

# Reflections on the Pan Africanist Congress 'Underground' in the Era of the 1976 Youth Uprisings

by

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## Introduction: Contesting Voices

The 1976 uprisings have given rise to extensive academic research, party polemics and a diverse literary output in genres like poetry and fiction. Academic research has focused largely on the causes of the 1976 uprisings and their impact on the South African political scene; on the significance of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and its philosophy in directly or indirectly shaping the politics of a large section of the student population of the time; on the state in the 1970s; and on the role of the then outlawed liberation movements like the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the African National Congress (ANC).

This article will look at the PAC in this era: at its state of organisation, at attempts to revive the organisation's underground machinery within South Africa and at how it developed its political theory in the context of exile. In particular, it will investigate the impact of the 1976 uprisings on the thought and practice of the organisation.

Over the years the PAC has argued, as in 1985 did Johnson Mlambo (at the time, Chairman of the Central Committee of the PAC external mission with its headquarters in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania), that:

The 1976 nation-wide uprising, commonly known as the *Soweto Uprising*, was the direct result of the mobilisation and politicisation campaign undertaken by the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania. This is borne out by the fact that the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania and the Black Consciousness Movement were the only political organisations that were formally charged for the June 16, 1976 Soweto Uprising in what has come to be known as the Bethal 18 Secret Trial. Comrade Zephania Mothopeng, the veteran leader of the PAC, received a 30 year sentence for what the racist judge described as ‘organising and predicting’ the 1976 Soweto Uprising.<sup>1</sup>

However, Michael Lobban in his *White Man’s Justice. South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era* is sceptical. He observes that the evidence for Mothopeng’s direct involvement with the youth of Kagiso, such as that of the youth who claimed that Mothopeng had said that the riots and school stay-aways were to start simultaneously and that there should be attempts to cripple the South African economy, involve a ‘stretch of credibility’.<sup>2</sup>

The court, however, was happy to accept that the uprising had been at least in part engineered by people like Zeph Mothopeng. In his judgement, Judge Curlewis convicted him among a number of counts for having ‘acted to sow the seeds of anarchy and revolution which led to the 1976 riots, which he had predicted and encouraged’.<sup>3</sup>

There is, none the less, substantial evidence of the PAC’s interaction with a large body of students. Some of them were active in student formations like the Students Representative Councils (SRCs),<sup>4</sup> the Student Christian Movement (SCM) and the South African Student Movement (SASM). A number of these students had linked up with the PAC underground led by Zeph Mothopeng, John Ganya and Dr Naboath Ntshuntsha. Thomas Karis and Gail Gerhart point out that ‘in May 1974, a joint National Youth Organization and Transvaal Youth Organization (NAYO-TRAYO) leadership seminar in Wilgespruit conference centre in Roodepoort featured a speech by Zeph Mothopeng’.<sup>5</sup> But this perspective is contested, and indeed all former liberation movements point to their interactions with the student and youth activists of the 1970s. Allan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill note that the National Youth Organization (NAYO) had a ‘range of ideological trends’ under its umbrella and that as a result it is ‘not possible on the available evidence to infer what were the dominant trends’.<sup>6</sup> However they do acknowledge that some NAYO members were also connected with the ANC.<sup>7</sup>

There is also evidence of the PAC organising routes for the students to leave the country and subsequently joining its external mission. Dan Mofokeng, who was a 20-year-old student at Naledi High School, recalls how he linked with the internal PAC underground:

I got hooked in the PAC structures. Zeph Mothopeng, John Ganya, Victor ... There was quite a network around Naledi and Mndeni ... Now the actual person who assisted me is Dr Ntshunsha. He was a banned and banished medical doctor. He was no longer practicing. He was the one who organised the hideouts, the roads, the funds.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Sithembele Khala, another former student from Orlando High School, was drawn into the PAC and Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) through connections with John Ganya.<sup>9</sup>

High school student activism in the 1970s could be said to have been a development of the brief period of student organisation that followed the outlawing of the ANC and PAC in 1960. The formation of the African Students Union of South Africa (ASUSA) and the African Students Association of South Africa (ASA) was followed by the founding of the South African Students Organisation (SASO) in July 1969 which was immediately followed by the formation of the Black People's Convention (BPC). At the same time, labour militancy was increasing. In the context of the spread of the BCM, an independent militant worker movement led a series of strikes in Durban.

The state of armed struggle in the 1970s in general also deserves critical commentary. The Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) argues that 'the flood of young people into exile after the uprisings served as a serious indictment on all the liberation movements. The fact is that prior to June 1976 there wasn't enough pressure exerted on the South African regime militarily either because the organisations lacked the capacity or the political will to do so'.<sup>10</sup> However, the article which makes this argument fails to point out clearly the hardships and challenges of building an armed underground movement, and ignores the fact that guerrilla warfare requires thorough preparation as well as political mobilisation. It also underplays the struggles at the international level to win international solidarity for the South African freedom struggle.

However, 'each generation must out of obscurity discover its mission or betray it'.<sup>11</sup> Franz Fanon's statement is true of the South African liberation movement. Each generation has brought its own brand of militancy to the liberation process. The ANC Youth League radicalised African politics in the 1940s. However, when, as Ngubeni recalls, BC members started trickling into Botswana in the early 1970s, his impression was that they 'despised the rhetoric of ANC and PAC to the extent that they were not fighting but only talking war'.<sup>12</sup> When the class of '76 reached exile, the same attitude prevailed.

But it is notable that BCM activists and the 1976 students who did not join the older liberation movements failed to establish alternatives that could operate effectively in exile to exert diplomatic pressure on the South African regime and to wage armed struggle.<sup>13</sup>

We now turn to the case of the PAC and focus on the formal, if clandestine, world of political organisation.

### **Reassembling Clandestine PAC Cells: Linking with the Exile Mission and Recruitment for Armed Struggle**

It is always difficult to trace the exact beginnings of a movement operating in secrecy under conditions of repression. However, the PAC's programme in the mid 1970s can plausibly be traced to a decision to launch a training programme in Engwavuma. In October 1975, three commanders of the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), among them Enoch Mabatu Zulu<sup>14</sup>, veteran of Paarl and "operation Villa Peri", moved to Swaziland. They began a small military training programme at Mkalamfene<sup>15</sup> on the South African border. However, this unit did not make any impact on the South African political scene and in fact it struggled to acquire weapons as well as to utilise infiltration routes through Mozambique. This was despite the fact that in 1974 the PAC had secured permission from the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO) for its cadres to travel through the country.<sup>16</sup>

The PAC then shifted to internal mobilization. Zeph Mothopeng, a key PAC figure, had been employed as a clerk in Fordsburg by Depper and Depper, and then as an administrator for the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED), an organisation that helped students prepare for junior certificate and matric examinations. Classes were held at Orlando West High School near "Uncle Zeph's" home. Towards the end of 1974, he became a director with the Urban Resources Centre in Wilgespruit. This was a voluntary community organisation with programmes based in Kagiso, Roodeport, and St Ansgars.<sup>17</sup> These were the open and public activities with which Mothopeng was involved in order to make a living as a family man and to connect with the people, a mobilisation strategy developed by the Black Consciousness Movement.<sup>18</sup> At this period he had just returned to his home in Orlando West, Soweto, after three years on Robben Island and several months' banishment to the remote town of Witsieshoek in Qwa-Qwa.

Behind the scenes, a different story emerges. There are several views on the beginnings of the PAC's revival programme. One is that Mothopeng began to revive the underground structures on his own initiative.<sup>19</sup> Contradictions in exile, the argument goes, prevented the PAC from taking the initiative despite the advantage of its ideological affinity with the BCM which had been sweeping the country since the mid-1960s.

Another view is that at the time when Mothopeng had begun reorganising, Potlako Leballo (the former Secretary General of the PAC who was in the founding executive together with Zeph Mothopeng and became the acting President while the President Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe was incarcerated as well as after his passing on) dispatched an agent on a nationwide tour of PAC contacts, ordering them immediately to reassemble their clandestine cells.<sup>20</sup> Another view again is that the PAC leadership in exile issued a directive which was passed on to the internal activists via Joe Moabi who was based in Swaziland. A *Drum* photographer was sent to Swaziland to corroborate the message. The directive asked Mothopeng to begin a recruitment programme for the PAC, as the external mission was by now ready to receive recruits for military training, having been offered military bases in Libya.

Whatever the precise modalities, the underground machinery began to operate in Soweto, Kagiso and Pretoria in what was then Transvaal. Another unit operated in East London to cover the Eastern Cape. In Soweto, three areas of operation emerge. The first of these consisted of Mothopeng's link with school-going youth through his work with SACHED and the Urban Resources Centre. Through these networks, he was able to give political education to many youths. He also linked up with the banned PAC President, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, the two leaders meeting on two occasions, facilitated by journalists Joe Thloloe and photographer Mike Mzileni. Another little-known link is acknowledged by Mrs Mothopeng who recalls Sobukwe 'nicodimously'<sup>21</sup> visiting her husband in their house in Orlando West. We have no records of the conversations between Sobukwe and Mothopeng as it seems that for security reasons activists in the vicinity were asked not to be part of the consultations. At the Bethal trial, it was alleged that between June 1964 and 1965 Mothopeng attempted to revive the PAC and continued PAC activities on Robben Island; that he made numerous contacts with activists at home and abroad with the intention of organising military resistance; and that he established contact with Robert Sobukwe.<sup>22</sup>

Three other critical figures operating in Soweto emerge at this point. The first is John Ganya.<sup>23</sup> Born in 1931 at Engcobo in Mqinci village, he joined the ANC Youth League and later became part of the PAC. He was detained during the mass arrests of Poqo activists in 1963 and served five years on Robben Island. He was released in 1969 and immediately became active in underground PAC activity. In the late 1960s, political activity inside the country was predominantly among the youth as demonstrated by the BCM at universities and the gradual cascading of this activism to high school children. Indeed, a number of activists whom Ganya assisted to leave the country were at the time university students. Among them were Sabelo Phama and Siyaya Nkonyeni who later became members of the High Command of the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), the PAC military wing. He also recruited a number of high school students, some deeply influenced by the anger over the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.

Ganya also had links with Zeph Mothopeng and Dr Naboath Ntshuntsha who were the core of the Soweto Unit. He occasionally went to Kimberley to brief Sobukwe on developments, and linked up with the Central Committee of the PAC in Dar es Salaam.

It is said that when he was in Dar es Salaam he would address meetings of PAC recruits and challenge the stagnation that prevented them from getting the appropriate military training. According to PAC activist Mxolisi Mgxashe, 'he was that kind of man who did not keep quiet when things were wrong. He spoke his mind fearlessly and courageously, without favouring anyone'.<sup>24</sup> At the Bethal trial, the state alleged that Ganya made strenuous attempts to recruit people for military training abroad, and was in constant touch with the external wing of the PAC.<sup>25</sup>

Dr. Naboath Ntshuntsha<sup>26</sup> was the chairperson of the PAC branch in Jabulani in 1961. Its secretary was Moses Dlamini, the author of *Robben Island Hell-Hole. Reminiscences of a Political Prisoner in South Africa*, in which he writes of the meetings, enrolments and oath-taking ceremonies. Dr. Ntshuntsha avoided the mass arrests of 1963, and in the 1970s his home was centre of activities, with students meeting at his house for political education. Many of these students, including his son, escaped into exile to join the PAC.

He also involved himself with civic struggles. Late in 1976, he issued a pamphlet calling for a meeting to discuss issues of concern to local people. The meeting, which he chaired, was held at his home at 1124 Emndeni South. In attendance were members of the unpopular government-imposed Urban Bantu Council (UBC)<sup>27</sup> namely Mr. Mota, Mr. Letsatsi, Mr. Radebe, Mr. Mahlangu and Mr. Makaya. The meeting was also attended by members of the BPC, among them Reverend Farisani, Reverend Mayatula and the trade unionist Job Mavi. The meeting discussed the detentions that had followed the June 16 unrest, and the fact that due to police harassment students were no longer staying at their homes with some sleeping in classrooms.

A follow-up meeting was to be organised, but before it could be held police raided Dr. Ntshuntsha's house. They said they were looking for weapons but as he was a practicing doctor they found medicines, as well as a book by Karl Marx, which in Dr. Ntshuntsha's view was not banned. Subsequently he was arrested, but was released later only to be arrested again during the swoop on PAC activists. He later died in police hands. His name would feature in the Bethal case records side by side with those of Michael (Sithembele) Khala and John Ganya when the state alleged that Khala was behind various preparations for military activity.

At the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, where Mothopeng was part of the Urban Resources Centre, emerged another former Robben Island prisoner, Sello Matsobane from Kagiso in Krugersdorp. In 1963, he had been sentenced to three years and six months under the Suppression of Communism Act for leaving the country to undergo military training and had served his sentence on Robben Island and at Kroonstad. He linked up with two other prison graduates, Vusi Johnson Nyathi and Aaron Khoza, who had served their prison sentences at Kroonstad and Stofberg.

In 1975, the Young African Religious Movement (YARM) was officially launched at Kagiso Anglican church. The keynote speaker was the then Dean Desmond Tutu. Reverend June Chabaku also spoke. The launch attracted a substantial number of youth from all over the country. An executive committee was elected including Sello Matsobane as President, Johnson Nyathi as Assistant President and Aaron Khoza among the additional members. YARM became active at schools and facilitated the formation of SRCs. The state would later allege that Matsobane acted as liaison between the YARM executive and Zeph Mothopeng with regard to organisational activities and funds, urban unrest in the Kagiso area and recruitment for military training. It was also alleged that he and Johnson Nyathi discussed the use of violence during the anticipated unrest in Kagiso, and promoted YARM activities amongst students at Masupatsela School.

Within a short space of time, YARM attracted the attention of the Bureau of State Security (BOSS). Their first target was Sello Matsobane. They demanded that he surrender all YARM documents or face arrest. The build-up to June 16 was under way and this group of youths, who were YARM activists, would on 17 June link up with Soweto students, with the uprisings starting the following day in Krugersdorp. Shebeens were closed down, and, according to the court records, the arrested students stoned, burnt and attacked various state and company properties and vehicles.<sup>28</sup>

In Pretoria, underground activities were led by Mark Shinnars and Isaac Mafatse, both former Robben Island prisoner. Shinnars' political activism began shortly after the PAC Positive Action Campaign against the pass laws, which led to the shootings at Sharpeville and Langa. Dan Kutumela visited their school, Hofmeyer High School, to introduce a student body known as the African Students Union of South Africa (ASUSA). After this visit they formed a branch of ASUSA and became associate members. According to Shinnars, the aim of ASUSA was 'to bring the African students together because it was felt that the main student body that was existing at the time, the National Union of South African Students...catered ...for the interests of white students and there was no body that could look after the interests of the African students'.<sup>29</sup> Shinnars notes that 'ASUSA identified itself with the view that the Continent of Africa belong to the African people and it was the duty of the people of Africa to uplift themselves and that the African student had a role to play in this'.<sup>30</sup>

In 1962 he became chairman of ASUSA at the Hofmeyer High School. As chairman, he led the students 'to address ... problems that were at school and also to bring to the awareness of other students ... the broader social problems in society'<sup>31</sup>. These activities led to his arrest together with fourteen others and to his being charged with membership of a banned organisation and conspiring to overthrow the government. He was sentenced to 10 years, which he spent on Robben Island.

Shinners was released from Robben Island prison around the same time as another Poqo<sup>32</sup> veteran, Isaac Mafatse. By 1975, Mafatse had linked up with the PAC office in Botswana. Like activists in the other units, they revived the PAC and its membership, holding meetings in Atteridgeville, Pretoria. Subsequently Shinners and Mafatse were joined by Abie Patric Motau, Samuel Rahube, Moses Masemola, Jonathan Sibiya and Joseph Mogashoa. This unit also had access to PAC literature, and through Shinners linked up with Mothopeng in Soweto.

In East London, underground work also began around 1975. The key figure was Hamilton Keke, also a former Robben Island prisoner. He established a planning committee whose function was to co-ordinate activities in the Eastern Cape. By April 1976, he was already receiving and disseminating PAC propaganda material, and linking up with the units in the then Transvaal. By the time of the Bethal trial, the state alleged that he had established contact with the PAC office in Swaziland, had recruited personnel for military training abroad and had brought in funding to John Ganya.

### **Routes to Exile, Training for Resistance: Swaziland, Botswana and Beyond**

Swaziland had a substantial concentration of PAC activists in the 1970s and was a major route through which PAC recruits found their way to exile. According to the Bethal trial record, the recruited youth assembled at Park Station in Johannesburg from where they were transported to their destination by minibuses, one of which was operated by Alfred Ntshalintshali, a Swazi national. In Swaziland, the PAC had a substantial presence; activists based there at the time included Joe Mkwanzazi, Vuyisile Dlova, Joe Moabi, Pitika Ntuli, Dan Mdluli and Gasson Ndlovu.

The Swaziland route was used by Sithembele Khala, Dr. Ntshuntsha and John Ganya; according to the Bethal trial records, conveyance of recruits to Swaziland took place on seven occasions between September 1976 and January 1977. Also active in the Swaziland route was Goodwell Moni who interacted with Vuyisile Dlova and Lena Mawela. According to the trial records Dlova, Mawela and Moni assisted recruits to cross into Swaziland three times in March and April 1977.



Khala recalled how he crossed the border into Swaziland in 1975, meeting the PAC leadership in exile and continuing with his political education in the underground. He was driven to Swaziland in a public taxi by Alfred Ntshalintshali, and undertook the perilous trip across the border, avoiding South African soldiers, search-lights and other hazards:

then I skip the border fence go into Swaziland and wait at a Caltex garage next to Oshoek border. I waited there and they picked me up in the morning and our journey continued and I was dropped off in Manzini in Swaziland. I came to this house in Swaziland ... and I found another guy there. His name is Dan Mdluli. Mdluli received me. He told me that there were few other students there who were already in exile; that they had gone out to the city or to town and we would be joining together that afternoon. The other leaders of the PAC would come and meet us and we would continue our discussion. We had a meeting that afternoon with leaders of the PAC in the person of Joe Mkhwanazi, Michael Muendane, Pitika Ntuli, Gasson Ndlovu, Joe Moabi, Mzwandile Gumbi and a few others.<sup>33</sup>

In Botswana, the PAC activists were Solly Ndlovu, Baldwin Hlanti, Isaac Mafatse who was in and out of the country, and Stanley Ngubeni April (Ngubeni Ka Nkophe). Nkophe remembers that he was

the only PAC operative dealing with trained guerrillas from Dar es Salaam, Zambia, Uganda and Libya. Solly Ndlovu worked at a furniture shop in Gaborone. Isaac "Saki" Mafatse arrived in Gaborone shortly after Robben Island and I arranged and enabled him to fly to Dar es Salaam like I had done for Ezrom Serame Mkgakala before him. Baldwin Hlanti was a PAC cadre who risked all for the PAC; often when we met we were surprised that each was still alive.<sup>34</sup>

Nkophe recalled the presence of Sabelo Phama in Botswana, at the time using the name Victor Odeira. Phama would in later years rise to the position of Secretary for Defence of the PAC. And for the Swaziland unit, Botswana seems to have been well organised around the period of the 1976 uprisings. Nkophe described the command structure and the shipping of arms and ammunition to Soweto: 'Cde Sabelo Phama and I had even wormed our way into the confidences of Sir Seretse Khama who okayed arms shipments to be dropped in Gaborone by Libya'.<sup>35</sup>

Many recruits were arriving in Botswana. Some came directly to the PAC and others were BCM activists. The routes used were largely Ramotosa-Zeerust/Dinokeng, and Ramatlabama-Mafeking. APLA infiltration from the east was planned from Dar es Salaam by among others Enoch Zulu who was active in Mkalanfene near the border with Swaziland.

According to Mark Shinnars the Botswana operatives recruited BCM activists.<sup>36</sup> Ngubeni corroborates this: 'Personally', he says, 'I recruited hundreds of BCM students. However, the very first BCM batch ever to go to Lusaka, I forced Thabo Mbeki (then in Lusaka) to accept them in good faith'.<sup>37</sup> He was with Onkgopotse Abraham Tiro just before his assassination 'actually talking about his assassination. We shook hands that he would not dare open a letter or parcel without giving it to the police to examine first. We failed because he was dead within 30 minutes after we said "Good Bye"'.<sup>38</sup>

Though it is always argued that BC as a philosophy is close to the PAC, there were ideological differences that made its adherents unwilling to join the PAC. Nkophe believes that the PAC 'was outlawed too soon before forming its own organisational character' whilst 'BC had formed its character.' Therefore, 'joining PAC would have limited the public work of BC' so 'collaboration was more useful.' On the other hand, 'PAC was very Afrikanist',<sup>39</sup> it had a problem with calling Afrikans Blacks. African identifies us with Afrika and stakes the claim to the land and country whereas the term "black" as "um-Ntu omnyama" refers to psychic retardation and therefore a perpetual dependency.<sup>40</sup> Mothopeng expressed a different opinion. In the context of Robben Island, some did not join the PAC because 'we had some ambitious young men who developed the idea of a "third force"'.<sup>41</sup>

Cadres of the PAC/APLA received their military training in various countries. The experience of Wilberforce W. Mbuyiseni Zweni<sup>42</sup>, known as 'Mazambane', sheds light on this. He was born on 17 January 1958 in Mofolo Village, Soweto. He became active in student politics in the early seventies, which led him to quit the country in 1976. He joined PAC and APLA in the same year, went for military training in Tanzania and was sent for further military training to Kampuchea. Whilst there, he experienced war between Vietnam and Kampuchea and survived. Following his return to Tanzania, he underwent the Military Security and Intelligence Course in Yugoslavia. Thereafter he was sent to Sudan for more specialised military courses. He was later appointed to the High Command of APLA, and on his return to South Africa rose to the position of General in the South African National Defense Force.

Another example is that of Jerome Kodisang, accused no 12 in the Bethal trial. According to the records, he had contact with Isaac Mafatse in Botswana, P.K. Leballo in Tanzania and Uganda as well as Templeton Ntantala in Libya. It was further alleged that he received military training in 'automatic weapons, Rockets, Grenades, Mortar bombs and map reading'.<sup>43</sup> He returned in the country in the middle of 1976.

## **Diplomatic Breakthroughs Undermined by Party Infighting**

Difficulties within the PAC in exile destroyed many opportunities to prosecute the struggle. However, a number of significant breakthroughs should be acknowledged. For instance, at the time of his assassination David Sibeko, true to Pan Africanist beliefs, called at the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Council of Ministers in Nairobi, Kenya, for a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the treatment of black people in the USA.<sup>44</sup> The PAC also established long-lasting relationships with sister organisations waging struggles for the liberation of peoples of African descent at home and abroad like the All African People's Revolutionary Party and the African People's Socialist Party.

According to Jackie Grobler, 'by the early 1970s, when the PAC's international image had begun to recover, they scored a number of diplomatic successes.'<sup>45</sup> Grobler refers here to the role played by the PAC at the International Conference of Experts for the Support of Victims of Colonialism and Apartheid, held in Oslo in 1973, where the organisation successfully lobbied for the expulsion of South Africa from the United Nations. The OAU supported this call, and the UN General Assembly suspended South Africa in 1974. The PAC's call, in the well articulated 'Bogus Independence of Apartheid "Republic"'<sup>46</sup> signed by Leballo, was subsequently accepted as an official document of the OAU by the Council of Ministers during the Kampala summit in July 1975.

However, it must be said that the PAC in exile at this period is characterised by often vicious infighting, which resurfaced in the late 1970s. Some writers and PAC activists link it to the death of PAC founding-President Mangaliso Sobukwe. This created a leadership gap of which Leballo, the acting President, had already taken advantage. The tensions of the 1960s continued to bedevil the organisation, and there were appeals by expelled members to the OAU's African Liberation Committee, recriminations between various members of the leadership, the beginnings of the use of force to attempt to resolve conflict within the organisation, expulsions, and the formation of rival organisations such as the African People's Revolutionary Party (APRP). A particularly low point is the alleged role of Leballo in the arrest of PAC activists in Swaziland and Botswana. It is alleged that he asked the authorities to arrest the PAC underground cell operating in Swaziland on the grounds that its members were opposed to his leadership. The arrests in Swaziland and Botswana crippled the underground network that had been effective in recruiting APLA guerrillas and sending them into South Africa.

Nonetheless, the organisation's consultative conference of June 27 – July 2 in Arusha produced a programme of action that identified the critical priorities. These were: building the Party throughout the country; creating and expanding a people's army inside the country; promoting the armed struggle in the countryside; organising political and industrial resistance in urban areas; and establishing local popular political power at strategic points around the country.<sup>47</sup>

The achievements of the consultative conference were limited because it did not involve most of the members of the organisation in exile and was not linked to the emergent home network. Increasing criticism, culminating in the meeting of the Administrative Committee in Dar es Salaam from April 30 to May 1 1979, was followed by the establishment of a political directorate consisting of David Sibeko, Elias Ntloedibe and Vusi Make<sup>48</sup> which forced Leballo to step down in anticipation of the release from Robben Island of John Nyati Pokela,<sup>49</sup> who would later be credited with giving the PAC a new lease of life.

## **New Theories of Revolutionary Struggle**

At the time of its founding, the PAC published *The Africanist* which was continued after its banning in Lesotho. Subsequently, its ideas were carried in *Azania News* and *Azania Combat*, which was the official organ of the Azanian People's Liberation Army. During this period it also issued several publications reflecting the assimilation of other revolutionary theories, a process started in *The Africanist* of the Lesotho period. For instance, in 1970 the PAC issued '*The Commissar's Field Manual*'; in 1975 *The New Road of Revolution*, *The National Mandate in Azania* and *Principles of A United Front in People's War*.

On the home front, state repression struck at PAC cadres, particularly those leading the underground revival programme. Lobban has observed that 'it was the PAC which faced what was in many ways the largest Terrorism Act trial of the 1970s.'<sup>50</sup> Various theories attempt to explain the arrests. Davies believes that many of the older PAC activists were known to the security police because of the lists captured in the Lesotho raid in 1963. Therefore, 'by skilfully using informants and surveillance, the police did not take long to arrest nearly the entire leadership of the reconstituted PAC, trying them together in what became known as the Bethal Trial.'<sup>51</sup>

According to Tom Lodge, the South African police captured three PAC/APLA instructors operating the Mkalanfene training programme in Ngwavuma, in Northern Kwazulu Natal.<sup>52</sup> A year after the arrest of the three instructors, the police went after Mothopeng and a year later raided the home of the founding President of the PAC Mangaliso Sobukwe. Subsequently, hundreds of PAC and student activists were detained and held incommunicado until brought to court and charged under the Terrorism Act. The trial date was set for January 9, 1978.

Before the trial, the detainees were severely tortured. For instance, Johnson Nyati survived after being thrown out of a window by the police. He fractured his legs and was to appear in court walking on crutches. Others were tortured with electric shocks. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was told that while Zeph Mothopeng was in Pietermaritzburg prison:

a policeman placed a sharp knife on his head and gently beat the knife down with the palm of his hand. He was also forced to lie on ice, and was placed in a sack and spun around in the air. With his hands and feet shackled to a stick, Mothopeng was suspended from the ceiling and spun around. This became known as the 'helicopter technique'.<sup>53</sup>

Four activists were tortured to death: Dr. Naboarth Ntshuntsha, Daniel Malinga, Arthur Khoza and Bonaventura Malaza. This brutality was part of the culture of apartheid colonialism. It is worth asking: Why such brutality? Lobban argues that 'the state had good reasons for wanting a major trial to break the PAC. There were long memories of the violent revolutionary activities of Poqo in the early 1960s.'<sup>54</sup>

Poqo symbolised the most threatening and brutal form of black revolt, involving both the killing of whites, and the carrying of black revolt into the heart of white towns, as had been done at Paarl in November 1962 ... many PAC activists had been imprisoned for relatively short prison terms and, now that they had been released, there was a clear danger of their reviving the organisation. In the context of township unrest, the PAC seemed all the more dangerous, particularly since its Africanist ideology seemed more in tune with the philosophy of black consciousness than did the ANC's non-racialism. The state therefore targeted those PAC members who had been released recently from Robben Island.<sup>55</sup>

There were 18 accused, and in its attempt to break the PAC the state assembled no less than 165 witnesses. The identities of state witnesses were withheld and evidence was given in camera.<sup>56</sup> Not satisfied with 18 trialists and 165 state witnesses, the state further listed 86 co-conspirators, including Robert Sobukwe, the President of the PAC.

## **Conclusion**

The Bethal trial is but one example of the casualties suffered by the PAC in the 1970s. There were other trials in East London, Transkei, and Grahamstown.<sup>57</sup> Those arrested were sentenced to long prison terms for membership of the PAC, inciting people to leave the country, undergoing military training and other activities deemed illegal. However, the Bethal Trial, and disagreements and factionalism within the party in exile, did not mark the death of the PAC as is generally argued by its rivals and by commentators. There was always a will to regroup and return home to fight. As Tom Lodge put it,

The flow of recruits continued after Mothopeng's arrest and the return home of the first fresh graduates from Chunya was signalled when three PAC insurgents were convicted in 1978 of establishing an arms dump in Krugersdorp.<sup>58</sup>

Again in 1978 APLA was involved in an encounter in Soweto when sixteen police vehicles pulled up and police surrounded a house in Zone 6, Diepkloof. This led to the death of Kenneth Mkhwanazi, a former student at Musi High. According to the British *Morning Star* of 12 December 1978, the police claimed he 'was shot dead when he grabbed a hand grenade from the top of a wardrobe during a scuffle with the police when they went to arrest him at his aunt's house'.<sup>59</sup>

The arrests, imprisonment and killing of PAC activists, and the disarray of the exile mission were an ironic way to usher in a new search for unity and relevance in the organisation. As the Bethal trialists and other activists of the late 1970s were being imprisoned, another Robben Island graduate, a Poqo veteran, was being released. In a few months time John Nyati Pokela would slip out of the country to lead the PAC external mission and in the process prepare the party and APLA for the 1980s. The PAC was about to write yet another new chapter in its history and in the history of South African resistance.

## Endnotes

1. See Johnson P Mlambo, 'The Decade of the Azanian Revolution. Statement to the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly of the United Nations October 28, 1985' in *For the Liberation of Azania. Voices of the African Revolution*, No. 2. Lester Lewis (ed.), London Pan African Association,, 1987, p. 9. I am indebted to Lester Lewis who gave me this booklet shortly before his untimely death.
2. Michael Lobban, *South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era. White Man's Justice*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 213.
3. Ibid p. 217.
4. It is recognised that SRCs were formed after 16 of June 1976.
5. Thomas Karis and Gail M Gerhart, 'The 1976 Uprisings' in *From Protest to Challenge. Volume 5: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979*, Pretoria, UNISA Press, 1997, p. 158. NAYO was the National Youth Organisation and TRAYO was the Transvaal Youth Organisation.
6. Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm*, Cape Town, Mayibuye Books, 1978, p .84.

7. Ibid.
8. Sifiso Ndlovu and Ali Hlongwane, interview with Dan Mofokeng. 2004. Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum Oral History Project.
9. Ibid.
10. Azanian People's Organisation, 'June 16, 1976 Background and Aftermath'. <http://azapo.org.za> Accessed 20 Jan. 2001.
11. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, p. 206.
12. Ngubeni Ka Nkophe, email to Ali Khangela Hlongwane, 20 October 2005, about the Botswana Testimonies.
13. Two movements were established in exile: the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania, and South African Youth Revolutionary Council (SAYRCO).
14. Enoch Mabatu Zulu was born in the village of Hiyita, Cofimvaba and worked as a migrant in Cape Town. In the Western Cape, he became part of Poqo cells operating at Langa and Nyanga townships. In 1965, he went into exile in Lesotho from where Poqo activities were directed. He later undertook military training in Congo, Egypt, Algeria and the People's Republic of China. He became part of the twelve-member detachment led by the late Gerard Kondlo that was intercepted by the Portuguese army at Vill-Peri. In 1975, he was deployed in Swaziland.
15. For a discussion of PAC activities at Mkalambane, see Willie Mazambane 'APLA's long road to now', *Azania Combat*, official organ of the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), issue No. 16, 1993.
16. Tom Lodge, 'The Pan-Africanist Congress, 1959-1990' in *The Long March - The story of the struggle for liberation in South Africa*. Ian Liebenberg, Fiona Lortan, Bobby Nel, Gert van der Westhuizen (eds.), HUAM, 1994, p.119,
17. Bethal Trial Records. Department of Historical Papers. University of the Witwatersrand
18. Ibid.
19. Stephen M. Davis, *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South Africa's Hidden War*, AD. Donker, Cape Town, 1987 p. 32.
20. Ibid.
21. Biblical mythology tells a story of Nicodemus visiting Christ to hold profound and detailed discussions.
22. Bethal Trial Records. Department of Historical Papers. University of the Witwatersrand.

23. Information on John Ganya was sourced from the Bethal trial records. See also Funeral of General Dlevalile John Ganya, Obituary, Funeral Programme, 31 July 2004. Author's private collection
24. Mxolisi "Bra Ace" 'Mgxashe, Mzi wakwa Ganya nezalamani.' Funeral Tribute. Author's collection.
25. Bethal Trial Records. Department of Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand.
26. Information on Dr Ntshuntsha is sourced from the Bethal Trial records. See also Moses Dlamini, *Robben Island Hell-Hole. Reminiscences of a Political Prisoner in South Africa*, Africa World Press, Trenton, New Jersey, not dated.
27. Student activists changed this acronym to 'Useless Boys Club' in the 1970s.
28. Bethal Trial Records. Department of Historical Papers. University of the Witwatersrand.
29. Mark Shinnars' testimony, Bethal Trial Records.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Poqo was a military wing of the PAC formed in 1961. Its name was changed to the Azanian People's Liberation Army in 1968.
33. Sithembele Khala. Interviewd by Sifiso Ndlovu and Ali Khangela Hlongwane, Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum Oral History Project.
34. Ngubeni ka Nkophe, email to Ali Khangela Hlongwane, 20 October 2005, about Botswana Testimonies
35. Ibid.
36. Mark Shinnars during conversation with the author.
37. Ngubeni Ka Nkophe, email to Ali Khangela Hlongwane, 20 October 2005
38. Ibid.
39. Africanists or Pan Africanists sometimes spell Africa as Afrika. Among them is Ngubeni ka Nkophe.
40. Ngubeni Ka Nkophe, email to Ali Khangela Hlongwane, 20 October 2005
41. Gail M. Gerhart, interview with Zephania Mothopeng, 12 December 1989, University of the Witwatersrand. Department of Historical Papers.
42. Programme, Memorial Service for Brig Gen W.M.M. Zweni, Obituary of Brig Gen W.W.M. Zweni, 16 July 2003. Author's private collection.
43. Bethal Trial Records. Department of Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand.
44. Black News, Sibeko. A True Pan Africanist. *Black News*, 4, no.8, June-July 1979, p. 5.
45. Jackie Groebler. *A Decisive Clash? A Short history of Black protest in South Africa 1875-1976*, Acacia Books, 1988.



46. Potlako K Leballo, 'Bogus Independence of Apartheid "Republic"', *Time for Azania*, Norman Bethune Institute, Toronto, Canada, 1976.
47. Thomas G Karus and Gail M Gerhart, 'Document 110. "Programme of Action." Statement signed by Potlako K. Leballo, acting president, PAC Consultative Conference, Arusha, June 27-July 2, 1978', in *From Pretest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990*, volume 5.
48. Elias L. Ntloedibe, *Here is a Tree. Political Biography of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe*, Century-Turn Publishers, Botswana, 1995, p. 134.
49. There are various views about the appointment of Nyati Pokela as chairman of the Central Committee. However, there is some consensus that he brought a new lease of life to the leadership of the PAC after his release from Robben Island Prison. For a detailed life history of John Nyati Pokela, see Ali Khangela Hlongwane, *We are our own liberators. A Biography of John Nyati Pokela (1921-1985)*, unpublished manuscript.
50. Michael Lobban, *South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era. White Man's Justice*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996
51. Ibid.
52. Tom Lodge, *The Pan-Africanist Congress, 1959-1990*, in *The Long March - The story of the struggle for liberation in South Africa*. Ian Liebenberg, Fiona Lortan, Bobby Nel, Gert van der Westhuizen (eds.), HUAM, 1994, p.120.
53. Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 'Torture in Custody' in *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, vol. 3, p.178.
54. Michael Lobban, *South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era. White Man's Justice*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996
55. Ibid.
56. David Sibeko, *The Bethal 18 PAC Secret Trial*, Liberator Press, Chicago, 1978, p. 5.
57. For a survey of the PAC trial from 1960 to 1989, see " PAC Activities & Trials, 1960-1989" in *Indicator SA* , vol 7 no 3, Winter 1990.
58. Tom Lodge, *The Pan-Africanist Congress, 1959-1990*, in *The Long March - The story of the struggle for liberation in South Africa*. Ian Liebenberg, Fiona Lortan, Bobby Nel, Gert van der Westhuizen (eds.), HUAM, 1994 pp. 104-124.
59. "The shooting of Kenneth Mkhwanazi", *Morning Star* (UK), 12. 12, 1978, See also Weekly News Briefing, Volume Two 1978 Issue No. 51 Third Week, December, African National Congress (South Africa).