

WALKING WITH GIANTS

Sindiso Mfenyana

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Foreword

It is an absolute honour for me to write the foreword to an impressive, highly readable and absorbing autobiography of a very dear comrade and friend, Sindiso Mfenyana. From the early 1960s, over three decades, our paths crossed in astonishingly different contexts. Sindiso is a revolutionary cadre, quiet diplomat, competent administrator and loyal ANC functionary. Also, quite unexpectedly (but happily), a writer of note, with the publication of his memoirs.

Starting his life in humble beginnings in the Eastern Cape, Sindiso became the first black person soon after South Africa's historic transition to democracy to occupy the position of Secretary to Parliament. In that post he displayed a remarkable equanimity in the face of heated and at times acrimonious and rancorous debates across the House. In 1994 I was appointed as Parliamentary Counsellor to late President Nelson Mandela and I have endearing memories of our engagements with Sindiso to process our respective parliamentary duties.

My association with Sindiso predates our arrival in Parliament. Shortly after the New Year's celebrations in 1962, I was tasked with the responsibility of secretly transporting him and eight other young ANC recruits to Botswana, leading to their eventual enrolment as students at universities in the Soviet Union. They had ostensibly left the country as a table tennis team taking part in a championship in Gaborone.

As in earlier years, Sindiso was a diligent student and excelled in his academic career. Having graduated in 1967 from the Kiev Economics Institute, Sindiso was deployed to Budapest to represent the ANC Youth Section at the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY). I too had worked for some time at the WFDY in the mid-1950s. This year I had the good fortune of going back to Budapest to reignite fond memories of my time there.

Sindiso held several illustrious positions in the ANC-in-exile. He served as its representative in Egypt and the German Democratic Republic. He worked as the Administrative Secretary in the Office of the ANC Secretary General, Mr Alfred Nzo. In 1978, he was appointed as Head of a newly-created Department of Professional Bodies to oversee the creation of the ANC's Departments of Education, Health and Arts and Culture, as well as its Legal and Economics Units. In 1985, he held the prestigious position of Secretary to the ANC President, Oliver Tambo. He also served a term on the National Executive Committee of the ANC.

I was delighted to meet Sindiso again after almost thirty years. Immediately after Mandela's release from prison we met with the ANC leadership in Zambia, where Sindiso received me with intense affection and warmth.

These memoirs provide us with a tapestry of the inner workings of South Africa's premier liberation movement, the African National Congress, particularly after it was banned and forced into exile. Sindiso is able to describe this history with detail and depth. His insights give one a rare perspective on the inner workings of the ANC during an important part of its history.

Ahmed Kathrada
September 2016

Acknowledgements

I am immensely grateful to the people mentioned below.

Katherine McKenzie drafted the first summary of my achievements from my oral account of this life story. Then Wilson Matidze showed me a booklet he had self-published electronically and got me to tell my story as he typed. Barbara Masekela put me on the correct path, saying, "Stop writing the reports you did for the ANC. I want you to tell your story. Move from the 'we' into 'I did this and that'". I was on my way and produced up to fifteen chapters.

Lynn Prins, my daughter-in-law, worked hard to get me to improve my typing skills and enlisted the help of her cousin, Natalie Malgas, a third-year student at a tertiary institution. Natalie's selfless dedication and enthusiasm boosted my morale. Then I looked for a professional editor. After a few false starts I was fortunate to find Sandra Dodson, who edited the manuscript and also checked the flow and logical sequence.

My interaction with the participants in the June 16th student uprising of 1976, who arrived in large numbers in the countries neighbouring South Africa up to the end of the 1980s, brought to my attention that the Apartheid regime had almost succeeded in erasing the past achievements of black teachers and students prior to 1956. I felt that the story of the kind of education we received needed to be told. I would do this on the basis of personal experience rather than in the style of an academic treatise.

I am grateful for the assistance from Omar Badsha and staff at SAHO (South African History Online), particularly Ian Africa for placement of photos and final arrangement of footnotes and the Index.

Special thanks go to Prof. Andre Odendaal for his enduring support even in the darkest hours. He persisted that "this book must be published even if we have to do it ourselves". He put money to his mouth.

On my return from exile, I made the mistake of telling family and friends that I was writing a book. It was their soft-spoken, but incessant, queries - "How far is the book?" - that made me realise I would never know peace until the manuscript was published. To all these friends and relatives, especially my wife Filarida and our son Nikita, I dedicate this book. Here it is, for your voracious ingestion, your critical digestion and, if need be, your woeful deconsecration.

Sindiso Mfenyana
June 2017



Family gathering, Mission House, Noupoot, Northern Cape, 1955.

My Aunt (Mrs Ngodwane, had 4 daughters, denoted by letter N.) The rest (7), are children of Rev. Mfenyana, boys and girls.

Front Row: Thandiwe Ngodwane (40) Teacher; carrying Bubele (1month) Teacher/Canon, Anglican church; Kwezi (7) Teacher; Mrs Mfenyana (37) Teacher; Buntu (5) M.A.– languages/ Priest; Phumeza (N) (7) M.A. – psychology; Father Mfenyana (47) Canon; Nomso (N) (5) B.Sc – pharmacy/ MBChB medical doctor; Mzikazi (2) B.A. – music/Archdeacon;

Back Row: Kolisa (N) (10) B.Sc/IQMS; Fundisa (13) Diploma in Community Nursing; Sindiso (15) M.Sc – econ; Zukisa (N) (16) Diploma in Community Nursing; Pumzile (10) Pharmacy Asst., B.Juris – Labour Laws, Radio Stories – Xhosa.

Chapter 1

Family origins

The Mfenyanas are part of the Bhele clan, an offshoot of the Hlubi tribe, and can trace themselves to an area around Alice. To this day there is a village near Alice called kwaNomfenyana. Our presence in the Eastern Cape is historically linked to the *iMfecane* (1820-1840), the wave of tribal migration, dispersal and conflict resulting from King Shaka's conquest of neighbouring tribes and subsequent creation of the Zulu kingdom.

Various ethnic groups, including the Hlubi tribe, fled from this onslaught and sought asylum in different parts of the country. They were collectively referred to as *amaMfengu*, which derives from the word *ukuMfenguza*, meaning "to seek refuge",¹ or, in English, the "Fingoes". The *amaMfengu* were received with sympathy by the respective kings and chiefs of the regions where they sought asylum and offered land to plough and graze their stock. At around the same time the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Benjamin d'Urban, acting on behalf of the British colonial powers, allocated land to some of the migrants in areas under his jurisdiction. In this way the Governor hoped to buy the *amaMfengu*'s allegiance and support in the event of hostilities with the resident Xhosa rulers.² The Hlubi group were given refuge on the banks of the Great Fish River in the Eastern Cape. By the twentieth century, the Bhele clan as well as other Hlubi offshoots, had spread all over the Eastern Cape.

I learned from my father that my grandparents, Isabella (née Ntshaba) and Samuel Mfenyana, received a basic education at a missionary primary school at Indwe, where they were brought up as Christians. When they married they set up house at Indwe, where they had six children - five boys and a girl, the last-born. The eldest child, Jackson Ndyebo (which means "wealth"), was born in 1902. Up to the time of his death he was known as J.D., the reason being that, when he was being registered, the white official who knew only a smattering of Xhosa left out the letter 'N' and simply wrote Dyebo. Jackson was succeeded by Jaconius Siganga in 1905. His name derived from the word *isiganga*, meaning "a great person". Unfortunately even some of his progeny were reluctant to use this name because it is close to the Zulu word *ukuganga*, which means "to fool around".

My father, Mtutuzeli Naphtali Mfenyana, was born with a twin brother, Mxoli Zebulon, on 3 November 1908 at Lufutha, Cala, in the Xhalanga District of the Transkei; within what is now the province of the Eastern Cape. This was two years prior to the founding of the Anglo-Boer Union of South Africa in 1910. Sadly his twin

died at the age of five and was buried at Indwe. During the burial ceremony, before the corpse was lowered into the grave, my father was placed there briefly and then removed. According to tradition, this was to ensure that his twin did not come back to bother him. The fourth boy child, Nceba Mordecai, was born in 1910 and the last male child, Mabandla Robert, was born in 1913. The only girl, Thandiwe Anna, was born in 1915.

My father started his primary schooling at Indwe in 1915. However his schooling was disrupted by an outbreak of typhoid fever which killed people in large numbers in 1916. So widespread was the pestilence that Naphtali would recall: "This is when I learnt to dig graves." Fortunately none of the family was affected. Together with other survivors, they packed all their belongings into an ox-wagon and in 1919 migrated towards the Glen Grey District (Cacadu), settling in a village now known as Dophu, near Glen Adelaide, the present day Lady Frere. The journey of forty-three kilometres took two weeks. (From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, Africans typically kept track of dates by relating them to historical events. For example, the year the family moved to Dophu was at first referred to as "shortly after Halley's Comet", which occurred in 1910. It was only later, with the help of documented history taught at schools, that the year of departure from Indwe was identified as 1919.)

Shortly after the move they experienced massive stock reduction from *rinderpest* - a contagious viral disease of cattle causing severe inflammation and diarrhoea - which they attributed to a peculiar type of grazing grass. There had not been time to grow crops and, according to my father, this led to mass starvation. "People literally fought over wild melon (*umXoxozi*) found in ravines and forests." The family survived with minimum stock, which they were able to increase through selective grazing. The fields were planted up with sorghum (*Imfe*) and maize, sorghum being the dominant crop. The sorghum was ground and the meal called *amabele* or *maltabella* was used to make porridge or steamed bread. After harvesting, sorghum and maize stalks were used as feed for the cattle. A controversy still rages as to the source of our surname, Mfenyana, which denotes a diminutive. Is it from *imfe* / sorghum or from *imfene*/the baboon? Needless to say, the majority of the family prefer the sorghum option!

Besides cattle, Grandpa Samuel had sheep, goats, chickens and a free-range piggery at the homestead in Dophu. He was comparatively well-off and exercised the powers of a headman (*isibonda*). In the 1920s the villagers in Dophu were largely traditionalists and animists. They worshipped the Almighty through the ancestors and anointed themselves with red or white ochre (*abaaqabimbola*). They were referred to as *Amaqaba*, a name that has since been discredited because it degenerated into

a term for the illiterate. Samuel and Isabella built a church for worship and worked hard to convert the villagers to Christianity. My grandfather had powers to allocate land for ploughing and used these powers to coerce the animists to convert to Christianity: "You want land? Then you and your family go to church." He and my grandmother, MaXaba, also mobilised for the building of a school where the village children learnt the "three Rs": reading, writing and arithmetic. My grandfather was among the first in Dophu to send his children to school beyond the village.

At the back of their homestead in Dophu there was – and still is – a road coming from Mount Arthur (uBangindlala) towards the main road, linking Lady Frere to the provincial road from Queenstown. Occasionally my grandparents would see a weary traveller walking along the road towards the village. (Only a man would undertake such a long journey alone in those days. A woman would invariably be accompanied by a man with a stick or some other form of traditional weapon, such as a club or a spear.) According to my grandmother, Grandfather would instruct one of the children: "Go and invite that person to come and drink some water. He looks very tired and thirsty." Once the traveller had been welcomed into the homestead, he would be given not only water but a full meal, during which time my grandfather would enquire about events in the outlying areas. The grateful visitor would then be allowed to take a nap or sleep overnight if he wished, continuing on his journey the following day. This hospitality was an effective means of communication. From his conversations with the travellers, the old man would have something newsworthy to say at church the next Sunday. From there the news would quickly spread to Lady Frere, Queenstown and beyond.

One-and-a-half kilometres from the main house there was a stream that overflowed during the rainy season and had water even in winter. My grandma was a person of great initiative and started a gardening club for the local women. She taught them how to collect the seeds of various vegetables and plant them in pots. Later she showed them how to transplant the seedlings into a composted vegetable garden. The women took turns, either in the morning or the evening, to water the growing plants and to remove weeds. In no time most households in the village, and later in neighbouring villages, prepared meals with home-grown samp, beans and vegetables.

It took commitment and strength of character for my father to attend primary school. He would leave home in morning darkness, travelling on foot, and return only in the evening. A diligent scholar, he passed Standard 6 in 1924. In 1926, with some monetary support from his elder brother Jackson as well as a bursary, he registered at St Matthews College, an Anglican college situated forty-five kilometres

from King William's Town. He completed the Teacher Training Course in 1928 and in 1929 he obtained a teaching post at Machubeni with the help of an Anglican priest, Reverend Kota. He was an excellent choirmaster and in his second year the school choir won a choir competition, beating thirteen other school choirs. In 1935 he registered for a Higher Teacher Training course at Lovedale, taught at Emnxu in Cala for three years and finally went to Bolotwa as principal teacher in 1938. In 1939 he married Miss Nombuyiselo Czarina Makalima from the Ngqamakwe village of Ncisininde. She was a qualified primary school teacher and taught the lower classes at the school.³ I was born on 12 March 1940. I will later explain how I "lost" two days of my life. My date of birth is now registered as 14 March 1940.

My mother was tall in stature and soft-spoken, with a pleasant face and a steady gaze. Whereas my father had grown up surrounded by brothers, my mother had four sisters and only one brother, Mziwakhe, who was the youngest. The girls' names, in order of age, were Nothemba, Nombuyiselo, Nomaqukumbana and Thandiwe. In keeping with tradition, my mother called my father *Yise ka Sindiso* (Father of Sindiso) and never addressed him by his name. This was the accepted code of conduct for married women when addressing their husbands.

I have no recollections about my early life in Bolotwa apart from anecdotes related to me by my father much later. Apparently when I was about two years old my parents left me sleeping in the house with a helper to watch over me. When I woke up I walked to the small village church within the yard, entered through the main entrance and walked over to my father who was conducting a church service as a lay preacher. It is difficult to assess who was more surprised: my mother, who I had passed on my way to the altar, or my praying father, who felt a tug at his church robes. From then on, an invisible Sindiso was cause for concern.

When I was four years old, my father left the school in Bolotwa and went to St Peter's Theological College in Rosettenville, Johannesburg. After three years he graduated as a Licentiate in Theology (L.Th.). Mother spent this time commuting between my paternal grandparents' home in Dophu, Lady Frere and her home in Ngqamakwe. During the period that Father went for training as a priest, I stayed at my grandparents' home. Otherwise we would pay visits when it suited our parents, usually during school holidays.

Early memories

My earliest memories are about life in Dophu. My grandfather, Samuel, had passed away when I was very young and my grandmother was head of the household.

Makhulu (Grandma) Isabella's house was built of red bricks with glass windows, with the main door facing the east. I fondly remember waking to the sound of cockerels at dawn and gazing through the main door as the sun rose slowly over the horizon. As it grew lighter, I would see cattle horns appearing in the kraal thirty to fifty metres from the house. The cattle spent the night lying down, with their legs folded beneath them. When the sun rose they would get up to signal their wish to be released from the kraal to go and graze. Next to the cattle kraal there was a kraal for sheep and goats. The house had a kitchen and pantry, a lounge/dining room and two big bedrooms. One bedroom was Granny's and the other was shared by us, her grandchildren.⁴ There were always three or four children in the house, girls and boys. My father's brothers – Jackson, Jaconius and Mabandla – had also built their houses in Dophu, but his two other siblings were teachers and lived some distance away from the family home. Their first-born children also stayed with my grandmother. Our parents would come to visit only during the school holidays.

I have a distinct memory of how we children did things together, whether doing chores around the house or playing games outside. We also washed together. For the morning wash there was a basin or small bathtubs. Each of us had a "washing rag" or facecloth. We were taught to start by cleaning our face and neck, then to wash our chest and armpits and lastly our legs. The boys washed their feet up to the knees while the girls always went further, to the thighs. After the washing routine we would quickly dress, gulp our sour mealie-meal porridge for breakfast, grab our school books and dash to school. During my years in Dophu we walked or ran to school together, but I do not remember sharing a class with my cousins, who I regarded as fondly as my brothers and sisters. After school we would wait for each other so that we could keep each other company on the walk home. Then we would have something to eat, do our homework and help out with home chores such as washing the dishes or sweeping inside and around the house. During the week there was always an elderly supervisor who saw to it that we had a full body wash every evening before bed.

The domesticated animals at the family home were formerly the property of my late grandfather. Jackson, the eldest son, acted as the caretaker on behalf of Grandmother. He would inherit the stock when she passed on. One of the advantages of spending my growing years in the rural areas was that I learned a great deal about the facts of life simply by observing the habits of the domestic animals. I saw first-hand how cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, dogs and cats periodically gave birth to single or multiple young. It took a bit longer for me to understand the sexual aspect of the reproductive process, and even after I had seen different animals mating, it took me a few more years to relate the mating act to human beings. Most of the animals

– dogs, goats and cattle, for example – were pretty transparent about it, while cats were more discreet. It was the pigs that took me by surprise.

The pigs' food was a mixture of all the left-overs from different households. There was an iron tub close to the kitchen and the pigs fed on the swill there twice a day. One afternoon we young ones were observing the parent pigs and their litter gorging energetically from the half-full tub. Suddenly I noticed that a snake was attacking one of the older pigs and I cried out in alarm. My elder sister Lindiwe quickly punched me and made a sign for me to keep quiet. She took me aside and explained that what I had seen happening with the pigs was similar to what I had seen with goats and dogs – it was a male sexual organ. I was incredulous. It was the strangest shape I had ever seen. All the other males' organs were rigid and straight; this one was curled! I kept watch, hoping to see how on earth the curled intestine could penetrate the female pig, but to my disappointment I never caught him in the act.

Every few days two oxen were in-spanned to draw a sledge with a water drum to fetch water from the nearest stream. Between six and ten oxen could be in-spanned to pull my grandmother's ox-wagon, similar to those portrayed in pictures of the "Great Trek".⁵ In spring, during the months of September and October, the oxen were used to draw ploughs to prepare the soil for planting sorghum or maize. We had two sets of ploughs and it was fascinating to watch the skill of the ploughman as he guided the oxen along a predetermined route to produce furrows in the one-acre plot. When young, inexperienced oxen pulled the plough, it was necessary to have a boy aged between six and ten to lead them until they understood the instructions to stop. To signal for the oxen to make a u-turn, the ploughman would shout "whoom!" To make them stop a whistle was enough. I soon mastered the art of leading the oxen, whether it was for ploughing, sowing or weeding. I recall that each process had its own equipment. The plough was used to dig furrows for sowing maize seeds. The equipment for sowing was similar to the plough, but had a container that held the maize seeds. As the oxen pulled the equipment the seeds were released into the furrows, and immediately covered with soil. Two months later the maize shoots would be about thirty centimetres tall. The weeding machine, which moved between the maize rows, uprooted any weeds that had grown alongside the maize plants.

I remember that Grandmother had a huge mature bull and one or two young males that would be groomed to replace the older bull later. All the other males were castrated and served mainly as beasts of burden. They were also slaughtered for funerals and festive occasions like weddings and Christmas, when there were

many guests to feed. There were always four or more dairy cows and their milk was mainly used for *amasi* (sour milk). Mixed with steamed mealie-meal bread, *amasi* produced a prized and nutritious dish (*umvubo*) in both rural and urban homes. (Spoilt brats are still sometimes referred to as *amasi* children!) Milking time was always early in the morning, once the oxen and non-dairy cows had been released from the kraal for grazing. While the oxen and cattle were being released, younger boys would release the sheep and goats from the adjacent kraal, holding back those ready for milking. I went through the various phases of herdboys life. First I milked goats and sheep using small tin containers. This milk was used for tea and coffee or boiled for suckling babies. I learnt to milk directly into my mouth after the tin had been filled. This was one of the “freebie” benefits of being a herdboys.

When I was growing up our village was still a combination of Christians and “nonbelievers” who worshipped God through the ancestors, although the number of traditionalists had dwindled and there were very few people who still used red ochre and red blankets to cover themselves. However, I was encouraged to play with the children of the traditionalists, who were masters of the original Xhosa language. To give you the flavour, they, after their parents, referred to the village of Dopu as *eMtsheko*, meaning “place of diarrhoea”! These long-established pre-Christian residents saw nothing wrong with naming the place in memory of the scourge that once afflicted the village. They called a spade a spade.

After the harvesting season it was common to have cattle from neighbouring homesteads grazing together in the fields. This brought us herdboys together and we would enthusiastically tell each other stories and anecdotes about noteworthy characters – famous or notorious – from the villages nearby. Later, we had to return to our homesteads. The boys whose homes were some distance away would set off in a group, and the rest of us would linger for a while. As they walked away, as a kind of farewell gesture, we would shout “praises” to each other in the most flowery language we could compose. This brings me to my friend Lenzi, a boy I greatly admired. Lenzi came from a traditionalist Xhosa family. He used the most descriptive swear words I had ever known or have since encountered. Indeed this was where Lenzi excelled. As the gap between the verbally “warring” groups increased, so our flowery language intensified, aided and abetted by Lenzi. The reason for this was that there was less chance that the group with the longer distance to walk would come back to physically defend their honour. Lenzi would warm up with something like “you and your big stomach that is pregnant with toads” (*Utsho ngesisu esikhulu esimithi amaxoxo*). The final verbal throw would be something like “Look at his reverberating buttocks summoning men to a meeting at the Chief’s kraal” (*Utsho ngomnqundu othi hoyi-hoyi yizani madoda ezindabeni*)!

Festive occasions and stick fights

At traditional ceremonies such as circumcision ceremonies or at festive occasions such as thanksgiving after a bountiful harvest, an ox would be slaughtered. The meat was cooked over open flames by the *abafana*, the circumcised who did not yet have families.⁶ The men would assemble in the kraal seated clockwise in order of seniority: the grey-haired (*iingwevu*), the middle-aged with families (*amaqina*), the *abafana* and finally the lowest rank, the newly circumcised (*amakrwala*). All uncircumcised men were collectively referred to as “boys” and they sat outside the kraal. Over time it was recognised that certain tribes did not undergo circumcision and those uncircumcised men who were grey-haired were allowed inside the kraal. All Xhosa men were circumcised. In fact none were allowed to reach old age without being circumcised.

Youngsters like myself would also wait outside the kraal, near the entrance, our mouths watering as we anticipated the treat awarded to good herdboys. The grey-haired and middle-aged men would shout out the names of known herdboys and one by one we would go into the kraal to receive cuts from the roasted meat. Nobody was left out. Those who were not called got their fair share from friends. To wash down the meat there were buckets of traditional beer, which were distributed to the various age groups and continuously replenished. Women sat in their age groups near the houses and also received their share of the meat and the homebrew. The women were responsible for the late lunch of cooked meat, samp with beans and vegetables.

By afternoon, with bellies full, the men would begin to drift away, either returning to their homes or seeking other celebrations like weddings in the neighbouring villages. Others would begin to display their stick-fighting skills away from the kraal. I remember watching in awe as the stick fighters performed. We young ones had the benefit of running commentaries from the older boys who knew the special skills of the champions from the various communities. I learned to “play the sticks” after the harvest, first by using dry maize stalks and later twigs. When we herdboys were learning stick fighting from the older boys, a popular expression or threat was, “I will wipe your nose, my boy!” (*ndakuku finyisa kwedini!*). This was a reference to some champion stick fighters who were so good they could pass the stick one millimetre from the nose. They did not break any bones. The evidence of their dexterity was allegedly a fine line of mucous on the upper lip. Another phrase of similar meaning was, “I will shave your beard”. It is alleged that King Moshoeshe (Moshesh) of Lesotho got his name after he defeated a British battalion in battle. Storytellers would relate how the King sheared the beard of the Commander of the British forces, the name

“Msheshwe” imitating the sound of the shearing. It was not wise to come too close to the men during the stick fights, so unfortunately I was never close enough to see the evidence of this exquisite stick-play artistry. I ended up concluding that the nose-wiping and beard-shaving references were intended metaphorically. Such expressions are typical of the flowery Xhosa language and other African languages.

To East London

In 1945, when I was five years old, my father was ordained as a priest in the Anglican Church. He took up his first post at St Phillip's Anglican Church in Duncan Village, East London (eMonti) and in 1946 I started sub-A at St Phillip's Primary School, just across the street from the mission house where we lived. (In the 1940s and up to the late 1950s most African schools were run by churches of various denominations.) In 1946 I covered Sub-A and Sub-B in one year and was promoted to Standard 1 in 1947.

In Sub-A left-handed children like me were persuaded by our teachers, invariably mature ladies, to use the right hand when learning how to write. My mother, in anticipation, had taught me to write with my left hand, but in the same way that right-handers do: holding the hand below the writing line and proceeding from left to right. Therefore I never adopted the strange technique practised by some left-handers (including former US President, Barrack Obama) who hold the hand above the writing line and flex the wrist. So when my Sub-A teacher – a motherly Mrs Ben-Mazwi – lifted the stick to render my left hand unusable, I pleaded with her to observe how I wrote just like the other children, although I used the left hand. I thus remained a left-hander who was able to write “properly”.

In Sub-A and Sub-B we sat on the floor. There were no chairs, stools, benches or desks. We used slates with soft-stone pencils that allowed us to erase and correct mistakes easily. Refreshment time was the real thrill. We would march in pairs to a special field, a distance of a hundred metres, with our “pints” tied to our belts, cowboy-style. Pints were enamel mugs or mugs made from tin containers for jam or condensed milk, which had been fitted with handles. School feeding schemes were the order of the day and accounted for the high level of school attendance.

In Standard 1 we started using lead pencils, rubbers and exercise books. We also received books in the Xhosa and English languages. In Xhosa we quickly learnt sentences and short stories, including folklore (*iintsomi*). I recall that the English books were red with hard covers and were named “Royal Readers”. We started with the alphabet, numerals and names of objects. Only later, towards the end of the year, did we start reading sentences.

At this time East London boasted one of the most impressive and resplendent scout movements, with the full regalia of standard bearers, drummers and bugle-blowers. We little ones were called Cubs and Sunbeams. The Cubs wore khaki shorts and shirts, with green and yellow caps. Sunbeams had yellow blouses and blue skirts. On selected Saturdays all the Scouts, Girl Guides, Cubs and Sunbeams would assemble at a certain spot at the furthest end of the township. The parade would commence and pass through all the townships up to our school. We would then join the parade and march in the rearguard from Duncan Village to the centre of town in Oxford Street, a distance of about one kilometre. We glowed with pride as we saw the crowds of spectators on the pavements.

By 1947 I was seven years old and had a five-year-old younger sister, Fundisa, and a two-year-old baby brother, Pumzile. Two cousin-sisters, slightly older than me, also shared our home: Nomazizi was two years older and Zukisa just one year older. I went with them to school and to the Scout Parades. On weekends we would walk to town together. As I explained earlier, I grew up regarding my first cousins as brothers and sisters. So I treated Nomazizi and Zukisa as sisters and they treated me as their blood-brother. During our walks we would sometimes meet slightly older boys and girls who recognised us as the children “from the mission house”. They would ensure that we were protected from any naughty bullies.

We also had two women helpers living with us, one of whom was my mother’s youngest sister. Her name was Thandiwe, but I called her Sis’Mhise, as did everyone else. It was only much later that I learned her true name and gained some insight into the behavioural norms for showing respect within Xhosa families.⁷ The last born and only girl in my father’s family bore the name Thandiwe. She was treated like a princess by all her five brothers. It was unthinkable that the youngest sister of her brother’s wife could be called by the same name. So the younger Thandiwe had to forfeit her name and be given a new one, totally unrelated to her in-laws’ name. Hence, “Mhise”.

On Sunday mornings the family attended the church service at the church across the street. The helpers looked after the young ones while Nomazizi, Zukisa and I accompanied my parents to church. I was now a server. This meant that over my shirt and shorts I had to wear a red robe called a “cassock”. Over the cassock I wore a white surplice, a loose, wide-sleeved vestment of linen reaching to the knees. I was a proud “boat-boy”, carrying the incense as I walked close to the twelve- to fifteen-year-old seniors carrying the thurible or censer with red-hot charcoal. At intervals I would put the incense on the thurible as demanded by the senior Thurifer. I recall that among the Thurifers were the Momoti brothers (Luvuyo and Ndyebo) as well as the Xiniwe brothers (Fish and Funda). They were also prominent scouts.

While we were out Sis'Mhise and our other lady helper prepared the lavish Sunday lunch for which we composed a kind of nursery rhyme – *Inyama namatapile nerays* (meat, potatoes and rice). It was always served in one big dish, with vegetables, samp and beans on the side. We always liked to eat the samp and beans (*umngqusho*) and vegetables first and to save the juicy meat for last. Well, that is until we noted that whenever “guests” came during the Sunday lunch, mother would give half our meat to the uninvited visitors! We then altered the order and started with the meat. “Lunch” visitors ended up getting tea or soft drinks. The main course was invariably followed by a dessert of jelly and custard.

The Queen’s visit

Besides the Scouts’ Parade, one event that occurred during our stay in East London has remained etched in my mind. Before school recess one day, we were instructed to come to school in our clean khaki uniforms by not later than 8 o’clock the following morning. We would be taken by bus to meet the great King and Queen coming from England, across the seas. My parents seemed excited by the news and ensured that Nomazizi, Zukisa and I went to bed early and had a good night’s sleep in preparation for the big day.

The next day we got onto the same bus and were given flags called “The Union Jack”. We were told to wave these as soon as we had been informed that the King was coming. But the King was a long time coming. It must have been close to lunchtime when at last there was a general commotion, shouting and waving of flags. We had formed long lines on both sides of the street, which I think was called King’s Street. When the motor cavalcade approached, we started waving our flags like mad, shouting at the top of our shrill voices, “Long Live the King!” We just managed to catch a glimpse of the King and Queen and the two Princesses – Elizabeth and Margaret – and it was all over. Such a long wait just for that! Thankfully our disappointment was short-lived. From King’s Street we were taken to a lovely big green field where we got “Sunday lunch” food, ice cream and sweets. This was better than seeing the King. We went home full of stories about the dress code of royalty, the nice cars and of course the generous helpings of lollies (*izimuncu-muncu*).

At the end of 1947, shortly after I was told that I had passed Standard 1 with flying colours, we left East London for Grahamstown. My father was asthmatic and the doctors explained that the coastal climate was causing his asthmatic attacks. I do not remember saying fond farewells to my cousin-sisters. At such a young age I had no idea that we would be leaving for good.

A choir with a big heart

DESPITE Queenstown assuming the title of the *little jazz town* - an endearment term used due to the town's ability to produce quality jazz musicians - it would also be safe to regard the farming town as a leader in the choral music field.

Local school choirs like Bulelani High and Kwa-Komani Comprehensive Senior Secondary have, in recent years, been renowned as kings of the genre.

As part of the ongoing Rep feature Dyanmos and Trailblazers, senior reporter Sikho Ntshobane this week takes a closer look at the St Andrews Church Choir which was crowned winners of the Queenstown African Eisteddfod competition in 1973.

The choir, based in Scanlan Street in Mlungisi, was made up of members of the St Andrews Church and established by the late Reverend Mthuthuzeli Naphtali Mfenyana who also doubled as its con-

■ Mfenyana's choral legacy lives on

ductor. Affectionately known as "Maggadaza," due his hyperactive and friendly nature, Mfenyana, who originally hailed from Mtsheko village in Lady Frere, first served at the St Phillips Church in East London in the 1950s. He relocated to Queenstown in 1961 from the Klein Karoo region on a transfer to the St Andrews Church - a move which gave rise to the church's choir in 1962. While most of the members were parishioners, Mfenyana also established small ensembles of soloists and duets, including the Modern Fours,

comprising the likes of Mfenyana's son Buntu Mfenyana, Kholekile Mbilini and Mpumezo Ntisa. The choir was primarily used for fundraising while the church housed the Thebelihle Primary school.

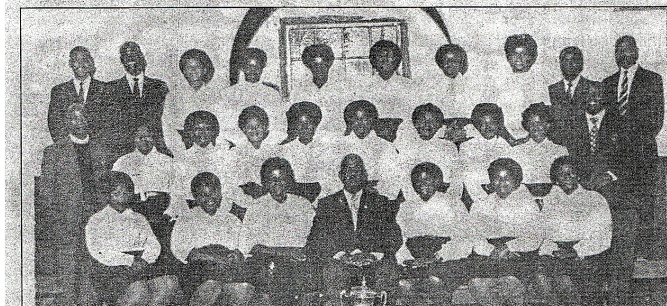
Mfenyana's son Buntu, said this week, "There used to be a lot of activities in that yard ranging from boxing, dancing and

music. The Reverend was focused on keeping young people away from the notorious streets of Mlungisi."

The St Andrews choir started entering competitions in 1964 and used to give popular choirs like the Komani Music Club and the Lukhanji Choristers a run for their money. Such competitions were held at the Mallet Hall. At the same time youth choirs would be invited to sing on the side of Queenstown.

"They used to have outings for young people where we would be invited to. The church choir was basically a family choir as even our parents were recruited," Mfenyana said.

Other notable choir members included Kenneth Masoka, father to prominent Queenstown businessman Elliot Masika. High profile competitions like the Eisteddfod were held at the Border Showgrounds popularly known as the Show



"A choir with a big Heart" Mfenyana's choral legacy lives on.

"The St Andrews Church Choir was crowned winners of the Queenstown African Eisteddfod Competition in 1973. The Choir, based in Scanlan Street in Mlungisi, was made up of members of the St Andrews Church and established by the late Reverend Mthuthuzeli Naphtali Mfenyana, who doubled as its Conductor." This is an extract from "The Rep" - a Queenstown newspaper, 1948.

Chapter 2

Grahamstown

Our new home in Grahamstown (eRhini) was the mission house, previously occupied by the family of a white priest. The mission grounds were enormous and, in addition to the church, the house and the rambling garden, there was a primary school, where I attended Standard 2. The school had a large brick hall that accommodated Standards 1 to 4. Classes for Standards 1 and 2 were held in the middle of the open hall, while classes for Standards 3 and 4 had enclosed rooms, each with a door. Classes for Standards 5 and 6 were conducted in a separate building, a short distance from the hall.

I was excited to be in Standard 2 and eagerly left home for school at the beginning of the first term. As the school was so close to our home, it took me less than five minutes to be in class. I remember that we were given an English reader, a Xhosa reader and notebooks for dictation and basic arithmetic, which we wrote in with lead pencils. The teacher would occasionally collect our notebooks for correction. My initial enthusiasm about the year ahead gave way to consternation when I was informed by some of my classmates that our teacher, Mr Zazini, was rather liberal with the switch when it came to the boys. Allegedly, after every dictation of short sentences or exercises involving simple sums, he would call on the boys to stand on one side of the classroom. Then each boy in turn would have to present his non-writing hand for whipping. The number of lashes would differ according to Mr Zazini's mood. It could be one each or up to three each. This is what my classmates had told me. But in the first few weeks of term I never saw the teacher whip anybody. So I began to relax in the belief that my mates were pulling my leg.

The primary school in Grahamstown, like the one in East London, provided refreshments for the pupils on school days. It could be a pint of soup with a slice of bread, or two slices of bread with peanut butter and a pint of milk. After the refreshments there would be another period of teaching before school closed for the day. There were also weekly periods of music, when we were taught to sing nursery rhymes. We would be divided into two groups. Group One would sing the first line and as Group two repeated the line after them, Group One would sing the second line. It was fun and I would sing these simple ditties at home to show what I had learnt at school.

The beginning and end of class was signalled by a bell, rung by the principal himself as he walked between the classrooms. I marvelled at his punctuality, but

otherwise I saw nothing strange in the principal teacher personally announcing the start and end of classes in this manner. It was a very effective way to get us running to our classrooms in the morning and after the “feeding scheme” break.

The first term had got off to a promising start. Then, alas, Doomsday came. We had just come back from a meal break when the teacher dictated a few sentences. I sat nervously while he went around the class correcting our work, then sternly called on the boys to stand on one side. I knew what lay in store. To be quite honest, I did not see him carrying a switch. But I was not going to wait for the thrashing to start. I was a newcomer at the school, and it would be easy to slip out of the classroom without the teacher noticing my absence. So instead of joining the line-up I sneaked out as quickly as I could and ran straight home. As I opened the door, I realised that I had no explanation for skipping school. I entered the house with tears streaming down my cheeks, wondering what I was going to say to my father, at work in his study.

In the 1940s most, if not all, African schools were missionary schools. The priest of the denomination running the school (my father in this instance) also served as Chairperson of the School Board. Appalled by my explanation that I had run away before the teacher could whip me, my father immediately summoned the principal and my class teacher to his study. I was told to wait in the kitchen. As I sat there I reflected on my impulsive actions and became more and more contrite. I had been brought up to always speak the truth and to respect adults, especially my teachers. And now, because of my fear of the switch, I had shown disrespect towards Mr Zazini. Why did I do it? After all, I had never seen him thrashing other pupils. It was all in my imagination, from the stories I had been told by my classmates. Worst of all, I had led my father to summon not only Mr Zazini, but the school principal for an offence which was a figment of my imagination. I had also compromised my father's dignity and integrity. After five minutes I was called in. My father took out a belt and started whipping me for telling lies about the respectable teacher. Ironically it was the teacher himself who saved me from further punishment. He said that I need not return to class as it was already the end of the school day. He would see me the next day.

This lesson was of great benefit in my life. I learnt to stick to the truth even if it hurt. Alternatively, if the truth is likely to hurt or destroy somebody else, then I have to evade it without telling a blatant lie. Fortunately in early childhood we easily forget harmful experiences once the physical pain has subsided. At least that is how it always has been with me. I am unable to retain a grudge for long, even when someone insults or tells lies about me. And yet I can be unforgiving if something is done to a member of my family. I can only ascribe this attitude to

the nurturing I received as the first-born: that I am responsible for protecting my younger siblings.

The Grahamstown Anglican church for the townships was also named St. Phillips. My father's appointment was seen as an elevated placement because Grahamstown was Head of the Diocese, with a resident Bishop. My father did all he could to enhance the attendance and status of the church in the community. He created what later became a prestigious choral group of four male and four female teachers called the St. Phillips Choristers. Their bi-monthly concerts at the church hall became the highlights of the township cultural calendar. On the eve of his departure in 1948 the community organised a special farewell concert in his honour.

The Grahamstown Scouts held their weekly practice in the school yard. The scout movement in Grahamstown was a modest version of the one in East London. There were no Cubs or Sunbeams and the brass band was rather pitiful: four kettle drums, one big drum and two bugles. Nevertheless my friends and I enjoyed listening to the music. The main attraction was the drummer. Not even in the professional East London brass band did they have such a virtuoso. He would hit the left side of the drum with both drum-sticks, so that one hand had to cross over the drum to reach the opposite side. The same would happen with the right side. Then he would resume normal drumming in preparation for his *pièce de résistance*. Crossing the sticks above the drum, he would beat the left side of the drum with the right hand and vice versa. As if this wasn't impressive enough, he would then cross the sticks behind his back and still manage to beat the drum. All this was done with consummate skill and without losing rhythm. His showmanship always drew tremendous applause from the young audience. Notwithstanding such talented performances, the Grahamstown scouts lacked an organiser who would draw in the youth and raise funds to create something closer to the East London scout movement. In the year I was in Grahamstown, there was never any scout parade to the townships, let alone to the city centre.

I also remember a four-day stay in hospital following an operation for tonsillitis. The reason I remember is because for the first three days, father unfailingly came for a visit before lunch. On the fourth day I was discharged immediately after the doctors' rounds at about 11 o'clock. I sat in the hospital reception in my normal clothes waiting for him to come and fetch me. Unfortunately he had not been informed that I would be discharged so early and he happened to have other engagements until late afternoon. When he finally appeared around 3pm, I burst into uncontrollable tears. My father was contrite and comforted me all the way home. This is one of those lasting memories. It was the day I knew that my father loved me.

It was in Grahamstown, at the age of eight, that I began to play regularly with friends in our street. It was safe to play in the road as there were no families with cars in our neighbourhood. One or two had a bicycle that they used to get to work. In the afternoons we would play various games using a tennis ball. I recall one of the games, which I especially enjoyed. On either side were the throwers (or bowlers, as in cricket). The group of up to ten pre-teen girls and boys would be in the middle. Whoever was hit by the ball was “out”, until only one “winner” remained. The game did not stop until he or she was actually hit by the ball. Our regular winner was a stunted, lean boy who was able to duck no matter the speed or accuracy of the throw.

I soon learnt board games like Draughts. I also participated in a “Guy Fawkes” night. We painted our faces and put on ragged attire and went around dragging burning tyres up and down the two neighbouring streets. Easter and Christmas time, similarly adorned, we went from house to house singing for coin donations and rattling our tins with slots just big enough for the coins to go through. I still remember the song we repeated, over and over: “Even a half-penny would be appreciated.” At that time South Africa was still using British pound sterling.

My best friend was an impudent and fearless scamp, Thozì Maseti, who introduced me to a new world of folklore. I had of course heard such stories from my grandma, MaXaba, but these were sanitised “do-good” stories about, for example, nice birds that gave endless milk or food to the hungry. Now I got to know the horror stories linked to superstitious beliefs. These stories had nothing “nice” about them, but they were a great deal more compelling for an eight-year-old boy. I remember his tale about a woman, Noseveni, who had lost a child at birth, and had to travel to her home village for “cleansing”. She crossed a river and found a baby on the other bank. She took the baby with her and pretended that it was her own. The news of her still-born child had not yet reached her village. There was rejoicing at her home and a white goat was slaughtered in honour of the new member of the family. That night, while the mother slept, the baby mutated into an ogre and demolished all the goat meat that was hung out to dry before cooking. The “child-ogre” pronounced a magic chant to convert itself from child to ogre, and back again from ogre to child. It went something like, “Grow, grow, you ogre, grow”, followed by “Subside, little one, subside”. The story-telling was accompanied by ugly facial expressions and lurid gestures that remained emblazoned in your mind. In Xhosa it goes like this: “*Mayitwabuluke twe, mayitwabuluke twe!*” Conversely, “*Mayifinyeleke finye, mayifinyeleke finye!*”

The following night two men secretly kept watch and witnessed the transformation. They killed the ogre with assegais and threw the body into the river. Then all the

villagers went to work in the fields, with the exception of Noseveni, who remained to cook the evening meal. (In villages during ancient times, people took leftovers to the fields to eat during the day. The fresh meal was for dinner.)

At noon, a voice asked Noseveni, "Who is with you there?"

Noseveni replied, "I am alone". Then the Voice said, "Here I come, the watermelon, dum-dum, dum-dum." The rolling watermelon appeared and began to thump the defenceless woman all over until she collapsed. When family members returned from the fields, they were shocked to find the almost lifeless Noseveni. The evening meal had not been cooked. The next day the two men who had killed the ogre stayed in hiding and did not go to the fields. They witnessed the arrival of the evil watermelon. But this time they hacked the cruel fruit. Instead of throwing it away, they boiled it in hot water and buried it in a deep hole. That was the end of Noseveni's nightmare.

In Grahamstown there was a famous plantation on a hill that for some reason was called *Intaba ye Zono* (Hill of Sins). It is, by the way, still there. Rumours were rife of all sorts of superstitious and criminal activities that took place there. To us young people it was a place to be avoided at all costs.

Brief sojourn in Peddie

Unfortunately my father's asthma did not improve and in early 1949, on the instruction of the Bishop of the Diocese, we left for Peddie. Peddie was completely different from East London and Grahamstown. There, in both black townships and white residential areas, properties were fenced and there were clearly-defined streets. Moreover, there was hardly any open ground; even leisure and sports fields were surrounded by buildings. Peddie was a much more rural environment, made up of small villages or settlements separated by acres of fields and forests.

The church in Peddie was much smaller than the churches in East London and Grahamstown and accommodated about a hundred people. It was a distance of a hundred metres or so from the mission house where we lived. I can only remember going to church on Sundays. However, I vaguely remember my father conducting services during the week. Our new home, though more modest than the Grahamstown mission house, had a large garden with an orchard. There were also vegetable plots. With the help of a gardener my father planted onions and carrots, potatoes and maize, pumpkins and watermelon, so that we would always have a supply of fresh fruit and vegetables. The house had about five rooms: a kitchen and a pantry, a dining/sitting room, a study and two bedrooms, one for my parents and

the other for the children. When we moved to Peddie the family consisted of my parents, me and my three siblings (Fundisa Isabella, Phumzile Phillip and Peter Kwezi, my baby brother born in Grahamstown) and a girl, Nontobeko, aged fourteen years. Nontobeko's widowed mother was one of the staunch members of the church's Mothers' Union and she had three other children to look after, all girls. She wanted to make sure that Nontobeko would get an education, at least until Standard 6. She had experienced difficulties with Nontobeko's three older sisters. In fact two of her sisters had already had children out of wedlock and the third one was pregnant. The mother's wish was that Nontobeko would escape this experience and get an education. Nontobeko and Fundisa slept on the bed and the boys slept on a mattress on the floor. Nontobeko, Fundisa and I were the three eldest in the family and we attended school together.

There was another major difference in Peddie. The school was no longer adjacent to the mission house and moreover was not even an Anglican school; it belonged to the Methodist church. I can picture it in my mind's eye as an imposing white edifice on a hill, visible from our humble abode and for miles around. It had an immense school yard with an assembly point where we all converged for the opening prayer and song, followed by notices and information. The school prayers and hymns were slightly different, but to me this novelty was a source of interest and enjoyment. The classrooms, from Standard 1 to Standard 6, formed a crescent around the assembly point. The whole area was fenced and there was a huge gate. The girls were smartly dressed in black and white. Boys wore khaki shirts and trousers, or any attire except suits. There was also a tuck shop for those who could afford it, but the majority depended on the school's feeding scheme.

Going to school was quite an adventure. We had to walk a distance of two to three kilometres on footpaths that wound through acacia trees and across a stream, which became a hazard after the rains. I had my first experience with what must have been the Cape Cobra (*Udlezinye*). The acacia trees were rather sparse and grew in a plain of short grass, so one could spot the snake from a distance of ten to fifteen metres, moving with its head raised. I had been told that the best way to deal with this snake was to move away from it. If you took a step towards it, it would come for you. So I gingerly backed off until it slithered away. Fortunately none of our lot was ever bitten, but it was a daily hazard.

My class teacher, Mr Mpondo, was ahead of his time because he commanded respect from his pupils without the threat of a switch. He had a great love of music and would patiently teach us new songs in our weekly music periods. The standard parts for girls were soprano and alto; for boys it was tenor and bass. All class pupils

fitted into one or other of the parts according to sex and voice pitch. Mr Mpondo took the trouble to take each voice group through the tonic sol-fa notes. He would make each voice group repeat their part until they could sing the notes from memory. Then he would introduce the words that followed the music. Finally all the voice groups would sing together in pleasing harmony. From my classmates I learnt that there were school concerts twice a year, before the school holidays. Sadly I wasn't able to participate in these concerts because our time in Peddie was too brief.

Aged nine in Standard 3, I was one of the youngest in our class. The oldest pupil was about fifteen years old. As in our village in Lady Frere, the young boys had to look after livestock and only went to school at the age of nine or ten when their younger relatives could become herdboys. My classmates were quite friendly and I enjoyed the new environment. I listened with wonder and awe at the stories my classmates told of adventures in the bush and fights over girls. I can remember a system we devised whereby those farthest from the school set out earlier and "collected" or were joined by others along the way. This ensured the security of numbers, which was maintained on the return walk or run home. When the school-closing bell rang, I would loiter at the gate until my group members appeared and we would set off together. During the week school was the main forum for social intercourse for people my age. I do not remember walking to town, which was about two or three kilometres in the opposite direction. The only other form of social activity was the regular Sunday Service and Sunday school at the nearby Anglican Church. At home we had daily evening prayers and would sing church hymns we had learnt at Sunday school.

Sadly my father had no respite from his asthma in Peddie and after just six months we were obliged to move again, this time to Noupoot, a railway junction in the Afrikaner hinterland of the Great Karoo. I remember that when we had packed up our home we travelled in a truck to the station with all our belongings. I was sorry to leave my friends, but also excited about the new world that awaited me. Strangely enough, with all these frequent moves I never felt the loss of friends. Instead I developed an ability to make new friends easily. In later years I would return to the towns and villages of my early childhood to seek out my old playmates. I remembered them all with affection.



St Agnes Anglican Church Choir, Noupoot, 1955. I am 5th from the left back row.

Chapter 3

Noupoort Junction

Noupoort was a vibrant, growing town and vital railway junction, bigger than Hanover, Colesburg or Middelburg. Trains from Johannesburg and Kimberley in the north regularly passed through Noupoort on their way to East London, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. For a young boy from the rural Eastern Cape, the town seemed like a metropolis, brimming with exciting opportunities.

My first impression of Noupoort was the abundance of coal. There was coal at the train engine maintenance depots, in rolling stock at stations and outside; and then there were hills of charcoal near the depots when engines were emptied of used coal. I learned that the coal that was not used for the steam engines was good for domestic cooking and heating. The towns of Beaufort West, Aberdeen, Graaff Reinet, Cradock, Noupoort, Hanover, De Aar and Colesberg were probably the largest coal consumers after the Railways.

We arrived in Noupoort in June 1949, as winter set in, and I soon understood the realities of living in one of the coldest towns in South Africa. I had never experienced temperatures like that before. I recall the importance of the *imbawula* (brazier) for our comfort and survival through that first bitter winter, when snow lay on the ground for two to three days at a time.⁸ We would prepare the brazier for the evening to make sure that the house was warm before we went to bed. Before my parents retired for bed they would always take the brazier outside. There were special iron rods with short hooks on both ends. You hooked one end into the brazier and held the other with your fingers. Then you gave the *imbawula* a frisky shake so that the ashes were blown out and only coal embers remained. You sprinkled the embers with water so that you would have charcoal for the next morning. It was also necessary to prepare the brazier before going to church on Sunday. By the end of the service, the brazier was glowing and ready to warm the water for washing.

Almost every winter season people in the community would take the risk of sleeping with the brazier in the house and whole families would be wiped out by carbon monoxide poisoning. Although community intelligence related the dangers of sleeping with the brazier inside, there would always be those who did not have sufficient warm clothing or blankets, and took the risk in order to stay warm during the night. I think we could only afford one bag of coal a month for making fire in the brazier (*imbawula*). The white households used a bag of coal every fortnight. Through the black domestics, the used jute bags found their way to the townships

and were recycled. Most of the African people at Noupoot had migrated from the rural areas of the Cape Province (present-day Northern, Eastern and Western Cape provinces).⁹ Some came directly from the Transkei, but some had been chased off the surrounding farms by white farmers when they were considered too old to work.¹⁰ Often these farm workers had served the farmers all their lives, but were now considered useless. In the later 1940s and throughout the 1950s, it was common to see these expelled families in their donkey carts, with all their worldly possessions, camping along the gravel roads on their way to find work and refuge in the nearest towns. All they had to show for their life-long service were the clothes on their backs and a pot and kettle to boil food and stale coffee along the way.

Noupoot, like other towns in the Great Karoo, was a rural commercial centre, supplying goods required by the commercial farmers within a twenty to thirty kilometre radius. In the surrounding Karoo farmland, where most of the sheep farms extended as far as the eye could see and beyond, life revolved around producing lamb for national consumption. In Noupoot, however, life centred on the South African Railways, the main employer in the town. All the young men in Noupoot, regardless of race or class, aspired to jobs on the Railways. If you couldn't get work on the Railways, you would look to some other government department or the Municipality for employment.¹¹

The working day started and ended with loud, piercing sirens, as if to emphasise the over-arching authority of the SAR. The morning siren sounded at 7 am, signalling the start of work. Men from the two African locations would have to begin their long march to the workplace in the early morning. Dressed in the regulation SAR brown overalls they walked in a crowd, urged on by the siren. They returned in similar fashion at the end of the working day, around 4:30 pm. The overalls were a symbol of honour and manhood. These were men who could provide for their families. A few railway workers with bicycles (typically churchwardens or lay preachers) would cycle home for lunch. That in itself was a mark of prestige. The poverty at Noupoot was such that there was not a single black person who owned a car. The fact of the matter is that residential Noupoot had a radius of about one kilometre. Most people could walk to their destinations: work, school, recreation or church. On Saturdays the men worked half days and spent the afternoon doing household maintenance, for example, repairing furniture and broken windows. The younger men enjoyed socialising in the houses where homebrew (*umqombothi*) was sold.¹²

The railway sirens also guided the women who, on hearing the early siren, would get up to make breakfast, prepare the children for school and pack sandwiches for their husbands. The final siren warned housewives to get home from social meetings

they may have been attending and was a signal to those who brewed alcoholic or non-alcoholic beverages to prepare to receive their thirsty customers.

On Sundays many of the railway workers and their families attended church, be it Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian or A.M.E. You could hardly recognise the hardened labourers who loaded and off-loaded rail trucks during the week. Those who had worked on the Railways for more than five years could be distinguished by their black suits, smart black shoes, white shirts and ties. Coincidentally these were usually also senior church officials or community leaders: lay preachers, churchwardens and members of the school board. The rest also dressed decently, although not in suits.

My father maintained a punishing schedule to provide the workers with Holy Communion from Tuesdays to Fridays, before they went to work. That meant a short service from 6.15 am to 6.45 am. As it turned out, hardly any healthy, virile males attended this morning service. Only people with ailments or sorrows, especially women, would pitch up. There would also be that odd carouser still recovering from a hangover. But it was all in a day's work for my committed daddy. Except that he needed at least one server for the Mass.

There was a roster for the servers who were stars on Sundays, performing in their uniforms to doting parents and "crushed" choral damsels. Only boys were servers in the 1950s. The girls occupied a special place as part of the church Choir, close to the altar, sitting directly opposite the Preachers. The price of being a star on Sundays was that you had to serve at least once a fortnight at the 6.15 am morning service.

It was inevitable that, on the extremely cold winter mornings, there were occasions when no server would turn up. The fall-back player was the Priest's son, who could always be woken up. One week, when I had to serve out of turn for the third successive day, I suddenly "developed" a stomach ache. But the padre was equal to the occasion. Without hesitation he whipped out a bottle of castor oil and, hey presto, the ache faded and I was ready to risk it! Returning from the service at about 7 am, there was no point in going to sleep. One had to prepare for school.

Thursdays, known as "Women's Day", were reserved for the Mothers' Unions of the different churches. Women of the three church denominations proudly wore their identifying colours: purple blouses and black hats for Anglicans, red blouses and white hats for Methodists and black or blue blouses with hats laced with animal fur for the AME. These uniforms were also worn for funerals that were routinely held on Saturdays. Weddings were rare because they were considered expensive. There were none sufficiently well-off in the African community to afford a communal wedding.

In the conditions of a small town like Noupoot, a wedding would be an invitation to an entire community.

Residential apartheid

After a few months in Noupoot I had explored the town sufficiently to have a sense of how and where the various communities lived. The population was racially mixed, with Africans, coloureds and whites living in different parts of the town in proportions of approximately 3:2:1. The African and coloured locations were to the south of the town centre, with the railway line forming a clear dividing line between the two communities. On the same side as the coloured location was an area we called “The *Erwe*”, where more privileged Africans and coloureds had household plots (*erwe*).¹³ White railway workers also occupied houses on the side of The *Erwe*. There were no more than twenty such houses but they were sufficient to accommodate the “masters” who commanded teams of mainly African unskilled and semi-skilled workers.

Moving northwards you would reach the railway station and then the business centre, with shops, a post office, a bank, a magistrate’s court, garages, hotels, a moderate hospital and several imposing churches. The white residential area occupied all the land to the north of the business centre, at the furthest remove from the black community. Here were the big houses owned by white traders, artisans and government officials. A posh white school provided tuition from primary to secondary levels and boasted grand and immaculate sports grounds. There were rugby, cricket and basketball fields as well as a well-kept athletics field. Black youth were not welcome as spectators, but you could pass through. For matriculation, many young whites went to boarding schools north or south of Noupoot, from Cradock to Cape Town or from Kimberley to Johannesburg.

The more prosperous whites in Noupoot, who had senior positions in the South African Railways, had huge plots serviced by at least one windmill. They cultivated vineyards and orchards with peaches and guavas, but most of all, quince (*iKwepile*). Quince was the second most abundant commodity in Noupoot after coal. The adventures of young black boys centred on procurement of coal from the rail trucks and quince from the “master’s” orchard. I also dabbled in these illicit activities for a brief period, but schooling saved me from becoming a professional.

I recall that white SAR supervisors also occupied nice big houses at each of the railway sidings as you approached and left Noupoot. These houses were a comfortable distance from the tracks and the train station. Right next to the railway

line, and not far from the station itself, there were four to six double-roomed houses with a kitchen. These were for the African SAR workers whose job was to carry out regular checks on the rails. They examined both the rail sleepers and the gravel that kept the rails in place.

There were two African locations at Noupoot: The Blocks (*eziBlokweni*) and New Bright. The Blocks were surrounded by railway tracks, which stretched from the railway station to the maintenance depot for rail engines. In 1949 The Blocks were about twenty-five to thirty years old. They were originally whitewashed, but had faded with time. Each block consisted of four partitions with a front room and back room. The front room served as a kitchen, lounge and dining room. The back room contained one or two beds with extra mattresses for use by the younger children or guests. Large families and those railway employees who had a record of long service typically occupied two partitions (four rooms). The main cooking was done at a fireplace outside, on a mud brick oven, and only two of the four partitions boasted such a mud-brick oven.

The New Bright location was made up of four-roomed, redbrick "matchbox" houses. They were about four years old in 1949, having been built after the Second World War. These houses were originally intended for one family, but by 1949 there were only three or four families that still occupied all four rooms. The rest had been halved, so that a family occupied only two rooms. They must have been supplied at the outset with "Welcome Dover" iron stoves because each original house had one such stove. In the new arrangement, only one of the two families that shared the house was privileged to have the stove. The other family had to find a primus stove or some other kind of heater.

There were five African families and about eight coloured families who owned *erwe*. Black and coloured ownership of the *erwe* had come about because, in previous years, the most loyal and hardworking African and coloured employees of white landowners had been promoted to the status of main supervisor or *baas boy* (master servant). These *baas boys* inherited the plots of land when the original owner moved to other properties he owned. The current owners of the *erwe* were understood to be descendants of the original *baas boys*.

One such plot hosted the huge – by Noupoot standards – Anglican Church, the mission house where we lived and a church hall made of zinc. The church serviced both the black and the coloured community. It also served as a schoolroom during the week. From 1949 to the end of his posting at Noupoot in 1962, my father devoted his energies to keeping the Anglican Church as a place of worship for both the

Africans and the coloureds, thereby promoting mutual understanding and respect between the two communities. During the church service, the two Bible readings were always read in two languages – Xhosa and Afrikaans. Sermons alternated: one Sunday an Afrikaans-speaking preacher would have a Xhosa interpreter and vice versa the following Sunday.

The two groups shared the Holy Communion and various activities meant to promote the church. The church choir that my father trained and conducted was predominantly made up of African children, but it included a few coloured children who were keen to sing in Xhosa. The choir kept the young people in the area entertained and their parents were happy to make contributions to the church in support of this valuable choral education. Not to be outdone, the coloured community, who had gifted artisans, offered their free services to repair, paint and provide flowers for the church.

The eight *erwe* owned by coloured folk were of two kinds. Two of them had big houses and amenities that included windmills and orchards. At the back of the houses were three brick-built, single-roomed houses available for rent to ex-farmworkers, black or brown. The landlords were two elderly sisters, reputed to be daughters of the original owner of both properties. One sister was a church-going old lady who did not harass her tenants. The other sister whose *erf* adjoined our churchyard, staged regular month-end shows which quickly improved our Afrikaans vocabulary. On the first day of each month she would, from early morning, send an African child of one of the tenants to buy her *mbamba*, a very potent alcoholic brew made from sorghum and pineapple peels. By noon she was prancing about in her yard like a peacock, describing those who had not paid their rent in colourful language that our mother pretended not to understand. We meantime memorised these new epithets for consultation with our Afrikaans-speaking schoolmates during school hours. Truly *Ouma* deserved honours for improving our Afrikaans in such a short space of time!

The other six coloured *erwe* were modern houses with windmills, orchards and proper toilets. The owners were professional artisans: bricklayers, electricians and plumbers whose children ran their own businesses from home. There were tailors, dressmakers and bakers who made cakes on order. There was also a piano tutor. Parents arranged the frequency of classes according to their pockets. There was also one Indian landlord who ran a café from his plot, but his residence was situated among the coloured “elite”, which also included the following families: the Marneys, the Geswindts, the Phillipses, the Africas and the Meyers.

Of the five African *erwe*, two had three-roomed brick houses. They had no garden to speak of, the land being used instead for shacks rented by the families of people recently expelled from white farms. As I have explained, the people who occupied the main house on each *erf* were descendants of the owner who had inherited the house. Their meagre railway wages were supplemented by the sale of *mbamba*. Two other *erwe* had two bedrooms, a kitchen and a lounge. They also had what had once been vegetable gardens and dried quince trees. The fifth *erf* belonged to the Anglican Church.

The churchyard bordered the residences of poor and semi-literate white railway workers (fondly referred to as "*arme boere*" by the black community). Though the white railway workers' homes were superior two-bedroomed houses with big gardens, which they tended themselves, the *arme boere* were like any modest household in the hard-working black labouring community. We could comfortably walk to town through the streets of the white location. A few of the white children became our playmates, but they quickly disappeared as apartheid took hold.

It was already apparent to me that the communities pursued distinct professions. For example whereas the whites typically worked in senior positions on the Railways, the coloured community inclined towards artisanship such as building, painting, plumbing, tailoring and carpentry. Some also did catering. These were professions that could be employed across the colour line. In the African community, making cement or painting houses was not considered an occupation for an educated person. Very few parents would have sacrificed their hard-earned money to educate their children in a field they believed "anyone can do".¹⁴ Teaching and nursing were the desired and respected professions.

My father was the only African priest in Noupoot who was qualified to issue birth and marriage certificates. He was also Chairman of the School Board. He used his influence to persuade black parents to give their children a secondary and tertiary education, thereby offering them a future in a respectable profession rather than a life of back-breaking manual labour. By the 1950s there were several teachers and nurses who came from Noupoot, who worked in bigger towns and cities. Other African families produced a court interpreter, a bank assistant and prominent athletes. I remember the family names: Maneli; Maseti, Mnweba, Mkhosana, Hlathi, Tshitshiba, and Gwatyu.

School and church provided the focus for the growing children in my family. From 1949 to the end of 1951 I attended the local primary "school", though there was no school as such. Rather there were classrooms spread through the township, where

the small churches doubled up as schoolrooms during the week. The zinc hall next to the Anglican Church was used for Grades 1 and 2 and Standard 1. Standard 2 was at the AME church. Standards 3 and 4 were run in the Anglican Church. Standards 5 and 6 were conducted in another zinc hall beside the Methodist Church in The Blocks. It was the same size as the Anglican zinc hall and probably designed by the same architect. The schoolgirls' uniform was a black gym dress with a white blouse. Schoolboys wore mainly khaki shirts and shorts. They reserved their white shirts and grey pants for church services or funerals.

There were very few pupils who lasted up to Standard 6. Many African schoolchildren dropped out of school as early as Standard 3 or 4, when they were thirteen or fourteen years old. Boys were encouraged, mainly by the Location Superintendent and a small number of white entrepreneurs, to stop "wasting time" and get good jobs. They could already read and write. What else did they want?

For boys there were jobs as gardeners or cleaners in the homes of whites. Some got "piece jobs", loading and off-loading vans and trucks at the various shops. If there were goods to be delivered, they would sit or stand at the back of the delivery vehicle or on top of the goods being transported. I remember how they would shout greetings when they saw friends or young ladies. It was a matter of prestige to have a job, even if only as a manual worker. Waving from the back of a truck emphasised that you were a reliable provider. A fall-back occupation was work as a porter. Teenage boys would be at the station when passenger trains arrived. White travellers would pay a ticky to sixpence, roughly forty to eighty cents, for a "boy" to carry their luggage. The amount depended on the weight of the luggage and the distance covered.

Black girls were hired as nannies and domestic workers, or as cleaners in the shops and hotels.¹⁵ Otherwise they collected charcoal at train engine depots and loaded the charcoal into jute sacks. The older girls and young women could carry a charcoal bag on their heads all the way from the train depot to their home. Distances varied from fifty to three hundred metres. Girls who had brothers or boyfriends got them to collect the loaded bags in a wheelbarrow.

Home life

As time passed my father's health improved considerably and he settled into work in his new parish. At last I had a place I could call home. I have happy memories of family life at this time.

My father taught me how to prepare porridge in the morning: usually sour porridge or mealie-meal with milk from the single cow which father kept through thick and thin. When I was younger he would prepare the porridge himself while Mother tried to catch some sleep after a hectic night with the current baby. But now, with a growing young man in the house, he could devote his time to preparing his daily reports and weekly letter to the Bishop in Grahamstown.

During the working week lunch and supper were cooked by a helper, but on Saturday and Sunday, Mother cooked. Our meals were modest, in keeping with the income of an Anglican priest in a poor community. Lunch was typically samp and beans. Vegetables varied between potatoes, cabbage and carrots which father grew in the house garden. We had cooked seasonal fresh maize from the garden in autumn. In summer we had *umphokoqo*, mealie-meal cooked in a small quantity of water like *couscous*, together with sourmilk (*amasi*). As I grew up, my mother taught me how to prepare these dishes. Supper could be remnants from lunch, or a soup made from unstamped maize grains cooked with brown beans. Sometimes there would be steamed bread made from mealie-meal or sorghum (*maltabella*).

After school we had lunch and then played outdoor games and helped to attend to the younger ones; in those years there was almost invariably a two-year old and a baby of a few months to look after. I cannot recall us doing any homework during the primary school years at Noupoot. Instead Father bought board games like Ludo and Snakes & Ladders. Whenever he had free time in the evening, Father would play these games with us young ones. Mother would watch us and make comments, but I don't remember her ever playing herself.

We received a weekly supply of home-made bread from the Maneli family in The Blocks. Using an outside baking oven (*iOndi*), they baked big tasty loaves twice a week. We would receive or fetch two loaves at a time. I never got to know whether we paid for these, but I suspect that, in rural tradition, these were gifts to the reverend. Occasionally we would take a small bag of flour to their house. There was never a calculation of how much bread you could get from the irregular flour that we brought. I also knew how to make the 11 am and 4 pm tea. It had to be hot with warm milk at the moment of delivery.

On Saturday mornings I would polish the main rooms: the study, where father received church visitors and also wrote his reports with the smallest mechanical typewriter in use at the time, and the dining/sitting room where meals for adults were served. This room was also used to receive guests, mostly from outside Noupoot. Then I would clean the kitchen and the passage that separated the two

main bedrooms from the rest of the house. After polishing the linoleum floor I would sometimes clean the windows. The standing chore after house-cleaning on Saturdays was to buy the weekly Newspapers: the *Eastern Province Herald* and *Imvo Zabantsundu* (*Black Opinion*).

It was a condition that I would complete all these and any other outstanding chores before joining my friends in the afternoon. I had a choice of three groups of friends: my African and coloured friends from The *Erwe*; my schoolmates from New Bright and The Blocks, and my friends from the church choir, some of whom were also servers in the church.

I became firm friends with Arthur, a boy whose family rented a house from the friendlier of the two sisters in The *Erwe*. Mzamo Arthur Xhantini, popularly known as Max, was two years older than me and became my mentor in the ways of life. In summer we would take weekend walks along the banks of what had once been a proper river, judging by its high banks, but it was now mostly dry, except during the rainy season. It was during such walks that we would sometimes be joined by young white boys of our age. I remember Hans and Derek who would join us in a walk towards the outskirts of the town, along a dry riverbed. They would tell stories similar to the fables we told each other at school, but they would also teach us songs in Afrikaans like "*Bobbejaan klim die berg*" ("Baboon climbs the mountain"). It all happened naturally; there was no racial tension between us at all.

Max helped me considerably with the Afrikaans language, the predominant language in the Karoo. He had a friend who also stayed in the yard and was friendly with the landlord's Afrikaans-speaking grand-daughter, Elsa. Elsa in turn had her own Afrikaans-speaking coloured friends who would visit her, especially at weekends.

In winter we would gather around one of the braziers (there were several in the yard) and tell stories. I was still picking up the Afrikaans language, so would mainly listen. One evening the conversation included a new word which coincided with the exchange of a cigarette for the first time since I had joined the group. (I was ten years old at the time) I took note of the word. Every now and then my friends would be called by their little siblings to come back home and help their mothers. On one such occasion I found myself alone with Elsa, who was smoking. I tentatively asked her for what I thought was a cigarette, using the new word in my vocabulary. Elsa laughed and said, "Ay, ay, Sindiso – even you?" When the others returned, there was humorous ribaldry and laughter. My friends pulled my leg saying, "He is now ready for it". I had paid the price for "picking up *stompies*". When it had finally sunk in that the "cigarette" I had asked for was in fact a girl's private parts (pronounced kwet), I

sweated –which is how Africans blush. But soon I relaxed. I had now been accepted into the inner circle and could get answers to all the questions I had about girl-boy relations!

The praying family

By 1951 our family had grown to five children: myself, Fundisa, the only girl so far (1942), Phumzile (1945), Kwezi (1948) and Buntu (1950). Earlier I had referred to Nontobeko who joined the family when we left Grahamstown. She remained with us when we went to Noupoot from Peddie. Sadly, three months after our arrival, it turned out that she was pregnant. It came as a shock to me, the only one of the children old enough to understand what this was about. So she was no longer with us in 1951.

We were in our second year in Noupoot and were beginning to settle down. I had started Standard 5 and Fundisa was doing Standard 3. Phumzile was enjoying Sub-A and Sub-B. The rest were still playing around the home. In mid-April our maternal grandmother came on another of her unexpected visits which we thoroughly enjoyed. We called her Ziko, because whenever something unusual happened, she would exclaim, “uZiko, umtakamXhamli!” (child of mXhamli!). Her best performance was at prayer time. After hymns we would all get down on our knees with heads bowed and my father would pray. But he clearly welcomed the break when Ziko was there. Certainly on her first night he would request her to lead us in prayer. Now this doyenne of the Mothers’ Union had a set of phrases for opening the door to the heavenly citadel. A humble “*Kumkani!*” (Lord!) would be followed in crescendo by “*Kumkani ka Kumkani!*” (King of Kings!), “*Nkosi yeeNkosi!*” (Lord of Lords!) “*Gongqo-gongqo lakuloMosisi!*” (Colossus of the House of Moses!). You could almost see the prayer rising like a jet to the heavenly firmament. We “grown-up” children thought only we appreciated the power of her rhetoric. Little did we know that even five-year old Pumzile had his own secret understanding of her methods. The moment father asked Ziko to lead us in prayer, a powerful whisper emanated from Pumzile’s lips – “*Kumkani!*” There was a barrage of uncontrollable laughter from all sides, but nothing short of thunder would have deterred Ziko once she had the bit between her teeth. With greater determination and resonance Ziko pushed home the message to the Almighty to ensure that we had a safe and peaceful night.

We were very happy to have Ziko staying in our home, but it turned out, to our dismay, that this particular visit by Ziko was because our mother’s health had suddenly taken a turn for the worse. Her strength diminished rapidly and on 23 May 1951 our dear Mother passed away. I later learnt that she had congestive

heart disease. My father did not make any announcement. He simply called us to prayer and began to commend the soul of our Dearly Departed to the mercy of our Creator. He gracefully allowed Ziko to have the last word. Mercifully the three youngest children, including the perceptive Pumzile, did not fully grasp what had happened and there were relatives and friends who ensured that we children were well looked after. Nevertheless I missed my mother dearly.

School life and an introduction to politics

Our primary school teachers at Noupoot were not of the highest calibre. But one teacher did make an impression on me. He was a teacher-in-training who originated from Noupoot and who came to do his practicals during the lull that follows examinations at the end of the year. It is the period for marking exam papers in the primary schools. Primary school teachers are happy to have these stand-in teachers while they are correcting their class papers. This trainee-teacher was the eldest son of one of the senior churchwardens in our church – Mr Maneli. The teacher's name was Bidi. He was with us for only a week, but we learnt something which I doubt the principal would have approved of publicly.

History textbooks at school were full of derogatory statements by colonial officials like the notorious Sir George Grey. This open racist is credited with discovering three main evils among the Natives in South Africa: ignorance, idleness and superstition. However, he failed to explain who dug the mines or built the roads and bridges. I recall that the textbook gave a very biased, colonial account of the Xhosa cattle-killing crisis of 1856-57 following the prophecies of the teenaged Xhosa prophetess, *Nongqawuse*. In 1856, Nongqawuse claimed that the spirits of three of her ancestors had appeared to her when she went to fetch water from a pool near the mouth of the Gxarha River. Their message to Nongqawuse was that on a given day, "two moons away, the sun will rise but stop at noon and return to the east. On that day the Ancestors will arise from their graves and drive the British settlers into the sea. There will be abundant harvest and livestock. For this to happen, all households must destroy their existing livestock and consume all their grain and any other produce by the eve of the appointed day." Her uncle and guardian, Mhlakaza, a Xhosa spiritualist, relayed this prophecy to the paramount chief, Sarhili, who authorised the mass slaughter of cattle, sheep and goats and destruction of crops and food supplies. The mass food destruction is recorded as lasting a whole year, from April 1856 to May 1857.

On the appointed day, people assembled to watch the movement of the sun. The sun rose from the horizon and at noon it proceeded toward the west and sank into

the sea. It was like any ordinary day but for those who had destroyed their wealth it was a catastrophe. The independence of the once proud and self-sufficient Xhosa tribes was destroyed and they queued up at mine recruiting-stations seeking “men’s jobs” two kilometres into the bowels of the earth. The event is still remembered every year in the annals of South African history.

Our trainee teacher in Noupoort gave a new and – to us – highly plausible version. Gold and diamonds had recently been discovered, but the self-sufficient Xhosas, as well as Africans throughout the land, were unwilling to undergo what amounted to torture: digging stony soil in the belly of the earth, three or four hours at a time. At the same time the white (European) missionaries were frustrated by the power of the traditional soothsayers and healers, who continuously warned against the whites who carried a Bible in one hand, and a “hole-less button” (money) in the other. The wealth-seeking white capitalists entered into a mutually beneficial agreement with the Christianising missionaries and a sinister plot was conceived. A group of whites hid at the river bank where Nongqawuse, the niece of the powerful soothsayer Mhlakaza, dutifully fetched water every morning. Speaking through a reed pipe, they delivered their fatal message from the “ancestors” to the frightened but gullible girl. This unofficial version of events was the earliest political education that I received. It planted a seed in my mind that would grow into a determination to regain our freedom.

In November 1951 we wrote our end-of-year tests to determine promotion from Standard 5 to Standard 6. The question papers for Standard 5 were set and marked by the school principal himself, who taught the two classes (Standards 5 and 6). He then reported to the school inspector who generally cast a cursory glance over the tests and signed his approval or disapproval of the marks given by the principal.

It turned out that my performance was borderline. I had scraped through. My father, as Chairman of the School Board, was made aware of this. One day, when I got home from school, he suddenly wanted to know how I was faring and gave me some arithmetic exercises to solve on the spot. I could not solve a single one. I had to be honest and tell him that I had not been able to follow the arithmetic lessons we were given at school. My father duly told me that there was a teacher in Cradock who had produced seven first class passes in 1950 at Standard 6 level. He had decided that this was the school I should attend the following year.

Fortunately it was not all doom and gloom: my reading and writing in my mother tongue had received a boost when I was in Standard 4, thanks to my father introducing me to the Xhosa translations of the Anglican prayer book and Bible.

The Anglican prayer book contained services and prayers for all occasions: morning prayers, evening prayers, Holy Communion, the Psalms, and Sunday prayers for the fifty-two weeks of the year. Then followed the prayers and services for special occasions: baptism, confirmation, marriage, illness and death. I soon memorised the morning and evening services and could read the Psalms with ease.

My father would assign me passages to read from the Bible during the evening prayers at home. By the year-end, I was reading the first or second lesson from the Bible during the church service. The Xhosa language of the Bible is extremely difficult, even for language specialists. The complexity of biblical language applies equally to Zulu, Sotho, Tswana, Venda and Tsonga. With this background I found it easy to read popular Xhosa novels and folklore from the school library, like *Ityala lamaWele* (*The Case of the Twins*) and *Unyana wolahleko* (*The Confused Young Man*). This is how I occupied myself after we had written the end-of-year examinations in Standard 5, before the school closed for holidays. In fact my classmates in Standards 4 and 5, who were all older than me, unanimously agreed that I should read aloud from the Xhosa novels for the boys. The girls at this time preferred to be together and did not do any reading. Mostly they told each other real-life stories and shared the latest gossip.

1father, 2mothers = one family

In January 1952 I travelled by train to Cradock, a distance of 140 kilometres, to begin my studies at St James Primary School under the headmastership of Mr Mzamo. I had with me a small suitcase, just big enough to carry two sets of my daily wear: a khaki shirt and shorts (no underpants), two vests, one grey pair of short trousers and a white shirt for Sunday wear, and a pair of shoes for use on Sundays and special occasions. I also had a jacket and a jersey for winter. This may seem miserly. But my father started school wearing his father's long shirt only, so you could say there was a generational progression. For the whole of 1952 I stayed in Cradock as a private boarder with Mrs Mvambo, the widow of a Presbyterian priest. However I would come back to Noupoot for the school holidays, and easily resumed my friendships back home.

In September 1952 my landlady unexpectedly handed me a train ticket from Cradock to St Marks, near Qamata, the home of Ma'am Sigcu who had been staying with us at Noupoot. When I got there I discovered that I was attending the wedding of my father to Miss Sigcu. I warmly welcomed this occasion. I appreciated that Tata would not have been able to look after us indefinitely on his own and needed a helpmate to assist in our upbringing. To my father, securing a mother for us

must have been a prime consideration. While my younger siblings were not fully cognisant of the loss of our mother, they desperately needed a mother figure to guide and help them in their needs. Moreover Miss Sigcu was an excellent choice of a mature woman brought up in the traditions of service and respect for an Anglican priest. She also had a high regard for the upbringing of children in the best African tradition of *Ubuntu*.

The wedding was a colourful affair and a number of important personalities from the area were present. St Marks is one of the oldest mission stations built by the early missionaries in the Transkei area. There is a huge Anglican church built of stone that can be seen from what used to be a railway siding, a stop for railway buses which covered the route from Queenstown to Mthatha. Because Tata (that's how I addressed my father) was a priest and his father-in-law was the Churchwarden at St Mark's church, it looked like the whole community of St Marks was there. To add further distinction to the occasion, the Churchwarden, Albert Sigcu, was the proud owner of two houses made of stone, almost like the church itself. They are the only buildings of that size in the surrounding villages.¹⁶

After the wedding we travelled to Noupoot where Tata called us, his five children, and announced that from now on we would call Miss Sigcu "Mother". We were happy to do so and it was a blessing that Miss Sigcu wholly and selflessly adopted us children as her own. We truly felt that we had a mother again. The blessing was twofold for me in that I was now a nephew to two families, nay, to two clans: the Gambus (my mother's clan) and the Ntlanes (Miss Sigcu's clan). African society adores children as God's greatest gift. The clans will adopt and care for any child of the same clan. So overnight, I became a child of the Gambus and Ntlanes.¹⁷

The bicycle

One of the things I remember distinctly about life in Noupoot during the Fifties is learning to ride my father's bicycle. He used the bicycle to go to town or to visit his parishioners. After his marriage in September 1952 he did fewer house visits and increased my errands to town and to the townships. For this purpose I used his bike. In December 1952, during the summer holidays, Arthur asked me to accompany him to one of the distant farms on an errand for his father. I got permission from my father to use his bike and said we would be back around lunchtime. Unfortunately my calculations were far from accurate.

It turned out that Arthur was not sure how to get there, nor did he know the actual distance. He was relying on getting directions en route. The farm turned out to be

much further from Noupoot than we had expected. We only reached the place at lunchtime, and after our long ride, we found that our host was not even at home. So there was none of the farm hospitality we had anticipated. After a short rest we drank water and set off home. We had covered about one third of the journey when I simply had no energy to continue. Arthur tried several times to coax me to ride, but I simply did not have the strength. So he guiltily left me, saying he would report to our parents where I was.

I must have slept for half an hour or so when I was woken up by municipal workers in a truck. By providence, there was a locust plague in the area. These workers had been sent to annihilate the clouds of locusts that were demolishing green pastures, fields of vegetables and sprouting corn leaves. The workers had seen a bicycle flat on its side next to a prostrate boy and had feared the worst. They were delighted to find that I was still alive and readily took me and my bike onto their truck. I remember that there were huge tanks of anti-insect spray next to me in the back of the vehicle.

The friendly workers dropped me near my home in the late afternoon and I reached the house still in the saddle, so to speak. I did not contact Arthur until the next day and he simply shed tears of relief that I was safe and sound. He had been too scared to report what had happened to his parents or mine. This experience increased my resolve to systematically improve my cycling, taking reasonable distances at a time.

On both sides of Noupoot junction there were small railway side-stations or "sidings". There would be three or four such sidings before you reached a town. I pursued my bicycle training by taking one siding at a time, but never went beyond two sidings. Going south towards Rosmead, the first siding is Carlton. From Carlton to Noupoot there is a steep upward slope that would force me to get off the bicycle and walk. One of my greatest achievements as a cyclist at that early age was when I rode to the top of that slope without disembarking. From there you came to a downward slope that accelerated the bicycle's speed without any pedalling. On this memorable occasion I reached Noupoot fifteen minutes earlier than my normal time. When I look back, I realise that overcoming challenges such as these strengthened my character and served me well when I faced obstacles in my later life.

Farm life

When my father visited parishioners in neighbouring towns like Rosmead, Colesburg, Hanover and even Norvalspont, he would use railway concession-tickets and travel by train. However, my energetic father-priest also used a bicycle to visit

communities on neighbouring farms. He was the only one of the many priests in the area who gave himself this extra burden. He became popular with neighbouring farmers because on each initial visit to the farm he would introduce himself to the farm owner to explain his mission. The general response was to thank him for coming to teach the workers about worshipping God. But there would always be the additional injunction: "Tell them to work hard, obey the master and reduce drinking!"

In the mid-1950s, with age catching up on him, my father delegated farm visits to me during my boarding school holidays. That was how I began to understand the Boer (farmer) mentality, which still seemed fairly benevolent and paternalistic at that stage. They seemed to want little more than to be called "*baas*" (master). Their workers' monthly wage was peanuts because they were paid in kind. On each farm there was always a tuckshop which supplied basic items such as soap, mealie-meal, beans, tobacco and clothing. The shop belonged to the farmer. The workers were allowed to take items on credit. The farmer then deducted the cost from the nominal monthly wages which they never received in full.

Every year, before Christmas, the employees were taken to Noupoot to get new clothing, blankets and Christmas gifts. In rare cases the most senior farm workers were paid with a sheep every year. However when the employee had more than five sheep, the farm owner would tell him that they were too costly to maintain. The farm worker had a choice: to sell the sheep to the farm owner or to go and find new pastures. This was another reason for the many roaming families with old donkey carts and a few sheep. They usually got better prices at the *slagpan* (abattoir) than the employer would have paid them.

As I got older I progressed from farm visits to conducting church services and funerals on neighbouring farms on my father's instruction. Again, I would use his bicycle to get there and back. I have mentioned that there was a high rate of pregnancy among girls aged fourteen years and over. Owing to poor sanitation and health, many lost their children before the age of two. My father would not conduct funeral services for small children of unmarried mothers. He assigned this job to his younger preachers. When I turned sixteen, and was at home from boarding school during holidays, I got assigned to such cases.

There was limited space at the hospital mortuary, so small children were buried the very next day. The coffin, for those who could afford one, was made of wooden planks nailed together and covered with black cloth. I wore my cassock from home and carried my white surplice and a wooden cross to the affected house. There was

a strong tradition that, before we walked in procession to the cemetery, all those present would be afforded a chance to view the corpse. The first time I stood next to the coffin and caught a glimpse of the corpse was an unnerving experience, but I survived it. From then on I gradually got used to viewing corpses in coffins, but it was always discomfiting.

During one of my holidays, while cycling to a remote farm, I experienced something that left a lasting impression. To give some background, it was, and in some places still is, common practice to sidestep a wedding ceremony through a process known as *ukuthwala*. The prospective groom would, by agreement with the bride's parents, pay a nominal *lobola* or dowry. Thereafter, without warning, the girl would be "kidnapped" and taken to the man's house. This was usually done at night. Upon arrival the girl would be given new clothes normally worn by a bride on the morning following her wedding. She was then called *Makoti*, meaning "the newly-wed". Most girls were aware of this custom, but to make sure there was no confusion, an elderly woman would spell it out to her: "You are now the wife of this man and we do not expect to see you going back home, except to give birth to your first child."

Now a few days before cycling to conduct the church service I had been enjoying myself playing card games with friends. One of my friends was a girl who had been at school with me in Noupoot. She was a pretty and vivacious tomboy and we had reached a kind of unspoken understanding. On the day I was due to take the church service I passed a siding about eight kilometres from Noupoot. There were a few houses belonging to railway employees. The road I cycled passed close to these cabins. A woman dressed in *Makoti* fashion sat outside one of these cabins. I realised with shock that this was my friend who had suddenly disappeared since our card game. I also realised that she was now somebody's wife. I had no clue as to the whereabouts of the husband. Reeling from the shock, I simply cycled on without greeting her. This incident remained in my mind for a long time.

Entertainment in Noupoot

My father's love of church and choral music had an enormous influence on me, and I was always involved with singing groups at school. We were constantly on the lookout for songs for our singing groups. Living in Noupoot gave us a distinct advantage. By default, because of its location as a railway junction, the town regularly hosted famous musicians who would tour the Cape Province during the school holidays, especially in the summer. During their tours these artists would make one-night stops at Noupoot because they had to change trains. They would willingly

stage concerts for the poorer communities of Noupoot, and children, teenagers and adult music lovers would flock to the concerts. I could therefore boast hearing, first hand, music by such groups as the *Woody Woodpeckers* (Victor Ndlazilwana), *Sidiyo Songstars* and some quartets from the province. Even students from the big cities like Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London could not always afford the entrance fees to shows staged by famous artists. Yet in Noupoot we could see them for almost nothing.

Between 1950 and 1955 an enterprising Mr Langley started weekly cinema shows (*ibay'skopu*) in our community. These shows were held in the church hall next to the Anglican church in our yard and thus I was introduced to the world of cowboys, swordsmen, Tarzan and the horrors of Boris Karloff. When Mr Langley was forced to discontinue because of ill health, there was no other white entrepreneur willing to stick his neck out to entertain the "*kaffirs*". This was the period when the ridiculously rigid Calvinistic policies of the ruling National Party began to be implemented – particularly in the smaller towns of the Karoo.

Fortunately an Indian entrepreneur, Mr Hamoo, replaced the cinema with weekly dance shows every Saturday evening. He played jive music, which became very popular with the local youth. As racist policies became entrenched, the police began a campaign of terrorising the African and coloured youth who attended these shows. A police van would occasionally "raid" the premises, stop the music and proceed to take down the names of the revellers. I once fell victim to this farce. The moment I mentioned my name the policeman, reeking of alcohol, said "Aha, even the Priest's son is here!" But nothing ever happened thereafter. Clearly they were not authorised to carry out such "raids". But they could not resist showing off their authority over the lives of black people. The dance shows continued and kept us in touch with the latest jive music, which we could not have afforded to buy for ourselves. And so this *plaasjapie* (dumb farm boy), Sindiso, shone at boarding school – sometimes more brightly than the "town fellows" – because of all the hip songs that he knew.

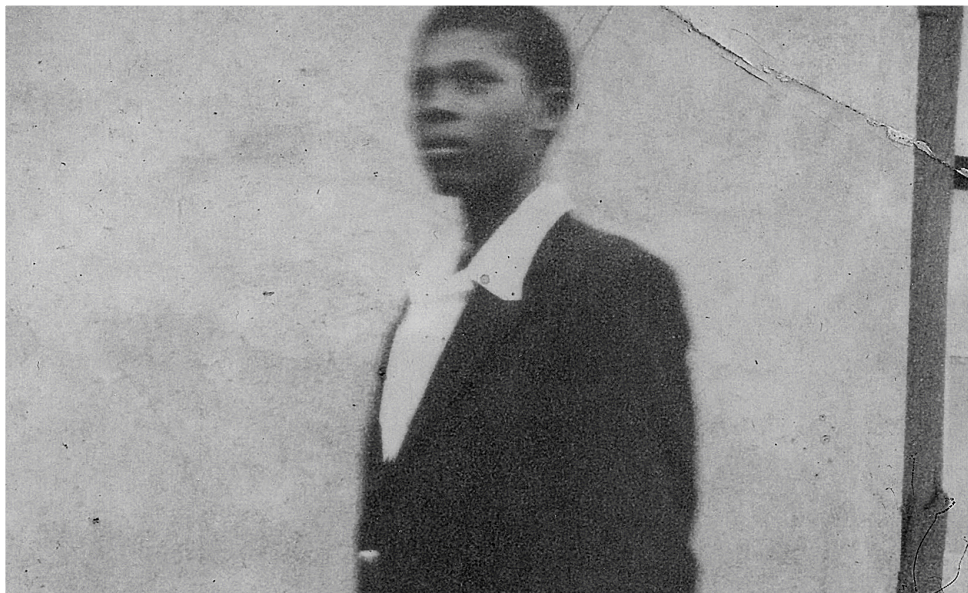
The Group Areas Act of 1950

In 1955 I returned from boarding school for the holidays to find that a plank wall had been built to prevent blacks from passing through the white sector on the way to town. The apartheid policy of racial segregation, first formalised in the Group Areas Act of 1950, had insidiously encroached on our lives in Noupoot through the Fifties, but this was its most blatant expression. Here, as elsewhere in the country, all whites irrespective of their education and skills were allocated decent houses

and indoctrinated into believing that they were innately superior to any other race, particularly blacks. Overnight, as it were, every white man, even from the poor, semi-literate Afrikaner community, was made supervisor of the railway squads of black workers who built and maintained the railway lines. With new houses and much higher salaries than they had ever dreamt of, former lumpen whites now demanded to be addressed as "*Baas*." Even white boys of my age, boys with whom I had talked and played freely as a child, suddenly demanded to be addressed this way.

One day my friend Arthur (Max) and I were walking from the railway station. We climbed the stairs leading to the pedestrian bridge over the railway line. As we came onto the bridge a young white couple in their teens approached from the opposite direction. The bridge was narrow, allowing for only two people to walk abreast. The starry-eyed white damsel suddenly looked up to her hero and asked, "Jannie, lovey, please just kick this *kaffir* out of the way for me." The hero had to prove himself and promptly landed a kick on Max's thigh. Max was bigger than me, but he couldn't hide the pain in his leg as he limped home.

Clearly there was a deliberate campaign to encourage exhibitions of white superiority. What is more, the penalty for fighting a white boy had suddenly increased from mere insults to assault and detention by the police. It was not advisable to engage in a brawl with a white boy. From that day on I avoided situations where there might be a one-on-one confrontation with a muscular white teenager. It was hard to reconcile this new era of racial hostility with the more innocent days of my boyhood when – black, white or coloured – we were just a couple of kids playing together, looking for adventure and fun.



St John's College, Umthatha, 1955.

Chapter 4

Cradock

Cradock was a bigger town than Noupoot, with an imposing Dutch Reformed Church in the city centre. Its clock tower was visible for a radius of at least one kilometre and featured four huge clocks that faced the cardinal points. Not far from the church there were two cinema halls, The Metro and The Odeon, though I never had the means to see movies there. At the age of twelve I neither received nor expected to receive pocket money during term-time, and during the holidays every penny my father gave me went towards buying the daily newspaper. I occasionally kept a few pennies aside and was able to go to the bioscope in Noupoot. So I could talk with some authority about Lex Barker and Johnny Weismuller in Tarzan, and Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and Hopalong Cassidy in the cowboy movies. But the cinema remained a rare treat. Even my classmates and peers in Cradock related cinema stories from what they had picked up from their older relatives.

Like Noupoot, Cradock was surrounded by farmland: fields of grain and vegetables and grazing for livestock, predominantly sheep. In 1952 there was no buffer zone between the city centre and the African townships. The white residential area was located north of the town centre. African townships were towards the south. The coloured population was a small minority located on the eastern side of the Central Business District.

There were two African townships – Magqubeni and Tulo. Magqubeni was closest to the CBD and more middle class, with clearly demarcated streets and brick buildings, including schools and churches. The varied character of the houses gave an indication that they were freehold plots and the owners built comfortable homes according to their means. There were two main churches and affiliated primary schools: St James Primary School (my school) was attached to the St James Anglican Church, and Lwana Primary School was attached to the Methodist Church. The two schools fed into the only secondary school, Cradock Secondary School, which catered for post-primary education for the larger part of the Great Karoo, stretching from De Aar, Hanover, Colesberg, Noupoot and Graaff Reinet down to Beaufort West.

Tulo township was further away from the CBD and consisted of typical municipal matchbox houses with small yards. In some cases owners had added rooms onto the original house to accommodate families of five to ten. Other owners had built small, single-room backyard shacks, for rent to migrants from surrounding farms or

from the rural areas. There were also backyard taverns called *shebeens*, which sold various forms of liquor, including the traditional *mqombothi*. Tulo could be classified as a working class area with no public amenities except some sporting fields. Nevertheless it was home to thriving African rugby teams. There were no soccer teams at that time.

I spent my year in Cradock in the heart of Cradock African society in Magqubeni township, where I boarded with Mrs Mvambo in a prominent street, Street A1. Other home-owners in Street A1 were Mrs Osary Zambodla, widow of a Methodist priest; Mr Mzamo, my principal teacher; Mr Austin Masiza Lupondwana, principal of the Methodist Primary School; Mr Ngumbela, a teacher; Ms Mbuli, also a teacher; and the Pilisos, whose two children were my classmates. The principal of St James Primary School, Mr Alphonso Nkosana Mzamo, had produced seven first-grade Standard 6 passes in the year 1951. My father hoped that I would achieve similar success at the end of 1952.

On my first day at school, I noticed that the class of Standard 6 had a significant number of students above the age of fourteen (I really could not call them pupils). So when two bigger girls blocked my entry into class until I had selected which one would be my "Mom" for the year, I did not hesitate to select the pleasant, but heavier one, for future protection. Her name was Siziwe. The other, named Smokotho, was prettier but more slightly built. Until the end of the year I was saved from the well-known bullies. Even the prettier, slighter girl I had not selected took it upon herself to offer her protection when needed. A few years later I learnt that she was elected Miss Cradock in a beauty competition.

The teachers, male and female, behaved as loving parents, unless you did not do your homework. Now the quince tree, so common in the Karoo, produces twigs that make for the most painful switches. Accordingly I did not need much persuasion to do my homework.

Every day at closing time, staff and students assembled in a big hall for notices and closing prayer. The teachers were always smartly dressed and all the male teachers wore ties. This way they could be distinguished from some of the older male pupils who were close to twenty. A few even had beards!

Mr Mzamo was a wonderful teacher, making all the subjects we learnt relevant to our lives. To me this was a new and welcome experience and I began to have a genuine interest in and understanding of the subjects we were taught. Whether the subject matter was hygiene, arithmetic, geography or history, he would use examples from daily life to clarify the concept under discussion. On reflection, I

assume all teachers were trained to teach in this way. However not all teachers had Mr Mzamo's innate gift for imparting knowledge and instilling a love of learning in his pupils. I recall a simple example. We were learning about the farm that had belonged to Simon van der Stel, one of the early governors in the Cape of Good Hope. We were taught that the name of the farm was "Vergelegen". One day, during a period which had nothing to do with farms or history, Mr Mzamo simply posed the question about the name of this farm. Noting the blank expressions on our faces, he gave us a tip – "Ek lig ver" ("I give light from a distance"). Half the class shouted, "Vergelegen! We just needed to break down the name into its components. Now it would be easy to recall.

Medium of instruction

By Standard 6 I had a firm foundation in my mother tongue, IsiXhosa. But I needed a better grounding in English grammar. Mr Mzamo cultivated regular use of English for all subjects except of course when we had Xhosa grammar and literature as a subject. We also used our mother tongue when we needed to clarify new concepts in the other subjects. In order to encourage use of English, Mr Mzamo made it compulsory for us all to read the daily English newspapers. If an English newspaper was not available at home, you were encouraged to go to a public library or to befriend a schoolmate at whose home at least one English paper was available. People who worked in offices or public institutions were in the habit of taking home from the office at least one English newspaper, after the staff had read it. It was a matter of pride and distinction to walk home with a newspaper folded under your arm. For our purpose in the classroom, it was enough to memorise one item in the news and to be ready, when called upon, to recount or recite it. But you had to understand what it was all about.

To deepen our interest in literature, Mr Mzamo introduced us to Shakespeare's tragedy, *Macbeth*. After he had explained the essence of the story, he assigned selected portions of the play to individual pupils. He had specially prepared copies of the required sections, which he distributed. Over the course of the week he had us mesmerised as he read out aloud in class how the extracts should be recited. I was assigned Macbeth's soliloquy. Within a week I was able to recite the soliloquy exactly the way Mr Mzamo wanted – all three pages of it. Up to this day I am still able, with some prompting, to recite the entire soliloquy.

To ensure that we paid equal attention to our own language, he did a similar exercise with Xhosa literature. I was assigned the speech by Ngub'engwe from the classic *The Wrath of the Ancestors* (*Ingqumbo yemiNyanya*), by AC Jordan. This

book was longer than the Shakespearan play. Ngub'engwe's speech covered two printed pages. Again Mr Mzamo gave us guidance on how the speeches were to be presented. As we neared the exam time at the end of the year, he would use the period after lunch for recitals. I recall that we acquired a spirit of healthy competition and even began to assist our fellow pupils who had difficulties with their assigned texts.

Every three months I would take a train to Noupoot during the school holidays. At the beginning of the year I had explained to my father the requirement that we should read English newspapers daily as part of our homework. So, whenever I came home, my father would give me money to buy the only English newspaper available in Noupoot – *The Eastern Province Herald*. Later in the year a new magazine called *The African Drum* made an appearance at the newspaper shop at the railway station. I bought it without my father's permission, convinced that he would find it worthwhile. When I got home from the station, I quickly perused the magazine and was captivated by what I read. There were excellent stories and articles about the lives of black South Africans – as well as fellow Africans in the rest of the African continent – by writers like Es'kia Mphahlele, Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, Arthur Maimane and others. When I showed my father, he was equally impressed by the quality of the publication and agreed that I should buy it on a regular basis.

A new type of lesson

One afternoon in mid-1952 an event occurred at our school that was to revolutionise my way of thinking. The bell had rung after lunch break, as normal, to signal resumption of classes. When we got to class, however, we were told to assemble in the school hall. Half the hall was occupied by pupils from Standards 4 to 6. The other half was occupied by neatly-dressed adults, including known personalities in the African community. We waited with a keen sense of anticipation as a group of speakers took to the stage. I would later recognise them as prominent leaders of the ANC, like Dr Njongwe, Dr Mji, Dr Cachalia and Mr Tshume. Each speaker introduced himself, giving his name and occupation, and then, with fiery eloquence, recounted his experience of defying the apartheid laws as a volunteer in the African National Congress's Defiance Campaign. Each of the speakers was part of a team of volunteers of ten to fifteen who had been assigned to break the new racially discriminatory laws. They would assemble in places like railway stations and public parks, where they would deliberately occupy benches marked "Whites Only". The idea was to have a peaceful, nation-wide campaign where thousands would be arrested for openly defying apartheid legislation.

This was my first experience of a political rally and a new dawn for me. Coming from Noupoot, I did not need any lessons about "White Oppression". Racial discrimination was an all too familiar experience. The Defiance Campaign rally was on a Friday. That weekend my friends and I enthusiastically sold Defiance Campaign stamps and put up posters in our township calling on people to support the campaign. From that time onward I considered myself an ANC supporter.

Among the main attractions of my school in Cradock were the feeding scheme and music lessons – in that order. Mr Rala-rala was the music teacher and a composer in his own right. He was so good that there was stiff competition between the St James Primary School Choir and the Secondary School Choir. I remember how we adjusted a farewell song to include the name of a senior official of the Education Department who was retiring.¹⁸ Apparently she had been very supportive of the school efforts to provide better facilities and increase teaching staff. It was a short farewell. The principal introduced the senior white lady, we sang our farewell song, and a modest gift was handed over by one of the lady teachers.

This occasion took place about two months after the Defiance Campaign rally. I began to understand that it was not all white people who supported oppression of so-called "Non-White" people. At this time I was aware of white people who took the trouble to work among black people and offered various services and forms of assistance. For example there were white doctors who treated blacks compassionately even if there were different entrances for blacks and whites at the hospitals and clinics. In church too there were white members who seemed to have no problem mingling with blacks. So clearly it was a certain kind of white who had no love for black people. During the Defiance Campaign rally the political songs we sang pinpointed the Malan government as the main agents of discrimination against black people.

In Cradock I was also introduced to extra-mural activities, like playing the caddy at the local golf course for a short time. On Saturday afternoons we young pupils in our street would come together and listen to the "professional caddies" who had stopped schooling. They were about fourteen to sixteen years old. One of them, called Marshall, was a typical township guy who dressed in "sharp" clothes of the latest fashion, including a nice-looking, second-hand Stetson hat. I took with a pinch of salt his story that the hat was a gift from his golf "boss". He came from a poor home with an unemployed father and a mother who worked as a domestic worker. Although he carried a knife "for protection", he was not the aggressive type. I enjoyed listening to his stories about outstanding golf players and recall that the name Bobby Locke occurred regularly in his tales. One time he brought two second-

hand golf sticks and allowed me to play some “holes” in a local field with three holes. That was the nearest I got to playing golf, but I had sufficient theory to participate in golf conversations and impress the uninitiated.

One day my “Moms”, who had volunteered their protective services on the first day of school, introduced me to my “sister” – Thini. She was in Standard 4, attractive and streetwise. Miss Mbuli, a lady teacher living in our street, had started a small choir of selected pupils from our school, myself included. The choir practice took place twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and among those attending was Thini. My “Moms” and a few other close friends enjoyed tutoring me on what I should do to show my romantic interest. Following their advice I one day escorted Thini home from choir practice. She indicated that she would arrange a convenient place we could meet the next time. But unfortunately this was not to be. Some friends informed me that she had a boyfriend who was a known pugilist. I didn’t want to stir his jealousy. Thini waylaid me at school and asked why I was no longer attending the choir practices. I told her that our principal, who stayed in the same street and was related to Miss Mbuli, had got to know that I spent evenings at choir practice. I lied that he had asked me to devote more attention to my studies than the choir. I guess this was my first “puppy-love affair”.

Changes in the family

In the course of the year 1952 two things happened that would have a significant bearing on my life. One was a joyous event I have spoken of already – the marriage of my father to Miss Sigcu. But the other event, earlier in the year, brought me great sadness. On a Thursday evening in April my guardian, Mrs Mvambo, gave me a train ticket to Queenstown. I was to travel the next day, Friday, and would be met by my father at Queenstown station. Mrs Mvambo never gave any explanation and I only found out when I got to Queenstown that my paternal grandmother, MaXaba, had passed away at the family home in Dophu. Grandma had always been kind to me and I was heartbroken to hear of her passing. Nevertheless I was grateful to have a chance to attend the funeral to say goodbye to my beloved grandmother. The funeral was an important occasion for the families of the five sons and single daughter. This was also to be the last occasion I would see my peers and seniors from the entire extended family together. I was sufficiently grown up to remember them all when I met them later in different contexts.

I returned to Cradock on the Sunday after the funeral and was back at school on Monday. Before Mr Mzamo started teaching, he asked where I had been on Friday. I responded that I had attended my grandmother’s funeral. He wanted to know why

I had not informed him because he had a very important subject to teach that day. He then took out his quince switch and gave me ten lashes on my right hand (I am a left-hander, remember?). While the pain in my hand was throbbing, I silently sent my teacher to the deepest valley of eternal fire in hell. When the pain subsided I was still crying, but I began to follow what he was saying. He said that my father had sent me to Cradock so that I should pass my Standard 6 with flying colours. He would ensure that this happened. I doubt he anticipated just how much his charge would achieve.

Home chores

On Mondays to Fridays I was allowed the freedom to study or to play with friends. Mrs Mvambo was quite elderly. Her son worked at a hotel. He left early in the morning before I was up and generally returned late at night, when I was already asleep. I only saw him on weekends. While I lodged there his wife was nursing a broken leg in a plaster of paris cast and could only do chores within the house. It was therefore my task to fetch water in a big bucket from a communal tap a hundred metres away.

Water collection was regarded as a job for girls and women. If my friends had seen me carrying a bucket on my head, I would have been subjected to their friendly ridicule. But at least I knew how to do it. This is where my family sisters at Dophu proved a godsend. I used to accompany them when they went to fetch water from Grandmother's stream and learned to carry a heavy bucket on my head, with just one arm to ensure the balance.

It so happened that we shared this tap with the township of Tulo, where my "sister" resided. I was always worried that one day we would meet at the tap. Fortunately this never happened. Now I come to think of it, she could have deliberately avoided us meeting there to save me the embarrassment of being seen with the bucket on my head. That was the only way I could carry it, because of its size.

Cradock had at least four rugby teams. The communal rugby field was in the centre of Tulo township. Every Saturday afternoon there would be an important match, sometimes with a visiting team from as far away as East London or Port Elizabeth. These rugby matches were a perfect occasion for vendors in the community to sell their wares. In my Cradock home, my family supplemented their income by brewing ginger beer for sale, and rugby matches provided the best market. Every Saturday it was my task to take the bottles of ginger beer to the rugby field and sell them to the spectators. Despite all the discipline instilled in me to obey my elders, this was one chore I hated. The idea of going around the rugby field selling ginger beer was something I just could not get used to. It seemed pointless. Selling the Defiance

Campaign stickers and pamphlets was the sort of salesmanship I had thoroughly enjoyed. It was my modest contribution to serving the African cause or, as the ANC leaders of the Defiance Campaign had put it, my part in “bringing Africa back”. Selling ginger beer simply did not compare. So I would carry this basket with six or eight big bottles of ginger beer on to the rugby field, then simply put the basket down and wait for those who might be thirsty to approach me. Some of my friends from school probably noted my discomfort. They enjoyed taking a bottle and mug around the field, calling on those who were thirsty to sample the best ginger beer for a mere sixpence (roughly R6 in today’s prices). I once had a nasty incident when a bully took the mug and asked for a taste. After taking a sip and swallowing, he grimaced and pronounced the ginger bitter. He did not want to pay. My school friend Mapiki confronted him and demanded payment, threatening that his older brother, a well-known sportsman, would otherwise sort him out. The man paid. That is when I learnt to value loyal friends.

I made many friends in Cradock both at school and outside. I recall an occasion when my schoolmates and I decided to go for a swim in a pool in the Fish River. I remember that I used to swim when I was much younger, back in our village in Dophu, but this was hardly swimming because even when I was standing on the river bed my head was above water. The pool in the Fish River was something else. Everybody started diving into the pool and I did likewise. The next thing, my feet could not find the ground. I was sinking. Amongst my friends was Naydo. This was his nickname because of his dark complexion, like the night. But he was a good swimmer. Every time I surfaced I just managed to shout “Naydo!” and then went under. This happened three times. Thankfully, Naydo grabbed me and dragged me ashore. I could already picture myself crossing the Biblical river Jordan. For a whole week after this incident the entire school was abuzz and referred to me as “Naydo”. It is one of those incidents about which I never informed my parents. Even my own siblings will learn of this only when they read this book.

Mr Mzamo kept track of his star pupils like a dynasty. Thus each year he would use the previous years’ stars to motivate the current class. I knew that among the star pupils for 1950 and 1951 were Ndiki Tabatha, Landu Sindelo and Mbulelo Akena.¹⁹ In my year I enjoyed friendly rivalry with two classmates simply because we vied for and interchanged first position in tests during the year. One was Ghandi Hlekani who was outspoken on any issue and, though he appeared aggressive, had a soft heart. The other was Vuyisile de Vos who, like me, came from outside Cradock. His home town was Graaff Reinet. He had been sent to St James Primary School for the same reason my father had sent me, namely to benefit from Mr Mzamo’s proven track record.²⁰

In December, after the end-of-year exams, I was overwhelmed when Mr Mzamo announced at assembly in the school hall that he had been discussing my academic performance with the School Inspector. It appeared that I had not only obtained a first class pass in Standard 6, but that I had come out tops in the Cradock circuit. My classmates congratulated me, saying that such a pass was guaranteed to attract one of several bursaries that were available to assist promising pupils to further their education.

For me, this was “mission accomplished”. I rushed home to Mrs Mvambo’s house, packed my belongings and went straight to the railway station. That night I slept at home in Noupoort. I later learnt that I had unintentionally missed a traditional ceremony where certificates were awarded. It had taken place, not in the school hall, but in the St James Church, with an array of Cradock personalities (largely black, with a smattering of friendly whites) in attendance. Tata was not unhappy to tender apologies to Mr Mzamo on my behalf.

The road was now clear to my secondary school education. There was a wide variety of boarding schools in the Cape. The most prestigious among them, from the Cradock perspective, were Lovedale and Healdtown. But my father selected a boys’ boarding school in (U)Mthatha – St John’s College. I can now make an educated guess regarding this choice. St John’s College not only had an excellent reputation, but was run by the Anglican Church. Over and above the scholarship I was awarded for my secondary school studies, there must have been special discounts for the children of Anglican priests. I looked forward to widening my horizons at my new school, and opened my heart and mind to the opportunities and challenges that awaited me there.



The Sigcu homestead - my mother's family home. My father, Rita and a family relative.
St. Marks, Eastern Cape, June 1993.

Chapter 5

St John's College, Mthatha

A week after the New Year of 1953, Mother showed me the clothing I was to take with me to St John's College (*eSajonisi*). She had kindly marked my name on all the items with indelible ink, explaining to me that my washing would be mixed up with those of other boys and that I would need to be able to identify it. She also got our domestic helper to teach me how to iron and fold my shirts and trousers properly, as I would have to do this myself at College. Fortunately I had begun to clean and iron my own clothes at Cradock, so this was not difficult for me.

At the end of the second week of January I said fond farewells to my mother and my younger siblings, and my father and I boarded a steam train to Mthatha. Mother had kindly supplied us with a hamper of provisions. I still have vivid memories of the exciting two-day journey which took us from the arid landscape of the Great Karoo into the lush Transkei countryside, with its green hills and valleys. As the "iron horse" chugged merrily on its way I eagerly took in the views from the train window. Picturesque village homesteads dotted the landscape and here and there spans of oxen drew ploughs, wagons or sledges loaded with 500-litre water tanks. Villagers tended to their crops of young maize plants while chickens and pigs rummaged for scraps in the yard. Beyond, cattle, sheep and goats grazed in green pastures. The rural scenes brought back happy memories of holidays in Dophu with MaXaba and my cousin-brothers and sisters.

I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to talk to my father on this long journey. Many of our conversations involved stories of his schooldays. His travels to school by train were longer, he told me, and he would have to spend several nights on the way. He reminisced fondly about different characters at his school, their exploits and achievements. Some of his schoolmates became teachers like himself, and they continued their friendships through inter-school academic, sporting and choral competitions. All of this served to reassure me that I would have a positive experience at St John's, and would make equally good friends.

We arrived at Mthatha railway station on a Saturday afternoon. The Warden of St John's College, Father John Shand, was there to meet us and drove us from the station to the College in his personal car. We entered through a gate into what looked like a grand English manor, with two lawned quadrangles surrounded by stately buildings. I was thrilled by the sheer size of the institution. The boarding establishment was situated in the imposing buildings overlooking the quadrangles

and included dormitories, ablution facilities and two dining halls. The Warden stopped outside the entrance to the dormitories, took out my trunk and told me to say goodbye to my father. He then drove my father to his office. I later learnt that they went through certain formalities and that, once these matters were in order, he escorted my father to wherever he was to spend the night.

The classrooms were in a separate complex, about a hundred metres to the north of the boarding establishment. Next to the classrooms were two staff rooms, one for white staff and the other for black staff, separated by the school library. On the eastern side was the majestic St John's Anglican Church, after which the school was named. St John's College was run under the auspices of the Anglican Church. Its admission policy was therefore tilted in favour of students whose parents were of Anglican faith. Beyond the church and separated by a fence was the St Bede's Seminary for training Anglican priests. This territory also housed the bishopric and the Bishop's residence. This was a separate, but related, institution. The College Warden was the administrative head of the academic institution. The Bishop was the directive authority of the entire Anglican establishment in the Mthatha Diocese. He conducted church services from the cathedral situated in the Mthatha city centre.

The College grounds were enormous, like a farm. The well-tended green lawns around the school buildings gave way to grazing meadows for the cows that supplied milk for the school. Two-thirds of the school grounds were sealed by the banks of the Mthatha river and the remaining grounds had a fenced border road with two wide entrances for trucks that would bring supplies and stationery to the institution.

The bulk of the students arrived the next day, by bus. The bus terminal was about one hundred and fifty metres from the college entrance. Many of the students carried their luggage themselves. A few students arrived in private cars or vans. There was a minority of students from outside the Transkei region. Those who came from within the Transkei and its urban areas were regarded as "rural". Those who came from outside the Transkei, whether rural or urban, were regarded as "town-folks". For example there were five students from a village called Peelton, near East London, all exceptional cricketers. The tendency was to regard them as coming from East London, hence as "town-folks". The "rural" students and the "town-folks" had a lot to learn from each other. Some students saw a train for the first time when they came to St John's, while some of the town boys had never seen or milked cows, knew nothing about stick fights and had never handled a plough or inspanned oxen to a plough. Having experienced the conditions of rural and urban life, I felt comfortable in the company of all my fellow students, regardless of their background. This

allowed me to focus on settling down and exploring what kind of life awaited us at *Sajonisi*. I had survived in a big town like Cradock and was not afraid of life in a church school under the protective authority of the teachers.

I quickly made friends with two other boys also due to start Form One. Geoffrey Sihandiba Nyovane was son of the Anglican priest in Langa Township, Cape Town, and owing to our similar upbringing there was an immediate affinity between us. Jeff, as we called him, was of medium height, quietly-spoken and a good listener. He was always well-groomed and was the only one in our class who occasionally wore a suit. This led our rather youthful, neatly-dressed Maths teacher (Mr Mokwena) to refer to him as “my Boss” (“*Umlung’wami*”). However, Jeff’s skills as a footballer in our “club” placed him firmly within the ranks of the ordinary street kids.

The other boy I befriended was Bernard Sportswood Mandlonke Ndlwana, whose father was a teacher at St Phillip’s School in East London. Although the same height as Jeff (I was the youngest and tallest), “Sports” was in every other way his direct opposite. Sports was a talkative extrovert who had an opinion on everything: behaviour, dress style, music, scouts, and sport. He was an energetic sports commentator and linesman in rugby and had names for all the prominent players: “Killer”, “Terror”, “Slicer” and the like. We quickly discovered that we had been taught by the same teacher up to Standard 1, in East London. Bernard helped to update me about our other peers and what they were doing. I was intrigued to hear about one of our most infamous contemporaries, Lwandle, renowned and envied for his fearless stealing exploits in shops. He had twice been sent to a Reformatory for Juvenile Delinquents, first in East London and later in Diepkloof in Johannesburg. Lwandle was a household name in the township because of his exhibitionist behaviour whenever he was put on the three-seater police motorbike. He would wave to the public as he was escorted from the scene of the crime. I bumped into him in East London around 1958, for just long enough to re-establish our acquaintance. I was to run into him again in Johannesburg in 1961 under typically Lwandle circumstances.

Within a few days I had settled into the school routine and fully embraced the St John’s ethos, which emphasised the values of community on the one hand, and self-reliance on the other. Both in the classroom and in the dormitory we were encouraged not only to look after ourselves, but also to help one another.²¹ Dining hall service was a way of fostering this community spirit. Each class, except the Form Ones, took on dining duties in turn, which lasted from Mondays to Sundays. The class on duty would allocate dining tables to each of its members. Each member would then collect from the kitchen whatever dish had been prepared by the professional cooks, and carry it to his table. It was the responsibility of those on dining hall duty

to ensure that no table was without food. Each table attendant had to dish out the food prior to the entry of the students. Those who completed the task early had to assist the others. After fifteen minutes a bell rang and the hungry hordes rushed in. The boarding master on duty would say grace. His thanksgiving would typically be interrupted by a unanimous "Amen!" and with a loud scraping of chairs everyone would sit down to eat.

There was a hierarchy in the seating arrangement. The Form Ones sat at tables closest to the stage where one of the two boarding masters assisting the Warden would say grace. The Form Twos occupied the next tables and so on. The Form Fives were farthest from the stage but nearest to the kitchen. It was a comfortable arrangement and people sat with their classmates. There was no adult "supervisor" at the tables. This facilitated conversation on incidents that had taken place in the classroom or on weekend adventures.

While this communal spirit permeated various school activities, so, unfortunately, did an element of corruption in the guise of "initiation". In the first quarter it was common practice for the Form Twos to mistreat the green Form Ones. I recall a particular initiation ritual in the dining hall. Breakfast was typically mealie-meal porridge. In the first quarter Form Ones were given porridge that merely covered the base of their dishes, but did not have "height", hence the slogan "base without height". There was, of course, no chance for the Form Ones to return the favour. As the black schools became more politicised, these sorts of practices were seen as an extension of the oppressive machinery of the state and this kind of discrimination against fellow Africans was abandoned. At any rate, such practices were at odds with the predominant ethos of the school, which encouraged us to relate to each other with care, appreciation and respect. Such values, nurtured over the years, were to have a profound and lasting influence on my character.

The sense of community at St John's was bolstered by the teacher dynasty at the school. There were three generations of teachers at any one time. I suspect this accounted for the excellent results achieved there, as the older, more experienced, staff community was constantly reinforced with new blood. There was no doubting staff members' loyalty towards the institution. Even the boarding masters who were responsible for discipline outside the classroom were products of the institution and took pride in their longstanding association with the school.

St John's offered not only a thorough secondary school education,²² but also teacher training courses. Equipped with a Junior Certificate or JC (awarded on successful completion of Forms One, Two and Three), prospective primary school

teachers could register for the Native Primary Higher (NPH) qualification. Prospective high school teachers needed to obtain a Matric Certificate (awarded on successful completion of Forms Four and Five) to register for an Advanced Teacher Training course. In order to teach at matric level one needed a university degree certificate (a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science) as well as a Bachelor of Education, a one-year teacher training course at a university. The biggest attraction of St John's was that it was one of only two colleges in the Cape Province that offered the Advanced Teacher Training course at the time. The other was at Healdtown in Fort Beaufort. Accordingly, students came to St John's from as far afield as Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and the major cities of the Cape Province.

Every morning from Monday to Friday, before classes began, the entire student body and staff gathered for Assembly, just outside the classrooms. The lowest grade lined up in front. The Form Fives were in the back row and the intermediate grades lined up in ascending order in-between. The teacher trainees stood in file at right angles to the Forms One to Five. The College Warden would say the morning prayers and make some announcements and then, to the sound of a marching song, we left for our respective classes. Jeff, Sports and I had been in the scout movement and we proudly marched in front, changing what had been a disorganised walk to the classrooms into a march in three organised lines. In short, the morning Assembly became a place for solemn meditation followed by a serious march. This was in 1953. We created a tradition which was followed by other new students. Even the teacher-trainees began to march to the beat of the music and no-one wanted to be out of step.

St Johns College had a primary school within the campus that was clearly separate from the secondary and upper classes. It so happened that two of the teachers at the primary school were trained as Boys' Scouts leaders. Before long these two teachers were allowed to conduct training of scouts at the College once a week. In due course, at the instigation of Sports, Jeff, Edmund Mxolisi Mankazana and Yours Truly, fifteen Form Ones had joined the scout movement. We were able to organise a camp on the banks of the Mthatha River and for the occasion the school bought us scout ties to wear with our scout uniform: khaki shirts, khaki shorts and socks and black school shoes.

School entertainment

The following year, when Jeff, Sports and I were in Form Two, we formed the core of a quintet singing group. The other two members were Stephen Pandula Gawe, son of Reverend Gawe (and one-time Chaplain of the ANC in the Cape Province)

and Vukile Mbebe. They were both from Queenstown and two classes ahead of us. We called ourselves the Broadway Brothers and vocal music was the order of the day. We taught each other songs and improved our repertoire from a Juke Box in Mthatha City. Each of us would save a tickey (ten cents) and we would deliberate carefully on which songs to select. Our singing group was seen to be composed of “town fellows”, while another singing group at junior secondary, composed of students from the Transkei, saw itself as the guardian of rural traditions and culture. Edmund Mxolisi Mankazana was virtual leader of the Transkei music group. This may appear to signify a sectarian basis to our singing groups, but was merely the outcome of our common backgrounds.²³

The school administration also organised entertainment. Every month we were allowed to watch feature films aligned to the academic programme: *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, current cowboy films like *Shane*, and pirate stories like *Mutiny on the Bounty* and *Treasure Island*. There were also short films on athletics and other sports. There was a strong colonial bias; these were the type of films that were shown at boarding schools in England. Nevertheless the films stimulated a lively exchange of opinions.

This informal debating forum was complemented by formal debating sessions organised by the Debating Society, which included Juniors, Seniors and teacher trainees. Debates took place fortnightly for each level. I recall many exhilarating debates in which we emulated the lofty language, mannerisms and styles of the Seniors. We aspired to reach their levels and studied our dictionaries daily so that we could come up with new terms in our debates. This extended to our written compositions. Once a quarter joint debates were organised, comprising Seniors and teachers on both sides. They were so popular that half the school would attend and participate. This further enhanced the confidence and oratory of the students at the college.

College yarns

College yarns were a less formal, but no less educational, form of entertainment. After “lights out” in the dormitory, there were fifteen or so minutes of “tall stories” related by anyone who had an extraordinary experience to share. Prickly pears were common throughout the country then and many of us had experienced their constipating effects. It was in the St John’s dormitories that I learned of some hilarious methods of “relaxing”. Apparently shepherds had devised a remarkably effective solution: namely to jump, naked, from a high river bank when the river was dry. No anal sphincter could withstand the impact.

I enjoyed relating some of the “dormitory” stories my father had told me on the train. But first I had to explain that my father was talking of young men in their twenties, not schoolboys like us. The 1920s saw the spread of schooling to rural areas. However, as it was the traditional chore of pre-teen rural boys to herd and tend to domestic stock (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and chickens) black boys typically did not attend school until the age of twelve. They would complete Standard 6 at the age of eighteen and then work for a few years until they could afford to pay the fees at higher primary, teacher-training institutions. It is a matter of historical record that, during that period, teacher training started after Standard 6. The course was called Native Primary Lower and those teachers became principals at primary schools, with outstanding results.

Of all Father’s dormitory stories, his snake story was the most enthralling. In my father’s day it was normal for schoolboys to have sticks under their mattresses in case a viper should find its way into the dormitory. One night, during his teacher training, one of my father’s fellow students happened to sleep with his foot hanging over the side of the bed. In the middle of the night he woke up to discover that his leg was numb. With a loud cry he jumped to his feet on the bed and shouted, “It has bitten me on the leg!” Within seconds the entire dormitory of young men were on their beds, armed with sticks, asking anxiously, “Where is it?” The picture of these grown men standing on their beds in panic, looking for a non-existent snake, sent us all into throes of laughter.

Ghost stories featured prominently in the repertoire of “tall stories” told after “lights out”. I remember being advised that, if you are the type who never sees ghosts, you should stand behind and look over the left shoulder of the one who does. I had tried this experiment without success, until one night in the dormitory some noise disturbed me and I awoke. I lifted my eyes and there, at the window opposite my bed, was a pale white face with piercing eyes staring at me. My body temperature instantly shifted from hot to ice cold, and I think I fainted. When I again opened my eyes, there was nothing behind the window pane. My older neighbour assured me it was no ghost but our “roaming Warden” checking for absentees. I had a few more encounters with the “pale face” in the window on other nights, but I stopped fearing ghosts.²⁴

It was during our nightly storytelling sessions in Form One that I learnt how to go about winning over the girl of one’s dreams. The recommended approaches ranged from, “Would you give me water if I were thirsty?” to the rather more direct, “I would like us to be special friends”. The nightly tutorials were a valuable guide to interpreting the girl’s response. Willingness to give you water whenever you needed

it signified a "yes". If she declined, you were out. Request for friendship or outright love could elicit the response, "Can we please change the topic?" The uninitiated might scupper their chances by retorting something like, "No-one ignores me when I make a point". "Changing the topic" was actually a "yes".

These stories of romantic etiquette were thrilling to Form One thirteen-year-olds. We discovered in due course that our seniors in Form Three had more practical ways of winning their targets. There was hardly an attractive "sweet fifteen" who did not have a boyfriend, usually from the other schools in Mthatha that were still co-educational or "mixed". The solution was to gently ease out the occupant of that coveted position. Teamwork was essential. Reconnaissance of two to three weeks would yield information: name, age, class of the lad in the driver's seat. The damsel's preferred route would then be determined. On "D-Day" two to three friends would conduct a "private" conversation well within the hearing of the young lady. "Solly is such a nice young man – intelligent and popular. What a pity he is afflicted by epileptic fits." A week or two later intelligence would report that the romance with Solly was shaky or over. Then you would go in for the kill and earn the St John's victory cry: *Hay' le Ntaka!* (The eagle forever!).

There were no prefects at St John's in 1953. Those students charged with administrative responsibilities were called Monitors. The legend goes that those who had been appointed as prefects in an earlier era had abused their authority. These prefects were tasked with maintaining order and discipline by ensuring that students did not break the college rules, for example arriving late for classes, or arriving at meals after grace had been said.

From 7 pm to 9 pm there were evening studies in the classrooms. This was a good opportunity to do one's homework, but you had to arrive on time. Thereafter there were evening prayers in the school church from 9 pm to 9:15 pm. A small proportion of students would routinely arrive late for the evening study session and chose to be anywhere but in church for those fifteen minutes of evening prayers. The prefects would duly report these transgressors to the college authorities.

They soon attracted the wrath of senior students, especially those doing teacher training courses. It was mainly the senior students who had reason to be AWOL (absent without leave) at night. You have to appreciate that those who were undergoing teacher training courses were significantly older and more experienced than the prefects. Some had actually been to the mines. Quite a number were married with families. These seniors were referred to as the Elders. Confrontation was inevitable. One day a pitched battle took place between the Prefects and the

Elders at the football field, with the opposing sides using branches for weapons. The Prefects lost the battle and the college administration decided that each class would elect, not a prefect, but a monitor. The monitor consulted the class whenever there was a breach of order or discipline. This enabled the monitor to carry out his responsibilities while maintaining full support from the class he represented.

We, the class of 1953, arrived in time to witness the power of the Elders. As I have mentioned, the Warden at the College was Father John Shand, reputed to have served in the British Armed Forces during the Second World War. When John Shand took over the administration of St John's, it was co-educational. The bachelor Father enjoyed walking along the banks of the river in late afternoons, after classes. At this time of day many students were engaged in extra-mural activities, particularly sports. However, others would while away the afternoon entertaining the opposite sex. The latter engagements rendered the puritan clergyman apoplectic. In short, he prevailed on the Bishop, who had jurisdiction over both St Johns College and the neighbouring St Bede's Theological College, that a mixed college was not conducive to the primary task of the institution, namely, to acquire knowledge for a decent profession in the future.

After the St John's girls had been banished to an institution on the other side of town (Cicira Girls' School) around 1950/51, the good Father preoccupied himself with midnight checks on unoccupied beds, and clashed directly with the Elders. One fine morning we woke up to find that some stones (the good Father called them "boulders") had been placed in one of the toilets used during lesson time. With military precision the Padre had the stones removed and then made an ultimatum. He wanted the names of those involved within twenty-four hours or he would deduct, from everyone, money from the Emergency Fund which was refundable in the final year of studies.

At an emergency meeting of the student body, the senior monitors reported on the conditions set down by the Warden. The Elders flatly refused to allow their money to be touched. Their spokesman was brief and to the point: "The moment you touch our pockets, you will make us wild" ("*Nizakusikelemisa*"). They then demanded an immediate audience with the Bishop as the overall authority of the college. His Holiness promptly appeared at the meeting and listened to outright accusations that the reverend "hates us and is unfit to run this institution". In a matter of a week the good Father departed from St John's forever. From 1954 began the "Golden Age" of *Sajonisi*.

My first year at St John's had been a baptism of fire. There had been very strict

controls on almost everything: prohibitions on crossing the lawn; unexpected finger-nail checks during evening studies; punishment for being late for class. After classes one could ask for a special permit to go to town. This would be granted as long as one had a convincing reason, for example to meet a parent, uncle or aunt who was in transit and had brought new rugby/soccer boots or tennis shoes. Two to four hours leave would be granted, but we had to return the same day at a fixed time. If we returned even five minutes late from the weekly visit to town, the punishment could be "gating" for one or more Saturdays. It meant you could not go into town with your friends, nor could you meet any of your friends from neighbouring institutions.

With the departure of the "military discipline" of Father John Shand and the arrival of the fatherly new Warden, Dr Quelch, these unpleasant aspects of school life soon receded into the distance. Dr Quelch, who was both a medical doctor and a theologian, started a new, more humane, era. Under his leadership none of the students abused the privilege of town visits in the afternoon. The new atmosphere made life in the boarding school one of pleasant camaraderie and co-operation. Our primary loyalty was to the institution, and we felt deep respect and affection for the Warden in charge. Before long we felt we were one big family.

Academic performance

Launched into academic success by Mr Mzamo, my Standard 6 teacher in Cradock, I never looked back. My biggest rival and close friend at St John's was Mxolisi Mankazana. Each year the school organised award ceremonies for the top three students in each class. From 1953 to 1957 Mxolisi and I alternated between first and second positions in our class. In 1955 he and I were among the seven who completed the Junior Certificate with a first class pass.

In Form Three we had an enthusiastic and no-nonsense English teacher, Mrs Barker. She hammered it into our heads that we should know the meaning of the words we used. One of my classmates was Ndafika, a boy I liked enormously. He came from rural Transkei and had never seen a train until he came to college. Moreover he had never actually been in one. I took it upon myself to help him understand modern life.

One day he brought upon himself the full wrath of Mrs Barker. Every Thursday we would be given a topic for a composition to be submitted on Friday. Mrs Barker would correct these over the weekends, and Monday was "D-Day". She was thorough and wrote detailed comments on our mistakes. She would call each of us up in turn

to give us back our marked work, and would use this occasion to remonstrate with a few negatively outstanding cases.

On Ndafika's "D-Day" Mrs Barker stood before the class and said, "Listen to this: 'People were fabricating up and down the streets.' This is unforgivably silly. It is you, Ndafika, who is fabricating." Our Oom Nda, as we fondly referred to Ndafika, was visibly embarrassed and audibly murmured in Xhosa, while Mrs Barker was in full cry, "This woman is insulting me". You see, he was still not sure what "fabricating" meant. If it did not apply to people walking up and down the street, then it could not refer to him either, except as an insult. Nevertheless that little incident went a long way towards strengthening the "dictionary" culture. Check the meaning of every word before you use it.

To broaden my vocabulary I read everything in our limited school library. At Junior Secondary I started reading adventure novels such as *The Saint*, *Lemmy Caution* and the *Biggles* series. I then moved on to the classics like *The Three Musketeers*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *White Fang* and various books by Charles Dickens. When I had completed the eight required book summaries at Junior Secondary, some matric students approached me and asked for my summaries. Apparently the English teacher had put them to shame by mentioning that a secondary level student had completed all the required summaries while some matrics had failed to submit even half the stipulated number. In my matric year I did my required twelve summaries and continued to take out library books that I had not yet read. At some point the English teacher, Mrs Kelly, declared that the school library was too small for me. She brought me a few books from her personal library for reading, without any obligation to write summaries.

I was the only matriculant at St John's to obtain a first class pass with exemption in 1957. I was surprised that my friend and academic rival Mxolisi did not also achieve a first class pass. My suspicion was that his writing – which our Junior Form teacher Mrs Barker referred to as "scribbling" – was largely responsible for this. Perhaps it was the harbinger of his future profession as a medical doctor!

Sport

From 1954 to 1957 St Johns excelled not only in academic studies and cultural activities, but also in sport. The neighbouring Colleges of Shawbury, Clerkbury, Blythswood and Maria Zelle lost to Sajonisi in rugby and soccer, while it was a see-saw situation in cricket and tennis. The most popular annual event was the athletics competition where all the secondary and high schools in the Transkei

region fielded their best performers. The occasion served a dual purpose: first, there was the individual bid to get the highest points in each athletic activity. Trophies were awarded to the top three athletes. Then there were trophies to the top three institutions in terms of overall points scored. The second objective was more prestigious. There were scouts from the Provincial Athletics Committee who were searching for athletes to recruit into the Provincial Athletics Team. The timing of the inter-schools' competition was one month before the National Athletics Competition, so the competitors had aspirations to compete, and win trophies, at national level.

In the five years that I was at St John's College I never missed this annual event. I would organise two or three of my friends who shared my enthusiasm for athletics and we would secure the best seats in the stadium. For this particular students' competition, entry was free. My friends and I knew all the St John's competitors and we would shout ourselves hoarse calling their names or nick-names. I can still recall the winner of the hundred yards sprint for the years 1954 to 1956. His name was Gibson Mqhwala. He did a teacher training course during those three years and, on completion, the College offered him a post as a boarding master. In 1957 he participated in the hundred yard race and won. This time he was credited with selection for the provincial team. As he was no longer a student, however, his winning points were not accredited to St John's.

Non-boarding secondary schools in peri-urban Mthatha, such as Misty Mount and Qokolweni, provided outlets for our junior sports teams. These schools played the host on all occasions because the sports fields at St John's were always engaged by the Seniors over weekends. The schools were quite happy to do this for the prestige of playing against the mighty St John's. The emblem of St Johns had a flying eagle, with the motto "*Lulo ke Olu uLoyiso*" ("Thus shall we achieve Victory"). Throughout sporting events the Juniors would loudly proclaim the names of our players in unison and round off with a war-cry – "*Hay' Le Ntaka!*" ("Victory to the Eagle!").

After classes I fully immersed myself in all available sporting disciplines. I played rugby and soccer to get to know the rules, but tennis and cricket were my favourites. I visited a number of neighbouring schools through participation in these sports. I also dabbled in boxing and took a trip to Queenstown, representing Mthatha boxers.

Amongst the 400 to 450 male students at the school there were, of course, characters with exceptional talents and personalities. "Shu-Shu baby" Mdunge from Cape Town springs to mind. Almost two metres tall, he was a gifted soccer player

who could kick the ball from one end of the field to the other. He did not play rugby, but I remember when he decided to test out his prowess on the rugby field. I saw him score a drop kick from the centre of the field (fifty yards). I informed the rugby captain of this feat, but he failed to persuade Mdunge to join the rugby squad.

Then there was Giyose who played top class tennis but was not interested in being a member of the tennis team. Instead he challenged the tennis team captain, Masoka, to a game. Masoka was not the best of players but was very passionate about the sport. Giyose went onto the tennis court wearing a heavy black overcoat. On that hot summer's day he beat the captain 6-2.

The classic case, however, was a quietly-spoken, but muscular, youth called Shushu (hot). It was whispered that one should never pick a fight with him because he never accepted defeat. If you defeated him today, he would wake you up early the next morning and, in his soft voice, tell you to "wake up so we can conclude our business". Wisdom borne of experience dictated that the only way you could end this marathon fight was to concede defeat.

This was all hearsay to me until one morning we were rudely disturbed at the morning Assembly by a brawl between Shushu and an unlucky opponent, Gazi. Apparently there had been a fight the previous evening, which Shushu had lost. His opponent, Gazi, had left his dormitory quite early the following morning to swot. The College Assembly was the first occasion Shushu had had to "settle the matter". He had been looking for Gazi all morning. Now that he had the chance, he began to assault him. There was consternation among the staff until they were informed who Shushu was. The affair was quietly pushed under the carpet with a dismissive "boys will be boys".

Political groups

In the 1950s there were two main political organisations for opponents of apartheid oppression and racial discrimination. The ANC was strongest in urban regions but also had a following in the rural areas. The Unity Movement was strong among the middle class teaching profession, particularly in the Transkei and the Western Cape. Both these organisations had youth wings, namely the ANC Youth League and the Unity Movement's Society of Young Africa, in all the boarding schools. Senior members of these youth organisations sought recruits from among students they assumed would be sympathetic to their cause, often making assumptions about students' political affiliations on the basis of their rural or urban backgrounds. In reality some students from rural areas had relatives in urban areas and were in

fact inclined towards the ANC. This was the case with myself and Edmund Mxolisi Mankazana. Thus in 1955 we found ourselves attending ANC Youth League (ANCYL) meetings on the banks of the Mthatha river. By January 1957 I had been elected as secretary and Mxolisi as Chairman of the ANCYL at St John's College.

At these meetings of the ANC Youth League I learnt the history of the ANC from 1912 to the present and was introduced to a new interpretation of history from the African perspective. The standard history books related the stories of eight Xhosa wars, the Zulu and Sotho wars, as disconnected incidents in the civilising mission of settlers from Europe. However I learnt to link these as wars of resistance to colonisation of our country. I also began to understand the dynamics of political struggle, from mere appeals for equal treatment to the adoption of a practical programme of action for change. The dictum "God helps those who help themselves" gained popularity in our political circles.

The ANC, like other black political organisations, displayed a maturity that was passed on to their young supporters. It was accepted as normal to have different views and to belong to different political organisations, even within the same family. Moreover, the movement strongly discouraged tribalism. Pixley ka Seme, first Secretary General of the ANC, memorably said as early as 1911: "The demon of racialism, the aberrations of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basotho and every other Native must be buried, and forgotten." His anti-tribalism call concluded with the resounding assertion: "We are one people!"²⁵

The students at St John's College, though predominantly Xhosa-speaking, came from various cultural backgrounds. However, our education reinforced the anti-tribal philosophy of Pixley ka Seme and made us deeply resentful of the "divide and rule" policy of South Africa's successive white racist governments. Our identification with the school's values of tolerance and mutual respect curbed any tendencies towards tribal sectionalism. In fact we were keen to learn from one another. In classes we were introduced to a rich Xhosa literature which served to underpin the oral history we had learned from our teachers at primary level. I recall a collection of Xhosa stories and historical essays compiled by W.G. Bennie, titled *Imibengo*. It explained the eight Xhosa wars of resistance and the heroic exploits of the Zulus. There were stories of good relations and intermarriage between the Xhosas and the Khoi-San people (*Abathwa*), who were renamed the "Bushmen" by the colonialists. The very language of Xhosa, full of clicks, testified to the influence of the San people.²⁶ In this way our St John's College education constantly reinforced Pixley ka Seme's call for solidarity among black South Africans: "We are one people!"

Political developments

In June 1955 I was at home in Noupoot for the holidays. I had gone to the newspaper vendor at the railway station around noon. There was a train at the platform and I noticed that about six or seven coaches were full of black men and women singing what were clearly freedom songs in African languages. The Railway Police were discouraging passers-by from stopping near these coaches. I did not attach any significance to this event until the end of the year, when Mr Tennyson Makiwane came to the school to address us. We learned about the June 1955 meeting of the Congress Alliance (made up of the ANC and its allies: the Coloured People's Congress, the South African Indian Congress and the South African Congress of Democrats) at Kliptown, near Johannesburg. It was at this massive gathering that members of the Congress Movement and its supporters adopted the "Freedom Charter", a document calling for the implementation of democracy and human rights, the fundamental principles of the Congress Alliance. The document began with a powerful opening statement – "The People Shall Govern!"

The white supremacist government denounced the Kliptown Congress and in December 1955 carried out countrywide arrests of all prominent leaders who were either known to belong to the ANC or suspected of supporting it. They were charged with treason, for attempting to organise an insurrection against the white minority regime. The arrests served to bring to the attention of the nation lesser-known leaders who were mobilising at provincial and local levels. With that one action, the apartheid regime informed all South Africans that opposition and resistance to apartheid was countrywide.²⁷

At St John's College one of the leaders arrested was the father of a member of our singing group – the Broadway Brothers. Rev. Gawe from Queenstown was among the clergy accused of treason. I recall the growing militancy inspired by his arrest. At the end of term, when school broke up for the holidays, departing groups walked through the school gates with their belongings and as a farewell salute, shouted, "*Sodibana e Drill Hall!*" This meant, "We shall meet at the Drill Hall!" (This was the initial venue for the Treason Trial.) The response of those still awaiting collection at school was: "*Ngaphaya, ukuba uyabuza*". ("We shall indeed meet there, if you (the police) want to know.")

The adoption of the Freedom Charter was one of many historic events that took place during my schooling at St John's. Another, of which I had first-hand experience, deserves mention. As we prepared for our final school year in 1957, the Minister of Native Affairs, Dr H.F. Verwoerd, came to Mthatha to address the tribal chiefs in

what was known as the Bunga. By this time I had been elected Secretary of the St John's College branch of the ANC Youth League. So, a few of us got permission to go to town to hear the message from the Great White Chief. I listened, incredulous, as Verwoerd told our unelected leaders that he had come to empower the Xhosa chiefs to "stop eating fruit from the white man's table. The white man's furniture was not suitable for nice mud huts." He had come, he said, "to plant this new tree called the Bantu Authorities Act. The chiefs must water this tree until it is strong." They would then "get their independence and cease to be copycats of white civilisation". Angered by this insulting address at the Bunga, exposing the insidious nature and objective of the government's apartheid policies, I resolved that I would do my best to get into the University College of Fort Hare and pursue a more radical course of political activism.

My resolve was reinforced by another political incident in the course of 1957. As Secretary of the ANC Youth League branch at St John's that year, I corresponded with Anderson Ganyile, who was the ANCYL Secretary at Lovedale High School in Alice. Lovedale had the advantage of proximity to Fort Hare University, and got regular briefings on the policies and activities of the Mother Body. In February 1957, after the election of the new Branch Executive at St John's, I had written a report to Anderson apprising him of the new executive. Anderson was from (M)Bizana and went home during the half-year holidays, passing through Mthatha. Unknown to us, in June 1957 the Police Special Branch in Mthatha, dealing with political activists, had confiscated Ganyile's hand luggage and found, among other things, my correspondence with him.

In August I was called to Father Quelch's office and there found an officer of the Police Special Branch (SB) who wanted to search my belongings because of the "incriminating" letter found in Ganyile's correspondence. Old Father Quelch, whom we fondly called "*Makhwekhwete*" ("Wise old man"), was magnificent. He pointed out that I was an exemplary student, a precentor in the church and certainly no danger to the state. He summarily instructed one of the boarding masters, Mr Maxwell Mabuto Mphahlwa (later the father of one of democratic South Africa's ministers), to accompany me to my dormitory to check what "subversive material" could be there.

I had some material dealing with ANC policies and programmes, but also publications registered with the General Post Office for public distribution such as, "Liberation", "Fighting Talk" and "Advance." Mr Mphahlwa had himself been at the St John's Teacher Training College a year before. Loyalty to St John's was underpinned by high levels of African solidarity, even at that time. At the dormitory I took out all my literature and we agreed that he would "take care" of the "subversive" material.

Publications registered with the General Post Office he took with him and presented to the Warden and the policeman. The College was not going to allow the Special Branch (SB) to deprive it of a likely first class matric candidate. Father Quelch, in grand style, handed over the more innocuous material, ignored the Special Branch policeman's protestations, and told him he would not suffer undue interference with his wards.

The following Saturday, during our town leave, a certain Mr Phoswa (from the SB) attempted to coerce me to collate all the material I had received from the ANC and to hand it over to him at a designated blind spot. I knew I had support from the highest authority at the school and never complied with his instructions.

There were other political incidents that year that served to clarify my political position. Over the course of my years at St John's the ANCYL invited several of the prominent ANC leaders to address us, among them, as I have mentioned, Tennyson Makiwane. One Sunday in July 1957, Mr Msweli came to address us on the Mau-Mau liberation struggle in Kenya. He explained why the Mau-Mau was overcome by the British colonial forces, identifying three main weaknesses in the liberation movement. Firstly, they were mobilised along tribal lines. Secondly, there was coercion, oath-taking and a death price for betrayal. Thirdly, and most importantly, they did not have the necessary machinery to educate the international community about the justice of their cause. Listening to him, I recalled that in 1955, when Anderson Ganyile was still with us preparing to write the Junior School Certificate (J.C.), he had spoken to me about the Mau-Mau liberation movement in Kenya, led by Jomo Kenyatta. He had pointed out that they were a genuine liberation movement and not the savages depicted by the media. He had ended by saying, "I understand the position of our movement to pursue a non-violent form of struggle. But I can assure you that the time has come that we should meet violence with violence." Ganyile was now doing his matric at Lovedale, across the river from Fort Hare. On the occasion of Mr Msweli's address, I would get to know how far we were from the inevitable meeting of "violence with violence". Indeed, Mr Msweli concluded by touching on rumours highly prevalent at the time, that the ANC was preparing an army to confront the apartheid machinery. He quickly dismissed these as pure fabrication, saying that he had personally verified this with Chief Luthuli, then President of the ANC. This came as a shock to me. I was determined as never before to find my way to the University College of Fort Hare. This was where the cream of the ANC Youth League was to be found.

As we prepared to write our final exams at the end of 1957, our teachers informed us that we would be the last black matriculants to write the Cape Senior Certificate

exams under the Cape of Good Hope Department of Education. A new interim syllabus had been devised by the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB), to be used until Bantu Education was implemented and education as we knew it would be demolished.

In the last week of December 1957, The South African matriculation results were published as a supplement to all registered newspapers. Noupoot sold "The Herald", published in Port Elizabeth. By this time the newsagents at the Noupoot railway station were segregated. The side where we had previously bought our magazines and newspapers was now for "Whites Only". I waited as the white sales lady prioritised white customers. I imagine the only reason she finally attended to me at all was that she believed I was buying the paper for my "*Baas*". A small window had been made for "Non-Whites" and I trembled with excitement as I passed my money through this aperture, saying to myself, "Go on Missis, give me the paper that may carry a bomb for you." A "bomb" it was: my matric results earned me a scholarship to Fort Hare University College from the same Bunga that Dr Verwoerd had addressed so insultingly earlier in the year.



The Committee of the Students Christian Association (SCA). I am seated at the extreme right. Next to me is Manto Tshabalala, later Minister of Health in the new Democratic Government. Fort Hare University, 1958.

Chapter 6

The University College of Fort Hare (*KwaNokholeji*)

I knew that I had passed my matric exams from the results in the newspapers. But I neither saw my symbols nor received any counselling on which field of study would be most suitable for me. In our misguided discussions at St John's, we speculated that a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree was for everybody, but that only the "clever" ones among us could tackle a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.).²⁸ I therefore decided that I would enrol for the B.Sc. at the University College of Fort Hare.

The university was situated in a quaint little town called Alice, about 320 kilometres from Noupoot. Formerly known as the South African Native College, Fort Hare was established in 1916 by the United Free Church of Scotland. It was the only university in South Africa that catered for Blacks – that is, Africans, Indians and Coloureds²⁹ – and had a reputation as one of the most prestigious universities in Africa. For many years it was a constituent college of UNISA (University of South Africa), but in 1951 was affiliated to Rhodes University. In 1955 it was recognised as a university in terms of the Universities Act No. 61, and was able to confer degrees. Characterised by non-racism and intellectually enriching critical debate, Fort Hare could be justly proud of its achievements and excellence.³⁰ I felt privileged to be accepted into the institution and my father and the rest of the extended family were proud that I would be the first in the family to obtain a university degree. With a first class matric pass, attainment of the degree was not in doubt.

One evening in January 1958, I left Noupoot for Alice on the 7 pm train. Among the passengers were other Fort Hare students, including several ANCYL and Unity Movement members who took the opportunity to recruit new political party members. Throughout the journey they approached new students and offered to answer any questions about Fort Hare, then tried to persuade them to commit to their organisation. I assured them that I needed no persuading. I was already a committed, signed-up member of the ANCYL.³¹

We arrived in Alice at about 11 the next morning. I recall the hustle and bustle as we disembarked from the train with our assorted tin trunks containing clothing, blankets and linen. Three "Durant" taxis stood waiting and we lined up according to our destination: Fort Hare University, Lovedale College and, for trainee nurses, Victoria Hospital.³² As we newcomers stood in the queue we found out from the older Fort Harians which hostel we would be in. The university was sub-divided into three male hostels according to the Christian denominations that founded

and administered them. Beda Hall was for Roman Catholics and Anglicans, and had an Anglican chaplain; Wesley Hall was for Methodists and had a Lutheran chaplain and IONA Hostel had a chaplain who served Presbyterian and related faiths. There was only one hostel for women. It was called *Elukhanyisweni* (The place of light or knowledge) and was referred to as Eluk.

I finally managed to board a taxi around lunchtime. As I was to discover, if your train got to Alice station in the morning, you were lucky to get your transport to Fort Hare by noon. On arrival I reported to the Warden's office and was assigned my hostel and dormitory. Second-year students helped to direct us. I was placed in Beda Hall in what was called Dorm 40. This was a long, rectangular dormitory, with four beds on either side. Two beds were directly opposite the entrance, making a total of ten beds. I later learnt that this was quite a prestigious dormitory, especially for Freshers. Eminent figures in the black community such as Oliver (OR) Tambo, Duma Nokwe and Mangosuthu Buthelezi had passed through Beda Hall and it is likely that some had enjoyed the hospitality of Dorm 40.³³ The same evening, after supper, a special meeting was held at our hostel to brief the "Freshers" – the newly-arrived first year students – on the rules and regulations at Beda Hall.

I quickly made acquaintance with my roommates as we made up our beds. They included Stephen Musi, Cyril Phakedi and Raymond Uren and three married men: Mr Zothe, Mr Zwane and Mr Mothumi. Mr Zothe and Mr Zwane already had teaching experience at secondary school level. Mr Mothumi was an experienced agriculturalist from Fort Cox. All three needed a university degree to advance their status and remuneration. My other three roommates were Logan Latchmansamy, "Texas" McKerdurch, and Chris Raju. We comprised a good mixture of races (African, Coloured and Indian,) ages (from eighteen to thirty-five), and origins (Transvaal, Free State, Natal and Cape Province). Though culturally diverse, we were all intellectually compatible individuals. Our language of communication in the dormitory was English – a language we all had in common. But we Xhosa-speakers (Xhosa was the language of the province) quickly picked up words in Gujerati, Tswana, Afrikaans and Zulu.

The former teachers were generally conservative and carried themselves with dignity. However they quickly learnt to shout out an enthusiastic "Chow!" at meal times and would often go to the dining hall before the appointed time, some carrying their own spices. Though middle-aged, they even joined us on an exciting nocturnal mission early in the term. One evening after supper Logan Latchmansamy and Raymond Uren asked everybody to fetch a pillowcase: we were going to raid a citrus farm in the vicinity. How they knew that it was orange-harvesting time is still a

mystery to me. Under cover of darkness we crept stealthily into the orange orchards and began to pick oranges. Our pillowcases were not even half full when we heard gunshots being fired into the air. The farmer must have experienced these raids annually over time and knew what action was needed to frighten off marauders. We high-tailed it out of there and back to college with whatever oranges we had managed to collect. We never repeated this citrus raid. But it strengthened our bonds of male friendship and gave us a sense of camaraderie.

We all got fully involved in Rag activities, including sales of the Rag Mag, in our first term. The Rag Mag was a fund-raising student publication which poked fun at various aspects of life in the university. The Editorial Board organised what was called "The Court of Injustice". Any of the students could be summoned to appear before the Court and were charged with the most ludicrous offences: disturbing the peace by attempts at singing; wearing bell-bottomed trousers to class; failure to turn up for meals and similar nonsensicalities. The Rag Mag funds were donated to charity institutions like the crèche in the neighbouring Ntselamanzi Township. It was a good introduction to the charity activities that awaited us after college.

There were certain rules that set the standard for behaviour and etiquette at Fort Hare. For example "Freshers" were not expected to speak at mass meetings in the first six months. Moreover male Freshers did not dare visit the ladies at Eluk, as any aspiring Casanova had to contend with the high COL (cost of loving,) where wooing involved taking the lady to the cinema or concerts by visiting artists. Under such conditions, we learned, the bulk of the male students at Fort Hare cast their eyes across the Tyhume River. First there was the Victoria Hospital, where I would later try my luck, though nothing lasting came of it. Future lawyers, doctors, lecturers or high school teachers were highly eligible and many student nurses succumbed to their charms. However, this accounted for less than 100 of the male students. So there were still about 150 unaccounted for. These young men looked to the neighbouring "mixed" Colleges like Lovedale, Healdtown and St. Matthews. If no romantic opportunities presented themselves there, they sought out the company of the young women in Alice, who were encouraged by their mothers to make worthwhile romantic choices among "future pillars of society". Some male students displayed no particular interest in finding female friends. They were quite happy with their week-end visits to Radomsky, the local pub, or, if they were traditionalists, they contented themselves at weekends with *Mqombothi*, the alcoholic homebrew.

Fort Hare offered a vibrant social life with attractive cultural and sporting activities. There was healthy rivalry among the three hostels in all areas of university life, but mainly in sport. Fiercely contested inter-hostel soccer (football) and cricket matches

took place every year. Owing to the annual arrival of new Freshers, each hostel would produce new star players and it was impossible to predict which would be the winning hostel. Soccer tended to be dominated by players from the Transvaal (Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West and Limpopo) while cricket was typically dominated by excellent players from the Cape Province and Natal (KwaZulu-Natal).

The annual athletics competition was the most colourful because the ladies from Eluk also had their stars in field and track events. Fort Hare also had a well-equipped gymnasium and almost every male would try his hand at weights and body building. Soon a story circulated that one of our lecturers, a pleasant man with a rather protruding “public opinion” (that is, a paunch), had been seen at the gym slowly and gracefully lifting the smallest weights available. He had announced, “You see, boys, you must start from the known and progress to the unknown.” His advice was music to the ears for a lightweight like me.

Inter-hostel competition reached a peak towards the end of the year in a roughly ten-kilometre cross-country race. The starting point was located on the main road inside the campus and the route followed a path that led outside the campus and traversed a forested area. Then there was a climb up a hill known as “Sandile’s Kop” and finally a one-kilometre descent, leading to the finishing line inside the College grounds. At the finish there were officials who identified the residential hostel of each of the runners. The first ten runners from any one of the three hostels who completed the race secured the winning medal for their hostel. Cheerleaders and supporters would line both sides of the road and shout encouragement to the runners, particularly those who represented the tenth runner from their hostel. In 1959, persuaded that the victory for Beda Hall was in my hands, I ran like I never had in my life before. I woke up in Victoria Hospital, where I was being treated for dehydration, to see my sister Singathwa staring at me. She was the daughter of the second of my father’s brothers and we were the same age. We had known each other from childhood but had lost contact when I was at St John’s College. I was not aware that she had joined the nursing staff at Victoria Hospital and she was equally unaware that I was at Fort Hare. So you can imagine our mutual excitement and surprise. The cherry on the cake was that my hostel won!

So strong was the passion for sporting victory at Beda Hall, there was even a Beda Hall anthem. This was sung whenever a sports team from Beda Hall emerged victorious. The team would be welcomed by fellow Beda Hall students at the hostel hall with a rousing tune to the following lyrics:

Beda Hall is just the place for me,

*Beda long may you live.
Every man of Beda Hall,
Will play the game, though he may fall.
Beda long may you live.*

Fort Hare Society

The intake at Fort Hare in the late 50s was roughly 350 (300 men and 50 women). Three-quarters of those who found their way to Fort Hare were sponsored, as the majority of African families could not afford the fees and tutorial material required at university level. These included the best brains from all the African, Coloured and Indian schools in South Africa. The oppressed black majority had long understood that knowledge is power and that the road to salvation from apartheid's repression lay in finding the means to send academically able students to the best available colleges. Outstanding students would obtain scholarships from various Funds and Trusts or from mining companies. There was also the option of government bursaries. The racist government sought to win support for its "homeland" or "Bantustan" policies by offering bursaries through the Bantustan or homeland administrations, which were rejected by all progressive organisations.

Adding to the diversity of the student body there were students from neighbouring countries, then known as Bechuanaland (Botswana), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and Nyasaland (Malawi), who had obtained scholarships in anticipation of their countries' independence. The sponsors had to take into account that they needed somewhere to stay during the short holidays, so the scholarships covered board and lodging during vacations. There were roughly twenty males and about five females from neighbouring countries. It was not difficult to identify them as they typically spoke with unusual accents, which we would mimic in a cordial and humorous spirit. Far from triggering any xenophobic tendencies, these neighbours were highly popular and were never seen as any kind of threat. In fact their small numbers aroused sympathy and charity. They were the first to own portable transistor radios and were always smartly dressed with ties. They set the tone and we South Africans would not be left behind.

Tackling the B.Sc.

Undergraduate students had to select two major subjects, to be studied for the duration of the three-year bachelor degree course. We also had to choose complementary subjects – two in our first year and one in our second. That meant

four subjects in our first year, three subjects in our second year and only our two majors in the third and final year. I enrolled for the B.Sc. with my subjects spread out as follows: first year – physics, chemistry, zoology and botany; second year – chemistry, zoology and philosophy; third year – chemistry and zoology. The B.Sc. subjects had laboratory practicals in the afternoons. So in the first year I had only one free afternoon in the week. In the second year there were extra tutorials for the majors.

I passed my first year without much effort, but I was getting less and less interested in dissecting frogs and cutting thin pieces from flower stems for observation under a microscope. So at the end of my second year I dropped (euphemism for failed) my two major subjects. The Warden in Beda Hall, a jolly old priest we called “Father Trotter”, called me to his office and gave me a surprise. “In your matric subjects you were excellent with languages. Of course you passed your Science subjects, but with lower percentages.” This put me on the horns of a dilemma. There was no question of changing over to Arts at this stage. I was, however, very keen to participate in public debates, so I joined the Editorial Board of a students’ publication called “The Fortharian”. I also revived my singing by joining a Quartet with my former mates from St John’s. Imbued with the optimism and resilience of youth, I remained confident that a solution to my problem would present itself.

Political involvement on campus

A week after my arrival at Fort Hare, Anderson Ganyile, whom I had known from my early days at St John’s, informed me of the time and venue of the ANC Youth League meeting to be held that weekend. Before the start of the meeting some older members (second year students) approached all the new students and verified their credentials: name, when and where you joined the Youth League, who recommended you, etc. Subscription at the time was 2 shillings per annum (about R1 in today’s terms). On seeing the other Youth League members I felt a strong sense of solidarity and looked forward to my involvement in political life on campus.

A quarter of the circumference of the Fort Hare estate was formed by the river Tyhume. One had to cross this river to reach Lovedale High School and the Victoria Hospital, which serviced the communities of Alice, Fort Hare, Lovedale, Jabavu Secondary School and the surrounding villages. By virtue of its location, Victoria Hospital was destined to play a significant role in the fight for the human rights and dignity of blacks. In the second half of my first year at Fort Hare in 1958, there was a nurses’ strike at the Victoria Hospital just across the Tyhume River. This was in protest against the meagre wages paid to black nursing staff. Rather than addressing their

grievances, the hospital management threatened and then summarily dismissed two-thirds of the nurses. In solidarity the Fort Hare students organised blankets for the nurses who had been unceremoniously removed from their sleeping quarters. The expulsion of the nurses increased political tensions at the university. Most of the nurses who did not join the strike were senior nurses and nursing sisters, many with family responsibilities. They did not wish to endanger their careers by participating in the strike. After the expulsion of the bulk of the nurses the Fort Hare SRC called a student mass meeting at which a resolution was passed calling for a boycott of the nurses who had not joined the strike. This was referred to as a sexual boycott.

This played itself out at the graduation ball of the final year students of 1958, which took place in January 1959. On the evening of the graduation ceremony the majority of the graduates found partners for the dance from outside the Victoria Hospital. However, a few of the graduates, who did not belong to the ANC Youth League, invited some of the nurses under boycott. A dance band, the African Quavers from East London, had been hired for the occasion. The President of the SRC, Mr Ambrose Makiwane, was present that evening. He was a seasoned ANC politician and teacher who had been elected into the post *absentia*, while teaching in the field.³⁴ At the peak of the dance he rang a bell and stopped the band midway. He then announced: "All uninvited guests – march out!"

The affected graduates were very annoyed and embarrassed at being publically disgraced. However, they had no choice but to escort their partners back to the hospital. They then petitioned for an emergency mass meeting with one item on the agenda – resignation of the SRC President. In response the ANC Youth League mobilised for maximum attendance by its supporters. It was not only the reputation of the SRC President that was at stake, the authority of the ANC Youth League itself was being called into question. The issue quickly became a dogfight between the ANC Youth League and the Youth of the Non-European Unity Movement called the Society of Young Africa (SOYA). At the mass meeting, SOYA spokespersons declaimed against the action taken by the President of the SRC, saying that it was unacceptable to expel legitimately invited guests.

The ANC Youth League used its overwhelming majority to defend the action of Mr Ambrose Makiwane. They pointed out that the resolution to boycott the nurses had been taken at a legitimate students' mass meeting and that the resolution had been adopted by a clear majority. The display of oratory would have rivalled the debates at the House of Commons. The petitioners then moved that a resolution be adopted, calling for the SRC President to resign forthwith. The motion was mercilessly crushed amidst provocative taunts. The SRC President himself then took the floor

and said, "I did not participate in this debate because I knew that, as Chairman of the meeting, I have the right to make the concluding remarks. A lot has been said about the unprecedented action of the SRC President. Precedence is created. Therefore, I, Ambrose Makiwane, have created the precedence. So, from now on, it is no longer unprecedented. I also wish to remind the petitioners that I was elected to the position of SRC President in my absence. I will continue in my position until the appropriate end of my term." This was yet another powerful demonstration of the strength and influence of the ANC Youth League at Fort Hare in the Fifties.

The year 1959 turned out to be one of intense political activity on campus, leading the National Party government to increasingly view Fort Hare as a political den. Mid-year, more than 300 staff members, students and Alice community members marched through the streets of Alice in protest against the Extension of University Education Act, passed on 19 June 1959.³⁵ This was effectively an extension of an inferior Bantu Education to the tertiary level.³⁶ The Act made provision for the establishment of separate tertiary institutions for Africans, Indians, Coloureds and Whites. Blacks were not allowed to attend White universities unless they had acquired special government permission. This separation of the "Black" universities was along ethnic as well as racial lines; for example, only Xhosa-speaking students would henceforth be admitted to the University of Fort Hare.³⁷ The demonstrations, which went off peacefully, were led by the university Dons. Among the university staff in the march were Prof. Burrows, Rector and Vice-Chancellor; Sir Fulque Agnew, the Registrar; professors, heads of faculties and lecturers. Ambrose Makiwane and other members of the SRC marched behind them, leading the students. (We generally referred to ourselves as the "vulgus" – the common people.)

Anti-government political activity and rebellious academic debate on campus intensified over the course of the year 1959, particularly once the Fort Hare Transfer Act of 1959 had placed the institution directly under government control. The passing of the Act met with fierce opposition. During the course of the year a delegation of the officials who were to take over the administration of Fort Hare as a tribal college, paid an exploratory visit to Fort Hare. The main figures were Professor JJ Ross, the Rector-designate and the prospective Registrar, Mr du Preez. Now the students had palpable targets on which to vent their anger. On arrival at the campus the Registrar was pelted with rotten tomatoes and his car was almost overturned.

Seven members of the university staff resigned before 23 September. Prof. ZK Matthews, a lecturer at Fort Hare and former acting principal, resigned from his post three months before his intended retirement date and gave up his pension in protest. Other staff members followed suit, so that, by the end of 1959, three out

of four had either resigned or had been fired. On 28 October 1959 a plaque was unveiled, marking the “death” of Fort Hare. It read: “The University College of Fort Hare, in deep gratitude to all who between 1905 and 1959 founded, maintained and administered this college at Fort Hare, and in remembrance of all who between 1916 and 1959 taught and studied here in association with the University of South Africa and Rhodes University.”

Angered by the government’s increasingly repressive measures, I decided to do something more than just read *New Age*, so I wrote to their Cape Town office asking them to send eight copies to me at my Noupoot address. I received a response from Sonia Bunting, the Cape Editor, expressing appreciation of my efforts to spread the *New Age* message to the Great Karoo. I then arranged with my father to pass on the weekly parcel of magazines to a former schoolmate who was working on the Railways as an off-loader, as his parents could not afford to pay for secondary education outside of Noupoot. During his free time he would distribute the magazines in the community, mainly to teachers, including two in the coloured community. In 1960, with the ban on black political parties, including the ANC, the postmaster told my father that he would no longer allow this “subversive publication” to pass through “his” post office. When I came home for the June holidays my father informed me that he had sent a letter to *New Age* asking them to stop sending any more copies. I appreciated my father’s dilemma and accepted his action.

In April 1959 a group had broken away from the ANC and called themselves the Pan-Africanist Congress. Their main gripe was that the ANC, particularly after the adoption of the 1955 Freedom Charter, had lost sight of the need to liberate Africans from White oppression. Their dissatisfaction was primarily with the preamble to the Charter, which declared that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white...” The Pan-Africanists were exhibiting a new and, to me, exciting, type of militancy. Allegedly, at the final ANC Conference of 1959 a PAC supporter had shouted loudly: “Mr Chairman, this meeting lacks fire!”

In the December holiday of 1959 I was very fortunate to have a chance to meet the dynamic leader of the PAC, Professor Robert Sobukwe. It happened like this. The daughter of a Mr Maneli, one of my dad’s churchwardens at Noupoot, had trained at Baragwanath Hospital and married a man from Johannesburg, Mbulelo Sothondoshe. In December 1959 Nomathemba and Mbulelo visited Noupoot for the first time as a married couple. They came to report their marriage at the mission house and I was able to meet the groom. Mbulelo had joined the new PAC. He told me that he would be meeting the leader of the PAC, Robert Sobukwe, at the railway station the following day. Sobukwe was in transit to his home in Uitenhage. I gladly

accepted the offer to accompany Mbulelo. It was an exciting opportunity to meet this new leader who was making headline news and there were some issues on PAC policy that I wished to clear with him.

We stood on the station platform and Robert Sobukwe leaned out of the window of his compartment to talk to us. There were two people inside who I assumed were his wife and child. I allowed Mbulelo time to greet Professor Sobukwe and to confirm to his President the massive and growing support for the PAC. He looked exactly as he appeared in the newspapers – confident and charismatic. I could see that he was also willing to listen to what this interested young PAC supporter had to say. When Mbulelo had conveyed his message, he stepped back and gave me a chance to talk. I asked Mr Sobukwe to explain the PAC policy with regard to Indians. The media was reporting that PAC policy was “Africa for Africans”. The Professor answered by posing a question: “Who do you think is an African?” The PAC was clearly hoping to wean the youth from the ANC by appearing to be more action-oriented. The ANC had stated in the Freedom Charter that South Africa belonged “to all who live in it”. The PAC had to say something different. I surmised that the PAC President was skirting the issue. The party leadership were probably still deciding how to deal with such questions as the breakaway from the ANC had only recently taken place.

The final year students of 1959 attended their graduation in January 1960. There had been growing dissatisfaction among students about the manner in which the graduation ceremony gave more space to prominent whites in the community than to relatives of the graduates and first year students. The student body was allowed to select one spokesperson from the SRC (Students’ Representative Council) to make a speech at the ceremony. The SRC spokesperson at the 1960 graduation ceremony, Mr Kutumela, had already been identified as a PAC sympathiser. His speech had fire alright. He declared boldly, “On the morning that Jan van Riebeeck landed at the Cape in 1652, the land problem started in the afternoon.” I am quoting verbatim. In the silence that followed you could hear a pin drop. And then there was a thunderous applause from the students.

On 21 March 1960 a group of at least 5000 people in Sharpeville, near Johannesburg, demonstrated against the pass laws, which had recently been extended to include women. The group presented themselves at the local police station and demanded that the police arrest them for not carrying their pass books (*dompas*). In the course of the events that followed the police opened fire on the protesters and massacred sixty-nine people. This precipitated a general state of upheaval in the country. The government declared a state of emergency and immediately banned all political organisations, including the ANC and PAC. The Youth League went underground

and strategically put in place the M(andela) Plan. This meant that only units of three members could meet and only the convener of the unit was in touch with two other conveners to form the higher cell. The pyramid structure minimised casualties as you only knew the two other members of your cell.

In 1960 the National Party government officially took control of the university, placing it in the hands of the Department of Bantu Education, within the Department of Native Affairs. The university ceased admission of Indians and Coloureds as well as any other ethnic group except Xhosas. The Registrar Sir Fulque Agnew made it known that he was not prepared to administer the new restrictions on political discussions, as demanded by the Department of Native Affairs. He and his wife left Fort Hare for the United Kingdom.

While I still loved and respected the ANC, I could no longer support Luthuli's advocacy of peaceful resistance in the face of growing violence by the regime. In my view, and that of many others in the Youth League at Fort Hare, it was time "to meet violence with violence". At the end of 1960 the SRC, reflecting the position of the ANCYL, took a decision to boycott the annual end-of-year Students' Farewell Ball in protest against what was being done to our institution. The newly-appointed administration kept a low profile. It was already the end of the year and they would wait for the long end-of-year vacation to prepare their strategy for the following year.

The night before the Ball a notice appeared on the notice boards outside the male and female hostels, which read: "All you have to do is to sleep in your bed and you will have achieved positive action."³⁸ The notice was signed "*Force Publique*" (French for "Public Force"), recalling the name of the Congolese army at the time of Lumumba's assassination. I and two ANC Youth League friends, Lungile Noah and Terrence Nguza, were responsible for this notice. Our use of the title "*Force Publique*" was a declaration of militancy, a way of saying that the time for boycotts was over and that the time for action had come. We knew this was how the student body would understand the reference to "*Force Publique*". The end-of-year function did take place, but with reduced attendance. There was uncertainty because this was the first time a public statement had been issued which seemed to contradict the official position of the ANC Youth League.

Around the same time the leadership of the ANCYL reported to the ANC provincial leadership in Port Elizabeth that the ANC youth were growing increasingly restless. They asked the leadership to respond to the readiness of their young supporters to undergo military training. The ANC mother body must have already reached a

decision on this because at the end of November 1960 the ANCYL approached individual members with a questionnaire. Those who were willing to volunteer for training abroad were asked to fill in their personal profile on a form and to confirm their readiness to obey any instruction that may be given. This was the moment I had been waiting for. I wholeheartedly wished to be one of the volunteers. To my mind it was clear that the apartheid regime could not be overcome by mere demonstrations and strikes and I filled out the form with a firm conviction that armed resistance was the only way forward. In fact a significant number of the students at Fort Hare made up their minds to heed the call to arms.

On 20 December 1960, while I was at home in Noupoot for the Christmas break, my father handed me a letter, which I opened with excitement. The letter was from Govan Mbeki, Oom Gov as we called him, who was a member of the ANC Executive based in Port Elizabeth. The letter instructed me to report to Johannesburg, specifically to the Orlando West house of Advocate Duma Nokwe, who was then the Secretary General of the ANC.³⁹ Although we had been warned at the time of recruitment not to inform anybody about our instructions, I felt I could not slip away from my parents without warning.

I showed my father the letter from Oom Gov and was astonished by his reaction. Far from expressing his disapproval, he said that Luthuli, Tambo, Sisulu, Mandela and Nokwe were all well-educated and I would be in good hands. Moreover he had met Mr Tambo, the ANC Deputy President, during his theological training at St Peter's in Rosettenville and recalled that he was a brilliant teacher and an outstanding choirmaster. He had no doubt that the ANC leadership knew what they were doing. Then, wasting no time, he bought me a train ticket to Johannesburg. This was a generous gesture, given that Anglican priests did not earn much.

On 22 December, 1960 I walked to Noupoot station accompanied by my father and Alex Fana, who was staying with us at the time. His father had passed away and my father had taken him in to relieve Mrs Fana of the burden of looking after three children on her own. If Tata had any anxiety about how long I would be away from home, he did not show it. We embraced warmly and I got onto the train. As we pulled out of Noupoot station I waved goodbye, wondering when we would meet again. I did not bother to look at my ticket, but went straight to third class. We had passed two or three railway sidings when the ticket officer came to check our tickets. He looked twice at my ticket and then said, "What are you doing here? This is a second class ticket." I was astounded. Dear, dear Father! He had sent me off in expensive comfort, with his full blessings. Thirty years later I learned from Alex Fana that Tata had become very quiet as the train left the station. Then he had said, as if to himself, "There goes my son. My son is gone."



Advocate Duma Nokwe, the secretary general of the ANC was among the last 42 Treason Trialists.1961.

Chapter 7

Johannesburg

My cell leader at Fort Hare had instructed me to take minimal luggage on my trip to Johannesburg so that there would be no indication that I may be travelling abroad. With this in mind, on 23 December 1960 I got off the train at Orlando East station carrying only one small bag (my father's briefcase) and the letter from Govan Mbeki instructing me to report to the house of Duma Nokwe – 7044 A, Westcliff, Orlando West. There were all sorts of stories about crime and gangsters in Johannesburg, but this was of no concern to me. I was in great spirits.

It did not take me long to find a taxi and fortunately the driver was an honest and sympathetic man. When I gave him the address with an "A", he declared that Westcliff did not have "A"s and "B"s. He first took me to Mzimhlope and then to Mofolo. We drew blanks at both places. In exasperation he asked, "Who are you visiting?" The moment I said Duma Nokwe he exploded, "Why did you not say so from the word go? Everybody in Johannesburg knows this famous lawyer." He then took me straight to Westcliff and to the right house. It turned out that only corner houses in Westcliff had the same number, which is why they needed to be distinguished with "A"s and "B"s. We both learned new lessons that day.

I arrived at Duma Nokwe's house at around 7 pm. Mrs Vuyiswa ("Tiny") Nokwe soon made me feel at home, kindly showing me where I would sleep and put my clothes; because of the restrictions on luggage I had brought only a worn charcoal suit, a spare shirt and underwear. It turned out that Sis' Tiny, as I called her, was originally from Langa, Cape Town. She had met Duma Nokwe at Fort Hare, so we had a lot to talk about, including the traditions and behaviour of Fort Harians, discussions about who else had been at Fort Hare with her and so forth. I learnt that we were not the first generation of Fort Harians to conduct strikes and listen to fiery graduation speeches by SRC leaders. She told me that Miss Darrol, our Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of English, once remarked that Robert Sobukwe held the "venom record" for his onslaught on the discriminatory and oppressive policies of successive white South African governments. Sis' Tiny obviously endorsed this view.

For the first time in my life I did not attend church on Christmas Day. I had spruced myself up to attend the Anglican service at a church near the Nokwe's house. Mrs Nokwe said, "What's happening?" I answered that I was on my way to church. She said, "What's the matter with you? Sit down and listen to some music. Church, indeed!" So, instead of singing "Hosanna to the King", I spent the day with my comrades listening

to a recording of "The Best of the Ames Brothers". You can imagine my state of mind. I was raised in a small town, in a home where prayer was an everyday affair. Now I was in the city, at the house of one of my heroes, where I was amazed to discover that nobody else was excited about Christmas. Sunday was the day of rest for working people in Johannesburg and churchgoers were a visible minority. As it turned out I wouldn't go to church again for another twenty-five years.⁴⁰

During my stay Sis' Tiny related some wonderful anecdotes about various struggle characters. Her story about Alf Hutchinson, one of the early Treason Trialists, is one I recall particularly well. Alf was among the first to skip the country in 1960 and wrote a book called *The Road to Ghana*. Alf apparently loved his "Mahogany" brandy. Every morning ANC wives and friends would take food to the detainees at Marshall square in Johannesburg. Sis' Tiny and her colleagues noticed that Alf regularly received a carton of milk with other food items. It was only after he had escaped abroad that the mystery of the milk carton was unveiled. Milk made up three quarters of the contents. The remainder was brandy, introduced through a medical syringe. So Alf was probably the only prisoner who enjoyed his captivity.

It transpired that Thabo Mbeki had earlier stayed with the Nokwe family. By the time I arrived, alternative accommodation had been arranged for him. Initially he stayed at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) residence, but was later transferred to some place I did not know. One of the earliest lessons for underground work was not to ask too many questions.

I was rudely introduced to the "fast life" on the second day of my arrival in Westcliff. A little girl knocked at the Nokwes' door, entered and in one sentence greeted me as follows: "Greetings, I'm fine, mother sent me to ask for a cup of sugar." All this happened as I was preparing for the normal greeting ritual, which would go something like this:

You: "Please, come in."

Visitor: "Good morning."

You: "How are you?"

Visitor: "I am fine. And how are you?"

You: "Rather chilly last night, but my health is good. How are your mother and father?"

Visitor: "They are fine, although Mother did cough last night..."

Normally this sort of polite exchange would go on for at least five minutes before you got to the matter in question. Well, not in Johannesburg!

I stayed with the Nokwes for the first two weeks, getting a lift into the CBD every morning in the only car that was available for use by the ANC national leadership. This was an old, but durable Dodge sedan driven by Malume, the official ANC driver. Duma Nokwe and I would leave the house to collect Mr Walter Sisulu, who lived nearby, and then the Administrator, Mr Alfred Nzo. Malume transported us to Macosa House, a commercial office block in Commissioner Street, where the ANC rented office space. (As the ANC was banned in 1960 there were no formal or designated ANC offices.) This office was shared by Mr Sisulu and an Indian bookkeeper/accountant, Mr Shaikjee. Both were registered as bookkeepers.

Although I was well-travelled within the Eastern Cape, my trips to Queenstown, East London, Grahamstown, Peddie, Noupoort, (U)Mthatha or Alice could not have prepared me for the sights and sounds of the city of Johannesburg and its townships. There was no television in South Africa at that time, so I had never even seen images of the metropolis. This was a new world to me, different from any place I had been before. The city was seemingly endless, with enormous office blocks, shops, street vendors and factories on the outskirts. It was an administrative nightmare, yet the law officers seemed to be everywhere. I remember my first ride on the electric train from the CBD to the black townships. At the time the service was still relatively new. The train travelled at tremendous speeds that got papers and other litter near the rail track flying. People who saw this created a new expression to denote superiority. If someone wanted to tell you that you were no match for them in whatever field they were talking about, they would say: "I will make you fly like paper next to the electric train." With repetition it became unnecessary to mention "the electric train." It was sufficient to say, "You will fly like paper" ("*ndakusus'amaphhepha*"). This expression was soon being used in all the provinces of the country. Such was the influence of Johannesburg on the rest of South Africa.

Every morning and evening thousands of people – spruced-up secretaries and clerks, manual labourers in overalls, men and women, young and old – travelled to town and back daily for work. Between 6 am and 8 am and 4 pm and 7 pm everybody was in a hurry to get to a specific destination. People pushed to get into already filled coaches with the war cry: "*FUDUWA!*" ("PUSH!"). There were one or two second class coaches and the rest were third class. The third class coaches were "open plan", with no separation into compartments, and commuters packed into them in the peak hours. In each coach there was invariably some preacher roaring at the top of his voice about thunder, fire and brimstone for those who refused to repent and accept the Lord in their hearts. Sweet sellers, boys of eight to twelve years old, were another familiar sight. They would move with remarkable agility through the crowded coaches, demanding and getting their money from

even the most stern-faced commuters. The secret of this apparent insolence was that, somewhere along the route, there were adults who would support the boy in demanding his rightful payment. You could never tell where they might be. For your own safety it was wiser to treat the young boy as an adult.

By the time I left the country a year later, I was convinced that no South African should leave the country without experiencing Johannesburg. My years at St John's College, and more so at Fort Hare, had led me to believe that I knew all the people and language groups in South Africa: Xhosas, Zulus, Basotho, Coloureds, Boers (Afrikaners) and English speakers. Without the Johannesburg experience I would have denied that Venda or Tsonga were South African languages. For the first time in my life I also heard Fanagalo (broken Zulu), a distilled mixture of languages used by the miners from Central and Southern Africa. I also came to admire and envy kids in the Johannesburg streets, who were ready to respond to whatever African language you used. Our nation-building efforts in South Africa will have succeeded when all our people in the nine provinces are as polyglot as the Soweto youngsters.

The Treason Trialists

The Treason Trial was now into its fourth year and the case against the 156 charged with high treason was collapsing. Of the original defendants, only forty were still on trial by December 1960. These forty travelled to Pretoria every morning by bus. Macosa House was one of the points where the Treason Trialists would be collected. The Dodge would drop Mr Nzo and myself at Macosa House and Mr Sisulu and Mr Nokwe would get into the bus travelling to Pretoria. The trialists would return to Macosa House around 5 pm. Malume would be waiting to transport Mr Sisulu and Mr Nokwe home or wherever else they needed to go.

Mr Nelson Mandela had his own car and must have driven himself directly to Pretoria, because I never saw him boarding the bus at Macosa House. At that time he was a partner at the famous legal firm, Mandela & Tambo. In our school political discussions we had been informed that this firm was prepared to take up the cases of poor, exploited communities and defend them free of charge. For example, they would provide legal advice to communities fighting mass removals and other discriminatory apartheid laws. This endeared many of us in the ANC Youth League to the courageous and humane leadership of the ANC.

While I was still at the Nokwes', Thabo Mbeki took me over to Westcliff Hill to witness an amazing sight. We were standing directly in front of what turned out to be Mandela's house. A nice car drove slowly from the other end of the street. There

were about four houses on either side. From these houses out came children of different ages, say one to five years old, and they all stood in front of their respective homes, forming what was similar to a guard of honour. As the car drove past the driver thrust out his arm with a clenched fist and called "*Africa!*" In unison the children shouted back "*Mayibuye!*" (Come back!).

This, I learnt, was a daily ritual as Mandela drove home from work. The children called Mr Mandela "*Tata Africa*" and looked forward to his arrival home every day. The respect and popularity Mandela enjoyed among all strata of society became well known. One morning Mr Mandela woke up to find that his car had been removed. He was forced to get a lift from colleagues in order to get to work at the legal practice of Mandela & Tambo. That evening, on arriving home, there was his car, cleaned spotless and with a note attached, "Sorry, Chief, we did not know it was yours." Clearly "*Tata Africa*" enjoyed respect even among the young people known to make use of people's property without their permission.

After a fortnight at the Nokwes I moved to the YMCA for about two weeks. The rooms were like school dormitories with about ten to twelve beds, and the rent was cheap. Subsequently I went to stay at Orlando East with Brother (Bro') Mike, Duma's uncle. Although Mr Mike More was Duma's mother's brother, he and Duma were more like brothers as they were close in age. In fact they used to play music together and Bro' Mike continued to play trombone for the Salvation Army.

The *Dompas*

I soon chose to travel by electric train to and from work and stopped using the car. For this I first had a weekly ticket until the end of January and from then on I bought monthly tickets. My daily schedule from Monday to Friday was as follows: up at 6 am; wash, dress and have breakfast by 7 am; walk to Orlando East station to catch the 7.20 am train into the city. In time I made friends with Steve, who passed my place daily on his way to the station. I got into the habit of waiting for him. If I wasn't ready, he would shout as he passed the house. I would quickly finish whatever I was doing and rush out. We would both catch the 7.20 am train travelling to Westgate station in town. At 7.50 am we would disembark and walk towards the Johannesburg Central Business District.

At least twice a week uniformed police would mount a search for the so-called *dompas*, or identity book. All our personal data was in this pass: full name, address, age, occupation and permit to be in a particular urban area.⁴¹ The *dompas* prevented people from travelling to or staying in certain localities and was supposed to regulate

the numbers of blacks in urban areas in accordance with Influx Control laws. Only African males had to carry this ID at all times. Failure to produce the booklet on demand meant spending a night in remand at a police station. The following morning the magistrate would routinely sentence "offenders" to a minimum fine. If they were unable to pay the fine, they would be sentenced to, a period in prison. *The Guardian* (later to become *New Age*) newspaper and subsequently *Drum* magazine had done an exposé of commercial potato farms in the Transvaal and Free State, which used pass law "offenders" as convict labour. Such was the fate of those who could not pay the fine following their arrest. On these prison farms they were subjected to torture, hard labour and the most inhumane and primitive conditions. The *Drum* exposure revealed that the sjambok was used frequently on the farms, sometimes with fatal consequences. Far from home, you could be given a pauper's burial without your family being aware. Cases were known of people who died and were buried in the same fields, as manure. Many prisoners died before they completed the relatively short terms of imprisonment of two to six months.

To counteract this problem the people worked out a system where, if someone was arrested for not having a pass, they would ask a passer-by to inform their family. In order for this system to work, it was important to state your home address and the police station where you were detained. The family would scour various police stations to find their arrested relatives and pay the fine. For the whole year I spent in Johannesburg, I did not have a pass. I had left it back at Noupoot as I was expecting to leave the country within a short period. However, I soon learnt a trick to avoid being searched by the police as I walked from the train station to my workplace. Walking in a crowd from the train I would see policemen standing in groups of three, facing the commuters walking from the train station. They were quick to notice sudden changes of direction or pace. So the best thing was to walk confidently towards them at a regular pace. On at least four occasions during that year the police called somebody either in front or behind me.

Unfortunately such tricks do not work in all circumstances. One afternoon as I left the Sisulu home in Orlando West, not far from Uncle Tom's Hall (a community hall next to the now famous Hector Pieterse memorial statue in Orlando West),⁴² a teenager of about eighteen or nineteen years old casually dressed in a T-shirt, khaki trousers and *têkkies* approached me. Taking out his police identity, he asked for my pass. I had heard of the police "flying squad" who did not wear uniform, but this was my first direct encounter. Rather than thinking of prison, I could not hide my concern and pity. In a shocked tone I asked him, "What would make a healthy young man like you take such a job? Surely you can find something more dignified – even the Blackjack (municipal) police. But to feed on your people like this?" The young man

had certainly never had such an experience. He looked embarrassed and shyly put his ID in his pocket and left. I would like to believe he ended up joining the People's Army, *UmKhonto weSizwe* (MK) when it was launched later that year.

Meeting the Struggle circles

The office that Mr Sisulu shared with Mr Shaikjee at Macosa House was on the ground floor. It was an accountant's office with a reception desk, behind which was a secretarial table. The two offices were on the left and right sides of the reception desk. Three gentlemen spent the day going in and out of the office after asking the young secretary to type this or that letter. These were Alfred Nzo, Andrew Mlangeni and Abel Mthembu. On the third floor there was an open space with two small offices. Here we organised what became known as the Rand Youth Club, the main activity of which was to teach the youth to do ballroom dancing.⁴³ We had one professional dancer who freely offered his services after work, around 4:30 pm to 5:30 pm. The place became popular with young domestic workers and some students who were doing short courses of the Damelin type. For the greater part of the day there was a relaxed atmosphere.

I often met my journalist friend Koos Segola at the dance classes; that is, when he was not out of town covering a story. Like me, he did not go back to Fort Hare and was waiting for further details of "The Mission". Koos did several investigative articles for *New Age* newspaper, especially on the conditions of farm workers. He also knew some of the journalists working for *Drum* magazine and I was delighted when he offered to introduce me to them. These were people whose writings I had admired over time: Can Themba, Casey Motsisi, Nat Nakasa and Willie Khositsile, among others. After the anticipation of meeting haloed icons, I was surprised to find them all quite ordinary and down to earth, which bred hopes in my breast that I could be a writer like them one day. To the journalists I was just one of the fans and they probably did not remember me afterwards. I also enjoyed visiting Dorkay House and the Bantu Men's Social Centre (BMSC), centres of Arts and Culture where prominent musicians like Dolly Rathebe, Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, McKay Davashe, Kippy Moeketsi, Dark City Sisters and the Manhattan Brothers were nurtured.

In 1961 Johannesburg, lunchtime was the opportune time for discussions and planning activities like demonstrations. For the Africans there was a *pap-en-vleis* people's restaurant around the corner from Macosa House, popularly called *kwa Moretsele*. That is where you were likely to find underground ANC leaders and delegates from the outlying areas, who had come to report on actions in their regions and to be briefed on planned activities.

I became a roving messenger for the ANC leaders at Macosa House. One day Mr Walter Sisulu (or Tat'uValter, as Sis'Tiny fondly called him) sent me to the *New Age* offices with an article for the *New Age* Editor, Ruth First. As I entered, I felt like I was stepping on sacred ground. I was about to meet a person I had come to regard as one of the icons of our struggle, along with her husband Joe Slovo, one of the famous ANC lawyers. The front reception office had three desks and there were two lady typists. One was Thandi Lujabe and the other Barbara Masekela. The third desk was occupied by the journalist Wolfie Kodesh, who had worked with Ruth First on the exposé of conditions at the potato prison farms.⁴⁴

I greeted the three and explained that I had a message for Ruth First from Mr Walter Sisulu. Mr Kodesh, whom I would later refer to as Wolfie, pointed at an inner door. I knocked softly at the door and a confident voice called me to come in. Ruth First's face was familiar from photographs in *New Age* articles, but in the flesh she was even more striking. Behind her glasses she had bright eyes with a direct gaze. She was dressed in a bluish-grey jacket and skirt and her manner was charming, but business-like. After quickly reading through the article I had brought, she said, "Fine!" and asked me to relay the message to "Walter" that the article was alright.

On my way out I spoke to the people at the reception. It turned out that Thandi was one of the nurses who had been expelled from Victoria Hospital in Alice. She was related to the Makiwanes and Tennyson may have been instrumental in getting her the *New Age* job. I thought to myself, if she is related to the Makiwanes then, in our convoluted Xhosa relationships, she is most probably related to me. So I saw her as a sister. (When considering romantic involvement, the safest option was to ensure that you were not of the same clan.⁴⁵) But Barbara was something else. She was strikingly beautiful, with big eyes that stared directly at you as she conversed in a clear voice. The eyes said: "I'm talking to you as an intelligent person and flattery will not get you very far." Then suddenly she would change and smile, as if to say, "If you talk sense, I could get interested." I knew that with hardly any wardrobe to talk of, and no cash to invite her even for a coke, I didn't stand a chance of getting closer to her. But that didn't stop me dreaming.

Then one day Tat'uValter came to me on the third floor of Macosa House and told me to get a pen and paper. He had missed a *New Age* deadline and Ruth was breathing down his neck. So I took dictation in my most legible and rounded handwriting and rushed to deliver the article to the Editor. The article was titled "What is to be done?" (Later, while studying in the Soviet Union, I would have reason to remember that heading.) I arrived breathless at the *New Age* offices and went straight to Ruth's desk. When she came in, instead of commenting on the article I

had brought, she looked at me with a mischievous glint in her eye and a killer smile and exclaimed "Success at last!" (On rare occasions she would flash that smile when she was happy with what you had to offer.) She then looked directly at Barbara. Whatever Ruth had in mind I am forever grateful because Barbara and I became good friends and comrades from then on.

One of my errands took me to the nearby offices of an NGO known as Defence & Aid, which I believe was founded by Canon Collins. It later operated from London and provided funds for the defence of political activists in South Africa. I had been directed to see Ms Ruth Mompoti. It was only later that I learnt that this lady had been secretary to the legendary legal firm of Mandela & Tambo. Sis' Ruth's credentials dated back to the historic 1956 Women's March to Pretoria in protest against the extension of the Pass Laws to women. She obviously knew about me because, without questions, she took me to a small office which stocked men's clothing and asked me to choose whatever I needed, from underwear to a jacket and a pair of shoes. She explained that support groups in Europe and the United States would collect decent second-hand clothing and send it to the various liberation movements, particularly in Africa. The Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) was among the most powerful in terms of influence, commitment, dedication and resources, so many of the clothes came from this source.⁴⁶

In the course of my duties as a roving messenger, I was one day instructed to deliver a note to the offices of the Congress of Democrats (COD), a platform for those whites who opposed apartheid and wanted a non-racial South Africa. There I met Ben and Mary Turok as well as other COD members and struggle activists from "the other side". At COD, people brought sandwiches and soft drinks that would be shared at lunchtime, while discussions ranged over past and planned activities. Mostly these activities involved placard demonstrations on pressing issues. At these demonstrations each of the component groups of the Congress movement would typically be represented: the ANC, for Africans; the Transvaal and Natal Indian Congresses, for Asians; the Coloured People's Organisation, for Coloureds mainly in the Cape and Transvaal, and the COD, for Whites.⁴⁷ The reason the Congress Movement comprised four racially distinct organisations was, at least in part, because language and physical separation made it impractical for people from one racial group to politicise and mobilise other groups. Leaders of each racial grouping in the Congress Movement were called upon to prepare their people to defy and confront white hegemony. Initially the leaders of these organised formations would conclude agreements on common grounds. Thereafter, there would be solidarity, co-operation and unity at grassroots level. The approach was a realistic and effective way of overcoming the logistical constraints of apartheid's racial enclaves.

Following an all-White referendum in October 1960, when the pro-Republic lobby won by 52 percent, the Nationalist government had designated 31 May 1961 as the day South Africa would be declared a republic. One day Thabo Mbeki and I were summoned from Macosa House to join a line of people standing with placards in front of the City Hall, calling for a boycott of the Republic Day celebrations. These demonstrations were usually organised by The Black Sash, comprising mainly white women opposed to racial discrimination, or the Congress Movement, which included the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).⁴⁸ Our presence was needed because there was no dark pigmentation among the demonstrators and we were there to “balance” things out. Because we did not have the *dompas*, we had generally avoided such exposure. As luck would have it, this was the day the police decided to select the two conspicuous “darkies” and demand their passes. Needless to say, into the police van we went.

The police were either consulting their superiors or waiting to catch more “pass-less” blacks because they kept us in there for about half an hour. We sat in silence, suspecting that this may be a trick to catch us saying something incriminating. At the same time each of us had wild thoughts like ending up as manure on one of the notorious potato prison farms. When the policemen eventually came back and simply opened the van door, we exited very cautiously, took tentative steps to the gate and then quickly went our respective ways, in the opposite direction of Macosa House.

Soon I was part of a study group meeting weekly either at the COD offices or other venues. Here I was introduced to the “Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism” by Mary Turok’s interpreter, Vincent Khumalo, or Mtungwa as we called him. (It was common practice to use an interpreter at mass rallies to ensure that those who spoke no English could follow the issues.) I was to see Mtungwa regularly at Macosa House, carrying his worn-out briefcase which contained literature from the Consulate of the USSR, later closed when U.N. member states called for the boycott and isolation of racist South Africa. Dear, gentle Mtungwa was normally soft spoken, until he climbed the platform at rallies to translate from English into what I can call “people’s Zulu”, using colloquial language and popular phrases. I can still see him clearly in my mind’s eye with his faded brown “Stetson” hat and brown jacket.⁴⁹

Leisure time

On weekends I happily walked the townships, visiting friends I had met at some Stokvel, mass rally or “mixed party”. I hardly had any pocket money to talk about. I got used to criss-crossing the south-western native townships on foot. I would walk

from Orlando West, past Dube and Mofolo, up to Jabulani and Emdeni. This was where the townships ended, although the construction of further townships had already begun. I would also travel by foot from Phefeni to Mzimhlope where the legendary Mrs Lillian Ngoyi lived. The longest period of my stay was in Orlando East; from there I would walk leisurely to Noordgesig to visit Mr Sisulu's sister.

From Orlando East I would also find my way to Diepkloof and Baragwanath Hospital Nurses' Home. There I found nursing students from the Cape to whom I was related. It was enough to know one nurse. Thereafter you would be introduced to several others from the same province. In short, there was never a dull moment during the weekends.

During our Youth League meetings at Fort Hare, we sometimes spoke of the "mixed parties" which took place at, for example, Rhodes University in Grahamstown. "Mixed parties" were social occasions where South Africans of all races were able to mingle. The idea was to create a relaxed and convivial atmosphere to facilitate dialogue on burning issues. For this purpose the funds of the SRC would come in handy, although sometimes private sponsors could be found.

In Johannesburg such parties were commonly held at the houses of progressive white friends, with all components of the Congress Movement represented, as well as other resistance organisations like the Liberal Party, The Black Sash, the PAC, the Unity Movement etc. There were healthy exchanges on a wide range of issues. The host would cover the cost of the refreshments and friends with employment would contribute with a bottle of wine or something stronger. Others would bring beer. I got to participate in these mixed parties at the time when a special police unit had been created to monitor transgression of the "Immorality Act", or sex across the colour line. Surprisingly, although there were sometimes a few gate-crashers, none of the participants misbehaved, even though there were alcoholic drinks of various kinds. People celebrated the hard work done in the past week or month, but did not forget that they were engaged in political struggle against a vicious enemy and needed to be vigilant at all times.

Mobilisation and fundraising

The ANC branches had established regular weekend fundraising activities, the most common and popular being a *stokvel*. Every month-end a particular venue and date would be announced for the *stokvel*, usually on a Friday or a Saturday. The venues shifted from one township to another, sometimes at three or four venues

simultaneously. It would be Dube, Mofolo, Orlando or Jabulani. I fondly remember one such *stokvel* that was held at MaNgoyi's (Lilian Ngoyi's) house. There was a wide variety of drinks: soft, traditional beer, bottled beer and hard liquor. Working comrades would offer to pay for those activists like me who did not really have a salary, but received irregular "allowances". This was where you got to know the views of the ANC membership or what transpired at some historical events like the PAC break-away during the 1959 ANC conference.

There were also mass meetings organised around specific issues, at rotating venues. The favoured venue was an open field in Fordsburg. I was fortunate to attend a special rally to protest the murder of Patrice Lumumba, the newly elected Prime Minister of the Belgian Congo, in 1960. The rally took place about six months after the event. The public was mixed; that is, attendance was from a variety of racial and language groups. Among the speakers was Mary Turok, whom I would later meet face-to-face at the offices of the COD. Tall and majestic, and in a clear, firm voice, she accused the imperialist forces of connivance and guilt in the murder of Lumumba. The United Nations troops were standing idly by, including some from the newly independent Ghana. This was followed shortly afterwards by the plane crash that removed the UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld from Sweden. His country pursued policies sympathetic to the decolonisation process. By the end of her speech one could see the clear connection between Lumumba's death and the support for racist South Africa by the western imperialist powers.

I also recall a rally organised to take place in an open field in Western Native Township, the home of "Uncle" JB Marks, who was to become Chairman of the banned South African Communist Party in 1962 and a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC). Under his inspiring leadership gold miners on the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, Pretoria and surrounds) went out on strike in August 1946 until after a week they were forced back to work by brutal police action.

The field would have made a good sports ground, but was full of stones of various sizes. People found it a convenient short-cut to their destinations – school, church or shebeen. Nobody thought of mobilising the young people to clear the field of the stones and make it user-friendly for sporting activities. The mass meeting was to be held at 10 am and it was already way past the starting time. Uncle JB stared at the empty plot and finally decided that he should begin his speech. A speaker at a mass rally had to "breathe fire", meaning that he or she had to speak passionately and without notes. A written speech did not convey the necessary feeling. Only messages of support and resolutions were written down and read. So Uncle JB got on to a big stone, which he used as his platform and eloquently

delivered his working class sermon⁵⁰ without referring to any notes. The main theme of his address was the need for the workers to unite and affiliate to SACTU, the South African Congress of Trade Unions. He argued that by doing so they would grow into a mighty force that could push the bosses to improve wages and working conditions. This call to united action was interspersed with vivid instances of worker ill-treatment and SACTU's power to uphold workers' rights. Gradually people slowed down to understand what this modestly dressed, but clearly sober, person was on about. In no time there was a sizeable crowd. The rally had begun and in half an hour the field was overflowing.

The All-in Conference and the call for strike action

Before the end of 1960 the leadership of the banned ANC with the help of its former allies convened a meeting of socio-cultural bodies and those political formations that had not been banned (for example, the Liberal Party which had black and white members). This new amalgamation agreed to convene an "All-in Conference" scheduled for 25-26 March 1961 in Pietermaritzburg, Natal Province.

The letters of invitation were signed in the name of the Preparatory Committee, which included prominent personalities in the participating organisations. There were also documents spelling out the objectives of the conference. All these were typed elsewhere and brought to us in Macosa House for reproduction. In the basement there were two machines called Gestetner machines. In order to produce copies you had to type each page using a typewriter and a stencil, then take the stencil and fix this into the Gestetner machine. Next you placed a full ream of paper in the machine and started winding the Gestetner by hand. Through this process you produced copies of each page, one at a time. So, for a document of twenty pages you had to type (cut) twenty stencils. If you wanted a hundred copies of the document you would have to produce a hundred single pages multiplied by twenty. I considered myself quite a technician for being able to produce numerous documents in this fashion. Considering that 1400 delegates attended the conference, we must have sent out at least 500 letters of invitation. As a member of staff of the Credentials Committee, I made a list of all the responses as well as the names of those who would attend as delegates. At the conference I was asked to verify the names of those present against the list we had earlier prepared.

Several factors highlighted the significance of the "All-in Conference". Firstly, the conference delegates were electrified by the unexpected appearance of Nelson Mandela, who delivered the main address. This was possible because the Special Branch had failed to notice that his ban on attending public meetings had expired

eleven days previously. The Eastern Province (Port Elizabeth and surrounding areas) delegation came to the conference venue just after dark in slow march formation, singing. By the time they were inside, all the delegates in the conference hall had joined in. The song marked a shift from earlier struggle songs that expressed support for the leadership, or called for the unity of all language groups. This song was a true protest song, a challenge to the regime and at the same time a way of alerting the nation that the form of struggle was moving from the defensive to the offensive. The slogan "*Africa May'ibuye!*" (Africa, come back!), shouted with thumbs raised, was replaced, for the first time, with the clenched fist and the slogan "*Amandla Ngawetu!*" (Power to the people!).⁵¹

The All-in Conference resolution went on further to say that if the call for a National Convention was not heeded there would be a nationwide strike from Monday 29 to Wednesday 31 May 1961, the day the Nationalist government would declare South Africa a republic. The Conference also nominated Nelson Mandela as the Secretary of a National Action Council (NAC) which would implement the Plan of Action for whatever needed to be done, arising from the Conference resolutions and decisions.

The Treason Trial had collapsed on March 29 1961. The collapse gave impetus to mobilisation of the three-day "stay-at-home" strike action. The ANC activists, who were still resisting going underground, grasped the occasion to show that the movement was very much alive, even if the name ANC was not used.

Already instructions had gone to all regions and branches to switch over from public ANC activities to the underground operation (the M-Plan). However, many militants of the movement still believed that the M-Plan meant "giving in" to the regime. The result was that many good leaders and some over-enthusiastic cadres became easy victims of arrest for pursuing the "aims and objectives of banned organisations". These were issues of heated discussion during the fundraising *stokvels*. One group would clamour for open defiance of the ban. In their understanding, defiance was part of the struggle. The opponents, on the other hand, accused these "militants" of foolishness in handing themselves over to the enemy "on a plate".

On Monday 29 May 1961, the first day of the stay-at-home strike, there was a visible reduction in the number of people at train stations and bus terminals. My colleagues and I went to work at Macosa House because we expected to get feedback from various regions on the success of the strike. The English and Afrikaans media splashed headlines in early morning papers, declaring the strike to be a failure. This was clearly intended to increase newspaper sales as well as discourage the strikers. It was a

clear reflection of the side taken by the media moguls, who could not have known of the failure of the strike when they printed their papers in the early hours of the morning. The extent of the propaganda was such that the leadership of the National Action Council, through its National Secretary, Nelson Mandela, issued a statement calling off the strike because of poor response. This statement was reported in all the afternoon newspapers and broadcast on the radio news.

In fact, in the areas of the Cape, 80 to 90 percent of the working population stayed at home on Tuesday 30 May, but the media headlines screaming "Mandela calls off the strike!" was the final blow to all efforts to maintain the strike action and people gradually went back to work.

On the morning of Tuesday 30 May I was sent to meet Govan Mbeki at Park station. We had never before met face-to-face, but I easily identified him from *New Age* pictures and other publications. I soon learnt the reason for his morning arrival. He had taken the same train that brought me from Noupoot to Johannesburg, which meant that he had left Port Elizabeth late morning on the Monday of the strike.

I took the opportunity to inform him who I was, and added that I had left Noupoot under his direct instructions in December 1960. The information pleased and relaxed him because he fired the first salvo: "Why did they call off the strike? It is common knowledge that, in a three-day strike, the first day is normally half-hearted, as the message may not have reached people in some areas. It is only on the second day that one can fully assess the success or failure of a strike."

I was not privy to the discussions Oom Gov had with the rest of the ANC leadership, but I got the idea. The evening of the first day is the appropriate time to drive the message home. Later I asked Tat'uValter whether or not it was true that strikes can only be assessed on the second day. He responded in his quiet, fatherly way, "Perhaps in Port Elizabeth there was a sizeable turnout in support of the strike, but it is important that the national leadership remain in control. They must not allow the strike to be declared a failure by the enemy." The strike may indeed have been a failure, but there was no doubt that the masses had demonstrated their opposition to this "White" republic.

The Police Special Branch

This was a specialised unit of the police who dealt with political activities and organisations opposed to the apartheid government and its oppressive laws. Before the ban on political organisations in 1960, the Special Branch police attended public

political meetings with hidden tape recorders and later made notes on who said what. The public meetings covered a wide range of issues both local and international. Local issues centred on the oppressive apartheid machinery and how it affected the South African population. Internationally, speakers covered issues in the Congo, Kenya, Angola, Mozambique, Algeria and Cuba. At Macosa House we got used to unexpected visits by Special Branch Inspector Daicker. He was convinced that if he kept tabs on those who visited Macosa House, he would be able to discover where the banned ANC was operating from. His main targets were Andrew Mlangeni and Abel Mthembu. However, in spite of his irregular visits, we were able to print thousands of leaflets and get them safely distributed.

This is how the operation was carried out. The leaflet would be typed at any of the friendly offices and then taken to the Printing Press just opposite Macosa House, next to a café owned by a Chinese lady known as Kate. Kate sold sandwiches, but specialised in Russian sausages which were bigger, dearer and quite filling. At times Inspector Daicker would come when there was some sensitive material in the office. Mthembu would hand it to an unknown person like me to give to Kate at the shop. Later he would fetch the material and give it to the printers. Once or twice Daicker went to Kate trying to find out if she knew anything about subversive ANC material. Kate could put some qualified theatre actresses to shame. She would play a complete fool and simply ask which type of sandwich Mr Daicker would like, or if he would perhaps prefer a Russian? Daicker gave up on Kate and started monitoring the printers next door.

There was, however, a case when, during his visit to the printers, he saw the leaflets calling for the stay-at-home strike during the commemoration of Republic Day. They were still being printed. After Daicker had seen the leaflets in print and established the expected total to be printed (around 5000), he left, intending to get a team to monitor their removal the next morning.

Of course, when he came to the printers the following morning, there were no leaflets. The printer told him that the owner had fetched them during the night, and that he had no idea where he had taken them. No, he did not take the registration number of the van that collected the leaflets. At that stage even the government did not want to be seen to interfere with the holy cow of private enterprise, legally registered. So they could not close the business.

There is a side story to this. Duma Nokwe had recently purchased a house in Dube Township, within walking distance of Westcliff. He had asked me to sleep there while they were gradually furnishing the place. The process took about a month. On the

night the leaflets disappeared from the printers, Mthembu knocked at the Dube house just after midnight and brought packets of leaflets for storage in the room I slept in.

I was jittery over the issue and decided to inform Duma of the leaflets in his new house. Duma went ballistic. In his anger he – I think, unintentionally – let slip that this was not the first occasion Mthembu had taken some action without consultation. By evening the leaflets were not in the house and Mthembu never referred to this episode, not even in conversation.

My Orlando East ANC unit (cell)

By February 1961 I was staying more or less permanently with Duma's uncle, Bro' Mike. One day a comrade, Maphumolo, came and took me for a short walk to the house of Mr Hashe. Clearly he was acting under instructions from the ANC. He knew my name and where I worked. Mr Hashe was originally from the Alice area near Fort Hare, but had now settled with his family in Orlando East. His full name was Govan Mantyi Hashe and I referred to him as Tat'uHashe. He worked for a chemical factory. After our introduction, I would visit him on weekends. Tata Hashe's wife was a kindly mother with four grown children – two boys and two girls. Their eldest son was about my age and their youngest daughter, Zinto, was still at school. Although my visits and conversations were mainly with their father, I began to feel accepted as family.

This was the time the ANC was learning to operate underground, using the M-Plan. The plan, credited to Nelson Mandela, was based on pyramid structures. There were units of three people with one convenor. Only the convenor was in touch with the convenor of another unit. Three convenors formed the higher pyramid, with only one as their convenor, and so forth. The scheme greatly reduced exposure of ANC members to the Special Branch. Anyone who was compromised (found with sensitive material) could reveal, under torture, no more than two other members of the pyramid or unit.

The three of us (Hashe, Maphumulo and myself) constituted a pyramid unit with Tat'uHashe as our convenor. I learnt more about how the ANC had operated in the rural areas in the Cape. In the villages and surrounding areas, the elders knew that Fort Hare was the most advanced institution for blacks. The elders saw in Fort Hare an institution that would produce the future leaders of the nation. At public gatherings like weddings it was proposed that each district or region should spare no effort in sending at least one student to that "cooking pot of our leaders".

In Orlando East I enjoyed the thrill of distributing ANC leaflets to our allocated street. Two of us in the unit were younger than thirty years, so we spared the middle-aged Tata from getting involved in leaflet distribution. When we had completed our task of putting leaflets in the postbox of each house, we would report to him and disappear. In one case we put the leaflet in a policeman's house and he discovered it when he arrived late from work, or the shebeen. He called a colleague and the two, on bicycles, went hunting for the "scoundrels" who were responsible for disseminating subversive material. I was amused to watch them from behind the curtain as they cycled up and down our street.

One evening Tat'uHashe called me outside and demonstrated a chemical (from his factory workplace) that resulted in combustion after thirty seconds of atmospheric exposure. From my chemistry lessons I could identify the chemical, but now the enormous potential became a tangible reality. At this time the ANC was dabbling in the research and manufacture of explosives. The delay in my "mission" to travel abroad was yielding unforeseen dividends.

A new students' body

Fort Hare was attached to a fully-fledged Rhodes University in Grahamstown, which gave accreditation to the standard of education provided at Fort Hare. In terms of the International Union of Students (IUS) grading system, only pupils who attained tertiary level were considered eligible for membership. However, students did not affiliate as individuals; they had to become affiliated to a National Students Union that was affiliated to the IUS.

Fort Hare, through the University of Grahamstown, became affiliated to the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), but there was no national organisation that brought together secondary and high school African students who were highly politicised, way beyond their counterparts in white schools.

The idea had been tossed around even during my days at St John's, that we needed an organisation to mobilise and co-ordinate the activities of students from the racially oppressed African majority. The oppression had galvanised African students at secondary level schools into militant, politically aware cadres ready to participate in the struggle to liberate their people.

Thus, using the Rand Youth Club at Macosa House, we organised a "Youth Party" with former and current leaders from various African secondary and high schools in the Witwatersrand. On the third floor, those who came to party enjoyed themselves

with dances, but on the ground floor, the reception and office of Tat'uValter became a conference venue where the invited youth leaders discussed the need to create an African Students' Association (ASA).

After this consultative meeting, communication was sent to Fort Hare and prominent high schools in the four provinces. A date was set for the inaugural conference of ASA for 29 December in Durban. A draft Constitution of ASA was prepared from the Rand Youth club to be presented at the Durban Conference. Around this time I was introduced to an Indian colleague by the name of Essop Pahad. He stayed at a family flat, five minutes' walk from Macosa House. I went to Essop's place with Thabo Mbeki, who was completing his matric at Britzius College. The reason was to seek Essop's assistance in raising funds for the launch of the African Students' Association (ASA). Essop can never forget that occasion. As he puts it, "These two – Sindiso and Thabo – wanted my assistance to make preparations for the launch of what they frankly told me was to be an organisation of African students only. Indians and Coloureds were not required at this stage."

With hindsight this may appear to have been unbridled arrogance, but you have to understand the times. As I remarked earlier, there were Congresses for the various racial groups, and this was simply a pragmatic course. To us there was nothing wrong in having an African Students' Association. If the Indians wanted a similar kind of association, they were free and welcome to set up their own. The two bodies could then work in partnership. I should mention that Essop and I nevertheless became good friends. On occasions of dire hunger, having missed out on my daily allowance, I would invite myself to his place near Macosa House in time to share his lunch.

The Conference on 29 December 1961 was a tremendous success. Word spread throughout the country that there was a new organisation for African secondary and high School students. The only weakness was that some of the participants were to leave the country in a few days' time.

Mr Walter (Tat'uValter) Sisulu

My year in Johannesburg was a socio-political school for me. I learnt a lot from many people, black and white, and I will cite some instances to illustrate my point. Certainly the most influential person I encountered during that stay was Tat'uValter. In fact he was the one who debriefed me about my parents and family and soon became my substitute father. More than that, I came to admire the way he gave good advice, but allowed me to express my views on whatever issue was at hand.

I remember during the early days, when we were in the thick of meetings and correspondence, trying to bring together all organisations to participate in the All-in Conference. Chief Albert Luthuli, the President of the ANC, had a regular feature article in the *World* newspaper called "The Chief Speaks". Under the conditions of the ban, he was the only leader who had this platform to address the masses. This was the way I saw it anyway. However, the Chief saw it differently. He used his weekly feature to address the white community, to allay their fears of the *Swart Gevaar* (Black Danger) that was trumpeted by every leader of the ruling National Party. With patience and clear logic he would show how this "separate but equal" policy was a farce, a guise to hide the immense suffering and injustice meted to the black people. He argued that the security of the whites lay in shared values and just treatment of all under the law.

I kept on hoping that, reading between the lines, I would decipher a message from the Chief to the black youth, particularly of the ANC. Not even a microscope could reveal such a coded message. One day, in exasperation, I complained to Tat'uValter about the Chief ignoring his own supporters, particularly the youth who were ready to lay down their lives in defence of our human rights. Tat'uValter smiled and, in quite an innocent way, said, "So, why don't you write and tell him what you think?" What, me? Write to the Chief to make my insignificant complaint to a man preoccupied with weighty national issues? However, Walter insisted that I had the right to do this and urged me to seize the opportunity to exercise this right. The ball was in my court and, I have to admit, I failed to return it.

With hindsight, I now realise that the grand Old Man saw right through my plan to get him to raise the issue with the Chief during their regular weekly meetings. He was nicely telling me that he was not my postboy. No, this is not true either. I just did not know enough about the Chief. In a way he had responded to my query; it was just that I was not aware of it. It was later in exile that I learnt about his famous statement: "We need young men and women whose courage rises with the danger." I can now see that Walter also wanted me to write to the Chief as a way of boosting his morale. Given his state of isolation, letters from young people like me affirming their loyalty would certainly have brightened his spirits. I was to learn this lesson only at a later date.

Walter would sometimes say profound things, as if he were musing. The leader of the Liberal Party, Alan Paton, was a giant opponent of apartheid practices and wrote profusely in defence of human rights and dignity. One day Walter quietly said, "I wonder when Alan Paton will join the ANC. His intellect surely makes it clear to him that his aspirations can only be fulfilled under an ANC leadership and its mass following."

He had similar views about other outstanding anti-apartheid activists like Jordan Ngubane (also of the Liberal Party) and Mthuthuzeli Mpehle of the Unity Movement. Mr Mpehle later joined the ANC in exile and was South Africa's Ambassador to Morocco in the post-1994 democratic South Africa.

On the morning of 29 March 1961, as the last group of Treason Trialists were boarding their regular bus to Pretoria, Walter himself got onto the bus and then, in a mocking sort of voice, said, "You know, they are going to release us today." Nobody took him seriously. People made humming noises to hide their scepticism. It was the same treatment you got if an elder belched after a good meal or drink. The reaction of those around him is softly pronounced, "Ha! The food has settled nicely in his stomach."

The same day, around 12:30 pm, Mr Alfred Nzo (But' Alf) announced that he had just received a call to the effect that the Treason Trial was over. Arrangements were made quickly for demonstrators to assemble near the City Hall with placards expressing victory and welcoming the leaders of the people. Walter had correctly predicted the outcome of the Treason Trial to the nearest hour.

Talking about But' Alf, I am reminded of the way Walter dealt with his stubbornness in refusing to abide by the court order not to visit Alexandra township. This was really But' Alf's constituency and he just could not accept that he would have to drop all his comrades and remain in Mofolo, the area to which he was restricted. So, for three Mondays in succession, one of us in Macosa House had to go to Marshall Square police detention centre to pay a fine for Mr Nzo who had been caught in Alexandra over the weekend again. Clearly a certain member of the Special Branch was determined to ensure, for whatever reason, that he was not able to visit Alexandra.

On the third Monday of But' Alf's detention, Walter could no longer take it. Turning to Mr Nzo, newly-arrived from Marshall Square detention, he raised his voice slightly, in itself a rare event, and said: "Hey Mfo! Can you please stop your one-man defiance campaign? We can't be paying money to bail you every Monday because you can't stay away from Alex!" The message got through and we were relieved of this unnecessary chore.

The days at Macosa House now seem like an exciting adventure, but the financial constraints of a banned political organisation came with a life of uncertainties, including where your next meal would come from. At times all my bosses (Nzo, Mlangeni or Mthembu) were nowhere to be found around lunch hour. So I would not get the daily two shillings (about R20). This was the time the new currency, the

Rand, was being broadcast on the radio daily. It was also about this time that I ran into my childhood hero, Lwandle. I was walking up Commissioner Street and I saw Lwandle standing outside a jewellery shop. As soon as our eyes locked, and as I was preparing for a loud and joyous greeting, Lwandle signalled to me to keep quiet and move on. Then it hit me. My childhood friend, now in his early twenties, was keeping a look-out for the cops while his cronies were ransacking the store, possibly under armed threat.

This nasty experience set me thinking. Here we were on a noble mission to liberate our people from racial oppression, and we could not advance our cause fast enough because some days we simply did not have food to eat. Why should I not come to an understanding with Lwandle and get him to provide a kind of monthly allowance which would ensure I did not sleep hungry on some days?

I gently related my experience with Lwandle to Tat'uValter, with a hint that Lwandle could help me solve the question of scarce funds for meals. The Old Man pulled me into a corner and sternly told me that the ANC was not a criminal organisation. I should never, in my wildest dreams, think of indulging in criminal activity under the guise of waging a just struggle. Only the organisation would decide if action of a particular nature could be undertaken. Until then, I must totally eradicate such thoughts from my mind. I was impressed. You could wage the struggle and still maintain the basic tenets of a Christian upbringing.

Walter Sisulu was a devoted father and family man. He seemed to find time for his political work and also spend prime time with his wife, Albertina, and their children. In fact it was from his example that I learnt that although political work is very demanding, it is not impossible to devote time to the family. I must say that this was characteristic of the leaders of his generation, from Luthuli to Tambo, Kotane, JB Marks, Thomas Nkobi, Duma Nokwe and others. They influenced those who followed in their footsteps, with varying degrees of success.

On the subject of family, it is important to emphasise the significant role played by the ANC wives and mothers, Albertina Sisulu (the "Mother of the Nation") being an outstanding example. They understood and supported their husbands and companions as well as their not always clear political activities. Pertinently, while they rallied together to support the ANC leaders, they also provided support to one another, showing a similarly cohesive relationship to the Mothers' Unions in African townships and villages.⁵² Mtutuzeli Mpehle, whom I met occasionally when I visited his younger brother Malizo, had great respect for what he called "the Congress wives". He believed that their bedrock of support was the main inspiration of the

ANC leadership. This inspiration was transmitted to the valiant women in the mass democratic movement until the unbanning of all political organisations in 1990.

My family

It was now six months since I had arrived in Johannesburg. During all that period I had not had any communication with my family. Although I thought about my family constantly, I observed the instructions to maintain a low profile and not fall foul of the law before the arrangements for my departure had been finalised.

However, in July of that year, Walter said casually (I am afraid this is the only way I can put it, because this was how he operated), "I am concerned about the reverend." (He was referring to my father). "I think you should visit home to show that all is still well." For the first time, he explained the reasons for the delay in my departure. He said that we would leave as a small group of not more than ten. The others were completing their studies at Fort Hare and we would all leave at the end of the year.

I was given a return ticket to Noupoot and told to spend about two weeks with the family. I packed a small bag of clothing, including some of my "new" *Mphando* clothes received from Ruth Mompoti, and boarded the train. It was on the journey home that I began to realise how much I had missed my family. In 1961 I was one of nine children: myself, the first-born, aged twenty-one, followed in descending order by Fundisa (19), Pumzile (16), Kwezi (13), Buntu (11), Mzikazi (8), Bubele (6), Qukeza (3), Squququ (three months). (The last-born, Papama, saw light in 1963, by which time I was already abroad.)

I had not sent any warning to my parents that I was on my way. The train arrived at Noupoot station at about 2 pm and I simply walked home and entered through the kitchen door, as was usual for family members. The front door was used by visitors. As it was after lunch Mother had already returned to the churchyard, where she taught primary school classes. Our house helper greeted me with surprise and excitement and informed me that Father was in his study.

As befits a Xhosa man, Father was able to hide his excitement. Nevertheless he welcomed me joyfully and asked if all was well. I told him about the warm fellowship I enjoyed with the various ANC leaders and some of their families and explained that our mission abroad would take place only at the end of the year. He was gratified to hear that Mr Sisulu had advised me to return home, knowing that my father would be concerned about my welfare. There is no doubt that Tat'uValter's generous gesture strengthened my father's faith in the ANC leadership. If this was Tat'uValter's

intention, it was a master-stroke; my father was to endure the five-year period of silence that followed my departure with brave restraint. Meanwhile, reassured that his son was in good health and in the hands of some of the most respected figures in the country, he expressed confidence that I would use the opportunities abroad wisely. He hoped that I would acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to be of service to both my family and the suffering masses.

The people in the location took my sudden appearance in Noupoot in their stride. For them it was nothing out of the ordinary for me to be home mid-year. I spent most days with Mr Hlathi, the Xhosa interpreter at the local Magistrate's Court.⁵³ Hlathi regaled me with stories of township quarrels, which the Magistrate dismissed, like a village schoolmaster talking to his pupils.⁵⁴ I also found time to meet up with my "agent", who had sold the ANC paper *New Age* before it was stopped by the postmaster. I briefed him on the political mood in Johannesburg, explaining that the youth in particular were becoming more militant and that the leadership had responded to their call for military training to confront the apartheid regime. I have no doubt that, when news broke about the launch of *Umkhonto weSizwe* on 16 December 1961, my man proudly indicated to his audience that Noupoot was also represented in the new People's Army – the "Spear of the Nation".

In the evenings, after prayers, I enjoyed telling stories to the young ones still at home. Most of the stories were folklore or accounts of life in Johannesburg, embellished here and there for dramatic effect. I even took my turn to preach in church one Sunday, without revealing that I had stopped attending church services.

When the time came to return to Johannesburg, I said fond farewells to my mother and father and hugged Buntu, Mzikazi and Bubele. They had no idea that their *Buti* would "disappear" for a long time to come. My parents made it clear that our home was waiting for me should there be any change of plans. I returned to Johannesburg reassured once more that I had their blessings for my mission.

The eve of departure

The seven ANC colleagues who had delayed at Fort Hare to complete their degrees finally arrived in Johannesburg in December 1961. Koos and I had spent the whole of 1961 in Johannesburg, waiting for them. The nine of us would constitute a team that would be sent abroad for training to help liberate South Africa from the racist, white minority regime. The nine volunteers came from all corners of South Africa: Koos (HK) Segola was from Crown Mines; Anthony Mongalo from Pretoria (Attridgeville); Boitumelo Phakedi from Kimberley; Mandla Tshabalala from Alexandra; Sizakele

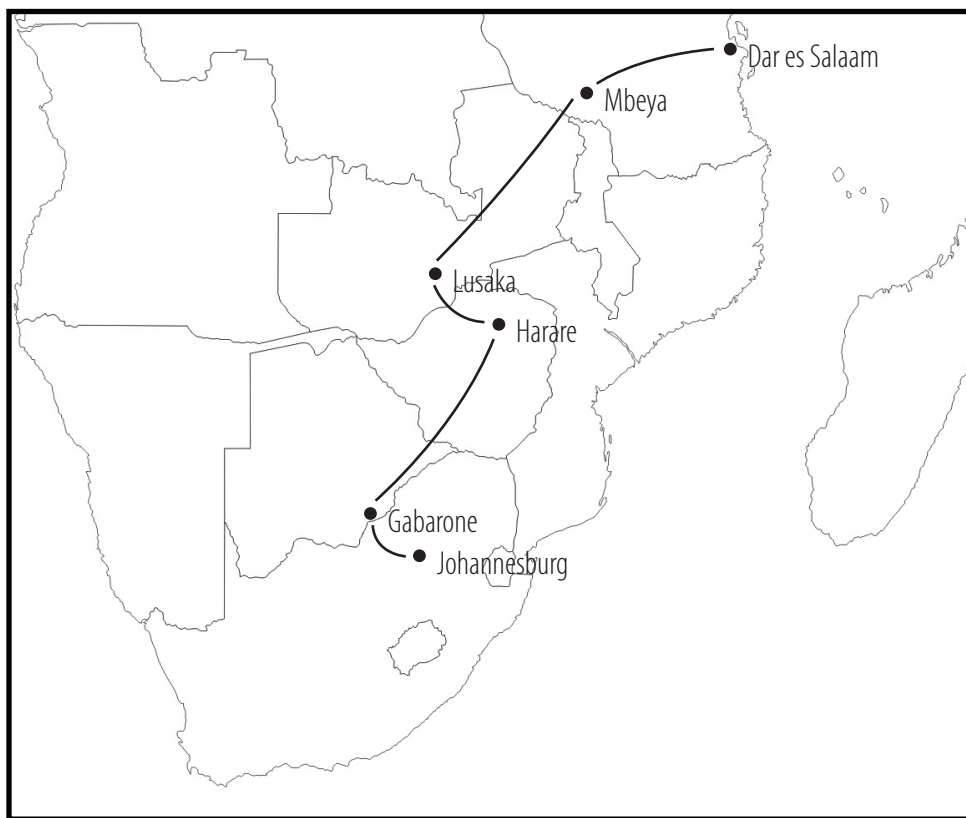
Sigxashe from Vidgesville (Transkei); Zolile Ngcakani from Uitenhage; Fanele Mbali from Port Elizabeth; Monwabisi Jara from East London; and I, Sindiso Mfenyana, from Noupoot in the Great Karoo. We were a cohesive group, all in our early twenties and all members of the ANC Youth League. While at Fort Hare we had attended ANC Youth League meetings prior to the ban in March 1960 following the Sharpeville massacre. Some in the group were members of the High Command in the new underground operational structure of the M-Plan.

January 1962 was also the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the ANC. A few days before our departure we were called to a house in the middle of Johannesburg and asked to wait. To our surprise Madiba suddenly came in. At the time he was the most wanted man in South Africa, dubbed "the Black Pimpernel" by the press because of his ability to elude the police. At forty-three he was the living symbol of the Volunteer-in-Chief of the 1952 Defiance Campaign: tall, athletic, handsome, with a benign face and steely eyes. He said, "Look, the ANC is training soldiers, but there are other important tasks which educated young South Africans can do for the ANC. We want you to study in the Soviet Union. Your mission will be to find out how the Soviets are able to provide free education, free health services, very cheap housing and virtually free public transport to all citizens of the country. This is the knowledge we require if we are to implement the Freedom Charter."

While we were disappointed not to be undergoing military training for MK, we accepted what we called Mandela's "marching orders". Given what we had heard about our comrades' military training in China, we did not anticipate a lengthy exile. We understood that they had returned to South Africa within six months and had not faced criminal charges.

It was the festive week of 25 December to 1 January when I visited Walter for the last time at his house in Phefeni. In his casual manner he said to me, "Now that you are finally leaving, have you people ensured that there is a youth leadership that will continue with your work?" The brutal truth is that we had not made any strategic plans to ensure continuity of youth and student leadership. We had not even warned our colleagues that we were leaving the country. In ANC Youth League structures, the M-Plan system of cells/pyramids had been introduced and was being implemented, but what was creating havoc with youth leadership were the arrests, detentions and torture of activists. Still, an informal indication of the situation might have better prepared them to assume responsibility. This issue of youth leadership bothered my conscience in exile. During this period I therefore devoted time and patience to giving guidance to young South Africans wherever my responsibilities took me.

Not all of us who had originally registered as volunteers left the country in January 1962; in certain cases a complex family situation made it impossible for cadres to leave. There was also the pull of romantic ties. A number of my friends and peers had girlfriends, but made the difficult decision to put these relationships on hold. Before I left South Africa I, too, had established a serious relationship with a young lady, a nurse by profession. Although it was sad to say goodbye, I was full of confidence that I would be back before long to cement our plans for a future together. There was, however, a case that was not so serious. One of my friends came to me as we were preparing for our departure and said that he had changed his mind about volunteering. His girlfriend had won the title of Miss Baragwanath and he could not leave his beauty queen! So not everyone lost out!



My journey into exile from Johannesburg to Dar es Salaam, 1961.

Chapter 8

Moving to an unknown future

New Year's Day 1962 fell on a Monday. We spent the day at Mr Thomas Nkobi's house in Mofolo township (now part of Soweto), where Mr Alfred Nzo was staying. Mr Nkobi, the National Organiser of the ANC, had quietly skipped the country with his family, and Mr Nzo had been given use of the house in his absence. This was partly to keep him from going to Alexandra Township, east of Johannesburg, from where he had been banished. Three of our group of nine had been lodging with Mr Nzo while he looked after the house. But' Alf, who had gone to enjoy New Year's Day somewhere else, had kindly left us a bottle of brandy so that we could celebrate the New Year. We happily passed the time recalling stories of exciting events at Fort Hare as well as the prospects for the ANC military wing, launched just over a fortnight before. Yet what remained unspoken – our group mission to the Soviet Union – was foremost in our minds. We knew that we would be leaving the country soon.

On Wednesday 3 January, Mr Duma Nokwe came to my lodgings in Orlando East and briefed me that our departure was imminent. He gave me a parcel of money for use on our journey and told me that six of our group would spend the next night at Mr Mathiso's place, a few streets from where I was staying. Mr Mathiso was an ANC diehard in his late forties, a jolly character who only lost his sense of humour when Jehovah's Witnesses came to his house with conservative pamphlets and magazines like *The Watchtower*. "You want me to buy material about some unknown kitchen towel (*ifay'dukwe*)? Well, I have news for you." And pointing to a framed photo of Chief Albert Luthuli, he would continue heatedly, "You see that picture over there? That is the only God I recognise. So get away from here with your *Fay'dukwe*!" Of course this had nothing to do with kitchen towels, but was an expression to show his contempt for *The Watchtower* as a "rag".

The following day I went to Koos Segola's home in Crown Mines. I told him that our journey was beginning and we should take our small bags and report to Mr Mathiso's house in Orlando East. Koos must have primed his mother about his imminent departure because he collected his small bag and said to her, "Mom, I am on my way." His mother embraced him without showing any sign of sorrow and we left. That night, as instructed, six of us slept at Mr Mathiso's place. In the morning we were joined by the remaining three who had been staying at Mr Nkobi's house. That afternoon, Friday 5 January, a Kombi came to collect us and we left without saying any farewells.

We had been informed that our overland journey would take us through Bechuanaland (Botswana) and Southern and Northern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe and Zambia) into newly-independent Tanganyika (Tanzania). There we would meet the ANC representative in Dar es Salaam before continuing by aeroplane to the Soviet Union. I briefed the group that I was the designated team leader and had been given funds, which we should use sparingly, as they were to last us until we reached our final destination. I put it to the group to decide who should be our treasurer so I would not have all the responsibility. The seven who had recently come from Fort Hare suggested Koos, who had been with me in Johannesburg through 1961, and he willingly agreed.

The driver of the Kombi picked us up at around 2:30 pm and we drove towards the Bechuanaland border post. Our cover was that we were a table tennis team playing in a match in Gaborone. Table tennis does not need any special equipment, so we did not need any evidence; the bats and balls would be provided by our hosts. Mr Ahmed Kathrada (popularly known as Kathy) was responsible for our travel arrangements and had assured me that the driver would take us to a house where we were expected.

We did not carry any South African identity documents, but had Bechuanaland ID papers. It was important that these papers should not be found in our possession while we were in Bechuanaland. We would only show them once we had crossed the Bechuanaland border into Southern Rhodesia. That night we slept at Palapye and the Kombi returned to Johannesburg. On arrival we discovered that our choice of treasurer was spot on. Koos, popularly called HK on the football field, turned out to be kind, but firm, when it came to allocating funds. Those of us who smoked were allowed one cigarette per day. It was up to you to decide whether to smoke it in one go or to take a few puffs and put out your cigarette after each meal. I preferred to make sure that I still had a *stompie* by supper time. Non-smokers got cheap sweets.

The next day we boarded the train to Francistown and on arrival there bought nine train tickets to Lusaka, capital of Northern Rhodesia. However, we had to pass from Bechuanaland into Southern Rhodesia through the border post at Plumtree. We had deliberately dispersed ourselves across three compartments and memorised our Tswana names for any eventuality. Most passengers were families, but there were some men whose behaviour gave away their identity as political refugees. They discussed the difficulties one encountered at the Plumtree border post. Sure enough, when we reached Plumtree that evening the border patrol police, all black with a white controller in the office, demanded our documents. One of them wanted to take us out of the train. Fortunately one of his colleagues appeared more

politically conscious and firmly told him that we were refugees and could not be arrested. The rest of the journey was incident-free, but we were now in territories where, apart from English, the languages were unrecognisable. At the numerous stops we would be hassled by hawkers selling food and soft drinks, but we had no idea what they were saying.

Palapye to Lusaka

The tedium of the long journey in the steam locomotive was eased by an atmosphere of excitement as people spoke and sang songs about the imminent end of the Federation of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. We must have been noticeable as South Africans because there was always somebody ready to interpret for us what the songs and debates were about.

"Kwacha" (meaning "Freedom" in Chichewa/Chinyanja) was the slogan they used to greet each other. At this time Nyasaland (which became Malawi after independence was declared on 6 July 1964) was at the forefront of politically-motivated uprisings in the territories of the infamous Federation. There was euphoria that, after forty years spent practising medicine in Great Britain, the black Englishman Dr Kamuzu Hastings Banda would unseat the Prime Minister of the Federation, Sir Roy Welensky, who had resisted British concessions to black majority rule and suppressed political violence with force. "We claim and demand," the good doctor was quoted as saying in the English newspapers, "the right to manage or mismanage our own affairs!" This was music to our ears.

Clearly the masses were in revolt, but there was no chance of massacres on the scale of Sharpeville. The British government was still the colonial power in these territories and recognised the inevitability of African rule. On 3 February 1960 British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, had made his famous "Winds of Change" speech to the Parliament of South Africa: "The wind of change is blowing through this continent. Whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact." Even so, this freedom would not be handed over on a plate. The people of Rhodesia and Nyasaland would have to fight for it through mass demonstrations, strikes and, if need be, through the barrel of a gun. The latter option became necessary in the case of Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe.

We arrived in Lusaka on Thursday 11 January at around 10 am. While waiting at the station we picked up from the newspapers that twenty-one highly qualified and experienced nurses from South Africa had arrived in Gaborone, Bechuanaland, on their way to Tanganyika, where we were also headed. In anticipation of British

civil servants repatriating on the declaration of independence on 9 December 1961, President Julius Nyerere had requested the ANC to assist with nurses to help maintain the health service. The ANC leadership had readily obliged. We were proud of this expression of solidarity with Tanganyika. As it turned out, the generous act of providing twenty-one qualified nurses would be repaid several times over by the grateful government and people of Tanganyika.

Koos remembered that there was a Mr Sikota Wina from Northern Rhodesia at Fort Hare. It was highly probable that Mr Sikota Wina would be a high-ranking official in the United National Independence Party (UNIP), the political party leading the struggle for freedom from British colonial power in Northern Rhodesia. This was affirmed. We allowed Koos to go to the city with one companion to find the UNIP offices and meet with Mr Wina. By noon they had returned with a UNIP escort and we were taken in a Land Rover in the direction of the border with Tanganyika.

About a hundred kilometres from Lusaka, as we travelled through forested terrain, our driver made a stop and disappeared into the bush. Only the locals knew that there were villages on either side of the road, hidden by the forests. Our driver soon reappeared with a canister of petrol and poured it into the Land Rover. Our admiration of UNIP increased tenfold. We suddenly felt very secure that we were in the hands of such an organised political party. At Chinsali the driver took us to a bus stop and told us to get tickets to Mbeya, a town in south-western Tanganyika. He informed us that, just before we got to the border post, a UNIP guide would meet us and walk with us on foot across a stream. We would have to wait for our bus on the other side. We would have crossed the border and entered Tanganyika without going through the border control post.

By this time our admiration of UNIP was such that we readily agreed to leave our luggage on the bus destined for Mbeya. Sure enough, before we got to the border post, a guide appeared and asked us to follow him. We walked with him along a footpath and crossed the river that formed the border with Tanganyika. We reached the Tanganyikan side ahead of the bus. When it finally approached, the driver pulled over for us, although there was no official bus stop. He was used to refugees crossing the border in this way. We boarded the bus and were not surprised when we found our luggage intact.

By the evening of Friday 12 January we had reached Mbeya, a sizeable town, and booked shared rooms in a hotel. It was a relief to be able to take a full bath after six days of travel. We had not had an opportunity since we boarded the train to Francistown on Saturday 6 January. We were heading for Dar es Salaam, a distance

of some 800 km away. However, our good luck could not beat the rainy season.⁵⁵ We were supposed to travel by train via Iringa the next day, but were informed that heavy rains had swept away the railway line. We would have to wait until the rail was repaired.

The following day there was fortunately no rain and we took a walk into town to get a sense of our surroundings. As we walked in this pleasant place and admired the greenery of the tropical rainy season, I felt there was something amiss, but could not put my finger on it. I communicated this feeling to my colleagues; they agreed that the atmosphere seemed unreal, almost eerily peaceful. We came across a green plain surrounded by houses. There were large crowds of people criss-crossing this plain, moving peacefully in different directions. We could see a few taverns where people were sitting in groups in the open air behind the semi-enclosed tavern walls, enjoying their traditional beer. They were engaged in animated conversations and laughing at each other's jokes. There was a relaxed, jovial atmosphere. Then somebody got it: "Do you realise that, in spite of these multitudes enjoying themselves on a weekend afternoon, we have not seen a single fight?!" We all exclaimed in wonderment. We had arrived in an Africa untainted by the violence we were used to in our townships.⁵⁶ I thought how wonderful it would be for our people back home to see that, historically, the people of Africa were by nature peaceful and humane.⁵⁷

After five days in Mbeya, just as we had resigned ourselves to an endless wait for the repair of the rail track to Dar es Salaam, the hotel manager informed us that two buses were available to transport all waiting passengers with enough cash to Dar es Salaam. Thanks to our frugal treasurer we could afford the slightly inflated fare and on Thursday 18 January 1962, thirteen days after leaving Johannesburg, we reached our first official destination.

On arrival we were taken to an ANC residence, where I discovered that we were not the first group to be sent abroad by the ANC. To my joy and surprise, here I met three people from my other childhood home, Cradock. They were Gandhi Hlekani, my erstwhile classmate in Standard 6, Thami John who had at some stage shared our home at Noupoot and Mazwi Reshane. Even as we were greeting and embracing, Gandhi fired, "So, what does Karl Marx have to say that is of interest?" Well, I did not attend those Congress of Democrats lunch hour discussions for nothing and I casually responded, "It is not man's consciousness that determines his being, but his social being that determines his consciousness." And we took off. It was a refreshing and exciting time, but it would also be the last time I would ever see my friend Gandhi.

The next day we were taken to the ANC office in Nkrumah Street in the Central Business District of Dar es Salaam. It was a fairly large room furnished with two office desks. On one was a sign saying, "Mr Jimmy Hadebe, ANC", and on the other, a sign saying "Mr Gaur Radebe, PAC". This surprised us, but it was explained that the founding father of the nation and first President of independent Tanganyika, Julius Nyerere, had prevailed on the leaders of the two organisations to work together under a United Front. Since the PAC was a breakaway organisation from the ANC, Jimmy and Gaur had worked together at some time prior to the split. It was therefore not such an untenable situation.⁵⁸ However, I felt we could not give a report to our representative in the presence of the representative of a rival organisation like the PAC. We therefore had to find a convenient venue where I could talk to Jimmy Hadebe in confidence.

The best place would have been the residence where we were to stay. However, I managed to have a private session with Jimmy at a café near the office. I asked him to ensure that the report about our arrival in Dar es Salaam was conveyed to Comrade Kathrada, who had specifically asked to be informed about our journey. As the person who had arranged the transportation from Johannesburg to Dar es Salaam, he needed to know the obstacles and challenges along the route.

I was disappointed to discover that the heavy rains had deprived us of the privilege of attending a state banquet in honour of the twenty-one South African nurses who had been flown from Gaborone to Dar es Salaam. The banquet had taken place just the day before our arrival. I personally knew one of the group, Nicoline Lekgoadi, who was a regular visitor at the Rand Youth Club at Macosa House. She used to come with Reverend Mentor (I cannot remember his first name) and afterwards they would travel together with our young secretary, Lizzie, to catch a train to Pimville Township.

On Wednesday 24 January our group of nine was taken to the airport to continue with our journey. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first experience of air travel for all of us, but none of us exhibited the concern or fear one would expect of people on a maiden flight. The journey went by quickly and it seemed I had barely had a chance to read the British Airways in-flight magazine when we touched down at Nairobi airport. Imagine our excitement when, on entering the transit hall, we saw standing before us the second partner in the famous legal practice of Mandela & Tambo. Although I was seeing Mr Tambo in person for the first time, I felt like I was meeting an old acquaintance. I had seen his picture so many times in various newspapers and journals that I was able to approach him and quietly inform him that I was the group leader. He gave me a satisfied smile and quickly briefed us

on what would happen henceforth. The plane would take us to London. There we would have to wait for a day or two while arrangements were finalised for the onward journey to Moscow. We did not see Mr Tambo again during the flight or thereafter.

Goodbye Africa

As the plane touched down at Heathrow airport on the morning of 25 January, I felt a surge of excitement. I had arrived in the land of Queen Elizabeth. I could not help reflecting on the Queen's visit to South Africa in 1947. At the time she was still a young girl, but now she was Queen of England. That young pupil who had waved the Union Jack on the side of the road back in 1947 was now on his way to the Soviet Union. None of my English teachers could have imagined their student passing through the United Kingdom on a voyage to communist Russia.

We went through Immigration with our one-page travel documents from Tanganyika. I do not recall any mention of a "transit visa". As soon as we were through, somebody greeted us and asked us to follow him. He guided us to the underground train. At the appropriate stop we followed him to a modest hotel close to the station, where we would rest for two days.

Mr Tambo had told us to spend whatever remained of our pocket money in London as, once we reached Moscow, we would not need any foreign currency. We would be fully taken care of. Long Live our Treasurer! We still had enough money to go to a nearby nightclub and get introduced to the Queen's language and her people. Considering the effort we put into speaking "proper" English, you can imagine our shock when the first black man we spoke to responded in what could have been Greek to us. After two more efforts we deciphered what sounded like "Ha issit bakhom?" It turned out to be a civil question: "How is it back home?" He originally came from the Caribbean, but in Europe all black people consider Africa as "home".

Once inside the club I found the patrons much easier to understand, though they too spoke with a heavy accent, possibly Cockney. We each sipped at our single ration of beer, listened to some music, then returned to our hotel and had an early night. The next day a guide took us on the underground train to Heathrow airport. He checked us in and we waited for about an hour before our flight was announced. The departure lounge was bustling, with planes to different corners of the world taking off every three minutes. As each flight was announced a sizeable group of people would move towards the boarding gates. At last we heard our flight number

on the tannoy. Only nine Africans and three Europeans stood up to walk to the boarding gate. Most of the other waiting passengers appeared to be reading their newspapers, but stole discreet glances at us as we passed. This was the height of the Cold War, just a few months before the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis, and you could almost sense their disapproval. Nine young Africans on a special flight to the country of atheists and enemies of democracy!



From left to right: Mandla Tshabalala, Sizakele Sigxashe, Anthony Mongalo, Cyril Phakedi, Zolile Ngcakani, Fanele Mbali, Koos Segola, myself and Monwabisi Jara. Kremlin, Moscow, 1963.

Chapter 9

The Soviet Union

The Ilyushin 18 Soviet aeroplane, with a seating capacity of sixty-five, dutifully flew us to Moscow in three hours. I was dressed for summer in my best charcoal suit. This was in keeping with a tradition nurtured during my upbringing: to be clean and dressed in your best clothes when travelling to a destination where you would meet important people. The suit helped when we arrived into temperatures of minus five degrees centigrade. If there had not been any incentive to dress formally, I would have worn casual clothes like a shirt and light trousers. As we stepped from the plane a few of us “paid our respects to the land of the Soviets” by slipping on the ice and landing on our bottoms. Africans always interpret incidents as a token of their fate. I took it as a good omen that I fell without breaking any bones. This meant that I was welcome in the land of Lenin and Khrushchev.

We had to fill in a customs declaration form and consulted each other to make sure we did not give any false answers. Thus, questioned as to whether we had any precious stones or metals, we answered in the affirmative. The guide, who showed great interest in our answers, was disappointed to discover that the “silver” we had declared turned out to be a two-shilling coin, while the “gold” in our possession was merely a watch alloy. Realising that we paupers from Africa were rather inexperienced international travellers, the guide gave us new forms where we were to write “nil” on all questions relating to valuables.

From the airport we were taken to the Moscow Railway Station where we boarded the train to Kiev, a journey of fifteen hours. The coaches were much bigger than those we were used to in South Africa and the rails much wider than ours. By 10 am the next day we had arrived in Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine. The Ukraine was one of the fifteen republics that constituted the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), or Soviet Union for short. Russia, whose full name at that time was the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic, was easily the biggest of the fifteen republics. Moscow was capital of both Russia and the Soviet Union.

My feet were saved by the heating system in the minibus that took us from the railway station to an unknown destination. Thick snow covered the fields and multi-storey buildings along the way. People wore hats made of animal fur, heavy overcoats and sturdy boots designed for comfortable walking in the icy conditions. Ahead of us a truck cleared the road of snow, its enormous crab-like pincers shifting piles of snow towards a conveyor belt. At the end of the belt was another truck with

a gigantic container which received the snow. In this way, all the main roads were cleared. On the smaller roads warmly dressed men and women collected the snow manually with shovels and stacked it in heaps on the roadside.

The Preparatory Faculty

We were taken to the hostel of the Preparatory Faculty of the Kiev State University. This was the first port of call for all newly-arrived foreign students in the Ukraine, who would spend the first year of their studies learning the Russian language. The period at the Preparatory Faculty also provided an opportunity for the teaching staff to assess each student's level of education and to help him or her decide on an appropriate field of study following completion of the Russian language course. I saw this as a chance to remedy my misguided choice of a Bachelor of Science degree at Fort Hare University in South Africa. However, it later turned out that my background in the field of science would be an advantage even in my chosen degree in production economics, a course I had understood to belong to the field of arts.

I was shown to my room, furnished with three beds, and told to report to Reception within half an hour. My roommates were a Vietnamese (Bhiwu) and a Russian (Ivan). After briefly introducing myself I went to Reception, as instructed. We were then taken to special clothing stores where we selected our sizes in the following items:

- 1 overcoat (brown or blue)
- 1 black suit
- 2 shirts
- 2 warm vests
- 2 "vasco da gamas" / "long johns" (long warm underpants)
- 2 pairs socks
- 1 pair of warm winter boots
- 1 winter hat
- 1 pair of winter gloves

I returned to the hostel ready to face the East European winter.

In the Preparatory Faculty hostel there was a Russian student in each room, with two foreign students from different Third World countries. The idea was that the Russian student would assist the "foreign guests" whenever possible. I noted that the beds were made up in a particular pattern. I later learnt that this pattern was followed in all institutions, including the army barracks. Ivan had completed his

mandatory military service of two years and was pursuing his studies at University, sponsored by the State.

In each room there was a radio receiver that could be switched on and off at will. Ivan encouraged us to listen whenever it was time for the news. I soon got used to the inflections of Russian speech and, facilitated by our language lessons, I began to understand sentences here and there.

Russian language lessons

As in the rest of Europe, the Soviet academic year begins on 1 September and ends in June. Then there are two months of summer holiday time. Of course when we arrived in the last week of January 1962 the rest of the foreign students were already three to four months ahead of us.⁵⁹ Regardless, we all had to write the Russian language examinations in June.

The teaching of the Russian language took various forms. We had to familiarise ourselves with the alphabet and pronunciation by repeating exercises on tape. There was also daily homework, which required use of a dictionary to increase our vocabulary. We were encouraged to listen to news on the radio and to take weekend walks with a Russian friend, so expanding our areas of discussion beyond the school texts.

The class teacher, Lubov Guiorgievna, emphasised that all progress depended on your effort. If you pushed yourself at the preparatory stage, you would have less difficulty with your selected field of study. Of course a lot would also depend on your level of previous study – secondary or tertiary – and your understanding of the subject matter.

It is over fifty years since we were in that Language Faculty. In all this time, I have not seen a learning programme that compares with the intensive course that would enable us to catch up with our fellow students. This was our daily programme:

7 am – 7:45 am: Language laboratory sessions, where we learned grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Those of us who had studied Latin were quick to grasp this grammar. For the first fifteen minutes you would listen to Russian voices on tape reading the lesson of the day, slowly and clearly. The next thirty minutes would be a repeat of the first session, but with gaps, to allow the student to repeat the pronunciation of the word or sentence.

7:45 am - 8.15 am: Breakfast

8:30 am - 1 pm: Lessons on, for example, the alphabet, numerals and short sentences in keeping with what we had learnt in the morning. A ten-minute break at 11 am was followed by lessons on Russian history, with an interpreter. Our class teacher did not speak English (though she probably understood some words) but she patiently coaxed us to speak. Her lessons were consonant with the morning tapes: "What is this?" ... "This is a table", "a door", "a teacher", "a student" and so forth.

Classes were from Monday to Saturday. The Saturday lessons were in the morning only. In the afternoon you did your laundry. I later learnt to do my laundry on weeknights as this allowed me time to go to the city centre on Saturday afternoons. Our excursions took us to various places of interest, including the museums and underground railway stations. Coming from Africa, the Metro was something we had never experienced before. You bought your ticket and descended to a depth of about a hundred metres or more. The outstanding feature of these Metro stations was that they were built with a double purpose: they were also designed to serve as bunkers in the event of war bombings. The Second World War had resulted in twenty-seven million dead in the USSR, including civilians and children. This was the highest number of casualties of any participants in the war. The Soviets wanted to make sure that such catastrophes would not be repeated.

Once we had picked up sufficient Russian to be able follow basic conversations, our excursions included visits to the cinema and theatres. There were many Soviet films about how the country overcame serious social problems, especially in the early days after the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 and the period after the Second World War. The large number of orphans and street children was a major source of concern. One of the best and most famous films made on this subject was based on a book written by Anton Makarenko – *The Ticket to Life*. It showed how a dedicated and competent leader could mobilise a team of like-minded social workers and teachers and turn juvenile delinquents into proud, well-educated youth inspired to save similarly placed juveniles. This film was popular in all the socialist countries. Soviet consulates also ensured that it reached audiences in the various Third World countries, including Tanganyika (called Tanzania after 29 October 1964, when the country formed a union with Zanzibar).⁶⁰

I soon discovered that there were special "kiosks" that sold newspapers and magazines printed in English. I also found out that some bookstores had sections that sold literature in various foreign languages. Later I was to discover that the central city library in Kiev had a special foreign literature section too. These places became my regular haunt on Saturday afternoons. This is when I began to learn that

some of the authors I had read during my junior and secondary school years had written much more interesting books than those I had been exposed to as a school pupil. For instance I associated Jack London with *White Fang* and other adventure stories. Then I came across the book where his socialist views are explicit and which accordingly made him famous in socialist countries – *The Iron Heel*. Here the author depicts the rise of an oligarchic tyranny in the United States and the book contains numerous references to militancy and revolutionary worker education. It was seen as a reference text for trade union organisers in the Soviet Union.

Following my discovery of *The Iron Heel* I began to peruse other novels and stories by English and American writers and came to this conclusion: foreign literature published in the Soviet Union invariably addressed the international workers' struggle for decent wages and trade union rights. Such books would naturally not be found in the library of a black secondary school during the era of apartheid in South Africa.

We reserved Sunday mornings for political meetings. The meetings were intended as an opportunity for us to update ourselves on developments in South Africa, gleaning what we could from the media and other sources of information. We also used them as an opportunity to educate ourselves further about Third World countries that were either decolonised or engaged in anti-colonial struggle. This was our first contact with the outside world and we wanted to make the most of the opportunities available to us. At the Language Preparatory Faculty there were students from various countries, including Cuba, Ghana, Iraq, India and Indonesia. These were large groups. Smaller numbers were mainly from non-independent countries or countries where there were liberation struggles, such as Cameroon, Congo (Lumumbists), Kenya (Oginga Odinga people), Guyana, Mozambique, Southern Rhodesia, Lesotho (Ntsu Mokhetle followers), Somalia and South Africa (ANC). Each of these students was a recipient of a Soviet government scholarship, which covered all expenses including residence, tuition, textbooks, notebooks and a monthly stipend for meals and personal needs.

In Johannesburg I had been appointed as team leader of the South African student group. Soon after our arrival I drew up a list of all the countries – and associated team leaders – represented at our Institute. Each member of our team was assigned a country. He had to get an agreement from the team leader for each country that he or she would come and speak to us on a specified Sunday morning. The student leaders were quick to respond and none refused our invitation. In these meetings I encouraged the rotation of the chair. This was to allow others to gain experience in chairing discussions. The representative of the country invited would

brief us on the socio-political situation at home and answer some questions. A few of the presenters would in turn pose questions on the situation in South Africa. By and large our invitees would express solidarity with our anti-apartheid struggle. We found this most encouraging.

Given the Soviet Union's support of anti-colonial and developing countries, many of these countries featured regularly in the news. I recall the Ghanaian speaker emphasising the words of his President Nkrumah, that the independence of Ghana was meaningless as long as one African country was not free. The Cuban speaker described how Cuba, as the first socialist (communist) state in the western hemisphere, was under constant threat from the United States of America. The US had declared an economic blockade against Cuba. The deterrent was the Soviet Union, other socialist countries and the worldwide movement for peace. The courage of the Cuban people was reflected in their slogan: "*Patria o muerte, venceremos*" ("The fatherland or death, we shall win"). North Vietnam had succeeded in ousting the French colonialists and was now prepared to face the strongest capitalist country, the US. They relied on their experience in guerrilla warfare. Through these meetings we learnt to distinguish between the US administration and the American people. The anti-war movement was growing and penetrated even the US armed forces. We began to appreciate the necessity of a non-racial approach in our own struggle against the racist apartheid regime in South Africa.

There were also fellow freedom fighters from Mozambique, Southern Rhodesia and South West Africa (Namibia). I recall a fellow freedom fighter from Malawi by the name of Atati Mpakati. The Malawian President, Dr Kamuzu Banda, was playing a double game. Although he had opposed the Federation of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland and achieved freedom for his country, as soon as he was President he adopted a policy of appeasement towards South Africa. There was no doubt that Atati was committed to the downfall of President Banda and the election of the Malawi Congress Party. Some years afterwards, in the late seventies, Atati was assassinated in Zambia. Many believe that his death was at the hands of Banda's agents.

Permit cards for security control

At the time we registered at the Preparatory Faculty, we were each issued with a permit card called a *propusk*. These had an objective totally different from the *dompas* in South Africa, designed to restrict the movement of black South Africans beyond the borders of the autonomous homelands or Bantustans. The *propusk* was issued to everybody and included basic information such as your name, place of

work/study, a passport-sized photograph and a space for annual renewal for five years. Thereafter you had to obtain a new permit. A new permit would also be issued if you changed your occupation or residence.

At every institution or enterprise (factory, government department and the like) there was a table or reception desk at the entrance, with officials who verified the permits before allowing you to enter. It was explained to us that these measures were necessary for the safety and security of citizens, as the socialist system that opposed private ownership and sought to provide basic human rights to all was under constant threat from the West. There had already been numerous attempts to topple the socialist governments in Eastern Europe, China, North Korea and Cuba.

As part of our acculturation we were shown films about the devastation of the Soviet cities and villages by Hitler's forces during the Second World War. Within this context one could understand why the Soviet government had introduced measures like the *propusk*. My feeling was that carrying an identity document at all times was acceptable in the interest of national security, a means to ensure that the Soviet people were never subjected to destruction like this again.

On entering the Preparatory Faculty hostel, we were given our permit cards. At student hostels during weekends, members of the Communist Youth organisation known as *Komsomol* would serve on a roster system as entrance controllers. In your own hostel it was not necessary to show the permit, if the controllers knew you. However, you needed to show your permit when visiting the hostel of a different Institute, for example the Technology Institute. Your *propusk* would be kept at the entrance by whoever was on duty and, on departure (non residents had to be out by 10 pm), you could reclaim it. This also ensured that you could be traced if you were involved in any infamous activities and left without your permit. Otherwise you were free to travel the length and breadth of the country.

It became clear to me very soon after our arrival that we were in another world, where there was almost no crime or violence. If you accidentally left your bag or parcel at a train station and reported this to the station commander's office or to the militia the following day, your bag would invariably be waiting for you at some depot or office for lost items. The militia (the word police was not used) were everywhere, in every street. If some hooligan or drunkard was making a nuisance of himself, you only had to shout "MILITIA!" and one would be there in no time. In turn the militia could call on the citizens for assistance, and this was always available. If you take into account that all males between eighteen and twenty-one years of age were conscripted into various branches of the army, the bulk of citizens in the streets

were trained people who did not need instructions on how to restrain hooligans. (In Russian the word is also "hooligan".)

African solidarity

In the Sixties there were not many Africans in the Soviet Union. When walking the streets, one could immediately detect another "darkie" across a distance. It was an impulse to greet each other, just by waving a hand or shouting "Hullo!" Even though the Russians were friendly to us, it was always heartening to see another black face in the crowd, even if we were from different countries and spoke a different language.

The Africans, particularly from Francophone Africa, resented the fact that we had to communicate with each other only through the Russian language. In 1962 the question of African Unity was a burning issue among Africans everywhere. There was a Cameroonian, a freedom fighter like us, named General, who insisted that if any Soviet citizen passed us during our conversation, he (General) would speak French and you would continue to speak your English. We would pretend that we understood each other, until the Soviet had passed. The humour of it was that he had to explain this idea to us in Russian!

Some strange sights

One Saturday afternoon in February, a few days after our arrival, I saw a strange sight near our hostel. A grey-bearded man was walking in the snow hand in hand with his grandson, aged five or so, and both were licking ice cream! How can you lick ice cream in the depths of winter, I thought? This made me smile. It was also startling to see an elderly person eating ice cream in the street, which was something I would not have seen back home. This would have made news in a letter to my family, but we were not supposed to contact our families, for their own safety.

Some months later, in the summer, I was walking in a public park where parents took their young ones for walks. This time it was a mother with her five-year-old, whom she called to every now and again: "Sasha!" She was seated on a bench and young Sasha was running around. Suddenly he stopped and came straight over to me. With a puzzled expression he asked, "*Pochemu vi ne moites?*" ("Why you don't wash?") The embarrassed mother was about to scold him, but I quickly signalled that I was not at all annoyed.

I took Sasha by the hand and we went to the nearest tap. Parks had plenty of taps for drinking water and irrigating the plants. I then washed my hands and rinsed them with a clean handkerchief. Sasha took my hand, rubbed it and said, "*Vi navernoe negr. Ya ih videl po televizoru.*" ("You must be a Negro. I have seen them on television.") I explained that I was from Africa and that the majority of Africans had dark skins. By this time a number of people had come closer to listen to our conversation. One man boldly said, "We do not see many Africans. But please feel at home."

By this time we were used to people greeting us, to see if we could speak Russian. They would then ask questions about our countries. Some only wanted to speak to people whose leaders had visited the Soviet Union or who were publicly distinguished as friends of the Soviet Union. We later understood why it was important for them to ascertain that we were not enemies of the Workers' State.

Rocking in the same boat

To get our Russian up to speed we would spend time after supper every evening building our vocabulary from all the words and phrases learned that day. Then we memorised these in rote fashion, some walking up and down the passage, others putting in time at the library. This way our Russian improved steadily.

By March our class teacher, Lubov Guiorgievna, had informed us quite frankly that the quicker and more pleasant way to learn a language was to have a steady girlfriend. This was far from an invitation to indulge in sex. Sex before marriage was strictly taboo and, if it happened, it was seen to consolidate an understanding that you were going to get married. Men and women saw each other first and foremost as comrades and called each other "Comrade". Students even called lecturers "Comrade Lecturer". There was no Miss, Mr or Mrs. The word "comrade" meant a friend, a companion, somebody to rely on. By encouraging us to find a steady girlfriend, our class teacher was suggesting a closer friendship with a girl comrade, not a sexual liaison.

As a result Russian male students were not in the least jealous when foreigners took their girls out for walks. And the girls patiently made you learn and repeat new words and sentences that were essential for travel (by train, bus or tram) and for asking directions (home, to the park, to the cinema). Even those girls who were studying foreign languages would not allow you to speak, say, English only. They made sure that you improved your Russian as well.

I must point out another important aspect that was dealt with during this period

of study at the Preparatory Faculty. Foreign students from various countries had different educational backgrounds. The course conveners had to assess the academic readiness of each student to undertake the courses they had opted for. As part of learning the Russian language, the class teacher would indicate the courses that were required in order to study for a specific degree. This would be done in the form of an informal discussion and exchange of views. Teachers were sensitive to potential limitations in the education system and subject content in some countries. The aim was not to intimidate or dissuade you from undertaking any area of specialisation. On the contrary, teachers encouraged you to pursue your desired field of study. They would simply point out that in order to succeed, you would have to put in extra effort. In short, they were there to encourage the students and empower them to pursue their chosen field. However, they were realistic in assessing whether the level of your academic achievements would enable you to undertake a particular degree. Together with the student, they would attempt to find a more suitable area of specialisation. This would be guided by its usefulness to your country.

Entertainment

Almost every fortnight there were cultural evenings or concerts at the Preparatory Faculty. There were bigger concerts held at the State University Complex every month. The bigger groups of foreigners from independent countries were supplied by their governments with national costumes and musical instruments, and some were artists in their own right. We had to do something. We had no costumes or musical instruments, but we had our voices.

We soon learnt that the Soviets had an incredible variety of music and dance groups in every town, village, factory or institution. They admired genuine indigenous music from all countries and did not want imitations of what they called “foreign” music from America or Britain. They said “Give us the music of your people!” Soviet citizens were taught to be respectful of other people’s culture and it did not matter how simple or uninteresting the performance was; they would always clap and show appreciation.

It was then that we realised just how little we knew of our traditional music and dances; it was certainly insufficient to put together a programme of concert items. We would have to resort to popular songs. Thanks to our musical groups like the Manhattan Brothers, Dark City Sisters, Miriam Makeba and our own amateur singing groups at high school and college, we put together a repertoire which placed South Africa firmly on the map.

As part of our Soviet cultural education, our class teachers organised various excursions fortnightly. On one such occasion, during a visit to Leningrad (currently St Petersburg), the teacher took us nine Fortharians to the famous Hermitage, comparable to the Louvre. It contains some of the best artworks and paintings by celebrated artists from both inside and outside the Soviet Union.

We started the excursion with enthusiasm, but the artworks were simply inexhaustible. Gradually two, three, five, then six members of our group began to find pictures that required more scrutiny. By the time we got to the exit point, there were only three of us still with the teacher, but the others were not lost. They had found their way to the exit much earlier. It was going to take a long time to get the music-loving South Africans to look at paintings with the same passion they had for music.

Whom do you worship?

There was no formal restriction on church attendance in the Soviet Union and Russia has iconic Orthodox churches regarded around the world as architectural gems. However, it was considered reactionary and taboo for Soviet citizens to go to churches for worship and none of my fellow Russian students attended church. Most church-going people were from the rural areas and above sixty years of age.

This led me to pose the question: given that religion was virtually banned, what substitute was there to fulfil the spiritual needs of the people? The typical response from my Russian peers was that for spiritual fulfilment you need only look to opera, ballet, literature, the visual arts, and other cultural activities. Others upheld sport as a form of spiritual self-expression. Others felt that there was adequate fulfilment to be found in hetero-sexual relationships.

I grew up in a Christian home, where the existence of God was taken for granted. Given my upbringing, I began grappling with this spiritual dilemma soon after our arrival at the Preparatory Faculty. Our Monwabisi Jara shared his room with an Indian student, Hussein, and a Russian, Valeryi, who was studying philosophy. The philosopher maintained that it was foolish to believe in something you did not even know existed. His people (the Soviets) preferred to pay tribute to Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Union, who was lying in state at the Mausoleum in Moscow. As the debate continued, Hussein reached the end of his tether.

Hussein: "You say you do not worship gods? Let me tell you. In Moscow alone you have more statues of Lenin than we have of Buddha in the whole of India!"

Valeryi: "And where is your Buddha buried?"

Hussein: "He is a god, a spirit."

Valeryi: "You are welcome to your god. I will stay with the Lenin that I know."

During my university course on atheism the following year, I had the opportunity to think more deeply about Valeryi's position, which so starkly contradicted the religious orientation of my upbringing.

Examinations and holidays

The language examination in June had both an oral and a written component. In her last lesson the teacher had assured us that we would be tested only on what we had learnt. There would be no surprises. We were to be marked out of 5: 5 – excellent; 4 – good; 3 – satisfactory. Anything less would mean that you were on the wrong level or doing the wrong subject. Our overall result would be determined not merely by our performance in the examination. Our teachers kept a progress report throughout the semester and our final evaluation would take this into account.

During the examinations we were treated to some interesting cultural conventions peculiar to the different developing countries. I recall a group of twenty Cubans in the exam room helping a colleague to answer a question, claiming that they were explaining the meaning of the question in Spanish! The well-dressed Iraqis bought bouquets of flowers for the teachers, but these were politely refused. They were advised to give them to the catering staff in appreciation of their service.

Our teacher had been true to her word and all the test material was reassuringly familiar: singular/plural, gender, case, tense, comprehension. Therefore, to my relief, the language exam did not pose a serious challenge. There was also another cause for celebration. After the exams we were told to prepare ourselves for an extended summer holiday over the months of July and August. The holiday programme was divided into two sections. During the first three weeks we were to help with harvesting onions, potatoes and tomatoes at collective farms. Thereafter, in the first half of August, we would spend two weeks at a holiday resort, free of charge. The farms and holiday resorts were in the southern part of the Ukraine where the climate was warmer. We were excited to hear that, to get there, we would be travelling by boat down the River Dnepr to where the river mouth entered the Black Sea.

The boat trip

On the day of our departure for our first holiday in the Soviet Union, we woke early and packed our summer clothing. We were pleased to be able to put our winter gear into storage. In the afternoon we were taken by minibus to the boat station. For all of us South Africans, a two-day boat trip was a novel experience. We identified our berths, explored the boat and, on hearing that no alcoholic drinks were available on board, went out for our last sips of beer. That night we slept soundly in the arms of Bacchus. We woke up to a warm summer day, had a shower and breakfast and realised that only half our contingent from the Preparatory Faculty was on board. These were mainly Cubans.

We spent most of the first day rehearsing some of the songs we would perform at a banquet to be held on the collective farm, at the end of our three-week stay. As we had learnt from our student performances at the Preparatory Faculty, it was important that our music should be authentically South African and not derivative of music from other countries. Our items were mostly vocal music. Over the two days we would learn new songs and then practise our “steps” in typically South African a cappella style. We had the good fortune to be accompanied by a pianist, Leon Borisovich, who had been employed by the Preparatory Faculty specifically for this purpose. Each of the various groups of foreign students could use his services. Besides Russian, he comfortably spoke Spanish, English and French. He expressed surprise when, as he played a tune on the piano, we made our own notes in tonic solfa and proceeded to sing in the four basic voices – soprano, alto, tenor and bass. We explained to him that in South African black schools music classes were compulsory from upper primary to upper secondary, and that this musical education was supplemented by participation in church choirs. I was the only one of our group who had participated in amateur vocal groups at university, but none of us had any difficulty learning and singing our own songs, as well as Russian ditties like *Moscow Nights*.

Mercifully the Cubans decided to play their bongo drums below deck as they preferred to rehearse away from the public. Their items consisted mainly of music and couples dancing the Caribbean Cha-cha-cha. There was keen, but friendly, competition between us. Our working class roots and attitudes meant that we had much in common. We admired the outcome of the Cuban Revolution and the Cubans were passionately supportive of our struggle against apartheid. By this time we had even picked up a few Spanish words and taught them a few Zulu and Xhosa expressions.

The rest of the boat was filled with Russian passengers on their way to the summer holiday resorts. Among the passengers were young people around our age, who were chatting and enjoying the summer weather. Our singing attracted an appreciative audience, including some of the young people we had seen earlier, casually dressed in sports clothes. I discovered later that they had recently completed their degree courses at university and would soon graduate. They all looked relaxed and happy. During intervals I conversed with a young lady in the group who seemed very interested in life in South Africa. Her name was Filarida Chromova and she went by the name, Rita. She was intrigued to hear that we were not just students, but also freedom fighters. Rita told me that she had just finished her degree in Aeronautical Engineering, specialising in Radio-electronics. Moreover, it turned out that she had some hours to her credit in flying a glider. I felt quite honoured that a real pilot wished to be my friend.

Too quickly the time came for us to disembark at a collective farm. I had thoroughly enjoyed myself and I was sorry to have to say goodbye to Rita and her friends.

Experiences at the collective farm

We nine South Africans, together with twenty-five Cubans (among them eight women), worked and stayed at a large collective farm, equivalent in scale to a commercial farm.⁶¹ Collective farms (*kolkhoz*), unlike so-called state farms (*sovkhoz*), were created by subsistence farmers pulling their resources together. These collective farms had their own administration, labour, implements and livestock. Part of the revenue was distributed as wages and the rest was reinvested for maintenance and growth. There was also a percentage that was distributed in proportion to the original input. This would be roughly ten percent of the annual profits. Each farmstead would get a bonus that would reflect how much they had contributed when the collective farm was set up.

The collective farm where we were staying produced onions, potatoes and tomatoes. Vineyards surrounded the fields of vegetables and there were pastures for a large herd of dairy cows. The workers stayed in their own houses on smallholdings, laid out in a village formation, and the collective farm had all the administrative offices of a municipality. There was also a small hospital, a crèche, a primary and secondary school, a bank, police offices and a cultural centre, called *Dvorets Kulturi* (Palace of Culture) with a hall. Outside the Palace of Culture was a park with a summer open-air stage and seating.

We were lodged in a dormitory-like structure with ablution facilities and served



South African exiles with Cuban colleagues at collective farm. Crimea, Ukraine, 1962.

three meals a day in a dining hall. The Russian staple food is potatoes, but there was a wide range of items available, from rice and meat (beef, lamb, pork, chicken) to cooked vegetables. We had noted earlier that Russians were heavy eaters. Each meal had at least two courses. My favourite was a dish called *pelmeni* – dumplings with minced meat inside. Soups were eaten with thick sour cream called *smetana*. For us South Africans, the greatest surprise was to discover that maize is not regarded as food, but fodder for cattle. We greatly missed *umngqusho* – the boiled mixture of maize and brown beans.

Two trucks would take us to the field to be harvested for the day. In the month we were there we harvested only onions, potatoes and tomatoes, as the grapes were not yet ready. The tomatoes were by far the easiest to harvest and the onions the most demanding. From Monday to Friday we worked from 8 am to 5 pm, with a lunch break. The locals worked separately from us, at a distance of 100 metres. We had already developed good relations with the Cubans at the Preparatory Faculty and on the boat trip. Now we constituted three rival teams who competed to attain the highest levels of productivity. The air rang with our Spanish cries of “*Manao!*” (“Here I come!”) as we raced to empty our containers at a collection point. The

Cubans would respond with shouts of “Ewe!” (Nguni for “Yes!”), as they dropped their loads. During weekends we had excursions to the central market and mixed with the locals.

On our last Saturday there we had a banquet and open-air concert in the grounds of the Palace of Culture. This was July, the European summer, but fortunately there were no heavy rains. We were entertained by the farmworkers and we, the “foreign guests”, entertained them in turn. I was pleasantly surprised when my boat girlfriend, Rita, surfaced in the crowd. She had found out about our destination and had been informed about the closing night banquet. My colleagues were impressed by her determination and I felt their unspoken support. This strengthened my interest in her and we talked more intimately about our respective lives.

Even at this early stage I could sense that it was the beginning of a serious relationship. It was already clear to me that the idea of a six-month absence from South Africa was a myth and that I was here for the long-haul.⁶² The effects of the launching of the ANC military wing, MK, in December 1961 had brought about a new rigorous control on illegal travel abroad. The penalty was six months to five years in prison.⁶³ Moreover, the course I was going to study at the Economics Institute would take at least five years, with the added prohibition of any contact with my family and friends in South Africa. I began to visualise returning home in a few years’ time with a Russian girl, and an engineer at that.

At the banquet the Dean of the Faculty gave a broad report on our performance at the Language Faculty as well as at the collective farm. He made his announcements in a humorous spirit. No certificates were issued at this stage because the real test was going to be at the Institutes we would attend in the next academic year. The results were announced as follows:

1. Best Russian language results: South Africa

This was in recognition of our arrival five months into the academic year. Despite this late start, we had all achieved the required basic comprehension of the Russian language.

2. Best musical performances: South Africa

While other national groups had costumes and musical instruments to boost their performances, we had relied solely on the harmony of our voices and actions.

3. Best comradesly, fun-loving celebrations: South Africa

This was greeted with humorous applause. We had clearly learnt from the masters how to handle Vodka.

From there we went on to enjoy ourselves on the beaches of the Black Sea, at a place called Alushta, one of the many towns that lined the coast of this great inland sea. We stayed in what were called “rest homes”, where we met other students as well as workers and pensioners enjoying a well-earned annual holiday at the seaside. We were two to a room, in a three-storey building that catered for about 180 people. Alushta was also popular for its sanatoriums, where people could recuperate after medical treatment.

Here we met many people from areas within the Soviet Union that were closed to foreigners at that time – places like Siberia and the Urals. The designation of “closed” territory for foreigners was one among many of the restrictions arising from the experiences of the Second World War. When Hitler’s forces attempted to storm the capital, Moscow, Stalin shifted the Defence Industry to the interior of the Soviet Union. When the war was over, it was deemed a good security measure to keep the armaments factories away from the tourist areas. The famous *Transsibirskaya Magistral* (Trans-Siberian Express) which traverses Siberia en route to the Far East, remained open to tourists. However, you needed special permission to disembark anywhere along the way. In the 1980s, as part of *perestroika* – the restructuring of the economic and political system of the Soviet Union – more areas were “opened” up.

My boat friend Rita was from the Urals, more specifically, from the famous city of Kazan where Lenin did his tertiary education and began to show his potential as leader of the first successful Russian Socialist Revolution in October 1917. The American author John Reed, who experienced this momentous historical moment first hand, describes the events in his book *Ten Days that Shook the World*.⁶⁴ Rita was descended from the Tatars, who created a powerful state in central Asia in the thirteenth century and practise a faith that is related to Islam. They also conquered parts of present day Europe.

Kiev Institute of National Economics (KINE)

At the Preparatory Faculty we had been informed that we would be dispersed to various towns for our tertiary studies, in line with our field of specialisation, and that we would need to strive for high academic performance as well as publicise the plight of our people back home. On our return from the holiday resort at Alushta, the Dean of Students briefed us on the institutions we had been assigned to. The class teacher had used a smart formula to clarify what kind of specialisation would suit each one of us, taking into account what we considered our mission to be. She had also cleverly wormed out of us what we had studied in our home country, South Africa. So the placement was meant to serve our interests.

After the brief from the Dean, we held what would be our final session as a group of nine. We reminded ourselves of our last group discussion in Johannesburg before we boarded the Kombi that took us from Orlando East to Bechuanaland, our first trip out of South Africa into the unknown. We were here to fulfil an important mission. Our education in the Soviet Union would equip us to play a significant role in the creation of a new, democratic South Africa.

Although we were sorry to have to part ways, we were excited about the challenges that awaited us. We were in the prime of our youth, keen and ready to face whatever experiences lay ahead. Up until now we had operated as a unit in one location. Now that we were to be dispersed, we had to consider creating an organisation that would link us and bring us together occasionally. This led to the formation of the Union of South African Students in the USSR. We resolved to ensure annual meetings to exchange experiences and boost our morale for the duration of our stay.

In the last week of August, just before the start of the new academic year in September 1962, we nine South African students split up according to our fields of study. Anthony Mongalo went to Baku to study petroleum engineering, Zolile Ngcakani and Mandla Tshabalala went to Leningrad to study chemical engineering and Cyril Phakedi remained in Kiev to study civil engineering. The remaining five in our group, myself included, went to the Kiev Institute of National Economics (KINE), though into separate faculties. The idea was to cover the major areas of national economy at a practical level. Sizakele Sigxashe studied finance and Monwabisi Jara signed up for agricultural economics. Fanele Mbali did national statistics and Koos Segola took on industrial economics. I did national economic planning.

Soon after our arrival at KINE we were introduced to a middle-aged man, Artyom Prokofievich, the Dean of Foreign Students there. He would be available to help sort any problems of a social nature. We did not anticipate any difficulties, however, because all five of us had established a good rapport with the Soviet citizens and our fellow students.

In the first week at KINE the five of us stayed in separate rooms, similar to those at the Preparatory Faculty. Again there were three students per room: one Russian and two foreign students from different countries. Each room had a single-station radio with official hourly news and some music and talks in between. It was useful to have the radio on most of the time as an aid to improving our Russian, and we all took a special interest in the news. Our Russian roommates had been instructed to assist foreigners to clarify issues, and they were very obliging.

However, after a week or so we South Africans felt we needed a room to ourselves. We were reasonably comfortable with the Russian language and did not need regular help. Moreover, we wanted to be able to discuss among ourselves any issues that were relevant to our mission in the Soviet Union. In particular, we wanted to be free to listen to the international English radio programmes, which were more easily accessible in the middle of the night.

Comrade Prokofievich kindly arranged for all five of us to be together in one room. We immediately bought our own stereo radio so that we could access stations from outside the Soviet Union. We listened mostly to the BBC World Service, the Voice of America and Radio Peking (now Beijing) of China, which we tuned into at midnight.

These programmes were the best lectures we could have hoped for as an aid to making our own assessments of the world-wide balance of forces. I recall us discussing the major differences that emerged at that time between the two most powerful countries in the socialist camp: the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. The differences were ideological, with the Soviets accusing China of practising a personality cult by elevating the Chinese President to the status of ultimate decision-maker. In retaliation the Chinese accused the Soviets of revising the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism, hence referring to the Soviets as the Revisionists. This Sino-Soviet dispute was a matter of daily comment and discussion in our political classes too, where lecturers put forward the Soviet view about the failures of Mao Tse Tung's "Great Leap Forward" policies.⁶⁵ I recall the Soviet disregard for the unscientific use of Mao's *Little Red Book* to solve all problems, big or small in China. These failures explained why Mao preferred to retain the personality cult that had elevated Stalin into a demi-god. The Cultural Revolution that led to the burning and destruction of historic and scientific literature and art objects, showed how far the personality cult could go. At the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1957 Nikita Khrushchev had denounced the personality cult of Stalin. As a result, by the time we arrived in 1962, the published works of Joseph Stalin could hardly be found in popular bookshops.

In our political classes we also learnt more about the Soviet Union's creation of the Warsaw Pact (the military defence bloc of the socialist countries in Europe). The Second World War had devastated the nation's industrial capacity, and the Warsaw Pact created a bloc of buffer states to serve as a military and political barrier between Russia and its potential enemies in the West. It made sense that the smaller countries should focus on developing such industries and agriculture as were commensurate with their natural and human resources. The Soviet Union would provide the market

for the sale of their products and, in exchange, supply them with whatever raw materials were required to boost their economies. In short, there was no need for all countries to attempt to be self-sufficient in all requisite commodities. There should be specialisation in order to strengthen the socialist camp in its competition with Western imperialism.

Settling in

At KINE I became more fully integrated with Soviet and other foreign students. The Institute had two students' hostels, each containing four floors. (Russians count floors from the ground, so, in Russian terms, each hostel had five floors.) The ground floors housed the administration offices and the canteen, where all three meals were available at a relatively low cost. Still, I had to learn serious budgeting because the monthly allowance from the Soviet government was to be my only source of income for the next five years. (As mentioned earlier, liberation movements from Africa, Asia and Latin America that were recognised by the USSR could apply for scholarships to send their cadres for studies that were necessary for nation building. The Soviet government paid the full cost of travel, accommodation, tuition and maintenance for such students.) The monthly stipend for foreign students was 90 Roubles a month, the equivalent of 90 American dollars, except that you could get much more for the Rouble in the USSR.⁶⁶ Students from independent countries received an additional allowance from their governments via the embassies. The stipend for Soviet students was about just a third of ours (25 Roubles minimum), but they were often helped by their families. Moreover, all academic textbooks, fiction and non-fiction, (including biographies), were subsidised and affordable to Soviet students.

Public transport in trams, buses, and the underground (Metro) did not exceed 5 kopecks (5 cents) irrespective of the distance in each urban or rural town. You could get a meal in the canteens of state institutions or factories for 25 kopecks or less than a Rouble per day. (The Soviet students taught us that, in order to save money, it was far better to buy raw ingredients such as potatoes, raw fish or meat and to cook your own lunch and supper. Only breakfast at the canteen was economically prudent as classes started at 8 am and there was no time to cook.) The Soviet "bourgeoisie" were the children. All items for children – clothing, food, toys, prams and toiletry – were affordable even to the lowest paid worker.

The stipend was paid to foreign students on the fifteenth of each month. The Soviets received theirs at month end. We worked out that it was best to lend your Russian friend a fifth of your allowance, which he would return at month end. This

way, even if you used your money to buy clothing (which was rather expensive) you could survive for fifteen days on what was called the “Student Menu”, meaning the potato. The potato is the staple food among Russians, much like pap in the northern and central areas of South Africa, or samp and beans (*umngqusho*) in the south. It is amazing how you can survive for fifteen days on potato chips with fried onions. For variety we boiled potatoes and added green vegetables.

Catering to Third World interests

The Soviet Union in the Sixties was at the forefront of decolonisation and championed liberation, self-expression and efficient use of resources for self-reliance. Soviet academic institutions that opened their doors to the youth and future leaders of Africa, Asia and Latin America strongly promoted these central ideas. They also featured strongly in Soviet foreign policy at the United Nations and other international forums. Ideals of Internationalism, Solidarity, Peace and Friendship were promoted to foster benevolent attitudes towards foreign students among the citizens of socialist countries.

However, in the early Sixties the wave of anti-communism was very strong in Third World countries and the newly independent countries in Africa. The Soviet government was aware of this. Hence they arranged that sensitive philosophical subjects would not be reflected in the foreign student’s Document of Certification. All students were free to study or not study subjects like Dialectical and Historical Materialism, The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and Atheism. Whether or not these subjects were studied, they were left out of the certificate. This was to safeguard students from situations where inclusion of “communist subjects” would prejudice their chances of getting jobs.

Many of the students from independent Third World countries did not attend classes for these subjects. However, all students from liberation movements, especially those from Southern Africa, went full-scale ahead with these subjects as ancillaries to their main courses.

Atheism vs Theism

At secondary school at St John’s College there was a subject called religious instruction, conducted by the junior priest at the college. This was the first time that I had had the chance to formally seek clarification about certain stories in the Bible. I am sure all young students with inquiring minds have raised questions about Adam

and Eve being the first people to be created. The priest was smart. He explained that the Bible was written by fallible human beings even if they were inspired by God. He then gave us various definitions of God from fields such as science and philosophy. I was impressed by his approach and accepted the idea of “cause and effect”, the concept that God is the “uncaused cause”. I still accept the idea of a force far superior to the human intellect, a force that could have created and maintained the universe as we know it.

On arrival in the Soviet Union I was keenly looking forward to a scientific explanation of the *non-existence* of God, as this was my understanding of what Atheism is all about. A course on Atheism was part of the syllabus at KINE and covered a period of six months. At the end of the course there was an oral test which was optional to foreign students. The most impressive – and for me, humorous – lecture I heard on religion during this course drew on Roman Catholic and Anglican aesthetics and rituals to illustrate Karl Marx’s expression, “Religion is the opiate of the masses”.

The lecturer referred to the dulling and numbing of the five human senses as a means to influence the human mind. To paraphrase his argument, the first time you enter a cathedral or similar place of worship, with its brilliantly-coloured stained glass windows and paintings on the ceiling, you are bedazzled and inspired by its beauty. The sight of life-size images of Jesus Christ hanging on a cross helps to induce a feeling of humility and awe. This sublime experience is enhanced by the stimulation of one’s sense of hearing. The organ plays music by the best classical composers, and bells are rung hypnotically during the preparation of the Eucharist. The lyrics of the hymns seem to transport your soul to the high heavens. Moreover, incense from a thurible assails your nostrils with its alluring aroma and overwhelms the sense of smell. The taste sensors are then conditioned to receive Jesus Christ (for Catholics the transformation of the Communion bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is not merely symbolic, but real, a process called transubstantiation). When the wafer and wine touch the tongue during the Holy Eucharist, the pleasant taste from the sweet wine again arouses pleasurable sensations. As the mild alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream, communicants experience light-headedness close to intoxication. Finally, those who ask for special prayers go to kneel in front of the priest, who then places his hand on the head of an already dazed and suggestible person. The touch of the priest completes the process of spiritual elevation. Such transient euphoria, to the majority of destitute church-goers, provides an antidote to the overwhelming tribulations of life.

This was an empirical analysis so strikingly close to my own experience that I found it difficult to deny; it was at once dogmatically simplistic and difficult to contradict.

Nevertheless, it remained an interpretation and did not explain why people need a superior Being to offer solace and security in the event of unexpected catastrophes in their personal lives. The atheist Marxist philosophy that "[i]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness"⁶⁷ has its merits. However, until there is an alternative to religion as a path to spiritual security, people should be free to decide for themselves what form that security should take. That is to say, before you remove the source of strength that enables many people to face life's tribulations, make sure that you offer a viable substitute.

The realities of life

I hadn't been at KINE for long when I began an intense correspondence with Rita, my first girlfriend in the Soviet Union. This was not merely to distinguish her from other friends and comrades who happened to be women. The primary reason for our rapid exchange of letters was that our relationship had significant implications for her life and career. She urgently needed to make a decision about her future. She was about to graduate with a degree in Aeronautical Engineering from the Kazan Aviation Institute, which was heavily subsidised by the industrial military complex. In return the Institute was required to provide specialists for the defence industry, so upon graduation Rita would be obliged to accept employment by the military. Those who worked in the aviation industry were restricted in their contacts with foreign nationals for security reasons. For our relationship to continue, she would need to inform the Institute that she was considering marrying a foreigner and request that she be released from her obligation to work for the defence industry.

I had painted a bleak picture for her of what it would mean to be a wife of a freedom fighter. Replying that she had taken into account all that I had said and written, her response was simple: "I will go wherever you go, as long as you love me."

I informed my colleagues that I had decided to marry Rita with immediate effect. Youth in their twenties are ready to try anything that promises a better future. My fellow South Africans at KINE were excited and intrigued. They asked,

- "Is there any other compelling reason why this marriage has to be entered into immediately?"
- "None."
- "Your mind is made up?"
- "Yes."

-“It’s your life, but we have no objections. We were impressed by the girl in the short time that we interacted with her. Good luck!”

If they had other questions or concerns, they didn’t voice them.

According to Soviet law, citizens of the USSR were free to marry foreigners. However, they had to obtain permission from their parents, as by law adult children were obliged to subsidise the state pension for their aging parents. The parents would have to accept that if their child emigrated in the future, they could not expect the state to take care of them. Rita no longer had parents alive; her father was killed during the Second World War and her mother had died when Rita was twenty years old. The family was centered on five sisters, who had bonded their husbands into a family unit. Her mother’s sister, Aunt Nadya, had helped Rita after her mother’s death and it was she only, of all the relatives, who was against our marriage. This was because she was afraid of “Africa being so far away!” So Rita’s extended family decided to send her Uncle Vali to see who their daughter was intending to marry. Uncle Vali, a Maths teacher by profession, came to Kiev to meet me and my compatriots. We all liked him, and the feeling was mutual. He went back and reassured the family that all was well with their South African son-in-law.

I confirmed with Rita that I was ready for us to get married. Then I informed Comrade Prokofievitch (Dean of Foreign Students) and observed the sudden change of expression on his face. I could almost hear him thinking: “This should not be happening. This young man comes from a country infamous for white racism against blacks. The Soviet Union preaches internationalism and there is no room for racist behaviour.”

After a short silence, he asked for her profile – where she came from, her education, her family background – and then he said, “I will discuss with the relevant authorities how to accommodate her as soon as she becomes your wife.” Good old Artyom Prokofievich, bless him! He left out the most relevant question: “How did you meet with somebody who comes from the zone declared ‘closed’ to foreigners?” This question was posed in a friendly way by the Chairman of the *Komsomol* at the Institute. He gracefully accepted my explanation that we had met at the Black Sea holiday resort and wished me well.

Now all that remained was for Rita to inform the authorities that she would be travelling to the Ukraine to get married to a non-Soviet citizen and would have to forfeit future employment by the defence industry. This was duly arranged and she came to stay at my hostel. The charitable Artem Prokofievitch kindly arranged for her to share a room with other girls while we fulfilled the obligatory notice period

of three weeks for a pending marriage. Thereafter, on 6 June 1963, we were dutifully married at the Kiev Palace of Marriage Registrations. Rita's family representative at the wedding was Nadya's husband, uncle Borya. His mission was to convey the family's blessings. He would also be able to report back to the family on the marriage ceremony.

The international students' community was curious about our future progeny, but the Russian girls did not hide their wish to verify that the children of the "mixed marriage" would be normal. Apparently, as is likely in any mono-racial society, any "mixture" of racial genes breeds mythology of folkloric dimensions. As one of our bridesmaids confided to me, the girls wanted to be sure that our child was going to be of even colour and not piebald. Could they also verify that the child would have no tail?

A year later, on 3 July 1964, our son Nikita Sindisovitch Mfenyana was born. As you may have guessed, his second name means "son of Sindiso". Unfortunately I was at the World Youth Forum conference in Moscow at the time and missed the birth. During the conference I received a telegram from Comrade Fanele Mbali, one of my compatriots at Kiev Economics Institute, informing me that I was now a father to a son. Both mother and baby were in good health. On my arrival back in Kiev, Rita and our newborn child were already out of hospital. Our son was sleeping in a cot that had been donated to us by a friendly Ghanaian-Russian couple, Henry and Katya.⁶⁸ The Russian girls were reassured that he was a perfect specimen of humanity.

On his first birthday, we went to Kazan to introduce our son to Rita's family. Nikita melted Aunt Nadya's heart; she could not resist her first grandchild. She also warmed to me after I fried fish South African style (with flour and eggs) for a family lunch. It surprised me how some family traditions were similar to ours back home. We were entertained by other relatives too. One of Rita's cousins, Ville, took me around on his motorbike, and we bonded for life.

Marriage and the liberation mission

It is interesting that in this area of marriages the various liberation movements from Southern Africa had different attitudes and controls. Our allies from Southern Rhodesia were firmly opposed to marriages. For them it was liberation first and soon, marriages strictly after. Leaders of our co-oppressed in South West Africa, with a population under one million, simply decreed that any male (preferably from Southern Africa) could marry a Namibian woman on condition that the man then became a member of SWAPO (South West African Peoples' Organisation).

The ANC took a broadly understanding attitude to such liaisons, on condition that the mission for liberation was not compromised. Our group of nine Fort Hare students was entirely male and it had become abundantly clear that the liberation of Southern Africa would take some time. Our needs could only be satisfied by interaction with the local women. The ANC leadership relied on our Russian hosts' understanding in this regard.

However, when the second group of ANC students arrived in August 1962, there were also women. In fact the female contingent was augmented by four ladies from Lesotho, the kingdom in the heart of South Africa. In no time weddings were taking place with ANC blessings. At KINE two of us were married, I to Rita, and my colleague, Sizakele, to a woman from Lesotho called Mangaka. As the penalties for illegal travel abroad increased (from six months to five years in 1962 to ten years in 1963 and minimum twenty years to life in 1964), we all came to the conclusion that it was better to advance the struggle from abroad than to rot on Robben Island. By 1967, of the original nine of us Fort Hare students who had left South Africa in 1962, four had already got married and had children. They were joined by those who came afterwards, at yearly intervals.

A chance meeting

In the spring of 1963 we five South Africans at KINE were selected to form part of a KINE Cultural group that would visit our counterpart institution in Odessa the Odessa Institute of National Economy. This was a regular exchange programme between similar institutions. On weekends and in the evenings we enjoyed practising our repertoire of songs. This was the first time that African students had participated in this exchange with musical items and our musical performance was well received.

The following morning we took a stroll to the city centre and met another group of sightseeing African students. They told us they were from Tanganyika and were being taught "polotics". This was the word commonly used by urban black youth in South Africa when they expressed boredom with lectures on political issues. We broke into laughter as it became apparent that we had met South Africans pursuing the "other" form of training in the Soviet Union. We had unwittingly, through our vocal skills, exposed a carefully worked-out plan to separate the academic from the military training of ANC cadres.

In the following years, in our interaction with the ANC leadership, we pointed out the dangers of dividing our youth into scholars and soldiers. The issue was to be resolved in the 1970s, when the ANC took an in-principle decision that all ANC

cadres should undergo the military training needed to defend themselves from the enemy. For the youth, those who first went for studies would later undergo military training. Trained soldiers would be given time to learn vocational and other skills to be able to earn a living after freedom.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to militarise ourselves, and with the backing of my colleagues, I persuaded our Dean of Foreign Students to arrange special shooting lessons for us at KINE because we had never handled guns of any kind. I argued that all young whites in South Africa did military service and that there were no blacks in the South African army. Even black policemen were only given sticks and handcuffs.

The authorities secretly arranged two shooting lessons at the range, and then stopped. The first lesson was comical. Lying on our stomachs, we were shown how to aim and where to pull the trigger. These were AK47 automatic rifles. We were still trembling with the excitement of holding in our hands the solution to all our suffering when our instructor shouted the order: "Fire!" We emptied our cartridges in seconds, our bullets landing everywhere except on target.

After the second lesson, we were informed that proper training could only be carried out when we had completed our studies. This would have to be properly authorised by the ANC and cleared with the Soviet authorities. In the Soviet towns there were recreation parks for target practices with pellet guns. This became one of our favoured pastimes for the remainder of our stay in Kiev.

Political convictions and loyalties

Our first year was marked by lack of information on the current situation in South Africa. The reports in the Soviet media were scanty. It was not until the *African Communist* (otherwise known as AC and published by the South African Communist Party in London) went on sale in the major Soviet cities that we had regular information about South Africa. This virtually became our bible. Indeed the articles published in the AC gave practical relevance to the philosophical ideologies we were grappling with in our studies. The Soviet model of socialism was founded on the historical, and other, realities of Russia. The AC showed us how the same socialist principles could be adapted to the South African situation.

In the meantime we studied Marxist-Leninist philosophy with a will and accepted it as the scientific analysis and method for conducting a successful people's revolution and building a socialist state. Almost all newly independent African states professed

some form of African socialism. There was the Senegalese President Senghor's "Negritude", which extolled pride in being of African descent with its rich historical legacy. Then there was President Nyerere of Tanganyika who introduced *Ujamaa*. This was a doctrine of "Self-reliance", starting with each homestead having its own garden or productive unit. They all condemned colonialism and some went further to condemn neo-colonialism. The latter was understood to be the continuation of colonial policies by African (black) capitalists who continued to be guided by their former colonial masters.

We, as ANC cadres, owed allegiance to the ANC. We left it to individuals if they wanted to join the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). My personal philosophy was straightforward. I had been sent abroad by the ANC and I believed that the ANC would engineer the liberation of the African majority. As spelt out in the Freedom Charter, the liberation of the African people would in turn ensure the liberation of all South Africans for the creation of a non-racial democratic order.

Before we left South Africa for the Soviet Union, Mandela had assigned us the task of understanding how the Soviet leadership provided basic services for its entire people. Here, in brief, I offer my own perspective on how this became feasible.

1. Education

The Soviet authorities invested heavily in education as a means to rise from the ashes of the Second World War. Primary and secondary education were compulsory and free. Thereafter there were broadly the following options:

- a. One could gain admission to universities, specialised institutions or technicons after participating in a selection process based on entrance examinations.
- b. One could apply for entry into a Vocational Training College (VTC).
- c. One could find a job as an apprentice or trainee at a factory or plant.
- d. One could attend tertiary evening classes or do correspondence courses.

The government subsidised all educational training. In addition students received a stipend, provided they did not fail any subject. The payback was that on completion you had to work at an assigned job, using your newly acquired skills, for at least three years. You could continue with your job after this period or you could find yourself a job elsewhere. However, the state did not guarantee you a position at your preferred workplace.

In the Soviet schools all the subjects, including mathematics, were compulsory and there was a particular emphasis on the sciences rather than the arts. The Soviet

education system sought to demonstrate how mathematics could be used to resolve problems in many fields of study. Three of the five of us at KINE had never been taught even the basics of mathematics. However, because these three had junior degrees at tertiary level, it meant that they had a proven capacity to understand complex issues. The Institute was able to organise special tutorial classes for them to understand the mathematics suited to their field of specialisation.

I realised that the popular notion that mathematics requires the brains of a genius is totally misleading and wrong. This had been particularly damaging in black schools in South Africa where teachers (black and white) would terrorise students about mathematics instead of showing them that it was simply a process of logical thinking.

2. Health

The Soviets also invested heavily in health services. There were targets for a doctor and a nurse per given number of citizens. For instance, the five-year plan would stipulate that currently there was one doctor for every 10 000 citizens. At the end of the five-year plan, there would be one doctor for every 5 000 people. While they differed in urban and rural areas, targets were continuously improved on the basis of five-year plans.

3. Public transport

The main forms of public transport were tramways, buses and, in the big cities, underground trains. What was distinctive was that the fares were cheap (50c) and fixed, whatever the distance. The level of honesty cultivated over the years was such that there were hardly any ticket controllers. There were gadgets where people paid the fare and took a ticket. The manufacturing capacity for private vehicles was not a priority, so there were very few privately-owned motor vehicles. Public transport could take one anywhere in that vast land.

4. Housing

Accommodation was under state control. Local governments were responsible for providing housing, mainly in the form of affordable flats. The size of the allocated flat would be predetermined by the size of family. Big enterprises had their own housing programmes for their workers. Dwellers in rural areas, usually members of collective farms, built their own houses on smallholdings. During my time in the Soviet Union,

a popular trend was developing among urban Soviets who were confined to flats. They would acquire a small plot of land in peri-urban areas, on which to establish a *dacha*. This was a wooden shed-like structure, not much bigger than a Wendy-house, with a small garden. With time the shed would be expanded into a wooden house. The peri-urban *dacha* became a popular escape from the heat and smog of cities during summers that, surprisingly, could be very hot.

Morality code and peer pressure

Soviet socialist society had clearly-defined, conservative norms of behaviour. Imagine my surprise when I noted that the Ten Rules or Codes of Behaviour prescribed for a communist echoed the biblical Ten Commandments, even when they contradicted them. When I was twelve years old I had to memorise the Commandments in preparation for my confirmation in church and I could still recite them backwards and forwards. Consider the following Commandments and their Soviet equivalent:

- You shall have no other gods besides me. (You shall have no god.)
- You shall not make for yourself an image for worship. (You may build statues of national heroes or to commemorate victims of national wars of resistance, for instance, the victory over Napoleon or fascist Hitler.)
- Remember the Sabbath day (seventh day) and keep it holy. (All citizens have a right to rest on Sunday).

The rest of the commandments applied to both measures of faith or belief.

It was interesting to see how the Soviet “believers” put this behavioural code into practice in their daily lives. As an illustration, I will describe a certain incident that occurred at KINE. The trade union representative at our hostel, an ambitious young man we shall call Valodya, had a nasty habit of abusing his position. When girls from town visited some of the foreign students, he would pick up a particular girl’s permit from the entrance desk, and leave an instruction with whoever was on duty for the owner to fetch the permit from his room.

One day this happened to Olga, a girlfriend of one of the South Africans. Olga informed her boyfriend, who accompanied her to Valodya’s room. A fist convinced Valodya to hand over the permit and run for his life. It is instructive that the Russian male students simply turned a blind eye to what would normally have been considered an assault and a serious offence. Clearly they had also had enough of Valodya’s antics and admired the plucky South African.

We then had a meeting with the Dean of Foreign Students and explained what had transpired. Comrade Prokofievitch expected me, as group leader, to pass judgement. Instead I applied the democratic norms that the ANC had inherited from the historic *imbizo/lekgotla* meetings at the Great Place (Palace of Kings or Chiefs). I asked the accused to state his case.

The defendant dutifully apologised to the Soviet authorities and the College community for disturbing the peace, but made no apology to the marauding Valodya. That is when Artyom Prokofievitch pronounced incredulously: "What individualism! The interests of the community should take precedence over those of the individual." In his view it was inappropriate to allow somebody the luxury of explaining what was obviously a misdeed; the person in charge should simply hand down a verdict.

These lessons were very useful when we had to deal with difficult situations in our exiled communities. We continuously had to educate our people that, where individual interests clashed with those of the community, the collective interest should always take precedence.

Contradictions of Soviet life

The long queues in the retail shops in most of the Soviet republics were legendary (only the Baltic republics were allegedly better). This arose from the fact that Soviet policy was focused on speedy development of the economy, through technological progress. The best brains went into engineering fields. Retail shops employed middle-aged people, predominantly women. The bulk of the men were working in heavy industries or doing their compulsory three-year military service. The shop assistants were notorious for their slow service and sharp tongues. They had no fear of losing their jobs. They would in fact tell you to your face: "I am not a slave. I am a citizen of the socialist Soviet Union!" One day I was in the queue at a grocery shop (*gastronom*) and the shop assistant finished serving the person in front of me. She calmly took the board on which "Break time" was written and placed it on the counter. I pleaded with her to serve me before taking her break. She calmly looked at me and said: "And who do you think you are?" Then she left. Mercifully she was back in five minutes. This sort of thing happened all the time. The Soviet customers had learnt to accept it. These were the negative aspects of a non-market economy where there was virtually no competition.

At times one could sympathise because the women would often have to drop everything to assist with off-loading trucks when new supplies were delivered. The

truck driver, usually a man, would calmly smoke his cigarette while the women were off-loading.

My experience with a butcher offers another example of this sort of insolent behaviour towards customers. On this occasion I could find no justification for it. Sacrificing my limited stipend, I had decided to treat myself to vintage lamb weighing half-a-kilo. The butcher cut a piece of the meat I had pointed out, but it was a bit below the required weight. The tall, hefty butcher looked me straight in the eye and picked up a dry white bone to add to my meat. When I protested, he responded: "There is no meat without bones. What you want is sour cream (*smetana*) – there are no bones there. So, what do you want?" I quickly agreed to take the package with the dry bone before he called on the next customer. Re-joining the queue would have meant a waste of half an hour.

There were other aspects of Soviet life that we exiles questioned amongst ourselves. Despite the tremendous material and human resources in the Soviet Union, the choice of food and clothing was very limited, even if you had the money. The reason was that these items were not a priority in terms of the Soviet Union's economic plans for the decade. All factories, plants and institutions had billboards outside their premises which gave percentage targets for increased production within five, ten or twenty years. In 1962 the overall target year was 1980 – the Year of Attainment of a Communist Society. Under socialism (the years before 1980), the slogan was, "From each according to their ability; to each according to labour". Under communism (from 1980 onwards) the slogan would be, "From each according to their ability; to each according to their needs". According to the billboards, then, food and clothing would be in abundance two decades later. In the meantime the aim was to ensure that at least basic food and clothing were available to all Soviet citizens.

I recall an observation by one of the South African students who arrived after us: a mature, experienced teacher called Mr Swakamisa who had long wanted to study medicine and had finally got his chance. He had reservations about the Soviet socialist system. He reasoned that if, after overthrowing the apartheid government, the ANC adopted a similar socialist model and the people of South Africa found themselves experiencing the same limitations in their daily lives, there was a risk of another full-scale popular revolution. In this matter he reflected the thinking of many others.

It did seem extraordinary that a country leading in space exploration could not provide sufficient service at retail level. However, most of us South Africans regarded the absence of consumer comforts as minor inconveniences considering

the valuable knowledge we acquired. We certainly did not support some of the students from Ghana who were doing a course in banking. They griped and whined about the lack of Colgate toothpaste and Nugget shoe polish, although there were locally made products that served the same purpose.

I recall how the Ghanaians' sartorial splendour stood out against the rather dreary and limited clothing available locally. The Sixties were the years of African liberation and Ghana had recently achieved independence from colonial rule. The colourful and voluminous Ghanaian national dress was always in evidence at socio-cultural occasions at Lumumba University in Moscow and other institutions. These institutions did a commendable job promoting what was then referred to as the "African Personality". They praised the newly-elected Kwame Nkrumah (*Osagyefo*, meaning "Redeemer") as the saviour of Africa and kept the Soviet populace spellbound with his achievements. Then came the 1966 military coup that overthrew Nkrumah and his "socialist" ideas. To our utter shock and amazement, as soon as Nkrumah's downfall was announced, the Ghanaian students celebrated in the streets and hostels in their resplendent gowns. It was a good lesson about various levels of development in the countries of Africa.

Some question marks

ANC students in exile had opportunities to discuss a wide range of issues. At their annual conferences in their countries of study they were able to make recommendations to the ANC leadership at the headquarters in Morogoro, Tanzania through various channels. More than anything else, I was interested in the principles and conditions that were scientifically determined as essential for the success of a socialist revolution. I then began to scrutinise the practical application of these principles in the Soviet Union itself. It was clear that there were limitations in democratic practice. To some extent these limitations were justified by the need for vigilance against imperialist onslaught, particularly following the enormous casualties suffered by the Soviet Union during the Second World War. When it comes to survival, one can accept the need to temporarily suspend certain rights that are not fundamental to your very existence. The question is, at what point do you restore those rights? There were numerous practices in the Soviet Union that contradicted the ideals of a socialist society and nagged at my own conscience. These are worth mentioning as they give insight into our experiences of Soviet life. For example:

1. Socialism is supposedly a higher stage of development than capitalism. Therefore its democratic institutions should be more highly developed than those in capitalist

countries. The reality, however, was that under Soviet socialism, some basic human rights and freedoms, like the freedom of expression and belief, had been curtailed or forbidden, in the interests of state security. In a society that had freedom of scientific research and discourse, why was it considered treachery to allow free discussion of “freedom of faith and belief”? The betrayal of the people by the Church had taken place fifty-seven years previously (in 1905).

2. One of the cornerstone principles for the success of a socialist revolution is that the revolution cannot be exported. However, this is exactly what was done to the countries of Eastern Europe. It was absolutely crucial to the Soviet Union that those countries they helped to liberate from Hitler’s fascism should not remain enemies to the new socialist order. A new world socialist system had to be created to face the powerful capitalist system.

3. There was one legitimate party, the Communist Party. At each level (branch, region and state), there would be contestation of posts by several candidates. The winning candidate was then put forward for the general membership to vote on. Hence the votes were always unanimous.

4. The same approach applied in the case of trade unions, where the benefits of membership were palpable. On top of the subsidised social services, and guaranteed jobs and pension, there was cheap, affordable travel, holidays at leisure resorts for members and their families and summer camps for children etc. To this end members of trade unions were always satisfied that there was bread (with butter and juice) on the table. They would not bother themselves about the processes for electing their representatives – until there was no bread or leisure.

5. Government structures, from local government and regional government up to state government, had their ministers and civil servants to carry out their tasks and assignments. At the same time there were also Party structures at these levels to monitor the state machinery. Sometimes they would actually override them. In class discussions, even in the presence of foreign students, local students would raise issues of the dangers posed by those who had performed poorly in their academic careers, but who now were able to exercise Party authority over their academic superiors.

6. Communists were supposed to be people of the highest integrity, ready to lead from the front, expecting the least rewards for serving the country diligently. It was, however, an open secret that there were special privileges for the Party faithful, including special shops where the best quality goods were available at very

reasonable prices, the best sea resorts and hotel accommodation, special transport amenities and individual summer houses (*dacha*).

7. Ukrainian students in class were quite vociferous about the Ukraine being the breadbasket of the Soviet Union and yet the best of their produce was hardly visible in their shops, but was in abundance in the state capital, Moscow.

These were issues for further study and discussion. Whatever logic emanated from my theoretical acrobatics, I had to keep my feet firmly on the ground. I was convinced that, under the prevailing circumstances, the Soviet Union remained our best ally in our pursuit of revolution. Our primary aim was to complete our studies and return to Southern Africa to pursue the struggle against the apartheid regime.

Whither after studies

In 1964 the so-called World Youth Forum was held in Moscow. Countries still engaged in the struggle against colonialism and racism were represented by youth organisations of their respective liberation movements. South Africa was represented by the Youth and Students Section of the ANC.⁶⁹ The ANC Headquarters in Morogoro, Tanzania, made the decision about the composition of the ANC Youth delegation. Delegates came from Tanzania, The United Kingdom and Algeria and were joined by student leaders in the Soviet Union itself. Because of my experience in Johannesburg in 1961, Headquarters included me in the delegation and I had to travel from Kiev to Moscow, where I joined Comrades Sipho Makana and Joseph ("Joe") Nhlanhla.

This was my first experience of an international conference. Delegates came from countries across all the continents. There were several breakaway committees on various themes. I served on the committee dealing with "Youth Solidarity Against Racism and Apartheid", a subject I could have written about in my sleep. The leader of the South African delegation, Comrade Alfred Kgokong (Themba Mqotha) was quite satisfied with my paper. The occasion provided me with a golden opportunity to update myself on developments at home as well as the activities of the ANC offices abroad. I was able to share this information with my colleagues in the Ukraine. It had been a long time since we had met with our ANC leaders. They paid regular visits to Moscow, so our comrades based there had many opportunities to meet them and gain information about their respective fields of operation. We were not so lucky in the Ukraine.

In April 1967 Artyom Prokofievich informed me that I was to have a meeting at

the Soviet Committee of Youth Organisations (SCYO) in Moscow. On arrival there I was met by a SCYO official who said that the ANC leadership (this must have been via the London ANC office) had instructed that I attend a Youth Conference in Helsinki, Finland. Since my arrival in the Soviet Union in January 1962, I had not set foot outside the Soviet Union, but during that five-year period I had had sufficient interaction with students from independent African states, as well as from other Third World countries (Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean), to broaden my horizons. My compatriots and I had the greatest admiration for Soviet society, particularly its provision of a wide range of services to its citizens. But what filtered through from television and some of our lectures, especially in economic geography, was that social life was much more relaxed in socialist countries to the west of the Soviet Union. I was therefore very interested to visit these countries and draw my own conclusions.

The SCYO arranged a Red Cross travel document for me as I, like the rest of the South Africans, did not have a passport. We had only the Tanganyikan travel documents we had been issued for our entry into the USSR. (Despite the change from Tanganyika to Tanzania, the original Tanganyika travel document remained valid, but only for re-entry into Tanzania.) Finland is a neighbour to the north of the USSR, and it is cheaper to travel by train than to fly. I travelled from Moscow past the Soviet border control but, on the Finnish side, the border controller was a man of Yugoslav origin who had obtained Finnish citizenship. Seeing my Soviet Red Cross travel document, he instructed me to get down from the train while he consulted the Finnish authorities. This was clearly an expression of anti-Sovietism, compounded by my being a foreigner. I had no option but to catch the next train, which was the following morning. At the Helsinki station the same man approached me with a jovial greeting, but I ignored him. The approval had come, as he knew it would, but he enjoyed exercising his power. I was not at all amused. It was a rude introduction to the realities of international travel, which I would learn and master with time.

At the conference I confidently presented my paper on "Youth Solidarity in the Struggle against Colonialism and Apartheid". This was well-received and I had interviews with various media agencies – newspapers, radio and television. I appealed to the Finns and other countries represented to isolate the apartheid government and to support the ANC in its struggle to overthrow the white minority regime.

My final exams, oral and written, took place in the last week of June 1967. I also submitted my thesis entitled, "Planning Transport on the outskirts of the Ukrainian

capital – Kiev, 1967". Immediately after this, in early July, I had to rush to Hungary in time for a special meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the World Youth and Students Festival, scheduled for July 1968 in Sofia, Bulgaria. My travel arrangements were made by the Soviet Committee of Youth Organisations. I suspected there must be some purpose behind these assignments.

By August I was back in Kiev to receive the results of my final examinations and to graduate. To my relief and pride I had been awarded my Masters Degree in Economic Planning. It is noteworthy that there were so many people with tertiary qualifications in the Soviet Union that graduation ceremonies were conducted without the pomp of gowns. Moreover gowns were expensive and they went against the grain of creating an egalitarian society. The gowns were replaced by distinctive badges, which could be pinned on jacket lapels or any garment during the graduation ceremony.

Soon after graduating I was informed that the ANC Headquarters had decided to deploy me to Budapest in Hungary. There I would represent the ANC Youth Section at the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), founded in the aftermath of the Second World War, to bring together the youth of the world under the banner of international solidarity, peace and friendship.

My appointment in Hungary marked the end of a significant chapter in my life. In the Soviet Union I had learnt to be a parent and a responsible citizen. Now I looked forward to my first exposure to international politics.



Paying respect. Lenin Mausoleum, Kremlin, 1968.

Chapter 10

Youth Work in Hungary

The capital of Hungary is divided into two parts – Buda and Pest – by the famous Danube River. Like all rivers in Europe and other places where they have at least four months of snow a year, the Danube never dries up. It is covered with ice and snow in winter and gets full to overflowing when the snow and ice melt in spring. Buda is on the hilly side of the river and features some of the most beautiful buildings in the city, including Buda Castle (*Budavári Palota*), situated on the southern tip of Castle Hill. This was the seat of the Hungarian kings from 1265. To the north of the castle is the so-called Castle District, famous for its Medieval, Baroque and nineteenth century churches, public buildings and houses which would once have belonged to the nobility. By contrast the Pest side is flat and features the magnificent parliamentary precincts, which are easy to point out to tourists as they sail along the “Blue” Danube. The Central Business District (CBD) is also situated here.

I arrived in the city with Rita and our three-year-old son Nikita in August 1967. My employer, the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), provided us with a furnished flat, situated on the long, straight avenue between the airport and the city centre, called Ulloi Ut, on the Pest side of the city. The entire block of flats was rented by WFDY for their staff. After staying in a single room in the students’ hostel in Kiev, it was a luxury for us to have our own apartment, with two bedrooms, a lounge/dining room and a bathroom. My monthly allowance from the WFDY was enough to provide food, clothing and transport for a family of three, and we were able to register Nikita at a nearby crèche. In a few months he was bi-lingual in Russian and basic Hungarian.

I was immediately struck by the soft manner in which the Hungarians spoke their language, which was at first incomprehensible to me. We were walking with a Hungarian friend one summer afternoon soon after our arrival, when we passed a couple in friendly conversation. At least that was what I thought it was, until my friend said quietly, “Gosh ! She is really giving it to him!” I was astonished that the two were quarrelling. I would never have suspected it from their tone of voice.

It was not long before other, more profound, differences between the USSR and Hungary became apparent. During my five years in the USSR I had acclimatised myself to a frugal way of life and was content with basic necessities. I appreciated the opportunity to gain an understanding of the wider world and the relations between the five continents. Initially my vision of the international stage was

straightforward: there was the socialist camp of the USSR, the capitalist world of America and Western Europe and the Third World of developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. By the time I arrived in Hungary it was becoming apparent to me that even within countries in the socialist camp there were peculiarities arising from the history, culture and traditions of each country. This determined the nature and character of “the dictatorship of the proletariat”, that is, the rule of the working class and the peasantry, supported by the intelligentsia.

In Hungary a combination of parastatal factories and small private enterprises for consumer goods, with free basic education and health services, was the recipe for a growing economy and a proud, hardworking, happy community. This mixed economy, allowing for small private outlets for sale of consumer goods and services, resulted in competitive service in the various enterprises. From big shopping malls to smaller kiosks, it was clear that the client was the boss. Ignorance of the Hungarian language was no obstacle to getting friendly service.

There were a few banners in prominent city squares where you could discern reference to *szocializmus*, but nothing that would disturb the flow of tourists from Western Europe and the USA. In fact Hungary was a popular tourist attraction for West Europeans. There were plenty of bars and coffee shops, where service was prompt and friendly, and nightclubs where you could listen to the “American Evergreens” and dance until late. At the back of our block of flats was a nightclub called “Tengersen” where we enjoyed dancing and listening to music at weekends. People dressed in simple, but fashionable, clothing and it was one of my African colleagues at work who drew my attention to the fact that, in spring and summer, Hungarian girls (young ladies) were famous for not wearing a bra! This was apparently one of the major attractions for West European youth when they came to spend their long summer holidays in Hungary.

The work of the WFDY

The three years I spent in Hungary represented my transition from student life to the more responsible life of a married, working parent. At the WFDY I worked in an environment with other young men, many of them married and new to fatherhood, who were also deeply involved in youth politics in their respective countries.⁷⁰ We were a team who had to learn to promote the interests of our political mother bodies, but also carve out a working relationship that would cement an understanding of the common challenges that affect young people the world over.

When I started work at WFDY the Headquarters were still at the old venue – 34

Benczur Utca, on the Pest side. The grandeur of the buildings suggested that they had once been owned by some Magyar (Hungarian) Baron or Count. In 1969, however, the WFDY acquired modern offices on one of the hills in Buda. They also acquired modern flats on the Buda side, so we had the experience of life on both sides of the Danube.⁷¹



Rita and I. Budapest, Hungary, 1968.

The WFDY Bureau consisted of permanent representatives from Eastern and Western Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Italy and France, the countries with the biggest and most influential communist parties in Western Europe, had WFDY representatives in the positions of President and Secretary General respectively. Within the Bureau was a Secretariat that was responsible for day-to-day administrative decisions.⁷² Bureau meetings, primarily about practical activities to be undertaken in keeping with the broad principles of the Federation, were held weekly and attendance was compulsory. Decisions were largely by consensus but, if it became necessary to vote, the typical pattern was that the socialist countries, the President and the Secretary General would sway the vote. In 1968 I proposed that, for efficiency, there should be continental sections which would meet regularly to formulate, prepare and monitor reports on annual WFDY events planned in the respective continents. They would also brief the Bureau on events of world significance unfolding in their areas. My proposal was adopted. Each continental group elected a convenor who chaired the meetings of the group. As a representative of South African youth, I convened and chaired meetings of the Africa Group from 1968 to 1970.⁷³

When I took up my assignment at WFDY, there were two Africans in the Bureau: Babacar Ndiongue from Senegal and Tchatchua from Cameroon, both French-speaking. Since French was the official working language of the WFDY, I immediately registered with the resident French tutor. French classes of two hours were available two or three times a week, as requested. I made sure I applied what I learnt by engaging

in conversations with my African colleagues at every opportunity. Fortunately the documents for Bureau meetings were prepared in three languages (French, English and Spanish) so I was able to follow and participate in the discussions immediately. There were also interpreters at these meetings to help representatives who had difficulty with these languages. By the third month I could follow the French political discourse, as the words had similar roots to their English equivalents. I found French socio-cultural discourse a great deal more difficult to follow.

My two African colleagues were in regular contact with African students studying in Hungarian tertiary institutions. They informed me that there were only two known South African students in Hungary and arranged for them to visit me at work. Remarkably, although one (Patrick Magapatona) was sponsored by the ANC and the other (Edward Ledwaba) by the PAC, they were close friends. South Africans abroad did not allow political differences to affect their social lives and acknowledged that the struggle for liberation was not the monopoly of one organisation. There was also the unspoken imperative to keep tabs on each other and this was easier if you mixed socially.

Patrick studied economics and was an argumentative extrovert. It was small wonder that he was elected President of the African Students' Association out of about fifty students from different African countries. Edward was of the quiet type. He enjoyed technical studies and ended up as an Information Technology (IT) specialist. Later we were joined by Lungelwa Sheila Martin who came to study medicine on a SWAPO scholarship. At first she played the Namibian, but I soon discovered that she was from East London. Up until 1970 that was our cosy South African community, including, of course, my wife Rita and our three-year-old son, Nikita.⁷⁴

The WFDY received funding for its international youth work primarily from the socialist countries, where the communist youth organisations enjoyed state support. The Anti-American war in Vietnam was the focus of the WFDY's work at this time. While the youth of Vietnam were not members of the WFDY Secretariat, the Secretariat mobilised its global youth membership to support the struggle of the Vietnamese people by organising solidarity meetings and demonstrations – mainly in Europe, Australia, Japan, India, Algeria and Brazil. The WFDY funded the delegations and the host organisations took upon themselves the local costs.

Political events in Africa and Cuba were also high on the agenda at this time. In line with its objective of international solidarity, WFDY focused its work efforts on Third World countries at the forefront of anti-imperialist, anti-colonial struggles, such as Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. Representatives from these Portuguese

colonies would be invited to WFDY meetings hosted by the youth organisations in independent African states. WFDY also sponsored delegations from these countries to attend youth conferences in European countries, when requested to do so by the host. Here they would debrief the delegates on the unfolding political situation in their countries. The armed struggle in the Portuguese colonies in Africa was advancing in strides, with a new vocabulary of “liberated zones” galvanising the international solidarity movement. Meanwhile Che Guevara had taken the decision to participate personally in the struggle against neo-colonialism in the Congo.

By January 1968 I was travelling to various African countries on behalf of the WFDY Bureau. On one of my first assignments I went to Algeria to meet with the Youth of the National Liberation Front (JFNL). We discussed bilateral relations with Algerian Youth and then had a session with the leadership of the Pan-African Youth Movement (MPJ) which was based in Algiers. This meant discussing the full programme of the WFDY in relation to Africa.

On this trip I was fortunate to be able to get an Algerian passport through the ANC Mission in Algiers. Until that time I had used documents from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, issued in the USSR. It was a UNHCR document that had I used to enter Hungary when I first went there. Once in Hungary I was issued with a Hungarian travel document – or *Laissez Passe*.⁷⁵ (As explained earlier, the original Tanganyika travel document issued for travel to the Soviet Union remained valid, but only for re-entry into Tanzania.)

After a few days in Algiers I travelled to Conakry, Guinea Republic, where I met with the Youth of the Democratic Party of Guinea (PDG). We discussed logistical plans for holding the main continental rally on 24 April 1968 in Conakry, as this date had been designated World Youth Day in solidarity with Africa. I also had to discuss Guinea’s participation in the ninth World Festival of Youth and Students. The World Festival of Youth and Students was the biggest WFDY event after the WFDY conferences. These two events took place every four years in different European cities. In 1968 the World Festival was scheduled to be held in Sofia, Bulgaria for ten days, from late July to early August 1968.

Official festival mobilisation trip

The host country’s preparations for the World Festival programme started at least four years in advance. Six months before the Festival opened the WFDY Bureau relocated to the host country and operated from the same building as the National Festival Committee.⁷⁶ There had to be close co-ordination between the international

(WFDY) and local festival committees. Information reached the National Festival Committee from various sources: the WFDY member organisations and the IUS (International Union of Students) Secretariat; delegations of the National Festival Committee from participating countries; embassies of the host country across the globe; and missions (embassies and other representations, for example, UN agencies) based in the host country. Communication and co-ordination was the key to successful organisation of the World Festival of Youth and Students.⁷⁷

By May 1968 most African youth organisations that intended to come to the Sofia Festival had made arrangements to attend, but as these had to be verified, it was arranged that I would travel to Tanzania to meet with the liberation movements of Southern Africa based in Dar es Salaam. On my way back I would meet with youth organisations in Uganda, Kenya and Sudan. I travelled with a Bulgarian national whose name was Ivo (I cannot remember his surname) who was responsible for Africa in the Bulgarian National Festival Committee.

En route to Tanzania the plane made stop-overs in Cairo and Nairobi. It had been six years since I had set foot on East African soil. We were allowed an hour in the transit hall in Nairobi and, although it was just after midnight, I remember the heat, which to me was like a welcome sign, saying, "This is where you belong." The wooden carvings, the ivory bangles and the loud conversations characteristic of people who had for centuries had to shout to each other across rivers and valleys, all combined to trigger a feeling of deep longing for my kith and kin.

On arrival in Dar es Salaam my colleague Ivo met with the Tanzanian Youth League (TANU) and made arrangements to get a Tanzanian youth delegation represented at the Sofia Festival. Meanwhile I visited the various liberation movements based in Dar es Salaam. The anti-colonial war in the Portuguese colonies (Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau) was gaining momentum and liberation movements in these countries were unable to send delegations from the Front. Delegates would have to come from among their students studying in Europe. The same situation applied to the liberation movements from South Africa (ANC), Southern Rhodesia (ZAPU) and South West Africa (SWAPO). For example the first battles between the Rhodesian/South African forces and the ANC/ZAPU Alliance had recently taken place in Wankie and Sipolilo in 1967-68. The focus was on pursuing the struggle further. Cadres already in Europe would attend the Festival instead of comrades engaged in armed resistance.

We spent only two days in Dar es Salaam where I just managed to visit the ANC offices and renew acquaintances. This was no longer the dual office of the ANC and

the PAC. The United Front that had been enforced did not hold. I listened to stories by comrades who had participated in the historic armed clashes between *Umkhonto weSizwe* (MK) and the combined forces of South Africa and Rhodesia in August 1967. I told them how we were building stronger solidarity through our struggle network in Europe, Asia and even in America. I felt euphoric after the meeting, sensing a renewed spirit of confidence that we would achieve our objective of a free South Africa. It was also heavenly to taste mangoes and pineapples after such a long time!

In Kampala, Uganda, Ivo went to the Bulgarian Embassy, where he was briefed about arrangements to secure the presence of a Ugandan youth delegation. I used the opportunity to attend a students' seminar on Decolonisation and Development at the Makerere University. I felt honoured to walk in the grounds of this famous East African intellectual institution. Fort Hare regarded Makerere University as its academic "twin" and I was happy to convey those sentiments. It was pleasing to discover that the Makerere student leadership had a similar view of Fort Hare.

Ivo established from the embassy in Kampala that there would be no need to stop at Khartoum. Issues had already been sorted out via the Bulgarian Mission there. So we returned to Budapest to report that Southern and East Africa would be represented at the Festival. Soon afterwards the names of the delegates from the liberation movements reached the National Festival Committee via diplomatic channels.

The ANC Delegation

Between 1962 and 1967, cadres of the ANC who were based outside the country would attend international youth and student events abroad from their places of exile or refuge. The internal underground mobilisation of young people to skip South Africa for military and educational training was gaining momentum during these years and there was massive support in the form of material aid and goodwill, particularly from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Sweden and other Nordic countries were also supportive, encouraging their citizens to collect food and decent second-hand clothing for ANC cadres in various refugee camps. During this time Mr Johnstone ("Johnny") Makatini and other leaders were assigned as spokespersons of the ANC Youth and Students Section.⁷⁸

The 1968 Sofia Festival was the first time a South African delegation had participated in a World Youth Festival since the banning of the black liberation organisations in South Africa in 1960 and the launch of MK in December 1961. This would be

the second occasion (the first was the 1964 Youth Forum in Moscow) that the ANC youth abroad, from East and West, would be able to meet and exchange views and experiences on the mobilisation of support for our struggle. The Sofia Festival presented an invaluable platform for spreading information about developments in South Africa. We strengthened ties with existing allies and opened new avenues of solidarity and support.

The ANC Youth delegation to the Sofia Festival was led by Johnny Makatini, who was by then the ANC Chief Representative in Algeria. It was a mottled team both in colour and age. Thabo Mbeki walked in front with the youngest participants. One was Nosizwe, youngest daughter of Duma Nokwe, the Secretary General of the ANC. Mrs Vuyiswa ("Tiny") Nokwe was also part of the delegation. She and Nosizwe had recently gone into exile in Zambia and it was decided that their attendance at the Festival would greatly reinforce the mobilisation of support for the South African liberation struggle. The other pre-teen walking with Thabo Mbeki was the son of Dr Nomava Shangase (née Ndamase), who later died a tragic death in Angola. (All evidence pointed to the fact that the driver of her Land Rover was one of the enemy agents infiltrated to destroy the ANC from within. They were climbing a steep, zig-zagging mountain road when the jeep fell down a deep ravine, killing Dr Shangase, who was the only medical doctor in the MK camps there at that time. But the "lucky" driver escaped without a scratch.)

There were other members of the delegation who would later become prominent activists and/or important figures in South Africa's post-1994 democracy: Barbara Masekela, Tom Sebina, Thandi Lujabe, Essop Pahad, Abdul Bham and Zola Skweyiya.⁷⁹ Also present in the ANC delegation were Indira and Marsha Poonen, daughters of Vera and George Poonen, who were well-known South African communists; Patrick Magapatona, the South African student from Hungary I mentioned earlier and Poppy Nokwe, the songbird of the Amandla Cultural Ensemble under Jonas Gwangwa. To my regret I was not able to be with the South African delegation during the day, except when I addressed a public meeting on Solidarity with the African Liberation Movements. Most of the time I helped put out fires when certain African delegations could not meet the official registration fee. However, I was happy and honoured to host a farewell evening party for our delegation.⁸⁰

Student revolts and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia

The year of the Sofia Festival in 1968 was also the year of student revolts that spread from France to the rest of Western Europe and beyond. These were typically rebellions against military, capitalist and bureaucratic elites. The Russian invasion

of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, which put an end to the political and economic reforms ushered in during the so-called "Prague Spring", caused considerable discord in the WFDY Bureau. Alexander Dubček, a communist statesman who became first Secretary of the Communist Party and leader of Czechoslovakia in 1968, initiated a period of liberalisation in what came to be known as the "Prague Spring". Determined to free Czechoslovakia from the rigid political and economic controls imposed by the Soviets, he and other liberal members of government began to pursue an independent foreign policy. This prompted the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces in August 1968 and Dubcek was removed from office.

Until the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops, the Bureau would typically have endorsed the Soviet position. Now, instead of kowtowing to the Soviets, the President and Secretary General of WFDY endorsed the Czechoslovakian representative's denunciation of what he called "the Soviet invasion of my country". For the first time there was division in the European Section. The GDR (German Democratic Republic), Bulgaria and Poland accepted the Soviets' explanation that they had been invited in by the Czechoslovakian government, while Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Italy and France denounced the "invasion". The host country, Hungary (who themselves had experienced a similar situation in 1956) remained non-committal, as did the Third World countries, who were willing to listen to both sides. Clearly the Soviets were no longer in full control.

When I assumed the position of South African Youth Representative, I sought guidance on the Czech debacle and other global matters from Johnny Makatini. I knew that Johnny had attended previous youth and student international conferences and was well versed on what position to take when there were ruptures in relationships among our friends. Unfortunately I was unable to find him in Algiers, and instead sought the advice of Mr Mark "Msebenzi" (meaning "worker" in the Nguni languages) Shope who represented the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) at the World Federation of Trade Unions in Prague (Czechoslovakia). Msebenzi gave sound advice for a representative far from ANC Headquarters. He said, "Look here, you cannot always be asking for guidance on how you should react to new situations. You are expected to have an understanding of ANC policy and principles, and you must also exercise your discretion. But you must be able to defend your position. You will be judged on the strength of your conviction that it was the best decision under the circumstances." I felt as though I had matured overnight.

With regard to the situation confronting us, I decided to keep my ears open and my mouth shut, for the following reasons: firstly, the youth representatives of the

Third World countries, without prior consultation, had opted to observe from the sidelines rather than involve themselves in these discussions. This was something more serious than mere matters of principle. We in South Africa had embarked on multiple forms of struggle, including armed struggle, and we needed assistance from all forces opposed to apartheid. Secondly, there was no attempt by those in direct conflict to apply pressure on the Third World organisations during the meeting. It would have been foolhardy for us to jump into the fray.

The Cuban situation

There were to be many occasions during my years at the WFDY when I would have to exercise my own political judgement. The Cuban situation, which remained high on the agenda, also required a careful response. In early June 1970 a special youth conference was convened at the request of the Communist Youth of Cuba, who wanted to review the methods of anti-imperialist struggle. This was at the peak of Che Guevara's campaign to build a strong guerrilla movement in the Belgian Congo in Africa.

The conference started at 9 am and there was a steady stream of speakers throughout the day, with a two-hour lunch break. By contrast with the majority of delegates who were eager to speak, there was a discomfiting silence from the person seated behind the nameplate of Cuba. We broke for dinner and reassembled at 8 pm. In keeping with the French alphabet, South Africa (*Afrique du Sud*) was in the front row. Cuba was in the next row. Returning from dinner I noted that where there had been one person warming the Cuban seat before the dinner break there were now three delegates, all in combat uniform. Cuba was the first to take the floor after dinner.

The first speaker spoke in a loud, steady voice. He spoke of the momentum of the struggle against colonialism and imperialism, citing the 1917 October Revolution, the Second World War, the successful Cuban Revolution and the creation of the Socialist Camp, the victory of the Algerian Revolution, and the on-going wars of liberation in Vietnam, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. He then reached the resounding conclusion that the era of World Revolution was upon us and that "the only viable form of anti-imperialist struggle is the armed struggle – *La Lucha Armada!*" He then called upon delegates at the Conference to adopt a resolution to this effect. While another string of delegates asked for the floor, I sneaked out and made a call to Johnny in Algiers. My own conviction notwithstanding, this was no textbook theorisation. Cuba (or its youth delegation) was declaring war on the United States, sixty kilometres from their shores.

When I explained the volatile situation to Johnny Makatini, he gave a brief, but telling, response – “Watch out for the Vietnamese!” I then recalled what had happened in previous international conferences I had attended. In complex debates the chairperson invariably sought refuge in the Vietnamese position. The Vietnamese people enjoyed unreserved support from all quarters – from Liberal and Christian Democrats to Communists. The children of Ho Chi Minh would always begin their input with the unwavering accusation: “The American aggressors are carrying out a systematic slaughter of our people.” This time they did exactly that, but their response did not address the issue at hand. I knew that by speaking of our South African experience I could provide a helpful perspective. I spoke about our struggle and pointed out that although we finally resorted to armed struggle, we did not consider this to be the only form of resistance. We had successfully appealed to the world to isolate and boycott South Africa – and we were receiving consistent support even from those who did not support the armed struggle.

The ovation was music to my ears, but this did not change the minds of the Cubans. After each vote you could ask for the floor to “explain your vote” and request another round of voting. This procedure had been adopted as part of the “Rules of Conference”. The Cuban delegation rotated their fresh cadres, “explaining” their previous vote and asking for a new vote, no less than eight times. By about 2 am everyone was extremely drowsy. Then somebody indicated that whatever was voted for would still need to be implemented. Each country reserved the right to implement or not implement a conference resolution. With that ingenious intervention, thirty-five delegations voted for the Cuban motion, nobody against and the majority abstained. With this we were finally free to go and sleep, relieved that the crisis had been averted for the time being.

Polish perplexity

In the summer of 1968 I attended a Polish Youth Congress in Warsaw, on behalf of the WFDY Bureau. In Soviet intellectual circles it was common to respond to the casual greeting “How is the situation?” with the words, “As in Poland...,” meaning “dicey”. During my visit to Warsaw I came to appreciate the complexity of the Polish challenge. As a people the Poles are allegedly argumentative and independent in their thinking, to the point that they very rarely have unanimity on any issue. The East European socialist countries were declared “secular”, which was understood to mean that religious faith could not determine state policy. This was generally understood and applied in all socialist countries, except in Poland.

I arrived the day before the start of the conference and Richard, my guide and

interpreter, was happy to show me places of interest. Warsaw has beautiful parks and historic places. Next to the former Royal Palace there is a park with a gigantic grand piano where maestros and piano students are free to play, as long as the pieces played are by the famous Polish composer, Chopin! During our tour I noticed that every time we passed a Catholic church – and there are quite a number – my guide would make the sign of the cross. This came as rather a surprise to me. I had assumed that in all the socialist countries, as in the Soviet Union, the youth were atheists and did not care much for churches.

Our visit to the Auschwitz concentration camp outside Warsaw disturbed me deeply. The fate of the Jewish prisoners is made devastatingly real by the collections of human hair and gold teeth torn from the mouths of the dead. The aim is to remind the world of the evils of Nazism – a racism so extreme that it completely dehumanised the Jewish people and other minority groups who were gassed to death there. At least 960 000 Jewish people were killed in Auschwitz. The overall death toll, including Roma (gypsies), Soviet prisoners of war and deportees from other nations occupied by German troops, was approximately 2 million people.

During our visit to Auschwitz I touched on the role of the Soviet Army in the liberation of Poland from Hitler's forces. To my utter amazement, the guide went into a bitter invective on how the Soviet Army had deliberately delayed crossing the Visla river until the German forces had wiped out the cream of the Polish Army. Only then did they cross the river and rout the fleeing German forces. To say I was shocked would be putting it mildly. I was incensed by the man's ingratitude to the millions of Soviet citizens who had died, firstly in defending their country and secondly during the push across Eastern Europe to Berlin. This incited my guide to come up with further anecdotes, including one about Russian men's addiction to vodka causing widespread impotence. In the end we were both so flushed with anger we just burst into laughter, but his story about the Soviet army remained with me until I came across a similar version of events in the Soviet publication "Moscow News" in 1987, during the upheaval of *perestroika*. It turned out that there was a measure of truth to Richard's story.

An extraordinary coincidence

There was a Trade Union Conference Centre (TUCC) directly opposite the WFDY offices.⁸¹ One day, around May 1968, I received a message at my office requesting me to go to the TUCC and look for the delegate from South Africa. Intrigued, I walked across at lunch time, when I was sure that the delegates would be having a break. A mature woman with a friendly, smiling face introduced herself as Ray Alexander,

a trade unionist from Cape Town. She then asked if I knew Reverend Mfenyana, and I said, "Yes, I have a father who is a priest". She explained that on her way to Johannesburg recently she had travelled via Queenstown. On arrival there she was taken to Reverend Mfenyana's official residence, the mission house, to spend the night. During the course of the evening my father told her that his eldest son had left the country in 1961 and that he had had no news of him since. He asked Mrs Alexander to help trace me during her travels.

I was overjoyed. ANC rules forbade us from contacting our families because the police monitored mail from "unusual" sources abroad and would harass families for news from their children or relatives. It was primarily for the protection of our loved ones that we did not try to communicate. Comrade Ray was happy that she had succeeded in her mission. She agreed to take a letter from me and also left a London address to use for future communication. I would write to my father and place the envelope inside another envelope with the London address. In London, the original letter would be posted to South Africa. At that time the Special Branch focused their investigations on mail sent from Africa and Eastern Europe.

In less than a month I received a letter from my father expressing relief and happiness that I was still alive. There had been deliberate disinformation by the Special Branch that I was dead, without giving specifics as to when, where and how I had died. He updated me on the welfare of my nine siblings and mentioned the dire need for funds to see them through their schooling. My next and last letter for that period told him of my joy at receiving news of the family. I also hinted to him that I was not in "normal" employment, or earning a salary, so that, much as I wanted to help, I was unfortunately unable to offer any kind of financial assistance. I also mentioned that I was likely to be posted somewhere else in a short while. I advised him that it would be better to seek support from the church or from Ray herself. Years later I found out that he had found the means to put all nine of my siblings through school. They all passed their matric and took up useful, practical professions.

Conferences

During my term at the WFDY I was able to attend only two WFDY conferences as these, like the World Festival, took place only every four years. However I attended numerous other significant conferences, including the Sudanese government's Khartoum Conference in March 1969 and the ANC's Morogoro Conference, held just after the Khartoum Conference, from 25 April to 1 May 1969.

The repercussions of the differences between the Soviet Union and China (Sino-Soviet dispute) affected the entire world-wide Solidarity Movement. Its effects were most severely felt in the liberation movements of Africa, as the Soviets and the Chinese supported different liberation movements, with different political agendas. In March 1969 the Sudanese government of President Nimeiri agreed to host the first conference on the continent to mobilise solidarity for the last colonies in Africa. Under the auspices of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) an appeal went out to a wide range of international and regional organisations to attend the conference in order to work out what action could be taken to expedite the eradication of colonialism on the African continent. By the time of the Khartoum Conference, six countries in Africa had “genuine liberation movements”, all of whom received support from the Soviet Union.⁸² They were Angola under the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) led by Agostinho Neto; Mozambique under the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) led by Dr Eduardo Mondlane; Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde under the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) led by Amilcar Cabral; and from Southern Africa, Southern Rhodesia under the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo; South West Africa under the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) led by Sam Nujoma and lastly, South Africa under the African National Congress (ANC) led by Oliver Tambo.

The main focus of the Khartoum Conference was to be the armed struggle in the Portuguese colonies. Tragically, just before the conference on 3 February 1969, Dr Eduardo Mondlane, the President of FRELIMO, was assassinated. A presidential committee comprising Marcelino dos Santos, Uria Simango and Samora Machel was set up, allegedly to investigate his assassination. Simango was later expelled for “betrayal of the revolutionary cause”.⁸³ Despite this enormous setback, FRELIMO still sent a delegation to the Khartoum conference, led by Marcelino dos Santos.

By the time of the Khartoum conference the ANC had developed a wide network of offices across the world, and also had representatives at various international bodies. Foreign missions had also been opened. All ANC representatives were invited to attend the Khartoum Conference, primarily because of its historical significance. The ANC delegation at the Khartoum conference comprised eleven members and came to be referred to as “the football team”. This is not strictly accurate because the majority did not come as ANC representatives, but as representatives of the international and allied organisations they served, for example, the World Peace Council (WPC), the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF), the International Organisation of Journalists (IOJ), the Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) and the

World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY). It was crucial that the decisions and recommendations of this conference should be distributed as widely as possible and these international organisations were fitting vehicles for communication.

Although I had been part of the ANC delegation at the 1964 World Youth Forum in Moscow, this was my first conference at senior level outside South Africa. I was keen to get an insight into how ANC conference delegates organised themselves. I noted that there were members of the ANC NEC elected at the last conference in Queenstown in 1959, before the ban. Among them were Robert Resha, Mark Shope, Tennyson Makiwane, Raymond Kunene, Johnny Makatini and Joe Mathews. There was another reason to assemble these and other ANC representatives in Khartoum. Immediately after this conference the ANC was to hold its own conference to review the work of the External Mission of the ANC and the progress of the armed struggle. MK soldiers had for the first time clashed with the soldiers of the South African army who were assisting the Rhodesian army of Ian Smith. An assessment of our strategy and tactics was required in order to map the way forward.

The Morogoro Conference

The Morogoro Conference was held just after the Khartoum Conference, from 25 April to 1 May 1969. This was the first formal ANC conference since the ban on the ANC in 1960. Morogoro in Tanzania was the Headquarters of the External Mission of the ANC. Several consultative meetings had been held before, the first in Lobatse, Bechuanaland in October 1962. In May 1965 a meeting was convened in Morogoro to assess the situation following the Rivonia Trial and the life sentences of leading members of the ANC and its allies. In November 1966 there were consultations between the ANC and its allies, including the South African Communist Party. This was a fully-fledged conference, in which we would have the power to make decisions about the new leadership required in the wake of the lifetime imprisonment of Mandela and his co-leaders.⁸⁴

A tense atmosphere prevailed as the Chairman, Comrade JB Marks, called the meeting to order an hour after all had assembled at 9 am. There were over seventy delegates representing regions and training camps and eleven invited representatives from Allied organisations – five Indians, three whites, and three coloureds,⁸⁵ all from within the Congress Movement. Everyone was dressed in casual wear to suit the warm Tanzanian climate. Small groups would form and disperse, to be replaced by different groups. People were keen to pick up the diverse views among the participants. The central topic of discussion was a memorandum that had almost caused the expulsion, punishment and even execution of the signatories.

Mr JB Marks, popularly known as “Uncle JB”, was tall (about 1.9 m) and of stout build, with a fatherly disposition. He was a good listener, and always looked at solutions that would be fair. To me he was closest in disposition to Mr Walter Sisulu, except that Uncle Valter could be decisive and firm when he thought the issues at stake were critical. Uncle JB was the perennial peacemaker. He opened the conference by assuring everybody that they would be free to express their views, even if they contradicted those of the leadership. He gave a guarantee that nobody would be victimised or punished for what they had to say. He reiterated this for about fifteen minutes, to convince the participants that he meant what he said.

I will mention the first speaker by name because he broke the ice and took Uncle JB at his word. He was Comrade Archie Sibeko, a known leader and trade unionist with the pseudonym Zola Zembe (“zembe” being the Nguni word for “axe”). He was forthright, an acknowledged teetotaler and non-smoker, and openly admitted that he had no respect for leaders who could not hold their drinks.

Then the floodgates broke. Speaker after speaker emphasised that MK was an army of political volunteers and that the soldiers could not be subjected to the discipline, including court martials, of conscripted soldiers. The ANC was a politico-military organisation, which required the kind of discipline that would build, not destroy, morale. This expression of discontent continued unabated until the Chair declared a break for lunch. During the break, people were more open about some of the unacceptable treatment that was meted out to MK cadres who dared to question certain MK officers. The morning session had given those with accumulated grievances the opportunity to air their chests, as the African idiom goes.

When we reassembled for the second session, the Chair now followed the time-honoured procedure of opening a conference with the singing of the National Anthem – *Nkosi Sikelela iAfrika*. It was no surprise when Uncle JB said, “Now that your anger has dissipated, we are ready to begin our conference in a serious and rational manner. The information given in the morning was very important and useful. Let us have it in the background as we begin to discuss the problems and corrections that will take us forward.”

The ensuing discussion and debate at the Morogoro conference provided the basis for the important document “Strategy and Tactics of the ANC”, authored by Joe Slovo, with input from Duma Nokwe and Joe Matthews. The document introduced a new way of analysing the struggle and charting the way forward. It also reviewed the idea of simply sending trained cadres into South Africa without creating the right environment for their reception and protection. There was a need

to build the underground ANC units within the country to create a political climate that would make the oppressed majority in South Africa resolute in the face of intimidation by the state. Such a change necessitated tighter control of political and military operations by a smaller and more closely-knit leadership that would operate in association with the People's Army. This shift prepared the ground for the development of what became known as the "People's War" in the 1980s.

In keeping with the recommendations of the document, the membership of the National Executive Committee (NEC) was reduced from twenty-three to nine (later reinforced by another two members) and a Revolutionary Council (RC) was created that would co-ordinate political and military policies. While the NEC remained open to Africans only, the RC was multi-racial and included Reg September (Oom Reg), Yusuf Dadoo and Joe Slovo. Oliver Tambo was confirmed as the Acting President General of the ANC, Duma Nokwe was replaced by Alfred Nzo as Secretary General and the Treasurer General was confirmed as Moses Kotane, later to be replaced by JB Marks. Uncle JB died in 1972 and was replaced by Thomas Titus Nkobi.

The Morogoro aftermath

Some of the people removed from the National Executive were not happy, but before they could begin to lobby for their reinstatement, a serious setback occurred in Tanzania. The former Tanzanian Foreign Minister, Oscar Kambona, was arrested and charged for a coup attempt against President Nyerere. It has to be said that in the early 1960s and 1970s, a number of African presidents were swayed by the rhetoric of the then Acting President of the PAC (Pan-Africanist Congress of South Africa/Azania), Potlako Leballo. He claimed that the PAC was the only genuine organisation that stood for the total liberation and unity of the continent. Kwame Nkrumah was among those who swallowed this without scrutinising what was happening on the ground. Thus when Leballo accused the ANC leadership of involvement in the Kambona coup attempt, Nyerere took prompt action. In 1970 there was a sudden surprise closure of ANC camps in Tanzania.

At first the Tanzanian government wanted the ANC soldiers to be taken to refugee camps. The ANC objected, saying that they were not refugees, but freedom fighters. The ANC was then simply told to remove them. The Soviet Union stepped in at this point and picked up the MK soldiers for an upgrading course until the lies were disproved and the ANC was able to make alternative arrangements.⁸⁶ From then on the ANC had a political, but not military, presence in Tanzania. There was no formal review of the position. However by the time the ANC's Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) and the ANC Dakawa Development Centre had been built in

the late 1970s, security was provided by the Tanzanian forces. They had never carried out investigations on the cadres who had been in MK before this.

Trip to Liberated Zones in Guinea Bissau

In August 1969 I left on a WFDY mission to cover the developments in the liberation war raging in Guinea Bissau. With me was a Soviet journalist from the youth newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* – Anatoly Agaryshev. It was a ten-day mission via the Guinea Republic of Sékou Touré. From Conakry we travelled by Land Rover to the southern part of Guinea Bissau, where we were received by “Nino” Vieira, who was then the Commander of the Southern Front. The two other fronts were the Eastern and Northern Fronts. On hearing that I was from the ANC, Commander Nino remarked that they had received one of our cadres three weeks previously. From his description (almost two metres tall with an athletic build) I established that it was Walter (Mavuso) Msimang.

Comrade Nino explained the programme to us. We would be travelling by night and resting by day. The first night we would be using a truck that was also carrying supplies. This would take us only fifty kilometres into the interior, owing to poor roads and light rains. Thereafter, for the next two nights, we would have to march on foot with a company of about twenty-five guerrillas. We would then be close to a Portuguese fortress called Gileje. The aim of the operation was to take the southern Portuguese outpost. We were given our uniforms and boots and introduced to our guide and interpreter, Comrade Barry, who was actually a political Commissar. Before we set off Anatoly interviewed him about a number of issues: How big was the Portuguese garrison at Gileje? Did they have tanks or mere armoured personnel carriers? Did the Portuguese have helicopters? How long was the siege expected to last?

We embarked as soon as the truck was loaded, resting rather precariously on top of the overloaded vehicle until we reached our destination in the late afternoon. We had a meal of rice, tinned fish and coconut juice and in the evening set off in single file through the jungle on narrow footpaths. There were occasional clearings lit by a bright half-moon. Fortunately the moonlight helped to improve visibility in the more overgrown sections of our route, where vegetation was thick on either side of the footpath. On the first night our pace was steady and we got used to the hard new boots.

On the second night the pace set by our comrades increased, but we could still manage. In the early morning we came to a river with no bridge. Two tree trunks

had been placed across the water and we had to run across without missing a step. Below, we were told, crocodiles would happily receive anyone who slipped. During our crossing there was a slight drizzle. Commander Nino commented that my ANC comrade had acquitted himself quite well during the night marches, so I had a reputation to live up to.

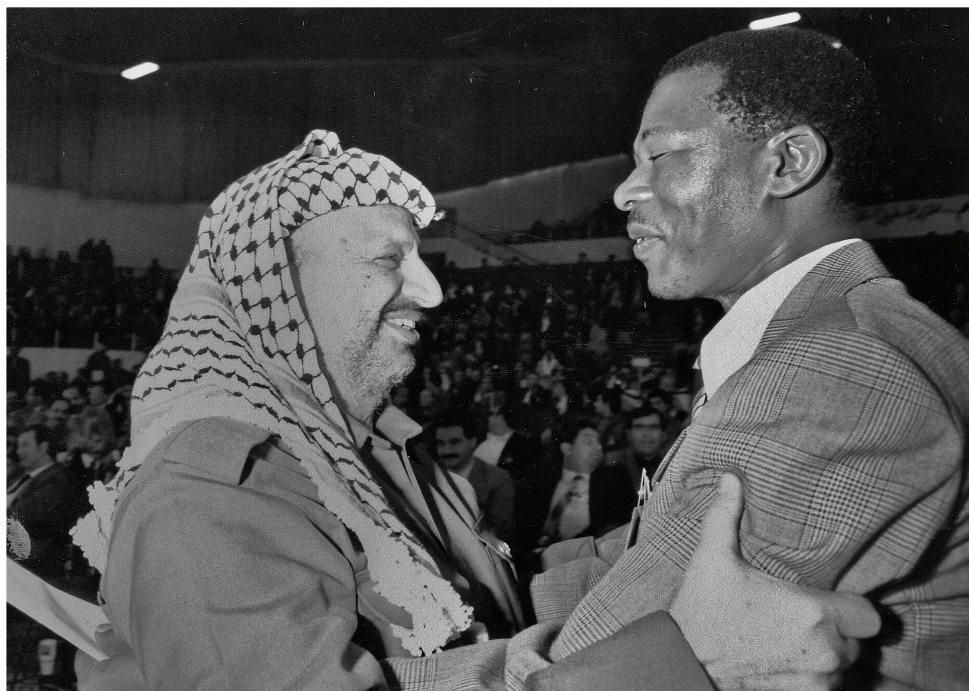
On the third night we reached our destination in the early morning, just in time to hear the thunder of artillery as the garrison was attacked. Our team was tasked with providing provisions and security and was not meant to be involved in the assault on Gileje. We slept till afternoon, when we received the report that the Gileje garrison had been successfully taken. Apparently the Portuguese were so overstretched by the three wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau that they could not afford enough forces to defend this garrison. The few soldiers on guard did not put up much resistance. In this way we came to experience how it was that, in the Portuguese colonies, they could talk of “liberated zones”.

The trip back, though still at night, was more relaxing. I took the liberty to taste, for the first time in my life, home-made palm wine, which was both delicious and thirst-quenching. We returned via Bamako, the capital of Mali, where I had discussions with the youth of the ruling party under Modibo Keita. They offered to host the Youth Day of 24 April 1970. We were also introduced to one of West Africa’s bustling market places, where you could buy any household items, furniture and clothing. Enterprising tailors promised that they could take your measurements in the morning and have your safari suit ready in the afternoon. There were no price tags; you had to bargain for every item. In fact there were hardly any shops as I knew them. The men owning bales of cloth sat conversing, but as soon as the customer had reached a price with the market assistant, the owner would come forward for payment. The stately gowns (*Galabia*) were also the “banks”. The “banker” would put his hand into some unseen inside pocket and come out with a roll of French Francs. However, the major currency was the Central-African Franc (CAF). I found this fascinating.

Within thirteen days of our departure we were back in Budapest and duly submitted our report at the Bureau meeting convened specially for this purpose. I felt privileged to have had the opportunity to be part of this mission before my term at WFDY came to an end in August 1970. I handed over to the new representative of the Youth and Students’ Section of the ANC, Connie “Gideon” Vakala, in the second week of August and departed for Cairo at the end of August to take up the position of ANC representative in Egypt.⁸⁷

In November 1980 I was intrigued to read that the President of Guinea Bissau,

Luis Cabral, had been replaced by Jao Bernardo "Nino" Vieira, our erstwhile host and commander of the Southern Front during our visit in 1969.



At the Congress of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) with Yasser Arafat. Palestine, 1974.

Chapter 11

Egypt

I found Cairo to be richly cosmopolitan: the meeting place of Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Tourists flocked to the city and Rita and I marvelled at how easily Egyptians could switch from Arabic to English, French, German, Russian, Italian and Greek. As the cultural centre of the Arab world it drew many visitors from the Middle East. Sheiks would arrive in private jets or hired planes for an evening concert by the legendary Egyptian singer, Om Kalsoum, and fly back immediately afterwards. Nightclubs with traditional Egyptian belly-dancers flourished, and the sheiks had a wide variety of choices for their harems. To Rita and me the most appealing aspect of Egypt was the hospitality and humanitarian spirit of ordinary Egyptians, evidence that almost five hundred years of colonisation had not destroyed the Egyptian soul.

My designation was Chief Representative of the ANC in Egypt. I also covered events in Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon or wherever our Headquarters (now in Lusaka, Zambia) deemed it necessary. As part of his commitment to the total liberation of the African continent, the Egyptian President, Gamal Abdel Nasser, set up an African Association. Located in the isle suburb of Zamalek, it housed the offices of national liberation movements from South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia.⁸⁸ Each mission of the National Liberation Movement (NLM) fell directly under the Office of the Egyptian President and the representatives of liberation movements received monthly allowances from the Presidency. Mr Mustafa Hanafy was the Minister responsible for the liberation movements; however, we had more direct dealings with his Director, Mr Bhagat Dessuky. Mr Dessuky was a lawyer by profession but an Egyptian by nature. We got on very well together.

Representatives of the liberation movements and their staff had special residence status in Egypt and we were all accommodated in Zamalek, in close proximity to the African Association. It was only a ten-minute walk from our apartment to the ANC office. This arrangement was both economical and sensible from a security point of view. Zamalek was full of hawkers and small *spaza* shops. The families running these small businesses would assemble for meals, mainly beans and baked flat bread, called *Eesh Baladi*. In the mornings as I walked to my office at the African Association, I would pass these families having breakfast. I noticed that they used the bread to scoop up the beans, just as we do in South Africa with our *pap-en-vleis*. Each day there would be friendly greetings from the family head who would then unfailingly invite us to join his family and share their breakfast. We would repeatedly thank him

for his kindness and apologise that we had just finished our breakfast. In time all the people from the African Association were known to the community in Zamalek. If we experienced any mishap on our way, children and adults would be ready to give help, or call the nearest policeman. However, I cannot recall a single incident that involved Egyptians and the freedom fighters working at the African Association.

We arrived just in time to witness the end of a special institution of police officers who wore the same black uniform as our Blackjacks – the municipal police in the bigger cities. Whereas our Blackjacks were used for Influx Control and showed a ruthless disregard for anyone's personal circumstances, the Egyptian Blackjacks were strongly "pro-family". To give an example, here is a young man with a family. He passes a shop with fruit displayed outside and takes an orange to taste. He is probably hungry and does not have the money to buy the fruit. The morning breakfast period has passed, so there are no meal invitations. The shopkeeper raises an alarm and a Blackjack arrests the "thief" and walks with him towards the police station. A group of women who have witnessed the "crime" quickly surround the municipal policeman and ask, "Just what do you think you are doing? This man has a wife and children. Who is going to feed them if the father is in prison?" The policeman looks this way and that, and then concedes, "Yes, indeed, who will feed his children?" So saying, he removes the handcuffs and allows the culprit to go scot free. This is not folklore. I witnessed such scenes myself.

This was the Egypt of 1970. On 28 September 1970 President Gamal Abdel Nasser died and was replaced by Anwar Sadat. In 1971 the Blackjacks were phased out (many of them were kindly, older men of pensionable age) and were replaced by a new, younger police corps. They wore smart green uniforms and were still pleasant, but firm. Anybody they arrested remained in police custody until they were released by senior authority or the law courts.

Settling in and finding a school for our son

Soon after our arrival we began to look for a school for Nikita, now aged six. Unfortunately by the end of August 1970 there were no places available at the private, English-medium schools. This presented us with a problem as the academic year was about to begin. (The academic year in Egypt followed the European calendar: the school year started in September and ended in July.) One of my colleagues in the ANC office advised me to approach the Roman Catholic primary school, St Mary's. The teachers were mostly nuns and the school had a good reputation for offering a solid primary school foundation.

I met the Mother Superior, who asked for our son's baptism certificate. I had to explain that as he was born in the Soviet Union and had spent the early part of his life in Hungary, he had not been baptised. The Mother Superior was sympathetic and agreed to make space for him, on condition that he was first baptised and later confirmed so that he could receive Holy Communion. I had gone through this process myself so the idea did not pose a problem. Rita also had no objections. Although there were no Christians in her family, who were Tatars by descent, some members still observed religious rites aligned to Islam.⁸⁹

St Mary's admitted Nikita into Grade 1 and he settled down easily and quickly made friends. The medium of instruction was English, but in no time he picked up Arabic. He was also much more relaxed and enthusiastic in his school environment than he had been in Hungary. As a black South African from Noupoort, I correctly diagnosed the social factors at play. At the Hungarian crèche Nikita was loved, but also the object of special attention because he was obviously not Hungarian. In Cairo he simply fitted in. This also explains why he picked up Arabic so quickly. His friends spoke English to him during classes, but Arabic during recess. Before long none of his peers doubted him being Egyptian.

We soon settled down in Cairo. Rita was largely occupied with Nikita's upbringing and schoolwork. Occasionally she would get part-time jobs as a translator. I recall her Russian-English translation of a doctoral thesis written by an Egyptian postgraduate who had studied Agriculture in Moscow. I was shocked to hear her talking about "light chestnut soils" in her sleep during that period! She also got a job translating the English sub-titles of some Egyptian comedy films into Russian.

Her circle of friends included the wife of my Deputy in the ANC office, as well as other women related to officials at the African Association. She often met with wives of Soviet colleagues at the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO), including Tanya Agarishev, the wife of journalist Anatoly Agarishev, with whom I had visited Guinea Bissau while still in WFDY, Budapest. With his good knowledge of Arabic, Anatoly was now a Middle East News correspondent for some Russian media. In time we had a circle of friends that included Egyptian, Russian and Southern African colleagues.

Through these contacts Rita was introduced to Guerman Kashoyan, Editor of the Soviet magazine *New Times*, who was launching the Arabic version of this publication. Mr Kashoyan then employed Rita as a general Russian/English interpreter. In the course of her work she was introduced to Sakina Sadat, the Egyptian journalist and Co-editor of the magazine, who happened to be the sister of Egyptian President

Anwar el Sadat. Mr Kashoyan and Sakina probably found Rita a useful assistant with her Soviet background and close links with the African liberation movements. Because of my frequent travels on AAPSO missions, Rita negotiated to be allowed to take Nikita with her whenever meetings took place outside Cairo, for example in Alexandria. By this time Nikita was trilingual, speaking Russian, English and Arabic. This endeared him to Sakina and she supported Nikita's travel with his mother.

Getting to know my colleagues

I shared the ANC office with my Deputy, Mr Zenzile Ngalo (But'Z), a friendly man who knew me from my Cradock days. He and his wife, Mary, had four children: Mpakamisi, Magorakazi, Mnizwe and a baby girl, Nunu. Mr Ngalo was responsible for distributing *Sechaba*, an important monthly journal, which provided an updated picture of the situation inside South Africa and the solidarity work of Anti-Apartheid Movements worldwide. He also gave bi-weekly broadcasts from the Radio Freedom station sponsored by the Egyptian government.⁹⁰

I also represented South Africa at the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) Headquarters, at 89 Abdel Aziz Al Saoud Street, El Manial, in Cairo. I attended AAPSO meetings on Fridays together with Mary Ngalo, who had for some time represented South African women in AAPSO. My additional work at AAPSO supplemented my monthly allowance from the Egyptian Presidency and enabled us to pay for Nikita's schoolbooks and uniform, as well as occasional dinners with our colleagues in the liberation struggle. (There was no question of inviting members of the "bogus" liberation movements on such occasions!) The allowances from AAPSO and the Egyptian Presidency saved me from having to ask for financial assistance from the embassies of countries friendly towards the ANC. It was common practice for my colleagues in the African Association to make such financial requests on behalf of their liberation movements.⁹¹

Each country represented at the African Association was represented by two organisations: what we in the ANC called the "genuine" liberation movements on the one hand and the "bogus" liberation movements on the other. The mixing of all these organisations under one roof was in line with the Egyptian character of African "brotherhood". The African Association building had two floors and organisations from the same country did not share the same floor. The PAC office faced the entrance directly and visitors would inevitably start at the PAC office, unless they specifically wanted the ANC office, which was directly above the PAC's premises.

Victor Mayekiso, the PAC representative, was a jolly, sociable fellow and we would greet each other as I ascended the stairs to my office. My Deputy, Mr Ngalo, had

warned me early on about Mayekiso, saying, "That one is naughty." I did not fully appreciate the extent of Victor's naughtiness until one day a visitor from Europe (remember Egypt is a popular tourist destination), came to my office rather agitated. She explained that my compatriot in the PAC office below had told her that it was the PAC at the forefront of the liberation struggle in South Africa. When she had asked for some informative material, Victor had calmly told her, "You see, we, the PAC, are fully engaged in the struggle. The ANC hasn't got much to do, so they concentrate on producing the monthly journal, *Sechaba*." The tourist happened to be an active member of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) in the UK. She knew that while the ANC was indeed producing *Sechaba*, it was doing a lot more besides, and she felt that this misinformation by my compatriot should be stopped. I promised her that I would attend to the matter immediately.⁹²

As soon as our visitor had left, I asked Mr Ngalo for his opinion. He laughed and said, "I told you Victor was naughty. I will go to him, but he frankly admits that he does not have much to say about the struggle waged by the PAC. So we should understand. He also needs to earn his allowance." I was to learn later just how far Victor could go to "earn his allowance" This was much later, in the 1980s, and I was no longer in Cairo.⁹³

Work-in-progress

In 1970, when I had already been informed that I would be going to Cairo, I happened to meet Mr Mzwandile (Mzwai) Piliso, the former ANC Chief Representative in Egypt, at an international conference. He told me that he would be leaving Egypt directly afterwards. By way of an informal brief about what awaited me in Cairo he said, with a wry look on his face, "For the past four years I have been addressing the June 26th meetings and telling the people that we are on the brink of revolution. I am relieved that somebody else has to say it. You have my best wishes." In the ANC calendar 26 June was designated Freedom Day, in honour of the Freedom Charter adopted by the Congress of the People in Kliptown on 26 June 1955. I was certainly not going to make empty promises about being on the brink of the revolution, but I realised that I would have to vary my National Day speeches to reflect a changing situation. Hopefully, in time, I would be able to speak with conviction about positive developments in our struggle for freedom.

I had hardly had a chance to settle down when an article appeared in the *Africa* magazine, a monthly journal published in London, but widely distributed in Africa. A journalist named Sam Uba had been assigned to cover an official visit by President Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi to South Africa. The article made reference to the

fact that Black Africa was boycotting the Republic of South Africa under apartheid rule. Clearly Sam Uba did not think this was a good idea. In his article he took the stance that Banda was a pragmatic leader who put the economic interests of his country first and was breaking the boycott to secure investments from South Africa. He also negotiated jobs for Malawians in the South African mines.

Evidently Sam Uba had been wined and dined in Pretoria and would therefore have nothing to say about internal resistance to racist oppression and exploitation in South Africa. My response to the Editor of *Africa* was published in the next issue in bold print. I decried Sam Uba's portrayal of Banda as a sensible pragmatist for defying the OAU and the world. I ended by saying that the unfolding struggle inside South Africa would expose the duplicity of the world "racists and those silent anti-racists, known to Sam Uba." Apartheid could divide the world along racial lines.

The letter was published without comment, but that was the last article by Sam Uba I ever saw in *Africa* magazine. The magazine then employed a dedicated specialist on South Africa who wrote articles exposing the evils of apartheid. It further publicised all actions taken by the OAU, the Anti-Apartheid Movements and the United Nations against racist South Africa.

In early 1971 Mr Dessouky called me in for a confidential conversation. Some ANC cadres from our military wing had arrived from the Soviet Union on their way back to the new ANC Headquarters in Lusaka. Cairo was a safe transit station and members of the Egyptian military would receive the groups as they arrived and ensure that they went to a safe destination. This was the first time I became aware that our soldiers had been thrown out of Tanzania and temporarily accommodated in the Soviet Union. I was happy to encourage and thank the Egyptian government for their support, but I was not permitted to see the ANC cadres as this would have been indiscreet. I had no information about where the soldiers would be going and they would not have been impressed with a senior official who had no news for them.

Later in 1971 I was pleased to receive a visit from South African students studying medicine in Cairo. Their leader, Ahmed Boola, came from a well-known ANC family. He briefed me that ten to fifteen medical students came to Cairo annually for their studies. Most, if not all, were of Islamic faith and this made their reception and treatment much more cordial. I impressed upon them the importance of maintaining their "outward neutrality"; that is, not exposing their sympathies with the ANC, so that they could be useful to the struggle. Indeed they were able to play an important role in assisting the ANC's underground struggle by seeking jobs in

the Frontline States such as Zambia, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. As doctors in these countries, they were able not only to give medical help to ANC underground operatives, but also to provide shelter or pass on messages and even funds for the operatives.

A welcome guest

Early in 1973 we received a welcome guest, Mzolisi Mabude from (M) Bizana, who stayed with us for about six months. He was wonderful company; it felt as though we had a relative living with us. Mzolisi had been with me at Fort Hare, but his sympathies then were more with the Unity Movement than the ANC. Although we in the ANC were dismissive of these “armchair politicians”, we had a healthy respect for their intellectual and literary training. In fact a number of good ANC cadres were nurtured in the Unity Movement. Mzolisi was on a mission approved by senior members of the ANC and it was not difficult to understand why. He had previously been one of a number of teachers who had opted to help the newly independent West African states rather than teach Bantu education, and he had been through the “Biafra war” in Nigeria. Some time later he decided that he wished to do something for his own people and joined the ANC military wing. By the time he arrived in Cairo he had already received training in intelligence in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Our mission was to erase any connection with MK.

He stayed with us for six months without going in to the ANC office. At the end of this period we needed to arrange for him to travel to Sweden, where he would seek political asylum. In preparation we had to “doctor” his expired passport, which had seen him through his West African sojourn. With a skilful tinge of light ink we converted a 1968 stamp into 1988. Now we needed a stamp from the relevant Home Affairs to confirm the extension of the passport’s validity. The first part of the operation was, as they say, “chicken feed”. The second part was a little trickier. We went to the cosmopolitan Cairo Market where “craftsmen” can produce birth, marriage and death certificates as well as business stamps. We had drawn the exact size and wording for the stamp and took it to the relevant stall. The man told us it would be ready in two days.

The next day I received a call to see Mr Dessouky. Now, Egyptian intelligence operates a complex network that is difficult, if not impossible, to evade. Mr Dessouky asked me to “spill the beans” regarding the stamp, so I took him into my confidence and asked for his assistance. All I will say is that, within a week, Mzolisi was able to fly to Stockholm on a tourist visa. This seemed like significant progress; now he would simply need to apply for political asylum. Unfortunately things were not that

straightforward. On his arrival the anti-apartheid support group there advised that he should get out of Sweden and come back with *no visa*. Apparently you cannot be a tourist and a refugee at the same time. Within a week our guest was back in Cairo.

I informed Mr Dessouky what had happened, but told him that I would find an alternative sponsor for the ticket. He was relieved. I went to the GDR representative at AAPSO and he arranged for a return ticket to Stockholm. At this time the airlines refused to sell one-way tickets except to returning residents. Mzolisi flew to Sweden and we breathed a sigh of relief that we had successfully completed phase one of the operation. Phase two involved registering for a degree to confirm that he was abroad on a study mission. He promptly did this and was granted a scholarship for five years. In 1978, after I had left Cairo and was working at the ANC Headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia, we proceeded with phase three of the operation.

The Mabudes have a touch of royalty in the Pondoland enclave of (M)Bizana. Mzolisi's father had been a close friend of KD Matanzima, the supreme ruler of the then homeland of Transkei. Unfortunately his father had passed away. The ANC's plan was for Mabude's son, Mzolisi, to seek refuge in his father's friend's kingdom once he had completed his degree. But first he had to get there.

Mzolisi got to Swaziland via Maputo, but Sipho Makana⁹⁴, who was by this time working for the ANC Intelligence Unit from Zambia, sent an urgent message expressing concern that from Swaziland Mzolisi would have to cross into the South African "republic" and would surely be kidnapped. So Mzolisi had to go back to Maputo to await the inaugural flight from Maputo to Maseru, in Lesotho. This way he finally reached (U)Mthatha and spent a week in the palace of the enemy of the ANC – KD Matanzima. However, the South African security forces prevailed on Matanzima to send Mzolisi to his father's village and to give him support until he could get a job. James Ngculu, the author of the book, *The Honour to Serve*, made me proud when he confirmed that Mzolisi, while lecturing at the University of the Transkei, was able to provide the necessary funds to MK underground operatives in this area of the Cape.⁹⁵

Passports, permits and baksheesh

During my years in Egypt I travelled widely, attending conferences and delegations in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Tunis and East Berlin. This was facilitated by my obtaining an Egyptian passport. To ensure the protection of members of liberation organisations, various government agencies were informed about our

movements. For example, before travelling, it was necessary to have exit and re-entry permits stamped in your passport. The most exasperating task was obtaining a travel permit to leave the country. The Ministry of Home Affairs had a huge building at the now famous Tahrir Square. This required fourteen signatures from various offices before permission to travel was granted.

I approached my friend Mr Dessouky about this inconvenience. He looked at me and smiled. "Sindiso," he said, "we have many poor people and we try to spread the crumbs. All you need to do is give a messenger at the first office an amount of one Egyptian pound and your problem will be over. You come the next day and your permit will be ready." I need to clarify that the Egyptian document was a *Laissez Passer*, which guaranteed my return into Egypt. I still needed exit and re-entry stamps on it.

While we were based in Hungary a colleague from Sierra Leone had helped to arrange a Sierra Leonean passport for me. I had entered Egypt on this passport. The problem was that I could not renew it in Egypt as Sierra Leone had no embassy in Cairo. My Algerian passport had proved a problem when I visited other African countries as I did not look like an Algerian, nor did I speak Arabic. Though no country found fault with the passport, there was always a murmur about why I did not get a passport from Sub-Saharan Africa. I thus applied for an Egyptian passport through the Presidency and fortunately obtained this without a hitch. Somehow an Egyptian passport did not raise eyebrows.

Egypt had one of the most elaborate security networks, probably closest to the Soviets, but they were much more discreet. It was common knowledge at the African Association that the information network started with caretakers in the apartment blocks and extended to taxi operators. If you wanted your caretaker to keep an eye on your apartment while you were away, a little *baksheesh* would make him go that extra mile. If you maintained a regular taxi driver for your trips to AAPSO meetings or to the airport, with a little *baksheesh* you got good and safe service. Just how far *baksheesh* could go was illustrated when you arrived back at the airport. Male porters were in abundance at the Cairo airport. The first man took your suitcase from the carousel and put it down. The next one took it to the Customs official; the next one took it to the Immigration desk; the next one to the exit; the next one to the taxi; and finally you paid the taxi driver when he drove you to your destination. All the people in this chain must get their *baksheesh*. If you tried to cut this chain short, your luggage could suddenly "get lost" somewhere. However, as Mr Dessouky put it, it was after all not much to spend in order to ensure the safety of your luggage while simultaneously spreading the crumbs around.

Meeting Colonel Gaddafi

In 1973, a few years after the former king of Libya, King Idris, was given refuge in Egypt, the new ruler of Libya, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, convened a meeting of African Liberation Movements (ALM) just outside Tripoli. There were the known ALMs recognised by UN Agencies, and also clandestine groups from independent states like Sudan, Chad, Malawi and others. All the liberation movements with offices at the African Association in Cairo were represented. I was joined by Thami Sindelo (John) from the ANC office in Algiers. Victor Mayekiso of the PAC also had a colleague with him.

The venue, outside Tripoli, was a huge marquee that easily accommodated three hundred people. We were all seated on cushions. Colonel Gaddafi, who preferred to be called Brother Leader rather than President, gave an hour-long lecture on what Africa needed to do to liberate itself from foreign powers. He cited certain countries from West and East Africa who had already achieved their liberation because they had adopted the correct ideology and faith. Then, referring to South Africa, he said that we could have obtained freedom long ago if we had discarded colonial religions and adopted the true religion of Africa – Islam.

At the end of the lecture Brother Leader went around, meeting the various delegations. When he came to our delegation, after a short exchange of pleasantries, I mentioned that we were keen to know more about how we could achieve our objective of a free South Africa by adopting a specific religious faith. Brother Leader did not bother to give arguments for his position. He simply repeated that we were mentally enslaved by foreign beliefs and would not be free until we saw the light.

The PAC delegation was nearby. Victor did not beat about the bush. He stated authoritatively that the PAC had plans to build mosques in South Africa so that people could know about the true African religion. All they needed was funding to develop the project. Victor was given a white envelope. We later learned that a number of delegations who said the “right thing” were rewarded with a white envelope. We, of course, got nothing.

On this occasion Colonel Gaddafi also launched his “Little Green Book”, which set out his political philosophy. This was intended as a guide to personal behaviour and principles of conduct in society. It was partly modelled on Chairman Mao Tse Tung’s “Little Red Book”, which explained to the Chinese people the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party. The “Little Green Book”, however, was structured along the lines of the Koran and was pedagogic, with simple philosophical sentences.

Work at AAPSO

The Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) was born at the Bandung Conference of 1955 in Indonesia. Its aim was to co-ordinate the decolonisation process in Africa and Asia through concrete action. Moreover, the intention was that it would begin to create a strong block of developing countries (the so-called Non-Aligned Movement) to promote mutual trade and economic assistance. AAPSO operated at the level of ruling parties who had successfully led their countries out of colonial shackles into freedom. The member-countries stretched from Indonesia, through Indo-China to the Middle East and into North, West, East and Central Africa. Three political hotspots united AAPSO members: the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation; the bulwark of African colonial domination in South Africa; and the fearless resistance of the Vietnamese people against American imperialism, dubbed the "international gendarme".

The structure and operational style of AAPSO was quite different from that of WFDY. The AAPSO Secretariat was headed by the President, Mr Youssef el Sebai. He was from the corps of Egyptian Army officers that had successfully liberated the Suez Canal from British and French occupation in 1956. Thus AAPSO had direct access to the highest echelons of power in Egypt. Most of the work was done by Mr El Sebai's Deputy, Mr Kamal Bahar el Din, and the Chief Administrator, Mr Shawky. The Secretary General was Mr Nouri el Razzak of Iraq. He had vast experience as former Secretary General of the International Union of Students (IUS). Other members were from India, Palestine, Guinea and South Africa. There were Associate Members from the Soviet Union (Soviet Solidarity Committee) represented by Mr Samandar Kalandarov from the Asiatic Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan. He was part of the diplomatic staff at the Soviet Embassy. The German Democratic Republic's (GDR) Solidarity Committee was represented by Mr Stanger, also a diplomat in the GDR Embassy.

The meetings of the AAPSO Secretariat were held on Fridays, and were chaired by Mr El Sebai.⁹⁶ The Chairman (dubbed President in keeping with the French interpretation) would walk into the meeting after everybody else was seated. He would then read out each item on the agenda together with a decision that had been taken on the matter. The presence of the President was both authoritative and ceremonial. After reading each item with the relevant decision, he would bang the hammer to signal "Agreed!" It was the most efficient form of conducting meetings I have ever witnessed. But there was more to this efficiency: Fridays are like Sundays in the Muslim world. Meetings were scheduled for 10 am and they had to come to an end at around 11 am to afford Muslims time to reach Mosque before noon.

The AAPSO Secretariat organised Solidarity Conferences on various topics in different countries, about two in each continent per year. AAPSO Conferences took place once every four years. In between there were delegations to member countries either to gather information on developments or to request hosting of an event already in the programme for the coming year. I participated in delegations that visited Liberia, where we met with President Tubman, and Sierra Leone, where we were received by President Siaka Stevens. Our visit to Conakry in Guinea (Sekou Toure) coincided with a state visit by Idi Amin. I sat directly behind him at one of Sekou Toure's fiery rallies. I also went to conferences in Iraq and Syria. At the AAPSO conferences the oppression of black South Africans under apartheid rule was an important item on the agenda, as was the oppression of Palestinians by the Israeli regime in the Middle East. At this time Israel had a strong lobby in some African countries and as a result AAPSO representatives from these countries were not prepared to draw analogies between the Israeli treatment of Palestinians and the injustices meted out by the apartheid regime in South Africa.

The Yom Kippur War

On 6 October 1973 Egyptian and Syrian forces launched a co-ordinated attack against the Israeli forces on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. While the so-called "Yom Kippur War" ended in a United Nations-brokered ceasefire on 25 October, the Egyptians had considerable success early in the conflict and ultimately regained some of the territory lost during the 1967 "Six Day War". This was a great victory for the Egyptians, who were inspired to increase their support for the liberation cause of the Palestinians and South Africa. I recall that immediately after the skirmish there was a state of heightened security, with a curfew from 6 pm to 6 am. At night there were blackouts and street lights were switched off.

It was around this time that my Deputy sadly lost his wife, Mary, who had succumbed to an illness. I agreed to go to the mortuary to identify her body. A grim sight awaited me. Rows and rows of charred bodies, their faces blackened and unidentifiable, lay on the mortuary floor. The stench was unbearable. These were Egyptian soldiers from the front, who had been killed by Israeli Napalm bombs. It was a harsh reminder of the price of victory.

The PLO Amman Conference

My most remarkable and memorable visit as an AAPSO representative was to the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) Conference in Amman, Jordan in 1973,

not long after the Yom Kippur War. The Palestinian representative at AAPSO had conveyed an invitation from Yasser Arafat to Oliver Tambo. I was assigned to take Mr Tambo's message to the PLO Conference, which stressed the commonality of the anti-apartheid struggle and the Palestinian struggle against Israeli oppression.

I flew from Cairo to Amman in Jordan and then travelled in a Land Rover with a military escort. We arrived at night and were lodged in a safe house. The night before the conference I slept in what was clearly a PLO camp. The next morning one could see armed cadres who provided security. The essence of urban guerrilla warfare is to use the civilian population as "the bush". The Palestinian cadres were very friendly and taught me how to take apart and assemble the automatic rifle known as the AK-47. For them the PLO and the ANC were comrades-in-arms.

While I appreciated the complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict, I was surprised to hear from my Palestinian comrades that they considered half of the Jordanian kingdom to be part of Palestine (West Bank). They asserted that more than half of the Jordanian population was Palestinian. Of course the whole world would like to see a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but their contested ancient history does not simplify matters. Indeed in 1973 it was still too early to talk of a two-state solution; that is, a state of Israel and a state of Palestine, living side by side in peace. I recall one of my PLO comrades telling me about a film produced in the Middle East titled *Goliath and David*, about the biblical combat between the young Israelite boy David, later King David, and Goliath, giant warrior of the Philistines. In the Bible story, David kills Goliath with a slingshot and then beheads him. The Arab-produced film had a different outcome: Goliath defeated David, but saved his life.

At the PLO conference I listened to messages of solidarity from most of the Arab countries as well as other Palestinian organisations, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine led by *Abbas*, known for conducting aeroplane hijackings during that period. There were young delegates who reported that they had grown up in Palestinian refugee camps and had not known their parents. All they wanted was to fight Israel to regain their land and birthright. I had a chance to talk with one of the senior members of *Al Fatah* about the support given to the Palestinian organisations, especially the PLO, by various Arab governments. The allocation was annual and a certain percentage of the national budget (from 0.1 to 0.5 percent). The senior official did not deny this, but said, "We may have the resources, but you South Africans have a major advantage over us. You have a country and you have a clear majority in a clearly defined territory. We are still fighting to get our rightful territory restored to us." It was an important lesson, which boosted my morale and that of my comrades at the ANC Headquarters when I reported back on the Amman conference.

1973 Youth Festivals

The Pan-African Youth Movement (PAYM) based in Algiers convinced its member organisations to link a Pan African Youth Festival (PAYF) to the tenth World Festival of Youth and Students scheduled for July 1973 in East Berlin, German Democratic Republic (GDR). The PAYF was scheduled for early July in Tunis. Sponsors were found to support the PAYF by funding the transportation of the African delegations from Tunis to East Berlin and back. It was an impressive co-operation between the PAYM and the WFDY.

I was instructed to join the ANC Youth delegation in Tunis and proceed with them to East Berlin. In Tunis I became assistant to Anthony Mongalo, who had come with the South African team from the ANC Headquarters in Lusaka. In Berlin the South African delegation almost doubled in number, augmented by delegates from London and our students in East and West Germany. During the proceedings I noticed increased interest in the anti-apartheid cause on the part of the participants from various countries and a strong sense of solidarity with South African comrades in the struggle. This was partly because the early Seventies had seen intense advancement of the liberation struggle in Portuguese Africa, especially in Guinea Bissau and the Cape Verde islands. By 1973 PAIGC (the Portuguese acronym for “African Party for the Independence of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde”) had declared independence, with Portugal still formally there.⁹⁷ Our comrades from the sister liberation movements were busy preparing to go home and we were full of excitement for them. The focus of the international community was inevitably shifting to Southern Africa – Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa.

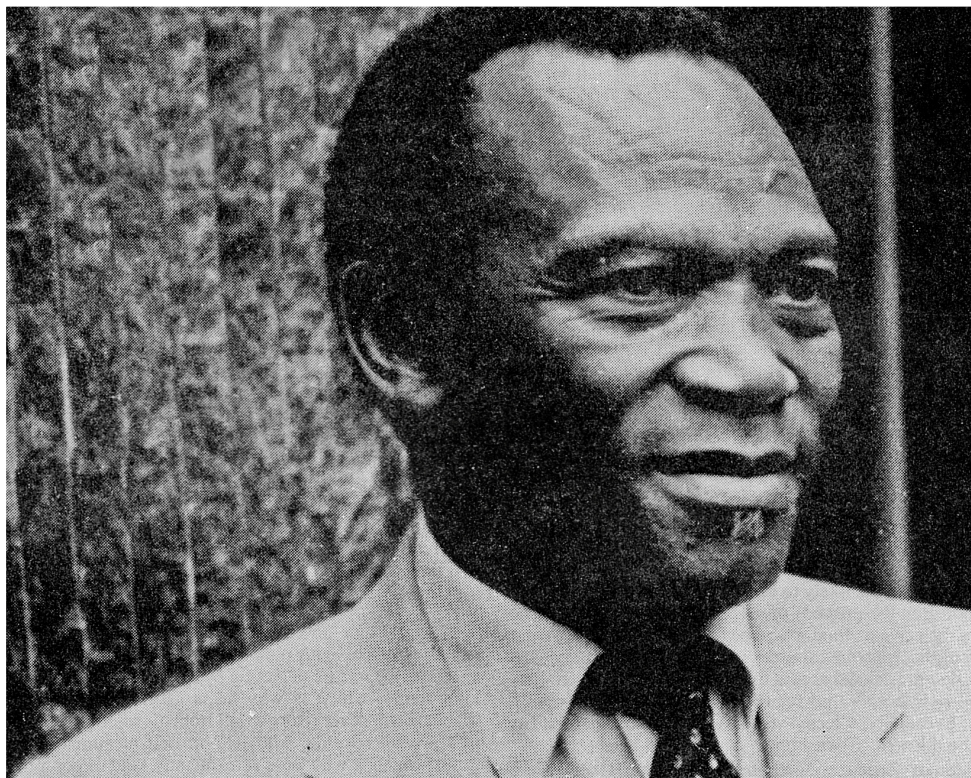
The buoyant mood among our comrades from Portuguese Africa helped to lift the spirits of our own militants and combatants. This was the first time that cadres from the military wing of the ANC (twenty-five strong) had participated in an international cultural festival. It was wonderful to see them performing the Gumboot Dance and the majestic Zulu Warrior Dance – *Indlamu*. The costumes for the *Indlamu* were not the traditional animal skins, but did convey a sense of warriors on the attack. For the Gumboot Dance they wore multi-coloured denim trousers, T-shirts and gumboots. The only woman in the dance group, called Jacqueline, became the star attraction for doing the physical stamp dance just as well as the men.⁹⁸

Not long after the Festival, on 25 April 1974, a military coup in Lisbon brought an end to the outdated regime. After this change in the political climate, Portugal withdrew from Africa unconditionally. It was around this time that the UN High Commissioner for Namibia, Sean McBride, paid a lightning visit to the African

Association in Cairo. He was already advanced in age, yet incredibly agile and sparkly. He outlined a timetable for liberation of the remaining African territories, warning us that we needed to start preparing to govern our countries. He also gave us assurances that UN member states would provide funds to establish a training facility for future Namibian civil servants. This was to ensure qualitative change in the region.

Back home to Southern Africa

Within a few months of McBride's auspicious visit, in the second half of 1974, I handed over to the new ANC representative, Mr Joseph Nhlanhla, and prepared to proceed to the ANC Headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia. Rita and Nikita would follow four months later. The way back home to Southern Africa had been circuitous, but it certainly seemed that fate or providence had had a hand in the whole saga. It was as if I was being afforded an opportunity to gain useful experience in preparation for what was awaiting me nearer home. My studies in the USSR had given me knowledge and practical understanding of various aspects of politico-economic activity. I had a global picture of what was entailed in building and administering countries that had been under colonial domination. Moreover, I had been exposed to the role and tasks of mobilising national youth organisations to support their political parties and prepare for future governance. I had also experienced interaction with ruling political parties in Africa and Asia and had learnt of the enormous challenges they faced in mobilising the national human and material resources for economic development. It seemed to me that this was all part of my preparation for the work and tasks ahead. I was excited about getting nearer home and taking up my new role at the ANC Headquarters. I had a feeling that I would have something valuable to contribute in the final stages of the struggle for the liberation of my people and my country.



Johnny Makatini, ANC Representative to the United Nations. Lusaka, 1988.

Chapter 12

Zambia 1974 – 1986

During the early 1960s Tanzania provided the main transit military bases for the liberation movements of Southern African countries, including Angola, Mozambique, Southern Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe), South West Africa (later Namibia) and South Africa. The basic training was provided by the few African countries that had already gained their freedom, and that had the political will and means to do so. These were Egypt and Algeria as well as Ethiopia (formerly known as Abyssinia). Morocco, Tunis and later Libya provided a variety of armaments that were sent to Tanzania and allocated by the OAU Liberation Committee to the respective guerrilla forces of the liberation movements. Libya also provided military training. However, the all-embracing military and intelligence training was mainly provided by socialist countries in Europe and Asia, spearheaded by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

In the late 1960s Zambia (which had achieved independence from Britain on 24 October 1974) joined Tanzania as a conduit of personnel and weaponry to the Southern Africa countries. In 1971, when ANC-trained soldiers had to leave Tanzania, they scattered into small "civilian" units across Zambia until Angola provided camps after 1975.⁹⁹ It was crucial that in Zambia, as in Tanzania, there should be no easily identifiable military camps that could be targeted by the racist regimes in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. Even in Lusaka the MK cadres mingled with the local population in normal houses.

On arrival in Lusaka in July 1974 I was taken to the ANC's underground residence (referred to by the ANC cadres as Gonakudzingwa¹⁰⁰) in Makeni, south-west of Lusaka. The residence accommodated not only MK cadres, but also some staff and security from the ANC political office which, at the time, operated from the Liberation Centre, located outside the Lusaka Central Business District (CBD), in a township called Kamwala. The area of Makeni had agricultural smallholdings and Gonakudzingwa, with its large garden plots, merged easily with the neighbouring agricultural properties.

It was nourishment for the soul to be back in Southern Africa, closer to my mother country than I had been in nearly fourteen years, and I was heartened by the comradely spirit at Gonakudzingwa. Everybody was ready to help in whatever way they could and soon made me feel at home. Before long I was introduced to the comrades in the various ANC residences in Lusaka. Some I had met at the Youth

Festivals in Sofia, Bulgaria (1968) and in East Berlin (1973), but even those I had not previously met treated me as one of them. They must have been informed in advance that I was a member of the first nine to go to the Soviet Union in January 1962. (The other eight had, after completion of studies in the USSR, been integrated into MK).

My first day of work was similarly heartening. I had been appointed as Administrative Secretary in the Office of the ANC Secretary General, Mr Alfred Nzo, under whom I had worked at Macosa House in 1961, thirteen years previously. I had had occasion to meet with Mr Nzo (now called Comrade SG, for "Secretary General") during my years of service in Hungary and Egypt. Now we would be working side by side again. As I walked into Comrade SG's office at the Liberation Centre, I felt I was back where I belonged. I quickly settled into my new work environment, routinely acknowledging mail received and preparing draft responses, which Comrade SG either perused and approved or edited. This he did daily, either in the mornings or late afternoons.

With the official ANC Headquarters now in Lusaka, the bulk of the National Executive Committee members were based there. Among them were Oliver Tambo (President); Thomas Nkobi (Treasurer General); Duma Nokwe (Deputy Secretary General and Head of Radio Freedom); Joe Modise (Chief Commander of MK); Johnny Makatini (ANC representative to the United Nations); Josiah Jele (Head of International Relations); Thabo Mbeki (Head of Information); Sizakele Sigxashe and Siphso Makana (Security and Intelligence). They had their offices in different houses known only to those who had business there. Only the supplies offices were known to all, including locals. My "boss" was in and out of his office, attending meetings at various undisclosed venues.

It is fitting that I give a picture of the man I would be working with, on and off, from this point until our return to South Africa. Mr Alfred Nzo had been a practising health inspector in Alexandra Township before he became the ANC Administrative Secretary under Walter Sisulu and later Duma Nokwe. He was proud of his phenomenal memory for telephone numbers. During quiet breaks he would say to me, "Sindiso, don't bother to look it up in the book; I can tell you any of the numbers that we have to deal with in our office." I recall Robert Resha rushing in and saying, "Get me Sonia Bunting's number at *New Age* in Cape Town," (or some similar request) and Mr Nzo would recite it to him off the top of his head. (Robert Resha was among the last forty in the Treason Trial and had covered the trial for *New Age* magazine.)

Mr Nzo was the very embodiment of optimism. He never allowed adversity to depress him. He always saw the bright and humorous side of life and events. He

enjoyed telling us stories from the 1952 Defiance Campaign, which he described as a risky venture into the unknown. To “defy the unjust laws” meant taking action against the existing laws and municipal regulations. Public amenities like parks, railway stations, banks and post offices had special segregated facilities – doors or seats for example – for Blacks and Whites. In the bigger cities where there was constant media coverage, the police were more restrained, but in the smaller towns or peri-urban areas they unleashed the full might of their authority, using sjamboks and kicks to get one into the police vans called “pick-ups”.

The campaign was carried out in a planned and systematic manner. Groups of “volunteers” were selected for specific targets, usually in the morning when police were concentrating on Influx Control. In keeping with African tradition, if you were going into battle, you needed to be “strengthened”. The medicine man or traditional healer took charge of this part of the operation. Close to midnight, at a chosen venue, the volunteers would assemble. These were strictly all male and had to be stark naked five seconds before the strengthening rites commenced. Naked and in single file they hopped into mid-air when they reached the medicine man, who dutifully whipped them (whilst in the air) with tied branches soaked with “medicine”. The exercise was brisk, with a switch and war-cry every second. Bra Nzo was at the tail end, and with every “swish” sound of the switch he was close to sniggering. By the time his turn came, he was on his knees with laughter. The switch was applied to his prone torso, as the warriors would not go into battle with a clean, “unlucky” and “uncured” Jonah.

However, beneath Alfred Nzo’s benign countenance he had nerves of steel. For instance, in the late 1970s, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast declared unilaterally that he would meet with the apartheid government in South Africa. He would seek to persuade them to abandon apartheid and adopt a fair position with regard to the black South African population. The ANC National Executive reacted with a stinging resolution condemning in no uncertain terms all attempts by individuals to act as substitutes for the oppressed and fighting masses of South Africa. The resolution stopped short of labelling such intentions as treachery to the African cause.

Alfred Nzo, as leader of the ANC delegation to Ivory Coast, had to read the resolution at a meeting of the cabinet of Ivory Coast which had been specially convened by President Boigny. The valiant Nzo read the statement and awaited a counter-accusation of treachery from the President. After an electric silence, the President thanked him for the message and said that his cabinet would seriously consider the contents and respond accordingly. There was no written response; instead the planned trip to South Africa was cancelled.

Finding my bearings and making friends

As in other countries where there was an ANC community, the ANC office was headed by the ANC Chief Representative in charge of political organisation and administration. In Zambia this post was held by Mrs Gertrude Shope, wife of my adviser during my early days as a youth representative in Hungary. Mark Shope was now operating as the Secretary General of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Jacqueline Molefe, better known as Jackie, was an MK cadre and the official chauffeur and assistant to the Chief Representative.¹⁰¹ She was available for any mission that required her services, as long as it was cleared by the Chief Representative. In the first few days after my arrival Jackie introduced me to all the places I needed to know, taking me along on many of her official trips. The ANC Treasury office was in Lilanda, a township where many ANC families lived. Here I was delighted to reconnect with Mrs Nokwe – Sis’Tiny – my original hostess in Johannesburg. I had met her briefly during the Youth Festival in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1968, but could now look forward to having more time to catch up. Next Jackie introduced me to the Supplies Man, known as Awolo, the lifeline for any of our personal needs, and to the personal typist to ANC President Oliver Tambo, known as Ramafatse or Manyanzela. He took over from Jackie in introducing me to other localities where there were ANC cadres. Soon, with Ramafatse’s help, I was able to find my way around on foot. We could not afford public transport. We walked from one end of town to the other.

Manyanzela and I became firm friends. We stayed at the same Makeni residence, worked at the same Liberation Centre office and took our lunch together at a nearby Zambian home specialising in delicious home-made tripe. The taste took me back to Noupoot, where some enterprising women would supplement their income by selling delicious cooked tripe (*inqwema*) for about 50 cents per cup. At lunchtime some of the younger, unmarried railway employees would walk from work to get their tripe with bread slices.

I was amused to discover the origin of Ramafatse’s nickname, Manyanzela. He was a speed touch-typist who referred to his work as “*umnyanzelo*”, meaning “pushing” the typewriter buttons. The name “Manyanzela” stuck, and he seemed unphased that it carried connotations of other activities like eating and even mating. On weekend evenings the two of us, together with a comrade called Eli Maroga, would visit a nearby dance club known as “Tiyeni”. There was a resident Congolese band specialising in Congolese music sung to a “rumba” beat. Eli was remarkable in that he was the first African I had ever met who was friendly with snakes. And there were snakes in abundance in Zambia. Just outside our residence yard, Eli had a single-

room “wendy house”. He did not bother to lock it, but nobody dared to go there. Where other people relied on dogs to keep thieves away, Eli had one or two snakes to secure his humble abode.¹⁰²

While the Makeni residence accommodated some MK cadres, others were scattered in residences in various Lusaka townships, another security measure to avoid a central place that would be known to the community and the enemy. These residences had communal dormitory, dining and ablution facilities and there were weekly supplies of meat and vegetables that came from a farm outside Lusaka. The ANC gave MK cadres a monthly allowance of around fourteen Kwacha (in the 1970s a Kwacha was equivalent to a dollar, which had the same value then as a rand). This allowance was referred to as a “smoking allowance”, but comrades were obviously free to use it for whatever they needed. As the Zambian government saw the freedom fighters as people in transit on their way home, there was no question of them seeking paid work, even if they had the skills. They could not be seen to be competing for jobs with the local population. The ANC and other liberation movements accepted these conditions and were grateful for the basic facilities afforded to them. They ensured control over their cadres and made sure that they did not disturb the lives of the local citizens, but rather built warm relationships with the people in the areas where they lived.

Families of ANC members engaged in full-time ANC work also received a weekly supply of meat and vegetables that was distributed through a market stall run by a South African woman – Margaret Lungu. Like MK cadres, these full-time ANC members received a monthly allowance of 14 Kwacha. The ANC did not have sufficient funds to provide individual or family housing for all ANC members. The partners and wives of even the ANC leadership had to get jobs in order to provide for their family’s accommodation and to cover school fees, transport and other such expenses. Mrs Adelaide Tambo (wife of the ANC President, Oliver Tambo) was a nurse in London and was able to provide for these basic necessities. Mrs Nzo, Mrs Nokwe and Mrs Nkobi, the wives of the Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General, and the Treasurer General respectively, also took jobs to help support their families. Mrs Nzo and Mrs Nkobi were both nursing sisters. Mrs Nokwe, a graduate of Fort Hare, was a teacher at Matero Girls Secondary School.

There were several middle-class South African families in Lusaka who were quietly supportive of the ANC, even if they were not card-carrying ANC members. This greatly assisted the movement when there were important or unexpected visitors who needed board and lodging. I recall that a few elderly officials were accommodated by such ANC supporters working in Zambia as expatriates. There were also a few

Zambians who had studied at Fort Hare and had married South African women.¹⁰³ Most of them occupied important positions in the Zambian government. These middle-class friends of the liberation struggle were very supportive of the freedom fighters and would take turns to entertain MK cadres during the festive season.

Rita's employment and our new home

Rita and Nikita arrived in Lusaka on 24 October 1974, the tenth anniversary of Zambia's independence. It was wonderful to see them again and particularly to be able to introduce them to my old ANC comrades. Arrangements had already been made to accommodate them in Kalomo, an hour's drive from Livingstone, for a few weeks. (In Kalomo a seasoned MK mechanic named Pat Long had a workshop where he serviced military trucks used for infiltration of guerrillas into Southern Rhodesia via the Zambezi river or Botswana.) I accompanied my family to Kalomo, but soon had to return to Lusaka. Fortunately they were well looked after in my absence. On a visit to Livingstone they met the South Africans Vera and George Poonen – another "mixed couple", Vera being white and George of Indian origin. They were very kind and I appreciated the way they made Rita and Nikita feel at home.

A few weeks later, when accommodation arrangements had been made, they were able to join me in Lusaka. Mrs Shope advised that in order for my family to qualify for ANC subsistence, Rita should be formally registered as a member of the ANC. Rita willingly fulfilled this requirement. In fact, she was more than ready for it; for her it was a mere formality. Over the previous ten years she had learnt all she could about the ANC and the situation in South Africa.

One of the secretaries in the ANC office, Neva, had a sister, Judy Seidman, an artist who worked mainly from home. Judy produced material for anti-apartheid posters and cartoons.¹⁰⁴ In 1978 she published a book of her cartoons under the title *Ba Ye Zwa* (The People Live). She and her husband, a lecturer at the University of Zambia (UNZA), were staying on the university premises. Judy kindly arranged that we stay at a university flat belonging to friends of hers who were on holiday. We spent three weeks there, during which time Rita obtained a contract with the Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation (ZESCO). The Managing Director of ZESCO, Mr Abel Mkandawire, had completed his degree in Electrical Engineering in the Soviet Union, and fully understood the value of Rita's qualifications. We were given company accommodation, a semi-detached house within walking distance of the company offices, and Rita started working in February 1975.¹⁰⁵ In January Nikita, who had gone as far as Standard 4 in Cairo, began Standard 5 at Lusaka Boys School.

Family life in Lusaka

Our ZESCO company house was three-bedroomed, with a spacious lounge and kitchen and a small dining room sufficient for a six-seater table. In front was a porch, which was ideal for relaxation and entertainment in summer. At the back we had a veranda, which came in handy for entertainment as well as children's activities.

Nikita quickly settled into his new primary school and was comfortable with English as the medium of instruction. He made friends easily and began to pick up the local Nyanja language. As quickly as he learnt the Nyanja language, he forgot Arabic. Like other children born and raised in exile, Nikita was very adaptable. However, like the children of our ANC comrades, he did not have a strong sense of cultural identity or belonging. This was a typical exchange when our children met with the locals.

Local: "I see you don't understand Nyanja very well. Where do you come from?"

South African: "I come from South Africa."

Local: "Great! How is South Africa?"

South African: "Actually I don't know. I have never been there."

Local: "That is sad. Don't worry, you are at home here."

In 1975, around New Year, we were invited to what was an annual event of the South African community. The gathering took place at a farm owned by Mr Humphrey Langa and his wife Rebecca. They had been my seniors at Fort Hare. Mr Langa was now the principal of Evelyn Hone College. Noticing how the children kept themselves occupied while the adults enjoyed the party, Rita came up with the idea of an organised children's programme during the school holidays. The idea was inspired by the holiday camps she had attended as a child in the Soviet Union. There children spent half of their two-month school holiday in summer camps, which were educational as well as fun. Children from different regions would exchange their experiences of the places they came from and this way would learn more about their country. They would organise themselves into groups to complete the chores that needed to be done at the camp and would undertake guided walks in the forest to learn about nature conservation, plants and animals.

A short while after the gathering at the Langas' farm, Rita visited South African families with children of school-going age and put forward her idea. It was enthusiastically supported by all the mothers and was the beginning of what later became known as the ANC Pioneers or *Masupatsela*.¹⁰⁶ The programme of activities was organised by the ANC Women's Section and specifically designed to foster a sense of identity and belonging in our children. With the promotion of the

ANC Pioneer activities, the South African children gradually gained confidence in themselves. They learnt more about their country and were able to talk about what was happening in South Africa as if they had been there.

From small beginnings, *Masupatsela* grew into an important annual programme for South African children with close links to Pioneer organisations in the socialist countries.¹⁰⁷ These countries were interested to invite the ANC Pioneers to meet their counterparts. The first invitation was from Pioneer organisations of the Soviet Union in 1977. Six children (four from Zambia and two from Tanzania) were invited to the Pioneer Summer Camp in Artek in the Crimea, where Florence Nightingale worked as a volunteer nurse during the Crimean War. The report of this delegation served as a guide on what kind of preparations were necessary and what would be of interest to children in Europe and elsewhere. The South African Pioneers had to be prepared to explain why they were living outside their country and to answer questions about the lives of black South African children living under apartheid. They also had to explain what it meant for their parents to be involved in the anti-apartheid struggle. They learned to narrate the story of their lives in poetry and song and practised the South African traditional dances as well as the popular miners' dance, the "Gumboot Dance".¹⁰⁸

Meanwhile Rita followed the educational progress of our own young Pioneer and made sure that he did his homework diligently, providing tuition when necessary. All credit for Nikita's good performance goes to Rita. Moreover, throughout the period of his schooling, it was Rita who provided him with the basic necessities: food, clothing, school books and stationery. She also transported him wherever he needed to be. Nikita gradually understood that I was involved in some kind of important work for which I was not paid. He had a ringside seat to the life of a freedom fighter. Nevertheless he always showed respect and as he grew older he developed a better understanding of why I could not be a traditional breadwinner.

After passing primary school as one of the school's top achievers, Nikita was offered the choice of attending Hillcrest Technical Boarding School in Livingstone, about four hundred kilometres from Lusaka. Hillcrest was a prestigious school and we were happy to assent to his wish to go there. However, he became homesick and unhappy as a full boarder and after six months we arranged for him to be transferred back to Lusaka. He was then enrolled at the famous David Kaunda Technical School in Lusaka and was allowed to come home on weekends. At boarding school he grew to like Zambian staple foods such as the hard porridge called *nshima*, eaten with meat and vegetables.

Besides his stellar academic performance, he was also keen on sports. He had already started swimming in Egypt and showed talent from an early age. At the age of fifteen he was the backstroke champion at the inter-school competition in Lusaka. We learned of his prowess in sport only when he was mentioned on the sports page of a local newspaper! Naturally we were keen to see him, but he insisted that our presence would distract him. On one occasion we secretly went to the school during an inter-school competition and had to creep around to avoid contact with him. It was gratifying to see his performance, but we never told him about it. We later realised that this was part of the “macho” upbringing for boys; to have his mother around would have made him an object of ridicule by his peers.

Political activities

By the time of our move to Zambia the racist South African and Rhodesian regimes had embarked on a violent campaign to annihilate liberation movements based in the country, using tactics such as letter bombs and other unconventional forms of assassination. Just before my arrival a letter bomb had exploded in the ANC office, killing John Dube (Mveve) and injuring Max Sisulu. In early 1975, on the instruction of President Kaunda, the Zambian authorities announced a dusk to dawn curfew and put the Liberation Centre where we worked under the control of the Ministry of Defence. This action was in effect a defence of the sovereignty of the Zambian state. From then on only the Chief Representative, Mrs Gertrude Shope, was allowed to operate from the Liberation Centre. Other ANC structures had to find premises elsewhere. The same applied to the liberation movements from South West Africa and Southern Rhodesia who, prior to 1975, also had modest offices in the Liberation Centre from where they could co-ordinate their activities with the Zambian Defence Force. When the Liberation Centre became an exclusively Zambian defence post, all the liberation movements were allowed to operate political offices at separate, publicly known venues within the city of Lusaka, while military activities went underground.¹⁰⁹

From the mid-1970s, after Mozambique had gained her independence, the Rhodesian army was determined to annihilate Zimbabwean freedom movements. I recall Rhodesian planes flying low over Lusaka streets and hurling out leaflets urging Zambians to chase from their country “terrorists who finish your mealie-meal”. I visited one of the ZAPU camps on a farm outside Lusaka shortly after a group of schoolchildren had been bombed there. These were children who had run away from the “protected villages” of Ian Smith in Rhodesia. I witnessed ambulances with screaming sirens rushing the wounded to the University Teaching Hospital. In response to these bombings the Zambian government requested its own citizens

to donate blood. I was humbled by the queues of Zambians who heeded the government's call to help out in this way.

Throughout this period the Zambian authorities enacted strict curfews from dusk to dawn on all civilians. The ANC also issued "Alerts", advising their members not to sleep at their normal lodgings and MK freedom fighters would sometimes arrive unexpectedly at our house for the night. We cemented the sharp ends of broken bottles along the top of the garden walls, as a deterrent to any intruder. Using empty sacks to jump over the glass surfaces, we would practise fast evacuation exercises in case we had to desert the house suddenly. We supplemented these efforts with our own patrols. There had been a few instances where locals had been bribed to guide agents of the Rhodesian regime to the houses where underground freedom fighters were staying.

New areas of work

As I have mentioned, following the decision of the Zambian government to Zambianise the Liberation Centre in 1975, the liberation movements had to find their own premises. Finding alternative offices was not a simple matter. So while the search was still going on, those who had been working at the Liberation Centre had to be engaged elsewhere. Early in 1975 I was asked to assist at Radio Freedom, which had been allocated one of the studios at the Zambia Broadcasting Services following an agreement between the ANC leadership and the Zambian government in 1974. I drafted and delivered weekly programmes in Xhosa under the pseudonym "Xaba". The programme manager was Duma Nokwe and the producer was Cassius Make. Duma gave political feature items and commentaries. Cassius ensured that there was commentary on current issues relating to South Africa, prepared in rotation in the African languages. Lindiwe Mabuza had a special feature entitled, "Culture and the People". She also reported on current events in Zulu.

At Radio Freedom all of us who reported in an African language focused on our own language Bantustans. It was inevitable that Lindiwe was hard-hitting on Inkatha and the Chief Minister of KwaZulu, Gatsha Buthelezi. Allegedly the Chief took the recordings of Lindiwe's diatribe to OR Tambo in London, on one of his trips. A troika of OR, Joe Modise and Duma Nokwe gave their views on the matter. OR felt the criticism was not opportune. There was still room to wean Gatsha away from apartheid. Joe had a similar opinion, but for different reasons: the MK cadres were being infiltrated from Mozambique through the KwaZulu Bantustan. There was no need to antagonise Gatsha at this stage. It was Duma who said, "Right on, go the whole hog. He is not a friend of the ANC!"

While the ANC was scouting for suitable offices, the mayor of Lusaka, who also had a private business, allowed the ANC to use his business office in the town centre. There was room for only one administrator and secretary, which meant that I would need to find alternative employment. I decided to do a refresher course under the "Southern African Team for Employment Promotion" (SATEP) for a period of three months. When it appeared that my services were not yet required, I approached Mr Makhunga W. Njobe, who was Dean at the Natural Resources Development College (NRDC). After consultations Mr Njobe confirmed that the NRDC was prepared to use me on a temporary basis.

I was offered a lectureship in agricultural economics for a three-month period while the designated new lecturer was winding up his affairs abroad.¹¹⁰ With my wife's help and encouragement (though she had studied in Russian, she was able to work in the medium of English) I spent sleepless nights preparing my notes. And I managed. At the end of the three months there were exams and my students did quite well, to the surprise of my senior lecturer.

The news that I was "working outside the ANC" reached the President, Mr Tambo, and he instructed that I return to work as Administrative Secretary in the Office of the Secretary General at the newly-opened ANC offices. The new ANC offices were located in the CBD of Lusaka at the back of Cha-cha-cha Road. Entrance was from an alley used mainly for goods deliveries for the shops on Cha-cha-cha Road. There were high walls and zinc gates and official security guards controlled the entry and exit into the office yard. Inside were offices for the President (Oliver Tambo), the Secretary General (Alfred Nzo) and their staff. In the yard there was also a rest house for the security guards. The Treasury operated from an ANC furniture-making plant known as "The Star Furnitures". This was a fund-raising project for the ANC that also provided useful occupation for some of the veteran MK soldiers and was the beginning of an ANC policy of ensuring skills training for all its cadres.¹¹¹ To make sure that our expanding community was as self-sufficient as possible, the ANC had created several of its own small enterprises. Star Furnitures produced furniture for the ANC offices and supplied coffins for our departed comrades. A mechanics' workshop had been set up for the maintenance of ANC vehicles and also serviced the vehicles of some Zambian supporters. There was also the farm outside Lusaka that supplied meat and vegetables to MK cadres and ANC families. These small self-help projects were highly appreciated by the NGOs who gave material support to the ANC.

A challenge to the UNHCR

Around this time the Treasurer General, Thomas Nkobi, was to go to New York to address a session of the UNHCR. He asked me to prepare a draft statement on the issue of freedom fighters' right to UN assistance. It was taking some time for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to accept that freedom fighters deserved the same assistance they gave to refugees. The UNHCR was ready and willing to assist individual refugees coming from areas where there were liberation wars. UNHCR staff, working with local government officials, were responsible for administration, food, clothing and shelter for the refugees. The UNHCR was, however, reluctant to accord refugee status to organised formations waging liberation struggles.

I drafted a statement that would focus on the liberation movements as the agents for the elimination of refugee status. I was aware that, although liberation movements were recognised by the UN and its agencies, they were only invited to speak when all the independent countries had spoken. Their time-limit to speak at the formal UN conferences was strictly three minutes, so the statement would have to be brief. The statement read: "Give sufficient assistance to the ANC because we are fighting to ensure that there will be no more refugees from South Africa criss-crossing the globe." In essence, the speech accused agencies like the UNHCR of being self-perpetuating. They needed to have refugees in order to function. The idea was to turn the purpose of these agencies upside-down and rather to ensure that refugees returned to their home countries. The statement went on to say that UN agencies should support efforts that would put an end to a situation where people are forced to abandon their homes. I argued that it was in fact the liberation movements who could assist UN agencies like the UNHCR to fulfil their ultimate mission of a world without refugees.

On his return, the Treasurer General told me he was quite surprised by the reaction of most UN member states. They fully supported the motion to give more assistance to liberation movements. However, funding would be strictly monitored to ensure that it was not used to buy weapons.

The impact of the Soweto Uprising, 16 June 1976

In June 1976 we received the devastating news of the South African students killed in the Soweto uprising, when students demonstrating peacefully against the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in local schools met with brutal

police retaliation. This resulted in widespread political revolt and some reports put the figure at close to 2000 dead countrywide. Many of the young people who had taken part in the uprising managed to escape the country and used routes through Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique and Botswana to reach the ANC Headquarters. They arrived at our offices with first-hand accounts of the massacre of their schoolmates, relatives and friends. They also had terrible stories to tell about the treatment of people in the Bantustans. Sustained by the "humanism" of Dr David Kaunda and the Zambian people, the ANC redoubled its efforts to mobilise international support to overthrow the apartheid regime.

In the aftermath of the 1976 students' uprising, education was a high priority. The mass exodus of young pupils and students from South Africa into neighbouring states had presented us with a serious challenge.¹¹² These young people were eager to strike back at the regime, but they were vulnerable and sometimes politically naïve. The Movement realised that the best way to harness the energies and idealism of our MK cadres and young students was to create our own school. We would get our own South African teachers and educationists to produce a curriculum that was both remedial and forward-looking.¹¹³ In the meantime, however, we would need to place students in functional schools across Africa, as far away from South African borders as possible to ensure their safety.

Because the students had left the country illegally and mid-term, none of them had school reports or other documentary evidence of their grade levels. We had to prepare the necessary documentation by relying on the students' testimonies, and on this basis they were accepted into host schools across the continent. One of the most effective agencies was the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF). Zanele Mbeki, who was in the IUEF office in Africa then, literally parked in Botswana doing registration and placement of South African youth in schools in countries from Zambia through Kenya to Nigeria. Unfortunately the bulk of the students failed in the first year of their declared levels. This was not because of a lack of knowledge or effort, but a clear indication of the disastrous impact of Bantu Education. In addition to Afrikaans the students had three subjects that were not suitable for examination purposes: home economics (home cooking and cleaning), religious instruction and an African mother-tongue language. This spurred us on in our plans to establish our own ANC school, with teaching tailored to our unique educational and political needs.

Word came back to us that three countries were ready to offer space or land for an ANC school: Mozambique, Sudan and Tanzania. Mozambique was considered a security risk and Sudan was rather far, with an extremely hot climate. Tanzania was

familiar, with a climate similar to South Africa's. The Tanzanian people were hospitable and relations between the ANC and the Tanzanian government had improved. The ANC Mission in Tanzania was informed that an ANC school in the Morogoro region of Tanzania would be the best option.

Tanzania had twenty-six regions, each under a Regional Commissioner (RC). Morogoro then was under the Regional Commissioner Mama Anna Abdallah. It was the first time that a woman had been appointed to such a post. Mama Anna Abdallah was very supportive of the ANC building its school in Morogoro. She knew that the ANC Headquarters were based in Morogoro in the early 1960s and had background information about ANC activities. She was also aware that, shortly after the ANC had sent twenty-one qualified nurses to assist in the improvement of the health services in Tanzania, the ANC had been permitted to build its first military camp at a place called Kongwa in central Tanzania near Dodoma. That area was unused, undeveloped land with no roads bar the provincial road that ran through the area, a few kilometres from the site. The efficiency and hard work of the MK soldiers was impressive. Within a short time the land had been made habitable for 800 people, albeit with only tents for shelter at first. The MK soldiers cultivated the land and it did not take long for them to provide themselves with fresh vegetables.

Against this background it was not difficult to get President Nyerere's approval for a piece of land to build an ANC school. Mama Anna Abdallah requested that she be allowed to offer the maximum possible piece of land outside the attractive provincial town of Morogoro, situated at the base of the Uluguru mountains.¹¹⁴ At the first meeting she convened she took the ANC delegation to this area, known as Mazimbu. "The land for your settlement and school starts here and goes up to those mountains over there!" It was an abandoned sisal farm with five farmhouses, and covered an area of 1000 hectares. We were profoundly grateful and filled with optimism about the opportunities the new school would present for our displaced youth.

The students who failed in 1977 were taken to Morogoro, where a few teachers already on site began to organise classes to establish the educational level of the students. Formal classes at the school, named the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, began in 1979.

First ANC Students Conference abroad

(Moscow 6 – 10 August, 1977)

Following the Soweto uprising the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) made

an assessment of its impact and possible consequences. By 1977 ANC delegates to international conferences included many young people who had witnessed the massacre of their school friends and loved ones in the student uprising. Among these was a young university student, Nkosazana Dlamini, who had been a leader of the South African Students Organisation (SASO). The ANC arranged for her to address the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) as well as the General Assembly of the United Nations. Her brief was to help inform the world about the student massacres and the reasons for the uprising.

A decision was then taken by the ANC NEC to revitalise ANC student activity by convening a conference to be attended by delegates from all countries where there were significant numbers of ANC students. The event took place in Moscow from 6-10 August 1977. Delegates came from Canada, eight European countries and four African countries. In addition two delegates came directly from South Africa. The ANC bodies and alliance partners represented were the ANC Youth and Students Section from the ANC Headquarters in Lusaka (Comrade Mothobi), the ANC Women's Section (Kate Molale), the South African Congress of Trade Unions or SACTU (Comrade Hlalukana) and the South African Communist Party (Ronnie Kasrils).

I was assigned to deliver the NEC report on "Recent Events and the Way Forward". The report inspired lively discussion. The students debated the role they should play in order to accelerate the pace of the liberation struggle. Delegates shared their experiences in mobilising public support. Students from Western countries realised that the students in the socialist countries worked in a far more favourable and supportive environment. The students from socialist countries in turn came to appreciate the demands on their counterparts in the West. While concentrating on their studies they addressed meetings at various student campuses, attended rallies and demonstrations, got the local population to form anti-apartheid groups for boycotting of South African products (for example, fruit) and encouraged them to make life difficult for open supporters of apartheid.

At this time the ANC was still a politico-military organisation. While students fully supported the armed struggle, there was a strict demarcation between "soldiers" and "students". MK soldiers did not think much of students. However, it emerged at the Moscow Student's Conference that students were keen to undergo military training. A practical solution was found. When the first students completed their studies they were, at their request, allowed to take the MK oath and join the ANC army. In keeping with the maxim that "policy follows practice", it soon became ANC policy that all those who first went for studies should also undergo military training

and all those who were members of MK should also be afforded an opportunity for academic and vocational training. There was recognition of the need for a wide range of skills and professions in order to run a free, democratic South Africa. By the end of the conference, the spirit of patriotism was considerably enhanced. Participants came to appreciate that, wherever you were, you were contributing to the advance of the struggle.

Resurgence of the Struggle

On 12 January 1978 the Assistant Secretary General of the ANC, Duma Nokwe, passed away suddenly following cardiac arrest. He had just started a new weekly feature on fascism on Radio Freedom. His death was a tragic setback to the entire movement and signalled the beginning of an era of loss of experienced cadres of the ANC.

A special meeting of the NEC was held in Lusaka from 25-28 February 1978 and it opened with a moving tribute to Advocate Duma Nokwe. Discussions at the meeting focused on the reorganisation of the ANC Headquarters in response to a resurgence of the struggle to overthrow the apartheid regime in South Africa. The 1976 uprising had been a catalyst for the growth and expansion of human resources, which had been reduced to a trickle in the early 1970s.¹¹⁵ The substantial increase in numbers of motivated and impatient young people galvanised the more experienced cadres to share their knowledge and experience and they were enthused by the spirit of confidence displayed by the ANC youth. While the young ones optimistically vowed to take everybody back home in a matter of months, it would be another decade before their wishes were realised. However, nobody had time to count the months and years because there were tasks to be fulfilled.

Our focus at this time was a two-pronged resistance strategy involving a combination of MK armed actions and strikes and demonstrations by workers and civic bodies. The meeting set out to create the kind of machinery that would ensure proper attention to and action on all aspects of the struggle. The three main Offices were clearly defined and their tasks expressly stipulated. These were the Office of the President, the Office of the Secretary General and the Office of the Treasurer General. All activities were properly classified and allocated within these three Offices. The new structure was sent to all ANC centres, so that members knew who was responsible for each aspect of our work. They were also able to identify the areas where they could make meaningful contributions. The new structure helped to change attitudes. People found themselves challenged to fulfil clear tasks and there was less time for complaints. If you felt there were shortcomings in any area,

you were encouraged to propose what should be done to rectify these, and you were asked what you yourself were prepared to do.

Unfortunately this ethos of optimistic cooperation and hard work was undermined a few months after the NEC meeting, when political infighting threatened the cohesion of the organisation at a critical time. One of the outcomes of the 1969 Morogoro Conference was the reduction of the National Executive Committee of the ANC from twenty-three to eleven members. Not all the people who were affected by the reduction in numbers took kindly to this decision. Those who opposed it mounted a campaign targeting President Tambo for the decision. They also decried the influence of the South African Communist Party in ANC affairs. Matters came to a head when there was clear evidence that the disgruntled group had formed itself into a clique bent on crippling the work of the new Executive. Some of them had been instrumental in recruiting a significant number of the current cadres. This was beginning to create confusion in the ranks. When all avenues for reconciliation had failed, the group, comprising eight members, was expelled from the ANC. From then on they were referred to as the "Gang of Eight".

Rumours arose soon afterwards that Thami Mhlambiso, who had been serving as the ANC representative to the UN, was not informing the ANC membership in the US about the expulsion of the Gang of Eight, but rather distributing a memorandum issued by the Gang of Eight in response to their expulsion. Thami was recalled to the ANC Headquarters in Lusaka, but without success. I had been with Thami at Fort Hare until 1960. He had been in the leadership of the ANC Youth League. The Secretary General, Alfred Nzo, and Treasurer General, Thomas Nkobi, briefed me on the situation in New York and directed me to go there and find out why Thami was ignoring his recall to Headquarters.

We met in New York and I asked Thami to explain his reluctance to follow instructions and report back to Headquarters. His response was that he was in debt and did not have funds to buy a ticket. He assured me that if a ticket was provided, he would be on the next plane to Lusaka. He alleged that he had not received the letter of expulsion of the Gang of Eight. To demonstrate this, he took my own copy of the expulsion letter and made a photocopy. He said that he knew nothing about the memorandum from the eight questioning their expulsion. However, I managed to meet ANC members in New York who contradicted Thami's professed ignorance and confirmed that he was indeed circulating the memorandum from the Gang of Eight.

I reported back to Lusaka and a ticket was sent to Thami the following day. He did

not respond. Meanwhile, because of his excellent track record, Johnny Makatini had been appointed to head the ANC Mission at the United Nations in New York. He had worked hard and had been largely successful in lobbying African Heads of State and the United Nations. In 1979 he was sent to New York, but could not function because Thami continued to occupy the ANC seat at the UN. The Secretary General of the ANC had to send a formal letter to the UN stating that Johnny Makatini was now the accredited ANC representative to the UN. Johnny Makatini was duly accredited as such and Thami found himself alternative occupation.

Professional bodies

In mid-1978 I was part of a team that went on a three-month military officers' course in the Soviet Union.¹¹⁶ On my return the Secretary General, Mr Nzo, informed me that the National Executive had appointed me as Head of a newly-created Department of Professional Bodies within the Office of the Secretary General. My brief was to spearhead the creation of these bodies. Over the next five years I was to ensure the creation of the Departments of Education, Health, and Arts and Culture, as well as Legal and Economic Units. The creation of professional bodies within the ANC was intended to achieve two major goals. The first was to facilitate the transformation of the ANC from a politico-military organisation into a government-in-waiting. The armed struggle was not an end in itself; our members needed to be psychologically prepared for the challenges of running a country.

The second goal was mass mobilisation and recruitment of professional South Africans into the ranks of the liberation movement led by the ANC. As Secretary for Professional Bodies I saw myself as the instrument for bringing together people who needed an appropriate platform from which to contribute to the liberation struggle. Those of us who had the benefit of a tertiary education abroad had had the opportunity to interact with South Africans who had taken up posts or jobs outside South Africa. Most of these people were supporters of the ANC, but were reluctant to be under the control of the ANC. As professionals they did not like the idea of a layperson instructing them on what to do in their specialised fields. In the course of our informal discussions and exchanges among the ANC cadres, we became convinced that the ANC would increase its support tremendously if these professionals were able to practise their skills within the organisation.¹¹⁷ We would give them full recognition and latitude to make policy proposals and practical recommendations. We agreed that we would create committees on each selected profession in all the major ANC centres. These committees would meet at Headquarters to thrash out policy. This draft policy would be presented to the NEC for approval. The committees would also prepare a draft programme of action on

how the policy would be implemented. The creation of the Secretariat of Professional Bodies was the fruition of those discussions and exchanges in various sectors and branches of the ANC outside and inside South Africa.

Travel documents

The ANC now embarked on a concerted campaign to mobilise international support for our professional bodies. This required constant travel, particularly to Europe. In the late 1970s to mid-80s we had to rely on the Tanzanian travel document or *Laissez Passer* in order to travel to other African countries and overseas. Tanzanians never complained that they seemed to bear the brunt for the liberation of Southern Africa, but their goodwill had to be within their means, so they readily provided travelling documents. These took the form of a one-page (A4) document. It was not impressive, but it served the purpose of enabling us to travel. Those in the world who were sympathetic to our plight accepted these “papers” as official travelling documentation.¹¹⁸

At this time Nairobi was a major junction for flights from Southern Africa to the rest of the world. The immigration officials at Nairobi airport were totally unsympathetic to our plight. During this period, various airlines were competing for passengers from Africa. If you had to break your journey to connect to the next appropriate flight, the airlines were willing to transport you to the nearest hotel, pay for your overnight sleeping room and transport you back to the airport for your connecting flight, all at no extra cost. You would land late afternoon in Nairobi, but your connecting flight to Kinshasa, Zurich or Amsterdam would be the next morning. Despite the voucher from your airline assuring that they would provide the overnight accommodation, the Kenyan immigration officers would wave your “paper” with scorn and refuse to give you a transit visa.

A number of us were caught in this situation several times. We started talking about what we would do to the Kenyans after our liberation: “When we get our freedom, comrade, I swear I will take a job as immigration officer just to fix up these Kenyans...” It did not ease matters when it became clear that Nairobi was a haven for those who had deserted the liberation struggle. For some reason they were received there and afforded the means to reach the United States of America or some other place of refuge.

There were a few ANC comrades who had been released or assigned to take up jobs with international agencies based in Nairobi.¹¹⁹ The families of Stanley Sangweni, Zolile Ngcakani (one of the original nine who left South Africa with me),

Walter (Mavuso) Msimang and Mzimkhulu Zambodla would come at different times to the airport in turns and bring me (and others) food parcels for the night. The ANC Treasury could barely afford the US\$10 they disbursed as emergency money,¹²⁰ so these food parcels were most welcome. On one occasion Ntombi, Walter's wife, was assigned to bring food to me at the airport. This is her story: "I got to the immigration officer and told him I had brought food for a South African who was in transit. His connecting flight would only be the next morning. I then asked him if he would allow me to deliver the food. He responded jovially, 'I know exactly who you are looking for! It is that gentleman lying on the bench with holes in his shoes.'"¹²¹

After spending nights at Nairobi airport on several occasions, I became familiar with one of the airport officers. One night this officer invited me to his office for a chat and coffee. I related to him how in my schooldays we used to swear by the Mau-Mau that we would also fight for our freedom one day. I poured out my bitter feelings that it was in this land of Jomo Kenyatta that I was humiliated. He was a patient and educated man, and was sympathetic. He indicated to me that a person like him was only carrying out orders, but that the bulk of the Kenyan people fully sympathised with the oppressed black masses of South Africa. I should have really known this myself, but it was so comforting to hear it said by a Kenyan immigration official.

During one such night, while I tried to sleep on the airport bunks, I was awoken by the sound of a group of more than a hundred people speaking what was not Russian, but clearly a Slav language. What was surprising was their manner of dress. They were all Caucasian males, dressed like miners coming off a shift. And then the announcement was made: "Flight ... proceeding to Johannesburg is now boarding," and they moved. I got up and went as close as I could in order to see their faces. They were definitely not tourists. Their hands looked rough, like those of road workers. I could feel the bile rise in my gut as I thought, "I have not been able to go home for over two decades because I want to be treated as a full citizen in my country. Here are menial jobseekers provided with a special flight to my country just because they are white."¹²²

Building the Education Department

I devoted three years to the creation and development of the Education Department because, more than any other department, it was directly related to the building of the forthcoming generations of South Africans. It would therefore be decisive in determining the future of our country. By 1978 the decision to have our own school was in the public domain. It now became urgent to ensure that teachers were found

from both outside and inside South Africa. The Lusaka Education Committee of the ANC became the first base. Not only did we get members who could meet weekly to discuss policy and direction, but some volunteered to leave their jobs and go to teach at SOMAFCO.

Around this time I undertook several missions to introduce the idea of professional bodies in the ANC to the various ANC centres. I emphasised the dire need to recruit teachers for our new school. For example I visited Botswana and went to the refugee camp at Dukwe. It was on this occasion that I met people like Dr Jeffrey Dumo Baqwa and artist Thami Mnyele. I went to our camps in Angola and met MK commanders, including James Ngculu and Mosiwa Mampe. I had been informed that some of our MK cadres were former teachers. The idea was to get the support of the commanders to release suitable candidates. Some commanders were not enthusiastic because this would confuse cadres who had been prepared for infiltration into South Africa, but there were others who had already started teaching or had begun studies at tertiary level. The idea appealed to some of the commanders and they promised to identify suitable people.

Most importantly, we now needed a head teacher. I first approached a retired secondary school teacher who had also been a school inspector. I put to him that the movement was considering setting up an educational institution, some form of school. I wanted his views on the role of the principal for such a school. His written response was brief and to the point. According to him the principal, as the overall authority in the school, should set in place policies and programmes; should be the final authority on use of funds; should appoint and dismiss the teaching staff; and should conclude agreements with the government Education Department on the syllabus and certification. He expressed the view that the principal's salary should be negotiated. The Secretary General, after consultation with his NEC colleagues, informed me that the ANC needed somebody who was more concerned with the content of education. This person must be prepared to be guided by ANC policy. I had the invidious task of politely declining the offer of the job to the author of that job description. I am happy to say that the situation was resolved amicably.

At this time the Head of the National Resources Development College (NRDC) in Zambia was an experienced South African teacher – Mr Wintshi Njobe. His wife was teaching science at a secondary school. They both held Bachelor Degrees in Science with University Education Diplomas (B.Sc and U.E.D) from the University College of Fort Hare. Mr Njobe majored in physics and mathematics. Mrs Njobe majored in zoology and chemistry. They had already taught at secondary and high Schools in South Africa. Mr and Mrs Njobe were among the teachers who, when Bantu Education

was put on the statute books in 1952, did their best to continue providing the high quality of education they had been offering their pupils before Bantu Education was implemented. When in 1957 Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African country to get its independence, the Njobes, together with several other teachers, decided to leave the country and go to assist the newly independent African state. Later they went to Nigeria, but problems relating to the so-called “Biafran War” forced the South African teachers in west Africa to move south, closer home – first to Kenya, then Tanzania and finally Zambia.

By the time Mr Wintshi Njobe had been appointed, the five farmhouses at Mazimbu were used for accommodation of the students, the teaching staff and construction managers. A zinc hall that had been built for the sisal farm became the hall for meetings as well as the first classes (junior and senior). In 1978 the first meeting of the National Educational Council was held. Finally, in 1979, the ANC’s Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in Morogoro, Tanzania, opened its doors for formal school classes. Thus the heroic survivors of the 1976 Soweto uprising achieved their quest for equal and quality education.

The school quickly grew into a thriving educational community, vividly described in the introduction to the book *Education in Exile: SOMAFCO, the African National Congress School in Tanzania, 1978 – 1992*:¹²³

The secondary school was at the core of the settlement, and around it grew a crèche, a primary school, a productive modern farm, a small but well-equipped hospital, workshops and factories making furniture and other goods, and other divisions. There was extensive boarding accommodation and housing for teachers and workers. There were sports facilities, an excellent library, a large meeting hall, a network of roads and other infrastructure. The complex was constructed and maintained by a skilled and effective Construction Department. Every day large numbers of Tanzanians came to work on the compound in trucks provided by the ANC. Visitors from other ANC settlements, Tanzanian officials and ANC supporters and sympathisers from all over Africa came and went. Mazimbu was a showpiece of the liberation struggle and a symbol of what could be aspired to in a free South Africa.¹²⁴

The ANC appealed to its members in the various centres outside South Africa to send their children to the ANC School in Morogoro for a few months after they had completed their matric, and before going on to tertiary institutions. Many parents who had noticed an identity crisis in their children born and raised in exile were happy to send them to Morogoro. When Nikita had matriculated he willingly spent six months at SOMAFCO. He and others raised in exile greatly appreciated the opportunity to mingle with students coming from the Soweto uprising. By the time they went on to their university studies abroad they were a united group of ANC

students. We were later pleasantly surprised to learn that our son had been elected President of the South African Students in the Soviet Union.

As mentioned earlier, in 1979, while I was still engaged in building the Education Department of the ANC, I paid a visit to Botswana on a drive to spread the message that the ANC was seeking the involvement of professionals to help set up the various professional bodies. I had heard about a project run by a South African named Patrick van Rensburg, who was the Director of an NGO called the Foundation for Education with Production (FEP). Although the Foundation offices were in Gaborone, Patrick was running projects in Mochudi and other places.

I was fortunate to have an aunt, Mrs Thoko Dichaba, who was catering officer at the University of Botswana. Her daughter, my cousin Nozipho Mabe, was already married and working for the Bank of Botswana. I was able to stay at her house for a week so as not to be a drain on the limited resources of the ANC Chief Representative, Mr Isaac Makopo. Patrick was happy to take me to his project sites. The project was a practical application of the theory that for developing countries education should not be a mere theoretical exercise, but should be combined with vocational training. Classes were interspersed with practical work like planting fruit and vegetables, leather work, sewing and tailoring. There was also training to learn the trade of a mechanic, electrician or plumber.

Patrick and I agreed to co-organise a special seminar on "Education and Culture for Liberation in Southern Africa" for the liberation movements based in Lusaka: the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (Patriotic Front), ZAPU, under Joshua Nkomo, the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front), ZANU, under Robert Mugabe, the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO), under President Sam Nujoma, and the ANC under Oliver Tambo. Of further help was the FEP's link to the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation based in Uppsala, Sweden. It was a reputable body and bound to get approval and support from the Zambian authorities.

In my capacity as Co-ordinating Secretary for Education in the ANC, I approached the education officials of the other liberation movements and got them to participate. I prevailed on our ZAPU allies to take part together with ZANU because by this time they had formed a Patriotic Front. It was the first time in Lusaka that ZANU was not treated as a pariah, but fully accepted as a "genuine" liberation movement. The seminar, which took place in October 1980, was a huge success. I sent out copies of the report to all the participants, including the ZANU representative in Lusaka, Mr Mubengegwi, who later became Foreign Minister of Zimbabwe, and Ms Fay Chung, who was Head of Teacher Training in the new Zimbabwe government.¹²⁵

Health Department

Even before SOMAFCO was formally opened, I had to ensure the creation of the Health Department. If education was needed to safeguard our future, the health of all our cadres was of immediate concern. All ANC centres in Southern Africa had to recruit nurses to reduce the burden on local clinics and hospitals. Fortunately we already had our own crop of medical and health personnel, including ANC doctors who had qualified abroad, enough to distribute to the camps and the civilian population. The basic policy was straightforward: to safeguard the health of our people using preventative and curative healthcare services. With the help of Doctors Mfelang and Tshabalala, we formulated the basic health policy which would serve as a guide for all our health practitioners.

This document enabled Mr Nzo, the Secretary General, to get formal NEC approval for the creation of the Health Department. Dr Peter Mfelang was appointed Chairman and Dr Manto Tshabalala Secretary of the Health Department. By 1982 there were medical committees in all the major ANC centres in Southern Africa (Tanzania, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique and Botswana). Medical and health personnel in Lesotho and Swaziland offered their services without being known ANC supporters. Their actions spoke louder than any public declarations.

Department of Arts and Culture (DAC)

President Tambo motivated for a Department of Arts and Culture very early on, even before the 1976 uprising. As a choirmaster himself he knew the power and beauty of the human voice. With song and other forms of artistic expression, you could spread your message worldwide. With Barbara Masekela as the ANC Secretary of Arts and Culture and with the assistance of committee members like Yolisa Modise, Lindiwe Mabuza and Jonas Gwangwa, the DAC became a formidable instrument for change. Artists and audiences throughout the world mobilised for a cultural boycott as well as a sports boycott of teams representing the apartheid regime and its Bantustan puppets. They were also able to provide platforms for anti-apartheid artists from inside South Africa. Besides international conferences and cultural festivals, the crowning cultural achievement of the ANC was the formation of the ANC Amandla Cultural Ensemble under Jonas Gwangwa. They became ambassadors for the anti-apartheid struggle in Europe (East and West), Cuba and the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand and Southern Africa (Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Angola).

The Department of Arts and Culture satisfied two basic needs. It strengthened the

resolve of the cadres in the face of formidable obstacles towards liberation. At the same time the distinctly South African music and dances became an instrument for increasing support for and solidarity with the struggle of the oppressed South African masses.

Legal Department

There was no pressing demand for legal defence of cadres in the law courts. The discipline in isolated camps and demarcated residences kept to the barest minimum any clashes with the local population. Cadres were educated to cultivate the best relations with the locals. Their very livelihood depended on it.¹²⁶ However, we decided to create a legal department that would be able to take a strategic long-term view of the needs of a new South Africa. The focus would be on what should replace the oppressive, discriminatory apartheid laws and – even more important – what kind of legal, constitutional framework would guarantee the human rights of all South Africans. In short, how to translate into practical statutes the broad policies contained in the Freedom Charter.¹²⁷ A core of legally-trained cadres grew from two main sources. There were those who had been in academic institutions abroad, mainly in Eastern Europe. The others were trained in South Africa and completed their training in Southern African institutions. The Legal Department comprised young law graduates like Zola Skweyiya and Jeff Radebe who had been trained in East Germany (German Democratic Republic). They were joined by legal trainees like Penuell Maduna, M Jobodwana, Zola Nqayi, Bridget Mabandla and later Mzimkulu Gwentshe.

Economics Unit

Even before the Economics Unit was formally launched in 1984 I had been in regular contact with the office of the ECA (Economic Commission for Africa) in Lusaka. Mr Bax Nomvete, a South African, was the director for Southern Africa. The overall Director was Adebayo Adedeji. Patrick Magapatona, who was the only ANC student when I took my first job in the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) in Hungary, had now qualified in economics with a Master's Degree. Patrick was one of the foundation members of the Economics Unit. Together we would attend ECA sessions and were present at the launch of the Preferential Trade Area (PTA), now operating as COMESA. As economists we also established links with the National Planning Commission of Zambia. I also used missions to Zimbabwe to maintain contacts with Roma Nyathi, an ex-student from Kiev, who was working in the Ministry of Finance in Harare.

When the Economics Unit was formed, we brought together those ANC cadres who had qualified in the various fields of economics. These included industry, agriculture, finance, statistics and planning. When the United Nations Assembly recognised African liberation movements in the 1970s, the UN Agencies invited representatives from the national liberation movements to their annual meetings. The main aim was to open links with those in the national liberation movements who were assigned for work with such agencies as UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Corporation). Earlier invitations were received by the ANC Department for International Relations. Now they were received by the designated Economics Unit.

We regularly received material from the UN Agencies and focused on information with relevance to the South African economy. However, when South Africa was suspended from the UN, reports on the South African economy were reduced and ultimately stopped. The annual reports on the socio-economic data of African countries which were published by the OAU as well as African Regional Statistics from the UN also began to exclude South Africa. We had to rely on publications such as those produced by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) for fairly objective data. But of course the statistical data from the South African regime and its Bantustans needed to be looked at critically. One had to sift the hard facts from propaganda.

From 1982 to 1984, I acted as Convenor/Chairman to the Economics Unit. We created areas of specialisation in order to cover the wide range of UN agencies. Our first delegates found that some material for the ANC delegation had piled up at the headquarters of UNCTAD, UNIDO and Habitat.¹²⁸ The organised ANC Economics Unit began to collect and properly file incoming information from various sources. We also began to prepare notes or draft points for the leadership when they were invited to address some of the conferences of a socio-economic nature. By 1985 the Economics Unit was an independent entity reporting directly to the Secretary General. This also marked the closure of the Department for Professional Bodies. Its mission to set up the various professional bodies had been accomplished.

The increase in the numbers of people who aligned themselves to each of these professional departments and the expansion of the professional units themselves had by now resulted in the qualitative transformation of the ANC. It grew in stature as a movement that was prepared to put its policies of non-racialism to the test. Moreover, the anti-apartheid organisations found new channels for mobilising support for the ANC. Volunteers, largely from Europe, raised funds in support of the ANC's projects in its incipient departments of Education, Health, Arts and Culture and

Food Production, later reinforced by the Legal Department and the Economics Unit. Food Production was under the Treasury, which supervised the farms in SOMAFCO and Lusaka.

Zimbabwe elections (1980)

The Lancaster House negotiations on the future of Zimbabwe started in September 1979 in Britain. Three months later, an agreement was reached. Lord Soames was appointed Governor for the transition period before the elections scheduled for February, 1980. During the period December 1979 to February 1980, the liberation movements engaged in mass mobilisation for electoral support. A week before the elections ZAPU sent reconnaissance and monitoring teams to assess the support of ZAPU in the various provinces of Zimbabwe.

On 28 February 1980, the day the results were to be announced, we assembled a small group of friends at our house in Thornpark, Lusaka: Comrades JM (Joe Modise) and his bodyguards, Jackie Molefe, Eddie Funde, Pat Long and a few others. Some of our comrades assisted Rita with preparation of the *braai* while Eddie assisted me with the *Mosi* – a favourite beer brand in watering holes in Zambia. During these preparations, JM gave us background information he had received from our ZAPU allies on the areas that had been monitored and a prognosis of the election outcome. Roughly the picture was that, of the eleven districts, ZAPU would at worst get six, but could reach even eight. We continued to listen to the radio reports on attendance at the various polling stations.

Finally, around 9 pm, results were announced district by district. When ZANU districts reached six, JM swore that the ZAPU scouts had lied to Joshua Nkomo. We started to doubt whether they had gone to some of the areas known to be ZANU strongholds. What was meant to be a celebration ended as an occasion to drown our sorrows, but all was not lost. Some of the leaders had ignored the demands from ZAPU that we should shy away from ZANU. I know for certain that Comrades Reg September and Jacob Zuma had maintained relationships with their counterparts in ZANU prior to the first Zimbabwe elections. This created bridges which enabled the ANC to improve its relationship with the Zimbabwe government without having to grovel. Indeed, shortly thereafter our respective departments received direct invitations to conferences in Zimbabwe that were relevant to our work.

My first experience of a coup d'état

By 1984 the ANC Departments of Education, Health, and Arts and Culture were fully established, as were the Legal and Economic units. There was a greater sense of preparing to run a government not just in our lifetime, but in the very near future. We had seen the Lancaster House negotiations on the future of Zimbabwe and the subsequent elections in 1980. Zimbabwe was now an independent self-governing state and a member of the Organisation of African Unity. Namibia was a protégé of the United Nations and the de facto South African administration had ceased to treat the neighbouring state as its fifth province. It was now encouraging and assisting the tribal authorities to position themselves for the national Namibian elections, although it continued to call the territory South West Africa.

In 1984 OR was to address a national commemoration at SOMAFCO. It was an occasion to highlight progress in this important educational project which was now supplemented by practical training at the Vocational Training College in Dakawa, fifty kilometres from Morogoro. On the eve of the ceremony, OR instructed me to go from Morogoro to Dar es Salaam where I would catch a plane to Lagos, Nigeria. President Shehu Shagari of Nigeria had invited OR for a state visit of three days. I was to finalise arrangements with the protocol officials in the Office of the President.

I was met by the protocol officer who took me to the presidential guest-house. He informed me that all arrangements had been made to receive the ANC President and that the next day, a Saturday, I would be transferred to a hotel where half a floor had been booked for the presidential entourage. He would also give me an allowance for the presidential team, due to arrive on Sunday.

Early the following morning I went for breakfast. The only attendant in the dining room did not provide any service. He was glued to the radio. Then suddenly he blurted, "They have done it again!" President Shehu Shagari had been ousted in a coup by military strongman Major General Muhammed Buhari. All went haywire. The protocol official came an hour later to tell me that the whole plan had been aborted. The allowance he had confirmed had disappeared. I should pack and go to the ANC Mission residence. I phoned our representative, Victor Matlou (Nkondo), who lamented that the Mission had not yet received its monthly allowance. The official said there was nothing he could do and left. In the meantime a three-day curfew was announced and all flights to and from the rest of the world were suspended.

I told our representative that this was my first experience of a coup and that we would have to starve together until I could fly back to Lusaka. I recall Victor telling

me the sad story of Tsietsi Mashinini while we waited for news about flights out of the country. Tsietsi was identified by international media correspondents based in South Africa as the kingpin of the June 1976 students' uprising. When he surfaced outside South Africa, the media waxed lyrical, predicting that he would be the first president of a liberated South Africa. He had meanwhile married the daughter of a cabinet minister in Liberia. However, when it became apparent that he would not be the next South African president, the marriage came to an end. Tsietsi sought help at the ANC Mission and Victor was able to look after him for a few days. Then he disappeared. There were rumours that he had died. When and where, nobody could confirm and researchers have never been able to establish his fate. When the three-day curfew was lifted, I was able to fly back to Lusaka, all in one piece.

Family reunion in Lesotho

In 1984 I travelled to the University of Maputo in Mozambique and to Roma University in Lesotho in an effort to identify suitable teachers for our school and to mobilise support for the ANC's professional bodies. In Maputo I met Ruth First whom I had last seen in her *New Age* days in 1961. For somebody who had undergone physical and mental torture at the hands of the ruthless Police Special Branch, she looked remarkably fresh. The story of her repeated solitary confinement is well documented, but it is the sadistic release and re-arrest that portrays the inhumane nature of the apartheid security forces. I remember her asking me some probing questions. She was now working as a lecturer at the University of Maputo.

After we had discussed my recruitment drive for qualified teachers for SOMAFCO, she drove me back to the ANC office. Lennox Lagu was the Chief Representative at the time. I remember that I related to Comrade Ruth my experiences in Guinea Bissau in August 1969, because I was aware that she held Amilcar Cabral in high esteem as one of Africa's foremost anti-colonial leaders. He had been assassinated in 1973, about eight months before Guinea Bissau's unilateral declaration of independence. I shared with her my conversation with our guide and interpreter known as Barry. I had challenged Barry to come clean on what I sensed were undertones of dissatisfaction with the leading positions held mainly by Cape Verdians, including Cabral himself, within PAIGC – The African Independence Party of Guinea (Bissau) and Cape (Verde). Barry grudgingly admitted this to be true. The expression on Comrade Ruth's face was a mixture of disbelief and academic curiosity. Unfortunately she did not live to witness the split of Guinea Bissau from Cape Verde.

From Maputo I was to fly directly to Maseru in a twelve-seater plane, without landing at any South African airport. The comrade who transported me to Maputo

airport told me that I would have two additional suitcases in my luggage, but that I was not to worry; on arrival in Maseru, the suitcases would be taken care of. Indeed, after disembarking from the plane, I noted the two suitcases that were left at the luggage collection point. I had been told to await somebody called May McClain who would come and fetch me. I decided to move the suitcases to indicate my ownership and almost lost my arm in the process. They were so heavy for their size, I could have been lifting gold bars. Then it hit me that this was material for the underground operatives of MK.

At that moment I heard May McClain calling my name and I went forward to meet her. We greeted and I took a sidelong glance at my suitcases – they had already disappeared. May McClain drove me to their house at Roma University where her husband, Bill, was a lecturer. Knowing how close I was to Queenstown in the Eastern Cape, it suddenly occurred to me that this might be a chance to see, if not my whole family, at least my father. My last contact with Father had been the exchange of letters through Comrade Ray Alexander sixteen years previously; I had not seen any members of my family since we parted in June 1961.

There was no reply when I called the number at St Andrew's Anglican mission in the black township, so I called St Michael's Anglican Church in the city. The white reverend's wife answered. I took a deep breath and asked for the telephone number for St Andrew's because the number in the directory was not working. She asked in surprise, "Where are you calling from? St Andrew's was destroyed in a fire a few years back." I realised that these were some of the situations we had been warned to avoid. I should simply have asked straight away whether she knew Reverend Mfenyana. If I were inside South Africa, my blunder could have given me away as a "terrorist" from across the border. Trying to disguise my anxiety, I then asked after Rev Mfenyana. She told me that he had moved with his family and was preaching at a parish in Whittlesea. Fortunately she was sympathetic and was able to give me the telephone number.

It is hard to convey the joy I felt on hearing my father's voice. He was equally joyful on hearing mine. I explained to him that I was in Lesotho for a few days and that this was a rare opportunity for us to meet. He would need to drive to Roma and ask for Professor McClain. After I had made my telephone call I met Chris Hani, who was in exile in Lesotho, and told him my father would be arriving any day. He kindly said he would arrange a room for him at the hotel in Maseru.¹²⁹

The next afternoon I could not believe it when May McClain brought in my father. I heard her whispering, "I want to see this!" For about five seconds I stared at the

short, balding, grey-haired man with the kindly face, and he stared at me. We were startled by each other's appearance. All these years I had visualised my father as a gentle giant, but there was no doubt in my mind that this was the man who had said farewell to me at the station when I left for Johannesburg in 1961. At a loss for words, we smiled and embraced warmly for the first time in twenty-three years.

Standing next to my father was somebody I presumed was his driver, or perhaps a friend. I asked my father who he was. He said, "Who do you think it is?" There was no way I could have guessed. The man before me was taller and bigger than me. It turned out that he was my younger brother, Kwezi, who was thirteen years old when I left home. He was now a married man with three children. We laughed and embraced. I had rediscovered my family. This occasion seemed to portend that I would soon return home, but it was to be another six years before I set foot on the soil of my beloved country, South Africa.

My brush with Shishita

As Secretary for Professional Bodies I had an office in what were the offices of the ANC Youth Section. At the time Comrade Eddie Funde was Head of the Youth Section. In the course of the day comrades with a bit of free time would walk in for an exchange on whatever was topical. Shortly after my trip to Lesotho I had an unexpected visitor. Comrade Piper belonged to the post-1976 wave of ANC youth. He had undergone a meteoric rise in SACTU (South African Congress of Trade Unions) and was in the highest echelons of SACTU within a space of two to three years. SACTU had its own headquarters in Lusaka, which I would visit only if I needed to see someone there. I had seen Piper before, but he was not in my circle of friends.

When Comrade Piper arrived, I was alone. Even my secretary had gone on some errand to the ANC offices, 500 metres away. I soon noticed that Piper was in a happy mood. As he continued to talk, I became convinced that his high spirits were induced by liquor. He spoke about how they, the young revolutionaries, were ready to advance the struggle beyond what we, the old guard, had managed. According to Piper, Comrades Nzo, Duma and Tambo had played their part, but were not ready to lead the struggle into South Africa. They, the young revolutionaries, would complete the job.

The conversation, or rather the monologue, continued for half an hour. I was puzzled. Firstly, Comrade Duma had passed away a few years back, in 1978. Secondly, why did he come to me with his new ideas? Thirdly, it was around lunchtime. Why

was he already soused? When he had done with his monologue, with me nodding in between to indicate that I was listening, he stood up, shook my hand and repeated that things would soon change. We would be going home soon.

I later mentioned this to some comrades and my secretary, still puzzled by the whole episode. Two days later I was informed that Piper and Oshkosh had been seen boarding a plane to Botswana. Now Oshkosh was known as the “airport man”. He met new arrivals at the airport and took them to their designated residence. This included underground “safe houses”. That he was not picking up new arrivals, but was himself travelling, aroused interest. The ANC security made quick enquiries as to the nature of his mission and no department or office knew. There was immediate concern that information about our residences were in the possession of somebody travelling on an unknown mission to Botswana.

The ANC office in Gaborone was informed and asked to get assistance from the Botswana security to detain the two comrades. The request was to put them on the next plane to Lusaka. A few days later, June, one of the security comrades with whom I had a good relationship, gave me the full story. On arrival, the two had been interrogated and finally came out with the truth. They were part of a team that had been trained by the special forces of the South African regime. They had been given specific assignments to infiltrate various sectors in the ANC. Each would get details about the assigned sector: the names, their residences and their security. Piper and his colleague had completed their task and were now returning home to hand over the data and receive their remuneration. This would be in the form of a house, a car and cash. For this they were ready to betray the thousands who sought to get freedom for our people.

A few weeks prior to this I had read a statement in the media made by one of the top brass in the South African security services. He claimed that out of every five cadres of the ANC forces, at least one was working for them. This began the clean-up operation that soon became known as *Shishita*. From the two agents who we had discovered we were able to appeal to the newly-arrived cadres in all our centres in a statement saying: “We appeal to each individual who may have been in the service of the Special Branch to come forward and confess. The ANC will forgive those who confess on their own, but if we discover that you are an agent and you do not confess, we shall take it that you intend to continue being an agent. This means that you are a threat to all of us. In that case you deserve any punishment, including loss of life.”¹³⁰

This appeal yielded surprising results. At our school in Morogoro a few students came forward. This kind of story was typical:

I come from a poor family in the Zola township in Soweto. My father has been unemployed for the past three years and my mother is a domestic worker. She is the sole bread winner. One day I was casually approached by a man who turned out to be a member of the Special Branch Police Unit. He said that he wanted me to report to him any new or unknown face in our street – that is all. For this I received a monthly allowance, enough to afford us food and cheap clothing. I never actually identified any new people that moved into my street. I reported that there were visitors, but they did not stay. When my friends and I decided to skip the country, I told the SB man that I was not interested in loitering around our street the whole day. I wanted to use the time to look for work either in the township or in the city. I was shocked when the SB man told me that if I stopped reporting to him he would inform my friends that I was a police spy. I was scared but went ahead and skipped the country.

I was relieved when we got to the ANC School. I was looking forward to a new life as a freedom fighter and a qualified professional. Then one day I got a shock when a student I did not know approached me. He informed me that he knew that I was formerly an agent of the Special Branch. From now on I was to take instructions from him. He would tell me what he required. I am very grateful for the opportunity offered to people in my situation to come forward and confess. This is my story.

With the help of a few more such confessions the ANC was able to “clean up”.

But why did Piper choose me for his indirect confession that he was an enemy agent? I do not know. I had long been concerned about the question which comrade Walter Sisulu had posed to me before our departure. Had we adequately prepared the machinery that would continue to function when we left the country? Because I could not give a definite “yes” at the time, I had made it my mission to educate, politicise and assist in whatever way I could to ensure that we produced strong cadres who would face the regime’s forces with the iron conviction of the justice of our cause. I was therefore always ready to listen and to discuss difficult issues, particularly with the younger comrades. Perhaps in the process I had reflected the ANC, which would not execute but politicise. I still believe that that is the correct approach in general. However, a person who is prepared to poison the food of a whole camp in order to get a house and a car does not deserve any mercy. In all events, the law should be allowed to take its course.

In the President’s Office

In 1985 I was appointed Secretary to ANC President OR Tambo (commonly referred to as Comrade OR, or just OR) and moved to the President’s Office. I mostly drafted his responses to correspondence or prepared draft statements on visits to African countries. He made it clear from the outset that nobody could draft for him. All he wanted was ideas; he would decide what to use and how. In due course I became

immune to my drafts coming back full of red ink marks. The only time I remember getting an “excellent” comment on my draft was in Ghana when I had drafted his response to a toast by President Jerry Rawlins. The only reason for this was that I had caught him “thinking aloud” about an appropriate response and had memorised his comments.

Working in his office, I became aware that he observed a punishing schedule of eighteen hours’ work a day. He remained physically fit because of daily swimming in the mornings, whenever possible. When we prepared for a trip to Ghana in response to an invitation from President Jerry Rawlins, he casually mentioned that he had not had proper rest for some time. On arrival in Accra, I worked on his schedule with the chief of protocol in Rawlins’ office. It was a five-day visit, including arrival and departure. I prevailed on the protocol officer to have working meetings only up to lunchtime and for all afternoons to be either free or to involve excursions without speeches. I felt pleased when OR’s personal attendant, Mshengu, confided to me that OR, on seeing the programme, said this was exactly what he needed.

On one of the evenings we had an informal, private dinner and we started telling stories of our younger days. OR joined in the spirit and told us a story about his youth. I am convinced this was one of only very few occasions when he was so relaxed as to talk about himself.

From the time I started going to school in our village in (M)Bizana, I would pass a homestead with a kraal. There was a grey-bearded old man whom I would greet every time I passed, as was the custom. I completed Standard 6 and proceeded to Junior Certificate (Standard 7-9). My peers then took up studies for teaching and completed at the same time I completed my matriculation exams.

When I went to Fort Hare University for my first year, the old man wanted to know why I was not working, like my peers. “You must have finished all the books by now,” he said. I explained that in three years I would also be ready to work.

In the middle of my Post-Graduate Diploma (U.E.D.) I was involved in a strike. As president of the Students’ Representative Council (SRC) I had taken a decision that we would not reveal our SRC discussions to avoid selective victimisation. But clearly one of us had mentioned me as the main instigator. The College Disciplinary Council did not hesitate to inform me that, as the main instigator of the strike, I was expelled forthwith.

When the sentence was passed, my thoughts did not go to my parents. No. It was the face of the old man that first appeared in my mind. How would I explain to him that after so many years, not only had I had not completed my studies, but had also been expelled?

This is the true reason I ended up teaching at St Peter's High School in Rosettenville. I just could not bear to face my nemesis – the Old Man!

OR said this with a smile.

Johnny Makatini arrived the morning OR was to address students at the University of the Cape Coast in Ghana. The hall was overflowing and a large number were standing along the aisles or sitting on the ground in front of the stage. The Rector, in his words of welcome, made the following statement: "We still remember how you sent us teachers who helped us in the early days of our independence. Now that you have your own independent territories, we are happy to reciprocate by sending our teachers to help your new states."

It was clear that the Rector was referring to the Bantustans. He, and probably many others who would be called intellectuals, did not have a clue what the Bantustans actually were. They did not understand that the Bantustans comprised 13 percent of South African territory for 80 percent of the South African population. It was clear that the campaign by the South African government to gain acceptance of the Bantustans was bearing fruit. This was at a time when the campaign for total isolation of the South African racist regime was at its peak in Europe, Africa and Asia. The Indian government had decreed that any Indian traveller whose passport had a South African stamp would have the passport withdrawn.

OR was a sublime diplomat. His response was that the South African regime, by inviting African intellectuals to the Bantustans, would reap unexpected results. Africans would come to understand the real nature of apartheid colonialism and oppression. The few South Africans present at the meeting, for example students and those who had married Ghanaians and settled there, were confident that OR's visit would boost their attempts to expose the insidious nature of apartheid to the Ghanaian people.

Worship resurrected

When I arrived in Lusaka in 1974 the ANC community were already singing freedom songs at weddings and funerals. ANC stalwarts would join new arrivals from South Africa who chanted known church songs as well as freedom songs and then prayed during the wake (*umlindlelo*). Around 1985, with the increased militancy of the clergy of the United Democratic Front (UDF), we started to invite local priests, Zambian and otherwise, to officiate at weddings and funerals.

Around this time a young Deacon of the Anglican Church, Fumanekile Gqiba,

arrived from South Africa and raised the idea of a chaplain for the ANC. This had been common practice before the ban on political organisations in 1960. President Tambo persuaded him to complete his theological training in Lusaka and to become a full priest. On the day of his ordination at Lusaka Cathedral, I attended the service. I must confess that after twenty-five years of not going to church, I felt great joy attending a proper service again. I had had a yearning to do so for years. I had visited exquisite churches and cathedrals in the socialist countries, but only to admire the architecture and the paintings by famous artists. Although there were services conducted by some Orders who ignored the scorn of officialdom, churches were generally treated as art objects, or heritage relics.

It turned out I was not the only one who wanted to see Fumanekile Gqiba ordained as a priest. When I cast my eye across the church aisle, I saw the unmistakable face of my President. I had been aware that in his younger days he had aspired towards priesthood, but that life had dictated otherwise. After his ordination, Reverend Gqiba did become the ANC Chaplain, according to his wish and dream.



Oliver Tambo and Mrs Adelaide Tambo with South African students at the ANC Embassy. I am seated next to OR Tambo with Rita. On the left of Mrs Tambo is Mrs Mittah Seperepere - then representing the ANC Women's Section at headquarters of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). East Berlin, 1986.

Chapter 13

The German Democratic Republic

In March 1986 I was deployed to represent the ANC in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), where the ANC office enjoyed semi-diplomatic status. We flew on a Soviet Aeroflot plane from Lusaka to East Berlin via Moscow. At Berlin airport we were met by the GDR Solidarity Committee officials and ushered through the diplomatic VIP Lounge – a clear indication of the upgrading of the ANC Mission. After the welcoming formalities we were informed that the ANC Mission vehicle would take us to our residence.

The ANC Mission building was one of several identical buildings in a quiet street called Angerweg, in the suburb of Pankow. It combined both the ANC office and the residence. The office of the Chief Representative (now referred to as the Head of Mission or even Ambassador) was on the first floor, which also had three bedrooms, a spacious lounge/dining room and a kitchen. On the ground floor there were offices for the Mission support staff and the official driver. There was also a communication room supplied with a telex machine and a copier, as well as a storage room with a collection of second-hand clothing, still in good condition, donated by support groups. Outside there was a large lawn, bordered by flower-beds, which was suitable for summer functions. The building and gardens were maintained by the GDR Solidarity Committee.

The GDR Solidarity Committee also provided for support staff at the ANC Mission. Three ANC cadres, all of whom used false MK names, had been seconded from the military after undergoing a six-month course in political education. One of the cadres, Nelson, was proficient in German and served as Deputy Head of Mission.¹³¹ Besides other duties, he also dealt with student affairs. His two colleagues, Alex Mashinini and Tilly¹³², maintained contact with ANC support groups, including churches¹³³, kept track of the calendar of events and ensured timeous preparations for these events. The GDR Solidarity Committee also provided for a German secretary to the Mission, who had an office next door to the Head of Mission's office, and a housekeeper who prepared meals for the Head of Mission and his family. She also catered for formal visitors and took charge of catering arrangements for all formal occasions. There were also drivers for each of the two GDR-manufactured Wartburg cars with diplomatic number plates. One driver was dedicated to the Mission Head.

The outgoing ANC Head of Mission was Anthony Mongalo, one of the original nine Fort Harians.¹³⁴ Fortunately we had known the Mongalos from Lusaka, prior

to their posting to the GDR. Anthony's wife, Lilian, was from New Zealand and they had two sons. We shared the limited quarters for a week, during which time I got a full briefing on what it meant to be the Head of a diplomatic mission. I made appointments with various embassies, but eschewed those representing countries that referred to the ANC as a terrorist organisation. My two neighbours were the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) Mission, which also had semi-diplomatic status (this was just four years prior to Namibian independence), and the Mozambican Embassy. Mozambique had obtained its independence from Portugal in 1975 and the Mission therefore had full diplomatic status.

In the GDR there were diplomatic missions for three liberation movements: the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the ANC.¹³⁵ These missions did not deal with the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but instead worked through the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee (AASC), a semi-autonomous arm of the ruling party. On taking up my post, I presented my credentials to the Secretary General of the AASC, Dr Reichardt. He was an affable man and he and his Deputy, Mr Dieter Hoffmann, spoke flawless English. I dealt with Dr Reichardt on special formal occasions. On a daily basis, however, I dealt with his Deputy, with whom I discussed the GDR diplomatic programme as well as the GDR solidarity activities for the ANC. Mr Hoffmann was my mentor and informant on any issue I chose to raise with him. Within a short time I had gained his confidence to the extent that he instructed members of my staff to first raise issues with me before consulting him. This helped ensure discipline among the mission staff.

The GDR gave carefully considered, practical support to the South African liberation struggle. They provided not only military training and special skills in the fields of intelligence and counter-intelligence, but also scholarships for vocational and academic training, with an emphasis on skills that would be needed to build a new, non-racial South Africa. They printed *Sechaba*, the monthly organ of the ANC, and the quarterly magazine, *The African Communist*. The GDR embassies in Southern Africa also gave material support to the ANC missions, providing long-lasting foodstuffs for the ANC military camps and equipment for farmers to produce food for civilians in frontline areas, including SOMAFECO and DAKAWA in Tanzania. The equipment came mainly from non-governmental organisations in the Nordic countries and Holland and from Anti-Apartheid Movements in Western Europe.

My time in the GDR gave me valuable insight into political solidarity in practice. Not long after my arrival I received a call from the British High Commissioner. He was ready to receive me at the British High Commission for a courtesy call. I consulted with both the SWAPO Mission and the Mozambican Embassy on this invitation and

they encouraged me to go, saying that I had nothing to lose and quite possibly something to gain. They were right. Indeed it became clear from the meeting that Western countries that had opened embassies in East Berlin had done so in large part to establish diplomatic contact with liberation movements likely to achieve independence for their countries in the near future. The British High Commissioner greeted me like a long-lost friend and proceeded to tell me about the posts and rank held by numerous staff members at his embassy. I did likewise. This was my first lesson in foreign diplomacy. He already knew about my mission and its staff situation, but we had to go through the motions; we were warming up for bigger things. He did not ask about the situation in South Africa. He simply said that Britain would be ready to have open relations with the ANC if we informed the British government of an ANC take-over six months in advance. This was totally unexpected, but it made sense. This was the only time I had direct dealings with the High Commissioner. Thereafter my communication was mainly with the First Secretary, although even this contact was rare.

East-West Berlin link

The division of Berlin into East (capital of GDR) and West (an island of the Federal Republic of Germany surrounded by the GDR) presented the closest point of contact between socialist East and capitalist West. As the ANC Embassy driver was not allowed to enter West Berlin, my wife and I decided to drive over by ourselves one day. Our South African staff assured us that we would encounter no difficulties at "Checkpoint C", or "Checkpoint Charlie" as it was called by the Western allies, the best-known and most visible crossing point in the Berlin Wall dividing East and West Berlin. They proved right: the diplomatic status we enjoyed made it possible for us to travel unhindered through Checkpoint Charlie.

The situation at the border post would have been ludicrous if it were not so serious. The GDR welcomed all visitors from the Western sector without restraint. Visitors simply paid the nominal fee as a permit to enter the GDR and got a receipt. But their travel documents were not stamped. As the USSR had been an ally of Britain, France and the USA during the Second World War, visitors included servicemen and women from the American military base as well as military personnel from the British and French Missions. On the other hand there was limited access for GDR citizens to visit West Berlin, let alone West Germany.

I recall an occasion when we went for a meal with Mr Hoffmann to a restaurant in the tower in Alexanderplatz, the centre of East Berlin. From the rotating restaurant one had a panoramic view of both East and West Berlin. It was clear from the

blocked rail lines that Berlin had once been a unified entity. The dividing “wall” was itself a picture of discontinuous, scattered blocks and fences that emphasised the artificiality of the division. As we stood there looking over the city I noticed that Mr Hoffmann’s eyes glistened with tears. In a soft, but emotional, voice he whispered, “But this is not fair. Our people have relatives on the other side, and yet they cannot even go to visit them.” It was a question of “so near, and yet so far”. His words brought home to me how much unhappiness this separation had caused people on *both* sides of the wall.

My predecessor, Anthony Mongalo, in collaboration with his counterpart in West Berlin, Tony Seedat, had secured an arrangement with a support group in West Germany to provide the ANC Mission with a weekly supply of South African newspapers. The papers were brought across by a courier, a German woman called Ursula. This weekly link made us all the more eager to meet South Africans in West Berlin. One day I had a pleasant surprise when Peggy Luswazi, a fellow ex-Fortharian, called the Mission.¹³⁶ She had done a postgraduate course in West Berlin and obtained a Doctorate in Social Sciences. She had heard that I was the new South African “ambassador” in the GDR and offered to travel across to the ANC Mission so that we could discuss opportunities to meet up with South Africans on the other side of the Berlin Wall. (This we were able to do on many occasions thereafter.)

During her visit, which must have lasted three to four hours, she gave us a clear picture of life in West Berlin. We learnt that there was a fair number of South African students there and that a few of them had found employment, albeit without work permits. According to Peggy there were cases of African migrant workers who could be seen driving a posh Mercedes Benz during the day. The reality is that they did not have their own accommodation, so at night the car became their home.

We also talked at length about our Fort Hare days and I clearly remember her describing the anguish suffered by young women when their boyfriends left the country without warning to pursue the liberation struggle in exile. Many of the romantic liaisons established during our period at Fort Hare had been abruptly and painfully disrupted when young men went into exile. Peggy spoke of the immense distress women suffered as they had to deal with the unexplained disappearance of their planned life-long partners.

Who’s who in the ANC External Mission¹³⁷?

As an ANC Mission we received a wide range of delegations from the mass democratic movement, including members of the United Democratic Front (UDF),

journalists, clergy, trade unionists and artists. The AASC facilitated their travel from West Berlin into East Berlin, ensuring that there were no East German stamps on their South African passports. Among the journalists were Mdu Lembede and Moegsin Williams, while the clergymen included Allan Boesak and Frank Chikane. The trade unionist Cyril Ramophosa was supposed to cross from West Berlin to meet with us, but changed his mind, maybe wisely so. Considering the anti-communist hysteria in apartheid ruling circles, his important contribution to the National Union of Mineworkers and the "Release Mandela Reception Committee" could have been adversely affected.

Artists such as Abdullah Ibrahim and Miriam Makeba each staged a full house concert during my stint as ambassador. I had previously met Abdullah Ibrahim when he visited the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFSCO) in Morogoro, Tanzania. It turned out that he was very popular in East Germany and was able to pay a courtesy call to our Mission following his concert. Unfortunately I missed meeting Miriam Makeba because my Mission staff "forgot to inform" me when they visited her at the hotel where she stayed. Somebody assumed that I would have received an official invitation. Fortunately I was able to secure tickets for us to attend the concert, but there was no time for a private meeting.

A few months after I started working in the GDR, Mr Hoffmann communicated the names of prominent ANC leaders who had visited the GDR without my knowledge. He indicated that they were members of the South African Communist Party (SACP). Since completing my studies in the Soviet Union in 1967, I had considered myself a Marxist who believed in the scientific inevitability of capitalism maturing into socialism at some stage. I fully appreciated the advanced ideological role of the Communist Party in the South African liberation struggle, but had felt that my primary allegiance was to the ANC. This was the organisation that would help secure our freedom from the oppressive apartheid regime. However, now I was effectively an ambassador, the eyes and ears of the ANC in the GDR. In that role it was my duty to have the broadest possible understanding of the liberation struggle. Since I did not have ideological problems with Marxist philosophy, I considered that it would be practical to join the Communist Party so as to gain a fuller picture of our struggle activities. I decided to apply for membership of the SACP and was accepted.

This was a period during which serious changes began to take place in the USSR. Mikhail Gorbachev had embarked upon his programmes of *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost* (transparency), moving away from the rigid, demagogic style of party politics. All this gave hope that it was possible to have "socialism with a human face", as envisioned by Alexander Dubček in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Being

a member of the SACP opened new horizons for me. There were now as many SACP visitors to the ANC Mission as there were visitors from the ANC. I discovered that, besides the ANC trainees in vocational skills, there were also MK cadres at the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* or SED) political school. MP Naicker came monthly to finalise printing and distribution of *Sechaba*. Brian Bunting came quarterly to complete production arrangements for the *African Communist*. Now I had a clearer picture of what was going on.

GDR and the Church

As a newly signed-up member of the SACP I thought a great deal about the relationship between the state and the church in the different socialist countries. This was determined by historical factors and ranged from suppression of the church as an institution, to tolerance and mutual cooperation. The primary condition seemed to be that the church should not work against the state. My experience in Poland had shown that socialism does not necessarily imply atheism. The Catholic Church exerted enormous influence in Poland and even the ruling Socialist Workers' Party would have been unwise to meddle with the authority of the church. The GDR showed me another form of cohabitation between a socialist state and the church. If in Poland the relationship was at worst hostile and at best grudgingly tolerant, in the GDR it was symbiotic. The state was happy to allow the church to carry out its human rights policies to the extent of free association and interaction with churches outside the GDR, including West Germany. The understanding was that the church would not allow itself to be used by enemies of the socialist state. This explains why members of the South African Council of Churches were invited to the GDR by the East German churches as part of their anti-apartheid work. The state ensured that their passports were not compromised with a GDR excise and customs stamp.

South Africa – the White haven in Africa

While in East Germany I received information from West Berlin anti-apartheid groups about an intensive campaign to get whites from Europe to immigrate to South Africa. These advertisements, carried in the media of West European capitalist countries, referred to South Africa as “the haven of the white people in Africa”. Whether it was the apartheid government or private business behind this, there is no doubt that the campaign suited the Nationalist government’s need to increase the number of whites who would serve in the apartheid army. It was now a matter of public record that many white South Africans were outraged that their children were dying in the undeclared “war” in Angola only to protect white supremacy in South Africa.

The campaign also targeted Eastern Europe, where the socialist governments had taken a strong anti-apartheid stance and would have nothing to do with South Africa under a racist Nationalist government. Many people in those countries felt frustrated by the shackles of socialist economic control and wanted to go where their skills and individual initiative would be appreciated; where you could become rich if you had an opportunity to engage in profit-making enterprise. It was not surprising that thousands of people from Eastern Europe found an indirect way to reach South Africa, a country that for them presented similar opportunities to those that their great-grandparents had found in North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their dissatisfaction with the regimes in socialist countries made it easy for them to believe that they had been misled about the evils of apartheid. They endorsed the South African government's propagandist argument that the Bantustans gave independence to black South Africans and that apartheid's social and spatial engineering therefore had a humane motive.

During some of the diplomatic functions my friends from the Solidarity Committee would casually introduce me to people originally from Eastern Europe, but who had now settled in South Africa. Our conversation would go something like this:

- "I understand you've just arrived from South Africa. How is life there now?"
- "It is such a wonderful country! They have high standards of living."
- "Did you meet black people with high living standards?"
- "You know, things are changing. Black people have their own independent territories."
- "Did you visit any of these territories?"
- "I did not have time to visit, but you can see on television daily how all the races are living together in peace. Each group is free in its own territory."
- "Do you know that whites constitute less than a quarter of the South African population?"
- "Yes, but there is a steady process of doing away with racial discrimination there. The strange thing is that blacks in South Africa have much higher living standards than in the neighbouring countries. In fact many of the blacks from neighbouring countries are flocking into the independent homelands with their skills."
- "What do they get with their skills?"
- "People with skills can find jobs or run businesses in the cities."
- "Are you ready to take up South African citizenship?"
- "Some of my friends have done so. I am still considering it."
- "Please do. You will soon be conscripted into the army and be expected to defend your White country against the Black majority."

At this point the conversation would come to an abrupt end. My interlocutor would suddenly see another friend he or she wanted to talk to. News gradually seeped through to the ANC Mission that many of the new white migrants to South Africa were unhappy with the idea of military service. In fact some returned to Europe and reported on this.

Visits to students in Eastern Europe

The ANC Mission in the GDR also served as the diplomatic mission for neighbouring countries where there was no permanent ANC representation: Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, and Hungary. The Mission Head in East Berlin had to pay at least one annual visit to these countries to meet with ANC students there. The visits, carefully prepared to ensure maximum student participation, were a tremendous morale booster to these homesick young cadres. Cut off from their families and friends in South Africa, they faced unusual climatic conditions, new languages and the ever-present problems of youth and sex. Because I had experienced this type of life myself, I was able to anticipate some of their questions and to tackle pressing issues before they were raised.¹³⁸ Fortunately only a few of the students reported problems with their studies. This was largely because there was a culture of group or team study in all the socialist countries. These groups were small and loyal and their members would assist one another in the various subjects. Higher percentages were also encouraged through various incentives.¹³⁹ The South Africans were highly politicised and patriotic and practically all of them wanted to return home.¹⁴⁰

Perestroika and cracks in the Warsaw Pact

When I first arrived in East Berlin, a few German university students came to me to discuss South Africa in relation to their thesis topics. I was aware that the Russian language was taught at secondary school level in all the socialist countries that were members of the Warsaw Pact: Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and the GDR. Because my knowledge of German was minimal, I suggested to the students that we converse in Russian. Practically all the students declined, saying that they had learnt sufficient Russian to pass, but had no interest in speaking it. This was 1986.

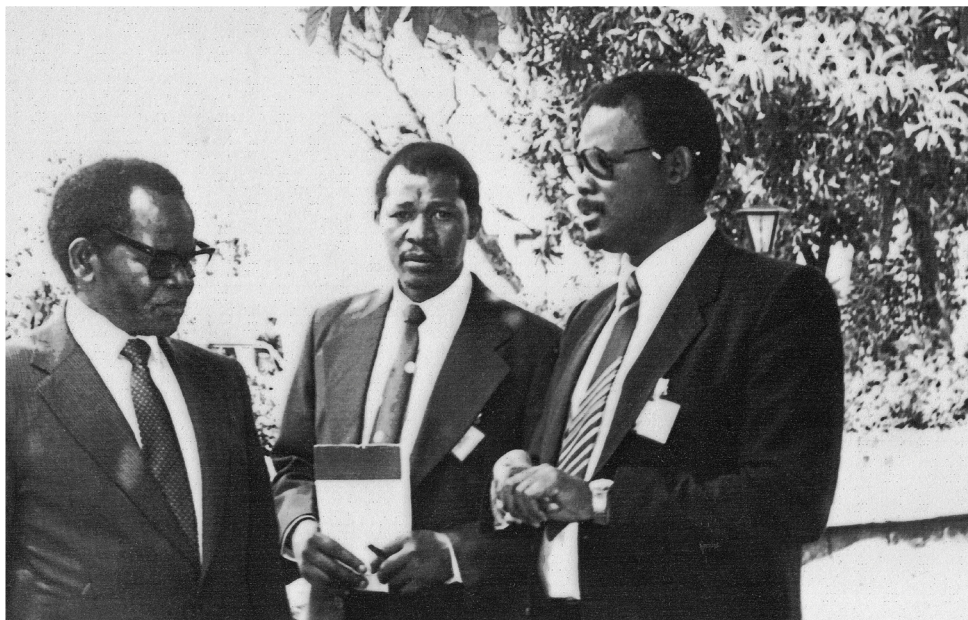
Early in 1988 I accompanied President Tambo to a formal meeting with Erich Honecker, the Head of State of the GDR. Honecker related his impressions after a meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev the previous week in Moscow. He was ecstatic about Soviet technological progress in nuclear armaments and space technology

and he saw a bright future for the socialist countries. He reaffirmed GDR support for the ANC. Mid-1988 one of the German students came up to me as we opened the office. He was in high spirits and his first words were, "I want to improve my Russian language. The incredible has happened: *Pravda* (the political newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) has been banned in the GDR! We all want to know what it is that Gorbachev has said and done, that Honecker does not want us to know." In a matter of days it became common knowledge that Gorbachev, without consulting or warning Honecker, had agreed with the US that the Berlin Wall should come down and Germany be reunited. This was the prelude to the collapse of the entire socialist system in Europe.

My immediate feeling was that this would go down in history as the most treacherous act among allies. From being a trusted and loyal ally, Honecker found himself facing a Nuremberg-type trial before going into exile in Chile, where he later died of cancer. Gorbachev's collusion with the US led to an ignominious end for a people who had built an economy and sovereign life from very limited resources. The whole world welcomed the elimination of the East-West tension over the two Germanies, but the East Germans got a raw deal when almost all their industrial plants and factories, as well as the vehicles they manufactured, were condemned as substandard and decommissioned.

The corruption and deceit exposed in the highest echelons of the Soviet government showed complete disregard for the basic principles of the constitution of the Soviet Union. My own reading was that a combination of factors led to the revision and ultimate betrayal of the "dictatorship of the proletariat". The following points may illustrate what I mean. The socialist revolution was to come in the wake of a decaying, moribund capitalist system where a certain level of democracy (and recognition of human rights) had been achieved. The Marxist literature clearly spelt out that a socialist revolution cannot be exported or imposed from outside. It had to mature and erupt from within. The theories that the Third World could bypass capitalism and move straight into a socialist society, contradicted the basic principles of historical development of societies. If the French Revolution was a dress rehearsal for the October Socialist Revolution of 1917 in Russia, then the socialist project in the USSR and the Warsaw Pact countries could be seen as a vital rehearsal for the creation of a peaceful, people-friendly form of socialism. The question for me is whether humanity will heed these lessons.

We were fortunate that my term ended in 1988 and we witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall from Lusaka in Zambia.



ANC President Oliver Tambo with Zola Skweyiya, then ANC Chief Representative in Ethiopia at the OAU Summit. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1989.

Chapter 14

Last days of exile

On my return to Zambia in October 1988 I began working as Administrative Secretary in the Office of the Secretary General, Comrade Alfred Nzo.¹⁴¹ My office was in the centre of Lusaka, on Cha-cha-cha Road.¹⁴² Comrade Nzo and the Treasurer General, Comrade Thomas Nkobi, worked from a different office, close to the ANC furniture factory, Star Furniture's.¹⁴³ Although we had learned to make ourselves at home wherever we were, it was good to be back in Zambia, among ANC comrades and friends again.

We were given temporary accommodation near the city centre and Rita began working full-time for the ANC Women's Section Project Department, having resigned from her position as an electrical engineer at ZESCO. Soon after our arrival the ANC Women's Section sponsored her to undertake a nine-month course on project-management at the Pan-African Institute for Development in Eastern and Southern Africa (PAIDESA) in Kabwe. Kabwe, formerly known as Broken Hill, is a town about two hours by car from Lusaka. I would drive to Kabwe on weekends to visit her.

Just a few weeks after I had returned from my service in the GDR, my comrade, Johnstone "Johnny" Fanafuthi Makatini, came back to Lusaka for what was intended to be a brief visit. He had flown from the United States via West Germany and was accompanied by my former colleague at Radio Freedom, Lindiwe Mabuza. It was commonplace for Comrade Johnny to stay with us when he was in Lusaka. As far back as 1975, when we were living in a ZESCO house, Johnny would occupy a guest room in our house whenever he was visiting. I was happy to welcome him into our home again on this occasion. Rita was in Kabwe on her project management course, so I was alone in the house. As we were settling down with light beverages one evening, Johnny suddenly began searching his clothes for his tablets. When he could not find them he said, "I must have them, otherwise I am in trouble." We rushed out to the chemist, but unfortunately it turned out that his medication was not available locally. Attempts were made to secure the tablets through our offices in Harare and London, but before we could get the medication to him he went into a coma from which he never recovered. He passed away on 3 December 1988.

I was deeply saddened by his death as he had been my friend and mentor for many years; of course this was also a great loss for the ANC. The funeral service was held at the Anglican Cathedral in Lusaka and was concluded at the Leopard's

Hill cemetery. I was asked to act as MC (Master of Ceremonies), perhaps because the German discipline of keeping time had rubbed off on me. There were many VIP guests, including Zambian government officials, members of the diplomatic corps and friends from solidarity groups. There were also Johnny's close friends from the Afro-American community, who accompanied his wife. Our guests made complimentary remarks about the clockwork precision with which I conducted the funeral proceedings.

I was about to call on the priest conducting the service to close with a prayer, when President Tambo signalled that I should approach him. He asked me to take the microphone to Reverend Dr Beyers Naude, Secretary General of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), who was seated nearby. I'd had no inkling about Beyers Naude's presence in the congregation, nor that he was expected to attend the funeral, but I calmly did as told and handed the microphone to him. Dr Beyers Naude paid a moving tribute to Comrade Johnny, but I and many others received an even deeper message. If Dr Beyers Naude was prepared to defy the regime and come to bury the "terrorist" Makatini, then the people at home were signalling that they had conquered their fear of the apartheid regime. This was the biggest morale booster we had received for some time.

By this time the South African Council of Churches (SACC) had grown in stature and influence. It had five sections, including the Dependants Conference, which dealt with political prisoners and exiles and was headed by Mrs Barbara Mathanta. Her husband, Thomas Mathanta, also worked for the SACC, in the section for Justice and Reconciliation. My younger brother, Buntu Mfenyana, worked closely with Thomas. They dealt with forced removals and prepared documents on the places from which people were forcibly removed. The SACC wrested from the regime the right to assist families to attend funerals of their fallen freedom fighters in exile. Between 1988 and our repatriation in September 1991, it became my responsibility to communicate the real identity of these cadres, who had had to assume false names on joining MK. It was an ANC requirement that members of MK should not reveal their true identity and moreover that their assumed name should reflect a different tribal origin from their own. This was to ensure that no ethnic differences undermined the struggle for liberation. If you met a cadre abroad, you had no way of telling his tribal background.

Once I had discovered the true identity of our fallen comrade, I would relay the name of the deceased as well as an indication of his or her town, district or province of origin to my counterpart in the SACC, Mrs Mathanta. In some cases I would provide both the exile name and the real name of the deceased. The frequency

of deaths seemed to accelerate from once a month to almost weekly during this period. It was a reflection of the accelerated pace at which the ANC's "Young Lions" were "jumping the fence", having decided to set schooling aside to assist in defeating the deplorable apartheid system.

It says a great deal about the organisational structure and network of the SACC that I cannot recall an instance when they could not trace the immediate family or relatives of the deceased. The SACC would alert the family and ask for two names to be forwarded as the official delegates or family representatives at the funeral. These family members would then be provided with air tickets to attend the funeral in Lusaka. Mrs Mathanta would provide me with the relatives' names as well as the date of the flight, so that the mourners would be properly received and accommodated. In Lusaka these arrangements were coordinated by the Office of the Chief Representative, together with the Regional Political Committee (RPC). The Health Department would liaise with the Women's Section to take the family to the mortuary and prepare the deceased for burial.

By the time of the SACC arrangement I had been involved in several burials, including the funeral of Mary Ngalo in Cairo (1973) and that of my cell leader in Orlando East, Mantyi Govan Hashe, who was buried in Lusaka in 1975.¹⁴⁴ Then there was my patron, Duma Nokwe, who was also buried in Lusaka just three years later, in 1978. It was debilitating to lose friends and close comrades one after another, but over time I found a way to deal with bereavement. As soon as I received news that a comrade had passed away, I would consciously switch my mind to the preparations that needed to be undertaken for the funeral. I would focus on the logistical arrangements until the funeral was over. A week or so later I would allow myself to reflect on and grieve the loss of my comrade, while also giving consideration to what help the remaining partner or friend might need.

Our first grandchild

While we were still in the GDR, Nikita had briefly introduced us to his girlfriend, Stella Arthur. She was also of mixed parentage, the daughter of a Ghanaian father and a Korean/Russian mother, and it was clear that their mutual attraction was consolidated by their common background. They were both students in Moscow; Stella was studying medicine and Nikita was doing a degree in civil engineering. When Nikita later informed us of his intention to marry her, we gave our blessings for the union, but in the months ahead there was no mention of a wedding. Then, on our return to Zambia in October 1988, we received unexpected news. Nikita informed us that he and Stella had had a baby girl, named Eva. She had been born

in February, 1988. We were delighted to have a grandchild and offered to look after the baby in Zambia until Nikita and Stella had completed their studies. When Eva was about a year old Duma Nokwe's youngest daughter, Noziswe, who was also studying in Moscow, kindly agreed to bring Eva to Lusaka when she flew to Zambia to visit her family for the New Year Holidays, in January 1989.

At the time our grandchild arrived from Moscow, Rita was still on her course in Kabwe. Unfortunately, as I was based at the ANC Headquarters in Lusaka, Rita had to look after the baby single-handedly. It was hectic for her to combine this with her studies, but somehow she managed. I would travel by car to Kabwe fortnightly with supplies of food from the ANC. At last, in July 1989, Rita successfully completed the course and returned with Eva to Lusaka. At this point we moved into ANC-rented accommodation in Libala township, near the Lusaka Hospital.

We had a blissful year with our granddaughter in Lusaka. Then, in February 1990, Stella arrived for what we thought was no more than a brief visit. On the eve of her return to Moscow, however, she informed us that she could no longer bear to be separated from her child. We couldn't persuade her to let Eva stay on with us and so our cherished granddaughter left us after only one year.

Political climate in Zambia

By the late 1980s there were rumblings of people's dissatisfaction with economic burdens in Zambia, caused to some extent by Western pressure because of Zambia's support for freedom fighters. President Kenneth Kaunda, popularly referred to as KK, spoke of an embarrassing situation where he had had to accept a representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) having an office in the Reserve Bank of Zambia. This was to allow the IMF to monitor the implementation of financial controls, recommended by the IMF, as conditions for loans to the Zambian government. This programme was known as the Structural Adjustment Programme. It was applied to a number of developing countries and led to serious restrictions, which became unpopular.

Zambia was one of the major copper-producing countries in the world, but now there was a slump in the price of copper in the world market. This led to inflation, which in turn led to increased prices of consumer goods. KK, as he was known, began to lament the high levels of beer consumption among Zambians. He then announced an increase in the price of beer, and exhorted his people to replace beer with staple food for their families. At first the Zambians in the street mocked the idea of a beer price increase. "We are not going to stop buying beer, even if you increase

the prices. Instead it will be the children who will starve."That was the conversation in the Lusaka taverns.

Then the worst nightmare for any African president occurred. The Zambian staple food is *nshima*, made from white maize. It so happened that in the same period Zambia also experienced extreme drought. A country that had been self-sufficient in maize production was now compelled to import maize. It was cheaper to import yellow maize and this soon found its way to all the shops. Then all hell broke loose. The reaction of Zambians to yellow *mielies* was a surprise, even to us South Africans. "You cannot make tasty *nshima* from this yellow maize! If we do not get white maize we shall flood the streets in protest!" This was coming from people who, when you asked about their health, routinely responded, "We are suffering peacefully."

The government reacted quickly and the more expensive white maize was imported. Opposition groups used this climate to demand a multi-party system. The reality is that, at the time of independence in 1964, there were two African political parties that vied for power. The United National Independence Party (UNIP) of Dr Kaunda simply eclipsed the smaller African National Congress Party. By 1970 Zambia was practically a one-party state. Against the backdrop of the maize disaster there was an increased demand for a multi-party system. This was spearheaded by the leader of the Zambian Congress of Trade Unions, Mr Fredrick Chiluba. His trade union was strongest in the region known as the Copperbelt. On 1 May 1989 there was a huge rally in Lusaka to celebrate Worker's Day. Dr Kaunda invited former Tanzanian President Mwalimu Nyerere as a guest of honour. Nyerere had himself, voluntarily, given up the Presidency and remained Chairman of the ruling party.

In his speech Mwalimu advised his friend to think about a multi-party system in the light of historical developments. The next speaker, Mr Chiluba, hammered on about the need for change in favour of a multi-party system. He topped this up with praise for Mwalimu for peacefully handing over the reins of power. The main speaker was Dr Kaunda. In his introductory remarks he expressed admiration for Mwalimu's charitable disposition, but pointed out that this was unlikely in Zambia. He then related a rumour he had heard that he was supposed to be afraid of the trade unionist Mr Chiluba: "Imagine David Kenneth Kaunda, who is 5 feet 8 inches tall, afraid of Mr Chiluba who is 4 feet 11 inches?!" This was the prelude to a pedagogical address to his followers and children. The lessons ranged from the need to go back to the land to the progress Zambia had made in providing free education and health services. He briefly touched on economic woes, the reduction of copper prices and the increase in oil prices. In winding up he bemoaned finding himself President to a nation with a high percentage of beer consumers. At this point, the emotional

President wiped tears from his eyes, using his trademark white handkerchief that he carried and waved around at all public appearances. The humorous Zambians would allege that this white handkerchief had *muti* designed to enchant the audience.

In due course international pressure forced KK to change the laws that had kept him in power since 1964 and in 1991 multi-party elections took place. It was indeed the trade unionist Frederick Chiluba, leader of the Movement for Multiple Democracy, who ousted Kaunda.

“From Kabwe to Pretoria”

By the late Eighties it was becoming clear that the apartheid government was finally beginning to buckle under national and international pressure. The second National Consultative Conference of the ANC had been held in Kabwe, Zambia, from 16 to 22 June 1985. Known as the “Kabwe Conference”, it was the first National Consultative Conference to be held since the Morogoro Conference of 1969 in Tanzania. The Kabwe Conference was famously the occasion on which the ANC adopted the slogan, “From Kabwe to Pretoria”, a signal that the struggle would be intensified on all fronts. Firstly, mass mobilisation would be increased; secondly, the underground structures of the ANC would be strengthened; thirdly, armed operations inside the country would be intensified; and lastly, greater efforts would be deployed to increase international solidarity.

During the time we were in the GDR the apartheid regime had increased state repression inside the country and the ANC had in turn increased infiltration of trained soldiers into the country. International condemnation of South Africa had intensified. For the first time various groupings of white South Africans initiated contact with the ANC and made independent trips to meet with the liberation movement in exile. These included groups of prominent Afrikaners as well as representatives of big business. However, the most striking for me was the visit by a group of Stellenbosch students in mid-1989. To fully appreciate the significance of this visit, I will take you back briefly to the Fort Hare of 1960, when a student researcher from Stellenbosch University addressed the Fort Hare student body following protests against the adoption of the “Extension of University Education Act”. This was effectively the extension of Bantu Education to the tertiary level. The reaction of the speakers from the floor was generally hostile, as we considered Stellenbosch to be the spring of apartheid ideology, an institution that produced white leaders who legitimised racial oppression of black South Africans. The latest Education Act was meant to indoctrinate black youth into believing black enslavement was a direct commandment from God. When I spoke I indicated that the visit was in itself

a precedent. To my knowledge, up until this time, there had never been a formal public visit, academic or otherwise, by a Stellenbosch University student delegation to Fort Hare. The researcher must have reported on the deep hatred that Fort Hare students felt towards Stellenbosch University and its academic programme. Against this background the arrival of Stellenbosch University students to meet with the banned ANC in Lusaka signalled more than just brave defiance of apartheid authority. It signalled the preparedness of white youth to look for solutions to South Africa's black/white confrontation through dialogue and mutual agreement.

Anti-apartheid groups within South Africa also began to consult directly with the ANC in exile and to actively co-ordinate their resistance strategies with the ANC's agenda. These included the UDF (United Democratic Front) and other political parties, COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), homeland leaders, church and sports bodies, student and other civil society groups. By the time we returned from the GDR both the UDF and COSATU were a powerful and unstoppable force. Rumours about Nelson Mandela negotiating with the regime began to trickle down to us and Oliver Tambo clarified the situation as exploratory to the possibility of a negotiated settlement.

The worldwide campaign against apartheid grew in leaps and bounds. The strength of the Anti-Apartheid Movement lay in its composition. It was organised and run by local people in the various countries where it operated, but South Africans provided the speakers at the rallies. By their presence, they boosted the morale of the local demonstrators. The New Zealand campaign against the South African rugby teams was especially effective in bringing South African whites to the realisation that what was happening in South Africa went against the accepted norms of all civilised countries. The assumption by apartheid practitioners that all Caucasians would "naturally" side with their "kith and kin" had proved a fallacy, as had their naïve belief that only agents of international communism would work against the white supremacists in South Africa. This attitude increased the effectiveness of white supporters for the liberation struggle.

The Amandla Cultural Ensemble, created by the ANC and directed by Jonas Gwangwa, was also a powerful force for change at this time. Jonas Gwangwa, a South African musician, had been based in the United States from the early 1960s. In 1980 he left the US to direct and train a selection of ANC military cadres, men and women, to form the Amandla Cultural Ensemble. They first performed in Southern Africa and became so popular that they undertook tours to several European and Nordic countries. The ensemble won the hearts and minds of even the most apolitical in European capitals, and they inspired the people of Southern Africa with

their music played on Radio Freedom. Their music, recorded on audio-tapes, was also distributed at taxi stations throughout South Africa. The crowning experience of the cumulative campaign for freedom in South Africa was the Wembley "Release Mandela Concert" in July 1988. International artists from all continents converged on the famous London stadium and offered their free services. Whitney Huston provided the climax to eight hours of unparalleled musical artistry.

From then on there were visible signs that even the former allies of South Africa who were hiding behind anti-terrorism could no longer sustain their support for a country whose policies were publicly declared by the United Nations as a crime against humanity. The 1985 promises of the National Party leader, PW Botha, about "crossing the Rubicon" and ushering in an era of change had proved illusory. The "tricameral" parliamentary structure in South Africa, which gave limited representation to Indian and Coloured South Africans, persisted in ensuring White domination, while the Black majority was still left out of any plans for "change" in South Africa. The United Democratic Front's message that "Apartheid divides – UDF unites" was clearly the only way out of the crumbling laager of White supremacy.

Mid-1989 a palace coup occurred in South Africa. FW de Klerk, who had by now taken over from PW Botha, made it clear that there would be radical changes in the country. He announced that the ANC leadership who had been arrested in Rivonia and sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island would be released in November 1989. This would be with the exception of Mr Nelson Mandela. Some of us had spent over twenty-five years in exile and had had our hopes raised and dashed several times, so we tried to contain our excitement about these developments. Nevertheless we knew that if it were to happen, this would spell the beginning of the end of apartheid and we would soon be going home. There was another reason to rejoice: I received news that my parents, with the help of the church, would be able to visit us in Lusaka in September of that year.

My parents' visit

At this time we were staying in a house owned by a Zambian senior civil servant, Mr Muchangwe. Mr Muchangwe's wife, Sibusisiwe (Sibusi' or Busi for short), was South African by birth. S'busi was among the Zambians of South African origin who occasionally arranged get-togethers at her home for the "home" freedom fighters. In a remarkable coincidence, her parents had stayed within the premises of St John's College, my Alma Mater. Her father was a school inspector and her mother was in charge of catering at the college. I had known her during our schooldays because her younger sister was friends with a friend of mine. When I met her in Zambia, she

treated me like her younger brother. Her Zambian citizenship enabled her to visit her family in South Africa without fear. On her latest visit she had actually been to my home and met my family.¹⁴⁵ This visit persuaded my parents that travel to countries like Zambia was possible without running the risk of arrest and detention.

My parents arrived in Lusaka in September 1989. I was overjoyed to see them again and to be able to introduce them to Rita. While I had seen Tata briefly in Lesotho five years previously, I had not seen my mother since my departure into exile twenty-eight years ago. There was also great jubilation on the part of a number of comrades who knew my father as a priest and quiet supporter of the struggle. The ANC sponsored a special lunch to which young comrades from the Eastern Cape were invited. This was to lift the spirits of comrades who had become homesick. Reverend Mfenyana addressed them as a priest and a parent who knew the agony of missing a child who had spent decades in exile. He gave a message of hope that the people in South Africa would do away with apartheid forever.

Sibusi' kindly also arranged a weekend lunch at her farm in honour of my parents' visit. It was a joyous occasion. We all felt that our long years of exile were almost at an end and that we would soon be reunited with our families.

Release of Rivonia Trialists

When the Rivonia Trialists walked free in November 1989, there was rejoicing in ANC and anti-apartheid circles. South Africa was the last country still waging a liberation struggle from outside its borders. SWAPO had already closed their camps in the Zambian bush and had gone home to prepare for and win the first elections in 1990. In his Statement of 8 January 1990 President Oliver Tambo referred to the decade of the Nineties as "the Decade of Liberation". Now it was our turn and preparations for that eventuality had to be made. Among these was the drafting and adoption of what later became known as the "Harare Declaration". President Tambo was very clear that we should not find ourselves in a situation similar to the Lancaster House negotiations on the future of Zimbabwe, or the UN Resolutions on Namibia. In both instances the liberation movements had no part in the drafting of the documents that spelled out the future of these countries. Instead the liberation movements from Zimbabwe and Namibia were "persuaded" or "convinced" that these documents were formulated in their best interests.

By this time there had been several consultative meetings with various groups from within South Africa. I recall one such meeting held in Lusaka with the ANC Economics Unit led by Max Sisulu. Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert made the telling point

that the solution to our problems should come from the 'South Africans themselves'. The NEC had approved the draft document on the demands of the South African oppressed. This document characterised South Africa as "colonialism of a special type, where the oppressor and the oppressed occupied the same geographical space". Comrade OR Tambo then embarked on a five-country tour in six days, to get the Frontline States (Angola, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia and Tanzania) to approve the draft document, which became known as "The Harare Declaration". From there it went to the OAU who then presented it to the UN as the position of Africa. It was this breathless mission that incapacitated OR Tambo. He suffered a stroke, but his mind remained as sharp as ever.

Comrade OR Tambo was in Sweden receiving medical treatment when the Rivonia Trialists arrived in Lusaka in early 1990. In his absence I informed our protocol unit that I would take over the responsibility of entering the plane to welcome our leaders. I jokingly said, "I particularly need to welcome Comrade Walter Sisulu, so that he can explain what he meant when he informed me, on the eve of our departure in December 1961, that it would be only a matter of six months before we were home!" The reality of that first meeting, after twenty-seven years, was of course overwhelming. The moment I introduced myself, several of my comrades said, "Hey, Sindi, it's you!" Soon afterwards the ANC community held a meeting at which we joyfully received our heroes. Our long struggle for freedom was almost over.

The Mandelas in Zambia

I will not dwell on our excitement as we watched on television on 11 February 1990 as Nelson Mandela left Victor Verster Prison with Winnie by his side. Hugh Masekela had foreseen this moment when he sang, "Bring back Nelson Mandela, bring him back to Soweto. I want to see him walking hand in hand with Winnie Mandela. Tomorrow!" Towards the end of that month Winnie and Nelson Mandela arrived in Lusaka and were guests of President Kaunda at State House. That day was declared a public holiday in Zambia. Thousands of people lined the road from the airport to State House. They were all ordinary Zambians, laughing and crying with us, their emotions as intense as they had been at their own independence celebrations twenty-six years before.

The next day the entire ANC community welcomed Madiba and Winnie at Mulungushi Hall, near the Zambian Parliament. There were also MK cadres who had been specifically selected to represent the various MK formations. I chaired the meeting. After the National Anthem was sung, Comrade Mandela said that he would like to hear from the membership what their feelings and opinions were.

Many expressed admiration for his steadfastness and good health after such a long incarceration. However, there were one or two cadres who used the opportunity to report on how they had been ignored and ill-treated by the ANC leadership. A young comrade I did not know from Adam mentioned me by name as among those who were not sympathetic to their plight. Madiba, the master diplomat, did not get himself involved in the accusations. He simply thanked the comrades for their fortitude and valour in sustaining the struggle and reassured them that victory was imminent.

At the close of the meeting I received information that there was a middle-aged Zambian lady who insisted that she had been waiting for this day all her life. She would not return home without shaking the hand of her "saviour". When I conveyed the message, Comrade Mandela did not hesitate but asked, "Where is she?" I took him to the lady. He greeted her warmly and then did something that would have made the pope look like an amateur. With one hand he took her hand, and then placed his other hand on her head. I swear the lady swooned! A minute later she stood up saying, "I will not wash this hand until I get back to my village." I could imagine her community forming a line to shake the hand that had touched "the saviour". That day remains permanently etched in my mind.

Thereafter there followed the process of composing the delegation that would meet with other appointees from the UDF to constitute the ANC team. This team would negotiate with the team from the South African government. At this stage we started using the proper civil name of "government" instead of "regime", if only to reduce unproductive hostility. It was agreed that when the selected delegates and supporting staff left for Cape Town, South Africa, some members of the NEC would remain to put out fires and help maintain discipline, among them Thomas Nkobi (ANC Treasurer General), Henry Makgothi, Josiah Jele, Robert Manci, Siphosiso Makana, Andrew Masondo, Steve Dlamini, Jacqueline Sedibe, Sizakele Sigxashe, Jackie Selebi and myself.

Those of us on the NEC who remained in Lusaka had to respond to the cadres' perceptions that the ANC leadership had "deserted" the membership by entering into talks with the Nationalist government. A meeting was called where I addressed the major points of concern. I reminded the audience that the armed struggle had been a means to an end; it had never been the ultimate goal of the liberation struggle. Throughout its history, right up to the historic Pietermaritzburg Conference in March 1961, the ANC had been demanding that the government sit down at the table with us to resolve the fundamental problems of our country, notably the divisive and discriminatory apartheid policies that had oppressed the majority of its

people. These demands were clearly articulated in the Freedom Charter. I further pointed out that our chief priority was to prepare ourselves to return to South Africa. I announced that we needed to abandon the pseudonyms we had adopted and start identifying ourselves by our real names and where we came from. It was very clear that even people from the most remote villages in the country wanted to be known to have fought in the glorious People's Army. I visualised community receptions for these heroes. There had to be people from those areas who could speak the local language and who would address the crowds. For this reason I suggested we start holding meetings according to our regions or provinces and discuss how we would undertake organisational operation and discipline inside South Africa while maintaining the close links we had forged in exile.

Questions were raised as to whether this would not introduce an element of tribalism into the movement, something we had been at pains to avoid. I responded, "There will not be a single village or district which will not want to be known as having made a contribution to our liberation." People would want to organise "Welcome Home" meetings and celebrations for their returned heroes, whether from exile or from prison. I maintained that the young comrades should "go to their areas so that they could speak to their people in the languages they understand". The comrades understood these points and promised to enlighten others who would be returning home.

A few weeks passed following the departure of the leadership to South Africa for "talks about talks". Days were filled with anxiety and tension. Not much information was reaching us in Lusaka. The fact that nobody was arrested or killed was a great relief, but what else was happening there, we wondered? Rumours started circulating about our comrades inside the country. People who had been holding on for decades suffered a resurgence of homesickness. Here and there one would hear speculative grumbings: "They have abandoned us! They are enjoying themselves with their families, eating home food, listening to home music ...". The majority of the membership, however, proved loyal and politically mature. They used humour to ridicule statements such as these which, in earlier times, could have been considered treacherous.

Meeting my family

In December 1990 Rita and I began to prepare ourselves for a trip to South Africa. As a member of the National Executive Committee of the ANC, I needed to attend NEC meetings in Johannesburg.¹⁴⁶ It would be the first time I had set foot on South African soil in twenty-eight years. Rita was due to attend the first ANC Women's

League conference in Kimberley. This was the first national political event organised by the ANC since the organisation's unbanning and would be a test of the sincerity of the De Klerk government's commitment to a peaceful transition.¹⁴⁷ I think Madiba managed to calm white South Africans' fears. Many regarded him as a saviour.

I realised that the vision of home I had held onto for the last two decades, might have to be adjusted. I would have to steel myself for that eventuality. On arrival at the airport, there were none of the signs one expected of a police state – no armed police or army groups. Transport took us to what I had known as the city centre, or what I used to refer to as "town", where the NEC meeting was to be held. The area around the Carlton Centre and the precincts of Hillbrow and Braamfontein looked very different from how I had remembered them. The big businesses were apparently no longer located in the inner city, but were moving out to the new centres of Sandton, Marlborough and Fourways. There was a noticeable presence of black immigrants in the city and they were unexpectedly carefree and at home. We were the ones who looked apprehensive and anxious, although there was nobody demanding identification of any kind, as in the old days of the *dompas*.

When the NEC meetings and the Women's League conference were over, Rita and I travelled together by bus from Johannesburg to Mthatha en route to Queenstown. In Mthatha I had the opportunity to visit my old school, St John's College. We stayed at my cousin Khaya's house. I had last seen him more than thirty years ago. He was now a qualified medical doctor and a professor at the University of the Transkei (UNITRA). Khaya organised a reception at his house in my honour and invited several members of the medical fraternity. I had a lovely time recalling the past and answering questions on the policies of the ANC. It also brought into sharp focus the length of time I had been away from the country. When I left, Khaya was only in matric. In the intervening years he had not only gained prestigious academic qualifications; he was also married and the father of four grown-up children.

After this warm welcome Rita and I travelled together to Queenstown where Rita would meet my family for the first time. I wished to revisit the route I had used when going to St John's as a boy, travelling from Queenstown to Mthatha and back, by a government bus service. A young man who had spent the last two years of exile at our house in Lusaka, Loyiso Jafta, arranged a lift for me with a friend, Singa Ngqwala, who was travelling in that direction.¹⁴⁸

We left Mthatha at about 10 am and began our journey through the familiar landscapes of my youth. On the way I asked Singa how long we would take to reach Queenstown. When he said "two-and-half hours" I just stared at him, incredulous. In

1957 the bus left Mthatha at 10 am, but arrived in Queenstown around 5 pm. He then explained to me that the roads would have been gravel during our time. Now the whole route was macadamized. Of course it would be. The last time I had been on this road was thirty-three years ago.

We reached home around lunchtime. My parents and siblings – all nine of them – as well as members of the extended family had gathered for a celebratory, “welcome home” feast. It is hard to describe my feelings on seeing everyone again. My siblings had grown beyond belief and most of them by now had their own families. Fundisa was a qualified nursing sister with three children. Phumzile was working in the Department of Finance in the Ciskei government and was married with three children. Khwezi was a teacher, married with three children. Buntu had completed a postgraduate degree in Anthropology in Boston, USA, and was married with two children. Mzikazi was a music teacher, married with three children. Bubele was a teacher with two children. Qukeza was a married teacher with three children. Albert Squququ was working for the Department of Agriculture and still a bachelor. The last born, Papama, was a teacher and also still a bachelor.

Throughout my childhood there were always older sisters or brothers living in our home. This apparently continued in my absence.¹⁴⁹ In most cases they became independent and would see my family only on special occasions. I heard that Alex Fana, who had lived with my family in Noupoot and accompanied me and my father to the station when I left for Johannesburg in 1961, had worked himself up to the position of postmaster in Cofimvaba. I looked forward to seeing him again. Meanwhile I met two sisters who had become permanent members of the family. Nobesuthu was a teacher and Nomfundo was a domestic worker. Nobesuthu had two children and Nomfundo had one child. This made it a family of twelve.

Rita received at home

In African families the bride leaves her family home and becomes a member of her husband’s family. A traditional ritual is performed to signify her being accepted and integrated into the husband’s family. These rituals differ among ethnic groups and tribes. My parents had arranged a special ceremony to welcome Rita into the family. It took the following form. Nobesuthu was appointed as advisor to Rita, her role being to explain the proceedings of the ritual and to help Rita dress in the “uniform” of a new wife (*makoti*). The family assembled in the lounge. As the husband, I had to sit in a prominent place in the lounge, separate from and facing the family. A mat was placed next to me. This is where *Makoti* would sit.

The ceremony began with Nobesuthu leading Rita into the lounge and assisting her to sit on the mat next to me, facing the family. My brother Bubele acted as the MC. He brought in a live sheep and addressed *Makoti* as follows: "Sisi, this is your sheep. It will be slaughtered in your honour. Thereafter, a special cut from the armpit of the sheep will be *braaied* and offered to you together with *amasi*." The sheep was then led out of the room for slaughter. Whilst the slaughtering and *braaing* took place, the family engaged in conversation on topical issues. Bubele then brought the braaied meat on a plate with a knife and said: "Sisi, this is the meat which you should eat and wash down with a cup of *amasi*. As you consume these items you will feel the spirit of the ancestors permeating your body with the warmth of acceptance into the family. Your husband can assist you to finish the meat, but you must drink the *amasi* alone."

As Rita ate the meat and drank the *amasi*, my father, now her father-in-law, made the welcoming speech: "We welcome you to this home, my child. You must feel free, as the eldest wife, to share with us any ideas you have about the running of this home. Your mother and I, as well as your husband's siblings and their families, look forward to a period of happiness and prosperity, which will come as a result of your initiatives. You are now our daughter and will be treated with respect by all. I do not subscribe to the malpractice of treating *Makoti* like a slave. There are no slaves in this family. *Wamkelekile!* (You are welcome!)"

My father's elder brother, Tata Jackson, was present and my father asked if he wanted to say a few words. The elder politely declined, saying, "After this wonderful message anything I say will simply spoil it." Thereafter the family began singing traditional songs. They made a procession around the house and returned for the final input from senior members of the extended family. The ceremony was recorded on video by my brother Pumzile, who had become the family videographer at all important events.

This marked the end of the ritual and lunch was served. On such occasions people eat in turns – that is, if they wish to sit at the table. Generally members of the family just take their plates and go out to the veranda to eat. However, I noticed a very interesting character waiting patiently for a chair to be vacated. He was a thin, grey-haired, middle-aged man, but it was his attire that drew my attention. He was wearing what would once have been a smart black suit, but was now shiny from over-use. The collar of the ancient white shirt was frayed around the neck. The tie had clearly never been untangled since the first day he had used it, but simply adjusted to take it off and pulled back into position the next day.

As soon as the plate was placed in front of him, he gave the contents his full attention. When the plate was half empty, he lifted his head and looked straight at my father and said, "By the way, who are you?" My reverend father was seventy-nine years old and considerably more charitable than I remembered. The canon was celebrating the return of his "long lost" son. He was not going to allow a gate-crasher to spoil his joy. So he calmly asked back, "Who do you think I am?" The gate-crashing gentleman was not put off. He simply ignored the question, finished his meal and calmly walked out. I then turned to my father in uncontrollable mirth and said, "Now I feel that I have arrived at home!"

This ceremony also served to restore my authority as the first-born. My sister Fundisa declared, "I am so glad that you are back. You can now relieve me of the family responsibilities that I was obliged to assume during your absence. Welcome home, my *bhuti*!" I had an unusual first task to deal with: an unresolved conflict between my father and my brother, Pumzile. As I have indicated, my father was an Anglican priest, by now promoted to canon. Pumzile was highly gifted. He had studied pharmacy in Pretoria, but left in his final year without completing. All family attempts to persuade him to complete his studies failed. He then taught himself finance and obtained a job in the Ciskei Department of Finance. He was also moonlighting as a playwright. Two of his stories had been broadcast on the Xhosa radio station. It was no surprise to me, therefore, that he was attracted to the charismatic churches. He was in fact co-leader in one of these churches. This did not go down well with the canon.

When I arrived there was palpable tension between the canon and the playwright cum-videographer. Pumzile appealed to me to help resolve this tension. I sat down with my father and asked him whether the part in the prayer book which prayed for the "lost people of Islam" was still applicable? I wanted to tell him that some of the best support we had received in the struggle had been offered by Muslims in Egypt and Algeria. He quickly pointed out that that passage had been removed from the prayer book. I then had to confront the tension regarding Pumzile head on. "Look, Dad, you should be grateful that your son still worships God. It's just that he wants to do it differently. In the world outside there are people who do not believe in God at all. This is the case in Russia where my wife comes from. I think we should praise God that he still believes in God!" My father thought for some time and finally agreed with me. So father and son were reconciled, much to the relief of the rest of the family.

After five days Rita and I travelled back to Johannesburg, where Rita participated in ANC Women's League workshops. A few days later she returned to Zambia carrying with her the video of her ritual of welcome into the Mfenyana family. I

delayed in Johannesburg for another ten days because of an unexpected trip I had to undertake with Nelson Mandela. In Lusaka it soon became known that Rita had been traditionally received into her new family and that the entire ceremony had been recorded. The young South African wives who had married in exile were keen to have a sense of what awaited them when they met their in-laws for the first time, and so the video was widely circulated. It seemed ironic that South African *makotis* should have to learn their traditions from a Russian! At this stage our son, Nikita, was still abroad. In July 1991 he returned to Lusaka, having completed his studies at the Moscow Institute of Civil Engineering. Like many others he was eager to know what joys awaited us in the new South Africa.

Madiba thanks Africa!

Following his release from prison on 11 February 1990, Mr Nelson Mandela had visited countries in Africa (Zambia and Tanzania), Europe (Scandinavia and the United Kingdom) as well as the United States of America. However, the demand grew for him to visit more countries on the African continent. Just days after Rita and I had arrived back in Johannesburg from Queenstown, I was informed that I would accompany Madiba to Gabon and the People's Republic of Congo.

I met the members of our delegation at Lanseria airport. Besides Madiba's security guards, the other members included Miriam Makeba, Jessie Duarte from the ANC President's Office and Billy Modise (then ANC Chief Representative to Sweden). Both Gabon and Congo were French-speaking and it was expected that there would be official English interpreters. My knowledge of the French language (acquired during my work in the international organisations WFDY and AAPSO) would be a distinct advantage during this trip. Miriam also had the benefit of understanding French, so the delegation would not be entirely at the mercy of the local interpreters. Makeba had already visited Gabon and Congo during her musical tours of the African continent. By now she was a household name in Africa owing to her musical career, hence the continent's affectionate title for her, "Mama Africa".

Gabon, with a population of around 1.5 million, gained independence from France on 17 August 1960 and in November 1967, at the age of thirty-two, Albert-Bernard Bongo became President. At the time of our visit our host, who was also leader of the Democratic Party of Gabon (PDG), had been in power for twenty-four years.¹⁵⁰ (He had subsequently converted to Islam and had changed his Christian name from Albert-Bernard to Omar.)

The main public meeting to welcome the heroic Mandela was held at the Gabon

University in Libreville. I picked up from one of the security officials that Mandela's visit had enabled President Bongo to set foot in the university for the first time in five years, as he was unpopular with the students. I briefed Madiba that it would be helpful to his host if he encouraged the students to focus on their studies. This way they would later be able to make a qualitative contribution to the development of their country and the well-being of their people. The student support was demonstratively for Mandela only and President Bongo did not even attempt to address the students. He did not want to push his good fortune any further. I have no doubt that President Bongo appreciated Madiba's favourable message to the students and reciprocated in kind.

Before Madiba had a private tête-à-tête with his host, he quietly asked my opinion on the appropriate size of a gift he should request. Taking into account that Gabon was among the top five petroleum producers in Africa and petroleum was a rare commodity, I suggested a comfortable million something. After the university experience, Madiba calmly doubled the figure. It is a tribute to the Bongo-Man that he did not even sweat.

On the third day of the trip we flew to Brazzaville in the People's Republic of Congo. The country, with a population of approximately 2 million, had gained independence from France on 15 August 1960. Dennis Sassou-Nguesso, leader of the Congolese Labour Party (PCT), became President on 7 February 1979. When we arrived, Madiba again consulted me about the sort of gift he should request from the President. I pointed out that we had ourselves witnessed the vast difference in the conditions of the two neighbouring countries and suggested half of the "million something" I had proposed in Gabon.

A twelve-vehicle convoy awaited us at the airport to accompany our delegation to the presidential State House. During the two hours it took to reach our destination I again picked up that the special guest had afforded the First Citizen – the President – a rare opportunity to visit some of the least developed residential areas. The deliberately long drive was exhausting. The host was exploiting the popularity of his guest to visit what were clearly "no-go" areas for him. This time there was no public rally. The two-hour zig-zag drive had served its purpose.

The feeling of being used without being consulted was frustrating and must have reminded Madiba of Robben Island. Later he quietly, but firmly doubled the half of the "million something". This time our host used a handkerchief to assist the air conditioner.

The final drama occurred as we flew over Zimbabwe. President Mugabe had met Mr Mandela and Mr Oliver Tambo at Fort Hare University College in the early 1940s and Mr Tambo had refreshed and strengthened these relations. Thus Madiba was able to call his colleague of college days to meet him at the airport in Harare. After a visibly warm reception, Madiba asked me to join him with his brother. Later I was informed that I was to remain behind in Harare to help weigh and verify the value of the gifts we had brought with us from Gabon and Congo. The delegation flew on to South Africa and I spent the night with senior trusted officials establishing the value of the gifts. The following day I got a ticket to fly to Johannesburg with the message that the goods would find a safe way to Madiba's organisational coffers. I could not help but feel proud that twenty-seven years on the Island had not reduced the courage of the Volunteer-in-Chief of the 1952 Defiance Campaign.

When are we going home for good?

In January 1991 a report-back team arrived in Lusaka from Johannesburg, led by Comrade Joe Nhlanhla. A full community meeting was called at the office of the Chief Representative, Comrade Japhet Ndlovu. Everybody was there, with millions of questions. "Where shall we stay?" the community asked, and "What shall we eat?", "Who provides accommodation, medical care, and schooling for our kids?" The main question, of course, was, "WHEN are we going HOME?" Painstakingly, and in great detail, Joe portrayed the situation and the complexities of our return. He painted a bleak picture of what awaited us if we did not prepare properly. "There will be no ANC structures to take care of the community of newly-arrived members, as we have here in Lusaka. The ANC will be busy building the organisation all over the country. Resources will be diverted to that decisive objective. Be patient, comrades, we must prepare carefully for your return ..." The comrades roared, "We want to go now! We have families there. They will take care of us!" Joe then countered, "Be realistic! Your families will not be able to keep you for more than one week. They have their own needs. Please comrades, give us time to lay the ground for your return!"

The reality of the logistics started sinking in. Some of the comrades began to think aloud. "Many of us were young when we left South Africa. Now we have families of our own." "My parents are now old, and will expect support from me." "We shall have to look for jobs. What kind of jobs can we hope to get in South Africa? What kind of housing and schools?" By the end of this meeting most comrades had come to realise the seriousness of the situation. They started contacting each other according to their home areas. I watched a realignment of people who came from the same district. South Africans are good with languages. There were a few cases where even I was surprised about the real background and mother tongue of some of the comrades.

As the comrades dispersed after the meeting, it was clear that their minds were already back home. They were visualising the state of their homes and families. The saving grace was that in response to the call for the youth to join the ranks of MK, new recruits were arriving as late as 1988. These late arrivals greatly assisted the older comrades to reorientate themselves, particularly in cases where their townships and villages had been shifted or destroyed.

The Arusha Donors' Conference

Shortly after this, in February 1991, an enormous Donors' Conference was held in Arusha, Tanzania, under the auspices of the Office of the Treasurer General, Thomas Nkobi. The donor community were mostly members of Anti-Apartheid Movements from across the world. The atmosphere was electric. At the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain on our African continent, we were finally making preparations for our reintegration into our motherland. The setting seemed symbolic. This was the first major reunion of the rank-and-file from exile and the internal mass democratic movement members.

The conference agenda was two-fold. First, it was to express gratitude and appreciation for the sustained support that governments and NGOs had given to the ANC over the years. It was that generous and timely support that had brought us to the brink of our freedom. Secondly, it was to confirm the commitment of the ANC and the South African government to a peaceful resolution of the situation in South Africa. To this end it was important to ensure that the released political prisoners and the returning exiles were assisted to create new lives for themselves. Some already had vocational and professional skills. They would need assistance in finding accommodation and food while they looked for jobs. Their children would need to be at school. The conference was warmly appreciated by the donors and they pledged to provide assistance, within their means, to assist in the smooth transition from armed confrontation to peaceful negotiations.¹⁵¹

We would be leaving behind in Tanzania the educational complex of SOMAFCO in Mazimbu as well as another settlement 50 kilometres from Mazimbu called Dakawa Development Centre, with a territory of 2008 hectares. This comprised an Education Orientation Centre (221 people), a Vocational Training Centre (76), a Leather Factory (76) and a Construction Department (704). When the Regional Commissioner made her recommendation to President Nyerere in 1979, she had shown remarkable foresight. "These people (referring to the South African exiles) will be free one day. They will not take with them the structures they are building in Tanzania. They will leave [these] behind for us in Tanzania. What they will take away with them are fond

memories of their stay here.” Indeed, in 1992, in a fitting ceremony, President Oliver Tambo formally handed over to the Tanzanian government the entire Mazimbu and Dakawa complexes.

The day has come

By June 1991 arrangements had finally been made for the repatriation of all ANC members in Zambia.¹⁵² At a final briefing the comrades were informed that each person would be given a suitcase to pack their clothing. They were strongly advised not to carry weapons in their suitcases. The movement would take care of any situation where there might be a need to defend ourselves.

We flew from Lusaka in three planes put at our disposal by the UNHCR. Each person travelling by plane was asked to ensure proper labelling of their goods to facilitate identification at our destination. Trunks and bigger items were sent by road to the personal addresses of returnees.¹⁵³ It was hard to contain our excitement, but when we landed at Jan Smuts airport in Johannesburg I appealed to the comrades not to celebrate by singing and dancing. We should maintain discipline and follow instructions. We were happily surprised when we were taken to a special entrance where we collected our suitcases and then proceeded to walk through the airport to a reception area, away from the security gadgets that would scrutinise the contents of our luggage. I later learnt that in spite of the instructions not to pack weapons into suitcases, some comrades had their pistols wrapped in foil to avoid detection. Clearly the security services had been instructed to make the homecoming as pleasant as possible and avoid any feeling that we were “walking into a trap”.

Once it was clear that there was no danger of an ambush, some comrades got on to their knees and kissed the soil of the motherland. The ANC had arranged hotel accommodation for returnees for a week or two, so from the airport the comrades were taken to the hotel. There arrangements were made for them to report to the new ANC Headquarters, in their formations, for further instructions.

Our first house

I was able to secure a flat in Berea, one of the suburbs in the CBD of Johannesburg. One of my comrades who had already relocated to the country as part of the negotiating team had secured himself a flat in the same building. We had agreed in advance that he would get the keys for our apartment from the landlord, so Rita, Nikita and I were able to travel directly from the airport to the new flat. We had a

short wait there before he arrived with the keys and we moved into our first home in South Africa.

The bulk of returnees were keen to reach their families, and arrangements were made for them to collect their identity documents and repatriation allowances in their respective regions. Once they had received their repatriation allowance they travelled to their homes to help with the task of reviving the ANC. Some returnees were assigned work at the Headquarters, which was finally located at "Shell House" in Johannesburg. I was among those who worked at the ANC Headquarters in the Office of the Secretary General. My wife, Rita, was still working with the ANC Women's League.

Soon after our arrival there was an in-house briefing at which we were told about offices that provided special services for ANC returnees. We were also given helpful information on the logistics of living a normal civilian life in South Africa. There I was, over the age of fifty, with no clue as to how to open a bank account! For the first time we had to learn about such matters as well as how to apply for home and car loans, how to take out insurance and how to commute to the city. To our fellow South Africans these were everyday affairs, but to us these were novel and unfamiliar responsibilities. Thus we began to adjust to the reality of our new lives. This was not without its challenges. In the period January 1991 to February 1994 all comrades received an equal allowance of R2500 a month, so we had to live very frugally indeed.¹⁵⁴

ANC revival meetings and Fort Hare's 75th anniversary

In the early days of our return I grasped every opportunity to learn more about my country and travelled widely, eagerly attending ANC revival meetings in areas where I could resume contact with my earlier acquaintances, dating back to my school days. I was equally keen to visit regions and provinces I had never been able to see before my departure into exile. Places like the homelands of Bophuthatswana, Venda, Lebowa, Kwandebele and Kangwane gave me disturbing insight into the operation of the Nationalist government's Bantustan policy. The leaders of these homelands now had to make choices in keeping with the changing balance of forces in the country. Most of them opted for an alliance with the ANC as the apparent future rulers of the country.

In 1991 Fort Hare University in Alice celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary. It was an auspicious occasion to honour one of the outstanding products of this institution. On 19 October 1991 Oliver Reginald Tambo, who had led the ANC for the past thirty

years, was installed as chancellor of the university. A few of us ex-Fortharians hired a kombi and travelled from Johannesburg to Alice for the celebration. There was Billy Modise and his wife, Yolisa, Joyce Piliso, Thandi (Mavis) Ndlovu as well as Rita and myself. It was thrilling for us to travel through the beautiful landscapes of our country. In the Free State, where there were vast tracts of flat land and hardly any mountains, ploughed fields stretched as far as the eye could see. As we entered the Great Karoo, we noticed that less arable, scrubby vegetation extended across enormous plains bordered by mountains. Each farmstead would have milk cattle near the farmer's house, but the rest of the land was dotted with grazing sheep. I noted that there were fewer trains than there had been when I was a child. In those days trains were the main mode of inter-provincial travel. Now we saw more buses and long-distance taxis.

We had left in the morning and, after several stops along the way, arrived in Alice during the evening. As honoured guests we were offered accommodation with some of the lecturers. Rita and I stayed with my brother-law, Professor Theo Maqashalala and his wife Singathwa. Singathwa had been a nurse at Victoria Hospital when I collapsed after the cross country race during my student days. She was now the wife of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Fort Hare.

The ceremony was both festive and historically significant. We were proud and touched that the man who for over thirty years had steered the ANC to victory was now being recognised by his, and our, Alma Mater. Walking around Fort Hare brought back so many fond memories. We were the militant youth who were going to change South Africa overnight. That "overnight" had lasted thirty years. Our youthful emotions of anger and revenge had matured into a yearning for peace, reconciliation and a better life for all.

Reception at Noupoot

My involvement in building the ANC internally entailed visits to various regions of the country, assisting the new ANC leadership in towns and villages to explain ANC policy. While people acknowledged that Mandela, who had sacrificed twenty-seven years of his life for the freedom of others, was the true leader of the ANC, many did not fully understand how the organisation functioned.

Nothing could have prepared me for the reception I received from the "Young Lions" in that former bastion of *"baasskap"*, Noupoot in the Great Karoo! The place had been my home for eleven years. I arrived late one afternoon in December 1992. I was aware that the fire of struggle had spread to even the remotest parts of

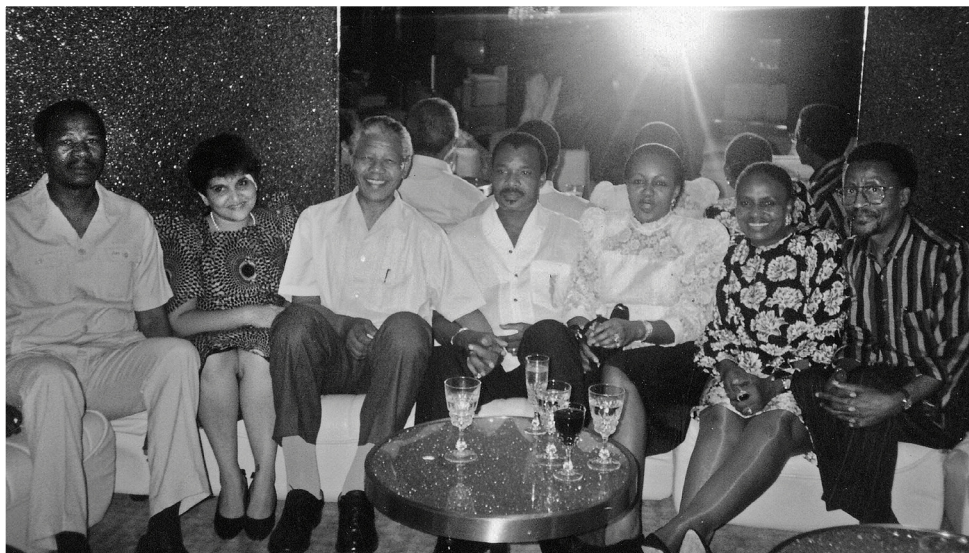
South Africa, but I certainly was not expecting this in the small home town of my childhood. Teenagers led by a flag-bearer carrying the ANC flag led me through a guard of honour into the hall, dimly lit by a paraffin lamp. The Chairman had been my classmate in Standard 5, so I felt like I was on cloud nine.

Fortunately I had made it a habit to speak my mother tongue, isiXhosa, and that alone brought ovations. How could I still remember my home language after thirty years, when there were people who spent one year in Johannesburg and came back speaking isiZulu, interspersed with words in seSotho? The audience looked like young people from any poor township, but that evening I could see the pride in their eyes. "We may be poor, but we have produced a member of the NEC of the ANC and an MK soldier." At the end of the reception the congregation formed a line and insisted that they must "touch my blood". This was a very moving occasion.

There were at least six of my peers still at Noupoot: Misters Maseti, Gwatyu, Fana, Mnweba, Kwayiba and Ms Tshitshiba. Some had migrated to other towns. At least one teacher who had taught at the primary school was still there. This was Mr Maseti, who was still teaching Standards 5 and 6. The primary school principal was the younger brother of Alex Fana who had accompanied my father when they saw me off for my thirty-year journey to Johannesburg and exile. Fumanekile Fana joyfully offered us accommodation for the three days we spent at Noupoot. We stayed up late talking and our conversation helped to prepare me for the "ghost town" I was to see the next day. The town council, the post office and garage were still operational, but the two hotels that were there when I left had collapsed and were not habitable. The entire location called "The Blocks" had disappeared, razed to the ground. Nothing new had been built in its place. The big Anglican church still stood across the railway line, in the area called "The Erwe". The mission house walls were still there, but the place was dilapidated. I went over to the Coloured location and was able to meet Mr Marney and his son Phillip, who was my age. Phillip was now a farmer in the Free State. It was like a dream for all of us.

There was Aunt Phyllis who used to prepare flowers every Saturday in the church. She immediately recognised me in spite of her age. Almost all the "White" houses with orchards and windmills were deserted. A few Africans had moved into these homes. The owners of some of these houses would visit the new occupants in the hope that they could raise a pittance for their property. However, they also knew that the local population would not be able to pay anything approaching the value of their houses. The owner of a property where the windmill was still working and where the orchard had survived told me I could have it for a mere R 20 000. I told him I did not have the money and that it would not serve my purposes because I did not

intend to stay there. It was not surprising that practically all the whites had deserted the area. The place had been killed by diverting the railway to bypass Noupoot. There was no employer for the town, now that the money-spinning junction was no longer there. Nevertheless the people who had remained in Noupoot were confident that they could create a viable farming community and had started breeding cattle, sheep, goats and chickens. The human spirit is amazingly resilient. It was also good to know that a few of my peers and seniors still remembered the vibrant town of my youth – Noupoot Junction.



To the left of myself, Jessie Duarte, together with Nelson Mandela, President Sassou-Nguesso, First Lady, Miriam Makeba and Ambassador Billy Modise. Congo, Brazzaville, 1992.

Chapter 15

Home Sweet Home

I have written a story about leaving the country to join those who were ready to forgo family responsibility in the belief that, as long as apartheid continued to exist, there was no future for the black person in South Africa. Repatriation was the fulfilment of my dream: the dream that our people would at last have the opportunity to shape their own lives and destinies. However, there was still a great deal of work to be done.

On our return in June 1991, preparations were already in full swing for the first legal conference of the ANC since the banning of the organisation in 1960. This historic event was scheduled to take place in Durban in December 1991. The composition of the ANC leadership was high on the agenda. It was becoming clear that there were three divergent streams in the leadership: ex-political prisoners, mainly from Robben Island; members of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), many of whom belonged to the United Democratic Front; and comrades from exile. Each group had a very different approach to leadership. Comrades from exile were used to military-style discipline, accustomed to receiving instructions from a commander or senior leader who would expect them to carry it out without question. Members of the MDM would want an assurance that the person issuing the instruction had been given a mandate to do so. The third group of former political prisoners had a tradition of discussing issues and arriving at a consensual position. These three approaches needed to be reconciled if the ANC was going to function as a united, co-ordinated body. In recognition of this it was decided that the December 1991 conference would be a consultative, rather than elective, conference.

Nevertheless the delegates felt that a caretaker leadership was vital in the interim. It was therefore agreed that at the start of the Consultative Conference we would elect members of an NEC who would serve until the official Constitutional Conference was convened.¹⁵⁵ It was obvious that new criteria would have to be taken into account when deciding on the post-liberation leadership. The leadership had to be balanced in terms of geographic distribution, race, language, gender and age. The candidates who were elected would have to have strong struggle credentials and proven track records in political mobilisation and leadership.

Several of us who had been members of the NEC in exile were not re-elected. I was aware that we were all products of a history of appointments by selection rather than competition. Most of us had simply been at the disposal of the Movement, ready

to carry out whatever tasks we were assigned. I called a meeting of those from exile who did not get re-elected onto the NEC and put to them the following proposal. In any government there are office-bearers (ministers, members of parliament and judges) and civil servants. The latter may not have a high profile, but they are in fact the pillars of government. Between us we had years of administrative experience in the ANC and I believed we could put this to good use if we were trained as senior civil servants. My comrades supported the idea. After a few questions and clarifications, the comrades mandated me to approach the new ANC President, Nelson Mandela, to arrange for civil service training.

I was gratified by the ANC President's enthusiastic response. Nelson Mandela not only liked the idea, but suggested that the team of probationer civil servants should be representative of the other liberation organisations in the country. He also suggested that the training should take place in two countries with a strong civil service tradition: the United Kingdom and the United States of America. At this time my position was that of Co-ordinating Secretary in the Office of the Secretary General, Cyril Ramaphosa. On being apprised of the training programme by the President, Ramaphosa requested that I draft the necessary correspondence to the British and American ambassadors. They supported our plans and liaised with their governments on our behalf. It was soon confirmed that early in 1992 we would be able to undergo courses in civil service training at the British Civil Service College (BCSC) in London and at the US Civil Service College (USCS) in Pennsylvania. Our final team comprised six ANC members, one PAC member, one Azapo member and one from the business world. The ANC six were Josiah Jele, Antony Mongalo, Stanley Mabizela, Sipho Makana, Eddie Funde and myself. The remaining three were, respectively, Misters Seleka, Cindi and Chonco.

At the start of the five-week course at BCSC each of us had to summarise our work and responsibilities during the period of political struggle. After this we were given a test to assess our management skills. Sir Kenneth Stowe, assisted by Geoffrey Morgan, was in charge of the programme and as early as the second day he reached his verdict: "You have successfully managed your tasks, but you were not aware that you were managing." It was a useful introduction to the course itself, which was geared towards clarifying management in various areas of responsibility, in keeping with set principles and procedures. We were then introduced to some of the ministerial (executive) Offices, including No. 10 Downing Street and to the (legislative) Offices of Members of Parliament.

A few months later we travelled to Pennsylvania to attend the USCS for four weeks. The course involved group-work for the first three weeks, but in the last week we

completed individual assignments based on our declared fields of interest at the level of state departments (as distinct from federal departments). It was a good introduction to the work of a senior civil servant. On our return we undertook a further one-year course in the Faculty of Public Service, Management and Administration at the University of the Witwatersrand, where our weekly lectures were interspersed with political work.

Within the ANC we were now members of the ANC Civil Service Unit. Under this unit we carried out visits to the administrations in the various homelands, like Bophuthatswana, Venda, Lebowa, Kwandebele and Kangwane, so as to have first-hand experience of how they operated. I began to draw a distinction between the puppet regimes in the Bantustans and the professional civil servants. Our training had shown us that civil servants are trained and conditioned to serve the government of the day. They may have private political views, but they should not allow those views to interfere with their work.

The Transkei had been the first Bantustan to be granted "sovereignty", quickly followed by the Ciskei Bantustan, which also accepted its "independence". The effect was to deprive all Xhosa-speaking people of their right to reside in the so-called Republic: the regime could now say that all Xhosas belonged either to the Transkei or Ciskei. These Bantustans became dumping grounds for all Xhosas who had reached pensionable age or who could no longer work. The Transkeian government was given more latitude than any of the other Bantustan regimes to create departments that were carbon copies of those in the White South African Republic. This was probably their golden handshake for being the first to accept "independence". Our Civil Service Unit therefore targeted the Transkei. We believed it would provide suitable ground for experimenting on the requisite government administrative structure.

By this time the Transkei was under General Bantu Holomisa, who openly welcomed the ANC Civil Service Unit and invited us to address a specially organised meeting of the Transkei Public Service in Mthatha. I was happy to be the main spokesman of the unit; Mthatha was after all the city of my Alma Mater. In fact quite a few of the senior civil servants had either been my classmates or were at St John's College during my time.¹⁵⁶ My years as a broadcaster in Xhosa at Radio Freedom in Lusaka stood me in good stead for my address. I traced the valiant history of the San and the Xhosa people from the time of the wars of resistance in the seventeenth century. I enumerated the historical events that were spearheaded by a modern political movement, the ANC. I then pointed out that all these sacrificial efforts would be crowned by the simple act of casting a vote. It was therefore vital that they should vote for the tried and tested liberation movement, the ANC.

My speech received thunderous applause, followed by an effusive vote of thanks. The audience was enthralled to have been addressed by their own product of *UmKhonto weSizwe*. Thereafter our unit had an animated meeting with select senior civil servants. We explained that there was a need for them to provide us with names of reliable and competent civil servants for future consideration. Unfortunately the officials were not quite honest with us. They simply gave us CVs of all the current senior civil servants. What is more, some had promoted themselves to levels that had not been approved, even by the White South African government in Pretoria. It is not for me to divine the reason why the capital of the new Eastern Cape Province eschewed the logical Mthatha (referred to as Umtata when it was capital of Transkei) for Bhisho (formerly Bisho, capital of Ciskei).

Areas of confusion

The years 1992-1993 were extremely tense. So-called “Black-on-Black” violence, believed to have been instigated by the former apartheid security forces, was destabilising many areas of the country. Mass killings involving ANC and Inkatha Freedom Party supporters were taking place in Johannesburg and KwaZulu-Natal while the “Witdoeke” in Cape Town were also part of a so-called “third force” fomenting violence in the townships. I was part of several teams that visited the various regions in order to provide information and answer questions about the ANC during community meetings. A publication entitled “A Guide on the ANC”, which was published and distributed throughout the country, helped to resolve community members’ confusion on a number of issues.

In these meetings I would speak with fervour about the importance of a new weapon that would far exceed the power of the AK-47 in deciding the future of South Africa. This was the power of the vote. Hundreds of years of suffering and oppression were going to be removed not by a bullet or spear, but by the X-mark for Mandela’s party – the ANC. I stressed that the last thing we needed was a confused black majority when their fate was to be decided at the ballot box. I said to my audience, “You are the blessed chosen generation that has been given the honour to deal the final blow to oppression and apartheid. This will not be done by rivers of blood. All you have to do is to make your mark against the name of the party that has delivered you from bondage and suffering.”

Fort Hare

In early 1992 I was invited by the SRC at the University of Fort Hare to address a

student socio-political society on my experiences of life in the Socialist countries and the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.¹⁵⁷ This was an interesting topic, but it was not the main concern of the youth attending the lecture. They sought clarity on the relationship between the ANC and the Communist Party. In their revolutionary fervour the “Young Lions” had informed people that the ANC and the Communist Party were more than just allies, and that you had to be a member of both.

This issue was certainly far less of a threat than the mass killings going on in Johannesburg, KwaZulu-Natal and Cape Town, but it was adversely affecting the drive of the ANC membership. South African society (both black and white) is religious, whether Christian or Muslim. Anti-communist propaganda had been particularly vicious in the previous thirty years. Emphasis had been placed on communist atheism. Thus large numbers of the people who supported Mandela and his movement, the ANC, were hesitant to be coerced into accepting communism, which they saw as anti-Christ or anti-Allah. Once I had clarified matters, the students at Fort Hare did not have difficulty in making the distinction between the ANC and the SACP.

I was asked to help resolve a different issue at a separate meeting with staff members. While the CODESA (Convention for a Democratic South Africa) negotiations were going on at Kempton Park, the people at various national and provincial educational institutions were not folding their arms waiting for the outcome. Most of the administrative bodies in these institutions had been run, overwhelmingly, by white staff members. People took the initiative to demand that, for a start, there should be equal representation of both whites and blacks on these bodies or councils. In the case of Fort Hare, this applied to the University Council. It so happened that the person who was understood to represent the ANC at the institution was opposing the demand for fifty-fifty representation along racial lines. The reason he gave was that the ANC believed in non-racialism, so he could not support the fifty-fifty representation call.

This was, of course, a grave mistake by our ANC representative on the campus. It was tantamount to saying that all the apartheid structures, which were skewed in favour of the white minority, must remain as before because we wanted to be seen as non-racial. The strange thing is that even the laymen in the street understood the need for corrective change. They accepted the need for a transition from the present system, which discriminated against blacks. In fact the whites themselves accepted transition. Some merely tried to delay it. I had a private consultation with my ANC colleague at Fort Hare and he was relieved with the explanation I gave for fifty-fifty

representation. He himself was not comfortable with the non-racial argument, but he thought he was implementing ANC policy.

More confusion

Towards the end of 1992 the ANC was launching regional structures through regional conferences. In the case of the Transkei region, the results of the first conference were disputed for various reasons and the ANC Headquarters at Shell House in Johannesburg had to annul the conference. A second conference was convened early in 1993, in the main hall at UNITRA (University of Transkei). I accompanied Mr Alfred Nzo, former Secretary General, who was to chair the conference. On the eve of the conference I went to inspect the preparations in the hall. On the three walls of the stage there hung the flags of the ANC, SACP and COSATU – in that order. The ANC and COSATU flags were facing each other and the SACP flag took centre stage. The “Young Lions” who were responsible for the hall decoration could not understand why I wanted the ANC flag to be at the centre. I had to give them a lecture on alliances and explain that while the ANC, SACP and COSATU worked together, they were not interchangeable. The youth began to doubt my credentials until I brought in the familiar face of Mr Nzo. Only then were they prepared to rearrange the flags the way I had instructed them.

The ANC/SACP clash

In mid-1993 I accompanied Steve Tshwete, Head of Organisation at Shell House, ANC Headquarters, to deal with a strange physical confrontation between two neighbouring ANC branches at Flagstaff. This is a deeply rural area and it took us some time to reach the venue of the meeting, which took place in a neutral hall at the border between the two villages. For the greater part of the afternoon and evening we listened to accusations and counter-accusations about who started the attack. Each side claimed to have acted in retaliation to an attack by the other side.

At about 9 pm Steve called for a fifteen-minute break. He then called a young man who seemed to be intimidating the rivals. There were continual hints about his possession of a firearm, but nobody would say it outright. The fifteen-minute break was over, but we had to wait another fifteen minutes before Steve returned to the hall with his interviewee. He then made an astonishing statement. This quarrel had nothing to do with politics. It was more about drinking water for the domestic animals – cattle, sheep and goats. Politics had merely been used as a pawn in one of the oldest sources of grievance since pastoral farming came into being.

The two neighbouring villages (let's call them Vuka and Vala) had both been branches of the ANC, living in perfect harmony and brotherhood. Vuka village happened to have a dam and there had always been an understanding that the livestock of Vala village would be allowed to drink water from the dam. A quarrel occurred between the headmen of the villages and the headman of Vuka instructed that the stock from Vala not be allowed access to the dam. When the headman of Vala went to the district ANC office to register their complaint, one district official defended the right of Vuka to do what they wanted with the water in their dam. It was at this point that the headman of Vala realised there would be no help from the ANC. With characteristic peasant wisdom, he went to register the village with the SACP. This is how this saga became known as an "ANC-SACP clash"!

Steve Tswete, with his rural background and rugby experience, gave a tongue-lashing to both sides. He scolded Vuka for selfishly putting the lives of the Vala people at risk by depriving their stock of water. He further remonstrated with the Vala people for creating a dispute between the ANC and SACP in order to solve their internal dispute. The two sides reconciled and the meeting ended soon after the post-interval resumption. The six hours we spent there were not without benefit. I had been away from home for thirty years and now had had a chance to listen to the articulate eloquence of the third and fourth generations of those who sorted out issues in public at the King's Great Place. I was reminded of a lecture at Fort Hare by retired Judge Blackwell, who recounted stories of how semi-literate natives (Xhosas in this case) not only saved themselves the expense of an attorney in court, but did a better job at defending themselves. In one case in Cape Town, the prosecutor had built a case against the accused, pointing out that he was part of an underground subversive cell of the ANC. When this has been translated to the accused, he looked at the prosecutor with pity and said, "I am afraid the prosecutor does not know the vegetation in the Cape Peninsula. It is all sand there. There is no way anyone can survive underground..."

Black-on-Black violence in the Western Cape

In August 1993 the negotiations in Kempton Park had advanced to the stage of drafting an interim Constitution for a democratic South Africa. The question of supporters for the two main contenders was becoming crucial. It was now known that elections were imminent and the date would soon be announced. It was of concern to the movement that at this late stage there was still conflict among the African population on the Cape Flats. This would compromise what should be unqualified support by the disenfranchised African population. I was sent to Cape Town, together with Sipho Makana, to investigate the real reasons behind the ongoing conflict in African townships in Cape Town.

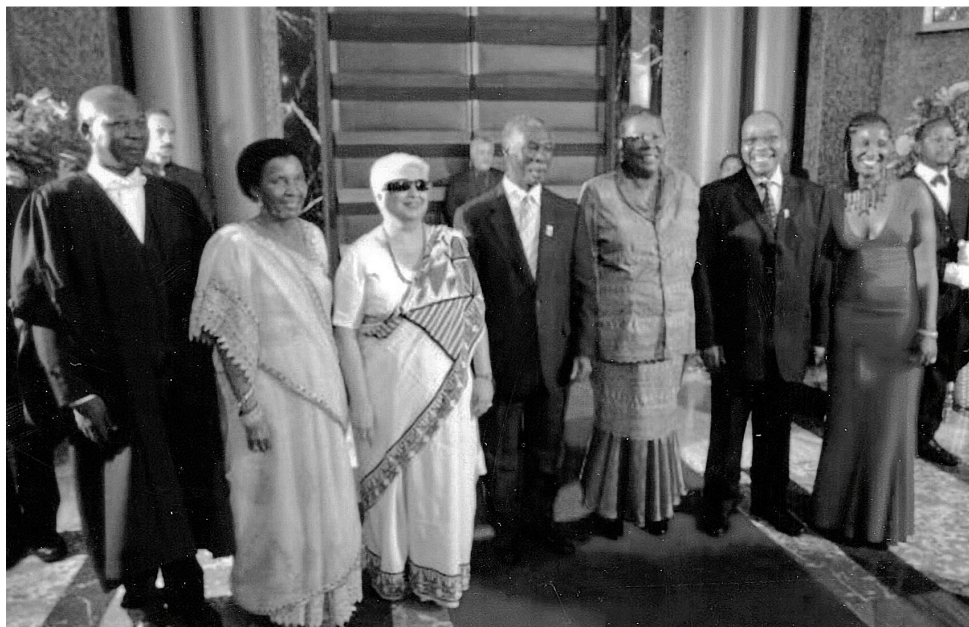
The three-month stint in Cape Town revealed the value of African *Ubuntu* (humaneness) and the importance of family relations. I had knowledge of some returnees who received miserable treatment from their kith and kin. Unemployment was high and the expectation was that returning exiles would help supplement the family income. When this expected added support was not forthcoming, many families firmly asked their returning “heroes” to find their own accommodation. I was much more fortunate in this regard.

The ANC gave us return tickets by train. We had to make all other arrangements. Fortunately we both had relatives in Cape Town. I went to stay with my cousin-brother, Reverend Mlamli Mfenyana, who was a priest at St Peter’s Anglican Church in Nyanga and lived in the mission house on the premises. We had practically grown up together in Lady Frere. He was happy to receive me in his house for the three months of our mission, which was interspersed by two report-back trips to Johannesburg. He proudly introduced me to his congregation as his brother who had been involved in the liberation struggle in exile over the past thirty years, and was now back as a senior leader of the ANC. The church provided an important source of information for my mission and my brother was able to give me his own perspective on the conflict.

We were hosted by the ANC in Athlone. My daily schedule was to leave the mission house by 8 am after breakfast and to meet Sipho at the ANC Athlone office. In the first ten days we received delegations of the various warring factions at the offices. For the remaining period we concentrated on visits to the communities themselves. We pressed home the point that if the people were not united they would lose their newly-gained freedom. I found the discussions with the various faction leaders illuminating and fascinating. First there was the overall division between the “indigenous Capetonians” and the newly arrived migrants from the rural areas. The “indigenous Capetonians” felt frustrated by the reluctance of the migrants to fully integrate into the society. They were less involved in political and trade union activities and tended to group themselves according to their areas of origin. While on the one hand this solidarity provided some form of security, there was a catch. These regional divisions enabled aspiring chiefs to become warlords. The new arrivals had to pay to the “chief or warlord” a monthly tax of R5 for the allocation of a plot. They therefore became like subjects of the “warlords”. The subject, after paying for the plot, still had to find material to build his shack. In keeping with tradition, no allocations were made to independent women.

It soon became apparent that the faction fights had more to do with territorial demarcation of authority than liberation politics. Ironically, the “chiefs” developed a

mistrust of political organisers. They saw them as a bad influence on their people. I enjoyed discussing the history of the struggle with the various faction leaders. As Siphso and I moved around, we noted a number of Saracen police vehicles placed at strategic sites in the townships. We soon found out that these police units were not innocent bystanders. Some of the white policemen owned taxis that were driven by black drivers and used to distribute guns and other weapons. This was the real source of conflict. I hope that our talks with the various “chiefs” contributed to the visible reduction in faction fights. We reported to both the local ANC and the national leadership on the nature of this “third force”. Our mission concluded in November 1993.



With Mrs Zanele Mbeki, Speaker Frene Ginwala, President Thabo Mbeki, Chairperson of National Council of Provinces (NCOP) Naledi Pandor and Deputy President Jacob Zuma, Parliament, 2003.

Chapter 16

Democratic elections and working in Parliament

By February 1994 the ANC had an operational deployment mechanism and most members had been informed, after the necessary consultations, about which fields of government they would work in. On the whole the deployment process was able to place people in positions where, even if they did not have the relevant experience, they at least had the potential to fulfil their tasks.

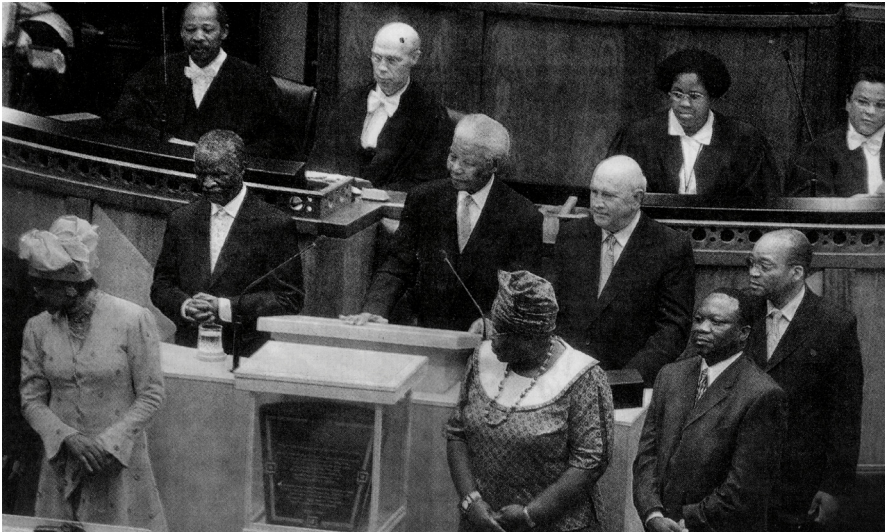
In March 1994, just before the first democratic elections, I was appointed Under Secretary to the National Assembly. This was part of a process that had commenced some months earlier, in November 1993, when I joined Parliament in Cape Town. Until this time Rita and I had been based in Johannesburg; however, I missed being in the Cape. Also, too many of our professional people were gunning for positions in Pretoria, the administrative capital and seat of government. I now wanted to feel that I was home and sought to distance myself from the exile community, which saw the capital as the main arena for jobs. For this reason I requested to be sent to Cape Town, to work in the public service there.¹⁵⁸

In November 1993 I travelled to Cape Town, where Dave Dalling, one of four former DA members who joined the ANC ranks, took me through an induction programme. This consolidated the training I had received for the role of senior public servant in Britain and the United States during 1992. In December I returned to Johannesburg and Rita and I packed up our lives there in anticipation of our move to the “Mother City” in February 1994.

On our arrival in Cape Town Parliament was not in session, as it had been closed in preparation for the new dispensation. However, the senior management staff had been briefed about the arrival of their new boss and had been instructed to introduce me to Parliament and assist me in understanding their respective departments (called “sections” in Parliament). The months of February and March were taken up with my getting to understand Parliament and my new responsibilities as Under Secretary.

By the time of my arrival the Tricameral Parliament had already been transformed into one Parliament. The other parliaments, namely “Coloured and Indian”, had been dissolved and the staff integrated into the national Parliament. Thus when I arrived there was one staff for one Parliament. At this time I was the only black person at senior management level. However, I had been prepared for this. When I

did the induction course in the U.S. in 1992, I met a black American man at one of the meetings who was also a very senior person in the Governor's office. One day I commented on this to him, saying, 'You are one very senior black American in a sea of whites. How do you work with this?' He responded, "These people are public servants. There is an understanding that a public servant can work anywhere with anybody. They are trained to work with whoever is in power." I was sceptical, but he said, "My brother, when it comes to professionalism, these people will help you. If you are told to do a job, they will give you valuable advice and assistance. Don't make the mistake of thinking that if they are white they won't assist you."



Thabo Mbeki, Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk at the joint session of Parliament, 2004.

South Africa's first democratic elections took place on 27 April 1994. The ANC swept the elections like an avalanche. Even we, as field workers, were pleasantly surprised by the overwhelming support for the ANC in all the nine provinces. The whole world accepted this victory as its own and lauded our new President, Nelson Mandela, who literally walked from prison to the presidency. Many had worked tirelessly day and night to strengthen support for the Anti-Apartheid Movement in their respective countries. Our democratic victory seemed to herald a new century of world-wide democracy.

Because of the brave history of the ANC struggle and the moral standing of Nelson

Mandela, the entire world was focused on South Africa. Many Heads of State visited and addressed our Parliament, as the international community expressed their solidarity with and support for the new South Africa. It was extraordinary to see not only the Queen of England addressing Parliament, but the President of America, Bill Clinton; President Fidel Castro from Cuba; the African Heads of State; Heads of State from Asia, Europe and the rest of the world. For me it was as if they were coming to pay tribute to the efforts we had made in creating a new country, which respected all its citizens; as if they were coming to say, "South Africa, well done!"

List of visiting Heads of State/Government

Head of State/Government	State/Government	Date
Mr Francois Mitterrand	President of France	4 July 1994
Dr Robert G Mugabe	President of Zimbabwe	16 August 1994
Mr Joachim Chissano	President of Mozambique	1 March 1995
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II	Queen of England	20 March 1995
Mr Zine El Abidine Ben Ali	President of Tunisia	6 April 1995
Ms Mary Robinson	President of Ireland	26 March 1996
Sir Ketumile Quett Masire	President of Botswana	23 April 1996
Dr Sam Nujoma	President of Namibia	14 May 1996
Mr Martti Ahtisaari	President of Finland	13 May 1997
Prof Dr Roman Herzog	President of the Federal Republic of Germany	10 March 1998
Mr W J Clinton	President of the United States of America	26 March 1998
His Excellency Yasser Arafat	President of the State of Palestine	12 August 1998
Mr Fidel Castro Ruz	President of the Republic of Cuba	4 September 1998
Mr Henri Konan Bedie	President of the Republic of Cote D'ivoire	8 September 1998
His Majest King Juan Carlosi	King of Spain	15 February 1999

Inside South Africa there was jubilation that the long-prophesied Armageddon had been averted by citizens who had sought peace instead of war. A handful of the “old guard” refused to serve under a black government. They took their pensions and left for what they thought would be greener pastures abroad. In Parliament the bulk of the staff remained, willing to adjust to the “paradigm shift”. This was a great advantage when I took up my position as Under Secretary.

Immediately after the election, the parties had to make decisions about which of their members would go to national Parliament. One of the issues of immediate importance was the reception and swearing in of new members. Most of the new members, especially the African ones, had never even travelled to Cape Town before. Furthermore, those Africans based in Cape Town had never set foot in Parliament. As this was a new experience for which we had to prepare people, we decided to have a rehearsal. After the rehearsal one of my former comrades, now an elected Member of Parliament (MP), said to me, “When we came here we started chatting amongst ourselves, saying, ‘What if the Boers are setting us up for an ambush? We are here unarmed. We are easy targets.’ But as we sat down, someone in our group said, ‘Just look at who is sitting at the rostrum.’” I was the only black person amongst white staff. Observing me there, he said, they felt reassured that this was not a trap!

When I joined Parliament the words of the senior Afro-American civil servant I had met in 1992 resonated with my experience. The predominantly white and coloured parliamentary staff members were eager to help me and I trusted their professional integrity. We worked together for at least two years while I was Under Secretary and I appreciated their support enormously. They came to understand gradually that it was in all our interests to work together. In fact, without the co-operation of the staff members who had been there before 1994, we would not have made so much progress.

Because I was quite cut off from the other public servants in Pretoria, I expected the Presiding Officers in Parliament to give me advice during my term as Under Secretary. On the National Assembly side, Frene Ginwala was Speaker, while the President of the Senate was Kobie Coetzee. He was a former Minister of Justice from the National Party, but he had been pivotal in getting the apartheid government to speak to the African National Congress. The Presiding Officers assumed that I would take the initiative to get promoted from Under Secretary to full Secretary, but I hesitated to approach the issue without their guidance. It was Makhenkesi Stofile, then Chief Whip of the ANC, who spurred me on, saying, “You must indicate to the ANC leadership that it is high time you took over”.

At that stage there was a General Manager who was Deputy to the Secretary, a Mr Chris Lucas. He was a very experienced man with whom I had established a good relationship. I told him that ANC officials were questioning why I was still Under Secretary. He replied that the Presiding Officers would have to make a ruling, but stated that he would inform the Secretary that I felt it was time that he should go. He came back to me saying that the Secretary was surprised that he had lasted two years! I was supposed to have taken over considerably earlier! These were some of the lessons one learnt as one went along.

I was appointed full Secretary to Parliament in June, 1997. I have always found law-making fascinating and it was a privilege to be close to the centre of power. I was also the first black person to hold the position of Parliamentary Secretary, and I took up the post with an enormous sense of pride. Prior to 1994 a black person could achieve no more than serving as a member of the parliamentary table staff. The position of Chief Administrator would have been out of the question.

During my term as Under Secretary my initial mandate had been twofold: firstly, to understand the workings of Parliament, and secondly, to help prepare Parliament for the integration of African people. The latter was still an important mandate when I took on the role of Secretary. My responsibilities as Secretary also included formulation and implementation of operational policy and promoting good parliamentary relations between the public and the media.

Now Parliament is peculiar. At other institutions you can go to university to study for your chosen field. However, in Parliament training is conducted from within. Senior staff would be people who came in at entry level and gradually made their way up. In a post-apartheid parliamentary setting, we could not wait for people to come in at ground level. We had to recruit African people who would enter into top level positions. We therefore discussed the advertisements and positions at length. These would fully describe what the candidates' responsibilities would be, with the understanding that we would be hiring people on the basis of their potential, rather than their qualifications. The candidates would be people with no previous experience, as this would have been denied them during apartheid. The recruiters were tasked to find people who had skills that would be suitable for whatever job needed to be done. Thus a recruitment drive to hire senior African parliamentary staff began.

We set ourselves targets for the parliamentary staff. We wanted 50 percent men and 50 percent women, 80 percent black staff and 20 percent white staff. This we achieved in 1998. Early on I had discovered that there was no concept of

management in Parliament – not even a human resources department – so we'd had to set it all up. Soon the various government departments came to accept that Parliament would call them in and ask them to account for their work. I regard this as one of our biggest achievements: converting Parliament from a puppet, rubber-stamping body, which it was before 1994, into a symbol of equality and justice for all.

It was also deeply gratifying to transform Parliament into an African institution. Many African countries have adopted everything from the Westminster system, including wigs and robes. One of the first things we said was that MPs could dress well, by all means, but we didn't want to see brown and grey suits everywhere. Presiding Officers decided not to go the route of wigs. We were trying to make this Parliament an example of what an African parliament should be: a parliament existing in Africa and adopting habits that have meaning in Africa. For example, we promoted the use of plain and simple language as a way of getting knowledge and information across to people. That is what we believed an African parliament should focus on.

One of the first changes that I influenced had to do with the outsourcing of the parliamentary catering staff. Because the catering staff were supplied by an outside company, they received only a portion of the money that Parliament paid to the supplying company. We decided to employ them as permanent parliamentary catering staff. This made people feel that they were now part of Parliament.

The transformation of the catering department involved interviewing the catering staff to determine the levels at which individual people would work. Because there was an increasing number of new staff who had unresolved grievances, I initiated an open door policy. If there were issues that could not be resolved by line management and they were not getting satisfaction, they could come to me directly. I needed to be fully informed. I allowed the staff to approach me about problems and would often chat with them, because I was interested to ascertain the thinking at the different staff levels.

One day I asked the name of one of the African catering staff, a lady who used to bring my tea. She gave me an English name – Elizabeth. I said, "Surely you must have a Xhosa name?" She nodded. I asked for this Xhosa name, to which she replied, "My name is Nokulunga." I said, "Why are you using Elizabeth?" She replied that during the recruitment process there was a white lady who said, "Don't come here with your funny names. You must use English names".

I took the issue up with the catering manager and asked him to call a meeting to tell his staff that I wanted people to use the names they were comfortable with. The staff members were very happy about this and thereafter used their real names. It angered me that we had a supposed democracy and this yet this type of demoralisation was still happening, in Parliament of all places!

During my period in Parliament, we initiated an internship programme for children from the townships. The aim of the programme was to provide opportunities for matriculants who had done technical subjects, to obtain practical experience. They were invited into a programme of in-service training in Parliament with our electricians and communications staff. About six students were mentored annually, following which they would complete their technical studies, boosted by the experience they had gained in that year. In one case I personally intervened when I learnt that the home conditions of a certain student were dire. I arranged for his internship to be extended to enable him to cover basic living costs such as cheap accommodation, transport and food. A few years later he was fully employed and is now one of the best in his field.

Setting up provincial legislatures

An important challenge of our new democracy was the setting up of provincial legislatures. These included the former apartheid-structured Bantustans, supposedly “self-governing” bodies outside the land that was considered to be white South Africa (87% of the land). Essentially these Bantustan institutions now had to be reabsorbed into properly-defined South African provincial legislatures that functioned as a part of the South African parliamentary system.

The divisional managers in Parliament played a pivotal role when the nine provincial legislatures were established in 1995. This included the recruitment and training of staff for the new provincial legislatures. At the end of my two terms of service amounting to ten years in Parliament I thought it necessary to recognise the contribution of the divisional managers and staff. In 2006 I received an award for meritorious service from the South African Legislatures Secretaries Association. I had helped to create a co-ordinating body of secretaries of the nine Provincial Legislatures together with the Secretary to Parliament. This was called the South African Legislatures Secretaries Association (SALSA). The Provincial Legislatures used existing buildings and administrative structures of the old Bantustans and the meetings rotated from one province to another on a quarterly basis. This helped us as secretaries of legislative bodies to better understand the environment within which our colleagues operated. Until then, we didn't fully understand the scale and complexity of the transformation process.

The creation of provincial legislative bodies was further facilitated by the involvement of universities, through research and training. South African universities provided essential resources, services and also training courses that facilitated the transformation process. This also led to the creation of new administrative courses established by many of the universities for a new cohort of civil servants.

A bitter pill to swallow

It was inevitable that people who had never been in government would make mistakes here and there. However, in my view the single most injured sector after liberation was education. With hindsight one can see how this happened. Both inside the country under the UDF and in the exile community, education had been a top priority. However, in 1994 practically all those who had devoted the previous five years to education, were placed in unrelated fields of work.

This was vividly portrayed by the composition of parliamentary portfolio committees. In the field of education, veterans with years of experience were elbowed aside by young comrades and deployed to new, unfamiliar areas. A case in point was Mrs MakhoNjobe, a veteran Science teacher with a track record of teaching in South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia. She was not even assigned to the Portfolio Committee on Education; instead she was assigned to the Portfolio Committee on Arts and Culture. Then there were the cases of Mr Gordon Henry Makgothi and Mr Tim Maseko, both of whom had extensive experience in the field of education and who had successfully administered the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Morogoro, Tanzania. Both were assigned to roles where education was incidental. Mr Makgothi was sent to the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), the second chamber of Parliament. Mr Maseko was sent to the Department of Foreign Affairs, where he was assigned as Ambassador. Those who felt committed to education remained so, but had no mandate to implement policies. Their voices were drowned out by new education “experts” with unknown track records.

My exposure to education in exile was only in setting up the ANC Department of Education. However, during that short period I was exposed to ideas that were beginning to gain currency in the 1980s. One of these was that, in the interests of not delaying pupils who showed ingenuity in certain subjects, you should promote them in those subjects, but allow them to remain at lower levels in other subjects. For example, one child could be in Standard 2 in geography, Standard 3 in history and Standard 4 in hygiene. Another could be in Standard 4 in arithmetic, Standard 3 in general science and Standard 5 in woodwork. I am aware that at SOMAFCO this novelty was thoroughly discussed and ultimately rejected. Imagine my horror when

I later learnt, around August 2004, that the material that the Education Extension Committee (EEC) had so painstakingly prepared in anticipation of our liberation was somehow misplaced and forgotten. I experienced the final blowout fifteen years after our education system had been continuously revised.

The tragedy for education came about because of a scramble for positions from young people in the mass democratic movement who wanted to get into positions of leadership in the newly-formed committees. One sensed that the “inziles” feared that all the top positions would go to the “exiles”. In an attempt to bridge a potential chasm, compromises were made. Because of these compromises, highly-trained teachers were overlooked in favour of people who were less qualified. For example there were South African exiles who had been teaching all over the continent, in countries like Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia. When the committees were being formed, experienced people who wished to go into fields of education, health and culture were out-manoeuvred by younger people. Many of these younger people would have been unable to compete in the field of technology, and saw education and health as options of entry. This was tantamount to a conspiracy: they conspired to remove people in certain positions to make sure that some of the “inziles” were committee leaders. This way they could prevent positions from going to exiles. As a result we lost the wealth of experience held by exiles, which our country needed at this crucial time. We needed people who knew what they were doing and these experienced individuals were unfortunately pushed aside.

These were some of the challenges and missed opportunities of the post-apartheid era. The prevailing sentiment seemed to be that older people would inhibit progress and bring in outdated approaches. A dire consequence of the new approach was the closing of the teacher training institutions. At the time I thought this was the worst thing a new government could do. Our experience in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries had made us acutely aware that the phenomenal development of countries like the Soviet Union, over a short period, was because they had compulsory and free education for the whole nation. They were able to build up the type of cadres who developed the space ships and the Sputniks. All these advances were a product of intense education and training in a short time. Thus, to people like us, the removal of the teacher training institutions meant we were killing the very source of our development. The effects are still being felt today.

To make matters worse, not only did we close these institutions, but we offered early retirement to teachers. As a consequence of this we lost our best teachers, who took their retirement packages and then went to work for industry. We should

bear in mind that the Members of Parliament who held these portfolios were the lawmakers. When the Minister of Education decided to close the teacher training institutions there should have been a strong reaction from the portfolio committees in Parliament. Unfortunately, these were people who knew little about education and therefore did not fully appreciate the positive impact of education on society.

Certainly it transpired that the vainglorious OBE (Outcomes Based Education) was nothing more than the fantasy that had been resoundingly rejected at SOMAFCO twenty-five years before. It is a bitter pill to swallow, but perhaps we should rejoice that we now know what should not be done. By contrast, many Eastern countries really developed themselves through their education systems.

Rest in peace

Soon after our move to the Western Cape in March, 1994, Rita and I revisited my family home in Queenstown, where we enjoyed spending leisure time with my mother and father and the extended family. My parents were not growing younger and I cherished every moment I had with them. My father regaled us with anecdotes about my brothers and sisters. It was a pleasure to learn how my younger siblings had grown into responsible adults.

At the end of June 1995 I needed to travel to Australia with a parliamentary delegation. My father's health had been deteriorating over the course of the year and it was hard to leave knowing how ill he was. My younger brother, Kwezi, phoned me soon after I had arrived to say that our father had been hospitalised in a critical condition. Somehow he held on to life. On the morning of 5 July 1995 I called Kwezi from Cape Town International Airport and asked him to tell Tata that I was now back in the country and would be seeing him soon. Fifteen minutes later, my other brother Bubele called back with the news that our dear father had passed away soon after receiving my message. I was devastated that I had not made it back in time to see him, but found solace in the memory of a story my father had told me in September 1950, the day General Jan Smuts died. My father and I had been listening to the radio when this news was relayed. Typical of the Black middle class and intellectuals of that time, he admired Jan Smuts enormously. (This is understandable considering the high praises the English media heaped on General Smuts. He was nothing short of a messiah in South Africa.) I distinctly remember him telling me that day that he firmly believed that Smuts had delayed his own death until it was convenient for him. He attributed this to his strength of mind and will. This is what flashed across my mind when I heard of my father's passing. Like Smuts, the revered statesman, my father had delayed his death until he knew that I was safely back home.

As the eldest of the siblings, I assisted my mother with preparations for the funeral.¹⁵⁹ In consultation with the rest of the family, we made the final decisions regarding the funeral proceedings. We would also have the final word on the disposal of my father's personal belongings. The funeral was held at St Peter's Anglican Church, outside Queenstown, in a township called Ezibeleni. The Parish Priest, Reverend Dano, rejected the St Michael's Cathedral in the Queenstown CBD, insisting instead that my father be buried at the church which he had helped to build. The Bishop of the Diocese, Bishop Russell, delivered a touching eulogy about my father's half a century of service to the church and his communities. He also recounted his relationship with Reverend Canon Mfenyana and made a pointed reference to the flood of correspondence that had arrived on his desk over the years, emanating from the untiring pen of the Canon. Besides the Bishop, there were two canons, an archdeacon and twelve priests at my father's funeral. The church was filled to capacity. There were in fact more people outside the church than inside and gazebo-like structures were erected to accommodate the congregation.

I was glad that my father had lived long enough to savour the fruits of freedom. Moreover I marvelled at the tremendous effort and sacrifice made by my parents, which enabled them to ensure that all their ten children received a good basic education and professional training. While in exile I realised what a heavy burden I had left for my parents. They had done their best to give me a good education in the hope that I would get a job and assist financially with the education of my younger siblings. Instead, with my mother's support, my father had achieved this single-handedly. I will never forget his words to us, his children, before he left us: "When I pass on, I do not want any discussion or quarrels regarding an inheritance (*ilifa*). I gave all of you the type of inheritance which nobody can take from you – that is education. Because of that you will be able to support yourselves and each other. The little I have is for the benefit of your mother." And so it was.

The phoenix will rise from the ashes

In December 1995 Rita and I set off for the family's annual Christmas gathering in Queenstown, following the route through the towns of Beaufort West, Graaff Reinet, Cradock and Tarkastad. Mr Zenzile Ngalo, my Deputy in Cairo in the early Seventies, had bought himself a smallholding outside Cradock. As I approached the town I recalled how, in our Cairo days, when homesickness was overwhelming, But' Z would dreamily say, "The day I get back home, I will become a farmer." Now it had happened, and I wanted to see this miracle.¹⁶⁰ Thus it was that, on that hot summer afternoon, Rita and I decided to stop over and visit him.

But' Z kept cattle, goats, chickens and some pigs. He also had a large, well-tended vegetable garden. The house was a typical Karoo homestead: a big farmer's house with three bedrooms and a veranda where you could sit and enjoy the cool breeze. Miraculously, all four of But' Z's Cairo-born children and all his grandchildren had come home to celebrate Christmas with him. His late wife must have been smiling.

But' Z told the story of how they had all travelled to Cairo the previous year to visit his wife's grave. The children could still speak Arabic, which was reinforced by their five-year stay in Morogoro. People who speak Swahili have no difficulty understanding Arabic. When they were due to return home the eldest daughter, Makazi, told the rest of the family to leave while she would negotiate with the government to assist with the exhumation and cremation of their mother's body for reburial in South Africa. Within a week Makazi had achieved this and was able to return with their mother's ashes for reburial in Cradock; so the family was complete. I asked But' Z, "Do you think the thirty-year wait was worth it?" He responded, "The God of the ANC would not let us down."

We left Cradock in high spirits and drove on to Queenstown. This was the first Christmas we were to spend without our father. The family had agreed to prepare for the unveiling of his tomb in June 1996. December 1995 had a celebratory atmosphere, with Mother enjoying the company of her eleven children and twenty or so grandchildren.¹⁶¹

On our return trip I felt a yearning to revisit the town of Cradock, which we had skirted on our way to Queenstown. Ever since my return to South Africa, I had wanted to revisit the places of my childhood. I had already visited Mthatha and Queenstown and I had been back to the town of Noupoort from where I had left my family and home in 1961.¹⁶² Now I looked forward to rekindling memories of my days at St James Primary School in Cradock, under the expert tutelage of Mr Mzamo.

I stopped at the Cradock town entrance and cast my eyes in the direction of what had been St James Anglican church and my former primary school. Seeing no sign of the church or the school, I approached an old man passing by and asked him to show me where these buildings were located. He looked at me in disbelief and asked, "Where do you come from?" Then he continued, "You see that green and red plain? That is where both the school and the church used to stand. As you can see, there is not even a brick left. Everything was flattened and the rubble collected and disposed of." My eyes just filled with tears and I could hardly speak. Is this what the toil and efforts of Rev. Calata, Mr Mzamo, Mr Mali and Mr Rala-Rala had come to? Damn Verwoerd and all his cohorts, I thought angrily! They had no right to eliminate

our heritage, to destroy our history! They can burn in hell for all I care, but the Phoenix will rise from the ashes! I intend to follow up the story of the land claims in Cradock as well as the restoration of that famous church and school. Already I have learnt that efforts are well underway to resuscitate St John's College in Mthatha.

In February 2004 I finally caught up with my former Cradock schoolmate, Vuyisile de Vos. By this time I was settled in Cape Town and would drive twice a year to the family home in Queenstown. On one such occasion I stopped in Graaff Reinet to visit the home of a comrade from exile, namely Jeff Maqethuka. While talking to his family members I happened to mention that way back in 1952 I had had a school friend at St James Primary School in Cradock, who was from Graaff Reinet and whose name was Vuyisile de Vos. The lady of the house looked at me with a smile and pointed to a house about a hundred metres away. We walked over there and I was introduced to a beautiful and confident young woman named Nandipha, who was temporarily dumbfounded by my story. She then replied that this was indeed her uncle Vuyisile's home. In fact I had missed him by just a few hours because he had returned to Cape Town where he now lived.

Nandipha gave me his phone number and on my return to Cape Town I called him. There was silence for a few seconds and then he said, "Sindiso, goodness me! Of course I remember you, but it was a very long time ago." After I had told him how narrowly we had missed each other in Graaff Reinet, I invited him to witness the swearing in of Members of Parliament following the 2004 general elections. I managed to secure a strategic seat in the gallery for him, where he had a view of both the ruling party and the opposition parties.

I looked forward to our reunion after fifty-two years. As I waited for Vuyisile at the entrance to Parliament, I felt a combination of pleasure, excitement and curiosity. In 1952 he had appeared to me as my sophisticated elder. I recalled that at the time he was rumoured to be the boyfriend of the young lady, Smokotho, who was later crowned Miss Cradock. Now, though older, he was still handsome, with mixed grey hair. I was surprised to find that he was shorter than me; I had remembered him being tall. However, there was no doubt that this was the same Vuyisile. At first glance, Vuyisile may have been mistaken as someone classified in South Africa as Coloured; however, he spoke perfect Xhosa and English as well as Afrikaans. One could not get a better definition of a South African than Vuyisile. As the ceremony progressed and I caught glimpses of him in the public gallery, my thoughts went back to Gandhi Hlekani, our competitor for top position in Standard 6. Gandhi had fallen at the famous Wankie battle in Rhodesia in 1967.

Resigning as Secretary to Parliament

When we started in Parliament, a large number of our members, as well as members of other parties that joined Parliament in 1994, were stalwarts of the freedom struggle. While some of them did not have the necessary educational background and experience, they had, over the years, made enormous sacrifices in their commitment to the struggle. It was therefore understandable why the communities they came from voted for them to become MPs. These people now found themselves in parliamentary positions with money and privileges they had never dreamt of before. To avert a potential situation where MPs would become too comfortable in their positions and not wish to vacate them, I thought it important to apply the two-term period of the Presidency to Parliament. (There was already a statutory two terms of five years each for the Head of State.) My underlying reasoning was that people who had benefited from their positions in Parliament, enabling them to afford houses and a good education for their children, should give a chance to others.

The year 2004 was both the tenth anniversary of a free South Africa and my tenth year in Parliament. I decided that at the end of my two terms I would retire and find some other occupation. By doing this I felt I would set an example and encourage others to follow suit. When my team heard that I was going to leave after ten years, they took a decision that they would all retire from Parliament. They likewise thought it a good idea to allow new people to come in. This was also for the benefit of the hundreds of struggle militants who had not secured employment in lucrative jobs that would enable higher living standards and educational opportunities for their children.

In a final gesture of appreciation to my team for their help during my terms as Under Secretary and Secretary to Parliament, I asked my Office Manager, Joe Phaweni, to prepare gifts and certificates for all my senior colleagues. Their genuine willingness to help had vindicated the words of the Afro-American senior civil servant I had met in Atlanta, Georgia, who assured me that as professionals the staff would support me.

When I asked the ANC to relieve me of my responsibilities as Secretary to Parliament in exchange for a diplomatic post, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, was a little surprised when I said that I would prefer a position in Africa to one in Europe or America. It was a lucky coincidence that an ambassadorial post was available in Tanzania at the time.

The same, but different, Tanzania

Like most African countries, Tanzania did not have diplomatic relations with apartheid South Africa. The first South African High Commission was opened by Ambassador Thandi Lujabe in 1995. She had spent some time in Tanganyika in the early 1960s as a young ANC cadre, so she knew the country well.¹⁶³ She did South Africa proud during her term and was also an inspiration to many professional middle class Tanzanian women. The second South African ambassador to Tanzania was Theresa Solomons, a militant activist of the United Democratic Front (UDF) who had later served as mayor of Cape Town, the second largest city in South Africa. She had made quite an impact in Tanzanian social circles and in the media.

Now it was my turn. It was apparent that our Ministry of Foreign Affairs held Tanzania in high esteem and was confident that I could offer the quality service that Tanzania would be looking for. From as far back as 1979, Tanzania had successfully promoted women to the highest levels of government administration. My challenge was to live up to the reputation built by my two formidable predecessors.

Early in July 2004 Rita and I flew to Tanzania. The senior staff from the South African High Commission received us at Dar es Salaam airport and escorted us to our residence. After a week (which my African fellow ambassadors considered special treatment) I was invited to present my credentials to the Tanzanian President, Benjamin Mkapa. It was a warm and cordial reception that reflected the good relations between the governments and ruling parties of Tanzania and South Africa. Within a month I was invited to an informal dinner with senior editorial staff of the *Daily News*, a newspaper aligned to the ruling CCM or Chama Cha Mapinduzi. During the course of the meal, my hosts quietly showed me photographs of a march-out parade of the first conventionally trained battalion of younger cadres of MK. It had taken place in March 1992 in what I recollect was the Morogoro Region. There I was, standing next to the MK army commander, Joe Modise, as he took the salute. You could have knocked me down with a feather. The trip had been undertaken without any publicity. I was surprised there were any photographs taken.

After some time I introduced the idea of monthly meetings of African diplomats, which became known as the Africa Group. A standing item at these meetings was an opportunity given in turn to the participants to brief the group on the latest developments in their respective countries. This item alone converted what had been informal social meetings into briefing sessions. At the start all ambassadors took the floor, but gradually only those with news of national significance did so.¹⁶⁴

In 1978, when a decision had to be taken as to the location of the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom School, Mama Anna Abdallah was the first female Regional Commissioner to be appointed in Morogoro. Mama Abdullah was the main person behind the scenes who pushed for the granting of land for the ANC to go ahead with the SOMAFSCO project. It was now my privilege to successfully recommend to the South African Presidency, with the support of the former Deputy Secretary General of the ANC, Gordon Henry Makgothi, that Mama Anna Abdallah be awarded the Order of Companion of Oliver Tambo in Silver.¹⁶⁵ President Jacob Zuma conferred the award in Pretoria in December 2009.

I learned many lessons of government administration in Tanzania, but easily the most outstanding for me was the Tanzanian process of selecting the ruling party president, who was automatically appointed the state president. All senior and experienced members of the CCM in good standing were eligible to apply for presidential candidacy, six months prior to the National CCM Conference, at which the president would be elected. Those who wanted to register as presidential candidates had to pay a non-refundable deposit, in the region of US \$1000. This was to discourage chance-takers. The Electoral College was a fixed number who constituted the House of Elders. The registered names of candidates would be voted for at regional conferences – usually in two rounds of voting, until the top three candidates emerged. These names were publicly announced. The last regional conferences would then mandate their delegates to the National Party Congress as to the favoured candidate of the three. This was not made public. Only the regional delegates knew for whom they had a mandate when it came to voting.

Now Tanzania has twenty-six regions each headed by a Regional (Political) Commissioner. At the National Party Congress the delegates were seated according to the twenty-six regions. The three final candidates were given time to motivate for selection. Each was given fifteen or twenty minutes to recount his or her service in the Party as well as the State. The three candidates were quite formidable, with extensive and varied experience. There was no clear front-runner. Before voting was to begin, the outgoing Party - and State - President took the floor to remind the voters of the three main criteria required for a president, namely: service in the Party from youth to maturity with an unblemished record; a minimum of a junior tertiary degree; and clear support from the youth who constituted the majority of the population.

After this “clarification”, we as observers vacated the conference hall to allow the delegates to vote. At lunch I was at table with one of the leaders of the regional delegations. He came from a region I had visited before and he knew who I was. Without prelude he said to me, “Damn it, the President confused my delegation!” He

explained that, on the first two criteria, all three candidates were equal. However, there was only one candidate who qualified under the third criterion. At the time I write, that person is serving his second term as President of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Farewell to mother-in-law

In 2006 we travelled from Tanzania to Kazan to attend the funeral of our Aunt Nadya. It was only then that we learnt that Kazan was no longer a closed city, but in fact on a popular tourist route. To add to our amazement, a black South African was playing for one of the top football teams of Kazan, with spectacular success!

It was a pleasant surprise for people in Kazan when they discovered that I could speak Russian. They would immediately ask where I came from. The moment I said South Africa they would warmly tell me, "You should know Assambai, the footballer? He has been one of our best in recent years." I did not inform them that I had beaten Assambai to the Tartar Autonomous Republic by forty years!

The Polokwane Conference 2007

During our farewell party at WFDY, my friend Joska Varga, the Hungarian Treasurer, said to me, "I have no doubt that you think your liberation struggle is very demanding and difficult. Just wait until you achieve your political freedom. Then you will really wish for the situation where your enemy is visible and identifiable. When you have to build a new society, your first challenge is to identify the enemy. It could be the one sharing jokes with you and being so genial."

His words echoed in my mind when I came back from Tanzania to attend the Polokwane Conference in 2007. I joined a group of ANC veterans from all the nine provinces who were staying at a common residence. To my horror all of them said, or reported, that they felt undermined and disregarded by the youth in ANC meetings. Some of the youth actually asked them, "What do you want here?" As far as they were concerned the veterans were taking their positions. It was clear then that this new ANC had no place for its veterans. For this reason we decided to create a third league in the ANC, alongside the ANC Women's League and the ANC Youth League. The third league, created after Polokwane, was the ANC Veterans' League. It was established to enable the veterans to have their own meetings where they would not be insulted and disregarded.

By the time I went to the conference we veterans were in communication and were aware that a significant amount of work had gone into building up the anti-Thabo Mbeki constituency. It was clear that Thabo had somehow enabled a platform for those who were disgruntled with his presidency. A number of senior ANC activists felt disgruntled that they had not been given higher positions in government. So even mortal enemies were united by this common dislike of the man who they thought did not recognise their contribution. Thabo's removal of his Deputy became the rallying point. The blanket support for the unjustly treated Deputy President was further fuelled by Thabo's announcement that he would be willing to become a third term President of the ANC. This provided a rallying point for people who had widely different motives. He had unwittingly brought them together.

Unfortunately this conference took place following major disruptions within the intelligence agencies, so Thabo did not have the intelligence that he should have had that would have informed him that he might lose. Some of us knew, but he was not aware. Once the majority said that this was what they wanted, he accepted their decision. This is what is expected from an ANC cadre.

Personally, it was difficult to witness the collapse of the revered authority of the President of the ANC, and by that I am not referring to the individual role players. It was the symbolic authority inherited from the past that OR Tambo had built on and brilliantly cemented. Now this pedestal that had been assiduously constructed over decades had been shattered. Much effort, sacrifice and suffering would be needed before that authority could be restored.

The only other time that the authority of an ANC President had been challenged was at the 1969 Morogoro Conference, during the period of underground operation and armed struggle. However, even this challenge culminated in the expulsion of the so-called "Gang of Eight". It is a fact that for armed insurrection to succeed, you need tight authority and discipline. It was simply unthinkable that the ANC would have survived the trying thirty years under Oliver Tambo without his strict, but dedicated leadership. Under it, we were prepared to sacrifice even our lives to attain our objective of liberation. Even during the transition period from apartheid to democracy after 1994, when free discussion was encouraged, there was recognition of the need to accept the collective organisational authority in the person of the Party President.

However, it is perhaps time for the next generation to begin to reap the fruits of freedom, some of which we, the older generation, will never know. The youth will have to wage their own struggle for a properly non-racial South Africa, in which there are equal opportunities for all. I have no doubt that they will also emerge victorious.

Postscript

Ending my story where it began

Soon after my retirement from the diplomatic corps, on the morning of 11 February 2011, the morning news included an obituary of the late Raymond Uren in Port Elizabeth. I was stunned. There was a picture of a balding old man with grey hair on the sides of his head, but there was no mistaking the stern face with smiling eyes. This was my roommate at Dorm 40 during my first year at Fort Hare in 1958. The obituary triggered a flood of memories, especially about Dorm 40. The faces appeared grudgingly, but finally there they were. I did a quick count and realised that before his death Raymond and I, together with Chris Raju, were probably the only remaining members of the 1958 intake at Dorm 40. The bulk of our dorm members had already passed away by the time I returned from thirty years of exile in 1991.

When the names are called, will my name be there?

It seems appropriate to end this story with a roll call of the Fort Harians who set out from Johannesburg on 2 January 1961 to seek the knowledge that would make them worthy freedom fighters, equipped to bring liberation to South Africa. As we used to sing, "When the names are called, will my name be there?"

1. Elijah Monwabisi Jara. Elijah died in 1969 during military exercises in Moscow. In 2000, while Secretary to Parliament, Sindiso Mfenyana was able to find his daughter Ayanda and her two children. From 2001 they finally received the heritage of their father's pension as an MK soldier. His body still lies in Moscow and needs to be sent home for burial so that his family can have closure.

2. Cyril Boitumelo Phakedi. Cyril qualified as a construction engineer. He served in Kongwa, the ANC military camp in Tanzania, before working at ANC Headquarters in Lusaka for three years. Thereafter he was deployed to Botswana where he worked for some years. He got married there and was repatriated in 1991. He passed away in his hometown, Kimberley, in 1996.

3. Mandla Tshabalala. Mandla qualified as a chemical engineer. He served in Kongwa, then as Chief Representative in Dar es Salaam. He lectured at Dar es Salaam University and thereafter in the United States where he has a second family. He visits home and is in touch with his first family.

4. Sizakele Whitmore Sigxashe. Sizakele gained a Doctorate in Finance. He set up the ANC Intelligence Unit with Joseph Ntlantla. He served as Head of the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) under the Mandela and Mbeki governments. He passed away in December 2011.

5. Koos "HK" Segola. Koos qualified as an industrial economist. He served in Kongwa, then at ANC Headquarters in Lusaka. He was deployed to Botswana, where he settled and started a family. After retirement he settled in Molepolole, Botswana, where he was buried in January 2013.

6. Anthony Mongalo. Anthony qualified as an oil engineer together with Angolan President Eduardo dos Santos in Baku. He served in Kongwa and went on to have a distinguished diplomatic career in East Berlin, Italy, Australia and New Zealand. He retired from diplomatic service in January 2013 and is back in South Africa with his wife, Lillian.

7. Zolile Ngcakani. Zolile qualified as a chemical engineer. He served in Kongwa in the top echelons of MK, then at ANC Headquarters in Lusaka. He was deployed to Kenya and Canada. Upon his return to South Africa he was appointed Inspector General of Intelligence Services. He has since retired and lives with his wife, Pulane, in Pretoria.

8. Fanele Hebert Mbali. Fanele is a qualified statistician. He served in Kongwa and specialised in the Coastal Unit. He was based in Lesotho for internal underground work and later lectured at the University of the Transkei (UNITRA), now known as the Walter Sisulu University. He is now serving as Treasurer of the ANC Veterans League. He is author of a book, *In Transit. An Autobiography of a South African Freedom Fighter*, published by SAHO in 2012.

9. Sindiso Mfenyana. The author qualified in economic planning. He was the first black Secretary to the democratic South African Parliament in 1997 and was appointed South Africa's Ambassador to Tanzania in June 2004. In January 2010 he retired from the diplomatic corps and now lives in Cape Town with his wife, Rita. In November 2013 Lindiwe Sisulu, the Minister of Public Service and Administration, awarded Sindiso Mfenyana the Public Service Lifetime Achiever of the Year Award in Gold.

Notes

Chapter 1

¹ Compare with “Mkhimbizi” in Swahili, which also means “to seek refuge or asylum”. There was never an amaMfengu tribe as such; the ethnic composition of the asylum-seekers was very diverse. Moreover this nomenclature has fallen into disuse because of its derogatory relegation of South Africans to the status of refugees in their own country.

² The British influence is demonstrated by records that show that the early Christians and first scholars were mainly “Fingoes” who had been given titles to their land.

³ Originally the school catered for pupils only up to Standard 3 level, but my parents gradually introduced new classes until it offered a full primary education through to Standard 6. They did this by creating new classes as the pupils progressed and recruiting staff accordingly.

⁴ In village homes there were no bedrooms for children. Any visitor who came would be allocated the so-called children’s bedroom. The children themselves would be sent to any of the other rooms.

⁵ There are still pictures and paintings of these wagons placed in circular formation and used as shelter from which to shoot at the natives who resisted the colonisation of their land. This formation was called the “laager” or fortress, a term later used to denote the racial exclusivity which became institutionalised as apartheid.

⁶ The *amakrwala* had to complete their period of probation, when they washed their faces and stopped wearing the special *krwala* clothing. This could be one week to one month, depending on circumstances. Only when they had dispensed with *imbola* (the red ochre) could they undertake chores like cooking for the community. They then joined the ranks of *abafana*.

⁷ Our grandparents instituted a tradition in the family where the younger siblings showed respect to those older than them by calling them “Buti” or “Sisi”. For instance, my father referred to his eldest brother Jackson as *But’omKhulu* (the big brother). He called Jaconius, the one preceding him, *But’omNcinci* (the younger big brother). In our second generation the respect was relaxed slightly. The eldest was called “Buti” by all the subsequent children. Among themselves they devised names derived from certain characters or life incidents and used these to sidestep the “Buti/Sisi” form of respectful acknowledgement of an elder. The third generation, our children, have taken this further. They have cleverly adopted use of the clan salute to refer to all elders in the two preceding generations. The Bhele clan has a string of salutations, for example: Bhele; Langa(the sun); Mafu(the clouds); Ntabay’nyukwa (the mountain top that cannot be reached, except by the Bheles); and so on and so forth. This is how the early traditions and culture have been “modernised”.

Chapter 3

⁸ Heating homes was a priority. Each household or family needed a brazier (*imbawula*) to survive the cold winter months. This functioned as the stove for each family and it had to be ready by 6 am to ensure that the wage earners (father and son/s) who logged in at the railways at 7am could get their breakfast and also carry lunch with them. Lunch was a sandwich and coffee/tea in a flask for the father of the house. The young ones could boil their coffee/tea from *mbawulas* at the workplace.

⁹ Many of the African boys who came to Noupoot had grown up on subsistence village plots in the rural areas of the Cape Province. They were accustomed to a harsh life of pre-dawn ploughing and cattle-herding with no meal until the afternoon. In the mornings, a pint of *amarewu* – a non-alcoholic and refreshing maize brew – had been sufficient to keep them going till a late afternoon lunch of samp and beans. The evening meal was usually steamed mealie-meal with sour milk (*umvubo*). In winter they would typically have soup made from unstamped mealies (*inkobe*), occasionally spiced and served with beans on cold winter nights. With this background, the young black men who moved into the towns were well-prepared for a demanding urban work schedule.

¹⁰ The families on the road or in the locations had an average of two to five children. This was not a result of family planning. The surviving children were a half to a third of the children born. The single greatest child killer was poor sanitary conditions. In the 1950s girls of fourteen to sixteen years old fell pregnant and invariably lost the first or second child.

¹¹ Depending on your race, you could get work as a shop apprentice or a goods carrier.

¹² Properly prepared homebrew was considered nutritious and healthy. There were known cases of some whites who bought a regular supply of *umqombothi* to treat ailments like high blood pressure and diabetes. It certainly was far less potent than brandy or whiskey.

¹³ You could learn a great deal about the development of societies and class formation in the Noupoot of the 1940s. Generally, a class is defined in terms of the relation of a group to the means of production. The owners of the means of production are referred to as the capitalist class. The people who supply labour are referred to as the working class. The small subsistence farmer is generally referred to as a peasant. The peasant class is peculiar in that he/she owns the land and at the same time provides labour. The land owned by the peasant is so small it can only be used for subsistence or personal survival. Land ownership associates the peasant with the capitalist, but the provision of labour associates the peasant with the working class. In the case of South Africa, this class distinction was artificially subsumed under the ideology of racial superiority.

¹⁴ There were already restrictions imposed by official legislation, which did not allow certain jobs to be done by Africans. The most blatant case applied in the mines. The same Africans who had to dig for the minerals were not allowed to learn and practise blasting (use of explosives).

¹⁵ At this time Noupoot had two hotels - the Noupoot Hotel and the Imperial Hotel. They were still thriving when I left Noupoot in 1960.

¹⁶ Incidentally, just five kilometres from the Sigcu homestead is the home of ANC hero Chris Hani.

¹⁷ When my father and his second wife had children, they were concerned that the children from both marriages should see themselves as part of one family, rather than identifying with one or the other maternal clan. So instead of dividing the children into those born of a Gambu mother and those of an Ntlane mother, my parents raised all the children to see themselves as born of an Ntlane mother and as nephews or nieces to the Ntlane clan. In African culture all children, except in very rare matrilineal communities, derive their clan name from the father. So all my siblings, regardless of their maternal line, were Bheles. My parents assumed that at a later stage, when we siblings understood that we were not all born of the same mother, we would nevertheless have a close family bond as we had a common father and were all of the Bhele clan.

Chapter 4

¹⁸ The song title was *Hamba Kahle, mfo kaStander* (Fare thee well, Mr Stander). We replaced "Mr Stander" with "Nkosikazi" (meaning "Madame") which had exactly the same number of syllables as "mfo kaStander".

¹⁹ I met Landu Sindelo and Mbulelo Akena at Healdtown High School in 1958, but Ndiki, now Mrs Ngcongco, was settled in Gaborone, Botswana, when I met her in 1979.

²⁰ Ghandi Hlekani also achieved a first class pass at the end of the year. Our paths separated until we met again in December 1959, when I was studying for a Bachelor of Science degree at Fort Hare. My train to Noupoot passed through Cradock. If I took the morning train, I could get off in Cradock and spend the day. There was also an evening train which would take me home. That was the advantage of staying at a junction like Noupoot. This time I went to see my old schoolmates and Ghandi was among them. Vuyisile de Vos and I lost each other for a period of fifty-two years. We met up again in Cape Town when I returned to South Africa after twenty-nine years of exile. But that is another story. A third schoolmate, Jerry Ngalo, had his home on a path I walked to and from school. I met his older brother, Zenzile, during my visits to their home. I was to meet Zenzile again eighteen years later in Cairo, Egypt, in 1970.

Chapter 5

²¹ For example, on Monday mornings we would hand in our dirty clothes and collect them after classes from the lawns, where they had been left to dry. If you came across an item whose owner was also searching, you would call out his name and give him the item. We

would iron our laundry in the dining hall, using pressing irons. There were a limited number of irons and we learnt to share them. We also offered help to those who clearly had no clue how to iron their clothing.

²² The Junior Certificate (JC) was awarded after successful completion of Forms One, Two and Three and the Matriculation (Matric) certificate was awarded after successful completion of Forms Four and Five.

²³ In the classroom different groupings emerged, fostered by commonality of performance. Similarly, on the sportfields alliances and fraternities were based on love of the game, be it rugby, football, cricket or tennis. My friends in the singing group were nowhere to be seen when I chose to practise tennis or cricket! They had other priorities and preferences.

²⁴ In urban settings ghost stories are typically associated with cemeteries. In villages, where there are wide distances between the villages, ghost stories typically involve “moving lights” which travel at an angle towards your destination, but always disappear at the expected point of contact. Once I had overcome my fear of ghosts I became convinced that there was also a simple explanation to the rural phenomenon of mysterious lights in the night.

²⁵ Published in *“Imvo Zabantsundu”* (Black Opinion) 24th October, 1911.

²⁶ The greater proportion of the Abathwa became integrated into Xhosa culture through intermarriage, but some remained independent. This spawned the historic untruths spread by the apartheid apologists, that the San people had been hunted to extinction by the Bantus.

²⁷ I later learned that the breakaway of the Pan-Africanist Congress from the ANC was primarily as a result of unhappiness with the pre-amble of the Freedom Charter, which read: “We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people” (“From Protest to Challenge”, vol. 3, page 205). The Freedom Charter’s commitment to non-racialism was at odds with the PAC’s Africanist philosophy.

Chapter 6

²⁸ During our debates at St John’s College, a perception arose that the two streams, “Academic” and “General”, defined the field or profession you were destined for. If, like me, you were designated “Academic” you studied six school subjects: mathematics, physical science (physics and chemistry), biology (botany and zoology), Latin as well as two languages (English and Xhosa, in my case). If you were in the “General” stream, you studied history, geography, biology, arithmetic and the two languages. Both those in the “Academic” stream and the “General” stream could become teachers, but only the “Academics” could go on to

become doctors or lawyers. (Engineering was not an option for Blacks before 1960.) Those in the “General” stream, according to our understanding, could pursue nursing and clerical jobs as an alternative.

²⁹ At this time in the history of South Africa, Blacks were referred to as “Non-Whites”, to emphasise the fact that they were non-citizens with no franchise. Ironically, of course, Whites constituted less than 10 % of South Africa’s population, Blacks 79 percent, Coloureds 8.9 percent and Indians 2.5 percent. This attempt to undermine Black identity only served to strengthen my political consciousness, which embraced the ideal of multi-racialism leading to non-racialism. I looked forward to a new era when Black people would finally be referred to in positive terms.

³⁰ The university produced graduates from as far north as Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria. Esteemed Fort Hare Alumni include: OR Tambo, Nelson Mandela, Chris Hani, Robert Sobukwe, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Eliza Mathu and Charles Njonjo (Kenya).

³¹ This gives a sense of the high level of political consciousness among students in the 1950s.

³² In fact, all three institutions were within walking distance of each other. In South Africa of the 1950s, “walking distance” was one to three kilometres.

³³ Oliver (OR) Tambo successfully led the ANC-in-exile for thirty years, while Duma Nokwe was Secretary General of the ANC at the time of its ban in 1960. He supervised the administration during the difficult period of transition from legality to underground operation. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi was still a Member of Parliament and President of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) at the time the author was writing this book, having survived both of his former Fort Hare colleagues.

³⁴ The ANC Youth League commanded a majority at College and effectively controlled the SRC.

³⁵ There was also a protest march in 1958, mainly by academics who were joined by white Liberals from the town of Alice. This was to protest against the tabling in Parliament of the University Extension Bill. The action was important in raising alarm at what was in store for Black education, but it was not sufficient to arouse anger and passion among the mass of the student body.

³⁶ The issue of Bantu Education had been highlighted when some high school teachers decided to leave the country to teach in other African countries. Recognising that the new Bantu Education system was meant to produce only menial workers, they took a decision that they would not be party to the intellectual deprivation of the African child in South Africa. Accordingly they left for countries like Ghana which, in 1957, was the first Sub-Saharan country in Africa to obtain independence. (A host of African colonial countries obtained

independence soon thereafter, leading to 1960 being declared “Africa Year”.)

³⁷ The University of the North in Turfloop was set up for the Sotho and Tswana students. Coloureds had their own University in Bellville (UWC), while Indians and Zulus had their universities in Durban-Westville and Ngoye (KZN) respectively.

³⁸ The Ball went ahead, though with only half the normal attendance. This was a reflection of the times.

³⁹ It so happened that Mbulelo and Nomathemba Sothondoshe were visiting Noupoot again at this time. I consulted Mbulelo on how best to get to this address by train. He advised me not to proceed to the main Park Station in the city centre, but to get off at Orlando East and then catch a taxi. It may seem strange that an ANC cadre should have sought advice from a PAC man, but Mbulelo also happened to be a Bhele, the same clan as I. Moreover, I was dating his wife’s younger sister at the time.

Chapter 7

⁴⁰ In my youth I was excited to find that there are homes where prayer and the church are not central. I was determined to find out what kind of guidance they had in their daily lives. If they did not get guidance from the preacher or the priest, then who was their guide? I soon found out that the basic Ten Commandments were a sufficient guide.

⁴¹ The most cynical explanation for the pass laws was given as far back as 1919. The ANC President Sefako Makgatho quoted it during his address to the eighth ANC congress in Queenstown that same year: “The authorities insist that they cannot abolish the passes” as they “are a great help to the Natives – they serve to identify the dead ones, and stop the living ones from committing crimes.” (in *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964*, eds. Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter, 1972, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, Stanford, Vol 1, page 107)

⁴² Today the tourist route in Soweto includes a visit to the now famous Vilakazi street where Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu used to live. It is the only street in South Africa, and possibly in the world, where two Nobel Peace Laureates lived at about the same time. From there, walking to the right, it is a short distance to the Sisulu home next to Uncle Tom’s Hall. Behind the Hall is the Hector Pieterse Memorial. (Hector was the first to die from police bullets during the 1976 students’ uprising in Soweto.) This area forms a historic triangle, which is accessible on foot from the nearby Phefeni railway station. There is a small hill on the left side of the Mandela house. If you climb over that hill, you come to the original home of Advocate Duma Nokwe, who was Secretary General of the ANC when it was banned in 1960. He remained the de facto Secretary General until the 1969 Morogoro Conference in Tanzania.

⁴³ During one get-together at the Rand Youth Club in Macosa House in 1961, I was introduced to a friend's girlfriend. I started chatting with her when she suddenly exclaimed, "My word! You are a real Xhosa. You speak just like my mother." Before I could respond, her companion chipped in, "Xhosas! They are said to be good thieves, but when it comes to lying, they are masters. Just look, all the best lawyers are Xhosas." It was a revelation to me. I had known that storytelling in the Cape was revered as an art. The best artist was said never to tell the same story in the same way.

⁴⁴ Wolfie Kodesh prepared Christmas hampers for those who contributed a half-crown (50 cents) a month. In December they would get a package of goodies which was enough for a family Christmas celebration. Mrs Nokwe Senior (Duma's mother) used to give me the money to pay for her hampers every month.

⁴⁵ The Xhosa tradition of paying attention to clan names facilitated the expansion of the family circle. You were then left with a clear choice of those with whom you could develop more intimate relationships. Cases were known of couples where both partners (man and wife) belonged to the same clan. This usually happened after elaborate research had revealed that there had been no intermarriage or "blood mix". But you did not want your "affair" to become a subject of discussion at various kraals when there were celebrations of one kind or another.

⁴⁶ Later, in exile, the ANC conducted clothing distribution once, and later twice, a year to all their members in the various communities or camps. This clothes and toiletry distribution became known as *umphando*, referring to the process of toiling for a livelihood. I used to boast during the *umphando* sessions that I was among the first to *phanda* even before we went into exile.

⁴⁷ I should fill in some background to the formation of the Congress of Democrats. Apartheid was the ultimate perfection and physical implementation of the "divide and rule" colonial policy. The foundation was laid by successive colonial governors in the eighteenth century when the new towns and cities were in rudimentary stages of development. It was quite natural that during the industrialisation period, particularly the growth of mining towns following the discovery of diamonds (1866) and gold (1885), people with a common language, culture and traditions would tend to congregate. But the 1913 Land Act gave statutory effect to the African dispossession by allocating 87 percent of the land to the colonial white immigrants, leaving 13 percent as reserves for the indigenous population. Gradually it became the norm to divide every settlement, urban and rural, into racial enclaves, with the Coloured population (and the Asians, when they were allowed to settle) serving as a buffer zone between the Whites (called Europeans) and the Africans (called Natives, then Kaffirs, then Bantus). This explains why the Congress movement initially comprised separate organisations within the various racial groups. Africans, Coloureds and Asians (mostly of Indian descent) were collectively called Non-Europeans, while the White minority designated themselves Europeans. With the growth of the liberation struggle, all those designated non-Europeans decided to call themselves Blacks in response to White rule and privilege. As a majority they then demanded the power to rule.

⁴⁸ The demonstrations were by either of the groups and at times, one group would initiate and the other would join in support. There was no hostility as both groups had similar goals against racial discrimination.

⁴⁹ The ANC people at mass rallies typically wore hats of different types or dignified caps. The few who did not cover their heads usually had umbrellas, as did the majority of ladies in the crowd.

⁵⁰ I use the word "sermon" to refer to the type of sermon you get on Good Friday in practically all black churches, irrespective of denomination. This is the day when even atheists go to listen to preachers proclaiming the Seven Words (pronouncements by the crucified Jesus from the Cross). In my attempt to get the correct nomenclature for these Words, I made an astounding discovery. In the "Anglican Prayer Book" printed in 1989, there is no reference to these "Seven Words", and yet all black churches, including the Anglican Church, continue to invoke them, preferably in the form of competitive delivery by seven preachers.

⁵¹ The Black Power movement, which emanated from the United States, gained world-wide recognition, particularly at the Olympic Games in Mexico. It is a sign of international solidarity that the black fist salute became a symbol of all organisations in a struggle for liberation. Our leaders who assembled to create the South African Native National Congress in 1912 had themselves been inspired by the writings and speeches of Black American leaders of the calibre of Marcus Garvey. Indeed it was the cross pollination of ideas from colonised Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and the United States that gave rise to the world-wide anti-colonial movement that saw 1960 being declared "Africa Year". In the same year the United Nations Organisation (UNO) adopted a motion proposed by the Soviet Union condemning the continued existence of colonies.

⁵² In African townships, and even villages, the most cohesive groups are to be found in the churches, especially the Mothers' Unions. In my understanding, this is where the wives, mothers and family caretakers gain strength to withstand their stressful lives.

⁵³ He was fluent in Afrikaans, the language of the Great Karoo at the time. Africans, when speaking to Whites, had to speak Afrikaans. Any attempt to speak English would be foolhardy. You would get a sneering reference as a "black Englishman" or Kaffir and be refused whatever it is that you were asking for.

⁵⁴ Most of these quarrels arose during weekend bouts of drinking the traditional brew, *umqombothi*. There were no township criminals. The black community was made up of largely conservative men and women who retained and practised the mores and behaviour from rural communities. Teenagers who misbehaved were either disciplined by thrashing or sent for circumcision. Thereafter they stopped their schooling and were apprenticed as helpers at the Railways. The Railways Administration welcomed young blood who helped supplement the tired efforts of the elders who were whiling away time until they were pensioned off.

Chapter 8

⁵⁵ The Equator passes just above the northern part of Tanzania. There are only two seasons: the rainy season and the dry season. Otherwise it is hot right through the year, except, perhaps, in places of high attitude such as Mount Kilimanjaro – the highest mountain on the African continent. The heat in Tanzania can be oppressive. To use an African idiom, the high humidity, especially in the coastal areas, can “make you sweat even while you are under a shower”. The oppressive heat has its advantages, however. Shelter and clothes are affordable. Blankets and overcoats are an unnecessary luxury.

⁵⁶ This violence was not so much a product of the history of inter-tribal battles, when warriors would distinguish themselves in valour, as the product of the colonial master’s stripping of black men’s pride. I had witnessed black fathers humiliated by white boys in the presence of their children. These men had to swallow their pride for fear of losing their jobs. They would then drown their frustrations and despair in liquor and gain a false sense of superiority by being violent towards their wives, children and other men.

⁵⁷ In Tanganyika at this time the percentage of colonial settlers was very small. This is largely explained by the devastating effect of malaria. In parts of sub-Saharan Africa one of the highest awards of honour is the “Order of the Mosquito”, in recognition of the role the mosquito (and Tsetsefly) played in discouraging Europeans from settling in Equatorial Africa in large numbers.

⁵⁸ Although the ANC and PAC shared an office in Tanganyika, they remained distinct political organisations. This United Front could not last. It was artificially created outside the borders of South Africa. It was no surprise therefore when, a few years later, the United Front dissolved. Each of the two organisations reverted to their original positions. The ANC had its headquarters in Morogoro and the PAC was based in Bagamoyo.

Chapter 9

⁵⁹ The ANC learnt from the experience of the first nine (our group) that the academic year in Europe starts in September. Thereafter they ensured that all students going to Europe for their course of study arrived on time. The bulk of ANC scholars were sent to Eastern Europe. The main host countries were: USSR, the German Democratic Republic or GDR (East Germany), Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Rumania. Students were also sent to Western countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States of America and West Germany. In the late 1980s about ten students were sent to Cuba annually until repatriation in 1991. In addition to these groups sent to study through ANC channels, there were also individuals who found their way to institutions in other parts of the world through their own efforts. In each of these countries there were now Associations of South African Students. They held annual conferences and sent recommendations and resolutions to the ANC Youth and Students Section either through the London Office or directly to the ANC Headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia.

⁶⁰ I have no doubt that many of the people who participated in the tremendous effort at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO), the ANC school in Tanzania, from 1979 to 1992, had either read the book or seen the film. I have often thought how helpful it would be if such films were shown in South African and SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) cinemas.

⁶¹ The state farms (*sovkhoz*) were farms confiscated from rich farmers (*Kulaks*) who had opposed the Russian Revolution. These farms were now owned by the state. The workforce was a mixture of small-scale subsistence farmers and pure workers who didn't have any land.

⁶² The bulk of my comrades left the country in search of the knowledge and means to obtain liberation from Apartheid. Nobody could have foreseen that this venture would take three decades before successful completion. Meanwhile our generation back home would face trials and tribulation that our predecessors had never dreamt of, even in their worst nightmares.

⁶³ The penalties increased in geometric proportions over the next few years: from six months to five years in 1962 to ten years in 1963 and minimum twenty years to life in 1964.

⁶⁴ Reed, John. *Ten Days that Shook the World*. New York: Bony and Liveright, 1919.

⁶⁵ The years 1963-1965 were the peak of the Sino-Soviet dispute.

⁶⁶ Following the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the independent Republic of Congo, the Soviet Union opened a special university in Moscow named the Patrice Lumumba University of Friendship. Many cadres from liberation movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America received scholarships from the Soviet Government to study there.

⁶⁷ Karl Marx, in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). Similarly, to the question, "What is superior: mind or matter?" the atheist response is "Mind is of matter, but a highly developed form of matter." The postulations I have made were derived from the interpretation given by highly qualified lecturers in philosophy. It was up to the student to accept or question the interpretation. Unfortunately I did not keep the Russian textbooks which elaborated on these postulations. It is not my intention to engage in philosophical explanations of the enunciations by the distinguished lecturers. Mine is to give the information as was explained to us as students.

⁶⁸ Henry later became Chief Electrical Engineer at the prestigious Akasomo electric power station built in Ghana with the aid of the Soviet Union. We, in turn, donated the cot Henry and Katya had given us to the next young student couple who needed it at our hostel.

⁶⁹ During the period of exile and armed struggle against the forces of apartheid, the autonomous ANC Women's League and the ANC Youth League were suspended and replaced by what were known as the Women's Section and the Youth Section. These Sections ceased

to be autonomous. They took instructions directly from the National Executive Committee of the ANC.

Chapter 10

⁷⁰ In the late 1960s all representatives of youth organisations at WFDY were male. Wives spent most of the time looking after the children and doing housekeeping. However, it was common practice for our wives to come to the Bureau offices for sumptuous lunches with a choice of three-course meals. Like other mothers, Rita would come with Nikita for lunch during school holidays. Rita always prepared supper during the week. In the evenings the Hungarian television had a special programme for children. Nikita would never miss this. We began to appreciate the way he improved his knowledge of the Hungarian language. At 7:30 pm promptly, a comic duck character would dutifully collect his doll, say goodbye to his parents and proceed to bed. Nikita faithfully imitated the friendly duck and we never had to tell him to go to bed. On Sundays I would take Nikita to the Vidam Park to play.

⁷¹ During the summer season the WFDY organised outings and picnics. These included harvesting of old grapes which were mainly used for making wine. Hungary produced Rizling white wine but specialised in choice Tokai wine of ten to fifteen years' vintage.

⁷² Membership of the Bureau and Secretariat was decided at a WFDY Conference that took place every four years in various European countries. The World Festival of Youth and Students was the biggest WFDY event after the conferences and also took place every four years in different European cities. The average number of participants, excluding local officials and guides, was around 20 000, the majority of whom came from the host country.

⁷³ The creation of the continental sections in the WFDY Bureau did not mean that you concentrated on your continent only. When youth organisations invited a delegate from the WFDY Bureau to their Congresses, it was preferable to have somebody from another continent. This gave me a chance, in Europe for instance, to ask for support for the struggle of the African Liberation Movements. Generally a Press Conference would also be arranged. In that case I would field more questions about developments in South Africa.

⁷⁴ In due course Patrick married Maria, a Hungarian, who accompanied him to Tanzania, Zambia, Finland and Zambia again, before they were finally repatriated to South Africa in 1991. Edward married Aniko, also Hungarian, and they ended up in Sweden. They also came home during repatriation but retained their Swedish citizenship. Lungelwa married Meso Letele, son of Dr Letele, who was National Treasurer of the ANC during the Treason Trial. Both Lungelwa and Meso qualified as medical doctors. After working in Zambia and the United States they were repatriated to East London, where they worked at Cecilia Makiwane hospital. Our small team from Hungary was certainly of a high calibre.

⁷⁵ There was nothing as humiliating as the scepticism of an immigration officer when he/she

was deciding whether to allow entry for a declared African carrying a European *Laissez Passe*. Of lesser embarrassment was the smile of an Anglophone immigration officer who “knows” you do not speak Arabic. These are the untold aspects of the liberation struggle.

⁷⁶ The International Union of Students (IUS) also mobilised its members at least one year in advance, taking into account the transient nature of their constituency. At the WFDY offices there had to be room for and co-ordination with the IUS component.

⁷⁷ The World Festival was held at the height of summer in Europe, in the holiday season. Tertiary and high school boarding facilities became available for accommodating the delegations. The students on holiday in the host country provided the human resources – guides, monitors etc. – to receive the guests and ensure that they were catered for. They ensured that each delegation sent its members to the various simultaneous events that took place daily, from morning till late. They also ensured that performing groups were transported to concert venues in time.

⁷⁸ Previously South Africa had been represented in Youth Festivals from the time they were organised after the Second World War. Some leaders in the Congress movement had attended these Festivals in their youth. It was with the help of Comrade Ahmed Kathrada, in the post-1994 democratic South Africa, that I got a comprehensive picture of those early delegations.

⁷⁹ Barbara Masekela who was one of the administrators in President Mandela’s 1994 office at Shell House; Tom Sebina became famous as the ANC spokesperson from the late 1980s up to his repatriation in 1991; Thandi Lujabe became South Africa’s ambassador to Tanzania, Botswana and Mozambique; Essop Pahad was a Minister in President Thabo Mbeki’s office and later Editor of the journal called *The Thinker*; Abdul Bham was associated with Intelligence gathering; Zola Skweyiya later became Minister of Social Services and South Africa’s High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.

⁸⁰ One of my abiding memories of the Sofia Festival is the delegation from Mobutu’s Zaire, which included some dancing children who wowed the largely non-African audiences.

⁸¹ There was a hotel next door to the TUCC, so workers’ delegates attending a conference did not have to commute from their place of residence to the conference hall.

⁸² There were parallel organisations in each country that received support from the People’s Republic of China. We referred to these as “Bogus Organisations”. In Angola, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) was led by Holden Roberto, later replaced by UNITA, led by Jonas Savimbi. In South West Africa (Namibia), the South West Africa National Union (SWANU) was led by Mr Kozonguizi (an ex-Fortharian of 1958). SWANU never posed a threat to SWAPO. In Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) was led by Joshua Nkomo. It is important to note that in October 1976 Mugabe (ZANU) and Nkomo (ZAPU) agreed to form a Patriotic Front of Zimbabwe. But during the elections in February 1980 each party stood separately. ZANU-PF won 57 seats and ZAPU-

PF got 20 seats. In Mozambique there was no clear opposition to FRELIMO. This came later, after liberation in 1975. In Guinea Bissau there was no serious opposition to the PAIGC up to declaration of independence in 1975.

⁸³ See page 497, *The Non Aligned Countries* (Prague: Orbis Press Agency, 1982; London: Harney and Jones Ltd, 1982. pp 119-121)

⁸⁴ The burning issues that necessitated the conference are covered in various documents, including the series *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 5: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964 – 1979*. p 34

⁸⁵ See *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol 5; 1964 – 1979. p 35.

⁸⁶ See Sellstrom, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa*, Vol. I (1950 – 1970).

⁸⁷ An ANC comrade, Conny Gideon Vakala, was the new secretary of WFDY, having completed his degree in Political Economy in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Let me state for the record that, after Conny, the other representatives of the ANC Youth & Students Section at the WFDY Secretariat were Max Sisulu (1973- 1976) and Jackie Selebi (1976-1979).

Chapter 11

⁸⁸ To the best of my knowledge, Egypt was the first country in the continent to formally host liberation movements, as far back as the United National Independence Party of Kenneth Kaunda.

⁸⁹ I had come to accept that if there was a Superior Being responsible for the existence of Earth and the Universe, then that Being was responsible for all the faiths that existed on Earth. Therefore, no faith was superior to others, including that of the animists who worshipped through the Ancestors. While living in the Soviet Union I reasoned that if God was ready to use atheists to assist us to get our freedom, we had no right to question people's belief system, as long as it served the interests of humanity.

⁹⁰ Mr Ngalo, my Deputy, once pointed out to me a property that had formerly housed the South African Consulate. The fenced house with a big yard had been abandoned and looked run down. I have never had the time to find out whether our Ministry of Public Works was able to repossess the property for the new South African government. What I was to learn later was that, while diplomatic relations with South Africa were suspended, Egypt remained among the countries that did not require a visa for entry into South Africa.

⁹¹ To the best of my knowledge, this was treated as maintenance allowance. I recall that I once travelled to Finland for a conference together with Andreas Chipanga of SWAPO. He

was a lively extrovert and a sharp (smart) dresser. We were sitting together on the return flight when he asked how much I had received. I had not received any instruction from my Headquarters to fundraise in Finland. It was important that fundraising efforts were not duplicated in unauthorised manner. So I truthfully told him I had received nothing. Dr Makao, as we called him, was patronisingly dismissive as he put his hands into the inside pockets of his jacket. The first hand came out with a roll of 100 dollar bills to the amount of \$2,000. The second hand revealed a roll of Finnish Marks. The amount escapes my memory. This, he explained, would come in handy when he paid his next visit to Finland later in the year. It was not a surprise when he deserted SWAPO to join a Bantustan party in South West Africa (Namibia) called the Turnhalle Alliance. This is where he derived his allowance.

⁹² All embassies, government departments, NGOs and media houses received *Sechaba* regularly. I should perhaps indicate that the production of *Sechaba* was a complex operation. The Editorial Board was based in London, where contributors sent their articles. The final copy, after approval by the Board, was sent to the printers in the GDR. The GDR Solidarity Committee was responsible for postage to ANC centres where the final distribution was done.

⁹³ After our repatriation in 1991 and the first democratic elections of 1994 in which the ANC won with a landslide victory, I met Victor at an ANC rally in Johannesburg. He was now a member of the ANC. Sadly, he passed away shortly thereafter.

⁹⁴ Sipho Makana was Chairman at Lovedale High School at the time Anderson Ganyile was Secretary of the ANC Youth League. He was the man with whom I corresponded while at St Johns College. We were later together at Fort Hare. Sipho was in the second group that left the country (together with Thabo Mbeki and Manto Tshabalala) after us. They also ended up in the Soviet Union.

⁹⁵ One of the main couriers used by Chris Hani for this purpose was the daughter of school inspector Dazana, who lived on the campus of St John's College, Umtata, during my schooling there. His daughter, S'busisiwe, got married to Mr Ignatius Mtshangwe when he was a student at Fort Hare. Ignatius Mtshangwe then took his bride home to Zambia. And the struggle advanced.

⁹⁶ From Mondays to Thursdays there were meetings of subcommittees on specific items of the Annual Work Plan. All documents to be submitted and discussed at the Friday meeting had to be distributed by Wednesday to allow AAPSO members time to peruse them. Matters arising from the minutes were raised with the administration before the Friday meeting (by Thursday).

⁹⁷ The African wars decidedly affected the political climate in Portugal itself, and on 25 April, 1974 the military coup in Lisbon brought an end to the outdated regime. Portugal was withdrawing from Africa unconditionally.

⁹⁸ In Tunis there was a sizzling group of women dancers accompanied by an equally vibrant instrumental band. It was rumoured that this was the famous band and performers that normally accompanied President Mobutu of Congo (then called Zaire). This particular group unfortunately did not proceed to Berlin.

Chapter 12

⁹⁹ After the collapse of Portuguese colonialism in 1975, the former colonies of Angola and Mozambique also provided a refuge and training ground for their former allied guerrilla movements from Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. Some ANC units had to partly support Angola forces against Savimbi, in solidarity. In Mozambique, the northern provinces were mostly wild forests which even the Portuguese never penetrated, so an ANC camp was located there. The liberation of Angola and Mozambique enhanced the infiltration of trained guerrillas into Southern Rhodesia (SR) and South Africa (SA). The regimes in SR and SA then adopted a policy of “hot pursuit” and bombed what they claimed were military camps of the liberation movements from Rhodesia and South Africa. In these attacks there were more civilian casualties than so-called “terrorists”.

¹⁰⁰ The name Gonakudzingwa was adopted because that was the name of the prison in Rhodesia where the political leadership was jailed (The Nkomos, Sitholes etc.) It was a psychological reminder of what awaited us out there. Naming it Robben Island would have been a dead giveaway.

¹⁰¹ Besides Jackie there were two other lady secretaries in the ANC office, Neva Seidman and Limpo (pronounced Dimpo) who later became the wife of Chris Hani. There was also Zeph Makgetla, Neva’s boyfriend, who worked in the Department of Information.

¹⁰² The country has a fantastic climate with two rainy seasons in a year. What is more, rain will fall for hours and is then immediately followed by bright sunshine. The soil is fertile and plants and crops grow to an impressive height– without the use of fertilisers. Wild animals also thrive, including rats and snakes!

¹⁰³ ANC cadres were permitted to marry foreigners, provided they would not burden the organisation with family maintenance. I do not recall any South Africans who saw marriage as a means to escape from apartheid. Most of them did not doubt that it was a matter of time before they “returned home”. ZAPU would not allow any marriages on the understanding that victory was imminent. Namibian SWAPO members were not prevented from getting married. However the non-Namibian spouse had to become a Namibian by joining SWAPO. It did not matter whether the prospective spouse was male or female. The Namibians had a population hovering around a million and were keen to increase their human resources.

¹⁰⁴ In 1978 her collection was published under the title *Ba Ye Zwa* (The People Live).

¹⁰⁵ We were very fortunate to have company accommodation for the eleven years that she remained with ZESCO.

¹⁰⁶ In June 1975 another party was held at the home of Hugh Africa and his wife, Louise. Hugh was a lecturer at the University of Zambia. Louise was working at the African American Institute. Other parents were teachers and nurses. This time they discussed a structured programme for the children to be organised twice a year during the summer and winter school holidays.

¹⁰⁷ 1979 was designated by the UN as the International Year of the Child. By this time there were at least five ANC Centres that had their own Masupatsela. These were in Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique, UK and Canada. A delegation of three children from each centre visited Germany and the Soviet Union. In 1981 there was a children's Summer Camp for children of the fraternal liberation movements of Zimbabwe and Namibia. From 1983, with the bulk of the children based in SOMAFSCO, Tanzania, the ANC took a decision to transfer the Pioneer Organisation from the Women's Section to the Youth and Student Section. The headquarters were at SOMAFSCO. It is of interest that, at that time, the Head of the ANC Youth and Student Section was Jackie Selebi. His secretary Mantombi Mpila had been my secretary when I headed the Professional Bodies. The Youth and Student Section had contacts with wider circles of Pioneer organisations in the East and the West. By 1988 the Pioneers were participating in Summer Camps in countries like the Soviet Union, Germany, Cuba, Algeria, Angola and the Scandinavian countries. Children at the primary and secondary schools at SOMAFSCO had pre-planned programmes of visits to various parts of the world. This was one of the activities which my wife, Rita, helped establish.

¹⁰⁸ Following the Soweto student uprising of 1976, a number of students were brought to Zambia to complete their studies. During the school holidays the freshly arrived South Africans were able to assist in training our Pioneers in song, poetry and dance.

¹⁰⁹ In Lusaka we were on familiar terms with our colleagues from Zimbabwe and Namibia. Occasionally we would socialise, or just meet in the streets. There were also working contacts in, for example, the Women's, Youth and Education sectors of our liberation organisations. Though there were no written documents, it was interesting to observe striking differences in the social policies of the liberation movements of the three neighbouring countries. These policies were probably dictated by the realities of their conditions of struggle. The understanding that we can belong to different political organisations and still socialise remained a guiding principle for me, even later in my political life. Of the five Southern African countries engaged in the national liberation struggle in the 1960s and 70s (including armed resistance), South Africans could readily talk and socialise with members of rival South African organisations. This was largely not the case in Mozambique, Angola, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and Namibia during this period.

¹¹⁰ I need to say something about how newly independent African countries invited people with skills to work under contract in their countries. Irrespective of origin or race, the policy was to employ people who could act up to the level of Deputy Head of national institutions

or parastatals. But they never allowed (through written or understood conditions) that an expatriate should be fully in charge of such Institutions or State enterprises. You would never get a case where an expatriate would actually lead a national delegation to some international conference, to the United Nations or any of its agencies. This made perfect sense. The competency of an expatriate could not be traded for the sovereignty of the state.

¹¹¹ This policy was further strengthened by Zimbabwe's experiences when the country achieved independence in 1980 and cadres were repatriated. Cadres who had loyally served in the Zimbabwe liberation forces but had neither academic nor vocational skills began to demand maintenance subsidies from their government. There was a clear danger of disgruntled former soldiers taking over the country's administration in a military coup. The lessons from military coups in other independent states were still fresh in mind.

¹¹² Within months of the Soweto Uprising it became public knowledge that many students were in transit camps in Southern Africa, especially Botswana and Mozambique. The Special Branch (political police) carried out investigations on all the young people who had disappeared, especially students, then put pressure on their families to fetch them from these transit camps. Those who succumbed to the pressure were assisted with return tickets to travel to the camps. It was therefore essential that these young people should not stay in the transit camps for long. The bulk of the students ranged from senior primary to pre-matriculation.

¹¹³ In 1976 The United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN) had started operating in Lusaka. This was a tertiary educational body set up by the United Nations Council for Namibia, with the objective of educating Namibians for roles in an independent state. The Institute also helped the resistance movement with military training and humanitarian aid. The opening of the Namibia Institute helped us to plan effectively for the educational needs of our own youth in exile.

¹¹⁴ The depth of her argument, which finally persuaded President Nyerere, was to be revealed much later.

¹¹⁵ Two items helped set the tone for the discussions. There was the recorded speech of the late 'Uncle' JB Marks when he opened the historic Morogoro Conference in 1969. The meeting paid tribute to the recently deceased Assistant Secretary General of the ANC, Advocate Duma Nokwe, for his contribution to the wider horizons that had been opened internationally in support of our struggle. It was to Duma Nokwe that Yasser Arafat had confessed that the material support the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) derived from Arab States could not match the advantage of the ANC in having a clearly defined territory with a majority population behind them.

¹¹⁶ For the record and benefit of posterity, I can now reveal the members of our unit who underwent an Officers' course in Moscow. This is partly because the bulk of them are

deceased. These were: Alfred Nzo, Reginald September, Dulcie September (no relation to Reginald), Albert Dlomo, myself and Jacob Zuma.

¹¹⁷ This was a timely move because, by this time in many parts of the world, if you were a South African, people simply asked you to which organisation you belonged. Even if you mentioned a religious or civic body, they would still want to know where your sympathies lay between the two liberation movements – ANC or PAC. Further hesitation could place you under suspicion of working for the regime. Indeed, with the creation of professional bodies almost all South Africans abroad either joined or aligned themselves with the ANC.

¹¹⁸ By this time the apartheid regime had adopted what it named the policy of “hot pursuit”. They claimed and implemented their “right” to launch attacks on neighbouring countries that gave refuge to members of liberation movements from South Africa. A few African countries that resisted the “hot pursuit” policy began to quietly offer their passports to ANC officials to enable them to mobilise international support. In the late 1970s it became clear that the Namibian situation was close to resolution. The United Nations was very involved in the Namibian situation and they began to issue special UN documents to the Namibians. As a result of this, even we, freedom fighters from South Africa, began to get respectable travel documents from UN Agencies like the UNHCR.

¹¹⁹ In 1988 the Kenyan government invited the ANC to open a mission in Nairobi. Thami Sindelo, whom I had met on our first trip out of the country, had been in the ANC missions in Algeria, Italy and Botswana. In Botswana he met his wife, and they went together to open our mission in Nairobi.

¹²⁰ The countries and/or NGOs that invited ANC delegates typically paid for our airline tickets and offered us a daily allowance.

¹²¹ Mercifully, Ntombi did not tell me that story until after we had returned home to South Africa. This was for the better. The humiliations we experienced in exile were now in the distant past. I laughed at this story.

¹²² It is the price of a peaceful, negotiated settlement and an irony of history that the countries that maintained good relations with apartheid South Africa retained their privileged position even after liberation. For instance, citizens of such “friendly” countries did not require visas for entry into South Africa during the apartheid era. They continued to enjoy that privilege in the democratic South Africa. I am not asking that their status be reviewed. I merely plead for countries like Tanzania which, in spite of their selfless sacrifices in support of our struggle, still remained subject to visa application before its citizens could visit our country. It is, however, heartening that steps have been taken to reduce this burden on the Tanzanians.

¹²³ Morrow, Seán, Brown Maaba and Loyiso Pulumani. HSRC Press: Cape Town, 2004. pp 2-3.

¹²⁴ In the early stages of SOMAFCO, when people in the teaching field enthusiastically

brought in innovative ideas, we had to be cautious. It was vital that we did not make serious mistakes that might jeopardise the future of our children. The annual meetings of the National Education Council (NEDUC) provided an open platform that allowed for incisive discussions. Opinions were canvassed and consensus arrived at. In this way, policy was formulated, enriched and put into practice.

¹²⁵ I later received an invitation to be an observer to the first conference of heads of primary and secondary schools convened under the auspices of the new Zimbabwe Department of Education, in April 1981. The conference was co-chaired by Comrade Fay Chung. I learnt important lessons from this clearly historic first National Education Conference in Zimbabwe. The senior ZANU education officials had operated outside the country running ZANU schools in the neighbouring countries of Mozambique and Zambia. This was the first time they had had a formal conference with heads of schools from throughout the country. After the opening formalities, the ZANU education experts and other ZANU officials explained the new education policy and vision. The Chairperson then called for questions, clarifications and comments. The general comment from the floor showed that most of the attendant heads of the schools had not been briefed about the purpose of the conference and were uneasy about expressing their views publicly. They had expected to simply be given instructions, as this was what they were used to. I had the sense that although this conference was a good initiative, it should have been preceded by visits to the schools themselves. The new officials should at least have conducted a preliminary assessment of the conditions under which the head teachers worked. They could then have prepared a conference programme that would seek to allay the fears of the participants. The conference ended up as a public relations exercise which sought to convince the educators that their views would be taken into account by the new administration. I submitted a report on my findings to the Secretary General, but I have no idea how this report was dealt with.

¹²⁶ So in many of the areas we needed to travel through on our way to South Africa, the locals saw benefits in giving refuge to ANC cadres. They shared food and clothing and later used the health facilities of nearby ANC clinics.

¹²⁷ The work of the Legal Department would be in demand from the very first days of negotiations between formerly oppressed black South Africans and the outgoing white Nationalist government.

¹²⁸ Because earlier delegates from the national liberation movements were not specialists in some of the fields, there was a tendency to collect the daily allowance but not stay till the end of conference. The agencies then altered disbursement of allowances. On arrival, one received half of the allowance (for hotel accommodation, food and transport). The other half was only paid a day before closure of conference.

¹²⁹ It was then that I realised that, although we had been together at Fort Hare for three years, I did not know his clan name. I jokingly said my father would not believe that I did not know the clan name of somebody I called a friend. After we had exchanged clan names, I asked where he grew up, that is, his home before exile. It turned out that his village (*kwa Sabalele*)

was just next to my mother's home at St Marks. It is the village next to KD Matanzima's palace in Qamata. We quickly went into each other's backgrounds and discovered that we had been the two main candidates for a Bunga scholarship to Fort Hare at the end of 1957. What secured me the scholarship was my 1st class pass with Exemption. We suddenly felt we were not just comrades, but brothers.

¹³⁰ During the interrogation of Piper and Oshkosh our security had asked what kind of punishment they expected now that they had been discovered. They replied that their handlers had assured them that they had nothing to fear as the ANC would not execute them. The ANC believed in political persuasion.

Chapter 13

¹³¹ Although I met Nelson again in Cape Town in 1995, I have unfortunately been unable to track him down to confirm his real name.

¹³² I later learned that Alex Mashinini's real name was Eddie Mokhoanatse and Tilly's was Isaac Kekana.

¹³³ This distinguished the GDR from other socialist countries.

¹³⁴ There was no fixed status for ANC members (cadres). One moment you were Head of Mission and the next moment you could be given an assignment without a title.

¹³⁵ The SWAPO Ambassador, Mr Haindongo, and I were regular guests to the Zimbabwe Ambassador, Mr Mvenge. He was like an older brother to us and kept us updated on developments at the OAU and United Nations.

¹³⁶ Peggy Luswazi was sister to Mrs Makhosazana Njobe, wife of the first Principal of SOMAFECO (Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College), the ANC school in Tanzania. In a way we were related. Let me tell you the anecdote of my wife and Jackie Molefe (Sedibe) when we were still in Lusaka. Because of our socio-military situation, we were discouraged from asking questions that you would normally ask when you made an acquaintance. Questions about hometown in South Africa, language group or even clan were not encouraged. But once, during my conversation with a long-time comrade, let's call him Sam, it slipped that we were of the same clan. So I informed my wife that, after being friends for such a long time, I had unexpectedly discovered that we were in fact related to Sam. Rita excitedly passed on the news to Jackie, who later became a General in the SANDF. Jackie was unimpressed and simply informed Rita about the people she had married into: "Ha! Those people from the Cape, they are all related." So now you understand what I meant when I said that we were, in a way, related to Peggy. We belonged to the same clan.

¹³⁷ The entire machinery of the ANC abroad i.e. outside South Africa, was referred to as the External Mission.

¹³⁸ I have referred to the first conference of South African students abroad held in Moscow in August 1977. One purpose was to create contacts and cement relations among our students, wherever they may be.

¹³⁹ A more common (and not unexpected) problem among the South African students was male chauvinism. The boys felt entitled to have love affairs with whomsoever they chose, including local girls or girls from other countries. But they took a "Big Brother" attitude when South African girls had non-South African boyfriends. I would deal with this issue early in my address, explaining that, as long as it did not hamper our mission to help liberate our country, people should be free to taste "brown or white bread" without intimidation.

¹⁴⁰ This included those who believed you could not claim to have seen the world if you had not visited the USA. A few South African students found their way there on their own. They "skipped" South African borders and made their way to Nairobi in Kenya. Even deserters from the liberation movements somehow knew that they could find sponsors for American scholarships in Nairobi. Recognising that the number of black South Africans studying in socialist countries far outweighed those studying in the West, the US later launched its own programme to recruit black South African students. There were many indications that this programme was politically motivated, one of the most obvious being that students who went to the US on scholarships were strictly not allowed to transit through the United Kingdom or independent Southern African countries where there were well-established ANC missions. The ANC in turn secured scholarships for selected mature students to study in the US. This was to enable contact with the newly-arrived South African "SOWETO" students who were on US government and private scholarships. The ANC felt it was important to brief them about the commonality of the goals of liberation on both sides of the East-West divide.

Chapter 14

¹⁴¹ Comrade Nzo, who held the position of Secretary General up to our return legally to South Africa in 1991. The same applied to the Treasurer General, Comrade Thomas Nkobi.

¹⁴² The name Cha-cha-cha derived from the days of struggle, when people engaged in mass action against the colonial administration.

¹⁴³ By this time the ANC was a big community. There were many ANC departments in different parts of Lusaka. A crèche had been built as a Women's Section project, and President Tambo had his residence along the Great East Road, well guarded and secure. There were also many small ANC enterprises, Star Furnitures among them, to ensure that we were as self-sufficient as possible. These self-help enterprises were highly appreciated by the NGOs that gave material support to the ANC. I remember a chat I had with an NGO representative from the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Foundation). He expressed his admiration for the proper book-keeping and accounting of the ANC. He then made a comparison with a local pastor of a church. FES: "You know that I need to account to my superiors about the use of funds. I cannot give you

any more financial assistance until I have receipts from the previous allocation." Pastor: "I am a man of God. Do you not have faith in me?" FES: "I have all the respect for you but my superiors do not know you. They deal with me on the basis of standing rules and procedures. If I cannot account for the money spent in the form of receipts, I may lose my job." Pastor: "It is your job to teach them about conditions in Africa. Most of the items we bought are produced by small entrepreneurs working from their homes. They do not have offices or receipt books." "So, in short", the FES man concluded, "I never got the money. The ANC has proven to be more reliable than a religious charity organisation."

¹⁴⁴ Comrade Hashe, despite his advanced age, had skipped the country in 1965. I met him at the 1969 Morogoro Conference, which he attended as one of the MK delegates. His wife, two sons and the youngest daughter Zinto came for the funeral. Shortly after returning home from the funeral, Zinto skipped the country into Mozambique. She was sent to the Soviet Union for studies and qualified as a medical doctor. She became a member of the ANC Health department in Lusaka until repatriation in 1991. She currently runs a surgery in the Mabopane suburb of Tshwane (Pretoria).

¹⁴⁵ One Saturday I was getting ready to leave for a lunch at the Muchangwes' farm when I was delayed by some task I had to fulfil and needed to call in at my office. Rita had left earlier with friends. As I was about to leave the office, a young lady arrived, expecting someone to meet her. It turned out that she was an Afro-American ANC supporter who was also a friend of Barbara Masekela's. Her name was Gay McDougall and she had expected to find Barbara at the office. After introductions I offered to take her to the ANC get-together at S'busi's farm. I knew that Barbara would be there. Barbara was happy that I had been able to bring her friend and ANC supporter to the lunch. All went well and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. The reason I mention this incident is that a few years later, in 1994, when we were at last celebrating our freedom, I saw the photograph of ANC President Nelson Mandela casting his vote in the first democratic elections in South Africa. Standing next to the polling booth was the same young lady. I recognised her immediately. This was in 1994, five years after our visit to S'busi's farm. It was only in 2000 that I met the lady again at a reception in Parliament. I approached her and recalled our last meeting in 1989 in Lusaka, Zambia. This time she was with her husband. She was a trained and experienced lawyer, but on this occasion she was speechless. She introduced me to her husband with such joy I felt honoured to have been the one who had rescued her from isolation in an African city. I like to believe that some acts of human sympathy and assistance are rewarded in various ways we cannot anticipate.

¹⁴⁶ On two occasions these meetings were held at the Rand Hotel, in the Johannesburg CBD. It was after such a meeting that we sadly lost a comrade who was an outstanding researcher and writer on the history of the ANC. He was Francis Meli (his real name was Madolwana). He died under strange circumstances. One morning the hotel cleaner opened his door and noted that he had fallen asleep while reading a book. She then locked the room and knocked off for the day. The following morning she was surprised to see Francis in exactly the same position as the previous day. It was then that she raised alarm and notified management. Medical examination confirmed that he had been dead for more than 24 hours. This was like my last case in co-operation with the SACC on matters of deceased comrades.

¹⁴⁷ After the June Consultative Conference the Secretary General came back to Lusaka for a short period. He asked me to move from the Cha-cha-cha offices to the offices near Star Furnitures.

¹⁴⁸ I am proud to say Singa subsequently rose in the ranks of the Provincial Government of the Eastern Cape.

¹⁴⁹ On several occasions since my return from exile I have been introduced to brothers or sisters who grew up in our home.

¹⁵⁰ Gabon had an ethnic composition of 66 percent Bantu origin and 33 percent Fang group.

¹⁵¹ The Arusha conference reaffirmed faith in the ANC leadership and vividly demonstrated that leadership extended beyond those who were participating in the “talks about talks”. There were other leaders who had to deal with the complex logistics of our mass return, for example, providing transportation for all ANC members in exile and ensuring their welfare once they were back in South Africa.

¹⁵² Taken from the motivation for the Regional Commissioner to receive the “Order of the Companions of OR Tambo” on 11 December 2009.

¹⁵³ When the time came for our repatriation, the Secretary General was in South Africa. I realised that the ANC correspondence from the two offices needed to be secured and transported to South Africa. At this time Rita was working for the Women’s Section Project Department. This Department obtained the necessary trunks for the transportation of documents of the Women’s Section. Thanks to the Women’s Section I was also able to transport six trunks of documents from the Secretary General’s office. On arrival in South Africa I reported to the Secretary General that I had brought all the important documents that I could find in the office. He was pleased with my initiative and after consultation instructed me to hand over the six trunks to Ahmed Kathrada. This material was ultimately deposited at the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape.

¹⁵⁴ Our monthly income had to cover monthly repayment of the home loan for the flat, which cost R75 000. We had repaid this loan by the end of 1993, which works out to an average of R3000 a month. Rita took out a car loan and bought a Volkswagan Sedan (Volks) for R29 000. This was also paid off by end of 1993. In addition to these expenses we had to pay the monthly services (rates, water, refuge, sewerage.) What remained went into household expenditure (food, cleaning materials and use of the local laundromat).

Chapter 15

¹⁵⁵ This took place in Mangaung (Bloemfontein) in December 1993.

¹⁵⁶ After the Durban Conference, I had taken a bus to Mthatha to visit my old school and friends there. St John's had literally gone to the dogs and I had remonstrated with my former schoolmates who were now top officials in the Transkei homeland (Bantustan) administration.

¹⁵⁷ The head of this society was Bheki Khumalo, who later became a spokesperson in the Thabo Mbeki presidency.

Chapter 16

¹⁵⁸ This was really a selfish decision, as I'd never wanted a career where I would have to beg people to vote for me. I'd much rather be considered on the merits of my job.

¹⁵⁹ My mother, Augusta, recognised and was on good terms with the relatives of maGambu (my biological mother, Czarina). These were four girls and a boy, the last born. These were Nothemba, Nombuyiselo, Nomaqukumbana, Thandiwe (Mhise) and Mzwakhe. Mzwakhe stayed with our family at Noupoot from 1953 and then went to work in Cape Town. During his annual leave he stayed with our family even after the family moved to Queenstown in 1962. It was my father and mother Augusta who arranged his wedding. When Mzwakhe passed away in 2003, my mother came with the whole family for his funeral in Cape Town. Afterwards she also received Thandiwe in Queenstown following the burial of her brother. Thandiwe was the last survivor from maGambu's family. Then there is the daughter of the first born, Nothemba, (called Nomazizi) who lives at Umlazi in Durban. She also visited the home in Queenstown and was received as a member of the family. The same applied to Mzwakhe's son, Mxolisi, who stayed with his mother. Mxolisi passed on in 2013.

¹⁶⁰ At this point I must recall that Zenzile Ngalo always proclaimed that he was of the "Thwa" people. I had no reason to disbelieve him. But something happened which revitalised his story about the Khoi San (*Abathwa*). Earlier, when dealing with lost Xhosa literature and history, I referred to the compilation of stories entitled *Imibengo* by WG Bennie. One of the stories relates to the Khoi San and the good relations that existed between the Khoi San and the Xhosas. Later there was even stronger evidence that the "Thwa" people are widespread across the African continent. In 2006, when the democratic South African government was mediating in Burundi, Minister Charles Nqakula, acting as Facilitator, received communication from leaders of the Thwa people, the direct relatives of our own Abathwa. These people are also widespread in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

¹⁶¹ My younger brother, Phumzile, had bought a video camera and captured the occasion of prayers, choral music and the exchange of gifts during a game of "secret pals". Lots had previously been drawn and each of us had a partner for whom we bought a gift not exceeding R200.

¹⁶² In 2009, while I was Ambassador to Tanzania, I attended a meeting of ambassadors in

Sandton, Johannesburg. Talk of coincidences! There I met a childhood friend from Noupoot, Piet Meyer. What is more, I later learnt from one of my other Noupoot friends that Piet, the lovely scamp (*jou lelike ding*), makes contributions to our old church whenever he visits Noupoot. During December 2012 I visited Noupoot and attended the Christmas service in the same old church where I used to serve as acolyte and trainee preacher. The Senior Churchwarden is Mr Francis Gwatyu who worked as a Standard Bank messenger. He is now retired but works hard to attract business into Noupoot and has managed to bring in investors to open a modest new hotel.

¹⁶³ When she came to launch her book, *A Dream Fulfilled - Memoirs of an African Diplomat*, during my term of service, the audience was predominantly made up of women – a mixture of professionals and social activists from a wide range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

¹⁶⁴ It was already common practice to organise special farewells for departing African diplomats. We introduced a novel idea of a gift in the form of a clock, with the photos of all the African ambassadors replacing the hours of the clock, and the departing Ambassador occupying the centre of the clock. By the time my term ended in January 2010, during which period I served as the Chairperson of the Africa Group, departing ambassadors would give me notice three months before their term of service expired. They seemed to look forward to receiving their “diplomatic clock”.

¹⁶⁵ In 1992 Dr Oliver Reginald Tambo, the longest serving President of the ANC, went to officially hand over to the Tanzanian government and people the outstanding symbol of South Africa/Tanzania solidarity, the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO). President Julius Nyerere was later awarded the Order of the Companions of Oliver Tambo by President Thabo Mbeki.

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