‘STILL, WE RISE’

The autobiography of
Muntu Nxumalo

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'For our tomorrow, they gave their today, everlasting glory to them.'

This is a tribute to all the freedom fighters, revolutionaries, combatants, the unsung heroes and heroines and the gallant fighters of uMkhonto we Sizwe who sacrificed for the cause of freedom for people of South Africa.

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Preface

> *Certain people told me that this story was too disgraceful, too shameful, that it should be concealed…There were others who claimed that it was a matter for tears and sorrow, that it should be suppressed so that we should not shed tears a second time. I asked them: how can we cover up our pits in our court yard with leaves or grass, saying to ourselves that because our eyes cannot see the holes, our children can prance about the yard as they like? Happy is the man who is able to discern the pitfalls in his path, for he can avoid them.* – Excerpt from *Devil on the Cross*
>
> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

I wrote this book for two reasons: *aesthetic enthusiasm*, that is, my desire to share an experience which one feels is valuable and ought not to be missed by the people who never travelled this journey; and *historical impulse*, that is, my need to find out true facts and stories and store them up for posterity and interested readers.

The son of a priest, I grew up in a church environment and received my religious education from my parents. At home, we used to read the Bible every day and every night. I attended Sunday school at Chesterville Bantu Baptist Church. Out of all the teachings and biblical lessons, I could not understand the meaning of some verses in the Bible, like Ecclesiastes 1 verse 18, which reads: 'For much (human) wisdom is much vexation and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.'

I only came to understand this verse after being a member of the African National Congress (ANC) from 1976 to 2012, when I was

unemployed for more than three years. Some of the people that I served with in the ANC were well-off, having become tenderpreneurs during the democratic era. As an independent-minded person, I was never part of any camp within the ANC. I was always an ANC member, and understood both historical materialism and dialectical materialism. Dialectics teaches us that 'a thing is and a thing is not, it is always in a state of becoming'. Many comrades that I left the country with, who dedicated their lives to fighting for freedom, continue to live in dire poverty. It is very sad that in townships like Lamontville, Kwa-Mashu, Umlazi, Sobantu, Soweto, Soshanguve, Gugulethu, Langa, Zwide, Chesterville and others across the country, many MK members are still unemployed for reasons unknown to us. These comrades served on both underground and open structures of the ANC and uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK).[1] I believe these comrades are employable, but maybe the willingness to employ them is not there, hence we speak of the unemployment levels as being very high in South Africa. I am not saying that our comrades should be employed because they served; equally, you cannot have the people fight for freedom and, when it is achieved, they are simply forgotten. Maybe this is a South African phenomenon.

When I look at things like police corruption that is so rampant in our country, I am convinced that if we were to employ MK cadres in the police, things would never be like this. This is my perception when I look at the dedication and discipline that is so lacking in our police. I always believe that they are loyal to the old apartheid regime. Post-1994 we expected that our glorious army, uMkhonto we Sizwe, would be the basis for integration into existing police and military structures. Sadly, that did not happen. Perhaps if it had, we would not be speaking of unemployed MK cadres.

What makes me more suspicious is that those in authority are unknown to many of us. We have never heard of them, never seen them anywhere, not even in local civics meetings. This is an unacceptable situation. It is the reason why a rebellion took place in Durban on Tuesday 3 April 2018, led by so-called Commanders in Front, where some MK members invaded the municipal offices and demanded to meet with the leadership and to be employed. Following this action, they were employed by eThekwini Municipality.[2] I am not sure where the vacancies came from. Maybe they were reserved for other people. But I don't think that as a movement we should conduct ourselves in this manner because it might have some serious consequences in the long run.

The post-revolution era is a very difficult one to make sense of. We did not expect to see something like the Marikana Massacre on 16 August 2012. On this day, police opened fire on supposedly armed protesting mineworkers, killing 34 people and leaving 78 seriously injured.[3] MK operatives should not die poor like General Dlamini, comrade Past Four Phungula and comrade Mdlalose. Those who are alive should not languish in poverty. At funerals, some of our leaders exalt our contribution to the struggle. They say 'Hamba Kahle uMkhonto, uMkhonto we Sizwe' (Go, go well MK, spear of the nation). This makes our hearts very sore, as we feel that we are just taken for a ride.

All the inequities that we witness in ANC structures, from local, regional and provincial to national structures, just remind us that we did not join the ANC for personal gain or material advantage. We will remain ANC irrespective of the circumstances. We know that leaders come and go but the organisation remains. Even in the army, when one detachment goes, another detachment comes, but the army remains. We had the Luthuli Detachment, the June 16 Detachment, the Young Lions Detachment, the Madinoga Detachment, the Moncada Detachment and others, but MK did not change. We celebrated the 50th anniversary of MK (1961–2011) in Orlando Stadium in Soweto on 16 December 2011 with nothing in our hands. With the 60th anniversary less than a month away as this manuscript is being finalised, nothing has changed for most of us.

When we celebrated the centenary of the ANC in Mangaung (Bloemfontein) in 2021, we had nothing in our hands, but we felt good about it. We hope that our minister of defence will address this unhealthy situation. Freedom fighters never lose hope. Hope is substance of things to be achieved and we have faith in our revolutionary convictions. Some ordinary people might wonder what kept us going for so long. It was nothing more than the moral and ideological conviction of the value of our struggle. Some of us have reached our destination, which is capitalist democracy. However, if the goal is a socialist democracy, like it is for many of us, you must continue until it is achieved. Our final goal is a classless democracy, where there will be no oppression of human by human. There is an ANC struggle song that says 'Yinde lendlela esiyihambayo' (We still have a long way to go).

The ANC was born in 1912 on the eve of the First World War in 1914 when imperialist countries like Britain, Germany, America, Japan and others were preparing to fight for markets and colonies. The organisation was a result of qualitative growth where conflicts between separate

tribes like the Zulus, Xhosas, Sothos and others against white colonisers were converted into a national struggle. There is and has been no other organisation like the ANC, which is widely recognised as Africa's oldest liberation movement. We have inherited and dare not betray the revolutionary teachings of our founding fathers Josiah Gumede, John Dube, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, Sol Plaatje and those who followed. There are many, but a few warrant mentioning. These include Dr AB Xuma, MP Naicker, Moses Mabhida, Moses Kotane, Duma Nokwe, Johnny Makhathini, Chief Albert Luthuli, Oliver Reginald Tambo, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki and, last but not least, Jacob Mhlanganyelwa Gedleyihlekisa Zuma. While the ANC has had 14 presidents over the more than 100 years of its existence, some political formations disappear from history without even a changing of the guard.

Over the years, the organisation has continued the tradition inculcated by our forefathers of wanting unity for the oppressed people, to pursue the struggle for liberation with dignity, valour and courage never ending. We fought for neither glory nor distinction; we wanted to be free. A fellow comrade, Mzala Nxumalo, once remarked that it is only those who identify themselves with history, not history with themselves, that are truly revolutionary. Factionalism is an evil that can occur in all revolutionary organisations and our ANC is no exception. Factionalism often manifests itself in the appearance of a small group of ambitious opportunists attempting under various pretexts to undermine the confidence of the army or members in the revolutionary leadership, using slander or exploiting difficulties that exist. Our people's army, uMkhonto we Sizwe, should never fall victim to pseudo-revolutionary verbosity, tribalism or rationalistic sentiments in attempts by counterrevolutionaries to provoke discontent against the revolution. The argument is still there that there is no effect without the cause. Counterrevolutionaries do not come out of the blue. The catchphrase is, 'Be vigilant against appearance, look for the essence, which can only be proved by time and consistency – for all revolutionaries shall be absolved by history.' When the ANC was formed in 1912, the aim was to unite all the tribal groups into one national group. Unity was of paramount importance. The prevailing saying at the time was 'Sikhalela Izwe Lakithi' (We are crying for our country). Zulu, Msuthu, Xhosa Hlanganani (Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa unite).

Being a military veteran in the new South Africa

In the new South Africa, a military veteran is somebody that has fought for the country, sacrificing all his/her life through blood and sweat, when the war is over, he/she gets sidelined. The new dispensation does not cater for such a person, instead he/she gets asked for the previous qualifications yet that person was involved in war. A veteran becomes irrelevant, obsolete, unemployed, poverty-stricken, discriminated against in all aspects of life not even being re-integrated to society. The stigma of the struggle is attached to his or her life. New people that went to school get a first preference, even those that had nothing to do with the struggle are first beneficiaries in our new democracy. This veteran is the one that brought down the apartheid regime.

Muntu Nxumalo

CHAPTER 1

Background

> *I come of those…who taught me that we could both be at home and be foreign. I am born of a people who would not tolerate oppression. I am an African…I am born of the peoples of the continent of Africa.*[4]
>
> The Roaring Fifties

I am a product of the Roaring Fifties, born on 5 August 1957 in Durban to the late Reverend Clifford Ndoda Nxumalo and the late Alice Nomabhunu Nxumalo (nee Jali). I am the eldest child in a family of six children, four boys and two girls. My brothers' names are Sipho (born 1959), Bongani (born 1960) and my late brother Thembinkosi (born 1964). My sisters are Nomusa (born 1969) and Nozipho (born 972). Our mother was the daughter of Phongoyi and Cornelius Jali from Ndwedwe, Thafamasi, outside of Durban. Mom was a nurse at Mc Cord Zulu hospital and later worked at King Edward VIII hospital, both located in Durban. I am a product of Bantu Education that was designed by the National Party (NP) that Africans must get inferior education. It was to teach us to be hewers of wood and drawers of water.[5] It is no surprise that in 1976 we stood up in defiance of this education. The late Dr HF Verwoerd, considered to be the architect, is probably turning in his grave knowing that his grand scheme has failed and that this book was written by a product of Bantu Education.

My full name is Timothy Sibusiso Muntu Nxumalo, given to me by my late father. My name was taken from the book of Timothy in the Bible, who wrote two Epistles to different congregations working in tandem with Paul the Apostle, admonishing, aiding and advising the Christian

way of life. Sibusiso (which means blessing) meant I was a blessing to my parents as the first born after their marriage in 1956. Every married couple gets blessed when they give birth to a son or daughter as their first child. My parents also felt blessed. It is a pity that they will not be afforded the opportunity to read my book as they are both deceased. My father passed on in 1987 when I was still in prison. I did not get the opportunity to bury him. I was only told about his death and I accepted it. My mom passed on 25 May 2007. My third name is Muntu (meaning person or human being), which was a family name and is also a unisex name. After being blessed with me, I guess my parents felt like they were now people or human beings (Sebengabantu manje) in the truest sense of the word. Muntu also means a really black-skinned person, which is befitting given my dark complexion. My mother, on the other hand, was light-skinned, and because of that she was given the name Nomabhunu, which means light-skinned person.

That I am a product of the Roaring Fifties probably explains the direction my life took, particularly my active participation in the struggle against black oppression in South Africa. This was a time of the formulation of the Freedom Charter by the Congress Alliance at what is known as the Congress of the People (COP) in Kliptown, Soweto, in 1955. The Alliance was an anti-apartheid political alliance led by the ANC and included the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the Coloured People's Congress (CPC) and the Congress of Democrats, the latter consisting of progressive whites. The Freedom Charter was a statement of core principles on which a non-racial democratic South Africa would be built and would ultimately inform the new democratic Constitution when the ANC came to power after the first democratically held elections in 1994. The Roaring Fifties was also the time of the seminal march against pass laws spearheaded by women in 1956. It was the time of the potato boycott of 1959 against slave-like conditions of potato labourers in Bethal, Transvaal. This perhaps explains my dislike for potatoes. It was further the time of the bus boycott of 1957 against the fare increases by the Public Utility Transport Corporation (PUTCO). The boycott was initiated by the people of Alexandra and rapidly spread to other townships in Johannesburg. The boycott was successful and ended when the old fare was reinstated.

The year of my birth is also very important in the history of African decolonisation as this was when Ghana became the first African country to gain independence from the United Kingdom. The first president of

independent Ghana was a renowned pan-Africanist who had this to say on the independence of Ghana: '…the forces that unite us are intrinsic and greater than the superimposed influences that keep us apart.'[6] The flag of independent Ghana consists of red, gold and green horizontal stripes, which symbolise pan-Africanism, with a black star in the gold centre. The black star symbolises the emancipation of Africa and unity against colonialism.[7] Its history can be traced from the flag of the Black Star Line, a shipping line incorporated by Marcus Garvey which operated from 1919 to 1922.[8] The star is also the reason why Ghanaian national teams, particularly the soccer team, are known as the Black Stars.

Growing up

I grew up in the township of Chesterville. More about its history follows later in this chapter. Township life was exciting. We did all the good, and the unfortunate bad and ugly things that boys do when they are growing up. Although we grew up in a poor environment, our material conditions did not prevent us from having fun. While some parents could afford to buy toys, we preferred to make them ourselves using ordinary stuff lying around. We would make toy cars and replicas of buses using wire from a fence. At times we would also use hangers stolen from our wardrobes at home. We would also go to a landfill site called Kwa Dee in search of materials to make our cars. Those who were either too lazy to make their wire cars or less creative would play with bricks, pretending they were cars. We would also make small wagons on which we would race down the streets. This was very dangerous as we ran the risk of being knocked by cars and buses. We did it against the wishes of our parents and would get a hiding if caught. There was also a forest area called Umkhumbane where we would go to pick fruit like mangoes, guavas and oranges. As typical young boys, we did not care about any danger we may have encountered, such as snakes. We were only interested in the adventure and the fruits we would get. We also caught birds using traps and made cages in which we would keep them at our homes. Of course, like most township boys, we also played soccer in the streets using small balls and tennis balls. Another favourite pastime as a youngster was going to rivers close to Chesterville to swim on sunny days. These were dirty and we ran the risk of getting infected with bilharzia, but we did not care. These rivers were called Umjafethe – we called it 'Mjay' – and Umtshingakebhe. We never knew the history behind these names.

School

My first school was St Barnabas Nursery School located at the Anglican Church building in Road 14[9] in Chesterville. My first teacher was the late Mrs Mndaweni, who I will never forget for as long as I live. She was born a teacher and had an insatiable passion for her work. She was able to take toddlers, educate them and plant a seed that will later germinate into an intellectual pride. I owe my intelligence, wisdom and understanding to her efforts and dedication. She left such a lasting impact on me that she is the only teacher I can remember. I wish she was still here to see the positive impact she had on my life and for me to share my book with her. She taught us how to pray and how to recite poems, tell stories and write legibly. After St Barnabas, I moved to Chesterville Junior School where I completed Sub A to Standard 2 (Grades 1–4) from 1963 to 1966. After that, I attended Christopher Nxumalo Primary from 1967 to 1969, where I completed Standards 3 to 5 (Grades 5–7). I then proceeded to Chesterville Secondary School, nicknamed 'Government', where I did Standards 6 to 9 (Grades 8–11) from 1970 to 1973. In 1974 I moved to Dlangezwa Boarding School, which is located in a rural area about two hours from Durban. The main reason for going there was because Chesterville only went up to Standard 9, and also because I wanted to specialise in Maths and Science. Between 1974 and 1975, I completed my Pre-Form 4 and Form 4 respectively. These were the equivalent of Grade 11, and in 1976 I expected to continue with Grade 12 at Dlangezwa.

Religion

We belonged to the Baptist faith and were, for the most part, congregants of the Bantu Baptist Church in Chesterville township in Durban. Our church was just an ordinary small building with a pulpit and the benches. This stood in stark contrast to the Central Baptist Church in town meant for whites. The building was white and was beautifully furnished with a piano, a pipe organ, decorated walls and a red carpet. It goes without saying that the church was racist and dominated by white males. My father was our church reverend. As a means of transport, the missionary society first gave him a bicycle and later a motorbike. All this unequal treatment made me question why congregants of the same religion are treated differently despite serving the same God. I recall asking my late granny why there were white churches and black churches when there is

only one God. I never received an answer. Another aspect of our church that was unsettling was the fact that black reverends were rotated every two years. By the time you are used to a certain place you get rotated. This created instability in our family life as we had to constantly get used to new environments when my father was posted to a different church. My family was moved from Chesterville to Umkhumbane–Cato Manor, then to Stanger, to Groutville and back to Chesterville again. As young boys, we never had the opportunity to develop long-lasting or permanent friendships because of this constant moving.

Ancestral lineage

> *Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your fore-fathers.*
>
> Proverbs 22:28

I am a descendant of the Ndwandwe (Nxumalo) nation, which was ruled by King Zwide before the formation of the Zulu kingdom. The Ndwandwe clan originated from northern Zululand and settled to the south of Pongola River. They are also known as the Nxumalos. The first ruler was Langa, son of Xaba. They spread to Magudu Mountain at Nongoma area up to Mahashini. When Langa died in that Magudu Mountain, his son Zwide succeeded him. Zwide's mother, Ntombazi, was a sangoma. To *nxuma* in Zulu means to breastfeed or to suck. The plural noun form of this is called *iminxumo* (suckers). When Zwide was growing up, he used to dance and those around him would sing 'Nxuma-lo' to spur him on. The name stuck and he was called Nxumalo from then on. His house was called kwa-Nxumalo.

Chesterville

Chesterville is a township located about ten kilometres west of Durban and was established in the 1940s as part of what was known as Blackhurst and thus more or less coincided with the introduction of formal apartheid in 1948. It was mainly intended to serve as family quarters for male migrant workers who provided labour to the city of Durban. In 1946, Blackhurst was renamed Chesterville in honour of one Mr TJ Chester, who at the time was manager of the administrative department

which was also administratively responsible for this township.[10] This was a time during which the lives of black people in South Africa would be regulated by apartheid's racist laws. Among these were the pass laws in terms of which black people had to carry passes inside the borders of South Africa. Failure to comply with this would lead to prosecution. As mentioned previously, a seminal event in protest against this law was the historic march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956 by about 20 000 women of all races. Other laws included the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, which criminalised marriage between white and black people, as well as the Group Areas Act, which prohibited the movement of black people from the rural areas to a white area without getting permission from a magistrate. You could not travel without getting a permit; failure to do so would result in prosecution, being sent to jail and being sent back to the rural areas after your sentence.

Municipal police, known as Blackjacks, were constantly searching and raiding the township to find out if you were legally residing or employed in Durban. If not, you would be deported to the rural areas. Curfews in Durban were strictly enforced and if found in town even a minute after the 5pm curfew, you would be summarily arrested and could find yourself deported again. Two or three deportations would land you in jail.

The Separate Amenities Act made provision for the creation of separate social spaces for white and other population groups. Thus 'Whites only' signs appeared in almost every social space imaginable, including beaches, restaurants and even toilets. It is said that an Indian man was arrested for swimming at a beach designated for whites only. When he went to court, he asked the magistrate, 'Which ocean was I found swimming in?' The magistrate replied, 'Indian Ocean.' The Indian man responded: 'You can't tell me where to swim in the Indian Ocean. I can swim anywhere in the Indian Ocean; I am an Indian.'

Chesterville has a population size of 176 576[11] made up of predominantly African females,[12] with many of its inhabitants having flocked there from rural areas in search of job opportunities and a better life. Bordering Chesterville are the suburbs of Westville and Mayville, with the former having been specifically zoned as a white suburb, and the latter designated as an Indian residential area during the apartheid years. The township was a hotbed of political resistance against apartheid and was a predominantly ANC stronghold. During 1989 and 1991 another new development was built between Chesterville

and Mayville, known as 'Masixhawulane' (Let's shake hands), so-called by residents as they mused that due to the proximity of the houses, if they put their hands out of a window, they could easily shake the hand of their next-door neighbour.[13]

Masixhawulane was earmarked as a residential area for low-income Indians, but Chesterville residents, citing the high levels of unemployment and congestion, requested that Chesterville residents be prioritised for accommodation in this new housing development, especially given that the Department of Housing had long promised Chesterville residents additional housing. Under the direction of the Chesterville Residents Association (CRA), people protested by forcibly occupying houses. The CRA had subcommittees, area committees and street committees. I belonged to the Road 1 street committee.

Negotiations between representatives of Chesterville and the municipality as well as the National Department of Housing failed to resolve the matter and many of those Chesterville residents who initially occupied houses in Masixhawulane continue to occupy them to this day. The failure to resolve the matter also led to other unfortunate things happening as people sought to take advantage of the situation. Thus, some people sold houses to outsiders, while others sold one house to two or three other people depending on the highest bidder. A CRA housing committee was tasked to resolve these issues.

Unsurprisingly, crime also engulfed the whole of Chesterville, which led to the CRA establishing a Disciplinary Committee (DC), of which I was later elected chairperson. A People's Court adjudicated over complaints and, if found guilty, punishment would be meted out in accordance with the crime. Punishment included sjambokking (whipping), and community service such as cutting grass and trees. During this time, many uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) members were returning from exile and took command, enforcing discipline through military means. We even disciplined the members of MK who committed crimes and other transgressions. While some may question the community taking the law into their own hands, it did achieve significant success in increasing people's sense of safety. This led to people from other townships like Kwa-Mashu, Umlazi and Lamontville moving to Chesterville because you could walk in public anytime of the day or night without anything happening to you.

During this time, Chesterville was a no-go area for police. Because of this, we established a Community Policing Forum (CPF) and decided

to allow police into the township so that we could work with them. We converted an old, vandalised beer hall into a mini police station from where members of the South African Police Services (SAPS) worked with the community. We also established community development programmes such as a teenage mothers' programme, a rape crisis centre and a youth programme called the Chesterville Youth Development Programme (CYDP). The latter, of which I was president and chairperson of the executive committee, was the most powerful programme as it absorbed 90% of the youth from the township. Our main vision was to keep the youth away from the streets, and involve them in sports, education and recreational programmes. The committee liaised with stakeholders like social workers, SAPS and the religious fraternity. Every week we would invite a speaker to give a talk on a topic that was relevant to the youth. Many CYDP members had left the country to join the ANC/MK after 1976 and formed the CYDP on their return from exile.

CYDP organised sports programmes for both boys and girls. It even had evening soccer matches that were attended by the entire township. Sponsors like Adidas generously assisted us by donating jerseys, kits, soccer balls and nets. This was thanks to two gentlemen from Westville, both of whom worked for Adidas and who supported what the CYDP was trying to achieve. Another gentleman by the name of Peter Watt, a Westville teacher, was so impressed by what the CYDP was doing that he left Westville and settled in Chesterville against the wishes of his family. He moved into house no. 60, Road 1, and took up a position at Chesterville Senior Secondary School. Because the house was a Nxumalo family home, he became known as Peter Nxumalo. Today, Peter is married and gets invited to and attends all the Nxumalo gatherings.

In the 1990s, a church from Westville established a number of community development projects in Chesterville, such as Bamba Izandla (Hold hands) creche and a feeding scheme. It also introduced a bursary scheme for poor families. These projects were spearheaded by Willa Fourie, Peter Watt and a pastor, Peter van Niekerk, from Westville Christian Fellowship. It resulted in increased interaction between the black residents of Chesterville and the white residents of Westville. The movement of people between these two areas made them realise that they have a lot in common. Some residents from Chesterville that could afford it even bought houses in Westville. As I worked for Community Organisation Research and Development Consulting (CORD), I left these programmes in the community's good hands. I did other work for CORD, including visiting rural areas.

The legacy of Chesterville

Like with many townships in the country, Chesterville would ultimately produce many political, sporting and cultural icons. A few are worth mentioning here, not because they are more important, but simply because they immediately come to mind. One is Allison Wessels George Champion, who was a leader of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). The ICU was a mass-based trade union in southern Africa and was influenced by the syndicalist politics of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), as well as by Garveyism, Christianity, communism and liberalism.[14] Other notable luminaries who hail from Chesterville include comrade Willies Mchunu, who was premier of the Kwazulu-Natal (KZN) province from 2016 to 2019, as well as the late Don Mkhwanazi, who was head of the Black Management Forum (BMF).

On the sporting front, we had the Chesterville United Brothers (CUBs) soccer team that well-known players such as Scara Wanda belonged to. Known as 'Brothers', the team slogan was 'Brothers all the way!' In boxing, Chesterville was home to boxing trainer Dingaan Mahlasela, who produced Olympians such as Irvin Buhlalu. In music circles we have big names like Thanduxolo Zulu; Madoda Mtshali; Sipho Mtshali; Nobesuthu Tshawe, who sang with the late Simon 'Mahlathini' Nkabinde; and a popular Mbaqanga musical group called Mahotella Queens. This world-renowned group, which was formed in 1964, popularised mbaqanga music. Mbaqanga is a South African music genre with rural Zulu roots. In the Zulu language, the word refers to a type of corn meal that is commonly consumed in black communities.

Other notable artists hailing from Chesterville were Sandile Shange and Dumisani Shange. The area was also well known for choral music and producing the best choral music conductors under the guidance of Babo Buthelezi. The Chesterville Choral Society is active to this day. Under apartheid, the Chesterville Cultural Group (CCG), led by the late Vuyani Mchunu (Nkosi), was known for singing revolutionary songs, music and popularising the ANC. They were not paid to do this. They were driven by their understanding and commitment to the movement and its cause, which was the fight for liberation – unlike now, when people's support for the movement is often driven by self-interest. Tenderpreneurship – when a businessperson uses political contacts to secure government procurement contracts (called 'tenders'), often as part of a reciprocal exchange of favours or benefits[15] – has polluted our politics. It has led to

the emergence of slate politics and a 'winner takes all' culture. The former refers to a phenomenon where a group of candidates run for elections on a common platform, either because they belong to the same political party, or hold the same views on policies.[16] Both these phenomena, slate politics and a 'winner takes all' culture, have allowed corruption to take root and flourish among our politicians. Some people know and understand money and tenders before they understand the ANC. Some comrades are remote-controlled by people in privileged positions. They are loyal to individuals rather than to the movement.

CHAPTER 2

Conscientisation

It is a dry white season, dark leaves don't last, their brief lives dry out, and with a broken heart they dive down gently headed for the earth, not even bleeding. It is a dry white season brother, only the trees know the pain as they still stand erect dry like steel, their branches dry like wire indeed, it is a dry white season but seasons come to pass.

'For Don M – Banned', poem by Mongane Wally Serote

Black Consciousness Movement

My life trajectory was shaped by the socio-economic and political conditions under which black people had to live under apartheid. In 1975, during my Form 4 A1 year at Dlangezwa Boarding School, I was part of a group that had attempted to get the school closed down in protest against bad, sometimes worm-infested food at the school. The conditions at Dlangezwa High School were not ripe for protest action as the school was rural-based. The school also placed a lot of emphasis on promoting Inkatha-inspired culture and Zulu customs among students. Traditional songs, dance and praise-singing were introduced, but those of us who came from the township were not interested in those traditions. However, the standard of education was very high and the matric (Grade 12) results were a testimony to that. For this reason, the school was popular among parents wanting their children to have a good education. It goes without saying that our efforts to get the

school closed failed. At the beginning of 1976, a few of us identified as the troublemakers received letters of no return (NR), which essentially meant that we had been expelled. I ended up enrolling at Lamontville High School in 1976 to complete matric.

When I was growing up during the 1960s, there was a vacuum in protest politics in South Africa. During this time, liberation movements had been banned, political leaders like Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo were either in prison or exiled, and the distribution of political material had been outlawed as part of the ruling National Party to stifle resistance against apartheid. Being the son of a preacher and having been raised in the church, I drew political inspiration from the Bible. For example, at school we always agreed that Jesus Christ was a freedom fighter who fought the Jewish Kingdom. We also understood him to belong to the zealots, a political party that resisted the throne of the Roman Empire. Another notable influence on my thinking was *Animal Farm*, a satirical novel written by George Orwell which tells the story of a group of farm animals that rebel against their human farmer, hoping to create a society where the animals can be equal, free and happy. Ultimately, the rebellion is betrayed, and the farm ends up in a state as bad as it was before, under the dictatorship of a pig named Napoleon.[17]

Towards the end of the 1960s there was a resurgence in political activism spurred on by the rise of Black Consciousness in South Africa. Pioneered by Steve Bantu Biko, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was strongly influenced by the rise in black militancy in the United States under leaders such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, as well as liberation scholars such as Frantz Fanon. BCM foregrounded race as a determining factor in the oppression of black South Africans and regarded the liberation of the mind as the primary weapon in the fight for freedom in South Africa. Sadly, Biko ultimately became probably the most well-known victim of apartheid state repression when he died on 12 September 1977 in police custody in the aftermath of the 1976 uprising.

I was instantly attracted to the values and ideas espoused by BCM and joined the movement. I later became an active member of the BCM high school student arm, the South African Students Movement (SASM). I engrossed myself in the writings of leaders such as Onkgopotse Abram Tiro, Steve Bantu Biko and any other material that I could lay my hands on. We used to listen to Radio Freedom from Lusaka. Speeches and songs led by the ANC shaped us as students. At the opening of the Rivonia Trial

in the Pretoria Supreme Court on 20 April 1964, Nelson Mandela declared from the dock that: 'The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices – submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit'.[18] This used to be repeated regularly on Radio Freedom. During the 1970s, three events that shaped my political decisions took place: the bus strike in Natal in 1972, the Frelimo rally at Curries Fountain in 1974 and the Soweto uprisings of 1976. During the bus strike, I was responsible for the distribution of pamphlets notifying the public of the strike. I was fortunate to attend the Frelimo rally, which was broken up by police with dogs. However, 16 June 1976 probably had the most impact on me. An ANC song, 'Sizobashiy' abazal' ekhaya!' (We will leave our parents at home to join the revolution), was the last straw for us to leave the country.

16 June 1976

The country was ablaze because of protest against apartheid and high school students were at the forefront. What had started as a protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at one Soweto school on 16 June 1976 rapidly spread throughout the whole country. A crackdown against student leaders by the apartheid police ensued. As a student leader, I had become a primary target, along with others. These included Cosbert Themba Rubushe, who was a student at the University of Zululand, and Stheni Georgina Gayo Nxumalo, who was my cousin and a matric student at Umlazi High School at the time. In the aftermath of June 16, I remember escaping being caught by the security police at Lamontville High School by climbing down a water pipe on the second floor after being tipped off that Special Branch police were at the school looking for me.

Cosbert, Stheni and I had been briefed the previous day that we were going to leave the country the following day. We were instructed to go to school as usual so as not to attract any attention. We were also told to each pack an overall to change into just before we arrived at the border. We were excited about the prospect of leaving the country to go for military training. As a security measure, we decided not to widely share our plans to leave the country. However, we later found out that our small group had been infiltrated nonetheless. We contacted Sabelo Ngobese and Muntu Dube to arrange our escape. We were emotional about our situation as we faced being arrested, but we were ready for anything. While we were

going to miss our families, the fact that we did not have children, wives, possessions or even bank accounts made it easier. We felt we had nothing to lose and we were desperate to leave. We drew inspiration from a quotation in *Animal Farm*. To paraphrase: 'War is war comrades, a better hero is a dead one.' We also drew inspiration from the slogan 'Black man you are on your own', coined by Steve Biko, and 'You have nothing to lose but your chains', from Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto. We planned and concluded that we had to leave the country that day.

Steve Biko

There are two basic parts that underpinned what one might call Steve Biko's vision of South Africa. That was a commitment to a non-racial society, and his assessment of South Africa's collective social anthropology. The latter part of this vision perhaps warrants further elaboration. The one side of this anthropological coin consists of the psyche and self-conception of white South Africans who, since setting foot on our shores more than three centuries ago, have regarded themselves as superior to us, African blacks and South African blacks in particular. The other side of the coin has to do with the distortions and damage colonialism inflicted on the soul and psyche of black South Africans, who throughout the history of their interactions with colonialists have regarded themselves as and feel inferior to white people. Biko articulated these views, as quoted in the *Boston Globe* on 25 October 1977: 'Whites must be made to realize that they are only human, not superior. Same with blacks. They must be made to realize that they are also only human, not inferior.'[19]

In this lay the vision of a South Africa that should have been, according to Biko. It was a vision nurtured by courage and commitment and a desire to restore the dignity of black people. While many Biko contemporaries lived to witness the historic birth of a democratic South Africa in 1994, others like Biko were not as fortunate. Whether Biko's vision has been realised is up for debate. In relation to this, the question that arises more than two decades since the attainment of democracy is: What is the political balance sheet of our country given the sacrifices of South Africans like Steve Biko and what prospects does it hold for the future of our country? My reading is this: Our country is in trouble. While there is nothing unique about that as many countries are in trouble, ours has to do with a deep crisis of leadership.

There were many times when the genuine leaders of our people and country were imprisoned, exiled or killed by the apartheid state led by leaders that lacked the intellectual capacity and moral integrity to do what was morally just. There were leaders, but not the leadership that was needed to serve the interests of all South Africans, black and white. The world eventually recognised this crisis in leadership and supported our struggle to bring back our leaders to their rightful roles to lead their country and its people. These were leaders that possessed the type of character required for servant leadership. Among these were Sobukwe, Mandela, Biko and many others whom we celebrate. Unfortunately, we are in short supply of this type of leadership today.

When one reflects on the issue of leadership and the nature of contemporary politics in South Africa, it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than to say that we are leaderless in every area of our society. I am not suggesting there are no people in important positions of leadership in our society today. There are, of course, people in places and positions of leadership. But where is the leadership – in the economy, education, youth matters, student affairs, academia, politics? Where are the men and women of moral stature and integrity? Where are those voices that can be respected by the majority, if not all our people, because they speak truth in a constructive and socially just manner? Where are the boys and girls of promise in whom we can see the future leadership qualities without which our country is doomed? Where is the leadership in the media?

If you want to see whether we have a healthy leadership profile in the country you must assess the health of the organisations which we have. Usually, healthy organisations exist because there is a healthy national or community leadership profile. I have been arguing that our country is in trouble at the leadership level. I now argue that bad leadership translates into bad organisations and institutions. Our business organisations are in bad shape. As a result, the South African economy has consistently been in the 'intensive care unit'. Our church organisations are in trouble; our political organisations are sick; the ANC is unwell; the Pan African Congress (PAC) and BCM are languishing. Similarly, the Democratic Alliance (DA) and all others of its ilk have never been well. The ill-health of our societal organisations reflects directly on the state of bad leadership that our country is stuck with.

Above all, we have a crisis of identity. We never strived to build one and so we achieved none. There is no black identity; there is no

white identity. There is no solidified working-class identity. We are an unreconstructed colonial mess. We suffer similar confusions and contradictions to those suffered by the progressive forces of French society during the French Revolution.

Jiving

You who shall emerge;
From the floods in which you are sinking
Think;
When you speak of our weaknesses,
And also, of the dark times;
That brought them forth;
For we went changing our country
More than our shoes,
In a class war despairing,
We who wish to lay the foundation of kindness
Could not ourselves be kind,
Alas when it came to pass,
Do not judge us too harshly.

'To Posterity' by Muntu Nxumalo

While we were unwavering in our conviction to leave the country, we were nonetheless overcome with fear, anxiety, excitement, uneasiness and a mistrust as to whether we would reach our destination or not. We had read stories about people being killed or arrested trying to cross the border, and the fact that this could happen to us filled us with fear. We were unaware that the Special Branch (SB) had learnt of our plans. This was the arm of the apartheid police that was notorious for killing or organising the assassination of activists, and for the brutality of its interrogation techniques through the use of torture. In this regard, they boasted about their accomplishments and were convinced that nothing would happen to them. They had licence because their actions were sanctioned by the state. As a result, they were feared to the extent that even when people spoke about them, they would whisper to make sure that no one was listening. Members of the SB would infiltrate public places like shebeens, churches, schools and everywhere. Knowing

that we were in their crosshairs strengthened our resolve to leave. Some members of the community, especially principals and teachers, cooperated with the police and acted as spies.

A Chesterville teacher was caught recording proceedings of a meeting of the Joint Rent Action Committee (JORAC) in Lamontville. He was generally known to be a police informer. In April 1983, while attending the funeral of an ANC activist that had been assassinated, he was pursued by members of the crowd and stabbed and stoned to death.[20] Furthermore, one of my classmates, Sabelo Ngobese, was an underground ANC operative who had given us instructions on our departure. Sabelo was a quiet young man. He was also a boxer who was trained by one of our teachers, Agrippa Cebekhulu, who was also a boxing promoter in Chesterville at that time. We learnt later that Cebekhulu worked as an informant for the SB. He was killed by a mob. Two of my brothers, Thembinkosi and Bongani, both of whom are teachers, were arrested on suspicion of being involved in killing. They spent two years awaiting trail and were eventually acquitted. Unfortunately, there were also cases where people were suspected of being spies, only to find out later that they were not.

Sabelo had briefed Cosbert, Stheni and I about our escape out of the country the day before the SB came looking for me at school. Bill Bhengu, a lawyer from Chesterville, gave us transport money and advised us on how we should behave when leaving the country. After escaping the clutches of the SB at school, I took a bus to the market in town, from where I walked to Durban Station to meet the other two. We arrived in town during the day when everybody was at school. We decided to kill time by walking around in town while waiting for our train, called the '10 10' (because its departure time was 10 minutes past 10pm), to depart later that evening en route to Swaziland.

Getting arrested, almost!

We were unaware that SB members armed with photos of known and wanted student activists were on board our train, searching for them. Fortunately for us, they did not have our photos. Bhengu had also trained us on how to react should we be confronted. They asked us who we were and where we were going. While they had suspected that we might be leaving the country, we were dressed as if we were from the rural areas. This made them doubt their suspicions. They asked for our

IDs, which we did not have, except for Cosbert, who also looked a bit older than us. While they were questioning him extensively, we just kept quiet and behaved as if nothing was wrong. Little did they know that our hearts were racing and that we were overcome with fear. We were also fortunate that the train was packed and that they had to check other people before the train got to the next station. By the time they came to us, we had changed into old overalls and were shabbily dressed. Our story was that we were going to Pongola for an uncle's funeral taking place that morning. When the police left, we reflected on what had happened. We felt relieved that we were not arrested, but we knew we came close and that we should take more care.

Golela border gate

At 5am the following morning, our train arrived at the Mkhuze station next to Golela border post, which is on the South African side at the border with Swaziland. On the Swaziland side was the Lavumisa border post. Our experience with the SB on the train made us aware of the importance of staying calm and not looking frightened. We also rehearsed our story carefully without being overheard by other people so that we would be more convincing should the police stop us again. After leaving the station, we went to the road coming back to the direction of KZN until we found a tuck shop where we bought drinks and food that was rather unpalatable while discussing our next move. After eating, we then left for the border post. This was our first experience crossing the border. We were not sure whether we would come back or not, but we were ready for anything, including death. We first observed the police patrolling along the border before jumping over the first fence. We then waited until it was safe to jump the next fence on the Lavumisa border post's side and cross over into Swaziland. Everything went smoothly and we felt a bit more relaxed as we were in a liberated country.

From there, we enlisted the help of a young boy who was used to escorting South Africans to the bus station. When he asked us for money, we gave him ten cents. He complained, so we gave him another 20 cents to make sure that he was happy and did not report us to the police. He even told us that if people don't pay him, he reports them to Swazi police and that the police often pay him to report people who cross into Swaziland illegally. We parted with him amicably at Lavumisa bus rank, from where we boarded a bus to Manzini, one of Swaziland's

largest cities, to meet our contact, a Mrs Sylvia Nduli. She was the wife of the late comrade Joseph 'Mpisi' Nduli, who was part of the MK group that fought in alliance with the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) led by comrade Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo against the colonial regime of Ian Smith during the historic Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns. While comrade Mpisi survived these military campaigns, he was later arrested and sent to Robben Island prison. The main aim of the campaigns was to open a front for guerrillas to infiltrate South Africa and to engage in armed combat against the apartheid state. This was necessary as at the time there was no friendly border for the guerrillas who went into exile for military training to infiltrate South Africa and fight the apartheid regime. Smith and John Vorster, the president of South Africa at that time, were in an alliance.

CHAPTER 3

Life in exile

Manzini, Swaziland

Before we left South Africa, we were briefed on how we were going to be received in Swaziland. We were given a secret code, which was 'Ayihlome' (let it be armed), with the corresponding code from the person meeting us being 'Sebephakathi' (they are inside). When we gave the code to the person picking us up from the bus stop in Manzini, he gave the correct response. What was strange is that this person never asked us our names and where we were coming from. This was the first lesson we learnt in the ANC – that codes were used. He then took us to Nduli, who was working at a furniture store called Dan Hands. After meeting Nduli and other people that we did not know, we were taken to Manzini White House, which is the ANC safe house, and we only felt safe once we arrived there. We remained inside for two weeks and were first interviewed by a comrade known as Nkonyana. He asked us a lot of questions about South Africa and the situation back at home. We were introduced to the ANC, what it stands for, how to become a member of the organisation and what it means to be in the ANC. We learnt about the Freedom Charter and the importance of South Africa's history.

When we were first interviewed individually, we were asked to write our life-stories separately. We had to say why we decided to join the ANC, who had recruited us and so on. I was also asked whether I wanted to go to school or join MK. I was very clear in my mind that I left school in South Africa because of Bantu Education. I did not imagine myself going to school for whatever reason. My only interest was military training as I wanted to liberate South Africa. I wanted to be counted as a liberator or a freedom fighter under whatever circumstances, victory or death.

Entering Mozambique

We spent two weeks in the safe house in Manzini and received our basic training there. I had thought we would go back to South Africa after this. However, we were driven to Matola in Mozambique in a Land Rover. The road from Swaziland to Mozambique was bumpy at times. In Swaziland we were also advised and warned about Swazis who were working for the South African apartheid government. We were also warned of a possible ambush while travelling. Swaziland was known for kidnappings, ambushes, killings and assassinations of ANC members or sympathisers by the apartheid regime. We were on constant guard as we were approaching the Mozambique border. Although we were not armed, our escort was. This, however, was not ideal and made us uneasy, tense and unsure about whether we would reach our destination or not. We were suspicious of cattle in the street slowing us down and forcing us to stop. The same was the case when we saw a car in front of us and one behind us, not knowing if it was a trap or not. When we finally crossed the border, we met Frelimo soldiers. They spoke to us in Portuguese and our driver responded. We just listened although we didn't understand anything that they were saying. We were happy and relieved that we had finally entered Mozambique.

In Mozambique, we were taken to Matola transit camp where we met other comrades from South Africa. There we sang freedom and other songs, unlike in Manzini where it was quiet. The windows of the safe house in Manzini were always closed and the house was kept dark. The focus was on reading and training all the time. In Matola we were interviewed by different people and we had to rewrite our biographies. We learnt later that these biographies were part of the security check. Your story always had to correspond with the previous one you wrote, otherwise suspicion was raised.

We tasted freedom for the first time in Mozambique. In the morning we would do physical exercises and during the day political classes. We would go to the hall for briefings. The house was a double-storey building with orchards and a swimming pool. Activities in Matola were very lively. In the evening there was a jazz hour (singing freedom songs). We were introduced to life in a camp and we got a taste of what MK camps look like. We were also given aliases and we tried hard to get used to these names. A certain comrade Dan was our camp commander and we had a number of commissioners (political instructors), as well as ANC veterans

who lived with us. It was clear that some MK comrades had trained in other countries, as this was a transit camp. Some comrades were arriving and some were leaving. We spent about two months there and were just getting used to life in Matola transit camp when we were told that we were leaving. I was going to go to Zambia, while Cosbert Rubushe and my cousin, Stheni Nxumalo, both of whom left Durban with me, were going elsewhere. I am not sure where they went, but I think Cosbert was sent for military training in the former Soviet Union, while Stheni was sent to the former German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Zambia

A platoon of about 35 comrades were taken to the airport, from where we were flown to Zambia. In Zambia we parted ways with other comrades, some of whom went to Tanzania, Angola and other countries. In each camp we would spend a few weeks and we were never told where we were going. In Zambia, we stayed in one of the ANC safe houses in Lilande township in Lusaka. We were free to move around on some days and we felt the same freedom we had in Matola. We were still trying hard to get used to our aliases. Before we left Zambia, we met old comrades from the Luthuli Detachment who were called 'imigwenya' (elderlies). They had been trained before us, in the early 1960s and 1970s. These comrades were very conservative, soft-spoken and noticed every behaviour. They warned us to be mindful of who we made friends with and that two out of every ten comrades were likely to be spies.

The Angolan situation

We arrived in Luanda, the capital of Angola, via airplane and were taken to a camp called Engineering. This was a huge transit camp for people from all over who were fighting for the liberation of their respective countries. These included but were not limited to Angolans, Cubans, Zairians, Congolese, Zimbabweans, South Africans, members of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) fighting for the liberation of Namibia (then called South West Africa), and members of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) fighting for the liberation of Palestine. We shared a compound with a group from Zaire called the 'Katangees', led by a General N'bumba. We trained at Engineering for a month before being taken to Funda camp in Angola

where, as in the previous cases, we had to write our biographies and were given new MK names. The changing of names from place to place served the purpose of uncovering spies. Having emerged from conflict, the remnants of war were visible almost everywhere in Angola. The town of Luanda, in particular, was ravaged by war. Buildings were demolished and burnt vehicles, including military vehicles and armoured personnel carriers, were all over town. Seeing people with amputated legs or arms around Luanda was a common sight. When we left Engineering camp for Funda, we were warned about impending attacks on the roads and possible ambushes by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Some comrades that went further south of Angola or north encountered ambushes on the road to their camps. As we had chosen military over schooling, it was clear that we were in for a rocky ride, but after training at Engineering, we felt ready for anything. When travelling from one camp to the next, we were escorted by members of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

Funda camp

> *I was born to fight devils and factions. It is my business to remove obstacles, to cut down thorns, to fill up quagmires and to open and make straight paths. If I must have some failing let me rather speak the truth with too great sincerity than once to act the hypocrite and conceal the truth.*[21]

Sometime in 1977, I was part of a group of about ten that arrived in Funda camp where most of our training took place. The terrain was frightening as we travelled through the mosquito-infested Angolan bush from Luanda, the capital city of Angola. As expected, we were very uneasy, waiting for anything to happen. The camp looked old and deserted. One could hear the sounds of strange bush animals screaming not very far from us. It was not clear whether these creatures were greeting us or if it was just a mere coincidence. Everybody else was relaxed because they were used to the camp. We were warmly welcomed and informed that it would be our base for the next few months. The writing was on the wall that we would get used to these frightening screams. We were familiarised with the camp and supplied with uniforms, dishes, bags and so on by our logistics section.

During our first night at Funda, we followed the same routine as at the other camps. We had supper with the other soldiers. After supper, we had what was called a jazz hour where the marching drill, toyi-toyi[22] and singing took place until late evening, after which we went to bed. The following morning, we were woken up and went jogging. After that, we washed, had breakfast and went to classes. We got new MK names and had to write our biographies. We now felt like fully fledged members of MK.

Our camp commander was comrade Zakes, and our commissar was comrade Sipho. Our camp was an old deserted farm next to a river that was infested with crocodiles and snakes. The terrain was very bushy and swampy, a perfect breeding ground for thousands of mosquitoes that troubled us daily. The water would be ice cold in winter and warm in summer. We eventually got used to the situation though. The jazz hour was a very interesting experience and lifted our morale. It felt as if the bush was singing with us. After singing, one would feel ready to go to war and fight.

In 1977, there was an attempted coup led by Nito Alves, the minister of interior, but it was foiled by the revolutionary forces. This situation kept us in suspense as it was clear that MK and SWAPO would have had to leave the country had the coup been successful. In addition to casualties resulting from military exchanges with the enemy, in Angola we also had to contend with the threat posed by malaria. We lost a number of comrades to the disease, with many of them succumbing for not taking their malaria tablets. There was a rumour going around that taking the tablets would make one impotent. For this reason, the anti-malaria tablets were jokingly referred to as 'anti-mulher' (*mulher* is the Portuguese term for a girl/woman).

Challenges in MK camps

The apartheid government had significant success in recruiting people to infiltrate the ANC camps, which resulted in widespread paranoia within the camps specifically and the ANC generally. At a camp in Novo Catengue, the entire camp suffered food poisoning, which was suspected to be the result of sabotage from the inside. Fortunately, no one died. Cuban reinforcements and doctors arrived at the camp from the Lobito Province to provide medical assistance. In many cases undercover operatives working for the apartheid state were exposed and

sent to Luanda for questioning. Some would reveal their networks and their contacts. Other challenges in the camps included the substandard quality of food rations and limited access to clean water.

Despite this, morale in the camps was high. Political education embedded in a Marxist–Leninist ideology was a cornerstone in all our training. This changed our consciousness and understanding that all revolutions have their challenges. We were ready for anything. Learning about other struggles shaped us in correctly understanding our situation. We accepted that every war has casualties, and that there was no easy struggle. Political material was widely available in the camps. We drew strength from publications such as 'South Africa: No Middle Road' by Joe Slovo,[23] and of course classics such as Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* and the Communist Manifesto that he co-authored with Friedrich Engels. We were also educated on African nationalism, the formation of the ANC and MK, and the Freedom Charter. All of this instilled in us the belief that you don't stop fighting until you achieve the goal. When you join the ANC, you expect nothing in return. You don't fight for material gain or personal advantage. I sacrificed much of my life to free the people of South Africa. We fought for neither glory nor distinction.

We also gained strength from visits to our camp by our commander-in-chief, comrade Oliver Reginald Tambo, as well as visits by MK leaders such as Joe Slovo, Jack Simmons and Joe Modise. These visits and words of encouragement were good for our morale. Their commitment to the cause of our struggle lifted our spirits and strengthened our resolve to free our country and its people from the evils of apartheid. Sports, soccer in particular, was also a fixture in our camp and helped us relax and not think about the challenges we were encountering. Most camps had soccer teams and on weekends we would compete against a team from a neighbouring Cuban camp. With the Cubans not being good soccer players, we won most of the matches. Jazz hour was also something we looked forward to. We would sing at night until we felt that we were not alone, and that the trees and spirits of the fallen heroes were singing along with us.

Underpinnings of MK military training

The majority of our training took place in Angola and consisted of compulsory basic training lasting nine months, and a further three or more months depending on the nature of the specialised training. Mine was in military engineering. A number of basic and mostly

interrelated principles underpinned our military training. These were drawn from the factors that are attributed to the military successes of Vietnam's General Vo Nguyen Giap against the French (1950s) and the US (1960s).[24] It led to General Giap being regarded as '…not only a legend, but perhaps the single greatest military genius of the twentieth century and one of the greatest of all time'.[25] These principles, as well as those drawn from Soviet partisan warfare during World War Two,[26] were synthesised into what in MK became known as Military Combat Work (MCW). MCW was compulsory for those who were going to be deployed back into South Africa.[27] Only a few of these principles are discussed below, purely for the sake of brevity and not because they are more important than others.

The first principle was an emphasis on *tried and tested leadership*. In terms of this, we were taught that you do not get entrusted with leadership unless you have a demonstrable history of active involvement in the struggle. These days it is not uncommon for people to get elected to leadership positions without the required credentials. Often people get elected because of how eloquent they are or if they can articulate themselves well in English. It is only when problems arise that it is realised that this person was not fit for that position. Some people elected to leadership positions have been found to have collaborated with the apartheid regime by infiltrating community structures so that they could report to their colonial masters. This is less likely to happen if one has a tried and tested history of active involvement in the struggle.

The second principle was a belief in our *moral superiority over the enemy*. The struggle for liberation is a morally just struggle. This is a struggle that is also guided by moral convictions which ought to be upheld. The fact that you are engaging in war does not justify the abandonment of these morals. For example, should you capture an enemy, you are not to torture him or her as this would be immoral and would make you no better than the enemy, and we are morally superior to the enemy.

The third principle was the importance of setting yourself apart from the enemy in terms of *discipline*, especially when engaging in guerrilla warfare. In this context, knowing who we were fighting and what we were fighting for was important. Discipline had to be the cornerstone of all our engagements with the enemy. We were not mercenaries who fought because they were hired. Our enemy was not every white man you meet in the street. The appendages of the system of apartheid were our enemy.

The fourth principle was the importance of our struggle to be guided by *clear revolutionary theory.* We were educated in the many revolutions from the past and the different forms these assumed. Our main enemy was monopoly capitalism based on racial discrimination that underpinned apartheid. We knew the form and content of our struggle. That is why in the midst of our struggle we had progressive whites who understood the theory of our revolution. It was not a matter of 'everything black is good' and 'everything white is bad'. We also had black people who were bad by collaborating with the apartheid system. We were schooled in the class dynamics emanating from racial capital and the class struggle that it necessitates.

The fifth principle was the importance of *international support*. As capitalism is international, so is our struggle. We could depend on the support of the many countries that identified with our struggle, and those that condemned apartheid. Our struggle against apartheid was evidenced by the fact that the system was declared a crime against humanity. During the 1960s when the ANC was banned by the regime, those that were exiled, such as comrade OR Tambo and others, extensively engaged the international community to solicit support for the organisation. They engaged with international bodies such as the United Nations (UN), the non-aligned countries and the Organization for African Unity (OAU) to explain our plight and why we were fighting against apartheid so as to convince them to support the ANC. This was particularly challenging as some of these countries from whom support was sought were in fact supporting the apartheid government, either overtly or covertly. Many countries had cordial relations with the apartheid state while multinationals invested in the country in defiance of international sanctions. This notwithstanding, the ANC was able to win support from socialist countries in general, as well as trade unions in Western countries.

CHAPTER 4

Reinfiltrating South Africa

After our training in Angola, we felt as if nothing could stop us from carrying the torch of freedom and liberating the millions of South Africans who were butchered by the racist apartheid regime. At a personal level, I was unwavering in my determination to leave my mark on this revolution. Our route back was going to be the same as the one we took when we left home to join MK. We left Funda camp for Luanda, where we stayed a few days. We then proceeded to Zambia, where we stayed for about two weeks, before proceeding to Mozambique and then Swaziland. When we left Funda, we were allowed to be civilians as we were fresh from the camp. We were, for the first time, given money to go and buy from a restaurant like ordinary people do. My dream was to fight against the racist regime on South African soil, and if I died, I must die like a soldier for the oppressed people of South Africa.

A near miss in Mozambique

At the end of our training in Angola, we were now fully trained guerrillas equipped to return to South Africa to engage in the armed struggle. We were confident in our abilities to infiltrate the country without being commanded by anyone from Mozambique or Swaziland. In addition to and related to this was the fact that mistrust had developed between us and our seniors that had arranged our travel. So much so that the only comrade we trusted was Past Four. He was one of those who trained in the 1960s, so we called them *Imigwenya* (hard fruits). We confided in him and tried to convince him of our belief in our ability to infiltrate South Africa. He warned us about being

overconfident and reminded us about our tactical training and the fact that worse situations awaited us as freedom fighters.

When we arrived in Matola in Mozambique, we had to wait for our next orders in Mozambique. During this time, we received some briefings and also immersed ourselves in civilian life, going to shops, drinking places and so on. We were staying at a residential ANC house called Jardinho in Matola. We then went to Matola camp to meet our contact. We were supposed to be picked up by a Land Rover at 6pm. When our contact missed our pick-up time, we followed the protocol taught to us in our training and changed the pick-up location. The following day we heard on Radio Maputo that an ANC Land Rover had been found in the Swaziland bush riddled with bullets. It was full of blood and the occupants were unknown and missing. We suspected that this was the car that was supposed to pick us up and that the enemy was now operating within our midst. Past Four arranged transport to take us from Matola to Boane at Nomahasha. We waited there before proceeding on foot to Manzini in Swaziland. This was to ensure our safety. We were a group of about 12 that undertook the long walk from the border to Manzini. Included in that group was Jacob Zuma.

We took almost a week to walk to Manzini. We only walked at night and would stay in the bush next to a river during the day. In our bags we had tinned food and a hard Mozambique bread called 'paos'. We used a stone to open our tinned food. Water from the river was the only liquid we could drink. Initially we tried walking in the bush among the tall trees. We realised that this was taking us longer and then proceeded to walk along the road. When we saw oncoming traffic, we would take cover until the car passed by.

When we finally reached Manzini, we had to wait a day for logistics to be prepared. We decided to arm ourselves, as we felt that Swaziland was not a country to be trusted. The security situation for ANC members had worsened since we had travelled through the country en route to Angola more than a year before. Since then, many comrades had been killed, arrested or kidnapped, and had confrontations with the Swazi police. In Swaziland, the apartheid regime also had a sophisticated network of spies even within the ANC itself. I discovered later that we had been trailed from Zambia, Mozambique and Swaziland.

Some of us decided not to continue to South Africa for operations but I proceeded with a new group. One challenge in the underground was that you are not to ask anything, and you are not told anything.

In Zulu, they say *Akubuzwa Emkhontweni*, which means 'you don't ask anything in the MK'. A mission can change at any time without reasons being given. This was sometimes problematic because even if one suspected that something was wrong, one would not dare ask. This sometimes had implications for our safety and cost some comrades their lives. It made us feel like sacrificial lambs. We could not ask who had sold out and to whom, and we were never told. Although we had made it safely to Swaziland, we were worried about other comrades that were still supposed to travel that route. We wondered if their passage would be safe or not. Asking questions could also bring unnecessary attention and suspicion onto yourself. It could lead to you being taken back to Angola, which we did not want, or you could be victimised and accused of being suspected of being an agent provocateur or even enemy agents.

Back on home soil

New arrangements were made for us to return to South Africa from Swaziland. While I had left South Africa through the border between Swaziland and KwaZulu-Natal, I was returning close to the Mahamba border gate, which is about 50 kilometres from Commondale in Mpumalanga province. There were three of us, and we were given strict instructions to be vigilant if we wanted to stay alive. When we reached the border, we decided to split due to the presence of heavy police and army patrols. This made us suspicious. If it was 1976 or 1979, we would have understood the heavy security. But it was around March 1978 and things had calmed, so we didn't expect the type of security visibility we were confronted with. I successfully made it across the border fence and hitch-hiked to the town of Pongolo in Mpumalanga. From there I was able to get a lift to Durban. Returning to Chesterville or the Durban township of Kwa-Mashu was out of the question as these two were known for the presence of underground operatives and tended to attract the attention of the security establishment. I decided to settle and operate from the township of Umlazi as it was relatively quieter in terms of the presence of liberation movements and activists operating from there. Once I was settled, I wasted no time in carrying out my responsibilities. These included training new recruits and establishing units in Umlazi as well as Durban and the surrounding areas. In addition to this, I had to send couriers with coded messages to Swaziland to report on the situation back at home.

Arrest and sentencing

> *For the revolution, everything, against the revolution, nothing! Because the revolution has a right to live, a right to develop and a right to succeed.*[28]

As a trained MK soldier, one was fully aware of the extremely dangerous conditions under which one had to operate. The threat to one's life was constant. You did not know what tomorrow would bring. I always told myself that I would never be arrested alive. For me, a quotation from author Douglas Pagel was instructive. He wrote that 'each new day is a blank page in the diary of your life. The secret of success is in the turning that diary into the best story you possibly can'.[29] For me, this was carrying out successful operations against the enemy. I was concerned when the courier that we sent to Swaziland to report on the situation failed to return. It was during a terribly windy, rainy and stormy week, so I had to wait until the weather cleared up. Couriers are usually underground operatives without any known political allegiance to the ANC. These are often people such as teachers, nurses and the unemployed.

On one rainy evening about a month after having entered South Africa, I became aware of a suspicious vehicle that had been parked for the whole week in front of where I stayed. It had dark tinted windows and it was almost impossible to see whether it was empty or not. I told myself that I would attend to the car once my courier returned. It was around 11 o'clock. Because I only operated in the evenings and was tired, I had decided to go back home to take a rest and quickly dozed off into a deep sleep. I thought I was dreaming when I heard a voice shouting: 'You are under arrest, you are under arrest!' On realising what was happening, I jumped for my nearest weapon, which was my pistol. Unfortunately, I could not get to it in time. I was surrounded and blinded by the strong torch lights that were focused on me. After giving me the customary beat down, I was handcuffed and blindfolded. I later learnt that police in a convoy of more than ten cars were involved in my arrest. It also came to light that our entire unit had been sold out by spies within the ANC, with me being the first one to be arrested. In addition to this, my courier had been intercepted on his way back from Swaziland.

Interrogation and torture

While I was detained at Brighton Beach police station in Wentworth, a predominantly coloured township in Durban, I was taken to the notorious Fisher Street police station every day, where I was interrogated and subjected to extreme forms of torture. I had to resist giving them information for a week. The idea was that once other comrades realised that I had disappeared, they would know to change their location. I still remember the names of some of my interrogators and torturers. These included, among others, a Captain Van Zyl, Warrant Officer Taylor, Ntombela, Nduli, Makhanye Mdluli, Mondlane and others. Torture included regular beatings and other unimaginable things that one human being is not supposed to subject another to. Pliers were used to pull out my finger nails and my face was covered with a wet sack and water poured over it, causing me to suffocate. I was hung upside down for extended periods and had electric shocks applied to my nose, ears, mouth and other parts of my body. In addition to this, a drawer was closed on my private parts, resulting in excruciating pain. The intensity of the interrogation caused me to collapse and lose consciousness more than three times. My torturers reminded me and boasted that they had killed Joseph Mdluli, Ahmed Timol, Neil Aggett, Steve Biko and others, so who was I to resist. However, I always knew at the back of my mind that victory or death, we would win.

I was arrested under Section Six of the then Terrorism Act in terms of which one was detained for six months to undergo interrogation. I was arrested during winter and was only allowed to wear my underwear. I was kept alone in a cell that had a basket as a toilet, a mat to sleep on and one blanket. I had to eat and do everything in my cell and was isolated from others. This meant that loneliness invariably crept in. Insects such as ants and cockroaches became my friends and I fed them bread crumbs. I came to know all the different species of these friends. I knew the strong ones and the weak ones. I would intervene when one took more bread crumbs than others. The only time I would be taken out of this wall-to-wall box that I was kept in was when I was interrogated. I learnt to know when this was going to happen as I could recognise my torturers' footsteps when they were coming to fetch me to be interrogated and tortured. They would announce themselves in Afrikaans, saying, 'Waar is daardie terroris?' (Where is that terrorist?) I was detained at Brighton Beach police station before I was taken to

court. A fellow comrade by the name of Themba Nxumalo, who was coincidentally also my first cousin (our fathers were brothers), was detained with me. He could not recognise me during that detention as a result of the torture and mistook me for an old man. I was later charged with six others including Themba, Sabelo Ngobese, Nhlanhla Ngidi, Sibongile Kubheka, Fana Mlaba and Penuell Maduna.

Court

During our court appearance, we asked the judge to recuse himself. He refused and rather separated our cases because some of the charger that related to the others did not relate to me. Because my case was heard in the Supreme Court, I was moved from Brighton Beach to Pietermaritzburg where the court was located. I was eventually charged alone and was found guilty. When you are sentenced, you can either get straight and/or concurrent sentences. I was sentenced to ten and 12 years straight and eight years concurrent. This meant that I was to spend an effective 22 years in jail. After sentencing, I was transferred to Leeuwkop Prison in Johannesburg. I remained at Leeuwkop from November 1978 until February 1979, when I was sent to Robben Island.

CHAPTER 5

Robben Island

'A Name to Remember' by Muntu Nxumalo

Highway men rush sigma,
Hounds that be in this society stigma,
For sailing and toiling the earth;
A name to remember.

A tearing cry stables the earth,
Again in 1962 in Howick,
The pimpernel has resurfaced
A name to remember.

Rivonia trialist has been condemned,
From a tiny Mvezo to rural Howick he emerged,
The heart of the revolution has come to ebb,
A name to remember.

Ah! The roaring lion Rolihlahla Dalibunga Mandela!
Ah! For him to be silent was toll distasteful a menu!
Ah! The world forgets that a new era has begun!
A name to remember.

Rivonia trial catches the world,
The beginning of the beginning has started,
Robben Island again becomes a world focus.
A name to remember.

Life sentence never became a deterrent,
Other lifers rejoice as SA's eyes are wide open,
A journey begins amidst the calamities
A name to remember.

Suddenly SA becomes a world spotlight
When the AbaThembu royal blood is incarcerated
Together with the struggle stalwarts they never gave up
Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki
All the underground leaders of the movement incarcerated
A roll call is read but endless

A name to remember.
Twenty-seven years of incarceration shall not be in vain,
The people's president shook the world in February, 1990.

Arriving on the island

After being sentenced by Judge Kriel, I was sent to Robben Island via Leeuwkop. I have to admit that I was relieved that I was not given the death penalty. Yet, I remained unwavering in my commitment to the struggle. I was reminded of a quotation in the Communist Manifesto that reads:

> *The history of all the hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles: free man and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word oppressor and oppressed – stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight.*[30]

I knew that one day I would be free; that poor people would rise against the rich people. The ANC would be in power and apartheid would be history. I also understood that in all revolutions, poor people ultimately prevail. I was part of a group of comrades that were moved from Leeuwkop to Robben Island. These included the likes of Kay Msiza, Kota Piluza, Mtshweni and others. We were transported from Johannesburg to the Cape in handcuffs and leg irons on the back of a police truck. From the Cape Town harbour, we were then ferried to Robben Island

where we were issued with prison numbers on our arrival. My number was 8/79, meaning that I was the eighth prisoner in the group that arrived in 1979. Similarly, Mandela's number, which was 466/64, meant that he was the 466th prisoner in 1964.

The structure of Robben Island

The prison was divided into seven different sections classified alphabetically from A to G, as well as the kitchen and hospital sections. Sections A to C all had single cells, while Sections D to G all had communal cells. Each section consisted of four cells that could house 32 inmates each. Section A was an isolation section that had a few inmates, not more than 20. Inmates in this section included what one may then have referred to as second-tier political leaders such as Harry Gwala and Tokyo Sexwale.

Top-tier political leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and others were housed in B Section. It had the fewest inmates and they were also isolated from other sections. Prison protocol dictated that all new inmates be taken to C Section, which was also an isolation section, so that they could be observed by warders. Your court file, as well as files from other prisons you had been to, would be examined. We stayed in C Section for two weeks before being moved to E Section. I would eventually be moved to F Section. This was better because it consisted of a mix of inmates in terms of both ages and organisational affiliation.

Section D mostly housed members of SWAPO, while Sections E and F consisted of young inmates. Section F was characterised by a high level of high morale. It had a lively atmosphere because of the constant singing of liberation songs, toyi-toying, political education and cultural activities that took place. I often led singing of not only the ANC songs, but also those from SWAPO and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Our slogan was 'Boost the morale', and singing and toyi-toying accomplished this successfully.

The prison also had a grading system in terms of which inmates were graded. Your grade was based on your reputation, as well as what was in your prison files, including those where you were previously incarcerated. Your grade determined your privileges. The D inmates, for instance, had few privileges relative to other groups. For example, while others could have a visit of 40 minutes, the D group could only

have a visit for 30 minutes. The number of visitors they could have was also less. In addition to this, the other groups could have contact visits while the D group had to communicate with their visitors from behind a glass window using a telephone handset. As a rule, everyone starts out as a D inmate.

Challenges

The weather on the island was cold to the extent that I was convinced I would never last 22 years. Similarly, the food was nothing to write home about. Our diet consisted mainly of plain samp without beans that sometimes had a very bad smell. I did not eat on the first day, but comrades told me that I would get used to it, which happened. As to be expected, the attitude of the wardens was generally hostile. They spoke Afrikaans, the language that sparked the 16 June uprising, and did not care whether we understood them or not when they spoke to us. Another challenge was access to water. We basically had drinking water and washing water, with the latter being water from the ocean. We were not warned that using soap to wash would leave our skins dry and pale.

The inmate population on the island was by no means homogeneous. The political prisoner component consisted of mainly PAC, BCM and ANC cadres. When we arrived in E Section, we discovered that there was conflict between the PAC–BCM and the ANC. The PAC–BCM alliance was referred to as the 'unholy alliance' and sometimes led to physical altercations between the two sides. As new arrivals, we were pressured to take a side. The ANC was in the minority and anti-ANC sentiment in the prison was rife. As we arrived at E Section, we heard this shout of the unholy alliance! We did not understand the aim of this alliance. The other slogan that dominated E Section was 'Harass the system', referring to the prison system. We were even detained by fellow inmates who forced us to individually explain which organisations we belonged to. For me it was a shock because I did not expect life on the island to be so complicated. I only knew about Nelson Mandela and other comrades. These divisions were encouraged by the prison authorities as it would benefit the system. It created favourable conditions for the recruitment of informers to tell the warders and other officials what was going on inside the cells.

The PAC also exacerbated the situation by encouraging young unpoliticised or non-aligned township boys to fight against the ANC.

With the PAC's numbers in decline on the island and those of the ANC increasing, the PAC focused on recruiting the 1976 youngsters that were entering the prison system. These youths would also provoke warders, who would then punish the whole section. This led to sporadic hunger strikes in sections that were dominated by the youth.

In contrast to the PAC, the ANC leadership discouraged fighting and instructed us to rather politicise these young, confused, misguided youths from the BCM and PAC. This was easier said than done. In most cases, we were on the receiving end. As young people who were disciplined, conscientised and committed to the struggle for liberation, we had to defend ourselves against other young people who were the direct opposite. Things only improved when we were transferred to Sections F and G, where the ANC was in the majority and where there was no fighting. The fighting eventually ended when 12 members of the BCM leadership on the island defected to the ANC. Defectors included the likes of Terror Mosiuoa Lekota, Casca Mokitlane and others. Ultimately, the ANC was able to win the hearts and minds of many ordinary BCM members. It signalled the end of the unholy alliance and prison life became normal insofar as conflict ended.

Rights and privileges

To eat and be clothed in prison was a right and not a privilege. Academic education was a privilege that could be given and taken away anytime at the discretion of the authorities. Prison authorities would often suspend our studies without giving any reason. They would just make a note in your file that you don't study. This happened to me. When I inquired, I was told that studying was a privilege, not a right. Visitors and letters from home were also privileges. Your letters from home or friends could be censored. A five-page letter that was sent could be one-and-a-half pages when you received it. Warders could cut out sections they felt you should not know.

While we were united as prisoners, our strong ideological identities as members of either the ANC, PAC, BCM or the African Peoples Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA) still resulted in divisions. APDUSA is a national political organisation which was established in 1961 by the Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA). The latter was founded as a federal body in 1943 and played a major role in the South African liberation struggle.[31] In communal cells, groups

would congregate in cell corners based on their political affiliation when it came to political and educational activities. If you were non-aligned you would idle in the centre of the cell, or go to the toilet until all politically aligned groups had finished their business for the day. A non-aligned inmate could even position his prison bed in the centre of the cell, so that when political meetings commenced, he could have an early sleep.

The issue of non-aligned perhaps needs further explanation. During the 16 June uprisings, people were arrested for many different reasons. Some were burning and looting during the unrest, wanting to exploit the situation for personal gain rather than ideological convictions. Their interest was not in the liberation of South Africa, but the liberation of themselves from poverty, even using criminal means. Some were sentenced to five years and decided not to join the ANC or the PAC. This is what is meant by non-aligned.

Adapting to life on the island

One of the fundamental teachings of the ANC was to transform a disadvantage to an advantage. After all was said and done, we easily adapted to prison life. After being effectively sentenced to 22 years, I found other comrades who were serving 25 years, 30 years and even life sentences. That changed my perspective to a certain degree and allowed me to adapt. I was assigned to a roadworks team (called a *pad span* in Afrikaans) that was responsible for road maintenance on the island. I enjoyed this because it gave me the opportunity to get to know the whole island. Other teams or groups were the *bou groep* (building group), which was responsible for the island's building maintenance. The freedom of movement afforded by being on the *pad span* also allowed me to personally meet other comrades to whom we were not ordinarily exposed. These included the likes of Mandela, Mbeki, Wilton Mkwayi, Elias Motsoaledi and others. The main activities on the island were music, toyi-toying, gumboot dancing, physical exercising, manual work and studies, both academic and political, as well as sports. We not only played soccer, but also rugby. I was a lock forward and one of the best rugby players.

Other sports we played included tennis and volleyball. Our indoor recreational activities included chess, snooker and draughts. In addition to this, we had quarterly concerts, interhouse athletics competitions and

summer games in December. Competing against other sections during the athletics and summer games allowed us to interact and communicate with inmates from other sections, which we were not generally able to do. As Section D was mainly comrades from Namibia, we were able to learn SWAPO songs. We also had music concerts where our jazz band performed. The band was led by the late Hector Ntshanyana from the PAC, who was a good saxophonist.

Prison had many restrictions, but we always found innovative ways to deal with those restrictions. One such restriction was communication between different sections. To overcome this, we would make a cut in a tennis ball and put messages inside. We would then use a racket to hit the ball from section to section to communicate. Also, when I was promoted to work in the kitchen, I had to deliver pots to different sections. I would hide tightly folded messages wrapped in plastic at the bottom of the pot and cover them with whatever was supposed to be in the pot, whether it was samp, rice or mielie meal. I would then deliver the messages to the section that it was meant for.

The ANC encouraged us to balance academic education with political education. Academic education is only useful if you want to contribute to the community you live in; if not, it becomes useless and can even facilitate egoistic, selfish corruption. We took that as a principle taught by the ANC. When I arrived on the island, I was deprived of the opportunity to engage in formal studies, what with me being in D Section. I had to wait until I moved to Section C to have the privilege of being able to study. When this happened, I focused on finishing my matric, which I had left half-way in 1976 as a result of the June 1976 uprisings and my subsequent going into exile. After finishing matric in 1984, I registered at the University of South Africa (UNISA), where I took courses in Development Administration, African Politics, and Politics, among others.

One of the best things on the island was our access to the wisdom of our leadership, our fathers, revolutionaries, freedom fighters and the vanguard of our struggle for liberation. As the younger ones, we often discussed and debated issues among ourselves, and could not reach agreement. When we had a stalemate on any discussion, we would consult with the High Command in B Section. For instance, one debate I can recall was around the question, 'Do we have classical peasants in South Africa?' It looked at South Africa's industrialisation and the present conditions, comparing it to other parts of the world. These elder

comrades had various areas of expertise. For example, Harry Gwala was a guru on the South African situation and produced a document entitled 'Man and His Country. At his funeral, then president Nelson Mandela had this to say about him:

> *Mphephethwa [his clan name] was a great 'political teacher' who taught generation after generation of struggle. Many of today's leaders drank from the deep well of Mphephethwa's political wisdom. But such was the nature of his teaching, that the products of his education, would themselves develop into political giants in their own right; using the tools he gave them to develop independent thought and analysis.*[32]

Mandela himself was an expert on the 'National Question', while Oom Gov's (the late Govan Mbeki) expertise was on the peasantry in South Africa and the analysis of the country as characterised by what is referred to as 'colonialism of a special type'. Whenever he analysed a situation or phenomenon, he would do it through the lenses of historical and dialectical materialism. The introduction of every document Oom Gov wrote contained something like: 'You miss this one, you miss them all.' That was his approach, and with this he managed to develop us into serious analysts on situations in and outside of the country. Oh, how we miss that tried and tested leadership! It is perhaps unfair to compare the leadership that we had on the island with the current crop, but you cannot help yourself. These people lived in different times under different conditions, and were a different breed altogether.

One of the most interesting characters on Robben Island was Bra Ray, who originally hailed from Sophiatown but was moved to Meadowlands, Soweto, during the apartheid forced removals. His real name was Raymond Komani and he used to entertain us with stories on a daily basis. He was such a good story teller that he would tell you about a film so that you had a good idea of what it was about. Each time Bra Ray told a story, a group of about 50 or 60 of us would gather around him to listen attentively. Bra Ray was also a good musician and could play a penny whistle flute very well. He used to accompany me when I played the guitar. He was a former boxer and his stories ranged from boxing, music and township events to politics. He was proud that he was recruited by the anti-apartheid activist, the late Father Trevor

Huddleston, to join the ANC, together with other high-ranking ANC officials such as the former minister of defence, the late Joe Modise, and the late Tom Nkobi, who was treasurer-general of the ANC in exile. Bra Ray would tell us stories about the Sophiatown gangsters known as the Msomi gang, which was notorious for robbing people.

What was particular about Bra Ray was that he did not want to be asked questions when he was telling a story. He did not want to be interrupted. Yet he would interrupt another comrade in the midst of telling a story and take over their stories or tell his own stories. When another comrade was telling a story, Bra Ray would be in agreement, saying, 'Dit is waar' (It is true). He would then hijack the story. His stories were always filled with humour and half-truths that would have everyone listening burst into laughter. He was so skilful that whenever he was around, there would always be a group of prisoners congregating around him. The fact that Bra Ray was fluent in Afrikaans and was able to converse with warders endeared him to most of them. That his brand of Afrikaans was mixed with tsotsi taal and even his Setswana did not matter. He also played good chess and a crowd would gather around him if he was playing against someone. He would make the game entertaining by mocking the opponent, especially when he won.

He fell ill once and visited the doctor, who changed his diet to boiled meat and vegetables, while everyone else only had soup and two slices of brown bread for lunch. One day we were having lunch as usual. Bra Ray was playing chess with someone while he was eating. A big crowd watched him as he slowly moved a chess piece and took a piece of meat. He knew that we were envying him as all of us would have liked to be in his position as far as him eating meat for lunch was concerned. So, he would take a piece of meat, pretending to eat it. With our mouths watering, our eyes would be fixed on the piece of meat in his hand.

Prison routine

Life in prison was fairly regimented. During the week (Monday to Friday), the prison would open at seven o'clock in the morning, when we would go to the kitchen to get our food. At eight o'clock, we would go out with our respective *spanne* (teams) to do manual work. We would then have lunch from 1pm to 2pm. At 4pm we would return to the cells and go to supper. On Saturdays, we did not have any manual work, and would either play sports or music. The prison also closed at 2pm on

Saturdays. We would return to our cells and later have supper. Then we would have academic studies for two hours, followed by political classes for another two hours. Afterwards, it was free time until we went to bed.

Every cell had a chairperson in charge of announcements from other cells. The chair also controlled noise levels so that other people didn't get disturbed. He also acted as a time keeper for cell routines. I was a chairman for five years in cell 4 of F Section. When transferred to G Section, I became the chairperson of G2 for two years. Chairpersons were democratically elected annually. At the end of the year, you either got replaced or were re-elected. In the morning, the head of prison would make rounds to all sections with his deputy to hear complaints. If it was a serious complaint, he would write it in his notebook. We always complained about food, studies, prison clothes, blankets, and letters from home if you didn't receive them and visits if you didn't get any. We would also go to the prison hospital for medication daily. Those with chronic diseases had to be taken to outside hospitals like Woodstock in Cape Town or Groote Schuur. At times you got injured playing rugby or soccer, and you would get hospitalised. During my stay on the island, a man called Mr Dayeni from PAC died after collapsing underneath a tree near the kitchen. In addition to this, a Namibian died in D Section. Some people had to be transferred to other prisons due to health reasons. Only prison doctors would recommend a transfer or a change of diet for a prisoner.

Hunger strikes were a regular occurrence during my stay at Robben Island. At times, the more we complained, the more conditions worsened, especially with food. If our complaints were ignored, we would embark on a go slow at work and eventually go on a hunger strike. Some hunger strikes were prison-wide, while others were confined to a particular section. One hunger strike over prison conditions lasted for six days. For us, embarking on hunger strikes to improve the conditions in prison was not a once-off event, but a continuation at various stages and levels aimed at ensuring that our rights as prisoners were protected. At times the gains were short-lived. You win today, and a few days later, you end up back where you started. For example, you get good food for a few days and then you go back to the bad food that you fought against.

Towards the end of 1986, we embarked on a hunger strike to demand access to televisions because we wanted to see what was going on in the outside world. We were tired of stories being told by the newly arrived

comrades on what the country looked like. The prison authorities eventually yielded to our demand and we got televisions. This was a very new thing for us as we were arrested before the introduction of TV in South Africa. The first day we watched everything on the TV until it ended. Getting used to this new technology also provided us with funny moments. In B Section, for example, where our leadership stayed, it was said that inmates were watching soccer. After a goal had been scored, it was replayed several times. Oom Gov complained that he could not understand how the same person could score unmarked from the same position three or four times. He did not understand action replay and we all laughed about it. It became one of our jokes that the older generation does not understand the slow motion played on the television. Even our generation, the 16 June 1976 generation, did not understand, though we laughed at Oom Gov.

Censor's office

The censor's office was a notorious part of life on Robben Island. There, highly qualified security branch personnel disguised as warders were employed by the prison to keep watch over us and report directly to the National Party (NP) securocrats. The office would intercept all our communication from our families. They would study our behaviours and learn details about our families through letters and other means. This office was responsible for censoring our letters, stopping our studies and cancelling our visitors. Office staff would also do underhand things to disrupt your life. For example, if you were married and you wrote a letter to your girlfriend, they would send the letter to your wife instead. This would sometimes break up families.

Being called to the censor's office either meant that you did something and would be punished, or that something happened to your family. One Saturday afternoon in March 1989, I was called to that office. I was given a telegram informing me of my father's passing. There had been fun up to then. We had been playing soccer and I had scored a goal, which contributed to my team winning the match. However, after receiving the news of my father's passing, all the sports excitement simply vanished. I was refused permission to attend his funeral. As political prisoners, we were not allowed to attend any family funeral. While everybody in the cell was excited, I just went to my bed and covered myself with the prison blanket. I wanted to be alone and not disturbed. However, I told

my cell mates and showed them the telegram. They sympathised with me and tried to comfort me. But there was nothing they could say or do to change things. In prison, you think about and never get answers on what is taking place within your family. You have no control over things that happen outside the prison, especially when it comes to your family or relatives. At times, you think until you fall sleep. You blank out all the noise around you. You often wake up in the middle of the night when everybody is asleep.

One never got good news from the censor's office. It was just another instrument used to break your spirit. Some comrades that had resisted torture, beatings and other methods succumbed to the tactics of the censor's office; however, most were able to resist. This is why we had a belief that in prison you complain daily until your last day of release. Prison is never good; even if you try to make it good, it is never; it will always be prison. This is why some people say 'prison is not a bed of roses'. Other dirty methods used by this office were to recruit prisoners to report on everything that was taking place in the cells. Not all sentenced prisoners were trustworthy. Some were working for the apartheid system in prison in exchange for their release from prison. Some would be transferred to other prisons or released but we never knew what transpired between the censor's office and a prisoner. This office made our stay in prison terrible. After our release in 1994, we visited Robben Island Museum, but refused to see the censor's office, knowing what it did to the inmates on the island.

The *pad span*

Being on the *pad span* gave us the freedom to do things that other prisoners would do. On one occasion, we were working on the road close to the sea and came across a small dead shark. Like typical politicians, we debated about when the shark had died. This was important as it would determine whether it was safe to eat it or not. Some comrades felt that it had been dead for a week, but after a long debate, it was concluded that it had died the previous evening, so it was still edible. Other comrades convinced us that anything you put on fire becomes fresh again. We roasted the shark and ate it and nothing happened to us – unlike the guinea fowls that caused our stomachs to run. We finally agreed that we would eat anything dead that we came across, whether on the road or in the sea.

The *pad span* was also the mainstay of morale in the prison. As prisoners, we did not have access to any newspapers, so we were cut off from the outside world. It goes without saying that politicians and the prison authorities did not want us to know what was going on outside of the prison. They knew that any good news was going to boost our morale as freedom fighters. During the course of our road maintenance work on the island, we would pass a dumping site where many old newspapers were dumped. We would go slowly as we were approaching the site. We would crawl towards the newspapers so that we were not visible to the warders. Once we had the newspapers, we could hide them under our clothes and then smuggle them into prison. We translated them at night as these were all Afrikaans newspapers such as *Die Beeld*, *Rapport* and *Vaderland*. We would then dispatch them to all sections of the prison. By this time my Afrikaans had improved greatly.

On one of our newspaper smuggling trips, I had hidden some newspapers under my vest and in my underwear and returned to the prison. I did not know that the newspapers were full of ants. Once I became aware that something was amiss, it was too late. My discomfort as we were returning to prison had become increasingly obvious and raised the suspicion of the warders. Ants were biting me all over my body. We were a returning group of about 12. As we approached the gate, we were stopped to be searched. By this time, I was sweating heavily and could not hide my discomfort. Being a clever group, one comrade by the name of Paul Langa of Soweto ran away from us to distract the warders. When they chased after him, I was able to release those newspapers and remove the ants. When Paul was brought back to us, and the search finished, he was asked why he had run away. He said that he was rushing for food in the kitchen. The story ended with him being suspected of doing something wrong, but there was no evidence. I was lucky to escape being caught on this occasion, but it was not always the case. At times I would be caught with newspapers, and sentenced to three, six or nine lost meals in solitary confinement, depending on the number of papers that were smuggled. Three meals meant you would be taken to isolation and would miss breakfast, lunch and supper for one day. Six meant two days without food, and nine, three days without food.

Smuggling newspapers also caused my privileges to be withdrawn as punishment. It was customary for us to receive letters from home on Saturdays. The prison would close to visitors at two o'clock. Prisoners would then read and discuss their letters. You would not be given

your letters because you were being punished. Similarly, while other prisoners could write home every week, you would not be allowed to because you were being punished. That really got to me and brought me down. You would sleep in your bed with a grey prison blanket pulled over your head and start thinking, or what we called 'blue-zing'. Even when people went to their visitors, you stayed behind because you were being punished.

While most people liked Bra Ray, not everyone was a fan of his. For example, he did not see eye-to-eye with the late comrade Aitken Ramadzuli, popularly known as TU. TU was Venda speaking and had political differences with Bra Ray. Whenever TU passed by while Bra Ray was telling a story, Bra Ray would switch and talk mockingly about Venda people so that TU could hear him. He would say things like the Venda community can't differentiate between chappies bubble gum and chips and that when they go to a restaurant to buy chips, they would say chappies, and would give them a box of chappies instead of chips. To the amusement of the crowd, he would imitate this scene. Some would laugh, some would chuckle, some would guffaw and some would giggle. Anytime a person passed by, Bra Ray would make sure that his story changed to joke about that person.

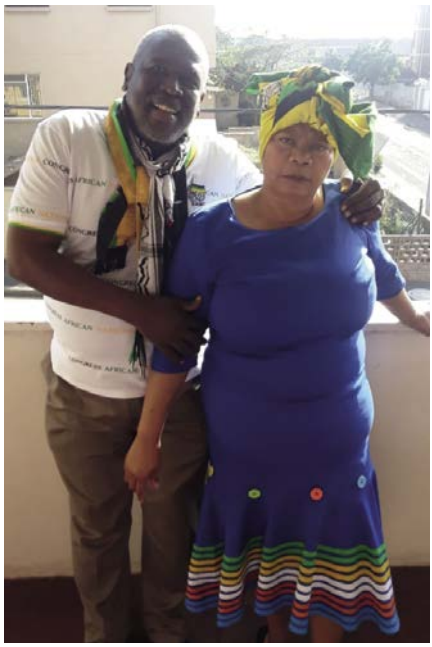
I also worked for quite a long time with Bra Ray in D Section, where he was a store keeper and I was a tailor. I assisted him in the shop where old prison clothes were changed to new ones. Those who had problems with sizes would come to me for alterations. He would decide who to give clothes to. To some comrades he would say in Afrikaans, 'Daar is nie nuwe klere nie' (There are no new clothes), even when there were. When I asked him why he refused comrades clothes, he would say to me he was just getting back at them. Some were his commanders in exile and had made him sweat. This was his way of getting revenge.

What kept us going

Immersing ourselves in the politics of the movement kept us going while imprisoned. This was referred to as Umrabulo,[33] which was a word used to inspire political discussion and debate on Robben Island. It is derived from the word *habula*, which means to sip/drink a little. Thus, every comrade had to *habula* with regards to knowledge and education, especially those doing shorter sentences. We studied South African as well as international politics, particularly from the former socialist bloc.

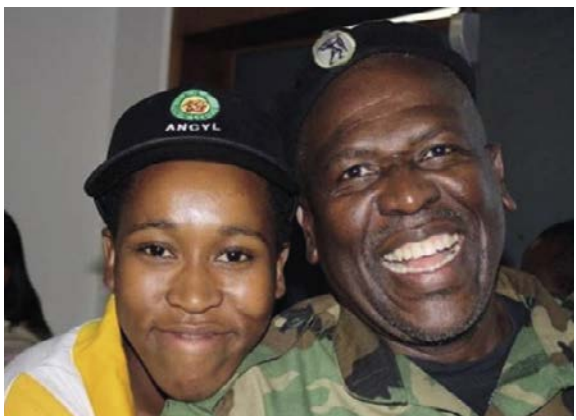
Other topics included the Freedom Charter, the Communist Manifesto, the labour theory of value, mind and matter, commodity production and so on. Those comrades who were studying politics correspondence through UNISA shared their study materials with us and it would be included in our political studies material on the island. Other informal Umrabulo groups were formed in most cells. In our F Section we had a morning class from 5am to 7am before the prison opened for the day. This sharpened our political analysis skills and helped us in our ideological debates among ourselves and with other political parties like the PAC, BCM and others. We felt politically superior to them, were confident in our positions and felt that they would shy away from debating with us. It was these superior ideological arguments that attracted many away from their parties and to the ANC because it made them realise that they had been misled. From time to time, we also received discussion documents from our leadership in B Section on which we had to comment and give our inputs. These documents covered topics such as the phase of our struggle, as well as the strategy and tactics of the ANC.

My parents, Alice Nomabhunu and Clifford Ndoda Nxumalo



With my wife

With my wife and daughter



With my daughter in Western Cape after delivering a lecture at Chris Hani memorial

At home

All images supplied by the author

Mama Dorothy Nyembe

Our release from Robben island in April 7 1991 –
I am raising a clenched fist

With the Khoisan chief in Cape Town

Lerumo la Sechaba in Mozambique commemorating

At a Christmas party for the children
of the CORD staff. I am Father Christmas

In Zimbabwe with Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo, President of
ZAPU during the liberation war

In Pretoria hosting the Ex-offenders
Conference in 2014

All images supplied by the author

Playing guitar at home in the township

At Parliament in Cape Town representing SA Religious Forum as secretary general

At a religious forum in Bloemfontein as a representative

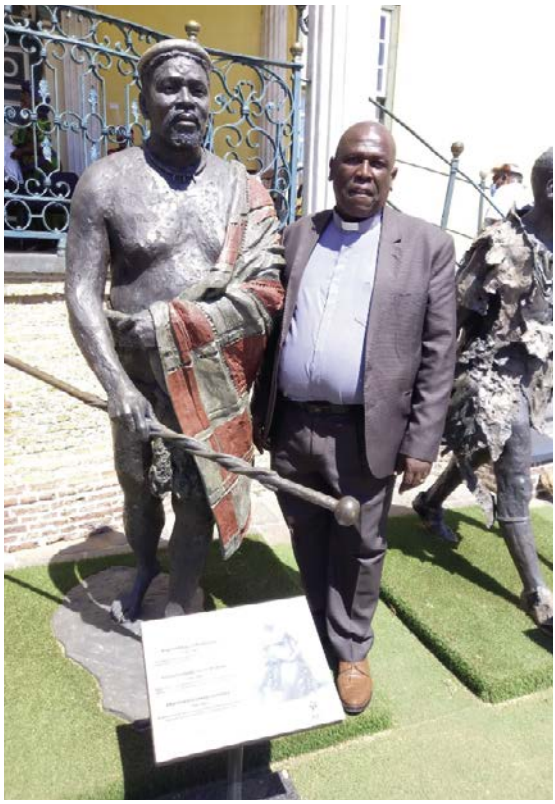
Saluting

Chesterville Baptist Church

A traditional ceremony at my wife's home at Inanda in Durban

All images supplied by the author

In Mozambique commemorating the Matola raid



I was invited by the Office of the President as the ARTLC Interfaith African Religious and Traditional Leaders Council. I am a provincial chairperson in KZN

At recent Ethekwini ANC conference 08–10 April 2022

Ethekwini ANC conference with the delegation of the SACP, South African Communist Party

All images supplied by the author

CHAPTER 6

The end is nigh

How negotiations started

During the 1980s it had become clear even to the most ardent apartheid ideologues that apartheid was unsustainable. The economy was in a dire state due to international pressure brought on by international sanctions and the anti-apartheid movement made sure that the plight of black people remained in focus internationally. MK had intensified its operations inside the country, and the labour movement as well as civil society stepped up pressure on the apartheid state. South Africans duly responded to a call from the then ANC president, OR Tambo, to make South Africa ungovernable through civil disobedience.

The history of South African politics in the 1980s would be incomplete without reflecting on the central role that the United Democratic Front (UDF) played in the demise of apartheid. Indeed, the new South Africa cannot be understood without a knowledge of the history of the UDF and its role in transforming South African politics in the 1980s and setting us on the path towards the transition to democracy.[34] Launched in 1983, the UDF was a front of hundreds of affiliates, established in response to the introduction of the new Tricameral Parliament in South Africa, with separate legislatures for coloureds and Indians, while continuing to exclude Africans from participation in government.[35] The overwhelming majority of UDF activists saw themselves as ANC-aligned. By coordinating popular struggles on the ground and promoting the standing of the ANC, the UDF played a central role in the demise of apartheid and paved the way for South Africa's transition to democracy. Led by influential figures such as the Reverend Allan Boesak, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Helen

Joseph, the UDF was able to galvanise the masses against the apartheid regime, and through strategic and tactical decision-making, helped to seal the fate of white domination while avoiding the general bloodbath that always threatened.[36] This happened while its members were at the receiving end of an onslaught from the apartheid government, as well as state-fomented violence at the hands of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). Inkatha was a Zulu nationalist movement formed in 1975 in the KwaZulu bantustan, where it used ethnicity as a vehicle to gain power. It ingratiated itself to the apartheid government through its moderate attitude and its embrace of the bantustan system.

During the apartheid era, South Africa was seen as the most powerful military state in sub-Saharan Africa due to its capacity to mobilise and deploy armed forces as well as the manufacturing of arms. While South Africa's regional policies seemed to have been about protecting white minority rule in Namibia and South Africa, as well as defending Western interests, during the 1980s these policies became increasingly linked to internal problems. One of the turning points in our revolution was the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale that took place intermittently in the town of Cuito Cuanavale, Angola, between 1987 and 1988. The battle was between the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) – with its military allies from Cuba, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Vietnam, the ANC and SWAPO – and the South African Defence Force (SADF) and UNITA. The defence of the revolution was of paramount importance.

> *Led by Soviet generals, the MPLA embarked on a grand offensive in order to knock out the pro-Western rebel movement UNITA in southeastern Angola. As UNITA's survival was crucial to South Africa's military strategy in fighting its own counterinsurgency war against the South West African rebel movement SWAPO, the SADF stepped in with a single mechanized brigade and broke the back of the overwhelming MPLA offensive. The MPLA forces were subsequently driven back over a hundred kilometers, before the SADF advance was finally stopped just short of the town of Cuito Cuanavale.*[37]

This shattered the myth of the invincibility of the South African military machine and had important consequences for social change. Thus, some

credit the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale with ushering in the withdrawal of Cuban and South African troops from Angola and Namibia by 1991.

As a result of these and other factors, our leadership started receiving visits from high-profile politicians, members of the business community and clergy. This included the likes of Helen Suzman of the then Progressive Federal Party (PFP) and Kobie Kotze of the National Party. By then Mandela and other Rivonia trialists were not on the island, having been moved to Pollsmoor in Cape Town in 1982. After these visits, Mandela would send us feedback and solicit our inputs. We would send our views and opinions as different cells and different sections back to B Section.

Internationally, things that had a bearing on us as a movement and a country were also taking place. Socialism was collapsing in the Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union was disintegrating. Mikhail Gorbachev introduced the concept of Perestroika (restructuring). These developments prompted Joe Slovo of the South African Communist Party (SACP) to author a discussion document titled 'Has socialism failed?'[38] It also raised the question of whether the armed struggle should continue and influenced the negotiated settlement that was reached in the aftermath of apartheid. By 1989 most of the Rivonia trialists had been released, with the exception of Mandela, who was only released in 1990. At the end of the following year, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) was established as a platform on which negotiations could take place.

In the midst of this, violence continued unabated inside the country. A major issue during negotiations was talks around the 'cessation of hostilities'. The ANC refused to suspend and abandon the armed struggle as long as the apartheid government did not cease hostilities towards the movement and black people in general. Negotiations were further threatened when the right-wing Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), led by Eugene Terreblanche, marched to Kempton Park to stop the CODESA proceedings. All this, however, failed to derail the process of negotiations.

Our release

I cherish my own freedom dearly, but I care even more for your freedom… I am not less life loving than you are but I cannot sell my birth right, nor am I prepared to sell

> *the birth right of the people to be free… only free men can negotiate. Prisoners cannot enter into contracts… I cannot and I will not give undertaking and the time when you and I, the people, are not free. Your freedom and my freedom cannot be separated. I will return.*[39]

On 11 February 1990, Mandela was finally releases from prison, previously banned political organisations were unbanned and exiles were returning home. While the political climate for negotiations had become conducive, violence continued unabated. Negotiations were further threatened by accusations from the ANC that the apartheid government had been negotiating in bad faith. In addition to this, divisions within the ruling National Party had widened. On the one side was the *verligtes* (enlightened ones) of the likes of Alex Boraine and Dr Van Zyl Slabbert, who had begun engaging with the ANC in Zambia and London in anticipation of negotiations for a new dispensation. In a now famous speech, then minister of foreign affairs, Pik Botha, acknowledged that change was imminent and that South Africa would likely have a black president in the near future. On the other side were the right-wing elements within the SADF and the police, as well as other subversive forces within the National Party that continued to unleash violence against the people of South Africa. While Mandela was talking peace in all ANC rallies, the apartheid regime was unleashing violence.

The state supported by the media preferred to explain the high levels of violence in terms of the black-on-black violence theory.[40] This was, however, rejected by the mass democratic movement (MDM), which blamed the state for fomenting the violence in which thousands of mostly innocent people lost their lives. In order to not derail the negotiation process, then president De Klerk established the Goldstone Commission chaired by Judge Richard Goldstone to investigate allegations of state involvement in political violence. In 1994, Goldstone announced that he had acquired convincing evidence of criminal activity involving high-ranking police officers in Pretoria, the KwaZulu police and Inkatha, in the conflict. This criminal activity included assassinations, train massacres, hostel violence, gun running and subversion of justice.[41]

While negotiations for the release of political prisoners were ongoing when Mandela was released, we felt aggrieved that we as

prisoners were forgotten and not mentioned in the talks. The delays were frustrating and we felt that we would have to do something drastic in order to be released. We stopped playing sports, doing manual work and other daily prison activities. Some of us also decided to embark on an indefinite hunger strike. This was to be the last hunger strike on the island. It was our last weapon to use against the intransigent regime. As a result, some comrades had to be hospitalised due to developing ulcers. We were influenced by the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) Bobby Sands, who led an indefinite hunger strike by Irish republican prisoners in Northern Ireland and died as a result. We were also willing to die if that was what it took to bring attention to our plight. In Cape Town, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and our comrades held night vigils in support of our cause.

A major stumbling block to our release was a document that we had to sign as a precondition for our release. Some of us refused to sign, while others signed. One clause stated that you must turn your back on your crime. Those of us who refused to sign found this problematic as we felt we had never committed a crime by fighting apartheid. Warders released prisoners in small groups and then stopped. That was the reason why we embarked on an indefinite hunger strike. We were the last group and we thought that we had agreed not to sign the form. It turned out that not everyone felt that way and that some secretly signed. A witch hunt ensued to find out who had signed and who had not. Visits from our families were stopped. Only our leadership from the ANC were allowed to visit us and they explained the meaning of the indemnity clauses. We later learnt that Mandela had signed on our behalf. By then we were on a hunger strike. The prison came to a standstill and we were finally released in two groups. On 26 April 1991, we were informed that we would be released the following day, 27 April 1991. The next day, our prison numbers were called out one by one. We were taken to the reception where our fingerprints were taken. From there we boarded a boat to take us from the island to Cape Town Harbour. There was a lot of excitement and singing during the boat ride. With clenched fists, we were singing 'Phesheya komfula sobabamba, nezingane zabo' (across the river we shall face them with their children). That day, 27 April, is now celebrated annually as Freedom Day in South Africa.

Cape Town

The boat trip from Robben Island to Cape Town takes approximately 45 minutes, depending on the weather. On a bad day, if the sea is turbulent, it takes an hour. When we reached the harbour, our families, friends and other comrades were there to welcome us. What surprised us were the resounding welcomes by university students, both black and white, presumably from the Western Cape. We were taken by minibus to Woodstock to a venue called Cowley's House. This was a well-known house built by the SACC and used to accommodate those returning from exile and released from prison. We stayed there for a week, consulting doctors, lawyers and other people. We were also briefed about the situation in South Africa. In addition to this, we were given counselling to help us get acclimatised to the situation. We visited townships in Cape Town, like Langa, Nyanga, Gugulethu and others. There we met comrades that had been released earlier than us who gave us tips on how to deal with life outside the island.

We eventually went to our respective homes in different provinces. Our group of five, consisting of comrades by the names of Gayo, Cococo, Thembinkosi and Bishop, flew to Durban and we were all overwhelmed with excitement when we arrived at Durban airport. From the airport, we were taken to Curries Fountain, where each of us was asked to address a Worker's Day rally. We jumped at the opportunity to be militant and put it on display. We told the workers that the walls of Babylon would collapse on our arrival and that we had come to destroy apartheid. We told the crowd that we were the sons of the workers and peasants. Only an organised working class can collapse the apartheid system. We thanked them for their contributions towards the struggle for liberation. The ululations and slogans from the crowd were a clear sign that they approved of our message. From there, we were taken to our different townships. Bishop and Thembinkosi went to Newcastle. Apparently, they were later killed by IFP vigilantes in northern Natal. Gayo, Cococo and I went to Chesterville township. It was like a dream arriving home after so many years.

Homecoming and new challenges

When we arrived back home, the tempo of our revolution was at its highest peak. The rent boycott in the townships was gaining

ascendancy. The Joint Rent Action Committee (JORAC) was formed to coordinate protests against a rent increase in Chesterville and Lamontville townships. In Lamontville, the term *asinamali* (we have no money) became a popular saying after comrade Msizi Asinamali Dube,[42] who had led the rent boycott, was killed. Affectionately known as 'The Sheriff' for his immaculately trimmed moustache, and 'the hero of Lamontville', Dube had earned the wrath of apartheid local police and authorities. He survived numerous assassination attempts until he was finally assassinated in 1983.[43] In 2016, then president Jacob Zuma awarded Msizi the Order of Luthuli – Silver (posthumously), which is awarded to South Africans who have served the interests of South Africa by making an excellent contribution in any of the following areas: the struggle for democracy, human rights, nation-building, justice, peace and conflict resolution.[44]

Each time an underground activist was killed, the masses would respond by destroying state property such as municipal offices and attacking councillors. Vigilantism targeting township residents from hostels was the order of the day. These hostels were used as springboards to attack people and burn houses. The hostel dwellers were mainly people from the rural areas used by the SADF against township residents, particularly ANC activists and other activists. Some vigilante groups were created to kill mainly ANC activists, especially around Durban and other cities. In Chesterville, a so-called 'A team' was armed and escorted by the SADF and the then South African Police (SAP) with the specific purpose of killing ANC activists. In other townships, similar vigilante groups existed to quell the revolutionary spirit of people. Two vigilante groups in Kwa-Mashu were called Amasinyora and Twenty-One Hlweza.

Some of the challenges that we had prior to our release included appearing before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The problem that I personally had with the Commission's structure was that it did not fulfil its functions by getting both the victims and perpetrators together to reconcile. Victims mostly appeared before the TRC. Also, during the struggle, our Baptist Church was undergoing major change. It became increasingly clear that the church should move away from being the old, conservative, reactionary organisation it was towards being a vehicle for change in South Africa. This led to a split into the Baptist Union and the Baptist Convention, with the former being those that were resistant to change, and the latter having a more progressive

outlook. The Baptist Convention was vocal in its support for our release from prison.[45]

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, we belonged to the Baptist faith, specifically the Bantu Baptist Church, and perhaps it is worthwhile to say more here. Like many other denominations, the Baptist Church was complicit in the maintenance of racial segregation and white hegemony. When the Nationalist government introduced formal apartheid in 1948, Baptist structures already reflected the political status quo in that white Baptist churches were affiliated with the Baptist Union of South Africa (BUSA), while black Baptist churches were affiliated with the Baptist Convention of South Africa (BCSA). On the coloured side you had the Baptist Alliance, while Indian churches were affiliated with the Baptist Mission and Baptist Association. While these different bodies had protested some of the grosser abuses of apartheid, they made little practical difference to Baptist life, and there was very little contact across the colour bar in Baptist churches.[46]

Since the formation of these organisations, the BUSA was considered the 'mother body' and, as a result, made decisions for the BCSA, often with little or no consultation.[47] During the mid-1980s, however, black Baptist churches in particular were keen to establish their own identity in relation to apartheid, liberation and reconciliation, and attempted to develop an alternative biblical response against apartheid in order to make a real difference to the future of South African citizens.[48] This led to tensions between BUSA and BCSA and, when efforts to resolve these failed, the latter took an independent stand and ended its affiliation to the Union.[49]

People's war and the Freedom Charter

My belief is that war is 80% political and 20% military. While we had excitement about coming home, we knew that the war was not over and that a lot was at stake in our new South Africa. Our people's war had reached a climax, where the regime had no control over it. Our immediate task was to politicise the people while defending the masses against the onslaught by the regime. We also had to ensure that people understood the fundamentals of our revolution, which was guided by the Freedom Charter.[50] People had to know why we were fighting and what we were fighting for. Adopted at the Congress of the People at Kliptown, Johannesburg, on 25 and 26 June 1955, its opening demand –

The people shall govern! – captured the spirit in which the people were to be embedded during the negotiations for democracy.

Besides the Freedom Charter, political material and literature formed the cornerstone around which mobilisation for the people's war was to proceed. MK cadres, because of their ideological and political conscientisation and training, were regarded as political commissars and had to complement the work done by our movement inside the country. This process had significant challenges. The apartheid regime had created a sophisticated network of spies within democratic structures, including the ANC structure. This, coupled with the 'dirty tricks' strategy (a term used in reference to the extra-legal and illegal methods the apartheid state used to counter resistance against apartheid), resulted in a significant number of casualties, including executions. By this time negotiations were at a peak. A climax was reached on 10 April 1993 when MK chief of staff, comrade Chris Hani, was assassinated by a Polish far-right anti-communist immigrant named Janusz Waluś. The country was in turmoil and would never be the same again. The assassination of a leader of Hani's stature and the racially fuelled riots that ensued, led to concerns that a racial civil war was almost inevitable. This was, however, averted thanks in large part to the mature collective leadership of the ANC alliance under Mandela. To deal with the rampant violence, MK cadres were sent to various countries for retraining. For instance, I was one of the 500 specialised commanders sent to Zimbabwe to be trained by the Zimbabwe National Army in British military tactics. On our arrival back home, negotiations had progressed to the extent that a date for elections was set, 27 April 1994, and the armed struggle was suspended. Although we were ready for a full-scale war, we did not fight as we took heed from our political leadership. I have to state, however, that a thorny issue for us as MK was the suspension of the armed struggle. Despite an election date having been set, our people continued to be butchered and massacred all over the country.

CHAPTER 7

Building bridges

When I was released, I had made significant progress towards completing my degree through the University of South Africa (UNISA). I thought that I would just continue where I had left off, but was told that I would have to start all over again and lost interest. From 1991 to 1993, the ANC and the SACC paid for some of us to do a diploma course in Community Development at the University of Natal (now University of KwaZulu-Natal, or UKZN). There I met comrade Sbu Ndebele who at the time was employed by the university. It was like a reunion of former political prisoners as Sbu had been my cell mate on Robben Island where he had served a ten-year sentence. In 1994, after the ANC won the first democratically held elections, Sbu became minister of transport in KZN and invited us to work with him in the department. We had to transform the department from being white and male dominated into a real department that served the interests of all sectors of society. Given that much of the work was rural-based and necessitated our engagement with the Amakhosi (local chiefs) on road safety issues, we were able to put the theory we learnt from university into practice. Other comrades decided to further their education at other local universities. The ANC Civil Service Department also sent me to Britain for six months to study civil service. I was excited by this course and the knowledge and skills it would give me. When I came back, I shared the concept of community policing and the lesson we could learn from how it was applied in Europe. The ANC subsequently decided to introduce it in South Africa.

In 1994, I was employed as a manager at Community Organisation Research and Development Consulting (CORD) at the University of Natal. CORD had a strong rural development focus and this experience

strengthened my knowledge, skills and expertise in developmental issues in these contexts. CORD in partnership with the Department of Transport had produced a Community Access Roads Needs Study (CARNS) document as a basis for building roads in rural areas. This became a blueprint for rural transformation in relation to transport in the country as a whole. The guiding principles of the department were 'prosperity through mobility' and 'roads bring the wealth'. The construction of roads therefore became a top priority in KZN. Naturally, building roads also meant building bridges, which was part of our job.

From technical bridges to human bridges

As the Department of Transport was building technical bridges and roads infrastructure, we had to build human bridges. Violence between the ANC and the IFP was on the upsurge. Our biggest challenge was how to work on development in unfavourable conditions. Led by the likes of Prof. Paulus Zulu, Amos Ndebele, Peter Derman and others, CORD staff had to devise a strategy to end violence, and show we could help revive our province to compete with other provinces at a socio-economic level. The violence also made it impossible to implement the CARNS document. We also designed training programmes for Department of Transport structures and entities such as the Rural Road Transport Forum (RRTF), Community Road Safety Councils (CRSCs), the Emerging Contractor Programme, the Vukuzakhe (arise and build) programme and Zimbabele (do it for yourself). We invited all the warring factions to attend our first development workshop, which took place at Melmoth at Kwa Nzimela church complex. In the beginning it was not easy as people held grudges against each other, some refusing to sit next to those that had allegedly killed their relatives. Although it was a challenge, we gradually made them understand that violence does not benefit anyone and that crime does not pay. The most problematic group consisted of representatives from a taxi sector, who came to a meeting with firearms.

The workshop was a week long and the duration gave everyone time to settle in and build trust and rapport. We were able to convince everyone to buy into the importance of what we called 'building bridges'. This part of the workshop was led by Amos Ndebele, an ex-teacher who was an expert on the subject. Singing between different

sessions was a major part of the workshop. It assisted in maintaining people's interest. The 'building bridges' session was preceded by what was called 'rules of the same', which was led by Prof. Zulu. Not only was he an academic, he was also an elder, which counted significantly towards participants being receptive to what he had to say. One thing about Zulu culture is that elders are always respected. The Zulu saying 'umlomo ongathethi manga' means 'a mouth that does not tell lies'. These workshops were attended by amakhosi (chiefs), headmen (izinduna), farmers, teachers, women, youth and other sectors of the community. We had resounding success as we invited all regions within KZN, especially those areas that were troubled by violence. As this was a departmental initiative led by CORD, we continued with other regional workshops throughout the province. They were well attended and we paid stipends to those people elected to various committees that would work towards reducing and eventually ending the violence. When the violence diminished, we could implement CARNS and began building access roads next to amakhosi areas. Although the budget was relatively small (R3 million for the whole province), we continued building roads, empowering the local communities and establishing contractors.

I worked for CORD from 1994 to 2007 when it was closed down. No reason was given why this happened, but we suspected it had to do with politics in one form or another. We discussed this as CORD staff and decided to approach politicians and senior administrators in our province to try to save CORD. We were not successful but we had hoped that the organisation would reopen. While we were waiting for that, we had to look for employment somewhere. This was easier said than done, and by 2012, we were still unemployed as cadres of the movement and as freedom fighters. We adopted a spirit of aluta continua (the struggle continues). We became involved in community development initiatives and civic structures that were revived in townships. In Chesterville, for example, we had the Chesterville Residence Association (CRA) and street committees that were responsible for all the township issues such as rent, water, electricity and housing. The township was divided into five areas, each with an area committee. The street committees reported directly to area committees. These structures had chairpersons and were organised along the M-Plan (Mandela Plan), which was formulated by the ANC underground before the end of apartheid.

Post-CORD

I voted for the first time on 27 April 1994, exactly three years from the day of my release from Robben Island. I felt out of this world. The only blemish on our moods was the fact that the IFP won the provincial elections in KZN. The only consolation was that they did not win by an outright majority, so they were the dominant party in a coalition. As a result, the ANC had three representatives as Members of the Provincial Executive Council (MECs). These were comrade Dumisani Makhaye, Dr Zweli Mkhize and comrade Sibusiso Ndebele. As the province was ruled by the IFP, these comrades were a beacon of light that one day the ANC would claim back our province. We knew that this province belonged to the ANC. The province is now ruled by the ANC and one of the MECs of 1994, Mkhize, eventually became our premier, before moving to the national government. It is ironic that we fought hard to wrest the province from the IFP only to find ourselves being unemployed when the ANC ran it. We approached many comrades to make them aware of our plight, but this fell on deaf ears. We hoped that one day MK would be recognised and given proper status, as we were important during the liberation struggle. We did not think that we would be sidelined or assigned to the periphery of the socio-economic life in mainstream South Africa, especially in KZN. It pained us that if we looked back, we did not believe that our efforts in the struggle were in vain. We were committed to continue fighting and influence developments in our province until we were back to our historical position as MK. If we look at our other freedom fighters in Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Angola, we feel ashamed at the position of MK in the new South Africa. Cadres in these neighbouring countries feel a sense of recognition for their participation in the struggle. We have buried a lot of MK fighters who died poor, hungry and sick. Poverty and diseases are the capitalistic twins. We hope that one day sanity will prevail; our pride and dignity will be restored as freedom fighters.

The Robben Island Singers

Up to now, I have made mention of music, song and dance, both in the military camps in exile, and also when I was sent to Robben Island. Music was a major part of my life and I had been an avid guitar player even before I arrived on the island. However, its significance would increase

multifold when I was imprisoned, and not only for me, but for all of us. Music gave us hope, it lifted our spirits, boosted our morale, soothed our souls, and sustained our commitment towards what we were fighting for, whether we were imprisoned or not. It allowed us as black people, as a country, not to be broken, despite the vicious onslaught against us by the apartheid state. For this reason, I would be remiss if I didn't make special mention of it in this book.

While imprisoned on Robben Island, I met two fellow fighters, Thembinkosi Sithole and Grant Shezi from KwaMashu, with whom I clicked because of our shared love for music, song and dance. Thembinkosi and I connected when he allowed me to play his guitar. Grant was a singer and often led toyi-toying. We maintained contact after our release. The three of us, along with two other former island inmates, formed a musical group and called ourselves The Robben Island Singers. We even released a CD in 2000 titled *Prison Songs, Cell Stories*. We could not have imagined that our shared love for music and the CD would impact on our lives long after we had been released and our goal of liberating our country had been achieved. It would also take us to the so-called land of the free, America.

In 1996, after the first democratically held elections and Nelson Mandela becoming the first president of democratic South Africa, Robben Island was declared a national monument in terms of the National Monuments Act of South Africa. Its heritage stature was globally entrenched by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and it is now recognised by the UN body as a World Heritage Site. This unsurprisingly meant that the island would become a must-see on the list of tourists, especially those from abroad. And so it happened that American Jeff Spitz visited the island as a tourist in 2001. Spitz is an Emmy Award winning documentary film maker. He and his wife are the founders of Groundswell Educational Films. After the island being granted the status of a monument and heritage site, it became standard for the site authorities to employ former inmates as tour guides, given their intimate knowledge of and personal connection to it. Spitz's tour was led by a former inmate and he was struck by the guide's narrative of 'prison inmates reshaping a place of banishment into their own university of struggle, teaching each other and their jailers about a better future for their country'.[51]

We had donated our CD to the Robben Island Museum for posterity and, as luck would have it, Spitz had bought a copy from the museum's

souvenir shop during his visit. Back at home in Chicago, Spitz listened to the CD. The music intrigued him and he was keen to learn more about the stories behind the voices. By then, Thembinkosi, Grant and I were the only remaining members, as the other two had passed on. Spitz approached a museum in Chicago to see if they would be interested in bringing the three of us over to share our stories and music and help inspire high school students, particularly those in some of Chicago's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The museum agreed.

Spitz also decided to do a feature-length documentary film about The Robben Island Singers, and teamed up with freelance South African film maker Mickey Madoda Dube. They told us, 'We've heard Mandela's story, let us hear yours.' The three of us agreed to take part in the project. It combines the Singers' uplifting music with our stories of South Africa's most notorious apartheid-era prison. We also travelled to Chicago where we visited schools and churches to share our stories and music to help inspire high school students. Our visits to these schools and churches were to be covered extensively in the film.

Sadly though, our involvement in this project did not have a happy ending. Spitz and Dube had agreed that we would benefit financially from the project, but this has not materialised. We were not kept up to date on how the production of the film was unfolding, or even when it would be released. The film's website is outdated and still refers to the film being due for release in 2010. The film is not available on the website – only a trailer about its future release. At the time of writing this manuscript, none of us had seen the film. However, a researcher that assisted me in writing this book was able to locate it online and shared with me the YouTube link where I was able to view it. According to information on the site, it was published on YouTube on 1 June 2017. It is likely that it was released long before that, especially if you consider the fact that this project started in 2001. If any royalties have been and are still being received from the film, we have not seen any of it. The researcher informed me that two CDs, one titled *Songs from South Africa's Freedom Struggle* and the other *Stories from South Africa's Freedom Struggle*, are available for purchase on the website. We were not even aware that these existed and have received nothing for them. It seems that Spitz and Dube were only out to exploit us.

It doesn't end there. One of the churches we visited in Chicago was Trinity United Church of Christ, where then senator Barack Obama was a congregant, and the church's pastor Jeremiah Wright his spiritual

advisor. After our visit, the church donated money that was explicitly intended for us. Spitz, however, insisted that it be used for the production of the film. The same happened with money people paid to attend our performances at museums. This is why veterans and their families are reluctant to share their stories, because they end up being exploited. Many of us are unemployed and are struggling. All three of us are in this boat. That being said, it doesn't take anything away from the social value our project had, and is probably still having. It is just a pity that we are not benefiting.

Because of our experiences in Chicago, we came up with the idea of designing a school exchange programme between South Africa and the US. The people who we had engaged with in Chicago supported the idea. Unfortunately, this was not the case at home. We made many enquiries and knocked on doors. We even approached the eThekwini Municipality, only to find out that there was already a sister city programme between Chicago and Durban, which had a budget that had not been used at the time. We then decided to abandon this venture that we had thought would help our schooling situation. We were so disappointed to lose such an opportunity that would have contributed to transformation. We as MK are worried about crime in schools and in South Africa as a whole. We feel that we can help, but we are not afforded an opportunity to use and apply our skills. We have tried on numerous occasions to approach our functionaries, but the doors are always closed. Maybe in the next dispensation within our democracy things will turn out differently. In the meantime, we sit at home with all the skills, know-how and expertise to take our democracy to greater heights. Our national democratic revolution will take another century to succeed if the architects of the revolution are being ignored, undermined, sidelined or forgotten. In spite of all the above-mentioned challenges, we do not fold our arms our sit and do nothing. We try to do everything that we possibly can to assist.

The ANC flag and Lerumo La Sechaba

The ANC flag, which was adopted during the party congress in 1925, is composed of three horizontal stripes of equal width – black, green and gold. Black represents the majority of the population. Green represents the country's vegetation and fertility of the land, while gold represents the mineral wealth of our country. In the centre of the flag is a logo

consisting of a spear and shield to represent the early wars of resistance against colonial rule, the armed struggle of MK, and the ANC's ongoing struggle against racial privilege and oppression. The wheel dates back to the campaign for the Congress of the People, which adopted the Freedom Charter, and marks the joining in a common struggle by people from all South Africa's communities. The fist holding the spear represents the power of a people united in struggle for freedom and equality.[52] The flag is omnipresent at all ANC events.

Around 2007/2008 at MK's Eastern Cape conference held at Walter Sisulu University in Mthatha, it was resolved that a cultural ensemble had to be formed along the lines of the Amandla group to popularise our struggle. Thus, former MK members formed a musical group called Lerumo La Sechaba to maintain the legacy of MK's operations and its commitment towards fighting against the injustice and oppression of black people during apartheid. This was when we were campaigning for comrade Jacob Zuma to become the president of the ANC. The formation of this group reignited the spirit of Mayibuye I Africa (Let Africa come back). It sings revolutionary songs and chants that were sung at meetings, mass rallies, fund raisers, demonstrations and in exile military camps. I was one of the founding members along with Dion Mkhize, Linda 'Max' Mbutho, Sabatha 'Shotie' Cebekhulu, Sipho 'Leh' Ncayiyana, Msizi 'Bridge' Ngcobo, Romeo 'Romario' Magubane, Siyabonga Ngcobo, Tiger 'Papa' Wanda (the nephew of Scara Wanda) and Sfiso 'Mrhabulo' Khuzwayo. We used to rehearse at an old municipal building in Durban known as Stable Theatre. We initially volunteered to sing at all ANC and MK rallies, but our performance at these events has now become customary.

We also produced a CD entitled *Tribute to Oliver Tambo*. This CD is very popular and contains Afro pop music as well as toyi-toyi songs. The group was fortunate to have a kombi donated to it by the eThekwini chairperson of the ANC, the late John Mchunu. The group does not get much financial support and some of its ten members are unemployed. Each time when there is a call by the ANC, the group is available. Dressed in MK military fatigues, the group not only performs on stage at ANC events, but group members sometimes also play the role of flag bearers. On 27 April 2012 at Kwa Dukuza, we did a marching drill at a freedom parade and later rendered musical items and danced on stage to the amusement of the crowd in the stadium. In addition to this, we also perform at ANC and MK funerals. With its popularity growing, we are

planning to release a second 'Centenary CD' in the near future. Sadly, we have lost members along the way. Comrade Sipho passed on in April 2012 and comrade Romeo later that same year.

Since 1994 the ANC has increased access to health and education, social security, water, housing and electricity.[53] Yet some comrades die poor and without telling their stories. Some returned from exile and died very angry. Others never returned from exile. I am one of the fortunate few who lived to tell his story. We owe this effort to our former president, comrade JZ (Zuma), who implored us to write about our struggle when he spoke at MK funerals. We have a lot of unsung heroes and heroines within the MK. It is not easy to write history about yourself because you did not record all the things that happened in your life. Some dates in this book might be inaccurate. For this reason, I am requesting you, the reader, to put yourself in my shoes. 'If you were me, what would you have done?'

Unkept promises

In South Africa it is rightly assumed that women, children and the aged are vulnerable groups in our society. However, it is also important to acknowledge the political vulnerability of those who fought in the struggle to liberate the millions, but who sadly are now forgotten. I am obviously referring to military veterans, those who sacrificed living a normal life and enjoying the things that normal people do. When liberation is achieved, you are not able to enjoy what you fought for. You end up unemployed and cannot even afford a house. Even people that were against the struggle are now in leadership positions. They benefit because of us, but we have to take a back seat and get marginalised.

We belong to what is known as the uMkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association (MKMVA). That we went from being revolutionaries to a mere association is further testament to our marginalisation. In fact, we were relegated to be less than the Veterans League, the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) and the ANCYL. These entities at least have a voice in the ANC and can influence decisions. Since we became an association, we have behaved like an association. I don't know of any other revolutionary army that just became an association. This was done without our consultation. Hence, we insist on 'nothing for us without us'. We do not even benefit from monies received on our behalf. One writer has this to say on the issue: 'During 1998, as competition for the

lucrative arms contracts intensified British Aerospace, now known as BAE Systems, made a generous donation of R5 million to the MKMVA, whose life president was Joe Modise. One of the bidders allegedly bought Modise millions of shares in defense company Conlog which was likely to benefit from sub-contracts if successful in its bid. It was, and Modise became chair of Conlog weeks after leaving office.'[54]

In 2008 at an election rally in Kwa Mashu, a comrade who at the time was the KZN Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for housing promised a donation of R194 million to be used to build houses for military veterans. To date, we have not received those houses. That MEC moved to another department and the new housing MEC refused to honour his promise. We tried as MKMVA to engage her office numerous times by sending a delegation to discuss the issue, but those meetings did not yield any fruit. We felt that in future when things are to be done for us, we should have a say. Many promises have been made to us, but they remain unfulfilled. Even in township branch meetings of the ANC, we are not allowed to participate fully. Most MK cadres are political commissars and want to help ANC branches and wards to develop politically, but we are met with opposition. We end up joining branches or functioning as individuals instead of being an MK structure.

The politics of the stomach

> *We must free ourselves of the friends who populate our ranks, originating from the world of the rich, who come to us, perhaps dressed in jeans and T-Shirts, as advisors and consultants, while we end up as the voice that gives popular legitimacy to decisions, we neither made, nor intended to make, which our friends made for us, taking advantage of an admission that perhaps we are not sufficiently educated.*[55]

We are prevented from participating in branches of the ANC because of stomach politics. An angry stomach knows no law and is easily manipulated, especially in politics. The ANC branches have been infiltrated by tenderpreneurs and opportunists who are only interested in making money within the ANC structures. Each time we raise political issues, we are accused of being old-fashioned comrades. Even members of the ANCYL have openly and unapologetically become

tenderpreneurs. They win big contracts, drive posh cars and live expensive lives. This has a negative impact on the youth that they are supposed to lead. MKMVA members are seen as poor, unemployed, backward politicians. In addition to this, fraud and corruption have also become the order of the day. People get into positions so that they can enrich themselves. This creates a lot of confusion within young people who do not know the ANC or who don't understand ANC values and politics. It is not surprising that the ANCYL people want expelled and suspended individuals back in the youth league.

Slate politics is the latest disease plaguing the ANC. It has intensified factionalism, which is very dangerous in any liberation movement. It manifests in cliques or cabals that want to run the organisation and only agree with decisions if they favour them and their interests. This phenomenon manifested itself in the UDF, and now in the ANC, even at branch level. I hope that one day branches will come to their senses and lead the ANC correctly. One of the factors that contributed to this scenario was a pre-Polokwane situation. When comrade JZ was embroiled in court cases, many people came out in support of him. These people have now infiltrated the movement and are hell-bent on running it in a way that serves their interests and nothing else. They carry a lot of financial muscle to exert their influence within the ANC. Some of these people came from nowhere, but now they have trusted senior positions in the ANC and its alliance partners, the SACP, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO).

The same happened in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). Some MK cadres who survived the war were given top positions of leadership and control in the army. When hungry MK cadres are given top positions, they turn against their own comrades. This is why you have veterans who are very rich, while those who fought side by side with them in the trenches, and in some cases shared a cell with them, are very poor. It is unthinkable that in the 18th year of our democracy some freedom fighters are still unemployed. Government departments can afford to employ all MK cadres in various positions and at different levels, ranging from security personnel and clerks to managers and directors. This is never done because people that are in positions to do so, do not have the political will to employ soldiers. Even veterans who are now tenderpreneurs can afford to employ all the MK cadres, but the willingness is never there.

My own view is that any former MK commander or commissar in a senior government position or on a tender evaluation committee who ignores the misery of other soldiers does so because of power-drunkenness. They make sure that they hold all positions available within the movement and believe that they are irreplaceable. They believe that when they are not there, nothing will move. They are position mongers, selfish, unpoliticised and short-sighted. Their offshoots get involved in daily scandals that are embarrassing the movement. They dent our hard-won revolution and play into the hands of our adversaries. They prefer to advance the interests of their cronies, relatives, friends and girlfriends at the expense of the combatants. They have been co-opted into neoliberal capitalism and are driven by conspicuous consumption. The politics of the stomach has replaced revolutionary ethics. They are always uneasy, not trusting anyone because they are not sure how long this will last. History will not forgive those who sold out on the revolution. It might not be now, but it will happen eventually. As Martin Luther King Jr said: 'In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends.'[56]

To make further sense of what is happening to our public officials, particularly those for whom the politics of the stomach is the only thing that matters, it is useful to invoke the views of French Marxist Guy Debord around what is known as official culture, which refers to culture that receives social legitimating or institutional support in a given society.[57] Because official culture is usually synonymous with bourgeoisie culture,[58] Debord argues it is a rigged game where conservative powers forbid subversive ideas to have direct access to the public discourse, and where such ideas are integrated only after being trivialised and sterilised.[59] This is what is happening to our public officials. Our own comrades have forgotten who they are and where they come from. They behave as though they are no longer cadres of the movement. They don't listen to the guidance of revolutionaries. They forget that they are deployed by the movement and have no sense of responsibility or accountability.

The SANDF and SAPS

The apartheid-era SADF was an instrument of repression, particularly against those that resisted racial oppression, and against black people in general. It not only had significant influence within the state's security

structures, but also carried much authority within political decision-making circles at the time.[60] Since 1994, however, the South African military has been one of the most successful state sectors to deal with transformation. Notwithstanding this success, the SANDF performance, especially insofar as it relates to military veterans, has not been all that commendable. The spending of state funding meant to benefit ex-combatants has been sporadic, difficult to access and politically selective.[61] In addition, some of these monies have been found to have been misused or misappropriated.[62] Other challenges include the fact that although military veterans came from ideologically, racially and experientially different backgrounds, the process of reintegrating them into the SANDF was designed by people who had limited knowledge of the racial dynamics and contentions of power among the military veterans.[63] These and other concerns led to actions by military veterans that some would describe as bordering on mutiny.

If the SANDF has not been perfect, then the SAPS has been worse. Who can forget the massacre of 44 miners at Marikana that led to the police being described as 'not fit for purpose'?[64] This is undoubtedly South Africa's biggest post-apartheid policing disaster. I doubt that the police would be able to prevent a similar tragedy. If the police are taking steps to prevent a recurrence, they are not discernible to outsiders. What is apparent is the lack of urgency with which they seem to be treating the need to restore public faith in themselves.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The TRC was set up to right past wrongs, yet I am not sure whether it fulfilled its mandate. We all know that mostly victims appeared at the Commission to share their stories. This was painful, but even more painful was the fact that most perpetrators did not come forward. Many did not confess, did not show remorse and were not brought to book. Reconciliation in the context of the TRC was supposed to be relational, involving wrongdoers and victims. It stands to reason therefore that reconciliation is impossible if only the victims show up. Most known culprits never showed up. Does this mean that they do not want forgiveness? Have they gone underground to continue with their clandestine activities?

In the statute books, apartheid laws were repealed and we had democratic elections in 1994, which the ANC won. But in reality,

apartheid still exists, more so in rural areas and on farms and mines. It was not an accident of history that we hosted a world conference on racism, which is still a big problem in South Africa. Only a fool would believe that just because we have a black government and there are no apartheid laws, racism does not exist. Yet there are people who behave as if everything is normal. A group that falls into this category is the black elite, purely because they benefit from current societal arrangements that exclude and marginalise the majority. Moeletsi Mbeki explains this situation in his book *Architects of Poverty*.[65] This is in line with what Karl Marx said in the 1848 Communist Manifesto when he explained, 'The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.'[66] Our present political system allows this to happen. This is why the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The manifesto continues to say the bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption. In my view, forgiveness goes hand in glove with the protection of capitalist interests. When the culprits apologise, there should be redress for apartheid injustices. Yet this is not the case. What we rather hear is that we must forgive and forget. Those that benefited and are still benefiting from apartheid don't want us to ask about their past. They behave as if there was no past; they emphasise only the present.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chairperson of the TRC, introduced the new South Africa to the world as the 'rainbow nation' to signify unity among diverse groups of people. Those who benefited from apartheid eagerly embraced this rainbowism because it seemingly absolved them of culpability, whether through action or inaction, for sustaining apartheid, and by extension the misery of black people, for so long. Yet how can we be a rainbow nation in the sense that it is implied? Freedom does not end with granting a historically oppressed group the right to vote and then continuing as if nothing happened. Freedom also extends to making sure that members of that oppressed group are compensated for the violation of their rights and that they can thrive economically in the post-oppression phase by removing structural barriers to their economic participation. In other words, political freedom should be accompanied by economic freedom. Being part of a global world should not be the excuse for poverty and hunger, one of the bedrocks of neoliberal realism. This is just a continuation of 'colonialism of a special type',[67] which results in ours being the most unequal country

in the world. Of course, in South Africa, class is a proxy for race, which means the overwhelming majority of those that are poor are black, and the overwhelming majority of those that are rich are white.

CHAPTER 8

The present

Family

I married a lady by the name of Gladys Babazile Sithole Mngomezulu. She comes from a place outside Durban, a village called Inanda next to the Dube village mall. I have four children. My children's names are Chris, Zama, Busisiwe and Zinhle. Chris and Busisiwe were born from my first marriage, which ended in divorce. Busisiwe is studying journalism at the University of the Western Cape. I have survived up to now in spite of all the hardships that I have gone through. I was always telling myself 'never on my knees', which sustained me a lot. My home is kept warm and safe by two of my siblings.

Politics

Presently, I am still engaging in Umrabulo by giving political classes wherever I go. It is important to link politics, the economy and religion. I am also a pastor/follower of the Fivefold Ministry. It is based on the five ministry roles of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher found in the Bible, and is believed to be the biblical blueprint we are given to equip people and grow the Kingdom.[68] In addition to this, I am accredited by the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP-SETA) as an assessor and moderator, and also accredited in the Wholesale and Retail SETA (W&RSETA). I am currently doing a postgraduate diploma in Security Studies.

You never look at the situation you are in, but you look at where you are going to. The future is more important than the present. Whenever

I have challenges, I always remember a gospel song that says: 'He (God) has kept us until now' (Zulu translation: *Usigcine kwaze kwaba la*). Being unemployed makes you humble because you are reminded of when you had nothing. I was back to the 1991 situation when I was released from prison and confronted with looking for work and acclimatising to life outside of prison. You have to do with what you have in order to survive. 'History repeats itself' is a daily saying when people are in difficulties; I also believed that.

I like the SACP slogan 'The future is socialism'. When the story is told it has to be concluded. Many MK combatants have not yet told their stories because they don't have the confidence to. They feel that they are not articulate or eloquent enough to tell their stories even though they might believe that it is worth telling. Many do not have the resources to assist them in getting their stories out. I believe that every war or every revolution has to be recorded for future generations. Every war has its casualties. The truth has to be told whether it is sweet or bitter. Silence is not an option. Suppression, which needs to be made public, only makes dealing with the past more challenging. At times the truth hides until the war is over. Not everything is told because it might implicate other people that are still alive. You hide the truth to protect some people. This is a daily occurrence, especially with veterans.

I believe that my story is worth telling and has to be told. I hope it is remembered long after I have left the earth. The main challenge is that before you tell any story you must first read, otherwise your story will be told by others for you. Hence, we encourage reading. It is said that Africans don't read, so if you want to hide anything from an African, write it down. If this is true, then it needs to change and I wish to contribute to this change. After all these years of toiling and exhaustion, I refused to play a blame game. Some people blame the government, their families, the circumstances, and so on. I was always determined to do something about my situation. That is why I started to write about my life and I will continue even after this book of my life has been published. My next book projects are the following:

- Kusemhlabeni la (In This World) (Poetry book)
- Evil Thoughts and Thoughts of Evil (Religion)
- Umkhumbane and Chesterville Coexistence
- The ABC of Politics (Marxism Made Easy)

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Victim Offender Dialogue

Towards the end of October 2012, I was appointed as a director of community outreach in the office of the KZN Minister of Correctional Services, Sibusiso Ndebele. One of my responsibilities was to work on issues related to Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD). I first met Minister Ndebele on Robben Island where he was serving a ten-year sentence with his co-accused, Kgalema Motlanthe.[69] Comrade Sbu was a librarian on Robben Island and encouraged us to read, which was something we were not used to. It is thanks to his encouragement that I ended up writing. We met again at the then University of Natal and again when he became the minister of transport in KZN in 1994. Comrade Sbu is a remarkably conceptual person, a thinker. He developed poverty alleviation initiatives like the Transport Forum, Road Safety Councils, Arise and Build (Vukuzakhe) and Zibambele (Do it for yourself).

As national minister of correctional services, he introduced the notion of VOD, which represented a new vision to bring together offenders and their victims to sit and talk about the crime that was committed. VOD considers crime and wrongdoing to be an offence against an individual or community, rather than the state. VOD is a restorative justice approach to offending and inappropriate behaviour, which puts repairing harm done to relationships and people over and above the need for assigning blame and dispensing punishment.[70] It fosters dialogue between victim and offender and shows the highest rates of victim satisfaction and offender accountability.[71] VOD centres the victims of crime, balancing their rights with those of offenders, and minimising their secondary victimisation in the various stages of the criminal justice system.[72] The victim has the opportunity to pose questions to the offender, such as why the offence was committed in the first place. The victim is also able to confront the trauma of their victimisation and experience a sense of empowerment by having a voice and direct participation in the process. The offender, on the other hand, hears first-hand the depth of trauma experienced by the victim and faces the full impact of their crime. As dialogue ensues, they might come to a conclusion and close the chapter in relation to the offence. The offender expresses genuine remorse and a commitment not to repeat the offence. The ultimate aim is the restoration of the relationship between

victim and offender and the dignity of both parties. However, it needs to be stressed that there must be absolutely no expectation of, or pressure toward, anything like forgiveness or reconciliation – unless the victim/survivor explicitly wishes for that outcome, without ambivalence.

The VOD initiated by Minister Ndebele had significant successes and, in addition to the victim and the offender, also included other stakeholders such as the community, social workers, prison chaplains, psychologists and traditional leaders in the case of rural areas. This approach will be institutionalised in all correctional centres in the country. Linked to VOD is the Ex-Offenders-Victims Program. After offenders have been rehabilitated, skilled and educated in a correctional centre, challenges are almost inevitable when they are released. These include stigmatisation, reintegration and the risk of recidivism. The aims of this programme are to accommodate a request from a crime victim to meet with an offender who has committed a crime against them, as well as to develop a process for victims of serious and violent crime who want to initiate a facilitated dialogue with their incarcerated offender. It is ultimately hoped that this will facilitate the social acceptance and effective reintegration of offenders into society.[73]

Minister Ndebele also launched the Reading for Redemption Programme (RFR) in September 2012. As part of this programme, Integrated Resource Centres (IRCs) were established at various correctional centres in order to foster a culture of learning, reading and knowledge sharing for both offenders and officials. The IRCs will serve as a knowledge hub to promote human capital investment, and support the department's development and rehabilitation strategic objectives through improving the prospects of offenders by acquiring skills that could make them competitive in the job market after serving their sentences.[74]

'We need to pick up the pieces'

I was interviewed by the newspaper *The New African* on 25 June 1992.

> *After the destabilisation caused by the state of emergency and violence, Muntu Nxumalo, a former Robben Islander, believes the key towards attaining meaningful freedom lies in people equipping themselves with political education.*
>
> Fraser, Mtshali

What happens after toyi-toying and apartheid is finally buried, is a question that should be paramount in the minds of the youth, believes Muntu Nxumalo who spent 13 years on South Africa's Alcatraz, Robben Island. The singing of freedom songs and the waving of placards at a rally or a demonstration should not be regarded as the ultimate in political activity. In the fight for freedom, you can't toyi-toyi forever. You have got to stop at one point and engage in another level of political activity. That's when political activity plays a crucial role, said Nxumalo. A Chesterville resident and an ANC activist, Nxumalo believes the youth must acquire political education in order to be able to wage the liberation struggle on another plateau.

Thirty-three-year-old Nxumalo was sentenced to 22 years and sent to Robben Island after being convicted of undergoing military training and of being in possession of arms and ammunition, among other charges. He notes that: 'To most of our youth, political activity means toyi-toyi-ing and carrying of flags. When meetings end, they go home in their thousands to sit and wait, looking forward to another gathering where they would again indulge in the physical spectacle.' He credits the period he spent on the Island as having provided the opportunity to educate himself politically, maturing him into a man who is able to use that education to understand the present in order to plan for the future. 'On the island we mingled with intellectuals and the academics to get Umrabulo (a Robben Island term for political education). We designed our own lessons with the help of those doing distant learning through institutions such as UNISA. It was the hope of all of us on Robben Island that when we come out of prison we will do so with our AK-47s high in the air, singing victory songs and hoist a new flag of a free South Africa. But what did we find – a society ripped apart by violence, weak ANC structures and a cold reality that we are still far from our goal of freedom.'

Nxumalo believes black communities and organisations are still reeling from the effects of the state of emergency

which destabilised the leadership and frustrated all attempts to galvanise the people into toppling the regime. 'We need to pick up the pieces and move on. And moving on means you have to possess the wherewithal to do so. To me that means to be equipped with sound political education. People should know that political struggles are conducted in phases.

'When the ANC suspended the armed struggle, we had reached a phase in our struggle that made it necessary for us to suspend it. Without political education to help you to interpret developments as they affect us it is not possible to understand decisions and their implementation by the organisation.' Perestroika, the watershed political development in the Soviet Union affairs in 1989, did not only have effects on the international front but impacted on events in Southern Africa as well. 'After it, things did not remain the same all over the world,' said Nxumalo. Dynamics of struggles have changed everywhere. Global priorities were overhauled as the cold war between the Soviet Union and the United States thawed in the wake of disarmament talks. 'As those international developments did not occur in a vacuum, we, in this region, were also affected by the change in the balance of forces between the two superpowers.

'It was a classic example of how global dynamics can affect regional affairs and how that in turn affects organisations on the ground. In … South Africa … the struggles waged by the liberation movements ceased to be the major focus it was. This resulted in the diminishing of material support given to the liberation movements by, notably, the Soviet Union. Global development coupled with the unbanning of the organisation corroded our outside support.

'This was bound to happen because in the final analysis, western countries have capitalistic interests in all that they are doing. Countries like the United States were averse to apartheid because they felt it created disturbances

and uncertainties opposed to their capitalistic interests. It is true that they supported us, but we should not be fooled into believing that they loved us. They had their interests at heart. That's why there was such a furore over nationalisation.

'When their interests are threatened America wastes no time in invading. You only have to remember the invasion of Iraq when they saw their oil interest threatened. Without political education, our youth would not be able to understand their developments. They would not be able to understand why the ANC went to the negotiating table.

'Political education would equip them with the background that talking to the enemy does not mean selling out. They would know that newer democracies in Africa, such as Zimbabwe and Namibia, are a product of adversaries engaging in talks to retain the initiative and, to avoid being marginalised, the ANC has to engage the regime in negotiations.'

Nxumalo prides himself with the political maturity he acquired while in Robben Island. 'Although I was removed from society for a long time, I do not regret it. Without Robben Island I'm not sure if I would have been so enriched. That is why I believe that we need to make a conscious effort for our people to acquire political education without having to go to a place like the Island.'

What steps does Nxumalo believe need to be taken to make political education accessible to the masses? 'Local structures of the ANC and grassroots organisations such as unions and culture groups should incorporate political groundwork in their operations.

'Those pursuing academic qualifications should not shun politics. They should marry the two. When that happened at that level you get an individual who will be equipped to make a contribution in all aspects of political stages

including intellectual level. As time goes on, I would like to see political education incorporated in curricula at school.'

We must go back to the drawing board to see where we went wrong. It is unthinkable to see members of the ANC leaving the organisation to form parties in opposition to the ANC. Here we speak about the formation of the United Democratic Movement (UDM) of General Bantubonke Holomisa, the formation of the Congress of the People (COPE) by Mosioa Terror Lekota and Sam Shilowa, who later fell out with each other. Another significant splinter group was the Economic Freedom Front (EFF) led by firebrand and former president of the ANCYL, Julius Malema. These offshoots speak volumes about our political situation, especially within the ANC. The factions within the movement have played a big role in dividing the ANC.

In my view, the emphasis on an individual is politically wrong if it is done at the expense of the organisation. When the cult personality of Nelson Mandela emerged, the ANC's trouble started. At times we create our own problems that later catch up with us. Today we are reaping what we sow. Political education is critical if we are to take the organisation forward. In this regard, the role of commissars cannot be overemphasised. Ignoring or marginalising commissars becomes a recipe for political disaster in any revolution. The role of MK is still highly significant in our present situation. They are the only ones equipped with a high level of political education in our branches.

Freedom calendar/significant dates

During our stay on Robben Island, we had dates that were celebrated or commemorated as part and parcel of our national revolution. Our liberation movement has these days as a cornerstone of our freedom. The ANC formed alliances with the SACP, trade unions and progressive forces around the world. In 1921, when the forerunner of the SACP, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), was founded, there was an exchange of ideas between the CPSA and the ANC. This resulted in a revolutionary transformation where the pursuit of national liberation became embedded within the ideals of socialism, which was seen as the ultimate objective. This was part of the class struggle that the SACP/CPSA infused into our struggle. Every

revolution fought anywhere in the world became a class war. It is a war between the haves and the have nots. When the ANC was undergoing a political metamorphosis, it became clear that we were heading for a classless society. A national liberation movement is not by itself a class movement but it contains a lot of classes like the bourgeoisie, the middle class and the working class. The struggle is never confined to a local area but it grows tentacles and becomes international. This is why we celebrated so many international days that are within the ambit of our freedom. Below are just some of these dates or days and their significance. Omission from the list does not suggest insignificance, but rather that much has already been said about some dates, such as 16 June 1976. Also, space constraints have made it impossible to include them all here.

22 January 1879: The Battle of Isandlwana. Historically, in relation to the spread of colonialism, it was said that 'the sun shall not set on the British Empire'. Of all the colonisers, the English were the strongest and most relentless in their colonial pursuits and this phrase was used to capture the vastness of the empire. However, the outcome of the Anglo-Zulu War sullied this reputation as the British suffered their first defeat by the colonised people. The Zulus, led by King Cetshwayo, son of King Mpande, routed the English regiment to submission at Isandlwana in Zululand despite the latter's superior weapons technology. To us Africans it meant a defeat of imperialism by tribal oppressed people and we always celebrated this day, both in exile and on Robben Island. The Zulus used what is known in the military as the anvil and hammer strategy,[75] a form of attack popularised by Alexander the Great. In the aftermath of the battle, military scholars were preoccupied with trying to determine how the British had been defeated.

8 January 1912: This day was the birth of the ANC in Bloemfontein. The ANC was founded on a strong base of black intelligentsia and religious leaders. More than a century later, the organisation still exists, its challenges notwithstanding, and is said to be the oldest liberation movement in the world.

23 February 1918: The Red Army Day. On this day, the Red Army, consisting of the army and air force of the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), led by Leon Trotsky, was established in preparation for the Russian Revolution.

26 July 1953: On this day, Moncada Barracks in Cuba was attacked by a group of revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro. While it failed and

many of the revolutionaries were imprisoned, the attack was widely seen as the start of the Cuban Revolution and one of our detachments was named the Moncada Detachment in recognition of the spirited actions of the Cuban revolutionaries.

21 March 1960: The Sharpeville Massacre. On this day, police opened fire on about 7 000 unarmed people who had marched to the police station in Sharpeville in peaceful protest against pass laws. As a result of the police's action, 69 people were killed and many others injured. In commemoration of the sacrifices made by those who lost their lives, 21 March is an annual public holiday celebrated as Human Rights Day. In addition to this, UNESCO annually marks 21 March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in memory of the massacre.

16 December 1961: This day signifies the birth of MK and for us veterans, it is perhaps the most significant celebration and one that we look most forward to every year. This represented a fundamental shift in our struggle from non-violent to violent resistance. The armed struggle was the ultimate option left to the liberation movements as non-violent resistance was met with increasing state repression, brutality and violence.

12 September 1977: This day marks the death of Steve Biko in police custody. In the early years, it was only the BCM that celebrated this day as Biko was known as the father of Black Consciousness. Later the ANC joined the celebrations as we tried to have joint celebrations of all holidays. This created a new problem within the ANC as some comrades were not in favour of joint celebrations. The point behind the commemoration was that Steve Biko was killed by the apartheid regime and that BC was the dominant liberation ideology during the banning of the ANC and the PAC.

6 April 1979: On this day, 23-year-old MK cadre Solomon Mahlangu was hanged after being convicted of murder, found guilty of other charges under the terrorism Act, and sentenced to death as a result. Mahlangu had joined MK in the immediate aftermath of the 1976 uprisings and received military training in Angola and Mozambique. He returned to South Africa in 1977 and was arrested. At his execution, Mahlangu is said to have uttered the words: 'My blood will nourish the tree that will bear the fruits of freedom. Tell my people that I love them. They must continue the fight.'[76] It is said that the day of his execution was deliberately chosen to coincide with the celebration of Founders Day

under apartheid, a celebration of the 327th anniversary of Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape in 1652.[77]

27 April 1994: On this day, South Africa held its first democratic elections, ending more than three centuries of colonialism and race-based oppression, exploitation and discrimination. This day is now celebrated as Freedom Day and coincides with the day of my release from Robben Island in 1991. For this reason, it is of special personal significance.

1 May: Known as May Day in South Africa and International Workers' Day and Labour Day in other countries, this is an international public holiday in celebration of labourers and the working-class struggle against capitalism.

25 May: This is a continental day of celebration under the auspices of the African Union (AU). On this day in 1963, the Organisation for African Unity (OAU – later renamed the AU) was founded. The 25th of May is commemorated annually to celebrate and acknowledge the successes of the OAU.[78] In South Africa, we celebrate this day to recognise our connection to the continent, a connection which was lost during apartheid.[79]

18 July: Mandela Day. On this day of Mandela's birth, we celebrate his spirit of Madiba and his vision to spread social justice and freedom for all and use it to motivate everyone to take action and inspire change. When it was introduced, it sparked controversy on Robben Island because some of us felt that it was inappropriate to celebrate the birthday of one leader and not others. The controversy has since subsided and in South Africa, all of us are now called upon to spend at least 67 minutes doing service to social causes on this day. The 67 minutes represent the 27 years Mandela spent in jail and the 40 years of his life in the ANC.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
APDUSA	African Peoples Democratic Union of South Africa
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CRA	Chesterville Residents Association
CYDP	Chesterville Youth Development Programme
DC	Disciplinary Committee
Frelimo	Frente de Libertecao Mocambique (Mozambique Liberation Front)
MK	uMkhonto we Sizwe
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola)
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
SACP	South African Communist Party
SANCO	South African National Civics Organisation
SWAPO	South West African People's Organisation
UNITA	Unidade Nacional Independence Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola)
VOD	Victim Offender Dialogue
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army

Endnotes

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Muntu Nxumalo was born in 1957 and raised in Chesterville, Durban, as the first-born son of Reverend Clifford Ndoda Nxumalo and Mrs Alice Nomabhunu. He joined the ANC's uMkhonto we Sizwe as the struggle intensified during the mid-1970s and went into exile in different countries. He was trained in Angola from 1977 to 1978.

He re-entered the country in 1978 to take part in the uMkhonto we Sizwe operations in KwaZulu-Natal. He was arrested on charges of treason and terrorism and sentenced to 22 years on Robben Island.

He served 13 years and was released on 27 April 1991 as part of an agreement between the ANC and the National Party. He remains an active member of the ANC and continues to serve the organisation in various capacities. He is also an ordained pastor and is involved in various cultural activities.

His book is a personal account of his life, the struggle for freedom, and his disappointment at the fact that complete freedom remains elusive for black people in South Africa.

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