle', *Work in Progress*, No. 46-63, 1987-1989, p. 5.

In one of their forays into the area of Bushbuckridge Motsoaledi was arrested with other members of the village in the early 1980s after an incident that was sparked off by lightning that had struck a household. Consequently, accusations of witchcraft were bandied about and an alleged perpetrator's house was gutted by a fire caused by angry members of the village. In that melee, Motsoaledi, who was on a mission in the area with Robert Mokoena, was told to hide in the bush until the situation subsided, but, when he later went to his host, George Mokoena (Robert's nephew), the police arrested him.³⁹⁶ Motsoaledi was not apprehended for his MK activities at the time but as part of the village swoop that was taking place in the area after the lightning episode. Chief Chiloane made a representation to the local magistrate that the majority of those who had been arrested for the lightning incident were students who were supposed to write examinations. They were all released on the strength that they were fingerprinted and could be traced to their parents when needed by the police.

Motsoaledi's case showed inconsistencies because he had a different accent from the rest of Chief Chiloane's subjects. It never occurred to the police that he was a member of MK having infiltrated the region from neighbouring Swaziland. Motsoaledi claimed that he was a relative of George Mokoena from Thembisa (an area likely to accommodate his accent) and it was on that understanding that he was released pending the outcome of the fingerprints. When his fingerprints were eventually confirmed by the police headquarters in Pretoria that he was, in fact, highly sought after and that he should be detained on the spot,

³⁹⁶ Interview with Frank Thabane, by the author, Acornhoek Police Station, Bushbuckridge, Limpopo Province, 23 October 2002.

Motsoaledi was already out of the country, having fled to Swaziland.³⁹⁷ Before he left the country in 1976, after the Soweto student uprisings, Motsoaledi had failed to report to a Soweto police station daily as had been required by the police; therefore a warrant for his arrest existed. The security police later persecuted George Mokoena for hosting Cassius Motsoaledi when they later discovered who he was (from the fingerprint's report) but they were not sure that George Mokoena was really George. This was the name that they had first heard from Cassius when they had apprehended him for the first time in that great swoop. Cassius did not know that George's name was not common knowledge in the area. He was called "Best" Mokoena. Cassius Motsoaledi told the police that he was visiting his relative George Mokoena who was studying in Bushbuckridge in his effort to explain why he was there instead of Thembisa from where he claimed he had come. He told the police that he was Phineas Mokoena to convince them that he was indeed George's cousin. In September 1981 George resolved to leave the country to go into exile; not the first time. He and his friends Frank Thabane and Michael Malope had been in exile for MCW in June 1980 during school vacations.³⁹⁸ They served as an underground linkage in the area until their arrest in the mid-1980s.³⁹⁹ These underground MK operatives were active members of school student movements in the Bushbuckridge area of the north-eastern Transvaal.

There are two points that need to be emphasised about the entire encounter of the MK deployed in the Bushbuckridge area of Lebowa:

³⁹⁷ Interview with Cassius Motsoaledi, by the author, Erasmuskloof, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 16 May 2005.

³⁹⁸ Interview with Frank Thabane, by the author, Acornhoek Police Station, Bushbuckridge, Limpopo Province, 23 October 2002.

³⁹⁹ Thabane was arrested for harbouring (alleged) MK guerrillas Prince Chiloane and Elphus Mogale. See *Weekly Mail*, January 17 to January 23, 1986.

MK cadres such as Cassius Motsoaledi and Robert Mokoena were on recruitment and reconnaissance mission inside the country.⁴⁰⁰ Firstly, they visited their relatives and somehow involved them in the underground liberation struggle which had more to do with security consciousness. Secondly, the nature of MK underground operations at the time made it impossible for a full disclosure of anything, otherwise Motsoaledi and Robert Mokoena could have been told that Thabane, Malope and George Mokoena (the nephew of Robert Mokoena) were already members of MK, who had joined in June 1980. In an interview with Cassius Motsoaledi, it emerged that when he visited Bushbuckridge he seemed to believe that these three MK cadres were not members but local sympathisers of the ANC.⁴⁰¹ He did not know that they had already gone through the crash course in MCW as far back as 1980. An MK cadre called a Nzimbi was the one who took them (Thabane, Malope and George Mokoena) across the border to Swaziland, and eventually to Mozambique.⁴⁰²

The nature of the underground liberation struggle at the time dictated that the three underground MK cadres mentioned above maintain a low profile politically in order to avoid the attention of the security police. There was always a need for them to be fully trained and it was always possible for trainees to disappear for some time, particularly after the completion of high school or during school vacations. Most of those who skipped the country for military and political training from the rural areas of the far Northern Transvaal claimed, when they resurfaced, that they

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with Cassius Motsoaledi, by the author, Erasmuskloof, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 16 May 2005

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, 16 May 2005.

⁴⁰² Interview with Frank Thabane, by the author, Acornhoek Police Station, Bushbuckridge, Limpopo Province, 23 October 2002.

had been working in urban areas and unable to come home due to work related reasons.⁴⁰³ After undergoing an intensive military training that took them to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the early 1980s Malope, Mokoena and Thabane were sent back to the Bushbuckridge area to carry out the underground liberation work for MK around about June 1984.⁴⁰⁴ The changing political climate in the country initially favoured them in that the country was caught up in a nationwide unprecedented level of political upheavals with the youth in the forefront. This was the mid-1980s. The youth comprised a revolutionary contingent that was “highly politically conscious, experienced in struggle over a period of more than half a century, who stood ready in their tens of thousands to be recruited and organised into contingents of political and armed fighters.”⁴⁰⁵

Matthews Phosa was at the time an attorney in Nelspruit working clandestinely for the ANC and servicing this MK unit in Bushbuckridge.⁴⁰⁶ This connection explains why Phosa was exposed and forced to go into exile in Swaziland when the police eventually caught up with the unit,⁴⁰⁷ which was organising and spearheading youth revolts in the Bushbuckridge area, by organising the youth into youth political formations and political education based on the ANC objectives and principles.⁴⁰⁸ The Thabane unit did not carry out these clandestine

⁴⁰³ Migrantcy was always used for all sorts of excuses including missions of going into exile for short consultations and training undetected.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with Frank Thabane, by the author, Acornhoek Police Station, Bushbuckridge, Limpopo Province, 23 October 2002.

⁴⁰⁵ Mzala, ‘Umkhonto we Sizwe: Building People’s Forces for Combat War and Insurrection’, Part 1, *Sechaba*, December 1986, p. 19.

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with Matthews Phosa by the author, Phosa Legal Offices, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, 30 January 2004.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with Siphithi Vincent Malaza by the author, Sunnyside, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 18 January 2005.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with Frank Thabane, by the author, Acornhoek Police Station, Bushbuckridge, Limpopo Province, 23 October 2002.

objectives on its own but had surrogates in the youth congresses that they infiltrated.

The exposure came because of an arrest accompanied by gunfire exchanges when this MK unit was moving house for security reasons. On one particular day in 1984, Thabane was relocated from the house in which he was secretly staying, to another in the neighbourhood. Unbeknown to those who were organising these safe houses, the owner of the new house into which Thabane was moved, was a policeman in Witbank whose son lived there and informed the local police about Thabane's presence in the house. In the gun battle that ensued, Thabane was injured in the leg but, nevertheless, managed to escape. He then moved to another house in the neighbourhood. However, he was bleeding so profusely that he had to seek medical assistance from someone. Feigning compassion, a certain man offered to seek help on Thabane's behalf. He left Thabane alone under the pretext of wanting to summon Thabane's uncle who was also part of the underground MK liberation struggle. The man came back with the police among whom was Siphithi Malaza, a double agent for both the security police and the ANC in exile.⁴⁰⁹ Thabane was then arrested. Thabane was sentenced to fifteen and half years on Robben Island for his MK activities.

In the same exposure and confrontation with the police, Michael Malope was killed when he was found in Patrick Mogale's room.⁴¹⁰ Mogale, a school principal of Bheki Zwayo Secondary School in the area at the time, used to lend these three cadres his car to carry out their political

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 18 January 2005.

⁴¹⁰ Interview with Patrick Mogale, by the author, Bushbuckridge, Limpopo Province, 23 February 2003.

missions, which led to his imprisonment later on Robben Island.⁴¹¹ Mogale, who was present in the room when the gun battle ensued, was also an ANC sympathiser who had taught some of these cadres of MK. Of pivotal importance is that the message the MK wanted to convey was now taking shape in the rural areas of the far Northern Transvaal – the politicisation and involvement of the masses.

Notwithstanding Tambo's vision of an ideal deployed MK cadre there were other political developments that were taking place in the rest of southern Africa. These developments impacted on the interaction of MK and those organisations that were internally based. They also affected plans that were hatched in exile with regard to MK deployees. It is against this background that the following conditions are outlined. It should therefore be understood that the Nkomati Accord signed by the South African government with Mozambique in 1984, disorganised the ANC and MK plans. Thabane alluded to this when he pointed out that the ANC was forced by the implications of the Accord to despatch them to South Africa without thorough preparation.⁴¹² That is why, according to Thabane, MK cadres were instructed to concentrate on political mobilisation and to cut down on military actions as the host countries in exile were beginning to be hostile towards them. It was around that time (after the signing of the Accord in 1984) that the ANC relocated some of the MK cadres to Ethiopia and Uganda. Thabane's sentiment seems to be borne out by a number of facts. Jorge Robelo, a member of the Political Bureau and the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the FRELIMO party in Mozambique maintains that their position was to give the ANC political and diplomatic support and not to contribute to its military

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹² Interview with Frank Thabane, by the author, Acornhoek Police Station, Bushbuckridge, Limpopo Province, 23 October 2002.

efforts.⁴¹³ This state of affairs culminated in confusion around the same time that Thabane refers to: the military coup in Lesotho affected the ANC; and in Swaziland and Botswana "...ANC and MK structures and operational capacity in Swaziland and Botswana were also undermined and destroyed, with cadres again hastily infiltrated into South Africa, causing increased casualties."⁴¹⁴ The Nkomati Accord in particular, unexpectedly compelled MK to realign its long-term military policy of "hacking its way home" prematurely. After the Nkomati Accord:

The ANC was forced to re-think its strategy in 1984 when the Mozambican government, which had been a traditional host and ally of the ANC, was forced to sign an agreement with the South African government. This effectively closed off Mozambique to the ANC and the ANC military was forced to withdraw to Angola and Tanzania. At the same time, other of South Africa's neighbours indicated that they too were unable to provide sanctuary for the ANC.⁴¹⁵

The psychological impact of the MK operations was immeasurable on the psyche of the majority of the people whose aspirations the ANC had in one basket. Alfred Nzo vividly captured this impact that instilled self-confidence and transformed the dormant resentment towards the government into a spirit of an open mass confrontation.⁴¹⁶ Even military and political sceptics, such as Dale McKinley, alluded to the oppressed black people's expectations of MK armed campaign.⁴¹⁷ The interaction between the deployed MK cadres and the youth congresses proved useful

⁴¹³ Muyanda Mavis and Jorge Robelo, *Apartheid's War on its Neighbours. Leaders of the Frontline States Speak Out about the Apartheid Regime's Destabilisation of South Africa*, A Pamphlet Published by Sheffield City Council, 23 November 1990, University of Cape Town, p. 25.

⁴¹⁴ Paul Gready, *Writing as Resistance Life Stories of Imprisonment, Exile, and Homecoming from Apartheid South Africa*, (New York, Lexington Books, 2003), p. 178.

⁴¹⁵ Andrew Prior, 'Political Culture and Violence: A Case Study of the African National Congress of South Africa', *Politikon*, Vol. 11, No. 2, December 1984 p. 16.

⁴¹⁶ 'The People's Programme: The Statement by Secretary General Alfred Nzo to the June 26th Freedom Day Meeting', Camden Centre, *Sechaba*, September 1980, p. 7.

⁴¹⁷ Dale T. McKinley, *The ANC and the liberation Struggle: A Critical Political Biography*, (London, Pluto, 1997), p. 106.

in the sphere of MK operations. The youth constituted the majority of ANC aligned organisations inside the country and they were able to identify targets, provide safe houses for MK cadres and organise secret underground meetings in which revolutionary skills were imparted to selected few and trusted cadres of the movement. The bulk of the membership of umbrella organisations like the UDF was not directly involved in the planning and execution of ordinary military and political missions of the liberation struggle. The dangers of doing something contrary were daunting. The focus on the youth was not mistaken because every revolution has the intention of capturing the minds of the youth as its primary objective.⁴¹⁸ The formation of youth congresses took up the cudgels in all spheres of life and in the process managed to challenge the causes of their marginalisation from community levels to the economy of the country. These young people who were in the forefront of receiving and protecting MK cadres infiltrated the country through 'routes' that were not as conventional as the observers of history would like to believe.

One daring mission of MK cadres into the cauldron of violence in KwaNdebele will confirm the above. The arrival of Maake and his MK unit in the mid-eighties in KwaNdebele under the guidance of Chris Hani, who was in exile, could not have been possible if the youth of Moutse, in particular, were not prepared to provide them with safe houses and other equipment.⁴¹⁹ Maake's unit (comprising Mike Sindane, Johnny Nhlanhla, and later joined by Chief Piet Mohlamonyane Mathebe, Charkie Edison Mathebe and Charles Doctor Mathebe) was hosted, undetected, in Moutse for almost two years when the community was

⁴¹⁸ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954 – 1962*, (London, MacMillan, 1987), p. 403.

⁴¹⁹ Interview with Selby Selape Mathebe, by the author, Moutse Tribal Authority, Mpumalanga Province, 14 October 2002.

faced with a two-pronged intractable problem.⁴²⁰ There was a looming incorporation of the area into KwaNdebele and the homeland was about to opt for independence.⁴²¹ The fierce battle that the community was waging against the vigilantes of Imbokotho needed a military intervention that could tilt the scale of the war in favour of the Moutse community. The unit fought fierce battles in tandem with the masses of Moutse in the KwaNdebele area.

This MK unit led by Maake carried out many operations such as the attack on Elias Musi (otherwise known as Elvis Mishi) for suspecting that he had been assisting the police in their war against the opposition of the Moutse residents against the incorporation into the Bantustan of KwaNdebele. The MK unit went to Musi's place at Saniesloot where he was seen standing outside his house. They fired several shots at him before he fell to the ground. It later emerged that he had been injured in the leg in that attack.⁴²² The same MK unit attacked a police station in the area in the early hours of the morning to minimise any possibility of injuring any civilians. The objective had always been to avoid the use of random violence and injury of guiltless civilians.⁴²³ The police returned fire but the unit managed to flee in a get away car that was parked a few metres from the police station where, in another attack, two policemen, Freddy Sepogwane and Jerry Motluong were injured.⁴²⁴ Maake

⁴²⁰ Interview with Jerome Joseph Maake, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 4 November 2003.

⁴²¹ For a comprehensive study of the KwaNdebele Bantustan politics and its attempt to incorporate Moutse see S. N. Phatlane, 'The KwaNdebele Independence Issue: A Critical Appraisal of the Crises around Independence in KwaNdebele 1982 – 1989', MA Thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, November 1998.

⁴²² See Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume Seven, p. 445.

⁴²³ See John D. Brewer, *Critical Choices for South African Society: Black Strategies for Change in a Constrained Society*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

⁴²⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume Seven, (Cape Town, Juda & Co. LTD, March 2003), pp. 1-7.

masterminded the attack on the magistrate's court at Sempupuru in 1987 after making a home made bomb that caused a neighbouring squatter camp around the Kwaggafontein police station, to relocate for fear of being caught in the crossfire.⁴²⁵ The unit also killed Lieutenant Petrus Fourie and his son Sergeant Mark Fourie on the 11 September 1987, in an ambush at Dennilton/Marble Hall/Moteti T-Junction.⁴²⁶ Lt. Fourie was a member of the KwaNdebele police and a commanding officer of the Watch Unit in Dennilton which was responsible for most of the brutalities visited upon the people who opposed their incorporation into KwaNdebele homeland. Sgt. Fourie was a member of the SAP based at the police college in Pretoria. At the time of the ambush he was just accompanying the father to the area. The MK unit got the information through contacts in the police force that Fourie senior and Warrant Officer Kekana were going to meet on that day to discuss the investigation they were carrying out at the time. These were not the only fruitful mission that they carried out in the area. There were other cases of bravery by the Maake unit in Moutse in 1987-88. The unit managed the Area Military Committee (AMC) that was responsible for all direction and operations of MK in the area, keeping track of what was taking place and liaising with their overall commander, Chris Hani, in exile. People who knew about the committee were able to report their cases there, for example, a member of the incorporation opposition had been kidnapped by the agents of the Imbokotho vigilante outfit and hidden at the Immerpan area. The Imbokotho vigilante brigade was the KwaNdebele Bantustan based outfit used by the homeland's political leadership to entrench themselves amidst community opposition to the homeland's political development. The AMC sent, upon investigations,

⁴²⁵ Interview with Bax Mahlangu, by the author, Bronkhorspruit, Gauteng Province, 28 April 2003.

⁴²⁶ TRC Amnesty Application No. AM 7756/97 by Jerome Joseph Maake.

the Maake unit to rescue the kidnapped MK functionary in 1987. These acts of the MK unit were made possible with the help of the involvement of several units of MK some of which were responsible for the distribution of arms and ammunition in the area. A military training camp was also established in the area in 1986 in a cave called *Mmaleonya* near the royal family of the Bantoane community.⁴²⁷

There was also a need for MK to establish a constant supply of trained cadres to ward off and sustain the resistance campaign against the two military states – the South African government, and the KwaNdebele Bantustan and its Imbokotho task force. These operations could not have been possible without the support of the local people in their organisation, Moutse Youth Congress, an affiliate of UDF. These underground cadres were mostly youths such as Bax Mahlangu, Themba Mahlangu, and families such as the Maepa in Dennilton who assisted Tlokwe when he was deployed to the area in 1984 and many others who laid the groundwork for MK to establish itself on home soil. MK cadres based inside the country such as Stanley Mathabatha, played a sterling role in informing deployed cadres from exile about the state of affairs.⁴²⁸

In the end, the Moutse community was left out of the independence sham that was envisaged. The Maake unit was enlisted into other national campaigns such as Operation Vula and when the network was uncovered almost all the membership of the Operation were arrested. Jerome Maake faced the bleak future of another imprisonment on Robben Island

⁴²⁷ Interview with Stanly Mathabatha, by the author, Provincial Department of Finance, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 2 August 2002.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

and only a dint of luck in the form of the unbanning of political organisations in 1990 saved him from another term on the island.⁴²⁹

Conclusion

The reappearance of the ANC stalwarts on the South African political stage and their interaction with the youth, the tentative movements of the ANC underground and MK tremendously counteracted the refined arguments advocated by the BCM related organisations of the 1970s.⁴³⁰ The decline of the BCM related organisations and their subsequent rise by the Charterists gave the ANC a confidence to declare the 1980s a “decade of freedom.”⁴³¹ The BCM organisations also lost their “prestige” because the ANC cadres who were following the instructions of the ANC in exile had infiltrated them.⁴³² This was a well orchestrated plan by the ANC carried into the country by deployed MK cadres on recruitment missions. The emergence of COSAS and the subsequent mushrooming of civic associations and youth congresses in the early 1980s ensured that the fortunes of the ANC and MK were catapulted onto the national stage. The creation of the UDF reinforced the local struggles that were waged because the UDF had the capability to provide a national political and ideological axis for forces opposed to the government’s racial policies.⁴³³ Contrary to Tambo’s persistent refutations that the UDF was not an ANC front, the symbiotic relationship between the two tells a different story. The South African government had the impression and perception of the

⁴²⁹ Interview with Jerome Joseph Maake, by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 4 November 2003.

⁴³⁰ Sello Moeti, ‘Ten Years of Soweto Uprising’, *Sechaba*, June 1986, pp. 4-5.

⁴³¹ Thando Zuma, ‘The Surest Way to People’s Power. A Response to Brenda Stalker’, *Sechaba*, February 1988, p. 9.

⁴³² ‘ANC calls for Unity’, *Sechaba* London, October 1979, p. 18.

⁴³³ Mark Swilling, ‘The United Democratic Front and the Township Revolt’, *Work in Progress*, No. 46-63, 1987-1989, p. 26.

“UDF as a stalking horse for the exiled ANC.”⁴³⁴ The perception spelt danger for the UDF and explains its persecution by the government towards the end of the 1980s decade. It is argued that the “central coordinating body inside the country” that was envisaged as part of the mandate of the terms of reference of the PMSC was actually indirectly answered with the formation of the UDF. Tom Lodge’s analysis of the UDF obliquely confirms this assertion that for an organisation that had fifteen members who belonged to the ANC (before it was banned) of whom five were members of MK (in some cases the same people) and seven were members of SACTU,⁴³⁵ what else is needed to prove that this was an ANC broad based church? The intermingling between the ANC and UDF obliquely brought to the fore the assumption that the UDF was the “– overt, internal face of the ANC.”⁴³⁶ The UDF united more than 400 community based organisations that comprised all South Africa’s racial composition.⁴³⁷ It may not have been the central coordinating committee as envisaged by the ANC in exile. How else were the many encomiums for the UDF, from the ANC in exile, supposed to be interpreted? It is in this spirit that Oliver Tambo urged:

...That outstanding product of the creative initiative of the masses of our struggling people, the United Democratic Front, has borne the brunt of the futile terrorist onslaught of the Botha-Malan-Coetzee regime to defeat our mass offensive and to suppress our democratic organisations. To this day, the threat of prohibition hangs over the UDF. Yet we are convinced that, having more than survived the assassination and imprisonment of its leaders, the cold-blooded murder of its leaders, the bannings of its meetings and so on, the UDF will overcome all attempts by the enemy to wipe it out of existence. Practice has more than amply demonstrated that the struggling

⁴³⁴ ‘South Africa: The UDF’, *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 21 January 1987, p. 4.

⁴³⁵ Tom Lodge, ‘The United Democratic Front: Leadership and Ideology’, *African Studies Institute*, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987, p. 2.

⁴³⁶ Gomolemo Mokae, ‘Robert McBride – A Coloured Life’, PhD Thesis, Department of English, Vista University, Pretoria, 14 June 1993, p. 37.

⁴³⁷ See Christian Science Monitor Publishing Society, *Christian Science Monitor*, August 23, 1983, the entire issue.

masses of our country need the UDF as an instrument to maintain, advance and deepen our united action.⁴³⁸

The UDF remained at the apex of internal opposition politics in South Africa after its launch on the 20 August 1983 at the Rocklands Civic Centre, Mitchell's Plain. Although it was conceived as a rallying point against the South African government's constitutional reforms, the UDF eventually coordinated struggles against apartheid.⁴³⁹ The youth congresses that were established throughout the 1980s were almost UDF affiliates. The link between the exiled MK and the internally based organisations was working perfectly well as of the late 1980s despite repressive measures taken by the government against them.

The UDF continued to serve as a reservoir for the MK's clandestine operations which did not go unnoticed in security police circles. Station Commander Johannes Jacobus Kloppers of the Dennilton and Siyabuswa police stations acknowledged the presence of the MK in the KwaNdebele-Moutse debacle.⁴⁴⁰ Presenting evidence before the Parson Commission of Inquiry, Commander Kloppers blamed Imbokotho vigilantes as well as the ANC and UDF for violence in the area.⁴⁴¹ The UDF's role and its ability to outclass the government's repression can be summed up in the words of *The Star* newspaper that, 'The UDF has become the hydra of SA politics...the many-headed snake whose opponents are bent on decapitating it but are faced with its ability to

⁴³⁸ OR Tambo, 'Attack! Advance! Give the Enemy no Quarter!' (January 8th Message of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress); *Sechaba*, March 1986, p. 5. See also Steven Mufson's Interview with Thabo Mbeki in *Fighting Years Black Resistance and the Struggle for a New South Africa*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1990), p. 206.

⁴³⁹ Jean de la Harpe and Andrew Manson, *The UDF and the Development of Resistance in South Africa*, *Africa Perspective*, No. 23, 1983, p. 66.

⁴⁴⁰ Jerome Joseph Maake, TRC Amnesty Application No. AM 7756/97.

⁴⁴¹ 'Vigilante's chief cause of Unrest', *The Star*, April 4, 1990

regenerate heads to replace those lost.”⁴⁴² This was a feat of unprecedented magnitude that was not there in the ANC before. The ability to replenish detained or killed cadres of the movement and be able to send recruited youth into exile as well as to integrate those that were trained in exile back into the country was a accomplishment that was relatively new in the 1980s. For those are looking for military achievements it is important to note that the ANC has always argued that the liberation struggle was more political than military. The military and political campaigns that popularised MK and indirectly mobilised the masses for the ANC were not as massive as they later became in the mid-1980s. The MK armed propaganda operations were also not without detractors, a criticism that was not new. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi for example, criticised the ANC at a meeting in KwaMashu on June 8 1980 after the Sasolburg and Secunda MK attack. His view was that he “would not stand by and watch the ANC committing political suicide by attempting to establish itself on the lunatic fringe of the society”.⁴⁴³

The legalisation of the trade union movement and the need for an umbrella organisation of trade unions also assisted in sustaining the people’s expectations about the ANC, particularly after the formation of COSATU in 1985. Individual members who were active in the trade union movement were able to carry out the campaigns that were engineered by MK such as the recruitment drives for people to join the underground structures. The DIRD eventually managed to accomplish its mission to establish contacts with the internal organisations that took up the cudgels against the government’s celebrations of Republic Day, the skyrocketing rents, the imposition of tribalism masqueraded as separate

⁴⁴² ‘The UDF & Regime’s Strategy of Control’, *The Star*, 30 April 1985.

⁴⁴³ *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa*, ‘*African Political Affairs*’, 1980, p. 53.

development, and a host of other social ills that affected the black majority. The role that the trade unions were playing on factory floors was actually not new in the ANC's war against the South African government. The SACTU played the same role as that of a conveyor belt to the ANC/MK struggles of the 1960s.⁴⁴⁴ It was just that new strategies and tactics used in the past were grinded and perfected with time by COSATU. When COSATU and the UDF were truncated by the emergency regulations in the mid-1980s, they were able to mutate into something as nebulous as the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). The goals were still the same – to outwit the government of the day in strategies and tactics of arrests, proscription and killings. MDM was described at some point as,

... the movement's hydra-headed character that finally defeated the Nationalist government and its security apparatus - it could not be disabled by simple decapitation, like the ANC and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) 20 years earlier. The COSATU unions, too, had developed their own bottom-up traditions, with strong factory organisation and an independent, worker centred political line. SACTU, by contrast, was little more than the ANC's labour auxiliary.⁴⁴⁵

In the final analysis, the interchange between the ANC/MK and the myriad of internally based organisations that were housed under the UDF became visible and beneficial to the re-emergence of MK in the rural far Northern Transvaal. It should be reemphasised however, that the underground nature of MK operations dictated that the deployment of the MK cadres in a particular locality be kept to a bare minimum. Their role was to control and give military and political guidance whenever necessary. The deployed MK cadres' brief was not to fight with the

⁴⁴⁴ See Edward Feit, *Workers without Weapons, The South African Congress of Trade Unions and the Organisation of the African Workers*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 162-3. See also Stephen M. Davis, *Apartheid's Rebels Inside South Africa's Hidden War*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁴⁵ 'Mbeki Reaps as he Sowed', *Mail & Guardian*, October 28 to November 3 2005.

SADF soldiers in a conventional warfare but rather, to conduct guerrilla warfare tactics whenever and wherever necessary for armed propaganda warfare purposes.⁴⁴⁶ It is in this context that the interplay between the exiled government and internally based opponents should be analysed and finally understood. Regional events that were unfolding in the 1980s, such as secret pacts, had a detrimental effect on the MK operations in the rural far Northern Transvaal. The effect was felt in the execution of the MK underground activities which needed "...safe rear bases in order to organise logistic support, training and refuge for guerrillas in-between attacks."⁴⁴⁷ The Nkomati Accord in particular was singled out by the ANC as a 'surrender' and since its signing, the allegation went, the rest of southern African states were under pressure from South Africa to follow suit. The unintended results of the secret pacts were that the ANC encouraged its cadres to stay inside the country and resist the government's clampdown rather than to leave the country for exile. This is not to deny that recruits were admitted to the MK training camps outside South Africa. The numbers dwindled after the Nkomati Accord and new camps were opened in places like Ethiopia and this proved to be costly and counterproductive. Rear bases became more attractive than faraway camps.

⁴⁴⁶ In the case of attacks in Moutse the idea was to reinvigorate the opponents of incorporation into the Bantustan of KwaNdebele by pointing out to them that there was a hand of a guerrilla outfit that was behind them.

⁴⁴⁷ An Appraisal of Armed Struggle in South Africa, SAHA, AL 2457 H5. 17 MK, Historical Papers Library, University of the Witwatersrand.

Chapter Five

MK and the South African Government's Response

Introduction

This chapter sets out to interrogate the South African government's response to the growing political consciousness and ungovernability of the whole of the rural far Northern Transvaal during the 1980s. Different methods of placating the politically agitated black majority, such as the 1983 political reforms (tricameral parliamentary systems) and the government's strategy of shifting its political responsibility to the homelands are the axis of argument in this chapter. The key argument here is the postulation that the constitutional reforms the government initiated were subterfuges whose desperate aims were conspicuous to any naked political eye.⁴⁴⁸ In the light of the realisation that the majority of the population was not to be fooled by political gimmicks sugar-coated as political changes, the South African government instigated a severe internal and external repression against its opponents. The aim was to entrench its power but the writing was also on the wall for the government which was aware that force in itself could not rule the majority. This chapter discusses the government's stratagems to entrench itself amid growing resentment of its policies, investigates the government's attempts to contain the growing political umbrage of the 1980s, and shows how the victims of state aggression fared in the environment of state security.

⁴⁴⁸ George Bizos made the same reference to Botha's reforms policies in a seminar as "cosmetic" and deceptive. See George Bizos, 'Frontline States. How to Counter South Africa's Destabilisation', Seminar Paper, Athens, Greece, African-European Institute, October 20-23, 1988, pp. 21-23.

Constitutional reform and legislated despotism

The South African government's unbending determination to pursue the politics of national security was underpinned by the idea that the successful promotion and sustenance of white political and economic supremacy depended on maintaining national security, and state repression became a fulcrum of state security throughout the decades of rule by the National Party government. The state did not abandon other means to keep itself firmly in the seat of power, however. Severe authoritarianism and superficial legalism, the enactment and execution of laws that exculpated the government's abuse of its power legitimately all became distinguishable marks of the South African government rule. The adoption of torture as a political tool to extract information or compliance in indefinite detention became the second hallmark of the apartheid government. Torture was common, regular and condoned by the South African government.

Torture went hand in hand with the official denial of atrocious acts carried out in the name of the government. The security police force was elevated above the law itself and the police were assisted by the pliant judiciary, which was always ready to be at the government's beck and call. This became evident in the arrest of Tlokwe Maserumule when a magistrate was woken up after hours to come and charge him (Tlokwe) when he was apprehended in Dennilton in 1984.⁴⁴⁹ Inadvertently confirming this forgoing assertion, Jack Cronje, one of the notorious security branch members boldly told the TRC Amnesty Application Committee that, "People hurt during interrogation by the security police had to be killed because detaining them under security legislation would

⁴⁴⁹ Interview with Tlokwe Maserumule, by the author, GaMatlala, Limpopo Province, 11 July 2002.

allow them to report their injuries to a magistrate.”⁴⁵⁰ This was not an aberration but a policy of government that was allegedly based on Christian principles. The dangers and occurrences of a magistrate taking action against the security police for inflicting harm on political suspects are minuscule. Magistrates and judges as well as the police were employed to perpetuate the system of government that was declared by the United Nations (UN) as a crime against humanity.⁴⁵¹ The extent to which these supposed custodians of democracy and freedom were misused by the South African government forms a part of this chapter. The ultimate aim is to determine the power of the state in its quest to suppress the will of the majority of its citizens.

Was this state repression a new phenomenon in the government’s security arsenals? Joe Slovo acknowledges that in the 1960s there was still a semblance of the rule of law regarding the abuse of power by the police in relation to perceived political activists that were in the hands of the state.⁴⁵² The biggest challenge to the status quo came in 1976 when apartheid was challenged to its core. After June 1976, it became virtually impossible for the South African government to pretend that there was nothing wrong with its racial policies. The youth generation of the 1970s was prepared to confront the bullets with bare chests and hands. The government, on the other hand, was unrepentant in its pursuit of total control of politically related disturbances. The heavy-handedness of the government in suppressing the countrywide political agitations besmirched its already sullied image in the minds of the victims.

⁴⁵⁰ October 30 1996 – *South African Press Association (SAPA)* press release or visit <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/media/1996/9610/s961030h.htm>.

⁴⁵¹ Cases of a magistrate assaulting political detainees are legendary. Both Maserumule Tlokwe and JJ Maake interviews make this point quite clear that the magistrate assaulted them after becoming enraged during interrogation.

⁴⁵² Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge, Op cit*, p. 26.

The government instituted its own constitutional changes in view of the political upsurge that had gripped the country since the late 1970s. The intention was to create divisions amongst different racial groups by applying disparate preferential treatment policies. A Cabinet Committee established in 1976, chaired by P. W. Botha, then the Minister of Defence, suggested bringing the Coloured and Indian communities into central government, but as subservient partners in a political system that catered for the aspirations of the whites. Only the National Party, from whom Botha came, supported the recommendations. Other government-created institutions like the South African Indian Council (SAIC) and the Coloured Representative Council (CRC) rejected the recommendations on the grounds that they excluded the African majority. However, these structures lacked legitimacy because they too were structured along racially exclusive lines and they were rejected by the majority of people belonging to these groups, while they set precedents for subsequent political developments. Botha was so infuriated by the reaction of these two institutions that he threatened the Coloured Labour Party that he would find himself other Coloureds who would cooperate with him if this party was not prepared to. Botha's threat was to become a reality later when conditions were optimal for the implementation of such a threat. The government dismissed the SAIC and CRC's rejection of the recommendations of the Botha Commission.

In 1979 the Schlebusch Commission was set up to look into constitutional reforms that were geared towards assuaging the international opprobrium that South Africa was faced with as a result of its internal racist policies against the African people. The Schlebusch Commission, under the chairmanship of Alwyn Schlebusch, then Minister of Justice and Interior,

reported on its recommendations in 1980.⁴⁵³ This Commission recommended the formation of the President's Council, which, when eventually set up, comprised sixty members who were drawn from the ranks of the White, Coloured, Indian and Chinese communities, and replaced the Senate that stopped its operation as of the 1 January 1981. One of the criticisms levelled against the President's Council was that its members were experts rather than representatives of the above ethnic enclaves. This body was also sanctioned to explore the possibility of constitutional developments along racial lines. The Schlebusch Commission also recommended the appointment of twelve additional members of parliament (MP) who were to be appointed by parliament. One of the beneficiaries of this recommendation was Magnus Malan who became the Minister of Defence in 1980.⁴⁵⁴ Both the Coloured Labour Party and the Indian Reform Party refused to have anything to do with the President's Council and Botha, then Prime Minister of the Republic of South Africa. True to his earlier threat, Botha found fourteen people from the Coloured; Indian and Chinese communities who were prepared to serve on the President's Council. As always, the exclusion of the African majority was based on the pretext that their future was in the homelands.⁴⁵⁵ For its obduracy in defying Botha's instructions the CRC was replaced with the Coloured Persons Council (CPC) but the CPC did not function effectively since Botha was not enthusiastic about it. The SAIC was put under pressure and eventually collapsed because the people it was supposed to serve interpreted it as a political mannequin

⁴⁵³ See de Klerk, *F.W., The Last Trek a New Beginning. An Autobiography*, (London, Macmillan, c1998), pp. 93-94.

⁴⁵⁴ Richard Leonard, *South Africa at War. White Power and the Crisis in Southern Africa*, (Connecticut, Westport, 1983), p. 198.

⁴⁵⁵ 'Cabinet Reshuffle', *Sechaba*, January 1981, p. 2.

functioning at the behest of the South African government.⁴⁵⁶

The banned ANC congratulated the Coloured and Indian communities for their rejection of the two structures propounded by Botha. Oliver Tambo even went further to call for the destruction of the Bantustan system and the Bantu Councils.⁴⁵⁷ The government's constitutional internal reforms did not achieve the intended results; at least, not in the long run, nor in the past. The concerted ruse to lure the Coloured and the Indian community to White racist politics was not new; a history of the SAIC would confirm this tenacity on the part of the South African government to initiate constitutional reforms based on racial lines. Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd's government which had created the Department of Indian Affairs in 1961 indirectly spawned the SAIC. The Minister responsible was authorised to appoint a "National Indian Council" to advise him on Indian matters that were selected by him. The 1963 "conference" attended by 100 Indians and held clandestinely in Pretoria by the government's selected delegates, appointed 21 men to constitute the National Indian Council (NIC). The secretary of the Indian Affairs Department chaired the Pretoria secret meeting. The opposition to their activities paralysed the NIC. The South African government remained steadfast in its racial constitutional track. In 1972, the government thought that increasing the number of members from 21 to 30 would make the body acceptable and accountable. Twenty-five members of the Council were appointed and five elected. In 1973, the government changed its own electoral rules and declared that 15 members of the Council were to be appointed and a further 15 elected through "electoral colleges" comprising members of the Indian local authorities, Local

⁴⁵⁶ OR Tambo, 'Extend and Defend Our Revolutionary Gains', *Sechaba*, President OR Tambo's January 8 1981 Statement, March 1981, p. 5.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Affairs Management and Consultative Committees.⁴⁵⁸ As in the past, a boycott of that charade was called thus there was no electoral roll. The South African government's recalcitrance to defeat the opposition manifested in March 1980 when 40 members of the SAIC were to be elected in terms of the common voters roll and five nominated. As previously, opposition to these racial reforms was mounted and the government's plans were frustrated but, nevertheless, continued to resurface in mutated forms throughout the years.

The most important question that needed to be posed in view of these aborted constitutional changes was why the insistence on constitutional reforms that excluded the African indigenous majority existed. The changing southern African political landscape and the perception that the seizure of power through military and political means was possible because of victories in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe and a myriad of internal problems in South Africa are amongst the causes that impelled South Africa toward constitutional self-introspection. The government's determination to continue with constitutional changes along the racial lines was bound to meet with growing anger and frustration. The *New Nation* newspaper concluded that there were, "... new contradictions, which opened up new fronts of conflict. Then followed popular grassroots resistance, which in turn gave rise to brutal repression."⁴⁵⁹

The 1980s witnessed an unprecedented upsurge in internal and external opposition to the government's policies throughout the entire country, driven by the African majority. It was clear that the government was not prepared to entertain an all-inclusive approach to its political future. It

⁴⁵⁸ 'Boycott the SAIC', *Sechaba*, August 1980, p. 27.

⁴⁵⁹ 'Total Strategy – Total Chaos', *New Nation*, January 5-11, 1987.

was also evident that the government was rating its own security above the freedom of the African people. This was confirmed by the appointment of the Rabie Commission. The government felt besieged towards the turn of the 1970s and in that state of paranoia, appointed the Rabie Commission to investigate all security matters. The Commission reported its recommendations in February 1982 and they were codified into the July 1982 Internal Security Act.

A brief history of security legislation patently brings to light the cumulative nature of state repression in South Africa. The Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 came into power two years after the National Party's victory. The Act was formally called Act No. 44 of 1950, which banned everything communistic including people merely regarded by the state as communists. The government's definition of communism was vague and nebulous causing untold victimisation of thousands of people throughout its years of application. The Suppression of Communism Act was repealed in 1976 and its provisions incorporated into the Internal Security Amendment Act. The 1981 Internal Security Act repealed all security legislation applicable in the past and extended the powers of the security forces. It circumscribed anything aimed at bringing about political, industrial, social or economic change by means of (allegedly) promoting disturbance, disorder or unlawful actions by encouraging hostile feelings between Blacks and Whites.⁴⁶⁰ As if the Act was not enough to subjugate any protruding opposition against the obnoxious policies of the government, the Intimidation Act, aimed at trade unions and school boycotts, was passed. The Demonstration In or Near Court Buildings Prohibition Act was aimed at preventing demonstrations in

⁴⁶⁰ Albertyn C, 'A Critical Analysis of Political Trials in South Africa, 1948 to 1988', PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993?, p. 114.

support of political trialists.⁴⁶¹

It was virtually impossible for extra parliamentary organisations to voice their grievances against the government policies without flouting any of the security laws that were in place. The government continued to hold its 'maxim' that, "The only way to render the enemy powerless is to nip revolution in the bud, by ensuring that there is no fertile soil in which the seeds of revolution can germinate."⁴⁶² In the government's view the causes of the fertile soil for insurrection was not political exclusion but the reluctance to obey the laws of the country. There was a misconception that the introduction of security laws would eventually cow the majority into submission. The flipside of these security laws was that they assisted in bringing together the government's very opponents and creating fertile grounds for popular political uprising. Victims of legislative arrogance came together into political organisations that had quasi freedom. It was also realised that there was a need for the amalgamation of all forces opposed to the government. The government's enforced reign and the implementation of constitutional and legislated repression were shaken when the government was directly challenged by the formation of the UDF in 1983.

This challenge was not new but it was an organised act which was mounted and sustained until the demise of legislated apartheid in 1994. The international community that abhorred apartheid also assisted in the exposure of the horrors of "... an uncommonly repugnant system."⁴⁶³ Before completing to cite her husband Sven Olof Joachim Palme's

⁴⁶¹ 'Pretoria's Commissions of Enquiry', *Sechaba*, July 1983, p. 26.

⁴⁶² Maj. Gen. A J. Wandrag, SOE Deputy Commissioner, SA Police (Riot Control), Political Unrest: A Police View, *ISSUP Strategic Review*, October 1985, p. 15.

⁴⁶³ Graybill S. Lyn, *Religion and Resistance Politics in South Africa*, (Westport Conn, Praeger, 1995), p. 25.

work⁴⁶⁴, Lisbet went on to urge: "...and so by declaring our support for the black struggle, and helping to isolate the apartheid regime, we must live up to our responsibility for bringing this repulsive system to an end."⁴⁶⁵ A barrage of criticisms continued unabated. Describing the 1983 constitutional reforms, Alfred Moleah points out that these were "... nothing more than pragmatic adjustments to secure white supremacy. Through clever manoeuvres and sleight of hand [Botha] is trying to let Afrikaners, and whites in general, have their cake and eat it."⁴⁶⁶ The state continued to capture the remaining semblance of governance through the legislative barrel of the constitution. On the other hand, measures to subvert new and whetted security laws were sharpened and perfected as soon as they were announced. Internal opponents of the apartheid system found a solution that was long overdue: the replacement of those that the government thought were instigators with new ones until victory was achieved. The legislative despotism that South Africa wanted to model itself into was not challenged on home soil but it was challenged from all corners of the globe by various means.

Intimidation versus internal response

The government's internal constitutional changes were calculated "to increase its own legitimacy" amongst South Africans whom the government thought were still politically undecided.⁴⁶⁷ The formation of

⁴⁶⁴ Sven Olof Joachim Palme was a Swedish Prime Minister who was assassinated on February 28, 1986 by a gunman in central Stockholm street Sveavagen. He supported amongst other political formations, the ANC and economic sanctions against the South African government visit http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olof_Palme for details.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴⁶⁶ Moleah, T. Alfred, 'The Apartheid Fraud: The So-Called New Constitutional Dispensation, The International Organisation for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD)', (London SEI, Ithaca Press, February 1984), p. 10.

⁴⁶⁷ Chris Maritz, 'Pretoria's Reaction to the Role of Moscow and Peking in Southern Africa', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1987, p. 332.

the UDF was a direct and immediate response to attempts to exclude the African majority from the political landscape by means of the so-called Koornhof Bills. The Koornhof Bills were a cluster of laws such as Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill, the Black Local Authorities Act and the Black Community Development Bill that were supported by Koornhof as Minister in the Botha government in the early 1980s. The idea with the Bills was to perpetuate racial discrimination while giving black people hope that the political arena was constitutionally changing. The ANC was frequently making calls that discriminatory laws should be disobeyed and the launch of the UDF was calculated to coordinate and organise resistance against such laws.⁴⁶⁸ The ANC called on its followers to “Let MK actions, ANC underground activity and mass actions form one mighty tide of revolt.”⁴⁶⁹ The disobedience was a sequel to Oliver Tambo’s appeal a year before when he was addressing the Second Italian National Conference of solidarity with the Peoples of Southern Africa that took place in Rome (26-28 February 1982). Tambo said:

The independence of Zimbabwe gave a powerful impetus to the revolutionary process which is rocking the foundations of apartheid colonial domination in Namibia and South Africa. If the light at the end of the tunnel is not visible to all, the problem is one of political shortsightedness [*sic*].

Allan Boesak, the then President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, summed up the prevailing responsive mood of the time in the exhortation:

⁴⁶⁸ Visit the section, “The ANC and the Internal Revolt”, submission of the African National Congress Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, August 1996 on <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/misc/trea11.html>.

⁴⁶⁹ MK 21, Umkhonto we Sizwe, a pamphlet on the 21 anniversary of MK (16 December 1982), SAHA, University of the Witwatersrand, William Cullen Historical Papers Library.

There is...no reason why the churches, civic associations, trade unions, student organisations and sports bodies should not unite on this issue; pool our resources, inform people of the fraud that is about to be perpetuated in their name and, on the day of the election, expose their plans for what they are.⁴⁷⁰

Civic and Church leaders summoned international intervention in the South African political dispensation. Some of these civic and church leaders made these calls for disinvestments, economic boycotts of South African products and economic sanctions. Bishop Tutu and Alan Boesak became the leading voices outside the mainstream of opposition organisations. Towards the mid-1980s the international and domestic uproar seemed to have taken their toll on the government's obduracy to cling to its racial policies. The campaign to isolate the government internationally, disinvestments and the general internal insurrection took their toll in the 1980s. Internally, the incidents on 3 September 1984 in Sebokeng, the Vaal Triangle at the time, considered "as a temporary outburst" in the eyes of the government, transmogrified into a profound challenge for apartheid after 1985.⁴⁷¹ In March 1986, the government lifted the three year old State of Emergency in the hope that it would obviate the impact of the impending sanctions from the Commonwealth nations.⁴⁷² The pass laws were also abolished in the same April as a result of, amongst other reasons, a threat by COSATU that it would call on its members to burn their passes if the government allowed the union's deadline of pass abolition to go by. The boycott tool at the hands of the oppressed majority was also becoming very useful as evidenced by the

⁴⁷⁰ Murray Martin, *South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny: The Upsurge of Popular Protest*, (London, Verso, 1987), p. 38.

⁴⁷¹ Pauline H. Baker, 'Facing Up To Apartheid', *Foreign Policy*, 1986, Unpublished Paper Presented at the South African Institute of International Affairs/World Peace Foundation Conference, (Natal, Hilton, 1984), p. 50. For a blow by blow account of the Sebokeng uprising and the Vaal Triangle in general see Patrick Noonan's *They're Burning the Churches. The Final Dramatic Events that Scuttled Apartheid*. (Bellevue, Jacana), 2003.

⁴⁷² Steven Mufson, *Fighting Years, Black Resistance and the Struggle for a New South Africa*, *Op. Cit*, p. 259.

national stayaway on the 1 May, 1986 as the recognition of worker's day.⁴⁷³ Campaigns of boycotts and sit-ins in identified buildings and other places also remained some of the tools in the hands of the government's opponents. The stage seemed set for a polarised and protracted racial conflict with the whites who were clinging tenaciously to apartheid on the one hand and the black majority whose freedom was tantalizingly on the horizon.

The countrywide school boycotts were threatening to return since education was generally severely affected by the countrywide political upheavals. The government's neighbours could not assist in the situation either in view of the belligerent policies against them, evidenced by the attack on alleged ANC bases in May 1986.⁴⁷⁴ The nationwide declaration of the state of emergency on June 12 was calculated to browbeat political activists into submission. That did not work. The ANC commented:

As we all know, the enemy is simultaneously engaged in a gigantic and fraudulent cosmetic exercise to improve the image of apartheid. Essentially this fraudulent exercise aims to give the impression that the racist regime is both capable of, and has started, to reform the apartheid system gradually and peacefully out of existence. The truth however is that all that our oppressors are doing is to create new conditions for the perpetuation and further entrenchment of their tyrannical rule.⁴⁷⁵

It was against this backdrop that the recalcitrance of the government became more and more desensitised. The government's siege mentality held sway throughout the 1980s as epitomised by the "Total Strategy" phenomenon. This phenomenon was described as an "all encompassing phenomenon wherein the state's policies and programmes are

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁴⁷⁴ For details on the South African government's belligerent behaviour see *South African Barometer*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 24 April 1987, pp. 51-2.

⁴⁷⁵ 'Let Us Rise to the Occasion', *Sechaba*, March 1980, London, p. 5.

constituted.”⁴⁷⁶ Its core functions, “...involved direct military action, economic and military sabotage, support for dissidents, assassination and propaganda.”⁴⁷⁷ The Total Strategy’s years of incubation included the late 1970s when the National Security Management System (NSMS) was established in 1979.⁴⁷⁸ NSMS was an attempt by the government to coordinate all covert and overt illegal practices to be in line with the Total Strategy campaign. NSMS mutated into the State Security Council in the 1980s as the country degenerated into a totalitarian state.⁴⁷⁹ These desperate measures were undertaken by the government in its attempt to respond to widespread political insurrection against its racial policies. On the other hand, the government’s relationship with her neighbours was also characterised by the same attitude displayed throughout the country. Pretoria used its immensely greater military and economic strength to uphold its position in Southern Africa and tried to discourage the neighbouring countries from harbouring the ANC or using their territories as springboards to attack the country.⁴⁸⁰ Unfortunately for the ANC, in the 1980s the SADF aggressively attempted to undermine the so-called frontline states to the point where many traded their support for the ANC for promises of an end to the South African subterfuge.⁴⁸¹ Consequently, military incursions into the neighbouring countries became fiercer and more callous.

A case in point was the attack on 9 December, 1982 on Lesotho by

⁴⁷⁶ Glen Moss, ‘Total Strategy’, *Work in Progress*, No. 1, 1980, p. 1.

⁴⁷⁷ Tatiana Sillem, ‘South African Destabilization of the Frontline State: The Case of Zimbabwe’, MA Thesis, Trinity Hall, Cambridge, August 1988, p. 11.

⁴⁷⁸ Kempton, Daniel Robert, ‘Soviet Strategy Toward African National Liberation Movements’, PhD Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1988, p. 239.

⁴⁷⁹ For detailed structure of the National Security Management System (NSMS) see the adaptation of it in the appendices by Robert D’A Henderson, *South African Intelligence under De Klerk*, (Pietermaritzburg, Shutter & Shooter, 1987), p. 140.

⁴⁸⁰ Howard Barrell, ‘Bash Your Neighbour Strategy’, *New African*, July 1986, p. 12.

⁴⁸¹ Kempton, Daniel Robert, ‘Soviet Strategy Toward African Liberation Movements’, PhD Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1988, p. 230.

members of the SADF about which *The Citizen* newspaper bluntly commented that the civilian casualties were unavoidable.⁴⁸² Forty two people were killed in this raid and most of them were Lesotho citizens. The same SADF raid was repeated in 1985 in which Leabua Jonathan, the premier of Lesotho was toppled. Still on the government's raids on neighbouring countries *The Rand Daily Mail* also commented, "No efficient army can be blamed for acting to paralyse that kind of plan."⁴⁸³ When MK carried out military propaganda stunts in which civilians were hurt, security police would pontificate and criticise their actions. The media would also join the denouncement of the actions. Some years later General H.D. Stadler told the TRC that unlike the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) that pre-warned the British police the ANC never issued a single warning where it knew that civilians were likely to be hurt.⁴⁸⁴

The search for the ANC bases and the brutality that went with it, knew no boundaries. In the Matola attack in Mozambique, on January 30 1981, twelve refugees were murdered and Selby Mavuso, David Thobela and Thibe Ntsekang, were abducted by the SADF⁴⁸⁵. Some of the victims' ears were cut off by the South African commandos.⁴⁸⁶ The secret pacts that were signed in the early 1980s between South Africa and some of the Southern African states did not dissuade them from issuing a statement in which they reaffirm their support for the ANC members as political

⁴⁸² *The Citizen*, 10 December 1982.

⁴⁸³ See 'Racist South Africa Invades Lesotho', *Sechaba*, January 1983.

⁴⁸⁴ Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by The Foundation for Equality before the Law, June 1996, Compiled by Maj. Gen. H. D. Stadler and other retired officers of the S.A. Police, Q1 AL 3097.

⁴⁸⁵ South African Government Information, Address by the Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, HE Jacob Zuma, at the 23rd anniversary of the Matola Raid, Maputo, Mozambique, 14 February 2004, <http://www.info.gov/speeches/2004/04021609461013.htm>.

⁴⁸⁶ Thomas G. Karis, *Revolution in the Making: Black Politics in South Africa*, (Pretoria, UNISA: EReserves, 1983) p. 385.

refugees.⁴⁸⁷ These were some of the steps taken by the South African government in its quest to pursue the ANC cadres and to discourage neighbouring countries from providing sanctuaries for them. In response, the ANC stepped up its operations inside the country particularly in the rural areas of the Eastern Transvaal. On 6 April 1981 a bomb went off after a goods train had passed over a section of a railway line in the North-Eastern Transvaal. The explosive charge was positioned on the line in a remote and mountainous area near Cottondale on the rail link between the mining towns of Kaapmuiden and Phalaborwa. The government sought to apprehend those who carried out these attacks throughout Southern Africa without much success. As G.G. Maasdorp observed, internal dissention remained because the government relied on the imposition of its political decisions rather than consultation.⁴⁸⁸

The responses to government's tactics of intimidation were not always frontal. Sometimes the best way of responding was to run away from the tactics of intimidation. About the time when the SADF attacked Matola in Mozambique, the would-be MK cadre; Tlokwe Maserumule arrived in the country to join the ANC having fled his home village of GaMatlala in the far Northern Transvaal after the police had left a note with his mother that they were not going to give up their search for him.⁴⁸⁹ After the liberation struggle Tlokwe told the TRC Amnesty Committee that he had taken part in the attack on a temporary SADF unit that was based in the Hectorspruit area around 1982.⁴⁹⁰ The attack was meant to remove the temporary military camp of the SADF from the Komatipoort area,

⁴⁸⁷ Carol Cooper *et al*, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1983*, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1984, p.44.

⁴⁸⁸ G.G. Maasdorp, *Nkomati and All That. Can New Economic Battles be Found for the New Marula Liqueur?*, (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1984), p. 9.

⁴⁸⁹ Interview with Tlokwe Maserumule by the author, GaMatlala, Limpopo Province 11 July 2002.

⁴⁹⁰ Tlokwe Frans Maserumule TRC Amnesty Application Number AM 6217/97.

because the area was used as an entry point for infiltrating MK cadres or as an escape route into exile after carrying out military and political missions. Pressed for a detailed prescription of the Hectorspruit operation by the TRC Amnesty Committee, Tlokwe responded, “I cannot be precise.”⁴⁹¹

The use of military aircrafts to monitor entry routes around the borders of South Africa started long before the ANC managed to entrench itself amongst the masses. The major reasons for the establishment of air bases were initially motivated by fears of communism rather than the ANC. But why the obsession with military air bases against military weak states that surrounded South Africa. A bit of history is essential to put the South African’s obsession with its own security into its proper perspective. Among the first steps taken to expand its air forces, the South African government constructed three military bases for the South African Air Force (SAAF) in the northern and northeastern Transvaal in 1966.⁴⁹² Another base was established in the Pietersburg district, not very far from the border with Zimbabwe, and was equipped with a squadron of Sabre jets and three S247 super-sensitive surveillance radar systems supplied by the British company, Marconi Avionics LTD, a subsidiary of GEC.⁴⁹³ As if this was insufficient, the government went on to establish one more military base at Nelspruit for use by the border ground and air patrols, and another one at Dunnottar as the headquarters of the 40th Air Squadron

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹² These military bases and others were used externally and predominantly against neighbouring countries and the liberation movements such as FNLA, MPLA, SWAPO and UNITA (converted after the Angolan independence on the 11th November 1975 into an ally of the South African government in the “Border War”).

⁴⁹³ Map No. 2 provides clear geographical details of where these military bases were located in the far Eastern and far Northern Transvaal. The idea is to show that there was always a fear from the South African government that MK cadres were going to come from the north of the country and these bases were meant to deal with that.

and major training centre for the Harvard planes.⁴⁹⁴ In 1977, the South African regime began to construct another military base, this time at Hoedspruit in the Eastern Transvaal, under the pretext of the need to deploy reconnaissance and interceptor planes to “defend South African air space.”⁴⁹⁵ However, it later turned out that the first air unit to be permanently stationed there was in fact the No. 1 Squadron, which was later joined by the No.2 Squadron, both of which were ground attack squadrons equipped with Mirage F-1 supersonic fighter planes. The air base that was located within 15 metres of the Mozambican border and lay within 15 minutes’ flying time from Maputo became fully operational in 1981. According to the commanding officer of the No. 1 Squadron, the Hoedspruit air force base would enable the SAAF “to cover all borders from Northern Natal up to the Zimbabwean border”, and would provide the government with strategic depth. In 1981, the regime opened another military base at Phalaborwa in the Northeastern Transvaal, to serve as a training centre for the 7th Infantry Battalion. Speaking at its opening, Magnus Malan issued one of his many threats against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Front Line States, declaring that, “every country that harbours terrorists must know it stands to lose in this struggle,” and that South Africa was “determined to wipe out terrorists even if” it had “to cross borders to do it.”⁴⁹⁶ These threats became daily occurrences. The genie was out of the bottle with Malan’s statement.

At the beginning of 1982, the South African Minister of Manpower Utilisation announced that plans were afoot to construct a new military airbase in the area. He referred to this as a “tactical air force base”,

⁴⁹⁴ Jeffrey Khensani Mathebula, ‘Apartheid South Africa Destabilise Zimbabwe’, *Sechaba*, 1982, p.14

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.14.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 14.

further adding that when complete and opened, this new base would serve as the focal point for the entire northern border system, and it would be bigger than the one located 100 kilometres away in Pietersburg. To drive the point home about the aggressive intentions of the regime towards Zimbabwe and the rest of the Front Line States, P. W. Botha declared later, in September 1982 that, “South Africa’s sphere of influence extends to all its neighbours.”⁴⁹⁷ The ramifications of the build-up of these military airbases in the border-areas were far reaching, with many people continuing to suffer both directly and indirectly.

The irony was that while the security police and soldiers were manning road blocks and arming farmers along the northern borders of the country as well as constructing air bases, MK managed to send ‘gifts’ using various modes of transport, mostly during the 1980s.⁴⁹⁸ These military airbases were not going to detect weapons secretly stuffed in compartments of buses and cars traveling from Zimbabwe into South Africa using Beit Bridge as an entry point. The role of the MK cadres based in Zimbabwe such as Refiloe Mudimu and his contacts in the rural far Northern Transvaal and the eastern Transvaal is a case in point.⁴⁹⁹ Their role proved that it was futile for the South African security forces to contrive security strategies such as the ‘area defence’, the Reconnaissance Commandos (Recces) and the Ethnic Battalions that were stationed near the borders of neighbouring states, ready for raids into these territories. It was also equally futile of the government to support puppet groups and

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 15.

⁴⁹⁸ Interview with Refiloe Mudimu by the author, South African Navy Headquarters, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 21 January 2005.

⁴⁹⁹ See also the interview with Dick Ralushai by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province 26 February 2005.

organisations masquerading as indigenous resistance movements.⁵⁰⁰ These military outfits were under the auspices of the government's Directorate of Special Tasks based in Phalaborwa and had links with rebels like the MNR of Mozambique. They were aided and abetted by the Reconnaissance Regiment also based in Phalaborwa and responsible for MNR operations like "operation Punda milia" during the 1978-1988 period.⁵⁰¹

Individual experiences at the mercy of the Government

The South African government's 'hold' on power became so desperate that the ANC's members who were arrested on missions inside the country relinquished any hope of dying decently. Back home in South Africa the situation looked very bleak for those who thought that they could forever evade arrests, detention and even death, since the security police were relentlessly searching for and apprehending political activists. These actions were neither novel nor were they newly reactivated only after the Soweto riots of 16 June 1976. They had haunted South African blacks long before these political revolts. The psychotic state of the South African government was evident. It distrusted everyone who was not part of its circle. Its state of paranoia worsened when P.W. Botha took over the reigns of government, as he was convinced that he was inheriting a government under siege.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰⁰ Rob Davies *et al*, *The Struggle for South Africa. A Reference Guide to Movements, Organisations and Institutions*, New Edition, Volume One, Centre of African Studies, Eduardo Mondlane University, (London, Zed Books Ltd, 1984), p. 184.

⁵⁰¹ Rocky Williams, 'Back to the Barrack: Changing Civil-Military Relations under Botha and de Klerk', Paper Presented at the 22nd ASSA Conference, 30 June – 3 July 1991, University of Cape Town.

⁵⁰² Chris Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand, The Rise and Fall of the South African Security State*, (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 51.

Botha's paranoid view accounts for the depth of the mess that he plunged the country into during his tenure in government. It also accounts for the brutality that was unleashed on the opponents of apartheid from the late 1970s. No wonder that Dumisa Ntsebeza, one of the commissioners of the TRC, describes Botha's era as having "laid the formal groundwork for the bloodiest decade of recent South African history."⁵⁰³

As briefly mentioned in earlier chapters, the salient roles that were played by the MK cadres who were sent into the country on various missions, but ended up in the hands of the security police, provide some insight of the unimaginable brutality of the South African security police. The distinction between the MK suspects and the trained ones became blurred in the government's quest to stem the tide of revolution for freedom. The line between children, women and the real sympathisers of MK became very blurry and prompted Oliver Tambo to question the wisdom of the killing of children in violence related uprisings.⁵⁰⁴ Tambo's question was posed against the unbridled rage that the government manifested in the face of mounting popular uprisings that resulted in the death of children at the hands of the security police and the soldiers in the mid-1980s. On the other hand, there was a contention that the ANC had decided to collapse the distinction between "hard" and "soft" targets since its National Conference at Kabwe, Zambia in 1985.⁵⁰⁵ The impression created was that if the ANC could take a decision to abandon differentiating between whom to attack then the SADF was justified to respond accordingly. The problem with this fallacy was that the

⁵⁰³ Dumisa Ntsebeza, *Unfinished Business South Africa Apartheid & Truth*, (Muizenburg, RedWorks, 2001), pp. 181-182.

⁵⁰⁴ *City Press*, 30 June 1985.

⁵⁰⁵ The SADF's submission to the chairman of the TRC in SADF Contact Bureau, AL 3098, University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers Library. It can be accessed on <http://home.wanadoo.nl/rhodesia.trurecl.htm>.

government's brutality did not start after the ANC 1985 conference but many years ago.

The government's reliance on the brute force of the security police to suppress the growing political consciousness among the marginalised communities knew no boundaries. Terence Beard writes that in South Africa during the height of apartheid it was hard to find a single individual whose skin was not white, who did not regard the police with "fear or dislike, if not hatred".⁵⁰⁶ He further asserts that the use of police and soldiers to subdue insurrections and civil instability had been notoriously counter-productive.⁵⁰⁷ Reporting on the role of the SAP in the liberation struggle in South Africa, the TRC Report concludes:

The development of intelligence-gathering units with an offensive capacity proved effective in the Rhodesian situation and was subsequently adapted to the South African context by both the police and military. The devolution of decision-making powers resulted in police units such as Vlakplaas and the Namibian-based hunter-killer Koevoet operating with virtual impunity, making it extremely difficult to establish lines of command and accountability.⁵⁰⁸

The description of Koevoet by the TRC as a "Namibian-based hunter-killer" is no exaggeration. The following edition of the TRC aptly describes and brings blood chilling and nightmarish experiences of those that suffered at the hands of Koevoet and the Koevoet administered helicopter torture – a method of torture in which the victim was cuffed by the ankles and wrists and suspended upside down for days from a pole

⁵⁰⁶ Terence Beard, 'The Police and the Public' – Part 1, *Reality*. Journal of Liberal and Radical Opinion, Vol. 13, No. 5, September 1981, p.4.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁵⁰⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume 6, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, p. 580.

between two tables. In Sekhukhuneland in the rural far Northern Transvaal the same torture took place at the Veeplaas Agricultural Project on the banks of the Limpopo River in 1986. With Koevoet, any confession was not sufficient for exculpation.⁵⁰⁹ Koevoet members' inability to speak a single South African language was the only mark of identification that was used to separate them from the rest of the security forces.⁵¹⁰ The description states that:

Koevoet was formed as a police counter-insurgency unit set up in South West Africa in 1979 by members of the SAP Security Branch. It comprised recruits mostly from the local population (of South West Africa) who were trained as a mobile unit to gather intelligence, track guerrillas and kill them. Koevoet (Afrikaans for 'crowbar') soon gained a reputation for brutality, largely because of its methods of interrogating and torturing local people and for its heavy-handed presence in the operational areas. In the early to mid-1980s, at the height of its war with SWAPO, Koevoet claimed a kill rate of around 300 to 500 people a year, for which its members were paid a bounty per corpse.⁵¹¹

Individuals who had paid the price for their liberation in the eyes of the majority of the dispossessed, like the ANC/MK stalwart Peter Nchabeleng, were not spared harassment by the security police.⁵¹² In a civilised country that prides itself on democratic and humane laws, Nchabeleng could have been accorded the status of a political dissident that he rightly deserved. Nchabeleng's wife, Gertrude, was told, when her husband was kidnapped from his home in 1986, that he would never come back alive, and indeed, Nchabeleng died at the hands of the police

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with one of the victims of the 'helicopter torture' Molatudi Maletjing "Hunter" Phillip by the author, GaSeroka, Sekhukhuneland, Limpopo Province, 21 April 2002.

⁵¹⁰ In some cases it became extremely difficult to make a confession to Koevoet members because of the language barrier and as a result unreasonable torture continued unabated. Visit <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koevoet#History>.

⁵¹¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume 7, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, p. 926.

⁵¹² The author was amongst those that Peter Nchabeleng found at Schoonoord police station in 1986 when he was abducted by the security police and brought to the station to be tortured.

at Schoonoord police station in Sekhukhuneland, Lebowa on 11 April 1986. Words cannot describe the ordeal that the author and others endured the night Nchabeleng died of a “heart attack” at Schoonoord police station.⁵¹³ In African mythopoeia, the belief exists that a leader cannot die alone. His pages have to go with him as well. It was in this context that those of us who were rounded up in Sekhukhuneland, and locked at the Schoonoord police station, were supposed to die together with Nchabeleng. Hell broke loose and to our delight, we survived to tell the story. The security police knew that the courts would argue, as they argued in Nchabeleng’s case that, “A policeman may beat a person to death if he resists – but not intentionally.”⁵¹⁴ this suggests that the police’s ‘unintentional’ misconduct was normal and apparently unstoppable. At the end of the late 1980s, the rural far Northern Transvaal was teeming with soldiers on horseback, in “hippos” and helicopters looking for insurgents.⁵¹⁵ That became a permanent feature until the police were satisfied that violence had died down.

The harrowing experience of Patrick Thibedi, one of the apolitical citizens, turned a prominent MK operative at the hands of the police force, serves as an example. Arrested for the MK attack on the SASOL II oil refinery plant at Secunda on 1 June, 1980, that caused the state damages, officially estimated at R66 million but originally announced at R6.5 million,⁵¹⁶ Thibedi went through a torturous ordeal until he was finally acquitted by a court of law in the early 1980s. The security police tried recruit him as their contact man in the underground operations of

⁵¹³ Ineke van Kessel, “*Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*” *The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa*, Op. Cit., p. 128.

⁵¹⁴ *The Star*, 25 June 1987.

⁵¹⁵ *SASPU National*, April/May 1980.

⁵¹⁶ Richard Leonard, *South Africa at War. White Power and the Crisis in Southern Africa*, Op. Cit., p. 21.

MK assuming that he was indeed a contact for the MK operations. The 'offer' was turned down on grounds that Thibedi had no contact with the ANC or MK.⁵¹⁷ His side of the story was unbelievable to the police and they thought that he was uncooperative and therefore had to pay the price. The torture that he went through remained indelibly hurtful until he went into exile to join the MK. Anger drove him to the ANC rather than the patriotism that normally does.

Thibedi single-handedly came back to attack the same SASOL oil plant he was accused of attacking in 1980 under the guidance of Joe Slovo, after he had left the country for short training in military combat and explosives in 1981. His bravery in executing the mission assigned to him by Slovo left such an indelible mark on Slovo that he recommended a movie be made of Thibedi's historical episode.⁵¹⁸ The security police's brutality after arresting Thibedi near the Swaziland border, two weeks after his narrow escape at a roadblock in Verena near Witbank, new no bounds of human morality and sympathy. He was buried alive in a hole that was infested with human eating worms in the Loskop Dam area for several hours.⁵¹⁹ The scars left on Thibedi's body, coupled with the gunshot wounds sustained when he had tried to escape from the police van in 1980 at Evander would make anyone vengeful.⁵²⁰

Thibedi had an opportunity of carrying out his vengeance after the unbanning of the ANC and the arrival of the new political dispensation in

⁵¹⁷ Interview with Patrick Thibedi by the author, ANC Provincial Head Office, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 29 August 2002.

⁵¹⁸ 'Slovo's Movie wish comes true', *Sunday Times*, June 19 2005.

⁵¹⁹ Interview with Patrick Thibedi by the author, ANC Provincial Head Office, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 29 August 2002.

⁵²⁰ Thibedi pointed out the body scars to me during the interview in Nelspruit.

1994 on Captain Visser who had asked Thibedi for assistance between Middleburg and Witbank after Thibedi's release from Robben Island in the early 1990s. Visser had had a punctured tyre in the Middleburg area (Mpumalanga Province) when he happened to stop Thibedi for assistance since he did not have a spare tyre for his vehicle. Visser went to Middleburg with Thibedi in his car where they bought the tyre and returned to replace it. After Visser had invited him to his home as a gesture of thankfulness, Thibedi told him who he was. Visser immediately recognised that indeed Thibedi was the MK guerrilla whom he had fed to the worms at Loskop Dam. When Thibedi went back before the actual day of the arranged visit he found that Visser had relocated.⁵²¹ The point is that the security police's brutality against perceived MK cadres was so vicious that it caused people like Visser to think that the punishment they meted out to capture MK cadres would not be forgotten in their victims' lifetimes. Visser declined to be interviewed and is still in the police service in Witbank.

Frank Thabane and his underground MK unit in the Bushbuckridge area of the then Lebowa Bantustan would also not forget their encounter with the South African security forces that resulted in the death of an MK cadre, Michael Malope, and the long imprisonment of Thabane and school principal Mogale Patrick on Robben Island.⁵²² Recruited into the underground operations of MK by Cassius Motsoaledi⁵²³ and Peter

⁵²¹ Interview with Patrick Thibedi, by the author, ANC Provincial Head Office, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 29 August 2002.

⁵²² Interview with Mogale Patrick by the author, Acornhoek, Bushbuckridge, Limpopo Province, 23 October 2002.

⁵²³ Cassius's father, Elias Motsoaledi, was imprisoned on Robben Island during the Rivonia Treason Trial together with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and others in the early 1960s.

Ngwenya⁵²⁴ in the early 1980s as part of the Northern Transvaal Rural Machinery of MK Thabane's unit, was uncovered by the security police in the mid-1980s.⁵²⁵ Paul Dikeledi and Cassius Maake (Job Shimankane Tabane) were killed by the security police in 1987.⁵²⁶ They were both members of the NEC of the ANC. The security police denied involvement in their killing.⁵²⁷ Thabane's unit was responsible for recruiting potential MK cadres and reconnoitering targets for military propaganda operations in the area. It was trained initially for MCW and other related underground activities such as recruitment and identification of possible targets for propaganda military operations that they would recommend to members of the SOU. In an area where the unit was operating, particularly in the 1980s, there were teething problems that brought people together. Bushbuckridge was geographically closer to the Eastern Transvaal homeland of KaNgwane but administratively under the Lebowa Bantustan.⁵²⁸ The Eastern Transvaal, as the area was called at the time, was mostly beset with land disputes between the South African government and the KaNgwane Bantustan administration that also involved Swaziland on the one hand and the Bantustan of KwaZulu on the other.⁵²⁹ In May 1982, the South African government announced its intention to cede the entire KaNgwane administration and the area of Ingwavuma to Swaziland.⁵³⁰ No official reasons were given for the government's intention. The decision sparked mass protests in these

⁵²⁴ Peter was related to Paul Dikeledi (nom de guerre) (real name Peter Sello Motau), a prominent ANC member who was based in Swaziland in the 1980s.

⁵²⁵ Interview with Cassius Motsoaledi by the author, Erasmuskloof, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 16 May 2005.

⁵²⁶ See Glen Moss, 'MK and the Armed Struggle', *Work in Progress*, No. 46-63, 1987-1987, p. 5.

⁵²⁷ Glen Moss, 'Politics with a Price on Its Head: Apartheid Death Squads', *Work in Progress*, No. 53, 4 May 1988, p. 25.

⁵²⁸ For MK activities in the KaNgwane Administration see the author's 'KaNgwane – Pretoria's Fiend or Friend', Unpublished Paper.

⁵²⁹ David Robbins, 'The South African Land Deal', *Africa Report*, November-December 1982, p. 18.

⁵³⁰ For a brief discussion on the subject see 'Swaziland: New Directions?' *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 21, No. 16, July 30, 1980.

affected areas and thereby provided MK units with fertile ground for mobilisation and recruitment.⁵³¹ The security police on the other hand were well aware of the upsurge of political activism in the area. The death in detention of an underground MK operative and employee of the KaNgwane administration, Timothy Thembuyise Mudau, is an instance of the plethora of police brutality in the now defunct Eastern Transvaal. Mudau was strategically placed in the KaNgwane homeland administration to recruit and work for MK in the area.⁵³² He had contacts with Matthews Phosa who was also responsible for servicing the MK unit in Bushbuckridge area under Thabane.

In the execution of their tasks Thabane's unit came into contact with other underground MK operatives such as Phosa who was based in Nelspruit as a lawyer in the 1980s. Phosa had provided this unit with the requirements and when it was eventually discovered, he left the country for exile after a tip-off of an imminent arrest by the security branch of the South African police, which, incidentally, came from a member of the police unit that had arrested Malaza Siphithi Vincent from Thabane's unit in Bushbuckridge.⁵³³ The story of Thabane's MK unit revealed the brute force that the security police used arbitrarily and with no moral compunction. After killing Michael Malope in a cottage used by the school principal, Mogale Patrick, the police ordered everyone inside the cottage to get out. The unit allowed only Mogale's son who was inside the cottage, to move out and in the ensuing gun battle Malope was killed. Mogale and George Mokoena were arrested. Thabane was injured in that encounter with the police but managed to escape. He was later arrested

⁵³¹ Interview with Matsane Lord by the author, ANC Provincial Offices, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province 3 April 2004.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 3 April 2004.

⁵³³ Interview with Matthews Phosa by the author, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 30 January 2004.

when the man who had promised to go and summon medical assistance for the wounds that Thabane had sustained in the gun battle with the security police, betrayed him.⁵³⁴

Malaza was a member of the security police division that was established to counter the activities of the liberation movements; particularly those of the ANC.⁵³⁵ He worked in the SAP as a field worker. Malaza's job entailed the identification of cadres of the liberation movements in the SAP Terrorist Photo Album,⁵³⁶ the time they left the country, and when they returned. He continuously monitored and researched their families and updated the information in the SAP 5 Investigation Diary. This was a file that was used as a registry for all political activities in a particular political locality. Chiefs and iNdunas enlisted to assist in the gathering of information in their respective farms or villages were usually rewarded with cigarettes, liquor, old clothes, or anything that a SAP field worker may have recommended to his superiors as a token of gratitude for their cooperation.⁵³⁷ Malaza's role also included tarnishing the image of the liberation movements with the assistance of these chiefs and iNdunas. He did, however, also work for the ANC in the South African security police. Malaza was recruited into the underground structures of the ANC after he had followed the information that he had gathered in the line of duty in the SAP.⁵³⁸ Malaza's double role in the security police as an agent for the ANC provides interesting reading. He provided the correct information to

⁵³⁴ Interview with Frank Thabane by the author, Acornhoek Police Station, Bushbuckridge, Limpopo Province, 23 October 2002.

⁵³⁵ Interview with Malaza Vincent Siphithi, by the author, Sunnyside, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 18 January 2005.

⁵³⁶ The SAP Terrorist Photo Album was a photo album in which alleged members of MK's photos were kept by the security police for identification purposes (Interview with Malaza Siphithi, by the author, Sunnyside, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 18 January 2005).

⁵³⁷ Interview with Malaza Vincent Siphithi, by the author, Sunnyside, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 18 January 2005.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

both the ANC and the security police and even went to the extent of recruiting his colleagues in the security police such as Matshwenyego Daniel Mokgabudi and Tshifhango Cetrick Rapudi. Mokgabudi and Rapudi were later arrested and charged with ten charges of terrorism when they appeared before Mr. W. J. van den Bergh in the Pretoria Regional Court on 7 November 1986. The state alleged that they had been recruited by the ANC or “a Malaza” to join the organisation.⁵³⁹ Malaza reported to the ANC through Peter Boroko and Willie Williams based in Mozambique during the 1980s. He also reported the contacts that the SAP had with British Mampane and Sam Nkuna (ANC members), agents of the security police based in the ANC camps in Tanzania. Mampane and Nkuna and were eventually brought into the SAP fold when the security police in South Africa suspected that the ANC was about to detect them as spies.

Back home in his hometown of KaNyamazane near Nelspruit Malaza was viewed with trepidation for his ferocity against suspected members of the ANC. Dorcas Mokoena was one of those activists persecuted by Malaza and does not believe that Malaza had any contacts within the ANC at all.⁵⁴⁰ The community of KaNyamazane wanted to kill Malaza at some point so he reported this to the ANC in Swaziland. Malaza was advised to consult with those that he suspected might understand his plight and tell them to come to Swaziland for consultation with the ANC regional structure. He was unable to secure such a hearing with his underground

⁵³⁹ Monk Nkomo, ‘Accused of Spying on Cops for ANC: SB’s in Court’, *Sowetan*, November 10, 1986.

⁵⁴⁰ Interview with Dorcas Nomsa Mokoena by the author, KaNyamazane, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province, 6 November 2004.

MK colleagues in the area⁵⁴¹. There is also no record of this meeting having taken place in Swaziland. He continued to be a double agent for the two greatest Nemeses of the South African liberation history.

Malaza attended a meeting in which a decision had been taken by the police in Nelspruit that Phosa was supposed to be arrested and eventually killed. After this tip-off to Phosa, Malaza suspected that because he was the only black member of the security police present when Phosa's fate was decided in Nelspruit, he was likely to be suspected of leaking the information to Phosa's contacts⁵⁴². Malaza too, escaped from the security police in Swaziland, where he had been taken after having been discovered to be an ANC contact within the security police; the police wanted to arrest, and possibly kill him. While in Swaziland, Malaza was ordered to make contacts with his handler, ANC intelligence Jabulani Sidney Msibi who at some point had been a bodyguard of Oliver Tambo while in exile.⁵⁴³ Msibi was abducted and taken to South Africa by the security police and has never been seen again. In his application for pardon during the TRC, Alexander Eugene de Kock of the South African security police and a commander of the Vlakplaas (a farm near Pretoria that was used by the security police hit squads) told the commission, "And I just want to tell you that his dignity and his integrity, his faith and his loyalty in the ANC, remained unscathed consistently and that is how he died."⁵⁴⁴ De Kock was referring to Msibi who died for his refusal to join the security police as an *askari*. Malaza escaped the police while on that mission in Swaziland and remained in exile with the ANC until he

⁵⁴¹ Interview with Malaza Vincent Siphithi, by the author, Sunnyside, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 18 January 2005

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 18 January 2005.

⁵⁴³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* Volume Six, *Op. Cit.*, p. 222.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

returned in 1994. His former colleagues in the security police felt that he had betrayed them by joining MK and continued to harass him before the dawn of the new political dispensation until he was sent to Lesotho by the ANC till he returned to join the South African Police Services (SAPS) Crime Intelligence Service (CIS).⁵⁴⁵

The persecution of underground MK activists like Ephraim Mogale, since the late 1970s, in the form of police harassment, imprisonment on Robben Island and the burning of his parent's home to a frazzle at Uitvlucht on 8 February, 1986 are some of the examples that depict South Africa's past.⁵⁴⁶ No one was safe unless ones' political persuasions were clearly visible and inclined towards the apartheid state policies. The history of the liberation struggle is littered with examples. When MK cadres attacked Sibasa police station in August 1981 in the Republic of Venda, the 28-year-old Lutheran lay preacher Tshifiwa Muofhe was arrested and eventually died at the hands of the Venda security police. True to form, the Venda security police, like their counterparts in the neighbouring South Africa (in the logic of Bantustan politics), issued a statement in which they alleged that Muofhe died when he leapt from the truck in an attempt to escape or commit suicide. The objective of these acts of maiming and killing was to discourage political activists from opposing the government's racial policies.

⁵⁴⁵ Interview with Malaza Vincent Siphithi, by the author, Sunnyside, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 18 January 2005

⁵⁴⁶ Interview with Mogale Ephraim by the author, Bronkhorspruit, Gauteng Province, 26 & 27 April 2003.

The cherry on top of state repression - the state of emergency

Addressing the President's Council on 9 June 1988, the South African Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, told the Council that the ANC/SACP alliance had managed to establish some 1 000 organisations inside the country since 1984.⁵⁴⁷ The assessment of the political situation like this was not only wild but it also influenced government policies with regard to the threat posed to the state security. How was it possible for the ANC to establish close to 1 000 organisations in a State of Emergency intermittently declared since 1985? The trepidation with which the ANC was viewed by the government, the aura that the ANC had created for itself and the general aversion that the populace had meted out against the government policies resulted in government trying various methods to remain in power, such as the extra judiciary powers that ensured continuance of the government's power. This necessitated the elevation of the police to new heights. The state of emergency was adopted to contain the political situation that was already out of control.

The state of emergency had three major effects on the liberation politics in South Africa. It allowed the security police, described by Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill as "the 'front line' troops of apartheid",⁵⁴⁸ and soldiers, as well as prison officials, to arrest and detain any person suspected of tampering with the security of the state. The security police and soldiers were not obliged to apply for a warrant of arrest in a court of law. The State of Emergency affected the freedom of expression in the sense that any comment against the country's political situation would be

⁵⁴⁷ Answer to Terrorism, *RSA Policy Review* Vol.1, No. 1, October 1988, p. 59.

⁵⁴⁸ Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm*, (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980), p. 243.

deemed subversive. It affected the freedom of movement in the sense that it proscribed what people were permitted to do. In the height of political unrest that gripped the country since 1984 the government decided to ban mass funerals (which were used as means of protest, political rallies already banned) under the cloak of the state of emergency.⁵⁴⁹ It was under these conditions that known and suspected political activists were kidnapped and thrown into police custody without proper channels of arrests being followed. Individuals political activists were arrested in the rural Northern Transvaal for example, and be blindfolded until handed over to security police in Natal. It also affected the people's choice of clothes since any clothing with a political message, such as political T-shirts, was deemed to be unlawful. It was illegal to wear a T-shirt that promoted the objectives of a banned political movement. The level of education in the police force compounded the situation in the sense that any writing on a t-shirt could be declared unlawful. Emergency regulations empowered the police to run the state with impunity: namely, the maintenance of order, arrest and detention of persons, and powers of entry, search and seizure. The failure of the State of Emergency to extirpate underground political activities was glaringly conspicuous. The *Sunday Star* reported that if the government thought that the State of Emergency would provide "a psychological climate locally and abroad for severe security action, including curfews and mass detentions in which a total of nearly 8 000 were detained", then, it failed badly.⁵⁵⁰ Did the government really think that these security measures would contain a high level of political upsurge? What was the subterfuge in the declaration of the state of emergency?

⁵⁴⁹ *Keesing's Volume XXXI*, Africa South of the Sahara, South Africa – Economic Situation – Continued Unrest under the State of Emergency- Relations with International Community, October 1985, p 33894.

⁵⁵⁰ 'The Emergency is dead, but the fears linger on', *The Sunday Star*, March 9 1986.

In a normal society the emergency regulations must have been necessitated by actual or imminent danger to the state.⁵⁵¹ To state that the life of the majority of South Africans was under extreme threat is an understatement, because of the racial policies that separated them from their white counterparts. The states of emergency during the 1980s were not meant to correct that anomaly. Mostly, it is argued that the government created the conditions that led it to declare the state of emergency in the first place. Andre Brink, in his open letter to the then State President of South Africa, P. W. Botha, concurs with that opinion:

In this country that is torn apart by violence your white minority regime and its agents have, through their arrogance, intransigence and organised campaigns of terror against the oppressed, created the circumstances you required for the declaration of a State of Emergency.⁵⁵²

Brink's message to the President was ignored, as usual. The government never attempted to ameliorate the situation that led to the declaration of the emergency regulations in the first place. The misdiagnosis of the situation accounted for the approach that the government adopted. The South African government's 'hold' on power seemed to slip through its hands considerably after the early 1980s. The reasons were quite obvious because the internally based organisations recruited every sector of the society. In Alexander in the mid-1980s, the Alex Funeral Coordinating Committee politicised funerals to such an extent that the government "stole" eleven corpses that were going to be buried at mass funerals.⁵⁵³ These were victims of unrest resulting from the declaration of the state of emergency. The state did not want the repeat of a mass funeral attended

⁵⁵¹ Nel. F and Bezuidenhout, J, *Policing and Human Rights*, (Cape Town, Juta & CO.), pp. 434-435.

⁵⁵² Andre Brink, *Reinventing a Continent: Writing and Politics in South Africa 1982 – 1995*, (London, Secker & Warburg, 1996), p. 20.

⁵⁵³ *City Press*, 16 March 1986.

by close to sixty thousand people when seven victims of unrest were buried in Alexander in March 1986.⁵⁵⁴ In the case of the victims of state repression, it was clear that the ANC was unbanned in their eyes. This was usually demonstrated at mass funerals where victims' coffins were draped with ANC flags,⁵⁵⁵ overt actions undertaken with the police and soldiers in armoured cars overlooking the gravesides. The state had resorted to repression of political aspirations for freedom yet there were always means of obviating the effects of these extraordinary measures. In the final analysis, it is crucial put into perspective the effects that the state of emergency had on the political events in the rural Northern Transvaal. The following statement puts it more aptly, "It is important to understand that the state of emergency has not stopped the revolution – it has merely placed a lid on it for the period that the restrictions remain in force,"⁵⁵⁶

The government was assisted by the pliable judiciary that was at all times ready to convict suspected political opponents on spurious grounds. When an MK cadre, Tlokwe Maserumule was arrested in 1984 for MK activities in Dennilton, the magistrate, at Groblersdal magistrate's court to which Tlokwe was eventually taken, was prepared to go to his office to charge him despite it being during the night when he was, apparently, supposed to have been off duty.⁵⁵⁷ Fearing that he would be murdered by the security police who had arrested him for allegedly concealing some of the weapons he was suspected of withholding, Tlokwe implicated his elder brother, Maserumule Kgopotso. A helicopter was then dispatched from Middleburg to Tzaneen where Kgopotso was working for a bus

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid* 16 March 1986.

⁵⁵⁵ *Sunday Star*, 18 May 1986.

⁵⁵⁶ Donald S. McAlvany, *Revolution and Betrayal, The Accelerating Onslaught against South Africa*, *The New American*, August 11, 1986.

⁵⁵⁷ Interview with Tlokwe Maserumule, by the author, GaMatlala, Limpopo Province, 11 July 2002.

company. Tlokwe did not want to “disappear”, as so many people had, in the throes of the liberation struggle. Eventually, the security police satisfied themselves that indeed Tlokwe’s brother knew nothing about his younger brother’s political activities, only after Kgopotso had been severely assaulted. Tlokwe was eventually sentenced to a lengthy period of imprisonment on Robben Island without having produced the weapons he was suspected of concealing from the police.

The government’s disregard for the rule of international law and calls for clemency when MK cadres were arrested went unheeded. Mthetheleli Zephaniah Ncube and Mzondeleli Euclid Nondula’s case serve as an example. Mthetheleli left the country in 1980 at the age of 20 to join the ANC. Mzondeleli left in 1982 at the age of 19 with the same mission as his comrade in arms. Mthetheleli underwent military training for three of his six years in exile before being sent back to the country on a mission to plant bombs at the border posts in the rural far Northern Transvaal around Mussina (previously Messina). The white farming communities adjacent to the borders were perceived as extensions of the state security network, thus the extreme measures taken against them were influenced by that perception. Mthetheleli and Nondula’s mission in 1985 and 1986, amongst others, was to cross the Zimbabwean-South African border into the Messina area of the Soutpansberg Military region, to lay landmines.⁵⁵⁸ Some people were later maimed and killed and this led to their arrest. Notwithstanding the torture they endured at the hands of the security police when they were eventually arrested in the Messina area, the fact that the South African government refused to recognise them as soldiers of war, added to the woes of their plight. They were not the only ones to

⁵⁵⁸ John Dugard, ‘Soldiers or Terrorists? The ANC and the SADF Compared’, *South African Journal on Human Rights*, Vol. 4, No. 2, July 1988, p. 221.

be refused the prisoner-of-war status by the South African government. The government never recognised the ANC's liberation war was as being legitimate, yet, it was always misconstrued as terrorist and communist inspired. This explains why almost all politically-related cases were classified as criminal.

The point is that by refusing to recognise MK soldiers as soldiers-of-war under the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of 1949, the government deprived MK cadres of the status that they should have enjoyed under the Geneva Convention. Mthetheleli and Nondula could have been spared police brutality when they were 'lucky' to be arrested. They could have enjoyed the prisoner-of-war status advocated by John Dugard and Tom Lodge during their treason trial in 1988.⁵⁵⁹ Despite international calls for their clemency, they were eventually sentenced to death in 1988, which was never carried out due to the major political changes that took place in 1990.⁵⁶⁰

Conclusion

The South African government's 'hold' onto power began to display some cracks in the 1980s when political upsurges became daily occurrences. The government then decided to use draconian measures to remain in power. This was after a spectacular failure in the effectiveness

⁵⁵⁹ John Dugard, then Director of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand argued in favour of the declaration of the prisoner-of-war status on Mthetheleli and Ncube. Tom Lodge of the University of the Witwatersrand's Department of Political Studies gave evidence in mitigation in *State versus Ncube and Nondula*, Messina Regional Court, 27 April 1988, *Tom Lodge's Personal Letters*, University of the Witwatersrand.

⁵⁶⁰ The famous 2 February 1990 President F. W. de Klerk's speech unbanned the ANC and other liberation organisation and set in motion the process that culminated in the release of political prisoners, including both Mthetheleli and Nondula.

of the legislations that were intended to appease apolitical citizens. Had it been heeded, Tambo's 1977 aphorism could have saved the government notoriety. Tambo cautioned that that the South African people wanted an all representative parliament and not laws that are based on racism.⁵⁶¹ The year 1984 seemed to be a turning point in the political fortunes of the liberation movement when sporadic and coordinated community based organisations daringly started to challenge the government upfront. This challenge of the government racial policies demonstrated that the military airbases the government had built in the rural far Northern Transvaal were not obstacles in the quest for freedom. It also proved that cross border raids into neighbouring countries, allegedly in "hot pursuit" of MK cadres deemed to have committed terrorist activities inside South Africa, were counterproductive measures. The government's shift of responsibility to the Bantustans (in this case the KaNgwane Administration), also seemed to be worthless as the people of KaNgwane were able to see through the prism of a hopeless ruse that the idea of incorporating KaNgwane and some parts of Ingwavuma, into Swaziland were mere subterfuges of delaying their freedom.

The concentration of security forces and police in the rural far Northern Transvaal and some parts of the Eastern Transvaal proved the expectations that MK would emerge from the borders marching southwards, were misguided. The truth was that individual batches of three to four MK cadres were sent into the country carrying minimal arms save for those specifically intended for self protection in case they were intercepted en route. The large arsenal of weapons was sent long before these batches of MK cadres were dispatched to carry out various

⁵⁶¹ Lulu Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains, Op. Cit.*, p. 536.

assignments. No amount of military preparedness was sufficient to stop the march to freedom and it was futile for the South African government to cross the border into the neighbouring countries as MK was deeply entrenched in the masses within South Africa. The underground political activities were beginning to be well coordinated, although, at times, lack of proper leadership as a result of a vacuum created by the state persecution of seasoned leadership, caused the underground initiatives to go astray.⁵⁶²

The state of emergency was a great inconvenience and hindrance to the underground political activities. It gave the security police the uncontrollable powers to arrest and detain suspects indefinitely. It limited the people's freedom of speech as the police could arrest and detain people for stating their opinions regarding prevailing conditions inside the country. The government's argument was that it wanted to curb "subversive statements" from being made that could have a bearing on the prevailing explosive political situation. The free flow of information was stifled, since electronic and print media, for example, were prohibited from reporting on the state of emergency situation. Newspaper reporters witnessing police harassments could not report on them without contacting the police for approval and acknowledgement that the incidents had indeed taken place, to which there would have been a standard response of denial and rejection. This explains the scarcity of written historical accounts of what actually happened during the state of emergency. The censorship laws, which stunted the political activities that were beginning to emerge in the 1980s, were attained with the

⁵⁶² The state of emergency managed to bring about this temporary dislocation in the crusade against apartheid by ensuring that seasoned leaders were jailed and young and less mentored political activists took over.

assistance of the judiciary that was ready to give a stamp of legitimacy to laws that were legally and morally unjustifiable. Incidentally, the state of emergency and other forms of harassment, gave the predominantly black political organisations like the UDF a legitimacy that they might not have themselves earned.⁵⁶³

It was not historically conjectural; therefore, to conclude that when the State President, F.W. de Klerk, decided to unban the political organisations on 2 February, 1990 and to lift the state of emergency, except in Natal, he had no option but to accede to the majority political aspirations. It is equally an exaggeration to suggest that de Klerk conceded to level the political field because of MK inspired political uprisings. A multiplicity of factors led to the ‘surrender’ of power by the apartheid South African government. The state of the economy, the international balance of forces due to the collapse of the Communist block and therefore the end of the Cold War, and a host of other factors, caused the de Klerk government to rethink its policy of apartheid. De Klerk took tentative steps to undo the harm that the policy of apartheid had caused, by instituting commissions of inquiries into the conduct of his security police during political turmoil.⁵⁶⁴ The commissions were inaugurated in response to the overwhelming rumour that a “third force” was behind the violence that was gripping the country. The rumour was reinforced by the startling allegations that were made by Butana Almond Nofomela who was imprisoned for killing a white farmer. Nofomela, a security police officer, disclosed that there was a policy of the systematic assassination of the government’s opponents by the South African

⁵⁶³ *South African Foundation*, UDF Changes Tactics, May 1985, p. 3.

⁵⁶⁴ Like in the past the Harmse and Hiemstra commissions government were exculpated from any complicity in the violence that gripped the country.

security police.⁵⁶⁵ These “third forces” included the SAP Unit C1 and the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB) of the SADF. The white-controlled media attributed the violence to a “black on black” phenomenon. In December 1989, when the demand for a judicial commission of inquiry became unbearable, it was authorised by the Minister of Justice under the de Klerk government, Kobie Coetzee. Justice Louis Harmse’s commission was fundamentally flawed in both proposition and preparation.⁵⁶⁶ The commission was mandated to an enquiry about violent acts committed within the borders of South Africa despite the fact that there was an overwhelming welter of evidence that the government’s agents were dispatched on evil missions the world over. By and large, the CCB was disbanded and everybody was exculpated. The commission was conceived as a whitewash by the opposition. The persistent demand for justice led to the establishment of the Hiemstra Commission in April 1990, headed by Justice V. G. Hiemstra. It was also prompted by the Johannesburg City Council’s (JCC) espionage network, the “Security Department” which tracked down government opponents. Both the Harmse and Hiemstra Commissions pointed out that there were indeed indications that a “third force” was operating both within South Africa and internationally. It is also noteworthy to mention that the “third force” theory was also disputed by those who argued that the legitimate right of the majority to fight for the liberation struggle through “ungovernability and a people’s war” was a subset of the “third force” theory.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁵ For a detailed discussion on Nofomela’s disclosures see Paulos Zulu’s ‘Third Force’ Operations in South Africa in *The Hidden Hand, Covert Operations in South Africa: Second Edition* by Charl Schutte, Ian Liebenberg and Anthony Minnaar, (eds.), Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 1998), the entire chapter.

⁵⁶⁶ An Africa Watch Report, ‘The Killings in South Africa. The Role of the Security Forces & the Response of the State’, *Africa Watch*, 1991, p. 11.

⁵⁶⁷ John Kane-Berman, ‘*Political Violence in South Africa*,’ (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1993), p. 77

In conclusion, the pressure that was brought to bear on the government throughout the years of the liberation struggle in South Africa bore fruit in 1990 when de Klerk unbanned the liberation movements and ordered the release of political prisoners. The rural Northern Transvaal's role in the national liberation struggle was interlinked with that of the entire country. The region's peculiarities and uniqueness has provided an invaluable lesson, proven by this study, that it was profitably utilised by MK. The Zimbabwean infiltration routes, particularly in the 1980s, have proven that, contrary to the expectations of the SADF military preparedness, the MK reliance on public transport and contacts inside South Africa was very useful.

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Chapter Six

Conclusion

Writers on MK history such as Howard Barrell⁵⁶⁸, Tom Lodge⁵⁶⁹ and Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart⁵⁷⁰ have tended to suggest that the struggle for liberation in South Africa was predominantly an urban one. This study has shown that the armed struggle in the rural Northern Transvaal was significant, especially after the release from jail of those incarcerated in the 1960s. But the changing political landscape of the 1970s and 1980s made the veterans of the 1960s such as Nelson Diale, Petrus Nchabeleng and many others wiser and more cautious when conducting the underground liberation struggle. This study has emphasized that MK never sought to engage the South African government in conventional warfare but rather, employed a myriad of tactics to destabilise the state and ultimately seize power. Various forms of revolutionary rural warfare models influenced the MK's thinking but were never really pursued. The postulation behind the rural warfare models was that guerrilla warfare waged in the countryside would surround and swallow the cities.⁵⁷¹ The leading theorists of these revolutionary rural warfare models are Mao Tse-tung, General Vo

⁵⁶⁸ See Howard Barrell, 'Conscripts of their Age: African National Congress Operational strategy, 1976 – 1989', PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1993 and *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*, London, Penguin, 1990.

⁵⁶⁹ See Tom Lodge's (amongst others) 'The African National Congress in South Africa, 1976 – 1983: Guerrilla War and Armed Propaganda', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 3, 1&2, October 1983, and The State of Exile: The African National Congress of South Africa, 1976 – 1986, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 1987.

⁵⁷⁰ See Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge, A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882- 1990, Vol. 5, Nadir and Resurgence 1964- 1979*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997).

⁵⁷¹ C. S. Sarkesian, *Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare*, (Chicago, Precedent Pub, 1975) p 3.

Nguyen Giap and Ernesto “Che” Guevara.⁵⁷² The ANC always argued that it had learnt from these proponents of guerrilla warfare and that it was not obliged to follow them mechanically despite criticisms that, “...the same literature [on guerrilla warfare as advanced by the aforementioned guerrilla warfare theorists] was being cleared from bookshelves in Umkhonto we Sizwe camps.”⁵⁷³ Affirming this notion and directly confirming the initial contemplation of launching the armed struggle from the rural areas, the MK’ Operation Mayibuye found by the police at Rivonia on 11 July, 1963 declares:

In the rural areas which become the main theatre of guerrilla operations in the initial phase, the overwhelming majority of the people will protect and safeguard the guerrillas and this fact will to some measure negate the disadvantages.⁵⁷⁴

In the Northern Transvaal a seminal role was played by individual students of the 1970s at the University of the North: Ngoako Ramatlhodi, Thabo Makunyane, Joyce and George Mashamba (before their arrest and after their underground operations had been uncovered), and countless others who either graduated from the university and became political activists in their respective fields, or were dismissed from the university for their political activities and went into exile. That Makunyane and Ramatlhodi were able to travel to Botswana and Lesotho to be briefed and debriefed by their political underground commanders as early as the late 1970s is a clear indication of the intricate nature of the liberation struggle that unfolded in the region. The Mashambas were former

⁵⁷² For details on these revolutionary rural warfare models see W. J. Booyse, ‘The Concept “People’s War” in the ‘Revolutionary Strategy of the ANC and the PAC: A Comparative Analysis’, PhD Thesis, University of Potchefstroom 1990, pp: 40-43.

⁵⁷³ Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid: the ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1991), p. 45.

⁵⁷⁴ Visit <http://www.bellum.nu/literature/ANC005.html>, “OPERATION MAYIBUYE”, “AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS” pp. 2-3.

colleagues of S'bu Ndebele who strategically relocated to the University of Swaziland. Ndebele's position in Swaziland allowed him to interact with his former colleagues in the rural Northern Transvaal and to communicate with his contacts in Botswana and Lesotho and those from his home town of Natal. Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland countries connected their university's programmes and students would move from one country to the next and therefore passed on information.

Students at the University of the North had contacts with political activists outside the university, who would later escape imprisonment and join the ANC in exile, such as Nwedamutswu "Mumsy" Mamabolo Phillip. Nwedamutswu became very influential in the ANC/MK military and political operations as he knew the area of Venda and Lebowa quite well and were able to provide deployed MK cadres with contacts that were underground inside the country.⁵⁷⁵ Nwedamutswu's membership of the Transvaal Rural Machinery of MK was very valuable on that score. The arrival in exile of such people changed the texture of the underground struggle within South Africa, as they were able to return and recruit more and more people, particularly in civic and trade union movements in the 1980s.⁵⁷⁶ Recruits brought fresh information and ideas that eventually shaped new approaches and tactics that were adopted by the ANC. These events occurred coincidentally with the arrival of exiled political refugees after the dawn of the historic epoch of the 1976 Soweto student uprising. The avalanche of people into exile contributed to the rise of political activities inside the country. The intricate nature of the MK operations and how they dovetailed with the popular struggles

⁵⁷⁵ Interview with Nwedamutswu "Mumsy" Mamabolo Philip by the author, SADET Offices, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 23 March 2005, provides details of this.

⁵⁷⁶ Interview with Frans Mohlala, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 22 June 2004. He became influential in civic and trade union politics in the 1980s.

against the government in the rural Northern Transvaal did not fundamentally differ from those that were carried out in other parts of the country.

The liberation struggle waged by MK underwent numerous changes throughout the years, a process that affected both rural and urban environments and invariably had an impact on the struggle's direction and efficacy. Reference to the early 1970s as a period of reorganisation and gradual move towards the establishment of infiltration routes and contacts with internal membership to the late 1980s when the country was engulfed with the liberation flame were some of the salient points that marked the changing nature of the liberation struggle throughout the years. This study has been able to expose the surreptitious connections and contacts established across this theoretical political divide of rural and urban settings, as well as how the two dovetailed one with the other. The reliance of MK cadres on rural based people, such as Dick Ralushai in Venda, to receive 'gifts' from Mudimu Refiloe in Zimbabwe and distribute them in the entire region and beyond, was a practical decision rather than a confirmation of a rural struggle as opposed to an urban struggle. The same type of 'gifts' were also received in the urban areas of Johannesburg by Kenny Fihla's unit from Refiloe in Zimbabwe.⁵⁷⁷ Evidently, the argument of the struggle's locality being mainly in the urban areas is indisputable but rural MK activities during years of struggle also took place. Rural areas (as well as urban ones) produced MK cadres who also swelled the ranks of the ANC. These rural areas also served as entry points for infiltration of arms and ammunition that were either stored in the region or were sent somewhere else.

⁵⁷⁷ Interview with Reliloe Mudimu, by the author, South African Navy Headquarters, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 18 January 2005.

It has also been demonstrated how the borders of the region were populated by a strong Afrikaner community that sought interaction with the country's security forces.⁵⁷⁸ The misconception that MK was based in the north of the region made this locality a suitable field of study. The construction of military bases in the region was also (mis)informed by the supposed entry point of MK in its attempt to fight the South African government, the study demonstrated. The ANC acknowledged in its report many years later that, "The region (rural Northern Transvaal) is also the stronghold of the white, right-wing lunatic fringe, who have made organising a dangerous task for ANC comrades, particularly amongst the farm workers."⁵⁷⁹ Of course, the ANC document cited above refers to the post-ANC unbanning of 1990, but it also highlights the historic fertile and strategic nature of the region, further confirming why the region proffers an ideal setting for this study of the liberation struggle. Notwithstanding the debates of rural versus urban struggles, both the communities came to venerate MK very highly in the 1980s. The ANC/MK managed to circumvent the concentration of security forces in the region towards the border with Zimbabwe by sending unarmed MK cadres into the country who were then, after their infiltration inside the country, reunited with their weapons for military and political missions.

The route that was followed from exile to the target (which could include identified individuals or a police station), was theoretically supposed to be monitored and directed with the assistance of others. Tlokwe Maserumule's trail of infiltration in the early 1980s into the country confirms the point. The arrest of Tlokwe by the South African security

⁵⁷⁸ The fact that these Afrikaner communities formed themselves into commandos attests to this assertion.

⁵⁷⁹ African National Congress, *'From resistance to reconstruction & national-building: African National Congress 49th National Conference, Bloemfontein 17-21 December*, (Marshalltown: ANC Dept. of Information & Publicity, 1994), p. 105.

police in 1984 was a result of a collapse in the communication line. Tlokwe was supposed to be hosted for a week at GaMampuru in the Burgersfort area after leaving Swaziland. It is essential to dilate on this point for a while. The choice of GaMampuru (the royal family was chosen as a host) for Tlokwe was recommended by Ramphelane Mampuru who was a member of the Mampuru royal family based in exile. He had contacts with his relatives from the royal family and it was through those contacts that Tlokwe's infiltration and subsequent deployment was discussed. The point is that infiltrations were thoroughly planned in exile and the exiled leadership of MK responsible for infiltration missions had no control over unforeseen circumstances inside the country as Tlokwe's case demonstrates. After spending a week at GaMampuru Tlokwe received instructions that took him to Motetema to be hosted by the Maepa family. Unbeknown to those who were responsible for his 'diary', the Maepa family that was supposed to host him had already relocated to Dennilton. It was left to Tlokwe to trace the family to Dennilton and by the time he succeeded to track the family down, Maepa (Ike Maepa, the head of the homestead) had already moved to Johannesburg. It is possible that Maepa suspected that his clandestine connection with the ANC deployees was perhaps under scrutiny and he felt that he should move about to evade the government's surveillance mechanisms. In the process, Maepa lost contact with those he was supposed to assist in the execution of their MK duties.⁵⁸⁰ This example symbolizes the extent to which MK operations kept on shifting from the original plans. This example also indirectly responds to the criticisms leveled by writers such as Barrell that no reception committees were put in place by the ANC before MK cadres were deployed inside the country.

⁵⁸⁰ Ike Maepa shuttled between Swaziland and South Africa servicing various units that were operating within his area of Dennilton (in the now defunct Lebowa and KwaNdebele as well as some parts of Witwatersrand).

It also highlights the difficulties experienced by MK cadres in striking a delicate balance between sticking to your planned mission (as communicated to you by people who are part of your mission without your knowledge) and conditions inside the country that kept on changing and affecting the original plan on which the mission was crafted in exile.

Tlokwe was informed from Swaziland and Mozambique that he was supposed to meet with Tito Manthata (another MK cadre on the same mission but from a different angle) at some point in their mission in South Africa. Tito was arrested first after entering the country from southern Swaziland into northern KwaZulu. This very intricate and highly organised process did not involve (in most cases) MK cadres who were supposed to carry these missions through to fruition. The MK High Command relied on sophisticated networks of individuals who carried out similar missions without even knowing one another. Tlokwe's example showed that people sent to transport him from one point to another did not know each other nor were they supposed to discuss anything other than transport from GaMampuru to Motetema. The reliance of internal networks was essential and the ANC always knew that:

An assemblage of rebel resources outside South Africa could mean little, however, without a formidable underground inside the Republic. Guerrillas, couriers and communications had to flow into South Africa from foreign bases for insurrection to grow, and indeed the Congress's exile bureaucracy had made much of that possible. But success would have to depend most of all on the ANC's ability to build a foundation of public confidence inside the country. If apartheid was to be toppled, it could not be done by any external force but by the one rooted at home.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁸¹ Stephen M. Davis, *Apartheid's Rebels. Inside South Africa's Hidden War*, Op. Cit., p. 75.

Ellis puts it more eloquently and convincingly in his explanation of the need for mutual dependence between guerrillas and communities based inside the country. He avers:

...unless a guerrilla force directs all its efforts to maintaining close links with the people it can have little chance of eventual victory. Guerrilla warfare is the war of the whole people, and as such demands that the closest attention be paid to those matters which concern the people most. Anyone organizing such a struggle must always realize that military considerations are secondary to political, social and economic policies. In the end the confrontation will be on the purely military level, but the guerrilla's capacity to be adequately equipped for that confrontation is a direct function of the duration and intensity of their political effort. Power may grow out of the barrel of a gun, but one must first persuade people to take up that gun, care for it, hump it around for years in the most desolate regions, and then to stand firm and pull the trigger. To do that needs much more than mere military expertise.⁵⁸²

This reliance on local communities has been pinpointed by the feats of various individual MK cadres. Failure to rely on communities (or some members within the communities) would have resulted in the perception that MK cadres were just “robbers and brigands” that could not “otherwise subsist than by rapine”.⁵⁸³ The disputation is generally reflected in the following phrase, “In the absence of concrete knowledge of a concrete and different situation, and particularly if the differences themselves are not understood, it is dangerous to import organizational formulas, even if they are based on a known theory.”⁵⁸⁴ It is also caused by the narrow attribution of the struggle to political movements. The ruse at the height of the liberation struggle and the government repression was to ‘divert’ perceptible political actions and masquerade them as religious or theatrical. Ngoako Ramatlhodi, an underground ANC/MK activist in

⁵⁸² John Ellis, *From the Barrel of a Gun. A History of Guerrilla, Revolutionary and Counter-Insurgency Warfare, From the Romans to the Present*, (London, Greenhill Books, 1995), p. 243.

⁵⁸³ R. S. Brownlee, *Gray Ghosts of the Confederacy*, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1958), p. 78.

⁵⁸⁴ Regis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968), p. 65.

the late 1970s at the University of the North, argues that there should be an acknowledgement that agitprop (agitation and propaganda) theatre played a part in the liberation struggle as a subterfuge for conspicuous political activities.⁵⁸⁵ The study has been able to highlight some of the community ‘organisations’ that were used as camouflages to distract government attention from their activities. Through such innovative thinking that MK cadres were able to evade arrests and harassment from the security forces. There were however, setbacks and hiccups on the way to liberation. Like the proverbial Phoenix bird, the ANC and MK were “temporarily anguished” as the political journalist, John Pilger would argue in his reference to the ‘vanquished’ communities of the world.⁵⁸⁶

The role of armed struggle as adopted by MK in the national liberation struggle in South Africa has never been thoroughly researched. Critics of that leg of the liberation struggle harp on it at the expense of other terrains of the struggle for freedom in South Africa. The four pillars of the liberation struggle adopted by the ANC in the early 1960s included: a campaign of mass political education; agitation from the underground; international isolation of the South African regime spearheaded by the ANC mission abroad; the formation of MK armed struggle; and the creation of a network of underground resistance structures; both in and outside the country.⁵⁸⁷ Luli Callinicos aptly captures the conception of the ANC of the four pillars of the struggle when she states that MK’s armed propaganda struggle versus negotiations was crafted into a bow of many

⁵⁸⁵ Interview with Ngoako Ramatlhodi by the author, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 24 February 2004

⁵⁸⁶ Visit The Ghost of Gleneagles, John Pilger, 11 July 2005 at

<http://www.johnpilger.com/page.asp?partid=370>.

⁵⁸⁷ African National Congress, *Strategy and Tactics as adopted at the 49th National Conference*, ANC Department of Information and Publicity, (Marshalltown, December 1994), p.4. For a detailed report see *African National Congress. Report on the 49th ANC National Conference*, Johannesburg: ANC Department of Information and Publicity, (Marshalltown, December 1994), the entire report.

cords.⁵⁸⁸ This study has been able to demonstrate that armed propaganda warfare was carried out as initially conceived.

The study has obliquely referred to the guerrilla warfare theories that were adopted in other parts of the world where liberation struggles were waged. The ANC had been blamed that it never took these theories seriously when it undertook its own liberation struggle. The engagement of MK in the freedom struggle is also often juxtaposed with other national liberation struggle operations where armed guerrilla warfare liberation theories were pursued, and the conclusion is usually that guerrilla warfare was bound to fail in South Africa. Reasons are attributed to various factors in cases that range from conformity with material conditions (in the case of Tom Lodge)⁵⁸⁹ to the dislocation of the military and political operational structures (in the case of Howard Barrell).⁵⁹⁰ Implicitly, this argument advances the view that theories of guerrilla warfare have been exhausted and there is no room for new innovations. There will, however, always be room for new ways of resistance, and past guerrilla warfare theories should not always be points of reference. The current modalities of waging an armed propaganda warfare taking place in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and occupied Palestine in the Middle East show that there is still room for new theories regarding armed guerrilla propaganda warfare. Suicide bombs, widely seen as instruments of self-immolation to those on the periphery, are new forms of armed propaganda resistance. This study has shown that MK was able to adjust and survive under extremely difficult conditions imposed by the apartheid system.

⁵⁸⁸ Luli Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 536.

⁵⁸⁹ Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 296.

⁵⁹⁰ Howard Barrell, 'The Turn to the Masses: The African National Congress' Strategic Review of 1978-79,' *Journal of South African Studies* 18, March 1992, p. 74.

MK operations were mainly propagandistic and not intended to trounce the South African government militarily.⁵⁹¹ Mahmood Mamdani argued that the ANC, despite its immense stature (his contention) acted more as a “symbol than an organisation of resistance in South Africa”.⁵⁹² The study showed that the “stature” in itself was necessary for the successful prosecution of the liberation struggle. This explains why emphasis was placed on the concept of armed propaganda warfare and not on open conventional combat. The disintegration of oppressive regimes throughout human history occurs in various ways. The duration of these repressive establishments differs markedly for one reason or another. Conversely, these differences determine the nature of opposition that each country faces internally. In apartheid- plagued South Africa, for instance, institutionalised repression lasted for over 46 years (1948 – 1994), whereupon, the collapse of the apartheid government took place after a negotiated settlement of political disputes on 27 April, 1994. The disintegration of apartheid was a process that unfolded after many years of vain attempts at its sustenance. It also happened after decades of long-drawn-out efforts of its eradication by the liberation movement through various intertwined strategies. The attack of the apartheid system became multifaceted and was sustained throughout all those difficult years. The struggle for liberation in South Africa was “multifrontal in nature” as Maishe Maponya puts it.⁵⁹³ International forums such as the UN were used by the ANC to internationally publicise the plight of black South Africans. Political measures taken by the South African government that entrenched apartheid, such as the clampdown on political opponents and the 1983 tricameral constitution, further obliquely assisted in this regard.

⁵⁹¹ Peter Delius, *Mpumalanga: History and Heritage, Op. Cit.*, p. 273.

⁵⁹² Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, (London, James Currey, 1986), p. 273.

⁵⁹³ Quoted in Okwui Enwezor, *The Short Century. Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945 – 1994: With Essays by Chinua Achebe, et al*, (New York, Prestel, c2001), p. 309.

The ANC was supplied with ammunitions to expose the fraud of apartheid on the international stage, through campaigns of international isolation of the South African government. Addressing the UN General Assembly on the 18 November, 1983, the Director of the International Department of the ANC, Mfanafuthi Makhathini informed the Assembly:

The facts before us are that the so-called new constitution does not deal with the fundamental issue confronting South Africa, namely, the need to transfer power from the minority to the entire population regardless of race. What we have witnessed these last few weeks and months has been a glaring example of the pattern of apartheid political process in which Whites proposed, Whites debated, Whites differed, Whites consulted and Whites decided. However, we refuse to dignify the monstrous subject matter of the racist referendum with the term 'new constitution' and a discussion of its provisions. For throughout history new constitutions have embodied the spirit of liberty and a new socio-economic order expressing the hard-won sovereignty of people liberated from bondage.⁵⁹⁴

It was on liberated foreign soil that the ANC was able to meet underground ANC/MK operatives for briefings and debriefings.⁵⁹⁵ As an example an internally based MK activist in the far Northern Transvaal, Cassell Mathale, would legally cross the border from time to time (in the 1980s) to meet with Refiloe outside the Beit Bridge border post in Zimbabwe. Isaac Maepa held the same responsibility of liaising with MK leadership in Swaziland on behalf of cadres who were deployed underground for MK related activities such as Tlokwe Maserumule and Tito Manthata. Unlike previous times, the ANC was able to make informed decisions about the latest events unfolding within South Africa brought to its camp by political cadres who were able to come out of the country and return undetected.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁴ 'International. ANC Representative Addresses the United Nations', June 1984, *Sechaba*, p. 7.

⁵⁹⁵ Ray Esther Simons, *All my Life and All my Strength*, (Johannesburg, STE Publishing, 2004), p. 329.

⁵⁹⁶ Rosie Pilcher's BA Honours thesis alludes to information that brought to ANC camps long after it had been undertaken by other events inside the country because of lack of friendly borders with South Africa amongst other problems. For full details see Rosie Pilcher, 'Occupation Hazards: Observations

The South African government was not oblivious to the fact that these countries were posing a threat to its racial policies by harbouring its outlawed enemies. The government's supporters used to argue that the failure of the policy of detente towards its neighbours in the 1970s, left South Africa with no option but to confront her neighbours head on. This unleashed a barrage of criticisms and inadvertently exposed the racial policies of apartheid to the international communities. The Frontline States also condemned, with added vigour, the internal policies of the South African government and its policy of destabilisation of the neighbouring countries.⁵⁹⁷ These condemnations did not bring the South African government to its knees, neither did they happen overnight, nor were they unanimous. The condemnation of the South African racial policies by the neighbouring countries indirectly assisted the ANC's quest of isolating the government on the international stage. It also exposed the South African government's belligerent attitude towards its neighbours on allegations that they were using their territories for MK to launch attacks against government installations. These neighbouring countries were initially reluctant to tolerate the presence of ANC members on their shores. ANC and MK members who took refuge in neighbouring countries did not enjoy carte blanche freedom and hospitality. This impacted negatively on the MK operations that were supposedly organised from the Front Line states. Several MK cadres interviewed allude to this fact (towards the mid-1980s) that the instability in neighbouring countries as a result of the South African government's confrontational and bellicose foreign policy destabilised MK operations in countries that hosted them. The ANC turned its attention particularly in

of Conditions in Umkhonto we Sizwes Angolan Camps.' BA Honours, University of Cape Town, January 1998. p. 14.

⁵⁹⁷ 'Peace is Incompatible with Racism and Colonialism. Final Communiqué of the Front Line States Summit', *Sechaba*, June 1984, p. 3.

the mid 1980s to internal civil war was such as those in Angola because it could not focus on her own liberation obligations.⁵⁹⁸

This study has been able to highlight some of the advantages that were explored by the ANC in friendly countries such as Mozambique (before the 1984 Nkomati Accord), Zimbabwe,⁵⁹⁹ and to a limited extent, Swaziland. Pretoria spoiled their hospitality. Several MK cadres who were based in Mozambique alluded to the difficulties that they experienced after the signing of the Nkomati Accord by Mozambique and South Africa. MK activists such as Frank Thabane, Lord Matsane and many others complained that after the signing of the Accord they were no longer able to receive instructions on time because of the dislocation of underground political activities emanating from the neighbouring countries. These activists were based near the borders of Mozambique and Swaziland. The non-aggression pacts signed by Pretoria with Swaziland (1982) and Mozambique (1984) also impacted negatively on the liberation crusade. Commenting on the negative effects of the Mozambican non-aggression pact (Nkomati Accord) with the South African government, Dan O'Meara avers that the ANC's presence in Mozambique was reduced to a "small, very tightly supervised diplomatic mission."⁶⁰⁰

The infiltration routes (called pipelines) used by some of the cadres of MK from these neighbouring countries were known to the governments but officially not sanctioned for fear of reprisals from the South African regime. The arrest of Mudimu Refiloe (in Zimbabwe), some members of

⁵⁹⁸ Interview with Sam Mkhabela, by the author, Acornhoek, Limpopo Province, 5 October 2002.

⁵⁹⁹ Interview with Mudimu Refiloe, South African Navy Headquarters, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 21 January 2005, has proved this point.

⁶⁰⁰ Dan O'Meara, 'The Collapse of Mozambican Socialism', *Transformation* 14 (1991), p. 99.

his unit and those arrested in Swaziland, deported to Mozambique and later to Angola serve as examples of these government sanctions.⁶⁰¹ The opposite is also true that if the host neighbouring governments were as hostile to the liberation movements as the South African governments wished, those arrested could have been repatriated to South Africa.⁶⁰² There has always been such a request from the South African government for the repatriation of those arrested in neighbouring countries back to South Africa. The request was made by the representatives of the SAP when they went to Swaziland after 1976 to ask the Swazi government to repatriate a group of youth that left Mhluzi Township in Middleburg for exile in Swaziland. When Mudimu's claim that he was Zimbabwean was shattered because of his inability to tell the court the names of his "parents" whom he had brought to court to bear witness that they were his "parents", the Zimbabwean government deported him. Although the ruling was made in court, he was allowed to stay in the country under sufferance and continue infiltrating MK cadres and weapons into the north of the country. These pipelines were very porous, particularly towards the late 1980s. The story of Sam Ditshego from Moutse in the former Lebowa, described in the body of this study, clearly indicated that the Pitsane-Molopo routes into Botswana were utilised legally and maximally for the benefit of recruits and those who reinfiltated the country to fulfill various missions.⁶⁰³

When Oliver Tambo called confidently in his speech on the 77th anniversary of the ANC existence (January 8 message) that the pace of

⁶⁰¹ Interview with Mudimu Refiloe, by the author, South African Navy Headquarters, Pretoria, Gauteng Province, 18 January 2005.

⁶⁰² Interview with Vuvu Mndebele, by the author, SANDF Provincial Headquarters, Middleburg, Mpumalanga Province, 26 February 2003.

⁶⁰³ For details of Sam Ditshego contribution to the underground struggle see Marepo Lesetja, 'The Incorporation of Moutse into the KwaNdebele Bantustan, 1985-1987: MK's Military Testing Ground', Unpublished paper, 2005.

victory should be quickened, he had the insight that apartheid was gasping for survival as it was being attacked on all fronts.⁶⁰⁴ The knotty question that this study has tried to answer is how that confidence of declaring the 1980s a Decade of Liberation and the collapse of the government transpired in the rural Northern Transvaal. In trying to answer pertinent questions like those on regimes' collapse, Regis Debray sagely advises:

... an insurrection that is begun but not carried through, or a military semi-putsch, [does not have] the faintest chance of succeeding, and there is not a single historical instance to suggest that it might. No battle is ever won in advance, but a battle that is only half-engaged is certainly lost in advance.⁶⁰⁵

It took the ANC over 80 years to realise the dream of liberation. The reasons for such a lengthy period of time spent on engaging the South African government and ultimately forcing it to capitulate and come to the negotiating table as an equal partner, have nothing to do with Debray's contentions. It has everything to do with an arduous and meticulous process of building a revolution that culminated in the formation of the UDF inside the country, described as, "... a plethora of political and community groups joined in a nearly uncontrollable grassroots expansion, growing as if by cellular division".⁶⁰⁶

The delayed revolutionary victory had everything to do with the vicious enemy in the South African security forces that had an "eleventh commandment" as enunciated by Craig Williamson during the TRC

⁶⁰⁴ African National Congress, *ANC Speaks: Statement of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress on the Occasion of the 77th Anniversary of the ANC*, (Dar es Salaam?, ANC, 1989), p. 1 Visit for details <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/jan8-89.html>.

⁶⁰⁵ Regis Debray, *The Revolution on Trial. A Critique of Arms*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1978), p. 45.

⁶⁰⁶ Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary*, (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1998), p. 446

hearings. Williamson's TRC testimony largely refers to the clandestine character and government's denial of its proclivity to assassinate its opponents on condition that *thou shalt not be found out*.⁶⁰⁷ This "eleventh commandment" splintered families; imprisoned people on flimsy grounds like possessing "banned" literature of the ANC, harbouring terrorists or just being suspected of complicity in the ANC underground activities. Most of the suspicions were not easy to validate in a court of law and therefore they served the apartheid regime well to persecute political suspects by indefinite detentions, detentions that were legalized by Acts of parliament and the state of emergency in the 1980s. The South African government's dependence on what Farisani calls "Captain Above-the-Law" held up the liberation of the disenfranchised majority for many decades in which many people paid dearly for liberation.⁶⁰⁸ These are some of the factors that delayed the liberation struggle in South Africa for many decades. All these negative measures contributed towards the delay of the emancipation of the black majority and prolonged the lifespan of the apartheid South African government.

Individual accounts of MK cadres that were sourced from interviews (not necessarily carried out by the author) provided the backbone of the study. These personal accounts also provide the weaknesses of plans that were hatched faraway from the theater of the struggle for liberation. Some of individual braveries need repetition here. Mthetheleli Mncube and Mzondeleli Nondula's case provides a riveting account of the liberation struggle in South Africa.⁶⁰⁹ They were MK cadres sent into the country on various missions in the late 1980s ending up in the hands of the

⁶⁰⁷ Visit http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/special_forces/sap.htm

⁶⁰⁸ See Tshenuwani Simon Farisani, *In Transit: Between the Image of God and the Image of Man*, (Michigan Eerdmans, 1990), the entire issue.

⁶⁰⁹ For the story of Mthetheleli and Nondula see *South African Journal on Human Rights*, Vol.4, 2, July 1988.

security police who tortured them into 'submission'. This study further highlights problems that were experienced by deployed cadres despite the fact that they were trained in topography and other related subjects. Mncube and Mzondeleli's case proved the limitations of such training where they were unable to intermingle with communities in Mussina (Messina, then) near the border with Zimbabwe.⁶¹⁰ Their inability to speak neither isiZonga nor isiVhenda (two languages predominant in Mussina) made them feel outcast and the communities were unable to hide them for the full duration of their hiding there because the security police had launched an intensive search for them. The study has examples of this nature and the case of Cassius Motsoaledi's arrest in the lightening episode and subsequent release in Bushbuckridge in the early 1980s comes to mind.

The 1980s brought about that coordinating body in the form of the UDF. The countrywide upsurge of political activities remained subdued and 'untapped' by the liberation movements. These political upsurges manifested sporadically and spontaneously in demonstrations and strikes, particularly in the 1980s, and in most cases, national leaders never really succeeded in capturing and channeling these events into a meaningful direction until the formation of the UDF in 1983. The necessity to confine and guide the pent-up anger of the oppressed African majority into an organised structure in the 1980s was not a new phenomenon. Naledi Tsiki, an MK cadre captured after a series of underground military and political activities in the late 1970s in the rural villages of the Northern Transvaal, concluded, during his trial that, "I should also mention that at the time I left, there was a great need for a sense of discipline and

⁶¹⁰ A chapter titled 'Guerrillas are to People What Fish are to Water' in *Umkhonto we Sizwe: Fighting for a Divided People*, (Alberton, Galago, 2005), by Thula Bopela and Daluxolo Luthuli captures the importance of this interaction between the masses and the guerrillas.

responsibility so as to control the bursting anger of the black youth and to avoid terrorism in the true sense of the word.”⁶¹¹ There was nothing new in Tsiki’s sentiments. Nelson Mandela had the same feeling in the early 1960s that was echoed in his statement during the famous Rivonia Trial. He felt that, “... unless responsible leadership were given to canalise and control the feelings of the people, there would be outbreaks of terrorism which would produce an intensity of bitterness and hostility between the various races of the country.”⁶¹² It was especially in the 1980s that conscious efforts were made to integrate the “professional” guerrillas of MK with the main force of the masses as a “political army” in protracted liberation struggles.⁶¹³

Contrary to obvious expectations of the ANC to take advantage of the internal political agitations within the country after September 1984, the Vaal triangle uprisings externally engulfed the ANC, the protracted internal turmoil in Angola (1984), and the effects of the Nkomati Accord in Mozambique left the ANC tottering on the brink of disorganisation.⁶¹⁴ Ellis mistakenly argues that the ANC was provided with a lifetime opportunity of military breakthrough by these internal uprisings that started in the Vaal but the organisation was ill prepared and failed to take up the opportunity.⁶¹⁵ The objective behind MK operations was to cause instability and ungovernability such as the one described above so that the political impasse that plagued South Africa could be overcome. In the context of the regional historiography that this study has in mind it is

⁶¹¹ Francis Meli, *A History of the ANC: South Africa Belongs to us*, (London, James Currey, 1988), p. 147.

⁶¹² Hilda Bernstein, *The World that was Ours*, ([S.I.]; Heinemann, c1967), p. 161.

⁶¹³ Hough M, ‘Revolutionary Warfare in the RSA’, *Institute for Strategic Studies*, University of Pretoria, May 1986, p. 11.

⁶¹⁴ Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid. The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile*, *Op. Cit.* p. 141.

⁶¹⁵ Stephen Ellis, *The ANC in Exile*, *African Affairs*, Vol. 90, 1991, p. 446.

wrong to conclude by assertions that the ANC/MK were in exile and therefore unable to take the advantages that were provided by the political upsurges of the 1980s. The current study argues that there were two groups of the same family, one based in exile and another inside the country. The constant change of positions and obligations throughout the years were calculated at the overthrow of the government and there was that natural replacement of individuals from generations to generations. First generation of MK cadres from the rural Northern Transvaal had the obligation to bequeath the baton of liberation to future generations. These people were able to link up with the young generation of liberation fighters such Aleck Nchabeleng, Mathabatha Stan, Tlokwe Maserumule, Ngoako Ramatlhodi and countless others.⁶¹⁶ These emerging political activists in the underground world of MK were able to replenish the older generations of Nelson Diale, Peter Nchabeleng, Joel Ntsoane, John Phala and the exiled generation of John Nkadimeng and countless others who hailed from the rural areas of the Northern Transvaal. Their efforts were beginning to emerge not only as a trickle but as an avalanche of political torrents that were unstoppable. Lodge points out:

Though it is possible that press restrictions have distorted the picture, it is conceivable that the infrequency of gun battles in rural areas since 1980 may reflect the successful establishment of secure lines of infiltration and supply for the guerrillas, as well as the completion of some of the major logistical tasks. For example, since 1980 announcements of the discovery of major arms caches have decreased markedly.⁶¹⁷

In the final analysis, the study has attempted to highlight the importance of the rural Northern Transvaal region in the context of guerrilla warfare

⁶¹⁶ Ineke van Kessel, "Beyond Our Wildest Dreams" *The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.

⁶¹⁷ Tom Lodge, 'The African National Congress in South Africa, 1976 – 1983: Guerrilla War and Armed Propaganda', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 & 2, October 1983, p. 156.

that was waged by MK. Visceral critic of MK, erstwhile member of the ANC, and the first Chief Minister of the Lebowa Bantustan (it was in the rural Northern Transvaal), Chief M.M. Matlala recognised the strategic significance of the rural Northern Transvaal. He stated that, “We of the Northern Transvaal would welcome any moves to bring about a peaceful settlement of disputes as this area would most likely be combat ground in the event of confrontation because we are but a staggering distance from the fangs of the terrorists...”⁶¹⁸ Infiltrated MK cadres were not necessarily supposed to be armed and ready for military conventional combat. There is no historical evidence that MK ever thought of confronting the SADF in a full-frontal conventional warfare. The strategies adopted in pursuance of the liberation ideology created the misconceptions and misinterpretations that MK was not ready for a protracted war with the SADF. Some of these historical analysts and observers attribute these strategies or lack of them to “... the absence of a prolonged tradition of military resistance in South Africa and the ANC’s life-long commitment to political mobilisation”⁶¹⁹ and that the ANC’s armed struggle was calculated to satisfy its political base in South Africa.⁶²⁰ John S. Saul maintains that it aimed at “neutralising the state’s repressive apparatus and to heightening the saliency of resistance both at home and abroad”.⁶²¹ In counteracting the state’s repression the ANC did not engage in terrorism, randomly killing civilians and securing the compliance of the people whose cause it claimed to serve by means of coercion, as claimed by Keith Campbell.⁶²² The ANC based itself on

⁶¹⁸ Homeland Leaders Reject Independence, *Lebowa*, December 13, 1974, p. 29.

⁶¹⁹ John D. Brewer, *Black Strategies For Change in a Constrained Society*, (Cape Town, Institute for the Study of Public Policy, 1989), p.6.

⁶²⁰ Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhard, *From Protest to Challenge, Op. Cit.*, p.6.

⁶²¹ John S. Saul, ‘Socialist Ideology and the Struggle for South Africa’, *Africa World Press*, (New Jersey, 1990), p. 183.

⁶²² Keith Campbell, ‘Terrorism in South Africa: ANC – A Soviet Task Force?’, *Institute for the Study of Terrorism*, London, 1986, pp.7-8.

conscious and organised involvement of the masses of the people, to build a strong and disciplined revolutionary movement, as Oliver Tambo said.⁶²³

The role that MK played in the national liberation struggle with special reference to the rural areas of the Northern Transvaal shows the intricate nature of that struggle, one that was not exclusive rural or urban, but was an arduous and complex process that needed thorough and constant planning and execution. The changing political landscape of southern Africa in the mid-1970s, the altering patterns of internal resistance in the 1980s, and the waning political and economic fortunes of the South African government together saved the country from greater violence and self destruction. But the role of MK foot soldiers in the Northern Transvaal must not be forgotten.

⁶²³ 'Presidential Statement. The Dream of Total Liberation of Africa is in Sight', *Sechaba*, March 1984, p. 8.

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Interviews

Note: Full details of the many interviews conducted as an important part of this study are provided in the footnotes and are not replicated here because of space constraints. In addition, names will be listed in the index (when the thesis is eventually turned into a book), where this information may be readily accessed.

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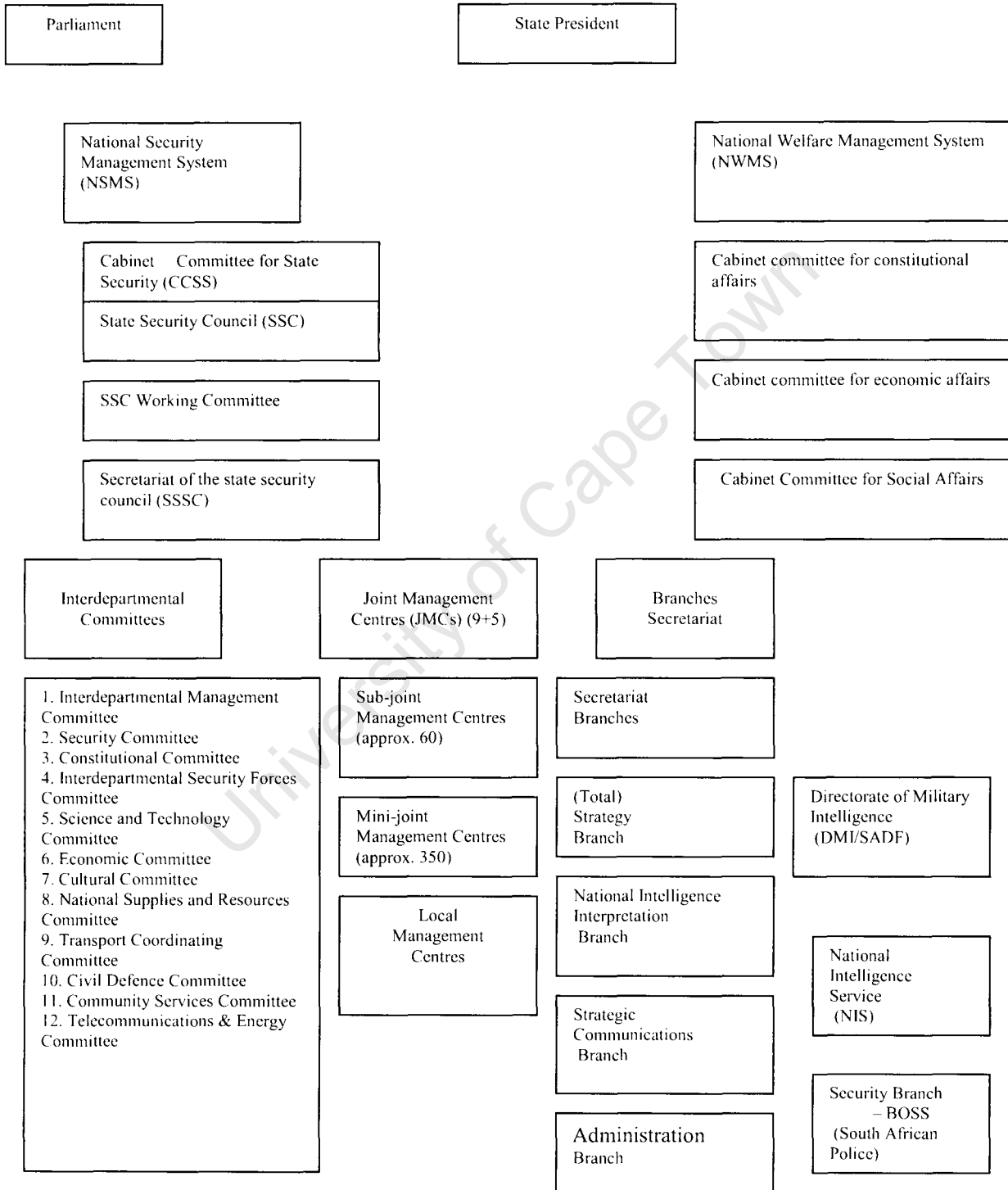
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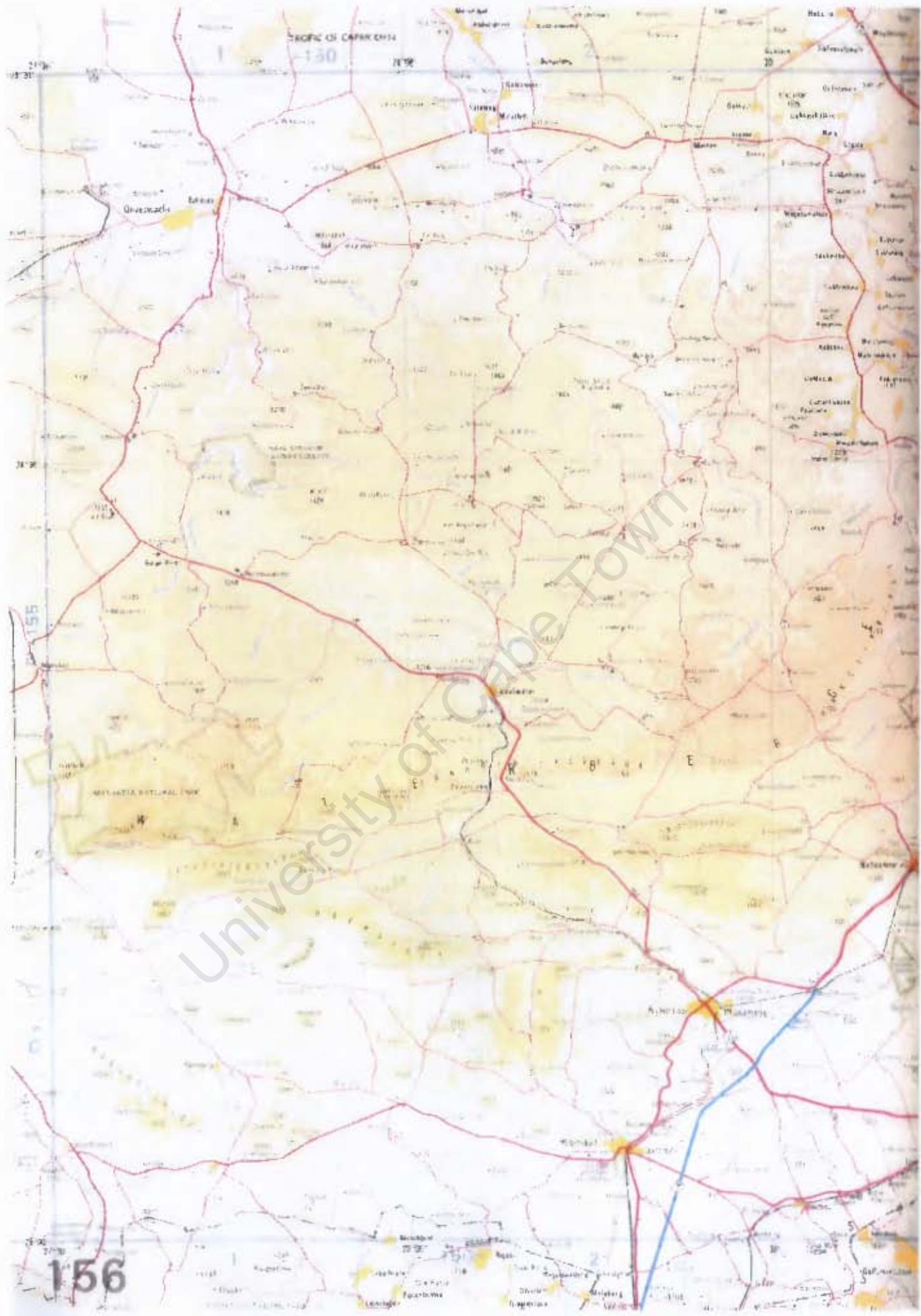
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Appendices

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